PHILOSOPHY IN THE PRISON

Gintautas Mažeikis

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@ Gintautas Mažeikis
Prof. Dr. habil.
Vytautas Magnus University
Email: gintautas.mazeikis@vdu.lt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9848-0908

Abstract. The article posits that contemporary industrial penitentiaries in Russia have evolved into sites of military mobilization, labour exploitation, psychic traumatization, and desocialization. Consequently, Belarusian correctional facilities have devolved into institutions of labour exploitation, political and cultural humiliation, and the dissemination of repressive political discourse. These penitentiaries deviate significantly from the Enlightenment-era ideals of penal reform, as articulated by M. Foucault, and from the notion of prisons as instruments of repression, as expounded by A. Davis. Consequently, the role of the imprisoned philosopher within the penal system evolves, shifting from individual spiritual resistance to the broader struggle against systemic coercive transformation. In the Western democracies of the 20th century, there was an increasing association of the prison with the school system, re-socialisation, re-inculturation and re-qualification programmes. In contrast, in Russia and Belarus, there has been a shift in focus towards the military-industrial complex, modern PR and the new system of exchange — political human trafficking. Consequently, the role of philosophy in prison and of the imprisoned philosopher is undergoing a fundamental change. The central question guiding this study is the conceptualisation of the philosopher within the context of the prison system. The present article undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the prison as a hegemonic system of political thought and related practices, examining the case of the imprisonment of the Belarusian philosopher Matskevich.

Keywords: prison-industrial system, prison as mobilization centre and PR institution, imprisoned philosopher.

Philosophical Inquiry and Prison

Philosophy is distinguished by its inherent scepticism towards all propositions, which has resulted in its longstanding association with religious, ideological and moral heresies since the time of Socrates. The philosophical process necessitates methodological scepticism and the interrogation of every thesis. According to Richard Rorty, philosophy is inextricably linked to the reflective and pragmatic, grounded in the concepts of contingency, irony and solidarity (Rorty 1999).

Prior to his incarceration, Vladimir Matskevich articulated his philosophical perspective, stating that "philosophy is simply a critical attitude towards any assertion, any truth" (2011: 49). In contrast, theological and ideological frameworks are founded on a priori propositions. Prisons within repressive political regimes demand unwavering adherence to official ideology, thereby foreclosing possibilities for open debates. Conversely, modern prisons in open democracies allow for the expression of doubts in state ideology, history and policy. Democracies typically abolish capital punishment, establish procedures for appellate review, and guarantee freedom of belief and conscience within the prison system. While the system does not accommodate philosophical challenges to the legitimacy of sentencing itself, they may enable philosophical inquiry by granting imprisoned intellectuals limited research privileges. In authoritarian regimes, by contrast, the state's interpretation of philosophical skepticism, methodological doubt (Matskevich 2021), and perceived heresy determines whether philosophers face deportation, arrest, imprisonment, or execution.

What is Prison?

The prison can be conceptualised as a complex social organisation, with implications for other social conditions of human life, including the family, the farm, the factory, war and political publicity. Like a factory, a prison is in a constant state of development and is part of various industrial and power complexes. Michel Foucault (1977), Angela Davis (2000, 2003, 2005) and other thinkers have sought to understand the prison through the lens of critical theory and sociology.

However, their reflections, which conceptualised prison as a problem of the public and individual mind, created a schism between prison and philosophy as the question of mutual recognition. The prison as a condition of the mind can be termed the Captive Mind. A term "zniewolony umysł" was coined by Czesław Miłosz (1953) to describe the

experience of being in a totalitarian system. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the captive mind only partially covers the subject of philosophy in a totalitarian state, i.e. in a concentration camp or a Gulag. The Nazi regime and the concentration camps, or Stalinism and the Gulag, are cases of prison as well as and should be included in thinking of opposition between the imprisoned mind and free philosophical thinking.

Paradoxically, the prison system demonstrated an earlier recognition of the philosophy's potential threat to its operations than philosophy itself devoted a critical examination of its own relationship with this social organisation. The prison system regarded unfettered philosophical inquiry as a threat rather than a progressive social force. This raises a crucial question: How does the prison system recognize "free philosophy"? It is important to note that not all prisons and punishments are the same, and indeed there is a historical and civilisational diversity of conditions that can be termed prisons. From a socio-historical perspective, the comparison between Socrates' place of imprisonment and death, the cave, and the Inquisition's Tor-di-Nona prison in front of the Vatican, where Giordano Bruno was tortured, is illogical. Similarly, the comparison or identification of the aforementioned cases with Antonio Gramsci is similarly illogical or with Sci's prison in Turi, Apulia, near Bari, as part of the Italian fascist concentration camp-prison system, or with Lev Karsavin's camp in Abez (Russia) as part of the Gulag system, or with Matskevich's imprisonment in various prisons in Belarus.

The fundamental differences between these cases are evident in their divergent aims, methods and epistemologies of punishment and transformation. In the Athenian context, although Socrates was neither required by the authorities nor recognised as a prophet, he was permitted to meet with students before accepting the poison. By contrast, during the Inquisition, Giordano Bruno was subjected to torture for seven years, during which he was compelled to recant his ideas and express repentance, while being denied the possibility of writing or meeting his disciples. Mussolini's treatment of Gramsci represents yet another paradigm: despite recognizing Gramsci's philosophical acumen, particularly his capacity to critique fascist ideology, the regime neither demanded repentance nor ideological transformation, instead allowing him to continue his philosophical work under conditions of censorship and surveillance.

The Lukashenko regime's response to the philosophical work of Matskevich was not one of recognition, but of concern regarding his public influence. Rather than allowing him to continue with his academic research, the regime demanded a formal renunciation of his beliefs, effectively acknowledging the regime's authority as the

legitimate source of truth. This case exemplifies the use of incarceration as a means of exerting power, where the prisoner is compelled to acknowledge the ruler's right to power and the legitimacy of the repressive system. Matskevich's refusal to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy of the authoritarian repressive system resulted in his imprisonment.

The contemporary prison has become the focus of philosophical discussion and scholars examining the institution from a variety of perspectives. Critical theory focuses on the system of surveillance, the transformation of individuals, and the prison-industrial and prison-military-industrial complexes as strengthening of hegemonic social relations. This standpoint is distinct from the prison as a form of propaganda of faith (as evidenced by Bruno and the Inquisition) or an Enlightenment concept (illustrated by Voltaire's time in the Bastille). In this respect, the contemporary prison system is markedly different from its Renaissance Inquisition antecedents, which demanded commitment to religious 'truth'. Contemporary authoritarian systems create prison systems first and foremost as the industrial transformation of oppressed people for authoritarian power needs.

Prison and Philosophical Freedom to Doubt

Philosophical doubt can be categorised into several distinct types, including scientific, theological, artistic and ideological doubt. Ideological doubt occupies a liminal space, mediating between empirical data, faith commitments, artistic seduction, and attempts to regulate everyday life. Philosophy examines all of these aspects: scientific, religious, ideological claims, artistic values. and everyday practices. This comprehensive scope of philosophical inquiry has led authoritarian regimes to characterize it as heretical, revolutionary, and dangerous.

Matskevich's philosophy is centred on the logic of argumentation within social and political sciences, social and political practice, and the public sphere. While public counter-argumentation always carries risks, it becomes existentially threatening for philosophers under authoritarian regimes. In such contexts, philosophers deemed subversive are those who challenge propagandistic claims; the ruling power responds through arrest, imprisonment, and execution. Social philosophers fulfill pivotal roles within society — analyzing conditions, fostering public debate, and engaging practically with emergent political relations and social movements.

Philosophy is concerned with values and is not constrained by the limits of fact or theory; rather, it is inextricably linked to the

social contract, social practice, and faith. Because institutions such as churches and dictatorships assert that all values are derived from divine sources, whether it be God, the Bible, or tradition and history, philosophy naturally doubts such assertions. By contrast, public social philosophy prioritizes justice and the social contract, advancing these through the medium of debate. The philosophical pursuit of arguments and alternatives fosters the evolution and progress of the social contract and democracy. Hierarchical ruling regimes, however, oppose philosophical discourse on values when such discourse challenges the ideological framework they seek to impose. The Lukashenko's regime has progressively undermined Belarusian sovereignty while pursuing incorporation into Russia. Simultaneously, the regime has abandoned electoral legitimacy and foreclosed the emergence of political alternatives. In contrast, Matskevich advocates for state independence and the possibility of a genuinely consensual social contract, emphasizing political pluralism. The regime deems this position intolerable and suppresses political philosophy through imprisonment and censorship of dissenting intellectuals. The penitentiaries under Lukashenko's regime bear resemblance to those found in Russia, defying the concept of prisons as dependent on open social contracts.

History of Philosophers in Prison

A notable proponent of Stoic philosophy was Epictetus, a slave who articulated the concept of inner dignity and wisdom within the context of the captive body but a free mind (Epictetus 2008). This notion would subsequently influence the conduct of imprisoned philosophers. During the early Middle Ages, Boethius, a prominent philosopher, authored one of the earliest notable works from prison *The Consolation of Philosophy*. In this work, Boethius reflected on the role of philosophy in the context of incarceration, proposing that it serves to pacify and fortify the individual spiritually. Boethius's philosophical perspective entailed the notion of philosophy as a revelation of the spirit within a world of imprisonment, thereby constituting a continuation of the Stoic practice of liberation, which encompassed not only the release from the concrete prison, but also the release from the Earth as a prison: "But if the mind, conscious of its own rectitude, is released from its earthly prison, and seeks heaven in free flight, doth it not despise all earthly things when it rejoices in its deliverance from earthly bonds, and enters upon the joys of heaven?" (Boethius 2003: 81).

Nearly two millennia later, Gramsci was imprisoned for decades for his opposition to fascism in Italy, subsequently gaining renown

for his prison notes. Unlike Boethius, his focus did not centre on the potential of philosophy to liberate the mind from earthly oppression caused by sin. Rather, he explored the manner in which social relations give rise to hegemony and the ways in which this hegemony manifests itself through various institutions of power. Notably, his writings were subject to stringent censorship, which precluded direct references to his experiences in prison. However, he did conceptualize the notion of "apparatus of hegemony," which he defined as a mental and cultural form of oppression:

In this multiplicity of private associations, one or more prevails, relatively or absolutely, constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (civil society), which is the basis for the state in the narrow sense of governmental-coercive apparatus. (Gramsci 2007: 107).

According to Davis, the concept of apparatus of hegemony provides a political-institutional interpretation of Hegel's notion of Wirklichkeit, or necessary actuality. The power becomes Wirklichkeit, or real, through its construction of active hegemonic or coercive apparatus. This apparatus, in turn, presuppose the prison-industrial complex. The repressive regime can only be actual because it is based on the aforementioned hegemonic apparatus, including the prison-industrial complex. According to the theoretical framework proposed by Gramsci, the prospect of liberation can emerge through the course of class struggle for a novel form of hegemony. New emerging form of hegemony is characterized by the fostering of solidarity actions and the cultivation of a novel type of productive relations.

Hannah Arendt's work on totalitarian regimes and masses raised the question of the possibility of freedom of philosophical thinking. She distinguished between two forms of philosophical thought: pure contemplative life (vita contemplativa) and active political engagement (vita activa). Contemplative resistance in prison can be understood as a renunciation of the captive mind, and this is similar to the choice of Epictetus and Boetius. In contrast, Miłosz's interpretation of the captive mind as a passive agreement to obey totalitarian or, in Gramsci's case, hegemonic power is more socially oriented. However, the concept of the captive mind encompasses not only submission to authority but also the internalization of ideological and propagandistic messages, producing a state of psychological captivity wherein the entire repressive regime functions as a prison. Miłosz's emphasis on the figure of Ketman, a man who fully conformed to the dictates of the communist system, underscores the intricacies of this phenomenon. This raises the question: How can philosophers critique the captive mind from within totalitarian systems?

Jan Patočka, who also endured imprisonment and communist repression, criticised historicism — including Marxist historicism — from a phenomenological perspective, denouncing its failure to grasp the subjectivity of human processes. His view is supported by Milan Kundera, who advocates the concept of the irreversibility of social processes. However, an important problem arises when many European and Russian intellectuals use history as a contemporary form of ideology, using narratives as a repressive and manipulative tool, rejecting subjective experience and the role of the free and creative mind in social processes. Thus, ideological and regime philosophers fight and negate philosophers who support civil liberties. This is why philosophical solidarity is the problem.

The primary function of imprisonment can be considered to be twofold. Firstly, it serves to instil a sense of fear among individuals outside the camp. Secondly, it aims to effect a transformation in the thinking and behaviour of the prisoners. A repressive regime perceives imprisonment as a means of preventing free civic activity and protecting conformists from the critique of radical philosophers. However, the imprisonment can also give rise to new forms of resistance, both within the prison environment and in society at large. Historical examples demonstrate that imprisoned philosophers can utilise prisons as an environment for teaching and explaining their ideas and for persuasion of new civic activists. Prisons are evolving into a new form of learning resistance, with philosophers and religious figures within prisons promoting a distinctive and radical form of social criticism.

Matskevich's Methodological Investigations and Critique

The philosophical and public intellectual thought of Matskevich emerged in the era of perestroika, a period which witnessed the emergence of free debate in response to the challenges posed by a rapidly changing social and political reality. Initially, Matskevich was profoundly influenced by the Methodological Seminar led by Georgi Shchedrovitsky in Moscow (Matskevich 2023: 43), a group which adopted a critical re-evaluation of dialectics with the aim of understanding emerging scientific and political realities. The group's thought was comparable to Western critical theory or American pragmatism, yet it diverged in its acknowledgement of the multiplicity of forms of rationalities. Shchedrovitsky's group aspired to formulate non-classical forms of scientific rationality, thereby challenging the prevailing logic and pragmatics of the social sciences in the Soviet Union. In this,

they resonated with Gorbachev's calls for the New Thinking (Russian: новое мышление).

In other Soviet republics, including Lithuania, Latvia and Georgia, philosophers emerged as autonomous public intellectuals, liberated from the constraints imposed by the Communist Party. Matskevich was witness to this transformation in the Baltic countries, where civil thought and politics became integral components of philosophical discourse. In Lithuania, during the Sąjūdis, philosophers emerged as leaders of freedom and citizenship, challenging the Soviet normative order and contributing to the liberation of civil thought in the period 1988–1991. Notable figures include R. Ozolas, B. Genzelis, B. Kuzmickas, V. Radžvilas, A. Juozaitis, A. Šliogeris, and A. Degutis. A comparable role was also played by philosophers in Belarus, although to a lesser extent in terms of public influence and only a few years later: V. Akudovich, V. Furs and others. This brief period has had a significant impact on the fate of philosophers in Belarus.

Following the ascension of Lukashenko to power in 1994, which marked the inception of his authoritarian reforms, Matskevich opted for a philosophical struggle, proclaiming that the primary objective of his public reflections was to inculcate citizens with the skills necessary for thinking and acting freely. He articulated his ideas not only within the circle of friends at the Flying University (Lietučij), akin to Patočka's underground university, but also on the democratic platforms of television, radio and social networks. Matskevich's strategy for attaining enhanced autonomy centred on the peaceful deconstruction of the prevailing regime through non-violent means, emphasising persuasion and dialogue over more confrontational tactics such as riots or armed resistance. This stance ultimately resulted in Matskevich and other dissenting voices being imprisoned during the 2020 Belarusian political crisis after the unsuccessful "revolution with a female face" (Schparaga 2021).

The concept of "wise disobedience" is central to Matskevich's philosophical framework. However, its application in the context of the imprisonment of political activists requires a thorough rethink. The consequences of imprisonment extend beyond the physical torture endured by prisoners themselves, affecting comrades who, outside the prison — in what is euphemistically called 'freedom' — devise ways to provide assistance, facilitate correspondence, deliver provisions and medical supplies, and disseminate philosophical discourse. The imprisoned philosopher must therefore consider how their thought impacts both a society under captivity and minds held captive by ideology.

This issue directly concerns Matskevich, who tries to socialise with prisoners and engage in philosophical reflection. In the context

of mass imprisonment of the free mind, philosophers transgress dictatorial norms and laws, seeking to cultivate an uncompliant individual by methodically deconstructing all substituted (manipulated) forms of thought. It is a paradox that prison not only represents the most severe test of civic attitudes, but also marks the onset of a new, transformed or liberated consciousness. The philosopher and the prison compete for the consciousness of the enslaved: one aims to instil maturity and responsibility for civic action, while the other seeks to cultivate cowardice, submissiveness and a lack of autonomy.

Non-Resisting Evil With Force or Counter-Violence?

The question of the contribution of philosophy to the prison environment is a complex one, and can be approached from a number of different angles. These include the question of whether to adopt a stance of non-resistance to evil through violence, or a stance of intelligent violence against violence. The Belarusian repression prison system can be seen as a continuation of the Russian prison tradition. Historically, philosophers have been targeted by the Russian Empire for their advocacy of religious and political freedom, active social and political criticism, and their efforts to educate the oppressed. A notable figure in this regard is Mikhail Bakunin, who was regarded by the Tsar's political regime as a threat and was repeatedly imprisoned and persecuted. In a manner similar to Louis Auguste Blanqui, Bakunin advocated for violence against repressive regimes, and for this he was arrested and imprisoned. Bakunin believed that only violence against violence could awaken the peasants and workers, who did not understand their enslaved condition. The notion of violence against violence was further developed within the context of critical theory by Frantz Fanon in his postcolonial work *Black Skin, White Masks*. In contrast to the approaches of Blanqui, Bakunin or Fanon, Matskevich advocated for a peaceful path of 2020, emphasising protest, civic education, political self-organisation, sabotage, boycotts and strikes, while eschewing direct confrontation. This divergence may have contributed to the ultimate failure of the Belarusian revolution.

The notion of peaceful, non-violent resistance has been espoused by various philosophers, who have likely been influenced by Christian thought. One notable proponent of this philosophy was Count Leo Tolstoy, who developed the concept of "non-violent resistance to evil" (Russian: непротивление злу насилием). This philosophy was further developed by Mahatma Gandhi, who adopted the principle of non-violence (ahimsa), and Nelson Mandela, who advocated for reconciliation.

The philosophical underpinnings of non-violent resistance have been further developed by prominent figures such as Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik and Jan Patočka, who have drawn inspiration from the ideas of Tolstoi and Gandhi. These thinkers have presented a model that Matskevich has built upon, albeit with distinct approaches and facing varied challenges. While I hold a degree of scepticism towards the notion of violent rebellion, I also believe that the rationality of society and elites to effect peaceful change in a socio-political regime is questionable.

Latent Civil War: The Gulag System

Philosopher Valery Podoroga advanced the notion that the Gulag system was a continuation of the civil war that raged in Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1922 (Podoroga 2017). The Gulag system, with its extensive prison network, can be regarded as a latent, protracted form of civil war against "anti-Soviet elements". This tradition has had a profound influence on the contemporary regime of Lukashenko, which is engaged in a constant struggle with political opposition and has imprisoned thousands of opponents.

The distinction between the Stalinist totalitarian regime and contemporary Putin or Lukashenko dictatorships can be found in the political technologies of persuasion employed by the Kremlin's PR technologists. New political technologists have transformed large-scale, tangible repression and fear into mass manipulation through persuasion, banalisation, infotainment, and by transformation of prisons into new kinds of military mobilisation centres. In contrast, the persuasive strategies employed by the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were characterised by the use of overt threats, including midnight arrests, incessant deportation trains, concentration camps, and the Gulag system as the primary network of repression. The most significant illustration of prisons as military mobilisation centres is evidenced by the Russian experience of enlisting suspects and prisoners to sign contracts to participate in the war against Ukraine and become members of storm brigades (starting from 2022).

Holocaust as the Result of Western Thinking

Emmanuel Levinas, who departed Kaunas to pursue his philosophical studies in Germany and subsequently in France, entered the French army as a translator. He was captured and interned in the Nazi concentration

camp at Fallingbostel for a period in excess of four years. Although he was discovered to be of the Jewish faith, Levinas was initially perceived as a representative of the French army and was not exterminated like other Jews in Nazi death camps. Although Levinas himself did not experience the horrors of the Holocaust first-hand, his family, who had remained in Lithuania, were exterminated, and he was aware of the torture and death of Jews in other camps. In the post-war period, Levinas dedicated himself to the task of comprehending the tragedy of the Holocaust, seeking to understand how and why the Western philosophical tradition had led to such a terrible outcome as Auschwitz.

The situation was different for many philosophers who supported authoritarian, criminal regimes; these philosophers took the position of either justifying the regime or of silent conformism. Those who justified totalitarian or authoritarian repressive regimes tended to understand the concentration camps as a way of cleaning the social being. These philosophers, including Giovanni Gentile, Julius Evola, and Martin Heidegger, embraced the principles of fascism and endorsed the propaganda of the regime. However, the more prevalent response among academics was to interpret Plato and Aristotle while maintaining passive acquiescence to the prevailing regime. These scholars performed philosophical erudition while disseminating a hollow enthusiasm for wisdom, lacking personal responsibility and burdened by false self-conception. Their complicity with authoritarian regimes reveals a profound misunderstanding of contemporary social existence and civic obligation.

In his critique of the Christian and Hegelian interpretations of the development (Bildung) of the World Spirit, Levinas raised the issue of the crimes committed during the Second World War. Contrary to Hegelian interpretations, the thinker argued for a more nuanced approach to the acceptance of the Other, emphasising not only the recognition of their unique identity, but also the need to understand and accept them within the logic of another system of thought, religion and civilisation. He proposed a limitation of the principle of Wirklichkeit to promote a more inclusive understanding of the complexities of human interaction, a standpoint that finds resonance with Gramsci, who similarly criticised hegemonic realism as the foundational principle of Western hegemony. In this regard, Levinas and Theodor Adorno contended that Christianity and the European Enlightenment, in the absence of a robust constraint on their aspiration for hegemony, harboured the potential to engender and perpetuate the concentration camp system, and indeed, Auschwitz and Gulag.

In his analysis of the phenomenon of zoē as politicised "bare life", Agamben drew upon the example of "the Muslim", "der Muselmann"

(Agamben 2017: 151), as exemplified in the Nazi concentration camps. Shalamov's earlier Kolyma essay, however, described a similar phenomenon of the reduction of human beings to pure animality and the desire to survive, albeit without any explicit political implications. Agamben's analysis identified the concept of "bare life" (Agamben 2017: 7) as a pre-extermination condition, thereby challenging the conventional understanding of human existence. In contrast, the Soviet Gulag system was not solely focused on total humiliation and extermination, but also on the transformation and construction of an ideological human. The Belarusian dictator Lukashenko does not single out philosophers as a separate group of friends or enemies; rather, he persecutes those who can be interpreted as independent public intellectuals defending the rights of citizens, seeking to criminalise and then commodify them, treating condemned people as if they were economic and political commodities. This includes practices of torture and reducing political prisoners to the condition of the "bare life". Despite the fact that his approach is partly distinct from Putin's prisons, which function as a system of mobilisation and persuasion, both accept the reduction of people to the "bare life" as a radical measure.

The Origin of Transformative Mobilizational Centres in the Industrial System of Soviet Prison

Yet the philosophers' memory of Russian imprisonment persists, enabling contemporary persecuted thinkers to draw upon this legacy, a memory that itself demands interpretation. Philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, imprisoned twice, analyzed the origins of the Russian intelligentsia through the lens of prisoners' resistance:

> Radishchev was arrested and condemned to death on account of his book, but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment. In the same way, Novikov, a notable worker for Russian enlightenment in the eighteenth century, a man of the mystical type, a Christian of very moderate political views was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul fortress. In this fashion the formation of the Russian intelligentsia was greeted by Russian authority. The first steps of the Russian intelligentsia along the paths of enlightenment-not revolution brought with them sacrifice and suffering, imprisonment and hard labour. (Berdyaev 1937: 22)

In their attempts to uphold the Christian ethos, certain Russian philosophers resorted to proffering socio-religious or philosophical

forms of escapism. A notable example of this phenomenon is the religious philosophy of the philosopher Pavel Florensky, who was condemned to the Solovky camp. Perceiving the prison as a 'state house' and the camps as an exemplar of Orthodox spiritual test, he used Christian exegetical language to describe his own experience. Another renowned Soviet and Russian philosopher, Alexei Losev, was deprived of his sight while imprisoned in a labour camp during the construction of the Belomor Canal. Losev employed the technique of writing between the lines, a form of philosophical allegorical language concealed within the reflections of Plato and Aristotle's philosophies, to articulate his personal perspective on the totalitarian regime. The utilisation of philosophical Aesopian language emerged as the primary medium for critical reflection among philosophers within the context of total surveillance.

Yakov Golosovker, a renowned scholar specialising in the logic of myth, was exiled to the Vorkuta camp prior to the Second World War. Following his exile, his friends and colleagues disowned the thinker and, on their own initiative, destroyed his works, a decision that was made without the need for a security order. Golosovker expressed remorse for his friends' actions, yet he did not engage in critical reflection on the Soviet government's modernisation policies or the Gulag system. Consequently, he failed to provide a thorough analysis of why his colleagues had destroyed his early works, which encompassed myth and religion. It is crucial to recognise that the new totalitarian state incorporated political myth as its own source. This incorporation and complete coincidence were addressed in E. Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, yet without any reference to the Nazi concentration camp system or the repressive industrial network of the Gulag.

Lev Karsavin, who perished in the Abez camp, clandestinely composed philosophical notebooks and taught prisoners his religious philosophy and history while imprisoned in the Abez camp (situated in proximity to Vorkuta). In these notebooks, he modified his concept of symphonic cosmic personality, corresponding to the authoritarian state needs, into pulsating existential personality, corresponding to resistance to the Stalinist regime. A notable shift in his philosophical perspective emerged, diverging from his prior admiration of the hierarchical nature of the divine cosmos to a novel interpretation of the Gulag system as the contraction of the divinity. Despite these significant changes in his philosophical system, Karsavin refrained from direct denouncing the Gulag system, a feat that would have been unfeasible within the confines of the prison camp, where strict surveillance prevailed. It was only Alexander Solzhenitsyn, in his post-Gulag memorials and reflections, who sought to philosophically analyse the

existence of "labour death camps" as a new invention within the prison system.

Valery Podoroga's philosophical reflections on the Gulag are among the earliest attempts to critically address this subject, drawing inspiration from Adorno's reflections on Auschwitz and reinterpreting Varlam Shalamov's essays on life in the Kolyma camp through the lens of political philosophy and the philosophy of the totalitarian state. Podoroga's interpretation of the Gulag system is multifaceted, encompassing not only the exploitation of forced labour for industrial needs but also the continuation of civil war and class struggle, as outlined in Stalin's doctrine. In the post-World War II era, the Gulag system underwent a transformation, becoming a site for mobilisation and functional transformation. Individuals who had formerly occupied the roles of inmate and labourer within the system subsequently ascended to leadership positions within prisons and industrial units, including the coal mines. The Gulag system functioned as a site for bio-political experimentation, transforming the rudimentary technologies of coercion and execution into a transformative apparatus. Following the onset of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the prison system underwent a comprehensive transformation into centres of propaganda and mobilisation.

Prison as the Element of Third Generation of Political Technologies

The question of the role of prison as a third-generation political technology is a complex one. As Matskevich argues, the material for persuasion was initially developed in a simple and direct manner, based on the principles of equal and open competition between political ideas, programmes and leaders in a free civil society, rather than within the confines of prison. The free competition of ideas and leaders did not require technological intervention at the beginning; rather, it relied on open collaboration of the political team and the use of direct rhetoric:

> The composition of political teams included a variety of specialists, experts in diverse fields, and activists. These teams were established under the auspices of political parties or other political actors. The members of these teams did not perceive themselves as hired employees, but rather as a support group for a political leader whose ideology, goals, and values they shared. (Matskevich 2020).

The advent of second-generation political technologies has engendered a sophisticated form of public relations, realised by the political leader's campaign team through the utilisation of advertising, black rhetoric and manipulation techniques. However, it should be noted that this is merely public competition in contemporary, relatively free societies:

> A market emerged for teams of professionals specialising in the effective management of political campaigns. In addition, there was a demand for companies willing to invest in the election of a dependent and controlled politician (i.e. their own person). (Matskevich 2020).

The most significant outcome of the second generation can be identified as the separation of the political party, the PR company and the financial group, with elections thus becoming a spectacle for society. This stage of development was completed by the concentration of PR agencies in the hands of a few companies related to the power. The evolution of PR agencies has been concomitant with conventional neoliberal processes, and the present era of substantial capital accumulation, social network expansion, and the proliferation of big data poses challenges to this development. In such a context, the state is uniquely positioned to regulate and limit the formation of opinion monopolies. The convergence of state institutions with dominant PR firms creates conditions for a third generation of political technologies. While contemporary democracies operate within first- and second-generation political technologies without requiring integration with repressive state apparatuses, the third generation incorporates the carceral system into strategies of political persuasion and mobilization.

The third generation of political technologies has the effect of returning us to a state of affairs in which the monopoly on propaganda is held by the state or the party, albeit with the use of contemporary technologies of persuasion, repression and persecution:" In the context of contemporary political campaigning, the client assumes a pivotal role, while the traditional client is supplanted by the ruling elite (junta)." (Matskevich 2020).

Prior to his arrest, Matskevich had been paying close attention to the fact that the third generation of PR technologies includes the repressive apparatus and the prison system, and had been attempting to resist the tendency towards the use of these technologies. Matskevich had found that the third generation of political technology functions in conjunction with the repressive police and prison system and surveillance. It is a matter of irony that Lukashenko has transformed the presidential candidates and their teams for the 2010 and

2020 elections into objects of torture and commodities for exchange, but only on a larger scale in 2020. In the election in 2025, Lukashenko's regime used the third generation of bio-political technologies in full scale even without the illusion of free competition.

Imprisoned Into the History of the Real

Matskevich is a pragmatic thinker who typically commences his analyses with a reflection on his own critical theoretical and practical experiences, which originate from the late Soviet period. Utilising sociological and psychological methods, along with critical memory, he employs a methodical approach to analyse the trajectories of various political and cultural movements. Through this process, he is able to derive practical conclusions regarding the direction of socio-political development. His formulations are grounded in the principles of fundamental democratic values, the separation of powers, the concept of a parliamentary republic, and the legal social contract of a mature civil society, eschewing a messianic, sacred, or national vision of a long-imagined history. In contrast, authoritarian regimes, such as those led by Putin and Lukashenko, seek to impose a new 'big history' of the Real, which they claim is obligatory for all. In pursuit of this objective, these regimes employ third-generation bio-political technologies, including the prison system, to disseminate this 'Real history'. A comparison can be drawn here between critical Matskevich's ideas and those of Dugin's philosophical circle concerning the idea of Real history. The concept of the Real History, founded on cohesive grand narratives, finds resonance with the ideas of J. Lacan and S. Žižek. However, it is crucial to augment their notion with the principle of the prison as a means of persuasion and transformation.

Critical rejection of the Real (ideological) historiography and alternative readings of contemporary political events have motivated resistance to the 'captive mind' as a form of mental imprisonment. Historical indoctrination through repressive means has become the foundation of neo-authoritarian ideology, with regime philosophers so committed to asserting historical primacy that they function as servants of a new Leviathan or Moloch. The adoption of political theology and historical essentialism (the Real and its symbolic organization) has foreclosed pragmatic deliberation, including negotiation, diplomacy, and public debate. In this context, Matskevich developed a trenchant pragmatic critique targeting post-Soviet dictatorship, its messianic pretensions, narratives of national betrayal, and apocalyptic anti-Western propaganda.

The Unbearability of Being in Totalitarian State

In the period of social unrest that characterised 2020, prior to his arrest, Matskevich derived his philosophy from the concept of "unbearability of being". It can be hypothesised that this reference pertained to his dramatic and public confrontation with an authoritarian and repressive regime, third-generation bio-political technologies centred on the system of imprisonment and torture, and the inability of the Belarusian opposition to engage in a concerted and intelligent struggle against this force. He further elaborated that this philosophy emerged from an attempt to comprehend the prevailing societal and human challenges. At the time when Lukashenko's repressive forces were dispersing demonstrators from the main streets of Minsk, Matskevich initiated the development of a civic neighbourhood movement, organising philosophical-political discussions in the courtyards of Minsk's residential neighbourhoods. This approach, characterised by its decentralised nature, proved to be a formidable challenge for the regime to comprehend. The development of a new resistance organisation and the emergence of leaders at the household level were notable aspects of this initiative. This approach is consistent with the creation of civic alternatives and the promotion of freedom of thought, as well as the development of solidarity and authentic trust among horizontal groups of citizens. Furthermore, the model of civic education, resistance and mobilisation proposed is noteworthy for its potential for effective transposition to the prison environment, despite the challenges and dangers involved.

Prior to his arrest in 2021, Matskevich appeared on the Probel programme (Yegor Kolesnik) and described philosophy as a form of resistance to an unbearable state of social being. The phrase "unbearability of being" is a paraphrase of the title of Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, with which the writer satirised his encounter with the events of revolutionary Prague in 1968. This phrase prompts us to interpret Matskevich's experience within the framework of civic existentialism and the Czechoslovak, Polish struggle for independence, a departure from Matskevich's original intention to focus exclusively on critical rationales and analytical methodologies.

Kundera's novel opposes Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence and its concomitant unbearable moral gravity, instead depicting a subjective dramatism of personal solutions and also representing the irreversibility of the course of events. This conception explains the immense value of every free action and decision, different from solutions of the hegemonic apparatus, which can repeat its repressive solutions again and again. The concept of unbearable lightness facilitates an

understanding of the price of reason, morality, freedom and even villainy in political activism, and distinguishes it from the mechanisms of prison mobilisation and power. The fragility of the present and of perspectives thus motivates a critical evaluation of civic values and the critique of those who claim that this political regime is the best of all possible countries.

Engaging in critical, practical, and existentially responsible discourse on the "unbearability of being" is imperative. This issue does not entail the imposition of a sense of hopelessness but rather signifies the provision of novel practical avenues for citizens. Prior to his arrest, Matskevich initiated the project "To Think Belarus" (Russian: думать Беларусь), subsequently followed by "To Make Belarus" (Russian: делать Беларусь). In the context of "To Think Belarus", Matskevich engages with the concept of responsible subjective civic choice, signifying the ability to transcend the influence of propaganda and the authority of the prison system. The capacity to resist the threats and repression of the political-prison regime is founded on a profound distrust in the system and the belief in the ability to devise effective solutions.

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