

Confronting Communism: Russian Literature, Leninism & Faith

Featuring Dr. Gary Saul Morson

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TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Welcome everyone to Cornerstone University's Wisdom and Influence podcast. I have a very special guest with us today. He's one of the world's foremost scholars of the Russian writers and thinkers who exposed the promises and the tragedies of revolutionary ideology. He serves as the Lawrence B. Dumas Professor of Arts and Humanities at Northwestern University, and has spent decades studying the intellectual currents that shaped the Russian Revolution, and the literary giants who warn against ideological certainty and utopian political dreams. He's also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the author or editor of more than 20 books, including a wonderful book entitled *Wonder Confronts Certainty*. His essays have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *First Things*, *Commentary*, and numerous other publications. Our guest is Professor Gary Saul Morson.

Professor Morson, welcome to our podcast.

Gary Saul Morson: Thank you, and thank you for that wonderful introduction.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, thank you for all the wonderful work you have done for so many, for so many years, and there's so much to talk about, especially given our current national moment—

Gary Saul Morson: Yes, indeed.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: —and all that's happening with communism and socialism. But let's begin. Maybe if you could talk with us—you spent an entire career really studying Russian literature and the moral witness of this literature. And just for our listeners to get to know you, what drew you to Russian literature and all that encompasses?

Gary Saul Morson: You know, it's the—I like literature that raises big philosophical questions about, you know, the nature of morality, life's meaning. The ultimate questions which Russians are obsessed with. You know, God, death, immortality, utopia, evil. You know, Virginia Woolf has an essay on Russian literature called "The Russian Point of View," where she says, "We English are just afraid to talk about big questions as if it's sort of juvenile or unimportant. But the Russians do it, and it doesn't ruin their art. It makes their art better. If we did it, it would ruin the art." And she says, "That's why the Russian novel is much better than the English novel, because it can do that." So that's the sort of thing that drew me to it.

And then I was mostly a specialist in, you know, the nineteenth century, in Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. But to write that last book you mentioned, *The Wonder Confronts Certainty*, I had to really learn the literature of the Soviet period. And of course, the experience of communism, the extremity of it made the questions raised in the nineteenth century even more pointed. Because, you know, it's one thing to talk about evil as it existed under the Tsars; it's quite another to talk about it as it existed under Lenin and Stalin. So the questions became even more pointed. And so one could really address questions that—they're addressed in other literatures, but not quite as sharply and profoundly, I think.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You know, Professor Morson, I've read a couple of your pieces in *The Free Press*. "The Terrorist Mind" was the most recent one you published there, I believe. And I want to ask you, what is it about communism and Marxism that has become all of a sudden so attractive once again to so many in our country? I came to the U.S. 45 years ago. My parents immigrated from South America, and I came as a nine-year-old boy in 1980. And a few months after I came, Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. And as you know, Ronald Reagan talked about trust but verify, bring the curtain down, the wall, the evil wall down, and there was all this push against communism and the evil empire. And yet all of a sudden now, 30-plus years, it's become attractive, and people, many are in love with it. And what's happened in our society and our country for this significant shift to have occurred?

Gary Saul Morson: You know, that's—I wish I really knew the answer to that. But I remember when communism fell. I mean, right after the Soviet Union fell, that was 1991, I was in a London bookshop, and they had put on sale all the works of Marx and Lenin and all the other communist thinkers. You know, they were basically giving them away. And I said, "What's going on?" He said, "Nobody wants these anymore." So I bought a whole library and shipped it home. But then all of a sudden, it's there again.

I mean, *The Communist Manifesto* begins with the line, "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of communism." But now I'd say it's a zombie. I mean, it's risen from the dead. A zombie is haunting America, right? Why? One can guess various reasons. There's always an appeal of any ideology that says to intellectuals or well-educated people that they should be in charge. That you have a scientific theory, and we social scientists should govern everybody. That was part of the appeal of the progressive movement, which made that absolutely explicit in the early 20th century. But communism goes even further in that direction. So that... But why... But that's been true for a while. Why now? It might be the way students have been educated or not educated in the last 30 years. I know from a lot of my students, they don't know basic history. They really know very little about communism. They don't know much about history generally. And the less you know, the more the idealism to which communists appeal will seem appealing because you don't know what it really is.

So I'm guessing that it's the poor secondary school education that is what's going on. That seems to be, indirectly, the product of the ed schools with their different emphasis on other politics and how teachers are trained. My guess is that it's lack of knowledge that has done it. But I don't really know. I wish I had a better grasp of why such a—what I think of as such a discredited ideology, responsible for more deaths and suffering than any other philosophy in the history of the world—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm-hmm.

Gary Saul Morson: —in the last hundred years, why would it be back?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, I ask myself, when Hasan Piker or Graham Plattner says, "I'm a communist," do they really believe in starving millions of people to death deliberately?

Gary Saul Morson: I don't know, but my guess is they do, but their followers don't really know what it entails. But I don't really know.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, you raise this issue in your piece where you speak about education, and you focus on Dostoevsky, and you mention how all the folks he was around when he was pardoned toward the end of his life, he looked around, he said there was not a single monster or scoundrel among all these revolutionaries, but that these were people who had become so susceptible to ideas and concepts that were so destructive. And you mentioned institutions, educational institutions. You're at Northwestern. I'm here at Cornerstone University. And in some ways you think that educational institutions should be the last fortress, that would help us or protect us or shield us. And yet today some of the most highly prestigious institutions and universities in America, if not the world, have become tremendously receptive, not just to communism and Marxism, but to the violence these ideologists advance. How do we address that? What do you recommend? What should we do?

Gary Saul Morson: Well, I mean, you have to educate people better. Getting control of the secondary schools would be a good start. Changing the tone of the culture so that—look, a lot of the people who wind up supporting these things don't actually believe in them. They are just afraid to oppose them because they'll be subject to ostracism or violence. It's still definitely a minority, but you have to produce some spine in the people who may be left-leaning, may like what is truly democratic socialism, not what these guys like. To recognize the radical difference, and to be able to stand up to it. That's what's really going to make the difference. These movements—I know from studying this historically—they will push things as far as they will go. There is no limit, like Nazi death camps or Soviet. There's no limit unless they are stopped, and the people who have to stop them are people who are not used to criticizing anyone to their left. But they're the ones who have to be woken up because there really is a radical difference between being a liberal and being a Bolshevik, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm.

Gary Saul Morson: A significant difference.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I mean, you mention in that—and this was jarring to me when I read this in your piece—that between 1905 and 1907, over 4,000 Russian officials or individuals were killed or hurt in Russia because of the violence. It had become so fashionable to be violent. Not just tolerated, but fashionable to be violent. And you talk about how these terrorists were not from the oppressed classes, the working classes, but they were highly educated and prominent individuals. And now we began to see some—

Gary Saul Morson: Very few of them were from the working class.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, very few of them. Right, and we've begun to see some of that here in the United States in some of these sort of political murders or attempted political assassinations, where it's not the working class or the oppressed; it's the highly educated who are carrying out violence. Not just speaking and arguing, but actually carrying this out.

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah, I mean, the latest polls, you know, in Michigan, whether you have this radical candidate in the Democratic primary, show that his support comes from wealthy, well-educated white people. And working-class people and Black people support his opponent. And the same with, you know, in New York with Mamdani. I mean, it's well-educated people who've been to Columbia and places like that, that produce the realms of support in the name of others, but they're not themselves others, right? What you mentioned about Russia in 1905 to 1907, and that was just an extreme, but it was very similar for about right up to the revolution and 10 years before that. Russia is the birth of the modern terrorist movement. It was the place where I think for the first time, if you asked a young man or woman, "Well, what do you want to be when you grow up?" the answer might be terrorist. It was a respected occupation. The only occupation that was probably more respected was, since this is Russia, literature.

Russians love literature. And I wrote an article once about one guy who managed to make a successful career as both a novelist and a terrorist. He did both, and he kept clippings about both careers. And I never could figure out, I've read his novels, whether he wrote novels to celebrate his terrorism—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Gary Saul Morson: —or whether the terrorism was to have material for his novels. I mean, which was primary for him? It wasn't clear. And this was a guy who didn't care which radical ideology he did his terrorism for. He'd sell out to anybody, including people who hated each other. "I'm just a professional terrorist, that's all." You had that phenomenon. I mean, one of my favorite stories of the period is that this provincial newspaper where one of the reporters comes to the editor and says, "You know, the new governor has been appointed. Shall we run his biography?" And the answer is, "No, save it for the obituary." You know, that's how. And then you've got the Russian liberal party, called the Constitutional Democrats or Kadets. They did not engage in terrorism, but they refused to condemn it. I mean, one of their leaders said, "Condemn terrorism? That would be the moral death of our party." Well, as soon as the Bolsheviks took over, the first people they turned on were the Constitutional Democrats. You know, within days, Lenin said they are, quote, "outside the law," meaning you could do anything to them, and two of them were promptly murdered in their hospital beds, two of their leaders. Those are the people who have to stand up, and in Russia, they didn't. Those are the people we have to realize there really is a difference, that someone a foot to your right is still closer to you than someone a mile to your left.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Gary Saul Morson: You know, people who grow up their whole life opposing anything to their right find it very difficult. It's almost as if they're violating their identity to do it in the other direction. It's really an identity question. It's become your politics, your identity, right? I mean, when I was growing up, you would find, let's say, Catholics wouldn't marry Protestants and vice versa, right? Now, my students don't care anything about that, but you don't marry someone from the other political party. You don't marry a Republican. That would be beyond the pale. It's the same. So it's become a kind of substitute for religion, you understand? And then it's very hard, right? It's your identity.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Help us to understand this further through unpacking the term you coined, Leninthink. I think it is a very important term and category to talk about. And perhaps maybe you can just tell our listeners what it is. What is this thing, and why is this a very important lens through which to look at communism and Marxism so it's not just a bad economic system, but there's more to that. So maybe you can talk about Leninthink a little bit, please.

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah. You know, when I was asked to write this article about Lenin—now, this was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth, so I was writing it for 2020. I thought I knew Lenin at that point, but then I started really reading him and reading the memoirs, and I realized I didn't. I study a lot of communism, but I would have said before that, that here's one position: don't worry about killing people. If you need to kill people, kill them. I would have said that's what Lenin believed, but it's not true. That's what other revolutionaries believed. But in a formulation like that, it means you don't kill them unless you need to, but Lenin believes you kill them whether you need to or not. Murder was a goal. He would state over and over again, "We want civil war." If you think, well, the civil war came because people wanted to oppose Lenin—he was killing them before they opposed him. The civil war was a reaction to his killing them, not a reaction to the revolution.

The fundamental idea is that there is no morality outside the goals of the party and the power of the party, so that it is impossible to say that the party ever does anything immoral regardless of what it does, because the standard of morality, the only standard, is the goal of the party. So if a Bolshevik was told,

"Okay, you need to take 1,000 hostages and kill them," they wouldn't do it. They would take 5,000 because they were afraid of being called charitable, having compassion, and that would prove they were not Bolsheviks. Because Bolsheviks laughed at the idea that the human soul has infinite value. That's a religious idea. And if you actually have compassion, it means you're secretly religious, whether you know it or not. And therefore, to prove you're really a Bolshevik, an atheist, you kill more people, and you kill them not just, but you kill them as cruelly as possible. You know, if you understand this, then you understand the Stalinist Gulag, the Stalinist interrogation, which involved torture in every case starting in the middle of 1937. And let me tell you, the tortures, if I described them to you, they would make you sick. I mean, they're much worse than waterboarding. And where does that come from? Anyone who didn't think it was a good idea would be proving he was not really a Leninist. So that's what Leninism means. Once you've signed on to Leninism, you have signed on to literally anything. And indeed, not just if it happens to happen; you have signed on to making the worst and cruelest things happen. That's what communism actually was in its ideology. It didn't use violence because it needed to. That was my mistake for many years. I thought, "Well, that's bad enough. You use violence whenever—you never need to. That's bad enough." It's not nearly as bad as what it actually was.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, this, I mean, this breeds a certain monster, right? I mean, I think about the psychology that you have to have to do that, and then the kind of psychology or psyche you breed and you nurture among the young and among the followers, right? A psychology that's just evil and destructive, and not just political, but it's fundamentally sadistic and evil and destructive, right? The psychology of you do whatever you need to do, period.

Gary Saul Morson: Well, it's even worse. You need—you... Even if you don't need to do it, you do it. I mean, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah.

Gary Saul Morson: You know, how do you... When I was really—people who, on October 8th, were saying that the Hamas murders and rapes and tortures were a good thing. This was not in reaction to Israeli response. It was, you know, 23 Harvard student organizations made that statement that it was a good thing the next day. There is no—the cruelty towards your opponents or to anyone who isn't your ally, 'cause it was "whoever is not with us is against us" is the idea, is a positive virtue. And that's why one of the reasons we're seeing so much violence right now, and it's going to go up, it would be my prediction. Because it's encouraged. I mean, do you see, you know, left-leaning politicians condemning left-leaning violence? I don't. I mean, a few cases you do, but not mostly. When it becomes a point where only people in the center and the right condemn violence from the left, you're in trouble. Now, if it were the case that all the violence came from the right, the same phenomenon would apply, right? That if only the people on the left condemned it, you'd be in trouble. But there is some from their end, but not nearly as much as you get from organizations like Antifa or—

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I don't think there's any other president who's been at least three assassination attempts on him, right?

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: So talk to us about, you know, when I think about Dostoevsky in foretelling what was going to happen, right—what was that? It reminds me of Edmund Burke and the Reflections on the Revolution in France, almost foretelling the horrific things that were about to happen, right? And there they are. What was it about Dostoevsky? What was the special gift he had that he was able to see this and say, "Look, this is what's coming. Prepare yourself"?

Gary Saul Morson: You know, by the Burke that, you know, when I first read the Reflections on the Revolution in France, it didn't register to me for a while how early it was written, and that the revolution had just begun, and he was saying they were going to kill the king. And that didn't happen till two years later. I mean, that's how prescient it was. In Dostoevsky's case, he's the only 19th century thinker who described in detail what we've come to call totalitarianism as it existed in Germany and China as well as the Soviet Union, right? No one else described in detail that kind. And the scale of murders—he said 100 million, which is at least what it was. The cultural policies—they're all described. How did he know? People say he was the only person who did, and he was regarded as crazy at the time, right? And I think the answer is he had been a radical and a revolutionary himself at one time, so he knew their psychology. And he knew that if that group ever attained power, that's what it would do. That is, he took seriously the intelligentsia's demand that they should govern, their attempt to seize power. And he also saw that moderates and liberals were not going to oppose this, and that sooner or later they would gather the momentum and they would seize power, and this is what would happen. You have to take seriously—"Oh, a few college kids, what do they matter?" They matter.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm-hmm.

Gary Saul Morson: Right? You know, if you think of the horrible events of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, I remember somebody saying to me, "Oh, what are these French Marxist professors? They don't do any harm." And I said, "They're the ones who trained Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, who studied Marxism in Paris and went back and killed a quarter of the population." It really does make a difference, and Dostoevsky saw that.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I mean, one of the things that I think was profound is in his novel Demons, and you cite this, he talks about these destructive leveling tendencies, right? I mean, Edmund Burke does the same thing, where you want complete equality, and in the name of equality, which sounds good, you're willing to cut people's tongues, gouge out their eyes, right, kill people. I mean, Burke speaks about this, these leveling tendencies. Dostoevsky does the same thing. And here today, I think about the last 10 years or so, where you have this equity, the argument for equity and radical equality, right, aggressive equality. And it sounds good on the surface, appealing to those who perhaps are suffering or perhaps are sensitive to injustices. But really, if Dostoevsky is right, what we can expect, unless someone stands up to your point with spine and says no, is significant, significant violent leveling tendencies. Is that fair?

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah. I mean, equality can mean everybody has equal opportunity. That I don't know many people who would disagree with that. But if it means the results have to be the same, the only way to get that is to... Well, you know, in one of the revolutionaries in Dostoevsky's novel, looking forward to the future, his summary of it is Cicero will have his tongue cut out. Copernicus will have his eyes put out. Shakespeare will be stoned, all in the name of equality, okay? That's what you'd have to do, right? I mean, it's, you know... And what's more, the people who don't have those talents benefit from the ones who do. So they suffer much more too, right? I mean, but in fact, in practice, it doesn't work that way. In practice, what it works out is that, yes, the Ciceros suffer, but there's one group that does prosper, and those are people who are good at bureaucratic infighting.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Sure.

Gary Saul Morson: They wind up very high-ranking, very well-off, and able to oppress others. It's not the ones who are most productive. It's the ones who understand how to manipulate power in an organization or a bureaucracy, and that's what happened in each of these countries, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You speak to us about, you know, when you spoke about Leninism, and the fact, the reality that under this way of thinking, morality is whatever the party says. There's nothing

outside. So let's talk about the importance of religion, faith—as a Christian university, the importance of Christianity to address this. To talk about transcendent morality and the importance of, you know, I think of the Declaration of Independence. We're all endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, right? What do we need to do to not just give a spine to people, but to reintroduce and continue to introduce the importance of faith and morality and moral authority outside of the state, right? Outside of the party, outside of ourselves, a transcendent moral order to address this.

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah, I mean, you know, in Solzhenitsyn, the great novelist of the Gulag, he started out as a believing communist and a believing atheist, right? And it was a long—he describes it in various writings—the long period where he gradually had a lot of counterevidence to why this was evil, but he overlooked it. And then gradually he realized there was something wrong with it and became a radical skeptic, but didn't really believe in anything.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yes.

Gary Saul Morson: And then gradually achieved faith. What was—for him and for others, what was the key thing that led them to faith? And the answer was, when you see evil of such extreme point, you are no longer willing to say, "Well, it's all just relative to your social condition. There's no real evil." You think there really is objective evil, and therefore there must be a source that defines good and evil, and there must be God, or some equivalent to God. I guess you could be a Kantian who says that, you know, reason provides standards of pure reason of good and evil. But, you know, as Lenin liked to say, "Kantianism is just religion denatured a bit." And there's a good deal of truth to that, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. Right.

Gary Saul Morson: If you were a Kantian, you believed in God anyway. Well, it's not exactly true, but it's true that it relies on religion, right? On a religious perception, it just doesn't appeal to it. So, when you see evil profoundly enough, and you're told, "Well, what you define as evil is just socially relative. If Nazis think this is good, then it's good for them and bad..." If you really accept the relativist paradigm, that's what you lead to, right? And you've got to get people to realize—if they don't accept it, if they want to say, "No, this is just wrong. It's not a matter of your culture, it's just wrong," there has to be a standard outside of social norms, right? And that's the consideration that Dostoevsky appealed to, and it's one that in the Soviet period led many people to believe in God.

I mean, it wasn't only Christians. I mean, Natan Sharansky, the Jewish [unclear], did a similar journey. And it wasn't just Russian Orthodox. I mean, people would meet in the camps. There were many sectarians. There were Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists in the camp. Not many, but there were some. And memoirists, even those who remained atheists, pointed to the fact that the only people who you could rely on not to save their own life at the expense of somebody else are the religious believers.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Hmm.

Gary Saul Morson: Even the atheists point this out, right? They think they're crazy for not saving it, but they point it out. They're the ones you can rely on. And it impresses them a lot. I mean, one of the memoirists who did remain an atheist, Yevgenia Ginzburg, she talks of a time when, in the frozen Gulag in the far north, a group of Seventh Day Adventists refused to work on Easter—or was it Baptists? I can't remember now. And as a punishment, they're led out onto a frozen lake and told to take their shoes off and just stand there. And they do that, and they sing hymns. And the other prisoners, including this woman, look on and say, "Is this an example of amazing spiritual strength or is it craziness?" And then the next question is, "But would we have the strength to do this for our convictions?" And the answer is no. So this is—you have to believe that there's something bigger than yourself and bigger than society to really stand up when the pressure is on. Anybody can stand up when it costs you nothing, you know?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right.

Gary Saul Morson: You know, "Oh, I would never steal or rob," say some of my colleagues. "I don't have God." Well, yeah, you're under no pressure whatsoever. But what if you were, you know, the cost was really great not to steal or lie, right? Then would you? Well, let's see. That's the consideration that leads so many, in the... And I'm suspecting there's a religious revival, or the rebirth, in some cases the birth, of Christianity in China, that I'm guessing, although I'm not a Chinese expert, that that has something very much to do with it too. Because the Chinese believe in the same ethic as, at least officially, as Leninism. They're Leninists.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Professor Morson, there are some—I've talked to some Christians who argue that what happens in the early church, in the Book of Acts, chapter 2, where we're told that the apostles and the early Christians shared all things in common, is really communism. You know, therefore there's a lot of synergy between communism and Christianity because of that scripture passage, that everyone shared everything they had in common, so therefore communism is somehow Christian or biblical. And I've paused because I remember my first year in graduate school studying communism, political philosophy, doctorate, and studying communism and reading Marx and Hegel and Feuerbach and all these individuals and thinking, "There's nothing here that would even suggest there's synergies." But help us, for the many Christian listeners of our podcast who think that there's some kind of friendship between communism and early Christianity, please shed some light on that.

Gary Saul Morson: Well, the question is, was there any government forcing the people to share everything in common at the expense of their lives? Was somebody going to shoot them or arrest them if they didn't? There's nothing preventing you right now from sharing everything you want. Communism is state power enforcing it. It's not people freely choosing it. That's the difference, right? You can freely choose it now. There's nothing preventing you from being a communist in that sense. But that's not what communism is. Communism is absolute unlimited power, as Lenin defined it, right? When the first Soviet law code was being formulated in the early 1920s, Lenin instructed the guy who was forming it to make terror a permanent feature of the regime. That is, there would never be a time when authority could not be bound by law—authority could not be bound by law, period. You could have a law code, but it didn't bind authorities. They could do anything, okay? That absolute unlimited power, as Lenin said, unrestrained by anything, that's what's enforcing it, and that's what communism is, and that's where the problem comes from. Sure, share things as much as you like. Tell your Christian friends, "Do it. Nothing's stopping you." But that's not what communism is, where you're forced to.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: A very important distinction. A very important, terrifying distinction. Yeah. Let's talk about our students today. You've been in the academy for years educating students, and earlier in our conversation, you mentioned how these political questions have become questions of identity, right? Deeply, deeply, deeply personal. And do you see any signs of hope, as you think about students now, the past, the future, where we are? Any signs of hope? Is there anything you're seeing—I mean, among your own students or among the culture or other universities that gives you hope, some bright spots out there as we think about where we could be headed?

Gary Saul Morson: I'm pessimistic but not hopeless. I see the trends going in the wrong direction. They're accelerating. I imagine we could be living in a quasi-communist dictatorial society within five to 10 years or less. Or I'm not certain it's going to be the case because I do have students who know there's something wrong here. And it's always possible that many of the students who don't really believe this but just don't oppose it can wake up. I don't think it's actually very few students who literally believe, think the way Lenin did. There are some. But if the others just wake up, see what the difference is, and, you know—maybe, I don't know, having a senatorial candidate with an SS tattoo proclaiming himself to

be a communist, supported in Democratic primaries—what did he win, 70% of the vote? Maybe something like that will be shocking enough. Maybe the attacks on synagogues will do that. I mean, the lawsuits against the Little Sisters of the Poor didn't seem to do much, but maybe physical violence will—people may have to, it may be brought home. I don't know, but that's what it depends on. The trends are bad, but it's not locked in and things can change, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: If you had one piece of, you know, a warning, an exhortation, a piece of counsel, to give to American educational leaders or civic leaders, what would it be right now? Oh, educational leaders.

Gary Saul Morson: Oh, well, if you take education and research seriously, they only flourish when prevailing orthodoxies can be freely and fearlessly criticized. Imagine a scientist who, instead of proving their theory by an experiment, could simply shut up anyone who said, "This drug didn't work." It clearly wouldn't be science anymore. But that's true of all research. And what educators can do is enforce that and also then create required classes in the importance of freedom, free dialogue, for education and knowledge. Now, in fact, there are some educators doing this. I'll just mention that perhaps the leader of these is the president or chancellor of Vanderbilt University, Daniel Diermeier. And there are a few others, like the president of Washington University in St. Louis, who really are doing this, and students have to really acculturate themselves to this from day one. And I know him 'cause he used to be a Northwestern professor many years ago. He thinks that university presidents, more and more of them are seeing this as something to do. They don't have enough support to do it. But more and more of them are aware that they should gather that support. More and more doesn't mean a majority, but it means more and more. And so those are hopeful signs. And, you know, look up what Diermeier has done. And the president of Dartmouth has been arguing this too.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: There are some. I mean—

Gary Saul Morson: Yeah, they see... And like 10 years ago, even five years ago, there weren't any, right?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Mm. Oh, okay, the University of Chicago, which always stands out.

Gary Saul Morson: Right, right, one of the few.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's right. Yeah. And on October 1, in just a few weeks, Professor Morson, you'll be here for our wisdom conversations on why not communism. A conversation, a wisdom conversation on faith, freedom, and the future of America. And there'll be a lot of students here in this chapel who will come to this event. We're looking forward to seeing you and hosting you on our campus. But perhaps you can send a message to our students, and any student listening to the podcast, what would you say to them? Should they, number one, if they find communism or socialism or this extreme communism appealing, or they don't know much about it, but it seems interesting, or more than appealing, they're supporting it, what would you say to them now? What would be the most persuasive case you can make to them now to say, "Stop"?

Gary Saul Morson: Stop. Look at what it actually was in practice, and not just in one country, but in many countries. It was 18 countries, and always with the same results, besides if one country made them, you know, went off askew, right? Take a look at, let's say, pick up Solzhenitsyn's book. There's an abridged edition, *The Gulag Archipelago*. Just read it and see what communism was in practice. And that's not the only really awful thing in communism, because the Gulag was not the only really awful thing, right? And there were many things that were as bad. But just read that one. See what you're really supporting. They appeal to the same ideals. They call themselves democratic. Even today you have North Korea calls itself the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The word democratic doesn't mean what it does in the United States, right? It can mean that. It can also be used to mean something done in the

name of the people by a fierce dictatorship. Look at what it actually is in practice, and The Gulag Archipelago is a good place to start, right? And if you think, "Well, that wasn't real communism," then the question is: what's going to prevent your version from being different? After all, so many have wound up that way.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: If somebody were to say to you, "Well, you know, that wasn't real national socialism. We need real Nazism now," what would you say? And that's only been done in one country, not 18. Okay? Learn what's actually happened. Professor Morson, it's been a delight to speak with you. Thank you for joining the Wisdom and Influence podcast here at Cornerstone. I look forward to meeting you in person in just a few weeks.

Gary Saul Morson: Me too.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you for all that you do, all your writing, all your work. It's so important. And may you continue for as long as you're able to. It's a treasure to our country. Thank you so much, sir.

Gary Saul Morson: Hey, thank you so much for having me. Much appreciated. I'm looking forward to meeting you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Thank you. Thank you. Bye-bye now.

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