Chapter Five

Russian Revolutionary Ideology and *We the Living*

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> "Russia has a long revolutionary history."
>
> —Sasha Chernov in *We the Living* (258)

Ayn Rand began work on *We the Living* in 1930 at age twenty-five, having left Communist Russia only four years earlier. The manuscript was completed by March 1934, before she turned twenty-nine.[1] Soon after this and over the next thirty years, she entered into a lively dialogue with readers, editors, fans, and others over aspects of *We the Living.* And on at least five occasions, she specifically addressed one issue: the "background" in *We the Living* as contrasted with the plot.[2]

Repeatedly, she stressed the fact that while the plot, as her own artistic creation, is fictional, the background for the novel was "true," "true to the smallest detail," "real," and "exact." Further, in an October 17, 1934, letter, she states that the "background is more essential than the plot itself," as it "creates the characters and their tragedy." And in a February 2, 1936, note to her publisher, she writes that "the background and circumstances which make the plot possible are entirely true."[3]

The background to *We the Living* is the setting within which the plot development occurs. As such, it includes the following: first, there is the myriad of people (family, friends, students, bureaucrats, etc.). Second, there is the existential world in which they all live (decaying cities, bureaucratic indifference and cruelty, fanatical adherence to communism, omnipresent hardship and doom, etc.). And third, there is the ideology of the communist revolution, which motivates several of the central characters, is the unacknowledged cause of the spreading material and spiritual disaster portrayed in the novel, and is omnipresent in the culture of *We the Living.*

The background to which Ayn Rand refers consists, in essence, of the ideology as the cause, and of the characters (other than the heroes) and the existential setting, as the effects.[4]

The focus of this chapter is the ideological background to *We the Living.*[5] That background, as we shall see, is in the first instance Lenin's and Stalin's versions of Marxism as "adapted" by them to the Russian situation of the early twentieth century. In what follows, I present the essentials of Marxist-Leninism, and reveal the accuracy with which Ayn Rand portrays this ideology in the action of *We the Living.*

Marxist-Leninism was the ideological *cause* of the Russian Revolution of 1917. It was also the *effect* or result of a century-long revolutionary movement within Russia, without which its rise to prominence and domination never would have occurred. In addressing the ideological background of *We the Living*, therefore, the primary goal of this chapter is to present the long

period of fermentation during which the old wine of elitist tyranny was poured into the new bottle of Marxist-Leninist ideology that dominates *We the Living.* This ideology is the background to *We the Living*, and this chapter will present the background to that background.[6]

REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY AS PRESENTED IN *WE THE LIVING*

The revolutionary ideology that pervades *We the Living* is presented to us in several ways: it appears in speeches and lectures; it is present in posters, banners, and slogans; and, it underlies the myriad of pronouncements and denouncements that appear constantly, throughout the story, as rationalizations for the robotic actions of the young revolutionaries. That tyranny in Russia is necessary, what its "lofty" goals are, and why sacrifice is virtuous, are constant mantras in the background of Kira's struggle to live.

With some exceptions—Pavel Syerov's speech at Andrei's funeral being the best example (435)—the ideological background is sprinkled throughout *We the Living* in seemingly disconnected and unsystematic fragments. For this chapter, I made note of over seventy of these.

It is possible, however, to take each instance of ideological rhetoric and identify the idea or theme it presents. This, in turn, reduces the isolated instances into a set of general propositions, and this set constitutes the ideological background in *We the Living.* Finally, these propositions can be placed in hierarchical order from the philosophically broadest to the more narrow and derivative. When this is done, the ideological "fragments" in *We the Living* coalesce into a comprehensive viewpoint, and this revolutionary ideology surfaces as a set of abstract "visionary speculations," plus an asserted set of narrower implications for human life of these speculations.

The ideological background of *We the Living* is no fictional concoction, tailored to fit the novel. Ayn Rand, as we have seen, repeatedly insisted that the background to *We the Living* was factual and true in every detail. This chapter will demonstrate that, in regard to the ideological aspect of the background to *We the Living*, her claim to factual accuracy is completely justified.

IDEOLOGY IN *WE THE LIVING*: THE ABSTRACT VISION

The first component of the ideology in *We the Living* consists of seven abstract propositions that are so broad and "visionary" that they could and have been applied to historical processes and events throughout human history.[7] These propositions themselves have a long history, and it is in examining this history that this chapter presents the background to the background of *We the Living.*

The world that both Ayn Rand and Kira Argounova lived in arose out of the following philosophical framework:

1. *There are profound and inescapable forces at work in history* (38, 58, 109, 174, 189, 295).

This notion, that the world is a stage on which a drama of human, if not cosmic, proportions is being played out, has a long history. In various forms, it has appeared in all of the Western religions, and it reappears here in an allegedly materialistic, scientific, and secular form. Throughout its long history, this "vision" presents some version of the Christian redemption saga: man, cast out and alienated from the good, struggling to return in order to be redeemed.

In *We the Living*, we find this notion repeatedly asserted in claims that "history is on the march," and a "historical drama of gigantic importance" is under way and will "sweep the earth."

2. *These forces must not be resisted or impeded* (38, 58).

The claim here is that the successful completion of this drama is the highest good. To participate in it and help to further it, is the most important purpose to which a life, and all human life, can be devoted. To not understand and not accept this, and thus to resist it or act to impede it, is the hallmark of the "lost soul," and is intolerable.

3. *These forces work through a specific process of first generating and then overcoming contradictions* (32, 170–71, 254, 308–9).

This necessarily mysterious process, known as "the dialectic," will be discussed later.[8] It appears in *We the Living*, for example, in Lenin's infamous New Economic Policy. This "policy," which is in place throughout the novel, involved the contradiction of freer markets within the embrace of a totally state-controlled economy. It also appears in Irina's observation that Sasha has been expelled from university for trying to think in a country of free thought. And again, it appears in the denouncement of Trotsky for his "purity," that is, his unwillingness to embrace contradictions, when circumstances required it.

4. *These historical forces work through and, therefore, necessitate conflict and violence* (30–31, 38, 73, 128, 162).

The dialectical process, as we shall see later, involves three steps. (It has been described as a "weird waltzlike contortion.")[9] In this process, an integrated situation, known as the thesis, arises. With time, an "opposite" or "contrary" to this thesis, known as the antithesis, develops within the thesis, and as a result of this contradiction, stress or tension builds. Finally, the tension, becoming no longer sustainable, is released in a cataclysm of conflict and violence (a revolution!), and a higher stage of historical development, known as the synthesis, is reached. This becomes a new, "fuller" integrated thesis, from which, inevitably, the process begins again. This process does not stop until the final goal of redemption is reached.

We see this view of the necessity of violence in *We the Living*: when Kira is told she is living in a "historical cataclysm"; in posters showing proletarian boots stomping on bourgeois necks; and, in little children singing of their "world of fire and blood."

5. *The goal being sought by history is "humanity," the releasing of "the truly human life," "the redemption of man"* (31, 58, 270, 426).

This is the supposed "goal" or "speculative vision" that justifies the violence, the cruelty, and the tyranny, both in the fiction of *We the Living* and in the twentieth-century horrors perpetrated by communists around the globe. Thus, when Kira first arrives at the Petrograd railroad station, she is greeted with a poster stating "Comrades! We Are the Builders of a New Life!" Following this, and throughout the novel, Kira is bombarded with the claim that the revolutionaries are building "a new humanity."

6. *These deep historical forces work through collectives* (42, 162, 166, 193, 270, 435–36).

The great historical forces have "mankind" or even "God" as their beneficiary, and work through the most potent agencies on hand. Be it "the Church," "the wretched of the Earth," "the laboring people," "the State," or whatever, it is such collectives that are most potent, and the significance of individuals lies exclusively in their participating in these collectives. "Society, Kira, is a stupendous whole"; there must be a "tight welding of the collective," a "clamping of the workers and the peasants." All must serve "the eternal collective."

7. *The achievement of the goal that history is seeking requires that individuals must sacrifice, or be forced to sacrifice, to the collective* (42, 46, 51–52, 70, 89–90, 145, 155, 176, 270, 355, 436).

This is the moral implication of all the foregoing and is the most pervasive philosophical dictate throughout *We the Living*.[10] Kira is bombarded at every turn with her duty to society, her good fortune at having many years to give to the cause, the notion that "the brotherhood of workers and peasants should be the goal of her life," and that she and all other individuals are "human resources" to be used by the state.

IDEOLOGY IN *WE THE LIVING*: THE NARROWER MARXIST-LENINIST APPLICATION

The second and more predominant component of the ideology in *We the Living* consists of five specifically Marxist-Leninist propositions. These are the form in which the wider vision we have covered is adapted, by Lenin, to the needs of the Russian revolutionaries. By examining the actual evolution of Marxist-Leninism in Russia, we will come to see the impressive accuracy with which Ayn Rand presents this in *We the Living.*

1. *The Industrial Working Class is the historical force through which history's goal will be achieved* (391).

As we shall see later, in detail, the industrial working class is the potent collective agency which, as the antithesis formed up within the capitalist thesis, will, through revolution, transcend the conditions that prevent a truly human life, and usher in man's truly human future.

2. *A person's consciousness (the ideas, hopes, and values held) is a determined by-product of the economic class to which he belongs* (25, 70, 73, 174, 179, 196–97, 209–11, 296–97).

This is Marx and Engel's materialist version of human consciousness, and Kira is constantly being bombarded with this. She is told that she suffers from her "bourgeois prejudices"; she is warned about her "arrogant bourgeois attitudes." Those who are "from bourgeois descent" are incorrigible; factory owners and their children are the worst class enemies of man. Those who are "from the workbench or the plough," on the other hand, are pure and on the side of mankind.

3. *The class is all. You must fight your private self and narrow ego* (71, 311).

Individuals are significant only in their participation in the collective force. The "slobbering egoism of the bourgeois whiners" must be outgrown, to the point where no one will have any individualist thoughts at all.

4. *The proletarian revolutionary force will be incapable of grasping its own best interest, let alone organizing and acting to achieve it. An elite group, therefore, will have to control them, and lead them down the path to their fulfillment* (55, 308–9).

This is the premise behind the training, at the university, of the young zealots who will be "the vanguard of the world revolution." All of them, in turn, will be slavishly obedient to the dictates of the elite vanguard party, as will it, in turn, be to its dictatorial leadership.

5. *The revolution is not limited to Russia alone; it is worldwide* (162, 166, 173, 200, 268, 308).

Thus we see, throughout *We the Living*, the visits from foreign labor agitators, utterances about "the world revolution," and children singing of their "world fire of blood."

This, in brief, is the ideology presented in *We the Living* as part of the background to the story. This is "what created the characters and their tragedy." Every one of these tenets was behind the actual Russian Revolution; and all of it is false. It is no mere coincidence that the total and brutal imposition of such ideas upon a society produces nothing but decay, destruction, inhumanity, suffering, and death. To observe such a catastrophe, as Ayn Rand did in her own life, and as readers do through *We the Living*, is a wrenching experience. But it must be faced if we are to learn from history. In the real world of communist Russia, as in *We the Living*, the roofs did in fact leak, the houses collapsed, the railroads were in chaos, the public clocks had no hands, the doctors had no phones, and the people were starving. They did hoard bread crusts and fight over the bodies of dead horses. They did walk stooped over, lose their children in crowds, descend into bestiality, and watch helplessly as all their hopes, and even their lives, shrank to nothing before them.

Why did this happen? What reduced Czar Peter the Great's St. Petersburg—his "jewel of the West"—to this? Ideas did this—false ideas. Not only is Ayn Rand's fictional description of existential life in *We the Living* true to reality, her portrayal of the dominant ideology is also true—it *was* the actual ideology that fueled Lenin's revolution.

We turn now to the historical context behind the ideology and events as portrayed in *We the Living* in order to see that the disaster of communist Russia has a longer and deeper history than the portrayal Ayn Rand was able to offer in *We the Living.*

SETTING THE STAGE: RUSSIA BEFORE 1825

Revolutionary ideology in Russia developed in three stages. First came the "Russian Jacobins" of the 1850s and 1860s; then came the Marxist stage of the 1870s and 1880s; and finally, there is the Leninist version of Marxism featured in *We the Living.* While the Russian Jacobins and the Marxists are the background to the background, they in turn grew out of an earlier history. We begin, therefore, with a brief sketch of this history in order to understand the context that would eventually give rise to the Russian revolutionaries.

Russia has had a long, tortuous, and dark history, dominated for centuries by three institutions. The first of these was despotic autocracy—absolute rule by one. The roots of this lie in the thirteenth century, when all of the lands to the west of the Ural Mountains, including the vibrant and relatively civilized area around Kiev, were invaded and conquered by the Mongols. Everyone was subjected to the absolute, unlimited, and unchallengeable rule of the Khan. Asiatic despotism took hold and would last for 250 years. In order to control this vast conquered territory, the Khans relied on the help of those who ruled over various principalities. These were the Khan's loyal and trustworthy grand dukes.

By the fifteenth century, the Mongol grip over these territories and these dukes began to erode, and in 1480, the grand duke of Muscovy (Ivan II) gained independence from the Khan, took control of the territory, and adopted the Mongol term for leader: czar. With this, Asiatic despotism in new Russian garb became a central institution in Russia's history.

The second institution dominating Russia's history—the Russian Orthodox Church—has even earlier roots. In the fifth century, Rome collapsed and the Catholic Church fled to Constantinople—the center of an alien Byzantine culture that had begun to penetrate what would later become Russia. This culture was primitive, agrarian, and communal, and obsessed with the mystical power of the soil. When the Catholic Church returned to Rome, the Constantinople "eastern" branch continued, led by its own patriarch. In the centuries that followed, disputes

between Rome and Constantinople grew—particularly over what was the correct (i.e., "orthodox") form of worship. This ended in 1054, with the Roman pope excommunicating the Eastern patriarch who, claiming a monopoly on the proper form of Christian worship, founded the Eastern Orthodox Church. This church spread slowly, eventually reaching Muscovy. When the Mongols, retreating from the West, sacked Constantinople, the patriarch there granted independence to the Moscow church, and the Russian Orthodox Church was born.

This church maintained that it alone (and certainly not the Roman Church) followed the proper form of worshipping God. Therefore, it saw as its mission to show all Christians, even all of mankind, the true path to redemption. This involved proper forms of worship and proper forms of work, the latter being voluntary collective labor on the soil. This type of labor, they believed, would generate a mystical process out of which God's truth would emanate to all. Salvation would follow the grasping of God's truth, and could only be achieved collectively, as a "people." The "toilers of the soil" are God's "royal priesthood." The people and the soil together make Mother Russia holy.[11]

The third institution dominating Russian history is serfdom. Early in Russia's czarist history, Czar Ivan IV (1547–1584) embraced the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church. Already the owner of all the land in Russia, he extended his ownership by binding to him all those who worked his land. Serfdom, the Russian form of slavery, arrived and was later formalized in 1649 by Czar Alexis Romanov, in his infamous Russian Code of Law, which was based on the principle that every individual belongs, first and foremost, to the czar.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, as the scientific revolution in the West accelerated, and the basis for the enlightened eighteenth century was being laid, Russia was sinking into despotism, Christian mysticism, collectivism, and human slavery.

When Czar Alexis died, and his son Peter became czar (Peter the Great, 1689–1725), it seemed that he would bring secularism, Western ideas, industry, customs, and institutions to Russia. His interest in this, however, was undercut by his financing of a huge military, his wasteful building of St. Petersburg, and his organizing the state into a powerful institution which, assisted by new organs of repression and terror, would see to it that his will was done.

Hope resurfaced again under Czarina Catherine (1762–1795), who, because of an early fascination with Western ideas, was known as "the philosopher queen." She was a study in contradictions, however, and as she aged, she lost interest in the West, and turned to extending serfdom to 90 percent of the Russian population.

Hope resurfaced for a third time when Catherine's grandson, Alexander I, became czar (1800–1825). He also admired Western ideas and accomplishments. He urged the Russian nobility to seek Western knowledge and developed around him a coterie of Western-thinking advisors.

Like Peter and Catherine before him, however, he turned away from the West as he aged, thus precipitating a true tragedy in Russia's history. Advisors, nobles, and army officers had followed his lead, and had turned to the West for guidance. They had read Locke, Smith, Bentham, and other Western liberal thinkers, and had become open advocates of liberalism in Russia, and outspoken admirers of the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers. Finally, they had observed successful uprisings against autocracy in Spain, Italy, and Greece. Consequently, they began to plan an uprising against the turncoat Czar Alexander; but in December of 1825, he died suddenly—and his even more reactionary son, Nicholas I (1825–1855), took the throne.

The tragedy of "the Decembrists" followed. These heroic officers confronted the new czar on the very day he took the throne, at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Nicholas met their pleas with bayonets, personally interrogated them all, and had them executed, announcing a few days later: "I cannot permit that any individual should dare defy my wishes, once they are known. The slightest infringement will be punished with all the force of the law. No pardon will be granted."[12] With this, Nicholas I began a thirty-year reign of warfare abroad, and the embracing at home of Russia's holy mission to lead mankind to God. All opposition to czarism was to be crushed. He censored ideas, alienated the educated, distrusted the people, and increasingly relied on a growing state police bureaucracy. He openly suppressed universities, and drove the intellectuals underground where, like poisonous mushrooms in the cellar, the seeds of the Russian revolutionary movement were sown and nourished.

TWO SHUNNED FUTURES: RUSSIA 1825–1855

In the face of the 1825 murder of the Decembrists, and Nicholas's subsequent policies, it became obvious to Russia's intellectuals that Russia would have to climb out of its dark past by abandoning czarism and serfdom. But to what end? In favor of what new type of social system?

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Russian intellectual life came to be dominated by two competing schools of thought on this, both trying to steer Russia away from czarism and onto the right path. In neither case, however, was that path to be the one followed by the Decembrists. Russia's future, both schools agreed, did not lie down the road to Western liberalism, freedom, and capitalism. According to one school, it lay back down the road to the past, to the Russian Church and agrarian collectivism. According to the other, it lay ahead, down the road to the future, as discovered by the nonliberal Western thinkers: the road to industrial socialism.

The first of these two schools were the *Slavophiles*.[13] The Slavophiles were so named because when faced with Russia's dilemma (to Westernize or not), they chose to shun the lure of the West, and to return to Russia's Slavic past. This school was to some extent influenced by Western ideas, notably those of Schelling and the early German Romantics. Their deepest roots, however, lay in the Russian Orthodox Church: the mystical soil of Holy Mother Russia and the simple, communal, agrarian peasant life. To them, Russia's backwardness was its strength, not its weakness. Czars Peter, Catherine, and Nicholas I were seen as imposers of alien ideas and goals on Russia, like the Mongols before them. Russia's czars, nobles, bureaucracy, and intellectuals, it was claimed, were all caught up in this, and thus had "lost their souls" and become "wanderers in their own land," as they sought to divert Russia from her divine historical mission.[14]

In the Slavophile view, Russia should shun Western secularism, individualism, liberalism, industrialism, and wealth. Instead, Russia should reembrace the village commune (the *obschind*) and simple cooperative agrarian labor governed by councils of appointed elders (the *mir*). Once this life is reestablished, and with the Orthodox Church as a guide, the mystical transformation of the people (*sobornost*) will occur. Thus, fused as a "people" into one group consciousness, the path to redemption will become clear. Faith in the "visionary speculations" of the church and the Slavophile thinkers will lead Russia to nonviolent, nonstatist communism, under which alienation will end and man will be redeemed.

The second school, the *Westernizers*,[15] like the Slavophiles, were also struck by the great contrast between Russia and the West. But they did not conclude that Russia should shun the

West. Quite the opposite. They believed that Russia's intellectuals must learn from the West—not from the Western liberals who had led the Decembrists to their doom, however, but from the French socialists (e.g., St. Simon, Fourier, Proudhon) and the German idealists, with heavy emphasis on the philosophy of Hegel.[16] From these sources, the Westernizers were led to the transformation of Hegel's thought flowing out of the young Hegelians at the University of Berlin in the 1830s and 1840s.[17]

Guided by these sources, the Westernizers were appalled by the "unmitigated horrors" of early Western capitalism.[18] They were also appalled by the mysticism and backwardness of the Russian Orthodox Church. Their conclusion, therefore, was that Russia needed socialism. Not mystical, rural, cooperative socialism, but scientific, industrial, state-guided socialism, supported by the populace but guided by the intelligentsia.

By this stage in her history, Russia's intellectuals had already embraced all of the general philosophical propositions to be found in *We the Living* (outlined above, pp. 115–17). There is a historical struggle under way to redeem humanity. Private property, individualism, and capitalism are now holding back this process. Russia needs communal work and collectivized property, guided by the intelligentsia. Czarism and serfdom must be abolished. But how is this to be done?

Driven by Nicholas I into underground journals and discussion groups, the Westernizers, led by a young Alexander Herzen, came to view themselves as Russia's "new men," whose destiny it was to lead Russia in overthrowing czarism and serfdom (cf. Herzen's *From the Other Shore*). With time and maturity, however, Herzen's group turned against the false guidance of philosophical abstractions that, with Moloch-like[19] power, could absorb and destroy actual men. They turned instead to "the people," the rural populace—to working with them, and being guided by their simple wisdom, in order to achieve reform of Russia through gradual, nonviolent means. This group was the forerunner of a later nineteenth-century movement in Russia known as "Populism," with its slogan "to the people."

Not all of the young Westernizers, however, followed this path. A different group, led by Vissarion Belinsky, was driven by its peculiar psychologies to remain loyal to the need for violent revolution. This was not to be revolution *by* the people, but revolution *for* the people, who were themselves unable to understand their plight or take action on their own behalf. This group took as their slogan not "to the people," but "to the axe." Russia's revolutionaries had arrived.

In Ivan Turgenev's influential and famous novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862), we encounter the "fathers": decent, intellectual, concerned men who hope for gradual nonviolent change in Russia. By contrast, the "sons," epitomized by Arcady Kirsanov and the nihilist Eugene Bazarov, are superficial, impatient, and angry, and welcome the prospect of violent upheaval in Russia. These "sons," whom Herzen would come to characterize as "the syphilis of our revolutionary passions,"[20] are the prototypes of Russia's revolutionary movement. They are the "new men" who alone understand "what is to be done," and have the motivation to do it.

RUSSIA'S FIRST REVOLUTIONARIES: THE JACOBINS

Social history is replete with examples of the fate that was now to descend on Russia.[21] False philosophical ideas seep slowly from books and lectures into the culture—propounded and spread by seemingly intellectual, patient, civilized men. From this process, the "fathers" are born. These are men who have integrated into their subconscious some valid ideas and values

and are, consequently, able to retain intellectuality, patience, and decency, despite undermining their basic outlook by the inconsistent and/or false ideas they have absorbed. Characteristically, such men are horrified by incivility, emotionalist rage, murder, and destruction. While they turn to dialogue, consultation with others, journal writing, and civilized discourse in pursuit of their mistaken philosophical goals, they meet with frustration and intolerance, and become bewildered, apathetic, defeatist, fatalistic, and, in the end, irrelevant.

The "sons," on the other hand, experience no such restraint. If, when young, they have absorbed false ideas—such as those propagated by the church or Hegel, and encouraged by the tragedy of serfdom—they develop early psychologies of anxiety, impotence, self-loathing, and anger. As they develop intellectually through their adolescence, they are easily persuaded to embrace a more consistent pseudo philosophical framework that will serve to rationalize their anger and scorn, turning it outward against the external world they now hold responsible for their suffering. And most importantly, these pseudo philosophical "speculations," which are in fact mere emotionalist assertions, provide them with the perspective within which their lonely and troubled lives are transformed into the agency through which great redemptive historical change is going to come to fruition. In essence, early childhood philosophical error produces a psychology that, in turn, seeks out a grander philosophical rationalization that, once in place, is immune to any further challenge.

Out of this process, the characteristic personality of the revolutionary emerges. He is full of abstract "justification" for his views and actions; he is impatient with dialogue, anxious to "act, not talk," and unconcerned with—in fact, even relishing—the violence, power, and destruction he deems necessary to the fulfillment of the great redemptive mission.

These are the mentalities that were developing in the dark cellar groups of Czar Nicholas's Russia, and who were about to bring revolutionary ideology and action into Russian life as a prelude to Marx and Lenin.

When Czar Nicholas I died in 1855, his successor, Alexander II, having witnessed the rising tide of opposition to czarism, announced his intention to reform and liberate Russia. He lifted the ban on university philosophy departments, reformed the judiciary, emancipated the serfs (1861), and set about reviving local government agencies (*zemstovs*) throughout Russia.

As the result of this "liberalization," Russia's universities reached out into the broader populace, offering subsidized education. Students from all parts of Russia, and all walks of life, came to Moscow and St. Petersburg. They were known as "the *raznochintsy*," the "people of diverse ranks." Cut off from their rural roots, eager to make their mark on Russian history, and bearing guilt and anger over the conditions from which Russia's peasantry suffered, they were easy prey for the radicalized branch of the Westernizers, and were soon co-opted into the underground revolutionary movement. Thus, when Alexander II abandoned his flirtation with liberalism in the early 1860s, and clamped down once again on the universities and the private discussion groups, the *raznochintsy*, prepared by their professors and intellectual leaders, were, despite not having yet encountered Marx, ready to act. The crop of poisonous cellar mushrooms was ready for harvest.

In 1862, as part of the repression of the intellectuals, Alexander II ordered the arrest and imprisonment of a prominent journalist, a leader in underground discussion circles, and hero of the *raznochintsy*: Nikolay Chernyshevsky. He was sent to Peter and Paul prison in St. Petersburg, where he immediately set about writing what would become a historic novel: *What Is to Be Done? Tales about a New People*, published in 1863. Joseph Frank, a noted scholar of nineteenth-century Russian literature, writes of this work: "If one were to ask for the title of the

nineteenth-century novel that has had the greatest influence on Russian society . . . Chernyshevsky's novel, far more than Marx's *Kapital*, supplied the emotional dynamic that eventually went to make the Russian revolution."[22] Frank is both correct and insightful in his focus on the "emotional dynamic" of the revolutionary movement. With this novel—a lauding of Turgenev's "sons" as the needed "new people"—the revolutionary fires in Russia were lit to burn for fifty-five years, right up to the lecture halls and parading zealots of Kira Argounova's world in *We the Living.*

Who were these early revolutionaries, and what did they stand for?[23]

The leading lights in this dark epoch in Russian intellectual history were: Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1829–1889), Dimitri Pisarev (1840–1868), Pyotr Zaichnevsky (1842–1896), Pyotr Tkachev (1844–1886), and Sergei Nechayev (1847–1882).

My focus is on Chernyshevsky, the undisputed leader, and idol, of the group.

Nikolay Chernyshevsky, son of a Russian orthodox priest, was "educated" at home until age fourteen. He was then sent to a theological seminary where he demonstrated his intelligence and mastered eight foreign languages. In 1846 he arrived at the University of St. Petersburg where his Orthodox Church upbringing was challenged by the ideas of the Westernizers. Within two years he was won over, and by the age of twenty was immersed in the study of the French Utopian socialists, Hegel, and the ideas of the young Hegelians, most notably Ludwig Feuerbach. (More on Hegel and Feuerbach shortly.) Chernyshevsky abandoned religion, accepted materialism, and committed himself to achieving the good of mankind as revealed to him by these mentors.

Another mentor was Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), who in his twenties had left Russia to study in Berlin. Studying in Berlin at this time meant studying Hegel and offering revisions, called "critiques" or "transformations," of Hegel's views. Bakunin's revisions included a rejection of Hegel's view on the process of change whereby historical advance occurs through transcending, while also preserving, the present. In its place, Bakunin insisted that advance occurs through the destruction, not the preservation, of the present.

By 1855, Chernyshevsky—now twenty-seven, committed to revolution and destruction and known in intellectual circles as a teacher and literary critic—was ready to take advantage of Alexander II's leniency. He denounced both Western liberalism and czarism, and sought to rally the people of Russia in support of rural, communal, agrarian life. By the time Alexander clamped down on the intelligentsia, Chernyshevsky had lost confidence in the people's ability to discern their true interests or muster the commitment to act for themselves. Thus, as his own imprisonment loomed, Chernyshevsky turned to the French Revolution—notably to Maximilien Robespierre—for guidance. With this, the Russian Jacobin[24] movement was born.

Jacobism, as characterized in the final bloody stages of the French revolution, stood for those "visionaries" who alone knew the destiny that man must seek. They also knew that they alone, and certainly not the masses, knew this, and thus they must lead their world through a bloody revolution, cringing at nothing, in order to reach this destiny.[25]

In Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov is a defeated and aimless nihilist, waiting and longing for social destruction. He has no idea of or passion for what might follow the destruction. Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done? Tales about a New People* goes much further. Here we find the blueprint for what is to be done, the portrayal of those who must do it, and the plan for carrying it out. Throughout Chernyshevsky's writings, we find the following themes which, it will be apparent, include many of the ideological themes found in *We the Living.*

In a secular version of his youthful religious outlook, Chernyshevsky was obsessed with the theme of a suffering mankind, cut off from "the full life of organic and psychical unity." One's highest calling—the most meaningful life a person could live—is to work "for the good of mankind." The achieving of such a life is only possible by merging oneself with the whole of mankind through sacrifice of oneself to the cause.[26]

This lofty goal cannot, and never will be, achieved naturally and spontaneously by the populace. "The mass of the population knows nothing, and cares about nothing, except material advantages."[27] Nor will it be achieved by waiting passively for some process of natural evolution to occur. Achieving the good of mankind, therefore, requires the leadership and action of those select few (the "new people") who do understand what is at stake, and what needs to be done. He writes: "The appearance of strong personalities has a decisive influence on history. They impose their character on the direction of events . . . the new type has been born . . . it does not matter what one thinks of them . . . whatever they say *will be obeyed by all*."[28] As for the general populace, "The mass is simply the raw material for . . . political experiments. Whoever rules it tells it what to do, and it obeys."[29] These "new people," the "elite cognicenzy" who will take on this historic responsibility, are "those able to realize the correct principles," those who are "rare specimens," "the flower of the best people."[30]

Obviously, the "weak" common people cannot be allowed to struggle against or oppose their leaders. "Therefore, I believe that the only good form of government is dictatorship . . . aware of its mission." The "strong" must realize that there will be resistance from the "weak." They must be prepared to crush this ignorant barrier to man's fulfillment. "Only the axe can save us, and nothing but the axe. . . . Summon Russia to take up the axe." And they must be resolute, and not shy away from the violence and destruction they will cause: "the high road of History is not the sidewalk of the Nevsky Prospect . . . [do not] shrink from dirtying one's boots." Finally, they must stop at nothing, until the final goal of man's fulfillment is reached: "This organization of new men must usurp government through dictatorship, and stop at nothing. We shall be more consistent than the great [Jacobin] terrorists of 1792 . . . [our] enemies must be destroyed by all possible means."[31]

For the more moderate Westernizers, this was a horror, and they turned away from revolution to working with and learning from the people. But to no avail. In their conflict with the more irrational, vicious, and consistent Jacobins, they were pushed aside, as a whole generation of fanatics followed Chernyshevsky's lead. Among these, the following stood out.

Dimitri Pisarev (1840–1868) presented the movement with a role model of what it meant to be a dedicated revolutionary. Totally committed to destruction by the age of twenty-two, and armed with the requisite dialectical rationalizations for his self-loathing and anger, he joined Chernyshevsky's revolutionary cell. He was arrested along with his idol, went to prison, suffered a series of mental breakdowns, and twice attempted suicide. Released from prison in 1866, he drowned in 1868, and became a martyr to their cause.

Pyotr Zaichnevsky (1842–1896) supplied the revolutionaries with exact guidelines as to what kinds of actions the "new people" must be prepared to take. In his *Young Russia*, written when he was nineteen, he presents in blatant blood curdling language the manifesto of the Russian Jacobin. The only escape from the "monstrous, oppressive condition" from which Russia suffers is "revolution, bloody and merciless revolution." The elite revolutionary party "must seize the dictatorship into its own hands, and stop at nothing." Opponents must be "massacred," and in this, the revolutionaries must "be more consistent than . . . the great terrorists of France."[32]

Sergei Nechayev (1847–1882) showed the revolutionaries, by his own life, what it would mean to be a revolutionary. Later an idol of the American Black Panther Party, and referred to by Lenin as "the titan of the revolution," he came to prominence at age twenty-two (1869) when he orchestrated the murder of a disobedient young follower.[33] In the same year, he cowrote with Pyotr Tkachev a manifesto entitled *Program of Revolutionary Action*, devoted to methods for recruiting and molding "new people." In 1870, Nechayev faked his own arrest and snuck off to join Bakunin in Switzerland, where they wrote *Principles of Revolution*, which advocated the assassination of the czar and his minions.[34] This tract was followed by *Catechism of the Revolutionary*, stressing the selflessness, necessary coldness, and fanatical commitment to the cause characteristic of the true revolutionary. To drive the message home, Nechayev snuck back to Moscow, set up a conspiratorial student group, murdered a faltering member in 1871, implicated members of his own group in the murder to further revolutionize them through prison terms, and then fled back to Switzerland. Arrested soon after, he was sent to Peter and Paul prison for the rest of his life, where, from his cell, he organized the infamous terrorist group, the *Narodnaia Volya* or "People's Will."[35]

Finally, Pyotr Tkachev (1844–1886) deserves mention for contributing three things to the revolutionary movement: an operating manual for revolution; an elaborate theoretical rationalization for revolution; and an introduction to the works of Marx and Engels. Tkachev addressed the mechanics of actually seizing power. He faced the fact that after seizing power, a long period of indoctrination of the populace would be needed. By teaching them the rudiments of "progressive communism," the revolutionaries "would breathe new life into society's cold and dead forms." And he argued in his *Revolution and the State*, contrary to the orthodox Marxist view, that the Russian state, not being an agent of any capitalist class, "floats in the air" and is there for the Jacobins to seize and use in the prosecution of the revolution. [36]

RESPECTABILITY AND GUARANTEED SUCCESS: THE ROLE OF HEGEL AND MARX

While in Europe the Left studied the growing corpus of works by Marx and Engels; in Russia Chernyshevsky's "new people" turned to violence, disruption, and assassination. On March 1, 1881, the People's Will succeeded in assassinating Czar Alexander II.

Not surprisingly, Czar Alexander III turned on them. Claiming that God had instructed him to reinstate total autocratic, czarist rule (weakened by Alexander II), he built the government institutions necessary to this end: a police-state to dominate culture; a state bureaucracy to manage the economy; and an organ for the persecution of Russia's Jewry. Revolutionary fervor and activity appeared to diminish. As Alexander III's grip on Russia tightened, the revolutionary movement—not lacking in passion and notoriety, but losing credibility—struggled on in increasingly desperate need of four things.

First, while the ideology of the movement was sufficient to generate moral fervor and desperate action, it failed them in other respects. It offered them only abstract "speculation" on which to build, not scientific rigor. And it offered them the vision of a battle to be waged, but no guarantee that they would win. Second, they lacked credibility to outsiders. Their ideology was viewed as the dreams of misfits, rather than genuine social theory with proven historical relevance. Third, they had no developed following or power base outside the ranks of their own

devotees. And finally, they had very little internal organizational structure or plans on how actually to conduct a revolution.

Starting in the 1880s, Marxism seeped into Russian revolutionary circles to cater to the first two of these needs. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, as we shall see, Lenin's "revisions" of Marxism would fulfill the rest of their needs. And with this, the Russian Revolution, and the "background" world of *We the Living*, would descend on Russia.

Marxism is the allegedly scientific demonstration of the fact that the inescapable laws of history necessitate an imminent revolution in which capitalism will be displaced and replaced by socialism, and that under socialism, humanity will at last be fulfilled.

These views were developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) between 1836 and 1848 as he wrestled with the philosophy of Hegel. To understand the essentials of Marxism, therefore, an extremely brief essentialized overview of Hegel's philosophy is necessary.[37]

Hegel is a candidate for the title of philosophy's most profound and comprehensive "visionary speculator," as well as a good example of the importance of Protestant Pietism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought.[38] Initially trained in a Protestant theological seminary, as a young man he was tortured by his separateness from God, and by the threat of sin and damnation. Never has a more elaborate resolution to this dilemma appeared in print! In long, torturous tomes, Hegel presents the following:

The universe, which is the creation of an omnipotent but not omniscient God (the Absolute or Reason), appears to us to be an independent, material reality. This, however, is an illusion. The universe is not only God's creation; it is in fact a manifestation of God in evolution, the cosmic mind (e.g., Reason) in action.[39] For what purpose? Hegel's God, not being omniscient, lacks crucial knowledge. This cosmic consciousness is ignorant of its own nature, of the fact that it is everything (the "totality," "infinitude," the "absolute"). In Hegelian terminology, the Absolute is "alienated" (i.e., separated) from its own identity, and is, therefore, incomplete, unfulfilled—in not knowing itself—and suffers from this self-ignorance. To end this suffering and return to itself fulfilled, the Absolute enters into a course of action, of struggle, out of which the end awareness of itself as "totality" will be achieved.

To engage in this struggle, the Absolute sets up a foil, an illusion of limitedness, for it to then confront and overcome, and thereby discover its own unlimitedness or "infinitude." This foil is the appearance to it of an independent, material universe that confronts the Absolute as "objectivity," "limit," "the other." Out of the origin ("pure Idea" as the thesis) appears its apparent opposite ("pure Nature," the antithesis). Out of "Idea" (mind unconscious of itself) comes "Nature" (matter, apparently separate from and opposing mind). And then, in the form of idea-in-nature, as "Spirit" or "Geist," the Absolute confronts the apparently objective world, engages it, and proceeds with the idealist struggle to overcome the seeming opposition of idea versus nature (thesis versus antithesis). Out of this struggle to "smash objectivity" arises the insight (the higher synthesis) that the Absolute is everything. The purpose of the illusory material world is fulfilled, and the Absolute, as Cosmic Ego, rests fulfilled in its discovery of its own true nature.

This triadic process of achieving fulfillment through a series of thesis-versus-antithesis clashes, which end in higher syntheses, each of which then unfolds into new "fuller" theses-antitheses-syntheses triad, is Hegel's famous dialectical process. This is why Hegel's philosophy is called "dialectical idealism." This process is one of seemingly stable "moments" in history, generating within itself its own opposite or contradiction, followed by a struggle or conflict between them. The resolution of this conflict constitutes an advance—a higher "moment"—from

which the process of internally generated tension, and then release of that tension in another advance reoccurs. This goes on until the ultimate goal is reached.

All of this applies to human history as follows. Geist (Spirit, Idea *in* Nature) appears in the form of man. Man's history, therefore, is the record of Geist's struggle through historical time to achieve its goal. This struggle is furthered, first, in individuals, but then, more powerfully, in families, or communities, or nations, or closely knit "volk" or nation-states. Virile nation-states engage in this struggle in the form of warfare with other states, down through the "slaughter-bench" of human history. At crucial stages in the dialectic of human history, agents of the Absolute appear, as World-Historical Individuals (Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon), who lead Geist to ever-higher awareness. Hegel believed that his philosophy, conjoined with Napoleon's advance and the rise of the Prussian state, had brought Geist to the long-sought goal!

This, in essentials, is the Hegelian "speculative vision" that Marx encountered when he arrived at the University of Berlin in 1836.

Karl Marx was raised in a Jewish family that had converted to Protestantism.[40] Consequently, in his youth he sought the path to a Christian life of serving, and even saving mankind, writing high school essays on these topics. By age eighteen, however, having wandered into a more dissolute and angry life at the University of Bonn, his father transferred him to a "serious" university—the University of Berlin. When Marx arrived there, the great Hegel had been dead for five years, and the campus was dominated by discussion and criticism of Hegel's ideas.

Marx was drawn into this, immersed himself in study, and "converted" to Hegelianism in 1841, at age twenty-three. But which Hegel?

When Hegel died, his followers disagreed over what his ideas implied for any action they should or should not take in their own lives. One group held that the goal of the Absolute, to reach awareness of its own infinitude, seemed to have been fulfilled, both in the march of the Prussian Volk-state, and in the mind of Hegel himself. Nothing further being required, these "quietists" retired from activism to await the end of history. To other young scholars, however, bent on their need to act, fight evil, and serve mankind, quietism was not merely wrong, it was disreputable. When the young Marx arrived, newly distanced from religion and looking for a redemptive life of action, he was immediately drawn to this group, known as the "left" or "young" Hegelians.

Led by David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, they accepted Hegel's notion of the dialectical processes of "advance" as the great kernel of truth in Hegelianism. But they believed that this kernel had been hidden within Hegel's mystical, idealist, cosmic shell, thereby diverting attention from the real struggle here on earth to end man's alienation from his own true nature. Their mission, therefore, was to demystify Hegel, to "transform" his ideas into guidance for the real struggle, namely, to end human alienation here, not holy alienation in the cosmos.

Strauss and Feuerbach led the way, focusing attention on religion, which gave all man's attributes of productivity, justice, goodness and love to God. In doing this, religion was the true source of alienation. What men needed to do was abandon God, re-orient their focus on themselves, and engage in communal labor and love of mankind. If we reorient ourselves and see that Hegel's philosophy is, in truth, "esoteric psychology," alienation will be overcome.

Marx was excited by this. Feuerbach had succeeded in overcoming Hegel's mystifications, thus showing that alienation is man's problem, not God's, and that to overcome this, man must act, not philosophize. But Feuerbach had not gone far enough. He had not located the fundamental source of human alienation. He had condemned religion, but failed to see that

there are "unholy forms of alienation" that are deeper than religion. Feuerbach was (in a pun) the "brook of fire" that had to be crossed to arrive at the true root of alienation, which lay in man's economic life.

In a burst of activity, from 1842 to 1848, Marx wrote a series of tracts, culminating in the *Communist Manifesto*, in which he believed he had laid bare the true source of alienation in man's life, and the actual arena within which the dialectic operates. The true source of alienation is the separation of the economic laborer from the instruments with which he labors. The proletariats, as a class, face the owners of the means of production, the capitalists, in a dialectical clash of interests. This situation, driven on by deterministic forces, drives both the proletariat and the bourgeois further and further from the fulfillment possible through communal, voluntary labor. At the same time, this situation steadily drives the two classes (the thesis and the antithesis) into deeper conflict, which, by 1848, Marx believed had reached its breaking point. Thus the *Communist Manifesto*'s call to revolution: "Workers of the world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains." In 1848, Marx and Engels believed that the "nodal point" of history had arrived, a revolutionary clash of interests would occur, the dialectical tension between thesis and antithesis would be released in a social revolution, and after a brief transitional period, human alienation would come to an end as the communist era—heaven come to earth—began.

When the expected revolution did not occur, Marx set to work to prove "scientifically" that his prediction of the overthrow of capitalism was backed up by necessary dialectical laws of economics and history. Thus, Marxism is referred to as dialectical historicism. He worked on this unsuccessfully for the rest of his life, in his famous *Das Kapital*, trying to prove that his theoretical "laws of capitalist development" were actually at work, and that the inevitable socialist revolution was at hand. The capitalist institutions of exploitation, dominance, and alienation were about to be overthrown in a violent revolution. The exploited would achieve a common understanding of their plight and of what they must do, and they would then rise up *en masse* in revolution, temporarily seize political power, use the state to "expropriate the expropriators," and prepare a short-lived dictatorship *of the* proletariat, following which the state would "wither away" and communist Utopia would arrive. And then the long-awaited reuniting of man with his alienated essence would occur, and the "pre-human history" that man has suffered through would end.

MARXISM COMES TO RUSSIA

These Hegelian and Marxist "visionary speculations" bolstered the struggling Narodniks by offering them pseudoscientific respectability, the moral certitude of Tightness, and the historical guarantee of success that they needed. When Marxism came to Russia, most of the ideological propositions in *We the Living* fell into place.

Marx's early writings first came to Russian attention in the late 1840s primarily through translations and other efforts on the part of Herzen and Bakunin. In 1869, a Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared, followed by *Das Kapital* in 1872.

Russian intellectuals, led by the "father of Russian Marxism," Georg Plekhanov (1857–1918), immediately recognized the value of Marxism to the Russian situation, and in 1883, the explicitly Marxist organization "The Liberation of Labor" was formed. Early Russian Marxists embraced the seeming "scientific respectability" Marxism gave to their cause. But they faced a major difficulty with Marx's theories. This was the claim—central to Marxism—that the laws of

social history, rooted in economic forces and relations, dictate that the development of capitalism is indispensable in generating the conditions for revolution.

To Plekhanov and other orthodox Russian Marxists, this meant that they must work to foment capitalism in Russia. Some of them, therefore, set out to promote Western liberal ideas and capitalism in Russia. Even the Decembrists of 1825 were rejuvenated as heroes.

In 1871, the Paris Commune socialist uprising in France collapsed. Marx and Engels were crushed. Revealing their ultimate commitment to be to revolution above theory, they went back to the theoretical drawing board and "discovered" that, under some circumstances, the capitalist stage of history could, in some societies on the capitalist periphery, be sidestepped. Russia exhibited these circumstances. When these views appeared in print,[41] Plekhanov and Russia's orthodox Marxists were displaced to the sidelines of Russia's revolutionary movement, as the Jacobins moved to the fore. Released from the need to experience capitalism before revolution, they set to work on two fronts. They began "revising" other aspects of Marxism (as Marx had done with Hegel) to fit their Russian situation. And they began to organize discipline within their ranks, as they began to prepare for the overthrow of czarism and the bringing of revolution and communism to Russia. Their leader in this was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin).

LENIN APPEARS AND ADAPTS MARXISM TO ITS NEEDS

Following the assassination of Alexander II in March 1881, Alexander III intensified the hunt for terrorist cells. Assassination attempts continued. In 1887, Alexander III's secret police uncovered another plot, arrested the leaders, and executed them. One of them was Alexander (Sasha) Ulyanov, a biology and chemistry student, and maker of bombs.

Sasha's execution traumatized his seventeen-year-old brother, Vladimir, who was still living at home. Vladimir took his brother's favorite book, Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* and read it five times over the summer of 1887. The die was cast. It gave him, he later recounted, a "charge" that lasted a lifetime.[42] In 1888, Vladimir (later to take the pen name Lenin) joined the People's Will, and began reading Marx. By 1893 (age twenty-three), he announced that on all fundamental questions, his mind was made up. He would no longer tolerate in his company any criticisms of Chernyshevsky, Marx, or Engels. Convinced of his destiny as a leader of the "new people," and guided by Marx as to where to seek support, he became a revolutionary agitator within Russia's growing industrial and unionized workforce. For this, he was arrested and sent to Siberia.

In 1894, Alexander III died unexpectedly from kidney failure. The "last czar," Nicholas II, took the throne amidst artificial expansion of Russian industry, agricultural collapse, labor unrest and growing unionization, and widening student and peasant revolt.

Released in 1900 from exile, Lenin fled to Europe to write and to foment agitation in Russia from abroad. His own *What Is to Be Done?* appeared in 1902—endorsing the Jacobin elitist approach to revolution. Other works soon followed, "adapting" Marxism to the Russian situation and, at the same time, he worked toward building up the ranks of his party and organizing mobs of dissatisfied Russian factory workers.

It is with Lenin's "adaptations" of Marxism that the ideology of Russia's revolutionaries finally reaches the particular form so accurately portrayed in *We the Living.* What changes did Lenin have to make[43] to Marx's own views?

At one point in *We the Living*, we find Kira reading from her thesis, "Marxism and Leninism":

> Leninism is Marxism adapted to Russian reality. Karl Marx, the great founder of Communism, believed that Socialism was to be *the logical outcome of Capitalism in a country of highly developed Industrialism and with a proletariat attuned to a high degree of class-consciousness.* But our great leader, Comrade Lenin, proved that. . . . (205, emphasis added, the passage from Kira's thesis ends here)

What had Lenin "proved"? That this italicized line is wrong!

Lenin made five "necessary" changes to Marx's views in order to justify the revolution that he was working to bring about in Russia.

1. Lenin's first change to Marx's theory had to do with socialism having to follow capitalism, because it is under capitalism that the necessary dialectic develops, as the precondition to revolution. When Marx revised his views on this, after the Paris Commune, he did so only as a special case and within the context that capitalism had developed in other countries. Lenin went much further in defense of this notion in his *Imperialism: The Highest State of Capitalism* (1917). Here, he develops the view that capitalism, in its most advanced state, will succeed in co-opting its own proletariat into the ranks of the exploiters. Capitalism spreads to the underdeveloped periphery of the world, exporting its exploitation abroad. These outer arenas, Lenin argues (and Russia is one!), are where the exploited will first rise up and supply the spark to a revolutionary fire that will sweep into the capitalist center.

2. Lenin also challenged Marx's claim that a revolution would require, as a precondition, that the mass of the proletariat, as a class, had attained a collective class consciousness of its condition. In *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin portrayed the proletariat as unaware, lethargic, conservative, "asleep," and incapable of grasping the need for, let alone acting for, revolution. Therefore, the proletariat and the revolution must be led by "new people," by a "vanguard party" of knowledgeable and committed revolutionaries. And the masses, if they prove to be hesitant or squeamish about what is to be done, will be indoctrinated and forced into the service of the revolutionary cause.

3. Marx expected the revolution to be relatively short lived, to be followed by a gradual "withering away" of the state. In *State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin asserts that the revolution will be a long, drawn-out affair, with the state, now in revolutionary hands, persisting and even growing in power as the revolution proceeded.

4. Marx had also portrayed the revolution as a continuously progressing event, without interruption or reversal. Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921, where elements of capitalism were reintroduced in the economy (cf. *We the Living*, 308–9) was a result of his rejection of Marx's linear view of revolutionary progress.

5. While Marx understood that the revolution would require violent destruction of factories, machines, and other forms of capital, he believed—with the model of the Paris Commune in mind—that within the ranks of the proletariat there would be discussion, free press, and cooperation. No personality cults or any internal authoritarianism would occur, as the proletarians, with mass collective awareness, prepared the way for communism. Given Lenin's dismissal of the masses as "asleep," he could not hold this view of the revolution. Describing it as "toy democracy," he brought to the revolution the cruel elitism of the earlier Russian Jacobins.

WITH THE IDEOLOGY IN PLACE, REVOLUTION FOLLOWS

In 1863, Chernyshevsky offered the first comprehensive answer to the question "what is to be done," accompanied by a portrayal of the "new men" whose historical mission it was to do it. In 1917, armed with a fuller development of revolutionary ideology, tailored to the Russian situation, and with history and science allegedly on their side, the revolutionaries were poised to act. It is a tragedy, and a lesson in the destructive nature of attempted compromise, that they were able to succeed. It could have been otherwise.

As Nicholas II halfheartedly led Russia into the twentieth century, unrest and economic dislocation led intellectuals to reject czarism and socialism, and to turn, one last time, toward Western liberalism. As Lenin's Bolsheviks worked steadily for revolution, Russia, with no opposition from the czar, turned to the idea of local, representative governing bodies—the *zemstovs* rehabilitated by Alexander II—as the basis for a free Russia. A "Union of Liberation" organization was formed to guide this, and plans were begun for calling a nationwide assembly at which the groundwork for genuine constitutional representative government would be laid. The beacon of the 1825 Decembrists was raised once again, but these new would-be liberals had no agreed-upon coherent philosophy to guide them. The possibility for a free Russia, undercut from the outset in this way, was doomed.

Thus, as Lenin from abroad, and Leon Trotsky from within, carried on their preparations, the Russian reformers argued, failed to unify, and frittered away precious time. Repeatedly, assemblies of *zemstov* representatives met (known as *Dumas*), but produced little. Then Russia was drawn into the First World War. Amidst confusion, the fourth Duma was taken by surprise when their demand for the abdication of the czar was accepted. Nicholas stepped down, and as the war neared its end, a provisional government was set up by the current Duma.[44] The primary objective of this government was to complete plans for a nationwide constitutional assembly where *zemstov* representatives from across Russia would meet and vote—for the first time in Russia's long, tortured history—for a nationally elected government.

As the Duma squabbled over details, and maneuvered for position in the upcoming Assembly, Lenin finally succeeded from abroad in bringing his Bolshevik organization, led by Trotsky, into action. In the autumn of 1917 with Lenin now in charge, his "Red Guard" storm troopers took control of St. Petersburg and forcefully disbanded the sitting provisional government. The next day, Lenin announced to Russia that the Bolsheviks were now in charge, and would proceed with the revolution by nationalizing all land, banks, and factories, and by arresting all who opposed them. Amazingly, however, at a meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee in Lenin's and Trotsky's absence, the Committee voted to allow the planned-for national constitutional assembly to meet, and to be bound by the votes cast at this meeting.

The meeting took place in January 1918. The result of the election, to the shock of the Bolsheviks, showed massive support across the country for the social democrats, as against the Bolsheviks and the liberals.[45] In the face of this, the long tradition of Chernyshevsky, Nechayev, Tkachev, and Lenin came to the fore. Trotsky and Lenin ordered out the Red Guards, who forcefully disbanded the Assembly, arrested many delegates, and executed some on the spot. The world of *We the Living* descended like a funeral cloak over Russia.[46]

From early 1918 until early 1926,[47] Lenin, Trotsky, and then Stalin[48] proceeded with the revolution, creating all of the state organizations and initiating all of the repression that appears as background in *We the Living.* Factories and buildings *were* nationalized, grain harvests *were* expropriated, civil war *did* follow, and families *did flee* the "red north" for the "white south." All

of the background in *We the Living*, both ideological and existential, was in fact now present in, and pervasive throughout, Russia. It *was* all true, as Ayn Rand repeatedly insisted it was.

CONCLUSION

In the foreword to the 1959 edition of *We the Living*, Ayn Rand writes that its basic theme is "the sanctity of human life" (xiii), and that the essence of this theme is contained in the words of Irina to Kira from her prison cell the night before being sent by train to Siberia (349–50). Irina is puzzled, as she faces doom, over what it is about human life that people, including herself, do not understand. "What is it? What?" she asks, that we need to understand in order to explain why every life is "precious," "rare," a "sacred treasure." Ayn Rand then comments: "At that time,[49] I knew little more about this question than did Irina" (xiii).

Thus, when Ayn Rand promised in real life, and Kira promised in *We the Living*, to "tell the world" about conditions in Soviet Russia, neither of them could then fully explain what made life sacred.[50] Thirty years later, Ayn Rand writes, "I reached the full answer to Irina's question" (xiv).

She certainly did—in an incomparably profound and comprehensive grasp: of what human life is; of why it is a "sacred treasure"; of how it is successfully lived; and of what its needs are. Had Ayn Rand, with this fuller understanding of human life and of the central role in human life of philosophical abstractions, returned to the Petrograd railway station (as Kira does at the beginning of *We the Living*), what would she then have known?

She would have known fully not only *that* Petrograd smelt of carbolic acid, but also *why*.[51]

She would have known that the revolutionaries we have discussed, and the ideas that fueled them, were the ultimate cause of the destruction of Petrograd, and of human life as such. This is because in those thirty years Ayn Rand had discovered the full philosophical answer to: why an individual's life is (or should be) his highest treasure; how, in order to achieve it, it has to be lived; and what form of government is compatible with this achievement being possible.

More specifically, regarding *We the Living*, Ayn Rand, by 1959, had discovered why it is that, given the nature of the human mind, it is philosophical ideas, once accepted and whether true or false, that ultimately determines the course of men's futures—for good or ill.

By 1959, Ayn Rand had repudiated every one of the components of the Russian revolutionaries' guiding vision—a vision that is both false, and mystical, and as such is guaranteed to produce the tyranny, misery, and destruction that this vision has spawned across the twentieth-century world.

Specifically, she had demonstrated that (1) the determinate force in history, being man's doing and not history's, is under man's control; (2) that men can, and must, choose to think and then control their own future; (3) that contradictions exist *only* in human minds suffering from error or irrationality, and explain nothing about the necessary unfolding of reality; (4) that individually or governmentally initiated violence is man's primary social evil; (5) that men, not history, must achieve truly human lives, on their own; (6) metaphysically, only individuals (not collectives) exist and are ends in themselves, not history's means to collective ends; and finally, (7) Irina is right—individual life is sacred, and is never to be sacrificed to any allegedly higher collective goal.[52]

In the 1930s, neither Kira nor Ayn Rand fully knew why Petrograd smelt of carbolic acid. By 1959, Ayn Rand did. She knew that the revolutionaries' *ideas* were the epistemological lice

and pestilence that had infected Russia, and that the revolutionaries were the human vermin that had carried these ideas into the Russian culture. And further, she would have known that her own ideas would be the philosophical carbolic acid that is needed to definitively combat such deadly scourges wherever and whenever they may arise.

NOTES

1. See Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 4.

2. See Berliner, *Letters*, 4 (March 23, 1934), 17 (October 17, 1934), 637 (August 21, 1965); David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 65 (February 2, 1936); and the foreword to the revised edition of *We the Living* (xvii).

3. Ayn Rand had every right to make this claim, having herself lived in the place (Petrograd) and the time (1922–1926) depicted in *We the Living.*

4. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "ideology" as "manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual; ideas at the basis of some economic or political theory or system; *visionary speculation*" (emphasis added). In the cases discussed in this chapter, "ideology" refers to the "ideas" that serve as rationalizations for deeply held emotional-psychological reasons. As such, "ideology" is not a manner of *thinking* in any precise sense. Intellectual history is replete with brilliant and passionate minds who have, at a young age, "discovered" the answers to profound questions (both Marx and Lenin being classic examples). Not being the product of actual thinking, however, these ideologies are not, and cannot be, knowledge, and to follow them necessarily leads to the undermining and destruction of life.

That ideology, whether rational (and thus beneficial) or irrational (and thus destructive) *is* inescapable, and the primary cause of social history, is not something Ayn Rand fully understood when writing *We the Living* (see her foreword to the revised edition, xiii–xiv), and will not be addressed here. On this issue, see Leonard Peikoff, "Philosophy and Psychology in History," *The Objectivist Forum* 6, no. 5 (October 1985). The present essay offers further evidence for a central conviction of the Objectivist philosophy of history, namely, that philosophical ideas are the primary cause of social history.

5. Puzzlingly, this aspect has received almost no critical comment in reviews of *We the Living*, as if it were either irrelevant or too obvious to warrant attention.

6. There is reason, in addition to the accuracy of her portrayal of Marxist-Leninist ideology in *We the Living*, to believe that Ayn Rand understood this ideology. At the University of Petrograd, she took courses saturated in the official Marxist-Leninist perspective. See chapter 4 of this volume.

7. Given the true nature of "visionary speculation," it is not surprising that very little is said in *We the Living* and in the actual revolutionary literature about the epistemological methods that lead to these "insights." Rooted as they are in the psychological needs of the visionaries, they are profoundly subjective; and they are considered convincing (to them) because of needs they cater to, rather than any evidence reality offers in their support; and they are held for this reason to be "true" and beyond challenge. Thus, those who dare to disagree face not counterevidence and logical refutation, but prison camps and firing squads.

8. For our purposes, the relevant view of this process is the one held by G. W. F. Hegel and "transformed" by Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

9. Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1991), 33.

10. This focus on morality rather than on deeper philosophy is in part explained by the early stage in her life and thought Ayn Rand was at when she wrote *We the Living.*

11. For a synopsis of the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church, see Tibor Szamuely, *The Russian Tradition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 67–73.

12. Constantine de Grunwald, *Tsar Nicholas I,* translated by Blight Patmore (London: Futura, 1954), 74.

13. The leading intellectuals of this movement included: Peter Chaadayev (1794–1856); Alexis Khomyakov (1804–1860); Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856); Konstantin Aksakov (1817–1860); and Yuri Samarin (1819–1876). Leo Tolstoy was, in significant respects, influenced by this school.

14. Cf. *We the Living*, where a philosopher comments: "Russia's destiny has ever been of the spirit. Holy Russia has lost her God and her Soul" (154). Similarly, later in the novel Lydia exclaims to Kira: "It has been revealed to me. . . . Holy Russia's salvation will come from faith" (272–73).

15. The leading intellectuals of this movement included: Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848); Alexander Herzen (1812–1870); to some extent, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876); and Nicholas Stankevich (1813–1840). Ivan Turgenev and Fyodor Dostoevsky were influenced by this school.

16. Hegel played a central role in the genesis of Russian revolutionary ideology and, through his influence on Marx, on the ideology of the Russian Revolution. More on this shortly.

17. Leaders in this group included David Strauss and, particularly, Ludwig Feuerbach. One of the early converts was Karl Marx.

18. "Horrors," it should be noted, that led to the greatest advances in population, material production, and life span in human history.

19. The Moloch was a tyrannical Canaanite idol to whom children were sacrificed.

20. Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 1979), 206.

21. For example, the French Revolution (from Rousseau to Robespierre), Nazi Germany (from Luther and Hegel to Hitler), and twentieth-century communist tyranny (from Hegel, Marx, and Lenin, to Stalin, Mao, Castro, and Pol Pot).

22. Joseph Frank, "N. G. Chernyshevsky: A Russian Utopian," *Southern Review* 3 (1967), 68.

23. The following sources will offer a doorway into the large literature on these men and their "ideas": Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*; Fredrick Copelston, *Philosophy in Russia* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Eugene Methvin, *The Rise of Radicalism* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973).

24. The label "Jacobin" was taken by the furthest left, most fanatical wing of the opposition to monarchy in late eighteenth-century France—ultimately to be dominated by Robespierre and Antoine St. Just. This group had used a Jacobin monastery for their meetings.

25. This they "learned" from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notions of the General Will, and the Legislator who alone knows this Will and has the authority and power to impose it in order that "men be forced to be free"!

26. See Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, chapter 10: "The Intelligentsia."

27. Quoted in Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, 156.

28. Quoted in Methvin, *Rise of Radicalism*, 181.

29. Quoted in Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, 156. In Hegel's terms, this is the World Historical Figure (e.g., Caesar, Napoleon) who tells his age what time it is (see Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*).

30. Quoted in Methvin, *Rise of Radicalism*, 187.

31. Quoted in Methvin, *Rise of Radicalism*, 184–85. From *We the Living*, cf. Comrade Sonia: "We've got to stamp our proletarian boot into their white throats" (73), and Stepan Timoshenko: "you don't make a revolution with white gloves on" (128).

32. Quoted in Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, 233.

33. Reports of this murder prompted Fyodor Dostoevsky to write his famous novel *The Demons*, a condemning portrayal of the fanatic revolutionary, published in 1872. (See Richard Pevear's foreword to his and Larissa Volokhonsky's translation of *The Demons* [New York: Vintage, 1995], which states that the victim, Ivan Ivanov, was beaten, strangled, and shot in the head.) This novel has, as a front piece, the following quote from the Bible (Luke 8:32–36): "Then the demons came out of the man, and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned." Out of what man? Chernyshevsky. What demons? Chernyshevsky's ideas. Into what swine? The Russian Jacobins. Tragically, as *We the Living* portrays, the swine did not rush to a quick death. On Nechayev's fanaticism, see Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, 247–71 (and especially 265–66, in regard to Dostoevsky).

34. Bakunin early on referred admiringly to Nechayev as "the young savage."

35. This name is intentionally misleading. The cell, as "new people," had disdain for the common people and what they might will. The model for this "people's will" was Rousseau's infamous "General Will," which he used to refer to a mystic, universal "Will" representing what the people should will, but were too ignorant of their true interests to do so. Pol Pot used the same dishonest terminology.

36. Quoted in B. Eissenstat, *Lenin and Leninism, State, Law, and Society* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1971), 16. See also Szamuely, *Russian Tradition*, chapter 16: "Tkachev and the Roots of Leninism."

37. Hegel's central works include *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *Science of Logic* (1812–1813), and *Philosophy of Right* (1821). Introductions to Hegel's thought include W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition* (New York: Dover, 1955), and chapters in Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 2, *Hegel and Marx*, 5th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), and W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 4, *Kant and the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

Although only the barest summary of his ideas, this will give evidence of the purely subjective and disreputable nature of the "visionary speculations" that ideologies often embrace, and connect them to their true source in the psychologies of the speculators and to their earlier roots in mystical (and therefore false) philosophy accepted when young. It is easy to understand why very intelligent young "speculative visionaries" come to an unshakeable truth while still quite young. It is because their method is merely quasi-logical inference from deeply felt premises. No patient observation, gathering of evidence, rejecting of error, or integrating of the warranted is required as it characteristically was by history's honest philosophical minds.

38. Hegel is the pivotal thinker in Russia's revolutionary history in that his philosophy lies at the deepest level of the many revolutionary neo-Hegelians who followed him, most notoriously, Marx.

39. This is the collapsing of Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms into one all-encompassing universe as phenomena. Hegel's philosophy is an example of *idealism.*

40. Protestantism, particularly in its more extreme Pietist form, was an important undercurrent in the thought of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dissident thinkers (e.g., Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and several of the German romantics).

41. This change in Marx and Engel's position appeared in 1882, in their preface to Plekhanov's Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto.*

42. Lenin's use of this term is clear evidence that the psychological processes mentioned earlier, as underlying a revolutionary's "discovery" of the "truth," are at work here.

43. By "have to make," I mean what changes he had to make to turn Marxist theory into a fuller rationalization for power-lust, and to eliminate any opposition Marxism may contain to Lenin's plan for Russia.

44. This government came to be led by their justice minister, Alexander Kerensky, who became a hero for a twelve-year-old resident of St. Petersburg, Ayn Rand. (Biographical interviews [Ayn Rand Archives].)

45. In the nationwide election, the social democrats received approximately twenty-one million votes, the Bolsheviks nine million, and the liberals five million.

46. Ayn Rand would later recount that in January of 1918, nearly thirteen years old, she witnessed, from her apartment window, the funeral procession of murdered delegates. In particular, she recalled the body of a beautiful black-haired young woman, in an open coffin, her hair framed by a red pillow. (Biographical interviews [Ayn Rand Archives].) Perhaps the young Ayn Rand realized that if she remained in Russia, she would share the same fate.

47. Ayn Rand left Russia in 1926. A comparison of the date and details of Ayn Rand's departure from Russia, with the date and details of Kira Argounova's attempted escape from Russia, and her death on the border with Latvia, seems to indicate that these two events occurred within a few days of each

other. With "poetic license,'" we could even say they happened on the same day, at the same border, 200 miles southwest of Petrograd.

48. Lenin, after a series of strokes, died in early 1924 (cf. *We the Living*, 291). Following this, Stalin maneuvered to the top of the leadership dung heap, displacing Trotsky on the way (cf. *We the Living*, 309). Note that Stalin is never mentioned in *We the Living.*

49. That is, the early thirties, when she wrote *We the Living*.

50. At a party in early 1926 before she left for America, Ayn Rand promised to tell America that Russia was a huge cemetery, where everyone was slowly dying. See Leonard Peikoff's introduction to the sixtieth anniversary edition (v). At the end of *We the Living*, Kira promises her Uncle Vasili: "I'll tell them . . . where I'm going . . . about everything . . . like an S.O.S." (451).

51. "Petrograd smelt of carbolic acid" are the opening words of *We the Living*. Carbolic acid is a powerful disinfectant used to fight the spread of disease born by lice and other carriers.

52. See the seven points listed above, in the section "Ideology in *We the Living*: The Abstract Vision" (pp. 115–17).