

Chapter Ten

We the Living: '36 & '59

By Robert Mayhew

We the Living was published by Macmillan in 1936, and during the following year, owing to the publisher's neglect, it went out of print.¹ After the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957, Rand prepared a revised edition of *We the Living*, which was subsequently published in 1959. Here is what she had to say in the foreword about these revisions:

I want to account for the editorial changes which I have made in the text of this novel for its present reissue: the chief inadequacy of my literary means was grammatical—a particular kind of uncertainty in the use of the English language, which reflected the transitional state of a mind thinking no longer in Russian, but not yet fully in English. I have changed only the most awkward or confusing lapses of this kind. I have reworded the sentences and clarified their meaning without changing their content. I have not added or eliminated anything to or from the content of the novel. I have cut out some sentences and a few paragraphs that were repetitious or so confusing in their implications that to clarify them would have necessitated lengthy additions. In brief, all the changes are merely editorial line-changes. The novel remains what and as it was. (xvi–xvii)

In what follows, I illustrate and explain the kinds of changes she made.

When I started comparing the first edition of *We the Living* to the revised edition, I was surprised by the number of changes Rand made. As a brief indication of the extent of her revisions, note that she made over 900 changes in punctuation and well over 2000 changes in wording (in which I include deletions, additions, replacing individual words or rewording phrases and sentences). According to my examination, only one page (of the 1996 edition) went without a single change (namely, 105).

I begin with the less interesting changes—for example, punctuation—then move to changes in wording, before finally turning to some of the more substantial and substantive changes.

PUNCTUATION, CAPITALIZATION, AND PARAGRAPHING

In her *Art of Nonfiction* (from a course given in 1969), Ayn Rand states:

Although there is a great deal of latitude in English, it is a language in which punctuation is particularly crucial. Incidentally, the other two languages I know—Russian and French—are not quite so prone to equivocation or double meaning.

English is very condensed and exact (which is why I love it), but these very qualities make possible sentences that can be read in two different ways, according to whether you insert or omit a comma.²

She wrote *We the Living* over thirty years earlier, during her transition from Russian to English, which most likely explains why there were so many changes in punctuation later. Of the over 900 punctuation changes, the majority involve commas: by my count, she inserted over 500 commas and deleted about 100. For example, she added a comma to the following sentence:

When the train pulled out <,> she was seen sitting on her bundles, (14/28)

and deleted a comma from this one:

She answered[,] and her voice had the intensity of a maniac's. (544/444)³

These examples are typical.

There were nearly 300 other punctuation changes, usually involving the change of one kind of punctuation mark into another. For example,

Irina studied Art. She devoted her time to solemn research. . . . (76)

became:

Irina studied Art; she devoted her time to solemn research. . . . (76)

This line change also provides us with an example of a typical change in capitalization. Most of the approximately 150 changes in capitalization accompanied changes in punctuation. Other changes in capitalization involved titles. For example, in the line:

It's a present from mother, (363)

“mother” is capitalized in the revised edition (300). Here's another example, from the scene with Andrei and Captain Karsavin:

The Captain said:
“Your gun.” (123)

This is revised to:

The captain said: “Your gun.” (112)

Note the change in paragraphing as well. Rand made changes in paragraphing nearly 800 times as she revised *We the Living*. In only three of these cases did she *add* paragraphing.

The changes in punctuation are explained by her having become—in the over twenty years between versions—more comfortable with, and knowledgeable of, the nuances of English, a language which she claims is more affected by punctuation than is Russian. The changes in capitalization (not linked to punctuation revisions) and the changes in paragraphing might reflect changes in literary conventions.⁴

CHANGES IN WORDING

Typographical Errors

Of the over three thousand changes Ayn Rand made, I found only fifteen that were corrections of typographical errors: “our” was changed to “your” (21/33); “its” was changed to “it’s” (47/53); “Sachs” was changed to “Sachs” (47/53); “some one” was changed to “someone” (62/65; cf. 190/222); “slubbering” was changed to “slobbering” (70/71); “flopping” was changed to “flapping” (100/94); “the” was inserted before “dictatorship of the proletariat” (103/97); the period after “anemic girl” was changed to a comma (177/155); “wardhobe” was changed to “wardrobe” (210/180); “Swans’ Lake” was changed to “Swan Lake” (220/189); “Misha” was changed to “Mishka” (232/198); “preying” was changed to “prying” (233/199); “stranger” was changed to “stronger” (315/261); “Galine” was changed to “Galina” (549/447); “mowing” was changed to “moving” (561/457).

Factual Errors

A few corrections were not of typographical, but of factual, errors. For example, the many instances of “pulpit” in the first edition were corrected to “lectern” (e.g., 374/308). In one passage, she writes that Mitya Vessiolkin “tried to jump off a moving tramway, and he fell under, but he was lucky: just one wrist cut off” (176). A wrist can be cut, but not cut off; so the line was changed to “just one hand cut off” (154). One last example: Vasili Dunaev had a prosperous fur business which had provided—according to the original—“the chinchillas that embraced many shoulders white as marble” (23). But chinchillas come from South America, whereas Vasili was a fur trapper in Siberia; so, “chinchillas” was changed to “sables” (34).

Spelling

There were dozens of changes in spelling that were not the correction of typos. A number involved hyphenation: for example, dry goods/dry-goods (114/106). Others involved the spelling of Russian words and names: for example, roubles/rubles (66/68), Trotzky/Trotsky (225/192). And still others involved changes to verbs in the past tense with a –t ending: for example, smelt/smelled (49/54), sunburnt/sunburned (3/19; 324/268).

There were also dozens of changes involving contractions—usually the removal of the contraction, for example, son’s/son is (79/78), didn’t/did not (107/101).

Grammar

Some revisions were corrections of grammatical errors.⁵ For example:

The library was like all the other rooms in the ‘House of the Peasant,’ except that it had more posters and [less] <fewer> books. (240/205)

In the following case, Rand simply removes the dangling modifier:

The girl in the leather jacket [from Kira’s office] was chairman of the Club. (240/205)

In another, she rewrites the sentence to remove the improper double negative:

It's better if no one—not a soul—nowhere—knows, but you and I. (278)

It's better if no one—not a soul anywhere—knows this, but you and I. (234)

One grammatical error that Rand commits about fifty times is the use of “as” where “like” is necessary.⁶ For example, here is a description of melting snow:

gray with city dust [as] <like> dirty cotton, brittle and shining [as] <like> wet sugar; (164/144)

and, of a sunrise:

A band of pink, pale and young, [as] <like > the breath of a color, [as] <like> the birth of a color. (569/463)

Similarly, though not as grammatically incorrect, Rand often used a single “as” where two would be better. For example:

He was sixty years old; his backbone had been <as> straight as his gun; his spirit—<as> straight as his backbone. (23/35)

In scores of places, she changed the tense of verbs, to achieve more precision. For example:

The only hero she had known was a Viking whose story she <had> read as a child. (41/49)

Other instances involve such changes as: having climbed/climbing (124/113); came/had come (151/134); was looking/looked (364/300).

What I find surprising is not that the young Ayn Rand committed a number of grammatical errors—she was in her twenties, and had been in the United States for less than a decade when she wrote *We the Living*—but that her copyeditors at Macmillan failed to catch so many errors. This may say something about the attention and commitment Macmillan gave to the novel.

Word Order

There were a few changes in word order (by which I mean that the order of the words was changed, but the words themselves were not changed nor were other words omitted or added). In most cases, the change is not significant, merely adding precision or making the passage smoother. For example:

Galina Petrovna sat straight up (25)

became:

Galina Petrovna sat up straight. (37)

In another case, Rand wrote:

She stood silently looking into his eyes (57)

which was changed to:

She stood looking silently into his eyes. (61)

There is a subtle difference, in that “silently” modifies not Kira’s standing, but her looking into Leo’s eyes.

Word Replacement

There are cases in which Ayn Rand simply exchanged one word for another (with no other omissions or additions). Often, the new word is simply better. For example:

And the golden spire of the Admiralty held defiantly a [disappeared] <vanished> sun high over the dark city. (106/100)

In dozens of cases, Rand traded one preposition for another, more appropriate, one. For example:

Maria Petrovna was talking [in] <with> a nervous, fluttering hurry; (23/35)

Lydia . . . had a suspicion [of] <about> the reason of her popularity at all the rare parties; (177/155)

little shadows of raindrops rolled slowly [on] <down> the wall. (377/311)

In each case, what is achieved—beyond grammatical correctness—is a bit more precision.

There are cases in which Rand replaced one word with another a number of times. For example, “look” and related words are replaced by “glance” and words related to it over ten times. In this example, Syerov is looking at Leo and Kira:

He turned once to [look] <glance> back at them. (105/99)

“Look” is a very broad word; glance has a narrower meaning—“look quickly or briefly,” according to one dictionary—and suggests a more directed look. Such changes create more precision and clarity.

She also replaced the word “immobile” a half dozen times, but more for accuracy than for connotation. Here are three:

She stood straight, [immobile] <motionless>, with the graceful indifference of a traveler on a luxurious ocean liner; (3/19)

the notes rose, trembling, repeating themselves, too rapt to be held [immobile] <still>, like arms raised . . . waving . . . in the sweep of banners; (74/74)

When Kira and Leo spoke to each other, their words were [short] <brief>, [precise] <impersonal>, their indifference exaggerated, their [immobile] <expressionless> faces guarding a secret they both remembered. (155/137)

In each of these cases, the problem is that “immobile” means (or can mean) “incapable of moving or being moved.” But that’s not what Rand wants to convey. For instance, in the first

example, the point is not that Kira stood incapable of motion, but that she—though capable—was not moving. It's a subtle difference, but the change is worth making.

In at least four cases, Ayn Rand changed the name of a country or person. In one case, "Saint Russia" is replaced by "Holy Russia" (176/154), because Rand—who in effect translated from the Russian—later discovered that "Holy Russia" was the convention in English. In another case, "British" replaces "English" (as in "British Trade Unions") making the usage a bit more accurate (233/200). Another example of such a change for the sake of accuracy occurs in the scene in which Andrei forces Syerov, through threat of exposing his illegal scam, to release Leo from prison. Syerov's reply originally was:

"All right, King Arthur or whatever it's called," he said. "King Arthur of the blackmail sword." (511/416)

Rand replaces "King Arthur" with "Sir Galahad," a better representative of chivalrous behavior toward women.

The most interesting name change comes in the passage describing the young Leo. One line in the original reads:

When his young friends related, in whispers, the latest French stories, Leo quoted Kant and Nietzsche. (156)

In the '59 edition, "Kant" is changed to "Spinoza" (138). Rand had a mild respect for Spinoza's egoism; but more important, in her mature philosophical writings she makes it clear that she regards Kant as the most evil philosopher in history, a view she did not hold in Russia or when she first got to the United States. (Later in the novel, when Leo is arrested, the '36 edition has him uttering an arguably Kantian line to Andrei: "A tendency for transcendental thinking is apt to obscure our perception of reality" [487/397]. The line was cut.)

In a few cases, a word was changed because its connotation does not fit the character it describes. For example, Ayn Rand a few times in presenting Kira replaces "funny" with "strange." Here's one:

the soldier noticed . . . that the [funny] <strange> girl in the child's stocking-cap had [funny] <strange> eyes. (17/30)

This change was no doubt made because Rand wants to convey that her heroine is unusual, not silly. On the other side of the spectrum of characters, she changed a word in the following line about Victor:

Victor came in, shuffling [leisurely] <lazily> in bedroom slippers. (158/139)

"Lazily" better fits Victor in general, and this scene in particular.

In a number of places, the word change makes the passage more accurate or precise. For example, in the scene depicting the university student elections, describing the student speakers from the Communist faction, Ayn Rand writes:

Its speakers bellowed [loudly] <belligerently> about the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. (71/71)

The first time Leo comes to Kira's home, Lydia asks him where he comes from. The response:

“From jail,” Leo answered with a [charming] <courteous> smile.” (146/130)

Leo may have been coolly polite, but there is nothing particularly charming about his behavior toward Kira’s family that evening. Similarly, when Andrei explains to Kira why he likes listening to music with her, he says:

Because you have a very [cruel] <stern> mouth—and I like that—but when you listen to that music, your mouth is gay, as if it were listening, too. (335/277)

“Cruel” is too harsh, and might seem to clash with “gay,” so Rand made the appropriate change. Here’s another example of a change made for greater accuracy:

She made a raft of tree branches and . . . [rode] <sailed> down the river. (38/46)

Similar changes are made involving “table” and “desk” (72/72), “pictures” and “photographs” (122/112), and a number of times, “purging” and “purge” (e.g., 246/209).

One word exchange was made to avoid a possible misunderstanding and some unintended humor during a very serious scene from Andrei’s past:

“Brothers,” he cried, “I have no [arms] <weapons>. I am not here to shoot.” (118/108)

Some words were replaced, I suspect, because of a change in usage over time (and perhaps a change in location too, from California to New York). In the ’36 edition, Irina is described as “a young lady of eighteen” (22); in the ’59 edition, she is “a young girl of eighteen” (34). In the first edition, Sonia predicts that she and Kira are “going to be great pals” (68); in the revised edition, her prediction—equally inaccurate—is that they will be “great friends” (69). Two more examples: “pupils” is replaced with “students” (e.g., 41/48), and “store” becomes “shop” (e.g., 18/31).

In a discussion of connotation, in *The Art of Nonfiction*, Ayn Rand states: “Watch out for philosophical implications, too. For example, if someone writes, ‘He had an instinct for courage,’ he may only want to convey, ‘He is brave.’ But the actual, and improper, implication is that courage is an instinct.”⁷ She replaced some words in *We the Living* to avoid improper philosophical implications. Here are six examples.

(1) *The ABC of Communism* was “a book whose study was compulsory in every school [of the Republic] <in the country>” (241/205).

The original might give the impression that Rand considered the Soviet Union a republic, like the United States or France, which she did not.

(2) Vasili Dunaev says that in the old days, “they had culture, and [faith] <moral values>, and . . . and integrity” (253/214).

Although these are the words of Vasili, and thus do not necessarily represent the views of the author, he is sufficiently a positive character that she would want to eliminate the implication that faith was in any way a positive value from “the old days.” Changing it to “moral values” avoids this implication, while at the same time leaving open what someone like Vasili would have considered moral values.

(3) “When a reduction of staffs came to the ‘House of the Peasant’ and she saw her name among those [fired] <dismissed> as ‘anti-social element,’ she was not surprised” (267/225).

I initially thought that this must be a significant change, on the grounds that “fired” is usually used in the context of a free (or semi-free) market, where employers have the right and the power to get rid of a person they no longer wish to employ, whereas in the Soviet Union, who got and kept what job depended largely on party membership and/or political pull. One could argue that “fired” gives too much dignity to Kira’s job at the House of the Peasant, and thus “dismissed” is the better word. There may be something to this, though Rand must have regarded this as a minor difference; for she does use “fired” in the revised edition of *We the Living* (137, 153, 167, 192, 290, 327, 447)—in fact, more often than she uses “dismissed” (225, 272, 274, 325).

(4) Galina Petrovna describing Victor: “Now there’s nothing [mystical] <sentimental> about him. He has his eyes open to [our] modern reality” (330/274).

Not only is “mystical” simply less accurate and appropriate than “sentimental,” further, its use here might imply that Rand accepts the notion that ideals (as opposed to what’s “practical”) are inherently irrational.

(5) “what reason could possibly keep her from her work, her life work, her only [dream] <desire>” (394/324).

“Dream” might suggest that what Kira desires is impossible—something to be dreamed of but never obtained. But she specifically rejects this, telling Andrei that what she wants is “[to] imagine a heaven and then not to dream of it, but to demand it” (117).⁸ Now it is true that what she desired *was* impossible in the Soviet Union—that’s why she tried to escape. But it was not a mere dream in her mind.

(6) Fairly late in the novel, Rand writes that Leo “would leave in the morning, smiling and cheerful and brisk with [activity] <energy>” (396/325).

The description “brisk with activity” suggests a level of purposefulness which Leo did not possess. His sole function in the food scam he’s involved in is to be a fall guy, so that if the authorities discover the illegal business, he will be held responsible, not Syerov or Morozov. Leo gets up in the morning with no real purpose, only some options: stay home and read, see Tonia, get drunk, empty the store’s cash register, and so on. One can do this with more or less energy, but it is not genuine activity.

Additions

Some additions were quite minor, the words being added to make a passage smoother or a bit clearer. For example:

Some letters had dried with long <, thin> streaks of red. (16/29)

A more important clarification is to the following line, on Kira’s thoughts about Leo in the weeks after she first met him:

She had never had any thought of him beyond the one that he existed. <But she found it hard to remember the existence of anything else.> (64/67)

On its own, the first line could be read to mean that Kira is aware of Leo’s existence, but beyond that he is of no importance to her. The addition makes clear what is meant: that Leo’s existence was constantly on her mind.

Here's an example of an addition of words to avoid an unintended philosophical implication. Describing a soldier's face, Rand writes:

there was an<air of> innate temerity. (17/30)

As stated in the original, the line implies that temerity is an innate characteristic. The addition removes or mutes that implication.

Finally, consider this exchange between Andrei and Kira:

“We're crumbling, like a wall, one by one. Kira, I've never been afraid. I'm afraid, now. It's a strange feeling. I'm afraid to think. <Because . . . because I think, at times, that perhaps our ideals have had no other result.>”

“<That's true! The fault was not in men, but in the nature of your ideals.> . . . I wish I could help you. But of all people, I'm the one who can help you least. You know it.” (408/334)

In the original, we are not told why or of what Andrei is afraid to think. The addition makes it clear that this is an ideological issue. Andrei's life is not crumbling under the stress of work or of Kira's refusal to live with or marry him; he is afraid, it is now made explicit, because it is dawning on him that that ideology for which he has been willing to die and for which he has killed may itself be the cause of the destruction he sees around him. Of course, having made that clear, Rand could not let Kira remain silent. Hence the rest of the addition.

Deletions

There were many more deletions than additions. Some were quite minor: “[Sister] Lydia” (5/2); “A [darn] fool peasant woman” (14/28); “At the Institute, she listened to [many] lectures, but spoke to few people” (49/55); “We had [very] red banners” (455/371).

Ayn Rand tells us in her foreword to the '59 edition that some passages were cut to eliminate repetition. In some cases, such passages, though repetitious, could nevertheless be well written and quite interesting. Here are two that qualify.

In the first, Kira is waiting for Leo to come home from one of his “dates” with Tonia. The 1936 edition describes the following activity while Kira waited:

She picked up her book, but she did not want to read; the book told the story of a dam built by heroic Red workers in spite of the nefarious machinations of villainous Whites who tried to destroy it. (405/332)

This brief paragraph is well written, and illustrates Kira's lack of options for enjoyable activities while at home, as well the ubiquity of Soviet propaganda. The problem is that the passage is repetitious, because Rand had earlier indicated the nature of Red literature, when she described the kinds of foreign novels that Leo was allowed to translate into Russian:

They were novels . . . in which a poor, honest worker was always sent to jail for stealing a loaf of bread to feed the starving mother of his pretty, young wife who had been raped by a capitalist and committed suicide thereafter, for which the all-powerful capitalist fired her husband from the factory, so that their child had to

beg on the streets and was run over by the capitalist's limousine with sparkling fenders and a chauffer in uniform. (136–37)

Thus, as the scene did not require it, the entire paragraph with “the nefarious machinations of villainous Whites” was omitted.

In another scene, Rand cuts a long sentence from a paragraph describing women at the European roof garden:

Women moved among the tables, with an awkward, embarrassed insolence. A head of soft, golden waves nodded unsteadily under a light, wide eyes in deep blue rings, a young mouth [open] in a vicious, sneering smile. [At a table, a blue-veined hand raised a glass with a liquid transparent as water; through the liquid, a heavy diamond dog-collar sparkled on a pale, thin throat; at the rim of the glass a painted mouth smiled gaily; and over the glass two dark eyes were motionless, as those of a Madonna looking into the heart of an eternal sorrow.] In the middle of the room, a gaunt, dark woman with knobs on her shoulders, holes under her collar-bones and a skin the color of muddy coffee[,] was laughing too loudly, opening painted lips [as] <like> a gash over strong white teeth and very red gums. (451/368)

I'm not sure why she cut this passage. She may have found it repetitious, and perhaps she concluded the image of a Madonna clashed with the diamond studded dog collar.

Some passages were cut because they did not fit the character who uttered the line or who is being described. In an early conversation, Kira says to Andrei: “If your cause can succeed, Comrade Taganov, I hope you'll see its success” (95/91). Now however much Kira likes Andrei (despite his ideas), it was not like her to wish him success in establishing a Soviet state; yet she sounds as if she were doing just that, so the line was cut.

In another scene, Tonia tells Kira that she should wear lipstick. In the first edition, Kira responds: “I appreciate your interest” (321). It's possible that this was intended as sarcasm, but that isn't clear. And taken straight, the response gives Tonia too much importance in Kira's mind, and makes Kira sound too conventional. So in the revised version, Kira does not reply at all (266). Later, after seeing the wedding present Leo bought for Victor—an extremely expensive vase—Kira says: “Leo, we can't give it to them. Not that I mind the price, but we can't let them see that we can afford it” (360). But it is clear that Kira *does* mind the price—in the sense that the vase was a waste of money that she preferred to save for their future, as well as the fact that such an ostentatious display could get them in trouble. So “Not that I mind the price” was cut (297).

Finally, Andrei says to Kira: “When one can stand any suffering[,] one can also see others suffer. [Perhaps one wants to see them suffer.] This is martial law” (221/189). Andrei is a communist, and he can be cruel and implacable; but to have him wanting to see people suffer goes too far, since Andrei is a communist that Ayn Rand wants us to sympathize with to some degree (at least to the degree Kira does). Retaining the bracketed line would have made that more difficult.

Some words or passages were omitted primarily because of their unpleasant or odd connotations. For example, here is an early passage from the description of the life of the young Vasili:

He had started as a trapper in the wilderness of Siberia, with a gun, a pair of boots, and two arms that could lift an ox. [He ate blubber.] He wore the scar of a bear's teeth on his thigh. (22/34)

Eating blubber, whether or not a typical activity of fur trappers, might come across as funny or odd, especially given the non-serious use of “blubber” as a term for excessive fat in humans. Further, to make the passage clearer, it would help if Rand specified the animals from which the blubber came. But the line isn't worth the trouble, so it was cut.

Here is a more striking example. After Leo has informed Kira that he is going to become Tonia's gigolo, he says: “She's an old bitch [and her underwear stinks]” (541/441). But it's enough that Leo acknowledges that he's leaving Kira for “an old bitch”; the rest is simply gross and thus distracting—and in fact may imply that he has a more intimate knowledge of Tonia than Rand wanted to convey.

Some passages were cut to avoid dubious philosophical implications. For example, pleading to a commissar to sign Leo into a state sanitarium, Kira says:

Don't you see why he can't die? I love him. We all have to suffer. We all have things we want <, which are> taken away from us. It's all right. But—because we are living [creatures] <beings>—there's something in each of us, something like the very heart of life condensed—and that should not be touched. [It's something very sacred and we should not even name or mention it.] (269/227)

But it is no part of Ayn Rand's philosophy that our sacred values ought not to be named or mentioned; that has a mystical ring to it, and so the line was removed.

In another passage, Sasha says to Kira and Irina:

There are some outward circumstances which an autocratic power can control. There are some [intrinsic] values it can never reach or subjugate. (306/254)

By 1959, Rand had identified the crucially important difference between the concepts of objective value and intrinsic value. So the improper word was removed. And there was no need to replace it with another word (“objective” or “absolute”), because it is clear from the sentence itself that Sasha does not regard values as subjective.

Finally, a minor (but interesting) deletion. Kira says to Andrei: “And who—in this damned[, endless] universe—who can tell me why I should live for anything but for that which I want?” (496/404). Ayn Rand probably removed “endless” because it was repetitious—“universe” is extensive enough on its own. But it is also possible that she deleted the word because—at least by 1959—she maintained that the universe is finite.

REWORDING

Many phrases, sentences, and in some cases paragraphs, were reworded. Often, Ayn Rand's editing simply improved the language. For example:

In that bundle were . . . /That bundle held . . . (5/21)
a light sudden as an explosion slashed the car . . . /a ray of light swept
across the car . . . (10/26)

The bare plaster walls of the station rose before Kira . . . /Kira looked at the words on the bare plaster walls of the station . . . (16/29)

Other such changes increased the accuracy of the passage. Here's one example, from Kira's description of engineering:

It's the only profession . . . for which I don't have to learn one single lie. Steel is steel. Every other science is someone's guess, and someone's wish, and many people's lies. (32)

This was changed to:

It's the only profession . . . for which I don't have to learn any lies. Steel is steel. Most of the other sciences are someone's guess, and someone's wish, and many people's lies. (42)

Rand changed "Every other science" to "Most of the other sciences" because it is simply inaccurate to say that—even in the Soviet Union—*every* science but engineering is based on guesswork.

Sometimes Rand changed the language because its connotation didn't fit the context. For example, speaking of the anti-communist students toward the beginning of the novel, she says: "students had always had a good nose for tyranny" (71). But that's slang; it lacks both the precision and the dignity of her revision: "students had always known how to fight tyranny" (71). Describing Kira seeing Leo for the first time after his return from the Crimea, Rand originally wrote: "her mouth sank into his hand and held it as a leech" (313), but she changed this to: "she pressed her mouth to his hand and held it" (260)—no doubt to avoid the negative connotations of "leech" and the image it evokes.

Some passages were reworded because they did not fit a character (and, in this first example, because they were as distracting as Tonia's underwear). In the first edition, when Stepan Timoshenko is explaining the nature of revolution to Morozov, he says:

Do you know what a revolution is? I'll tell you. We took officers on our ship and we tore their epaulets off. We tore them off and we cut new ones, red ones, on their shoulders. On their skins. We cut bellies open and we pulled guts out, by the fistful, and their fingers still moved, like that, opening and closing, like a baby's. We stuck them into the boilers, alive, head first. Ever smelt human flesh burning? There was one—he couldn't have been more than twenty. He made the sign of the cross. . . . (455)

Timoshenko is pretty vulgar for a mixed or semi-heroic Ayn Rand character; but this passage goes too far—there's a sadistic side to it that in the end she did not want to attribute to Timoshenko. Further, the passage's level of detail is unnecessary and distracting. So it was reworded as follows:

Do you know what a revolution is? I'll tell you. We killed. We killed men in the streets, and in the cellars, and aboard our ships. . . . Aboard our ships . . . I remember . . . There was one boy—an officer—he couldn't have been more than twenty. He made the sign of the cross. . . . (371)

Here's a passage from the scene of the climactic arrest of Leo, as found in the 1936 edition:

Leo walked leisurely to the mirror, adjusted his tie, straightened his hair, with the meticulous precision of a man of the world dressing for an important social engagement. He pressed a few drops of toilet water on his handkerchief and folded it neatly in his breast pocket. (490)

The toilet water had to go. An Ayn Rand hero does not splash on cologne or toilet water as a prelude to the firing squad, which is what Leo had every reason to expect. Here is the revised passage:

Leo walked to the mirror and adjusted his tie, his coat, his hair, with the meticulous precision of a man dressing for an important social engagement. His fingers were not trembling any longer. He folded his handkerchief neatly and slipped it into his breast pocket. (399)

Finally, given what we have seen so far, we should not be surprised to learn that some passages were reworded to avoid improper philosophical implications. Some could be quite minor. For example, Kira spoke the following line to Leo, expressing her concern that Soviet reality might be causing him to give up on life: "It can't do that to you" (445). Ayn Rand changed this to: "I won't let it do that to you" (364). At first glance, this may not seem significant, but the original line, taken literally, implies that it is impossible for Leo to lose his battle against the Soviet state; and yet we know it is possible. Kira may turn out to be wrong when she says she "won't let it do that" to him, but she is no longer stating it's impossible. Further, Rand is shifting the emphasis from Leo—who is increasingly passive with respect to his own survival—to Kira, who is a fierce fighter to the end.

As noted earlier, in her *Art of Nonfiction*, Rand warns against using "he had an instinct for courage," when all one wants to say is "he is brave." She made just this sort of change in *We the Living*:

And because she had a deep instinct against all things weighty and solemn, Kira had a solemn reverence for those songs of defiant gaiety, (44)

which became

And because she felt a profound rebellion against the weighty, the tragic, the solemn, Kira had a solemn reverence for those songs of defiant gaiety. (50)

In the scene describing Kira's Viking, the original has:

a Viking who walked through life bringing destruction and reaping victories, who walked through ruins while the sun made a crown over his head. (41)

This might suggest, erroneously, that the Viking's purpose is destruction itself. Note that Rand did not soften the line to make the Viking's actions less destructive—the reference to walking through ruins, which she does not cut, makes that evident—but in the revision, she clarifies the *purpose* of the destruction:

a Viking who walked through life, *breaking barriers* and reaping victories, who walked through ruins while the sun made a crown over his head. (49, emphasis added)

In the 1936 version, we read that Kira, during her attempt to get Leo into a sanitarium for his tuberculosis, “learned firmly as a prayer that if one had consumption one had to be a member of a Trade Union” (262). But this implies that Kira (and Ayn Rand) believe that prayers are in fact “firm,” that is, absolutely certain. Actually, Rand believed (in 1936 as well as in 1959) that prayers were irrational and unconnected to reality—and thus in no way “firm.” Moreover, even to religious people, prayer does not convey certainty. She therefore changed the line so that Kira now “learned, as firmly as if it were some mystical absolute, that if one had consumption one had to be a member of a Trade Union” (223). The change is effective: First, “mystic absolute” subsumes prayer, but also includes divine commands and other religious notions, thus making the line stronger and more precise. Second, the “as if” construction makes it clear that Kira (and Ayn Rand) do not regard mystical absolutes as real, which further conveys how out of reach a state sanitarium was for Leo. He didn’t have a prayer.

SEX, CAPITALISM, AND NIETZSCHE

I turn now to three areas in which Ayn Rand made some especially interesting, substantial, and in a few cases controversial, changes.

Sex Changes

Ayn Rand made numerous changes to a number of love scenes, and they are worth considering in greater detail.

The first type of change under this heading involves revisions to scenes involving kissing, in which a change is made to bring the kissing in *We the Living* more in line with Rand’s later conception of male-female relationships. In every case, in the original, the two parties are equal or the woman is in control; whereas in the revised version, the man does the kissing.

When houses rose close over the mast, [they kissed] <he kissed her>. (140/126)
he bent [for a kiss] <to kiss her>. (255/216)
Irina was standing by the window in Sasha’s arms, [her lips on his] <his
lips on hers>. (379/312)

Such changes, though slight, bring *We the Living* more in line with Rand’s handling of romantic relationships in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*.⁹

The second type of change under this heading is the cutting of details in love scenes. Some time between 1936 and 1959, Rand changed her mind about how much detail was necessary in describing them. (Note that there is not a single such scene in which she embellished what was in the 1936 edition.)

I begin at the bottom, with Comrade Sonia and Pavel. The 1959 edition has:

Comrade Sonia had pulled a chair close to Syerov’s, and he sprawled, his head on her lap, while she stroked his hair. (353)

The original has pretty much the same, but adds: “His hand wandered slowly up her tunic” (292).

The five remaining examples all involve Leo and (with one exception) Kira. I start with Leo’s first sexual encounter.

(1) He spent his first night in a woman’s bed at the age of sixteen[; the bed had white, perfumed sheets, white and fragrant as the body of the woman who moaned, her arms crushing him imperiously, possessively] (156–57/138).

(2) she knew that his hand was on her breast [and his hand was hungrier than his lips] (107/101).

(3) Then they were on the bed, her whole weight on his hand spread wide between her naked shoulder blades. [Of her whole world there was only Leo, and of Leo there was only his hand, the other hand that moved slowly down pulling off one of her stockings, then returning to where the stocking had been, and higher, very slowly. His fingers were bruising, furrowing the skin under them, crawling up reluctantly, digging into the flesh as if it could stop them. She did not move. Then he got up and stood looking down at her. She lay very still as he had left her, her one foot touching the floor.] Then he blew out the lantern. She heard his sweater falling to the floor (136/123).

(4) She heard nothing in the silence [but her skin under his hands and the bed trembling.] <but the sound of his breath.> She crushed her body against his [; she did not know how hungry her thighs, and her hips, and her stomach could be] (155/137).

(5) There was a contemptuous tenderness in his movement, and a command, and hunger; he was not a lover, but a slave owner[; she could feel a whip in his fingers. She wanted to be crushed; she wished she were lying still under a real whip in his hands] (398/326–27).

Why did Ayn Rand make such revisions? To return to her foreword to the 1959 edition, she said that she “cut out some sentences and a few paragraphs that were repetitious or so confusing in their implications that to clarify them would have necessitated lengthy additions” (xvi). None of these is confusing in its implications. So she no doubt made these cuts because she regarded them as, however well written, repetitious or unnecessary. In each case, she wants to convey that the two parties are making love; the details—the concretes—are unnecessary.¹⁰

Capitalism

A couple of passages in *We the Living* were changed in such a way that they *might* be taken as evidence that Ayn Rand’s conception of capitalism changed between 1936 and 1959. The first is part of a long speech, made by a communist who “had a little black beard, and wore a pince-nez” (374/308). I quote the original at length, employing italics to indicate where she made the interesting revisions.

Comrades! A grave new danger has been growing among us in this last year. I call it the danger of over-idealism. We’ve all heard the accusations of its deluded victims. They cry that Communism has failed, that we’ve surrendered our principles, that since the introduction of NEP—our New Economic Policy—the Communist Party has been retreating, fleeing before a new form of *victorious capitalism* which now rules our country. They claim that we’re holding the power for the sake of the power alone and have forgotten all ideals of Communism. Such is the whining of weaklings and cowards who cannot face practical reality. It is true that we’ve had to abandon the policy of Military Communism of the civil war

years. It is true that we've had to make concessions to private traders *and foreign capitalists*. Well, what of it? A retreat is not a defeat. A temporary compromise is not a surrender. *We are a lonely oasis in a world ruled by capitalism*. We were betrayed by the spineless, weak-kneed, anemic socialists of foreign countries who sold out their working masses to their bourgeois masters. The World Revolution which was to make a pure world Communism possible, has been delayed. We, therefore, have had to compromise for the time being. *What if we do have private stores and private profit? What if we are learning capitalistic methods of production?* What if we do have inequality of wages? What if some foul speculators in our midst do make exorbitant profits in spite of our implacable struggle against them? Our time is a transitory period of proletarian state building. (374–75/308–309)

Rand made four significant changes:

(1) In the line “the Communist Party has been retreating, fleeing before a new form of victorious capitalism which now rules our country,” “victorious capitalism” is replaced by “private profiteering.”

(2) In the line “It is true that we've had to make concessions to private traders and foreign capitalists,” she cut “and foreign capitalists.”

(3) She cut the line “We are a lonely oasis in a world ruled by capitalism.”

(4) She cut the lines “What if we do have private stores and private profit? What if we are learning capitalistic methods of production?”

There are likely two related reasons for these changes. First, she may have concluded that the speech in the original was too pro-capitalist for a communist—even one as pragmatic and compromising as the man who delivered this speech. Second, she probably wanted to eliminate any chance that one might take this passage to imply that she believed (a) that outside Soviet Russia is a world ruled by capitalism, and (b) that the “concessions” the Soviets made to stay afloat were actual concessions to capitalism—that the private profiteering (best represented in the novel by Morozov) had anything in common with genuine capitalism.

Another passage involving capitalism is somewhat more difficult to explain. Describing the failure of Alexander Argounov's first business venture under communism (contrasting his failure with the successes of speculators), Ayn Rand writes (in the first edition): “the dreaded word ‘speculator’ gave him a cold shiver; and he was not born a business man” (97). This line is objectionable in that it suggests (1) that those who succeed at business are born with their talent; (2) that speculators and businessmen are the same; and (3) that the man behind the Argounov textile factory was *not* a businessman. Therefore, Rand changed the second part of the line to: “he lacked the talents of a racketeer” (92). Does the original line suggest that in 1936 Ayn Rand had a lower view of businessmen? This is unlikely, especially given her portrayals of Vasili Dunaev and Alexander Argounov, and her admiration for her father (a successful businessman—he owned a pharmacy). That having been said, I do not know what she intended in writing that Alexander Argounov “was not born a business man.” In any case, by 1959, she was more aware of or sensitive to the negative implications of such a line, and thus changed it.

The “Nietzschean” Passages¹¹

I begin with three passages that might imply that Ayn Rand held the Nietzschean view that we are born to be the kind of people we are—to have the characters we have.

(1) In the passage just discussed, she writes that Alexander Argounov “was not born a business man” (97). She changed this to “he lacked the talents of a racketeer” (92).

(2) The following passage was not changed: “The revolution . . . found Leo Kovalensky with a slow, contemptuous smile, and a swift gait, and in his hand a lost whip he had been born to carry” (157/139).

(3) In the following passage, Rand retained (in a revised form) “born without the conception of bending,” but removed “born to rule” and “born to live”:

He moved as if his whole body were a living will, straight, arrogant, commanding, a will and a body that could never bend because both had been born without the [conception] <capacity to conceive> of bending [, born to rule as they had been born to live].

She stood [motionless] <still>, afraid to approach him, afraid to shatter one of the rare moments when he looked what he could have been, what he was [born] <intended> to be. (397–98/326)

Rand uses such “born with” or “born to be” language in *Anthem*, *Night of January 16th*, and *The Fountainhead* as well. For example, Equality 7-2521 was “born with a curse” and “born with a head which is too quick”; Bjorn Faulkner was “born with life singing in his veins”; Gail Wynand was not “born to be a second-hander.”¹²

We should not conclude that these passages are strong evidence of an earlier Nietzschean phase in Ayn Rand’s development, because such language can be strictly metaphorical (even if the result in part of an early interest in Nietzsche). For example, one can call someone a born loser—or as Rand describes Ellsworth Toohey in her notes for *The Fountainhead*, “a born enemy of everything heroic”¹³—without that necessitating any kind of determinism. However, because it *could* be taken as deterministic, Rand removed most of this language from *We the Living*. Philosophically, at *most* these passages suggest that when she wrote *We the Living*, she was not entirely clear about the nature of human volition. For example, she may not have seen fully the contradiction between human volition—which is obviously embodied in the actions of the characters in *We the Living*—and the existence of innate characteristics.¹⁴

Before I turn to the more substantive and problematic passages, I want to quote a 1965 letter that Ayn Rand wrote to a high school student. The student had asked her a series of questions concerning problems he had with certain passages in her fiction, and she answered them. For example:

You quote Karen Andre’s line in *Night of January 16th*: “I am capable of murder—for Faulkner’s sake,” and ask: “Isn’t murder a violation of the Objectivist Ethics? Doesn’t this statement make Karen Andre an Attila?” The answer is: Yes, murder is a violation of the Objectivist ethics. No, this statement does not make Karen Andre an Attila. It is not to be taken literally, it is merely her deliberate challenge to the moral philosophy propounded by Mr. Flint [the District Attorney] and an expression of the intensity of her love for Bjorn Faulkner. . . .

Rand then gives this fan the following advice, which I suggest we keep in mind when investigating the “Nietzschean” passages from the first edition of *We the Living*:

Now that I have answered your specific questions, let me give you an important suggestion: do not read any statement out of context, particularly when you read fiction. In analyzing the philosophical ideas presented in fiction, you must identify the total meaning of the story, of its plot, its main events and its characters. You must never judge any incident out of context, and this applies particularly to the dialogue. In real life and in fiction, people do not speak in terms of precise, legalistic philosophical definitions. This does not mean that people contradict philosophical principles, but it means that one must learn to distinguish when a particular statement does represent a precise definition and when it is a verbal part of a wider whole. In reading literature, one must learn how to analyze its parts, but one must never forget to put them together again, that is, one must know how to analyze and how to integrate.¹⁵

Rand was herself, in real life, capable of fitting the dialogue to the situation. For example, following a lecture she gave in 1974, she was asked the following unsympathetic question: “In the event that you re-wrote your novels, would you liberate your heroines, and change the way they subject themselves to passive behavior in romance?” She responded: “Dagny is very passive: In *Atlas Shrugged*, she’s nearly raped three times, by the three men in her life. Dominique, the heroine of *The Fountainhead*, is raped. If this is passivity, make the most of it.”¹⁶ I submit that this is Rand’s “deliberate challenge” to this questioner—her way of defiantly making it clear to this questioner (and the audience generally) that if he expects her to retreat from or feel awkward about her conception of men and women, and the love scenes that express it, he should think twice. Because, as stated, this answer does *not* represent her actual view of the “rape” scene in *The Fountainhead*. I again quote from that same letter to a fan:

You say you were asked whether “the rape of Dominique Francon by Howard Roark was a violation of Dominique’s freedom, an act of force that was contrary to the Objectivist Ethics?” The answer is: of course not. It was not an actual rape, but a symbolic action which Dominique all but invited. This was the action she wanted and Howard Roark knew it.¹⁷

I suggest that in evaluating the following “Nietzschean” passages, we keep in mind that Kira was a lot like her creator, and that in her first ideological confrontation with Andrei, she defiantly spoke in an exaggerated way. She certainly exaggerated the differences between them the first time they learned each other’s names:

“Are you going home, *Comrade Argounova*?” he asked.

“Yes, *Comrade Taganov*.”

“Would you mind if you’re compromised by being seen with a very red Communist?”

“Not at all—if your reputation won’t be tarnished by being seen with a very white lady.” (88)

Kira (like Rand) did not really regard herself as a “white” (to use the language of the Russian Civil War), which generally stood for God and country—Holy Mother Russia. But in this exchange, Kira purposely underscores the contrast between Andrei and herself.¹⁸

My point is that we should not make too much of the ideological content of the “Nietzschean” passages. As will be seen, their content is misleading—which is why they were changed. I think it very likely that in what follows, all that these revisions represent is the removal of what is misleading, and not any change in Rand’s actual convictions.

I present and analyze these pairs of passages—(a) the original and (b) the revision—in the order in which they appear in the novel.

(1) Kira to Victor:

(a) it is an eternal, unpleasant necessity that the masses should exist and make their existence felt. This is a time when they make it felt particularly unpleasantly. (53)

(b) It is an old and ugly fact that the masses exist and make their existence felt. This is a time when they make it felt with particular ugliness. (58)¹⁹

Passage (1), unlike the others, does not involve Andrei. This is significant, in that an important part of understanding the other passages is that Andrei sets the context and the terms of the discussion. But in passage (1), Kira is speaking to Victor (and other relatives), which may suggest that the line expresses her (and perhaps Rand’s) own view. Rand may have believed, in her early years, that what she saw everywhere around her in Soviet Russia—the masses existing and claiming the right to sacrifice the best people—was not simply an ugly Soviet aberration, but was something metaphysical, that is, built into the nature of human existence. Passage (1a) lends some support to this possibility. The best evidence, however, that (1a) was not a mere slip but represented at the time an actual conviction (however ambiguously held) are her 1928 notes to a novel she was planning to write but later abandoned, entitled *The Little Street* (which I can merely refer to here).²⁰

But even if she had held such a view, she did not hold it for long. For example, by the time *The Fountainhead* was published (in 1943), she had a radically different view of the American worker (exemplified by the character Mike Donnigan), whom she regarded as independent and proud. In 1947, she wrote that “America is the land of the *uncommon man*. . . . No self-respecting man in America is or thinks of himself as ‘little,’ no matter how poor he might be. That is precisely the difference between an American working man and a European serf.”²¹

What remains untouched in passage (1) is her loathing for the *Soviet* masses. She makes it clear in *We the Living* that she regards them as partly responsible for the communists being in power—that the Soviet masses were complicit in the communists’ sacrifice of the best people. Consider, for example, what she wrote, before *We the Living* was published, about Ivan Ivanov, Kira’s killer:

After the reader has seen Kira Argounova, has learned what a rare, precious, irreplaceable human being she was—I give him the picture of the man who killed Kira Argounova, of the life that took her life. That soldier is a symbol, a typical representative of the average, the dull, the useless, the commonplace, the masses—that killed the best there is on this earth. I believe I made this obvious when I concluded his biography by saying—quoting from the book: “Citizen Ivan

Ivanov was guarding the border of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.”
Citizen Ivan Ivanov is the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. And that Union
killed Kira Argounova. Kira Argounova against citizen Ivan Ivanov—that is the
whole book in a few pages.²²

The remaining passages all appear in conversations between Kira and Andrei, and four of them (2–5) occur in a relatively brief section of one chapter (92–94/89–90). This is extremely important, because (i) these passages represent a *very* small percentage of the novel, and in their original versions they seem to conflict with the rest of the novel, and (ii) in these passages, Andrei sets the terms of the discussion, and Kira reacts to him (which suggests that in the first edition, when Kira discusses politics with Andrei, her views are warped by Andrei’s own language, ideas, and choice of topics).

(2) Kira to Andrei:

(a) Haven’t you ever wanted a thing for no reason of right or wrong, for no reason at all, save one: that *you* wanted it? (92)

(b) Haven’t you ever wanted a thing for no reason save one: that *you* wanted it?
(89)

Passage (2a) is unproblematic. At a superficial glance it may sound as if Kira condones action done without regard for what is right and wrong—“beyond good and evil”; but such an interpretation does not hold up. (2a) almost certainly refers to *Andrei’s* conception of right and wrong, in which case Kira is asking if he ever thinks of his own happiness apart from what the party considers right. But (2a) does not make this clear, which is why Rand revised it.

(3) Andrei (speaking first) and Kira:

(a) “I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to say, as so many of our enemies do, that you admire our ideals, but loathe our methods.”

“I loathe your ideals. I admire your methods. If one believes one’s right, one shouldn’t wait to convince millions of fools, one might just as well force them. Except that I don’t know, however, whether I’d include blood in my methods.”

“Why not? Anyone can sacrifice his own life for an idea. How many know the devotion that makes you capable of sacrificing other lives? Horrible, isn’t it?”

“Admirable. If you’re right. But—are you right?”

“Why do you loathe our ideals?”

“For one reason, mainly, chiefly and eternally, no matter how much your Party promises to accomplish, no matter what paradise it plans to bring mankind. Whatever your other claims may be, there’s one you can’t avoid, one that will rise to the surface as a deadly poison to turn your paradise into the most unspeakable of all hells: your claim that man must live for the state (92–93). (b) “I know what you’re going to say. You’re going to say, as so many of our enemies do, that you admire our ideals, but loathe our methods.”

“I loathe your ideals.”

“Why?” (89)²³

Passage (3a) certainly sounds Nietzschean, and when Rand wrote it she may not have identified (fully) the evil of the initiation of force. But note Kira’s reluctance to advocate bloodshed: she is ambivalent (or ambiguous); she seems to advocate force, but not bloodshed.

I think there are two ways of taking this exchange: (i) Kira could be saying that if a group of people think they are right, they are free to try to force others to follow them (and even enslave and kill them if necessary); or (ii) she could be saying that if a group of people *are* right, even if they are a minority, they can establish a proper form of government against the wishes of the majority. Rand was never a defender of democracy, in any strict sense of the term. For example, if the Founding Fathers had been a minority (the majority being royalists), it would have been perfectly moral for them to use their army to impose a constitution on the country “by force”—one that guaranteed individual rights. They would not be obliged to wait for the rest of the people to come to see that a constitutional form of government is superior to monarchy. (This is only an example; I’m not suggesting that Rand had the Founding Fathers in mind when she revised this passage.) Of course, it isn’t clear that (ii) is the proper interpretation of (3a); and (i) is the more natural way to take the passage, especially given Kira’s statement “If one believes one’s right.” In fact, I think the most likely explanation is not that either (i) or (ii) is correct, but that when Rand first wrote the passage, she did not fully or clearly see the difference between (i) and (ii)—between Andrei and the communists forcing their ideas on Russia, and the American Founding Fathers, say, “forcing” their views on royalist Americans. Because of this confusion or error, the passage was changed.

But what is the implication of Kira saying: “Admirable”? What does she find admirable? She clearly does not admire Andrei’s *ideals*. So, she must be referring to his willingness to fight for what he thinks is right (which is a possible way of reading this) and/or his willingness to sacrifice others. If it is his willingness to sacrifice others that Kira admires (and that’s the most natural way to take the line), in what sense does she mean it? The next line is: “If you’re right. But—are you right?” Kira is probably saying that Andrei’s willingness to sacrifice others is admirable, *if* he is right about communism being the proper social system; but he is not right.

So, there is nothing about passage (3a) that forces us to conclude that Ayn Rand at one time defended some kind of Nietzschean amoralism. What we can say, however, is that the philosophical implications of passage (3a) are dubious and confused, and hence it had to be rewritten.

The most important part of passage (3)—basically the same in both versions—is Kira’s statement about why she loathes Andrei’s ideals: “the claim that man must live for the state.” Kira’s disagreement with Andrei here contains the essence of her political philosophy in *We the Living*—in ’36 as well as in ’59—and it is pure Ayn Rand, *not* Friedrich Nietzsche.

(4) Kira to Andrei:

(a) Don’t you know that we live only for ourselves, the best of us do, those who are worth leaving alive? (93)

(b) Don’t you know that we live only for ourselves, the best of us do, those who are worthy of it? (89)

The context of passage (4) is a discussion about sacrificing lives for what is right. The important part of the line—the part Rand changed—is “those who are worth leaving alive.” This certainly could be taken to mean that whether or not someone is left alive should be up to the best people in society. However, the passage is unclear, because “those who are worth leaving alive” could simply refer to those who deserve life—that is, those who have not betrayed it, who have not

declared war against those who truly know it. But the passage as written is unfortunate in its implications—it is more naturally read in the first sense—and so it was changed.

(5) Kira to Andrei, on sacrificing millions for the sake of the few:

(a) You can! You must. When those few are the best. Deny the best its right to the top—and you have no best left. What *are* your masses but mud to be ground under foot, fuel to be burned for those who deserve it? What is the people but millions of puny, shriveled, helpless souls that have no thoughts of their own, no dreams of their own, no will of their own, who eat and sleep and chew helplessly the words others put into their mildewed brains? And for those you would sacrifice the few who know life, who *are* life? I loathe your ideals because I know no worse injustice than justice for all. Because men are not born equal and I don't see why one should want to make them equal. And because I loathe most of them. (93–94)

(b) Can you sacrifice the few? When those few are the best? Deny the best its right to the top—and you have no best left. What are your masses but millions of dull, shriveled, stagnant souls that have no thoughts of their own, no dreams of their own, no will of their own, who eat and sleep and chew helplessly the words others put into their brains? And for those you would sacrifice the few who know life, who *are* life? I loathe your ideals because I know no worse injustice than the giving of the undeserved. Because men are not equal in ability and one can't treat them as if they were. And because I loathe most of them. (90)

Passage (5a) contains two elements, each of which can be taken in more than one way. First, Kira's remarks about sacrificing the worst for the few best could mean: (i) we must sacrifice the best in society for the sake of the worst, or the worst for the sake of the best, and the latter is obviously preferable; or (ii) in the Soviet Union, there is a war between the best in society and the worst, and the best should win. Rand certainly believed (ii), but in 1936 she may have accepted (i) as well—or failed to see the difference between (i) and (ii). But it is also possible that (iii) Kira is saying that although we need not in fact choose between sacrificing the best and sacrificing the worst, *if* that were the choice (as Andrei suggests it is) then we should not sacrifice the best. Hank Rearden says as much in *Atlas Shrugged*:

If it were true that men could achieve their good by means of turning some men into sacrificial animals, and I were asked to immolate myself for the sake of creatures who wanted to survive at the price of my blood, if I were asked to serve the interests of society apart from, above and against my own, I would refuse. I would reject it as the most contemptible evil, I would fight it with every power I possess, I would fight the whole of mankind, if one minute were all I could last before I were murdered, I would fight in the full confidence of the justice of my battle and of a living being's right to exist. Let there be no misunderstanding about me. If it is now the belief of my fellow men, who call themselves the public, that their good requires victims, then I say: The public good be damned, I will have no part of it!²⁴

In *Atlas Shrugged*, it clear that Ayn Rand did not believe the “public good” required victims. In any case, since the passage is unclear, and by 1959 she certainly rejected (i), this part of (5a) was revised accordingly.

Second, Kira’s remarks on equality could be taken to mean: (i) political equality is wrong—the best and the worst should not be treated the same (which includes their not having the same rights); or (ii) egalitarianism (the idea that the best cannot rise above the lowest) is wrong. Rand always believed (ii) and there’s little evidence she ever believed (i)—though at the time she wrote *We the Living*, she may not have seen clearly the difference between them. Since the remarks in the original are unclear, she made the revision.²⁵

(6) Kira to Andrei:

(a) You have a right to kill, as all fighters have. But no one before you has ever thought of forbidding life to those still living. (211)

(b) You may claim the right to kill, as all fighters do. But no one before you has ever thought of forbidding life to those still living. (189)

In light of what we have seen—and considering the context of the entire novel—there is no reason to think that when passage (6a) was written, Kira (or Rand) actually believed that if a person thought he was right, then he was justified in killing others. It’s more likely that this line was simply imprecisely written, and so was revised in 1959.

The original versions of the above six passages might seem to contain the following Nietzschean ideas—all of which Ayn Rand rejected in her later, mature philosophy:²⁶

I. The existence of the masses—an ugly, low, worthless herd of people—is a necessary fact; they simply (but unfortunately) do exist.

II. Either the masses sacrifice the best for the sake of the masses, or the best sacrifice the masses for the sake of the best. There is no other option.

III. Each of the best people should live only for himself, a fact which justifies actions that are beyond good and evil, for example, the use of force and even killing.

IV. One should not strive for *any* kind of equality, including political equality.

The confusing implications of the “Nietzschean” passages in *We the Living* are at most a residue of Rand’s early exposure to Nietzsche (though they do not add up to some full-blown Nietzschean “phase”). We are told that Leo sometimes quotes Nietzsche (156/138); and, early in her life, Ayn Rand admired (what she took to be) the philosophy of Nietzsche. But which of these four Nietzschean views, if any, did she ever actually hold? She probably accepted View I for a time in the twenties and thirties; and, she *may* have believed View II at some level and for some period. But there’s little evidence that she ever held Views III or IV (and beyond the above “confused” passages, there is no evidence at all).

The “Nietzschean” passages—especially when interpreted unsympathetically—contradict the spirit of the novel. For outside of these passages, Kira—the heroine—is not Nietzschean but Objectivist: she is against sacrifice of all kinds; she wants political freedom—freedom from the rule of the masses and from any other tyrant; she values the lives of others, and she acts not beyond good and evil, but with a heroic moral stature. In both the original and revised versions, *We the Living* is about the importance of the individual and of political freedom, and what happens to an individual when political freedom is denied. The Nietzschean ideas outlined above conflict with the novel’s theme.

Whatever Nietzschean influence—or more accurately, possible Nietzschean flavor—there might be evidence for in a few passages in the first edition of *We the Living*, Ayn Rand

later made explicit her complete rejection of Nietzsche's philosophy. For example, here is what she said about him, in a 1965 interview:

Nietzsche has certain very attractive, very wise quotations purported to uphold individualism with which one could agree out of context. But excepting his general "feeling for" individualism, I would not consider Nietzsche an individualist; and above all, he is certainly not an upholder of reason. . . . In all fundamentals—particularly metaphysics, epistemology and ethics—Objectivism not only differs from Nietzsche but is his opposite. Therefore, I don't want to be confused with Nietzsche in any respect.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Ayn Rand's foreword to the 1959 edition of *We the Living* opens: "I had not reread this novel as a whole, since the time of its first publication in 1936, until a few months ago. I had not expected to be as proud of it as I am" (xiii). In her revision, she improved the novel without changing its essence. Whatever grammatical or stylistic problems and philosophical confusions existed in the original, "The novel remains what and as it was" (xvii).²⁸ It had the same plot, the same characters, the same theme. She was right to be proud of it.²⁹

APPENDIX: THE BRITISH EDITION

A few months after the American first edition of *We the Living* appeared, a British edition was published by Cassell and Company, Ltd. It sold much better than the American edition, going into at least seven printings and remaining in print until the mid-1940s. This edition was not identical to the American, however, and it is worth indicating the nature of the differences. (I have not made an exhaustive study of the British edition.)

Most are differences in spelling. Here is a sample (giving the American word first): toward (7), towards (5); theater (7), theatre (5); Traveled (14), Travelled (11); labor (30), labour (26); honor (51), honour (47); esthetic (53), æsthetic (49); jail (55), gaol (51); today (107), to-day (101); gray (374), grey (362); sniveling (376), snivelling (363); color (569), colour (552).

Some American words were replaced by their British equivalents, though there were not as many cases of this as I expected (e.g., "elevator" was not replaced with "lift," nor "line" with "queue").³⁰ For example, "truck" in the American version (e.g., 58 and 117) is replaced with "lorry" (e.g., 49 and 123). In the American edition, the young Ivan Ivanov was "beaten with leather suspenders" (563); in the British, he is "beaten with a leather belt" (546). The American "cookies" appears three times: in the first case—"a tray of home-made cookies" (132)—the British edition replaces "cookies" with "sweets" (125); in the second, "potato skin cookies" (180) becomes "potato skin cakes" (172); in the third, there is oddly no change, "And here's the tea. And some cookies" (308/298).

Some word changes involved more than merely differences between British and American usage. For example, in the American edition, Timoshenko tells Leo: "Make your little whore keep quiet" (139); the British edition replaced "whore" with "trollop" (132). The "Because" scene, which ends with "Leo Kovalensky was sentenced to die," includes: "On a sack of flour in the basement, a man tore a woman's pants off" (270). In the British edition, the second clause is changed to "a man tore a woman's dress off" (259), as "pants" refers to

underwear in British English. Finally, whereas in the American edition, Marisha has an abortion (216), in the British, she has a miscarriage (207).

I encountered a couple of other minor differences. First, song titles are in quotes in the American edition, and italicized in the British: for example, “John Gray” and “Song of Broken Glass” (244–45), *John Gray* and *Song of Broken Glass* (234–35). An interesting typo in the British edition, involving the title of an operetta, seems to combine these two approaches, making use of italics and *one* quotation mark: “*Bajadere* (234). Second, in at least one case, there is a difference in punctuation and capitalization:

“Congratulations, pal,” someone slapped Pavel Syerov’s shoulder. (376)

“Congratulations, pal.” Someone slapped Pavel Syerov’s shoulder. (364)

In the body of the essay, I describe typographical and grammatical errors that Ayn Rand corrected for the 1959 edition. So far as I can tell, the British edition does not contain corrections of any of the grammatical errors, though it does correct *some* of the typos. For example: the British edition has “Sachs” (43) instead of “Sachs” (47), “wardrobe” (200) instead of “warhobe” (210), “Galina” (533) instead of “Galine” (549), and “your” (18) instead of “our” (21). In the following two examples, however, the British edition contains the same typo as the American: “Swans’ Lake” instead of “Swan Lake” (211 and 220), and “mowing” instead of “moving” (545 and 561).

There are more significant differences in two of the love scenes. In both cases, the British edition cuts parts that were considered inappropriate. Ayn Rand approved of these changes (which is not to say she was pleased with them—more on that shortly). In a June 3, 1936, letter to the managing director of Cassell, Sir Newman Flower, she writes:

I am perfectly willing to make the changes suggested, for I consider the somewhat too frank love passages as the least important ones in the book and I certainly would not want to let them handicap the novel as a whole or detract any possible buyers from it. I do approve of the changes made and I have marked them on each galley with my initials.³¹

Here are the two scenes, as found in both editions. I begin with the briefest:

(1) (a) *American*.³²

She crushed her body against his; [she did not know how hungry her thighs, and her hips, and her stomach could be]; (155/137)

(b) *British*.

She crushed her body against his; she did not know how hungry it could be. (147)

(2) (a) *American*.

She rose slowly, obediently, looking up at him. She stood still as if his eyes were holding her on a leash.

He said:

“Take your clothes off.”

She said nothing and did not take her eyes off of his, and obeyed.

[It was difficult to unfasten the hooks of her skirt, for she could not look down at her hands, she could not blink, her eyes in his.]

He stood watching her. She did not think of the thoughts of the world she had left. But that world came back once, for an instant, when she saw her skirt on the floor. Then she regretted that her underwear was not silk, but only heavy [Soviet] cotton.

She unbuttoned the shirt strap on her shoulder and let it fall under her breast. She was going to unbutton the other strap, but he tore her off the ground, and then she was arched limply in the air, [her legs hanging between his,] her hair hanging over his arm, her breast at his mouth.

Then they were on the bed, her whole weight on his hand spread wide between her naked shoulder blades. [Of her whole world there was only Leo, and of Leo there was only his hand, the other hand that moved slowly down pulling off one of her stockings, then returning to where the stocking had been, and higher, very slowly. His fingers were bruising, furrowing the skin under them, crawling up reluctantly, digging into the flesh as if it could stop them. She did not move. Then he got up and stood looking down at her. She lay very still as he had left her, her one foot touching the floor.]

Then he blew out the lantern. She heard his sweater falling to the floor.

Then she felt his legs like a warm liquid against hers. Her hair fell over the edge of the bed. His lips parted in a snarl. (136/123)

(b) *British.*

She rose slowly, obediently, looking up at him. She stood still as if his eyes were holding her on a leash.

He said:

“Take your clothes off.”

She said nothing and did not take her eyes off of his, and obeyed. (129)

Of passage (2), Rand wrote in her letter to Flower:

On galley 39, in the most objectionable scene of the book, I cut out the entire ending of the scene. I think you will agree with me that it is better to do so. The only importance of the scene is the psychology of Kira’s surrender in a cold, tense, matter-of-fact manner, without the usual sentimental love-making. I have kept enough of the scene to suggest this. The rest—the description of physical details—is not really important. Particularly if the strongest lines are cut out of the last paragraphs, the remaining lines have very little meaning, since they do not even create a definite mood. So I think it is best to omit these last paragraphs entirely. It will be safer and the story as such will not suffer from the omission.³³

In a letter to Leonard Read, Ayn Rand wrote of the 1937 British edition: “It’s the same as the American edition, except that my love scenes have been slightly censored, unfortunately.”³⁴ So, she was “perfectly willing to make the changes,” since they were not important enough “to let them handicap the novel”; but she was nevertheless displeased at having to make (all of) them. This must in part explain why, in the 1959 edition, she included more of love scene (2) than is

found in the 1937 British edition, though she did leave out the most explicit of the “somewhat too frank love passages.”

NOTES

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1. See Richard Ralston, “Publishing *We the Living*,” in the present volume.
 2. Ayn Rand, *The Art of Nonfiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers*, Robert Mayhew, ed. (New York: Plume, 2001), 102–103.
 3. Whenever two numbers are given in this way, the first refers to the page number in the 1936 edition, the second in the 1996 paperback edition. With rare (and obvious) exceptions, square brackets [] indicate a deletion, pointed brackets <> an addition.
 4. On the issue of paragraphing, a brief survey of some American novels published in the thirties was inconclusive: the manner in which Rand used paragraphing in dialogue (in 1936) was neither standard nor unique.
 5. Recall that in describing her revisions, Rand said “the chief inadequacy of my literary means was grammatical” (xvi). I suspect she is using “grammatically” more broadly than I am here, and would include, for example, changes in punctuation, word order, and choice of preposition.
 6. Shoshana Milgram pointed out to me that the Russian word for both “as” and “like” is the same: *kak*.
 7. Rand, *Art of Nonfiction*, 119.
 8. In the early seventies, commenting on McGovern’s campaign for the presidency, Rand quotes this line from a McGovern speech—“Come home to the affirmation that we have a dream”—and comments: “‘Dream,’ like ‘imagination,’ is a very dubious kind of attribute or compliment. Its value or disvalue depends on its relation to reality.” From “A Preview,” part 3, *The Ayn Rand Letter* 1, no. 24 (August 28, 1972).
 9. A word search for “kiss” and its cognates in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* supplies ample evidence for this.
 10. That she did regard these details as unnecessary, see the appendix to the 1937 British edition above. The love scenes in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* tend to be more elaborate than those in *We the Living* (both editions)—especially concerning the meaning of the scenes and what the lovers are feeling—while being less detailed about concretes than the 1936 edition. See, for example, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947; Signet fiftieth anniversary paperback edition, 1993), 216–19, 273–74, 282–85, 483–84, and *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Random House, 1957; Signet thirty-fifth anniversary paperback edition, 1992), 106–107, 239–41, 255–56, 600, 887–88.
 11. A full understanding of the nature of these “Nietzschean” passages requires a detailed account of Rand’s early intellectual development, which cannot be undertaken here. Given limitations of space, I merely provide brief comments offering suggestions on how best to interpret these passages.
 12. Ayn Rand, *Anthem*, fiftieth anniversary edition (New York: Signet, 1995), 18, 20, 21; Ayn Rand, *Night of January 16th*, final revised edition (New York: Plume, 1987), 118; Rand, *Fountainhead*, 609, 664.
 13. David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Plume, 1999), 89.
 14. See Harriman, *Journals*, 21.
 15. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 631–32.
 16. Q&A period following Ayn Rand’s 1974 Ford Hall Forum lecture, “Egalitarianism and Inflation.”
 17. Berliner, *Letters*, 631.
 18. Compare this description of Leo’s attitude toward the reds and whites:

Resenting the portrait of the Czar in his father's study and the Admiral's unflinching, unreasoning loyalty, Leo attended a secret meeting of young revolutionists. But when an unshaved young man made a speech about men's brotherhood and called him "comrade," Leo whistled "God Save the Czar," and went home. (138)

19. Compare the following line, which Andrei speaks to Kira: "no matter what human wreckage [I have to see] <I see around me>, I still have you" (408/335).

20. Harriman, *Journals*, 20–48.

21. Ayn Rand, "Screen Guide for Americans," in Harriman, *Journals*, 362. (See the entire section entitled "Don't Deify 'The Common Man.'") Cf. the passage from her essay "Altruism as Appeasement" (1966), in *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought*, Leonard Peikoff, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1989), in which she makes clear her rejection of what she calls the "elitist" premise, that is, "the dogmatic, unshakeable belief that 'the masses don't think,' that men are impervious to reason, that thinking is the exclusive prerogative of a small, 'chosen' minority" (36).

22. Berliner, *Letters*, 18. See also Ayn Rand's description of Ivan Ivanov in *We the Living* (458–60).

23. Kira responds as in (3a).

24. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, 452.

25. In a 1950 letter, Rand writes that Kira's statement about knowing of no worse injustice than justice for all "is a bad sentence when taken out of context." Berliner, *Letters*, 463.

26. I cannot go into interpretive questions about whether or to what extent Nietzsche did hold these ideas. I think he did, and I follow the standard outlook in so thinking; but there are scholarly debates on these issues. The important point here is that in certain passages, Rand *seems* to accept some of these views, although they are not part of her own philosophy.

27. The Ayn Rand Program, WKCR radio, 1965. See also Harry Binswanger, ed., *The Ayn Rand Lexicon: Objectivism from A to Z* (New York: New American Library, 1986), s.v. Nietzsche.

28. There is no contradiction in saying that the novel was, in essence, unchanged, though parts of the novel were changed (which is basically what Rand says in her foreword). To think otherwise is to commit the Fallacy of Division: what is true of the whole must be true of all of the parts (i.e., it is to maintain that "*We the Living* remains the novel it was in 1936" implies "every part remains what it was in 1936").

29. I wish to thank Shoshana Milgram and Tore Boeckmann for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter, and Harry Binswanger for his comments on the last section. Thanks are also due to Allan Gotthelf, who, in the mid-1980s, first brought to my attention the question of a possible Nietzschean influence on the 1936 edition of *We the Living*.

30. In a letter to William H. Steer, of Cassell's editorial department, she thanks "the editor [apparently someone other than Steer] for his splendid work in replacing some of the American words I used by their English counterparts." Letter to Steer, September 2, 1936 (Ayn Rand Archives).

31. Letter from Ayn Rand to Newman Flower, June 3, 1936, (Ayn Rand Archives).

32. Square brackets indicate sections omitted in the 1959 edition. I indicate no other differences.

33. Letter from Rand to Flower, June 3, 1936.

34. Letter from Ayn Rand to Leonard Read, November 30, 1945 (Ayn Rand Archives).