

Ideas of Revolutions and Revolutionary Ideas

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Velikie Revolyutsii ot Kromvelya do Putin [Great Revolutions from Cromwell to Putin], Irina Starodubrovskaya and Vladimir Mau. Second, augmented edition. Moscow: Vagrius, 2004. 511 pp.

In this magisterial, path-breaking book, which for the first time seeks to explain the origins and the course of the latest Russian Revolution by placing it in the context of the great revolutions past, Irina Starodubrovskaya and Vladimir Mau have produced an intellectual equivalent of a deliciously dense and rich multi-layered chocolate cake: like its physical counterpart, it is both impossible to consume in one sitting and hard to stop eating.

There are four conceptual layers, each containing the authors' answers to one of the four fundamental questions they pose: What are the commonalities in how revolutions come about, unfold, and end? What are the deficiencies of scholarly approaches to the study of revolutions, and how can they be synthesized and amended? How can these amended causal schemes help explain what happened in Russia between 1985 and 2004 and what will happen after? And finally, how will the experience of the Russian Revolution contribute to the existing body of theorizing on revolutions?

For those who have grappled with these issues as part of education or in their own work, an overview of the literature undertaken to answer the first question is an excellent refresher. The reader new to these topics will find this a fine introduction to what is known as "structuralism" in history, the many variations of which are centered on what might be called grand material ("objective") causes—be they, to cite a few examples given by the authors, Barrington Moore's economic imperative of "getting grain to the classes that ate bread but did not grow wheat";¹

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the state's inability to react adequately to military pressure from other states and to peasants' mobilization in protest in Theda Skocpol's explanation;² Jack Goldstone's demographic changes;³ or the emergence of rival groups claiming the state's political and economic resources and mobilizing the opposition, as described by Charles Tilly.⁴ In turn, these underlying tectonic metafactors affect the interests of multitudes (usually socioeconomic "classes") whose defense of their economic and, by extension, political interests, results in political upheavals.

Like the works of Skocpol and Tilly, *The Great Revolutions* falls into what might be called the Marxist-statist subdivision of structural analysis. While they reject Marx's philosophy of history (with class wars and revolutions as stages toward the inevitable triumph of classless communism) and emphasize the relative autonomy of state bureaucracies as political actors (in contrast to Marx's notion of their being nothing more than the "committees" for carrying out the agenda of the economically dominant class), the key methods and the tools of analysis are unmistakably those of Marxist historical materialism. (As Vladimir Nabokov used to say in his Cornell lectures on *Ulysses*: "Joyce lost his religion but kept his categories."⁵)

Early on, Starodubrovskaya and Mau synthesize theories of revolutions in a hypothesis that they continue to refine and validate throughout the book: "Revolutions occur in the countries that come into collision with qualitatively new, atypical for them problems, engendered both by internal processes and by global tendencies," while they lack flexibility both in the institutions of the ancien régime and the "psychological stereotypes" of the people do not allow for adjustment and thus doom an evolutionary adaptation.⁶

The authors leave little doubt that the "problems" they have in mind are economic. Indeed, when identifying major shortcomings in the "traditional approaches" that account for the "unfinished" state of the theory of revolutions and which their book was to amend, their diagnosis is centered around the neglect of the "problems stemming from economic development and economic policy."⁷

In addition to the authors' natural scholarly predisposition (both are economists by education and profession), there are deeper reasons for their choosing an essentially Marxist approach to the study of the latest Russian Revolution. While Starodubrovskaya and Mau say that Marxism has long been used in the West to analyze "social conflict, class war, and revolutionary violence," Russian scholars, brought up on an unrevised orthodox Marxism of the Soviet social sciences, continue to use historical materialism for the analysis of the antecedents (*predposylki*) of revolutions.⁸ In fact, the authors devote the entire last chapter to an apologia for Marxist analysis, the explanatory power of which, a few caveats notwithstanding, they find largely undiminished in the cases of the twentieth century upheavals in general and the latest Russian Revolution in particular.⁹

Yet, although the authors see economic factors as the key antecedents of great revolutions, their causality is richer, more contingent and far less linear than in orthodox Marxism. As in the best works of other structuralists, the interaction between the economic "basis" and the political and social "superstructure" is complicated. It is the nature of the state and its behavior in response to a bur-

geoning crisis (for instance, the inability to collect taxes or manage the budget deficit) that determine the speed of the disintegration and, in the end, whether a revolution actually occurs.

It is impossible, even in a lengthy review, to elucidate all the elements of what henceforth should be called the Starodubrovskaya-Mau theory of revolution, as it emerges from the authors' critical and imaginative reading of the vast literature. A few examples will have to suffice to convey the scope, ambition, and acuity of the authors' effort.

Rapid Economic Development, "Crisis of Economic Growth" and a Weak State

The authors arrive at quantitative parameters within which the "early modernization" revolutions are likely to occur. Using Maddison's pioneering estimates of per capita GDP in major countries of the world between 1820 and 1992,¹⁰ Starodubrovskaya and Mau argue that the British, French, Mexican, and Russian (1917) Revolutions occurred when the per capita national income was between \$1,200 and \$1,500.

While the growing weakness of the state has been noted before (and has come to be considered a *sine qua non* of prerevolutionary, revolutionary, and immediately postrevolutionary periods), Starodubrovskaya and Mau deepen our understanding of both the signs of this weakness and of its causes. Following Charles Tilly, the authors emphasize the state's increasing inability to wield competently and decisively the fiscal and monetary instruments, with the resultant failure to collect taxes, reduce budget deficits, and tame inflation.

Yet they also persuasively establish the seemingly paradoxical connection between the weakness of the state and the preceding economic conditions by demonstrating that revolutions are often ushered in by a period of rapid economic development. The latter, they conclude, "undermines the foundations of the traditional social structure" and leads to the splintering of the elite along social, political, and economic interests; redistribution of wealth; and the emergence of new, economically "empowered" social actors. The resultant "fragmentation" of the society, divergence of economic and political interests, and the appearance of new "social forces" is the key cause of the structural erosion of prerevolutionary states.

Because of the social fragmentation of the social and political classes in the prolegomena to revolutions, Starodubrovskaya and Mau revise the major postulate of historical materialism by rejecting class as the main unit of the analysis of revolutions and advocate finer gradations of the categories of actors in prerevolutionary and revolutionary situations to explain the complex, rapid, almost kaleidoscopic changes, especially the formation and dissolution of political coalitions.

Of course, as most factors in social sciences, the rapid economic development and the social and political transformation it brings, while a necessary condition of a revolutionary outcome, is not a sufficient one. For it to result in a revolution, it must, in the authors' view, occur at the time when a country is entering (and, thus, is buffeted by the social consequences of) one of the three stages of modern economic progress. They are "early modernization" (seventeenth century in

Britain, eighteenth century in France, the end of nineteenth century in Russia, and twentieth century in China); “mature industrialism” (between the end of nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century up to the Great Depression in the West, Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century); and the “early postmodernization” (postindustrialization) in the 1970s in Western Europe, and Eastern and Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.

How does the latest Russian Revolution fit into this widened, refined, and updated framework of the historical materialist approach to revolutions?

The evidence the authors provide in support of their central thesis of the essential similarity between the Russian transformation and the great revolutions of the past (and, therefore, the applicability of the existing theories of revolutions both to the analysis of the Russian Revolution and to the mapping of post-Soviet Russia’s future) is among the book’s most fascinating and stimulating themes, in which well-known facts are reorganized and interpreted in unexpected but usually convincing and always intriguing ways.

First, the nature and the scope of the Russian transition are clarified by comparing the mode of the transformation and its results with those of the great revolutions of the past. Russia shed “the three fundamental features” of the ancient régime: a totalitarian political system; the absolute dominance of the state-owned property in the economy; and the shortages of goods. Russia also left behind two other core attributes of the Soviet Union: the domestic and Eastern European empires and militarized economy, through voluntary divestiture of imperial holdings and a demilitarization historically unprecedented both in the scope for a country not defeated in a war. Hence, the author’s conclusion: “at the end of twentieth century, Russia experienced a full-fledged social revolution.”¹¹

Second, in the authors’ reading, the Russian Revolution has incorporated virtually all key antecedents and passed through all the major stages they identify as central to “classic” revolutions. Thus, they trace the beginning of the Soviet revolutionary destabilization to the social tensions and fragmentation that resulted from the record high oil prices in the mid-1970s. The petrodollar “flood” in the Soviet Union resulted in “uncontrollable re-division of resources; an artificial—by which the authors must mean “not caused by broader economic growth”—rise in the population’s standard of living;” and “galloping” increase in the USSR’s dependence on exports. Combined with the inevitable crisis that everywhere attends the transition from industrial to postindustrial economic system, the prices’ collapse a decade later became a catalyst of the revolutionary transformation.¹²

Along the way, the authors powerfully contest arguments denying the revolutionary essence of the Russian transformation. For instance, refuting the contention that the Soviet totalitarianism “was not defeated by the revolutionary heroes but died its own death” (174). Starodubrovskaya and Mau point out that the disintegration of the ancien régime had always been the starting point of most revolutions past (including the French, Mexican, and the 1917 Russian) and cite Samuel Huntington’s observation that the collapse of political institutions is central to the “Western” type of revolutions.

They also persuasively refute disallowing the revolutionary interpretation of the Russian events because “revolutionary turning points require a power that is strong and demonstratively concentrated power;” whereas in post-Soviet Yeltsin’s Russia, “the power was . . . weak.”¹³ The authors remind us that the “chaotic, unruly, and forced nature” of revolutionary policies, as well as the abrupt changes of policies by revolutionary leaders fit “the description of any revolutionary process, starting with seventeenth century Britain.”¹⁴

Similarly, the heavy presence of the old nomenklatura among the postrevolutionary elite is hardly an anomaly; the change of elites in other revolutions, including the English and French, was not as radical as is generally assumed. Many of the king’s supporters in Britain, for instance, bought back confiscated properties, while the French royalists likewise preserved their status as largest landowners, and more than one-fifth of the Napoleonic nobility came from the old privileged classes.

The authors also note that the absence of an instant democratic breakthrough (another often-advanced case against the revolutionary nature of the Russian transition) does not contradict history, since revolution and democracy are not usually compatible. On the contrary, in the short term, the great revolutions of the past led to authoritarianism and, in any case, the latest Russian Revolution has “demonstrated far more democratic achievements” (176) than its predecessors.

Similarly, as regards the absence of a quick economic turnaround as proof that revolution did not take place—a contention which has been largely muted by the Russia’s economic progress since 1999 but whose near-deafening prevalence in the late 1990s is definitely worth recalling—the authors maintain that great revolutions always result in a short- to medium-term economic decline. Their analysis leads them to believe that revolutions alone do not speed up economic development, although they may “eliminate institutional and socio-cultural barriers” (28–29) to economic progress. Thus, we do not know today (and we may not know for decades) if and to what extent the “genetic code” of the totalitarian system and the economic near-collapse of the late 1980s–early 1990s are to handicap Russia in forging a postindustrial economy.

Since the entire book under review is an extended argument for the inclusion of Russia’s transformation in the pantheon of the great revolutions, the authors may have felt justified in spending little time on the specific counter-revolutionary arguments, reprised above. Yet given the spread, recurrence, and persistence of some of the opinions above, they may have warranted a bit more exploration.

For instance, the heavy and continuing presence of the revolutionary elite was common for all postcommunist countries where, as in Russia, civil peace was judged to be more important than justice and retribution. In Hungary and Poland (the countries where the anticommunist sentiment among the leaders of the transition was among the strongest) one-third of the apparatchiks in positions of power in 1988 occupied the same office in 1993.¹⁵ (In 1999, Lech Wałęsa told a reporter: “I agree 90 percent with those who complain they made sacrifices that former Communists have taken advantage of. The Communists had a taste for action. They were better prepared for the new society.”¹⁶)

The Elites, the Masses, the Authoritarianism, and the Violence

In the Czech Republic, another leader of postcommunist transition, a prominent social commentator noted in 2000 that “the current political system . . . [is] based on an unspoken condominium with significant relics of the former Communist establishment.”¹⁷ To which a Prague worker added: “I believed [Václav Havel] would bring . . . justice but he really disappointed me. All the Communists who stole were allowed to keep their wealth, and today they are captains of industry.”¹⁸

The authors omitted entirely another popular perspective that denies the revolutionary nature of the Russian events because the “masses” played an inactive role and because the leaders later disregarded and discarded many of their populist supporters and movements that helped them to power. For instance, Reddaway and Glinski argue that while the English Puritan Revolution of the 1640s, the French Revolution of 1789, and the February 1917 Russian Revolution were determined by “proponents of change from lower social strata,” the revolution of 1991 was by contrast a top-down revolution and was “defined by the self-confident, almost messianic vanguard mentality of a self-anointed elite that sees itself entitled to impose ‘progress’ and ‘development’—according to its own understanding of these terms—on the ‘backward’ majority.”¹⁹

Such a judgment is at variance both with the facts of the Russian 1985–1991 transformation and those of the great revolutions of the past. The Russian upheaval became the first great social revolution in which the radicalization of the “masses” could be traced in the results of the increasingly free and fair elections.²⁰ Millions of Russians chose those who publicly espoused first reformist and soon revolutionary agendas.

“Every free election,” observed a leading post-Soviet Russian historian, “—in the spring 1989 (the Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR), and in spring 1990 (the Congresses of People’s Deputies of the Republics), and in June 1991 (the Presidency of Russia)—demonstrated an inexorable decline in the popularity of Gorbachev’s [moderate] supporters and the increase in the influence of his opponents,—but not the conservatives but the politicians who called themselves radicals.”²¹ (In elections to local Soviets in March 1990, pro-reform “democrats” won in fifty Russian cities,²² including the three largest: Moscow, Leningrad, and Sverdlovsk. In Moscow, the voters gave them fifty-seven out of sixty-five seats in the City Council.) The “liberal-democratic and simultaneously anti-communist revolution,” concludes the same historian, was “effected with the support of the society and non-violently, mostly through (*pri pomoshchi*) electoral bulletins.”²³

As a result of the elections, the “political leadership,” continues the same historian, passed from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, who was campaigning “under anti-communist pro-Western liberal banner,” and won a “decisive” victory in the 1991 election, while his “confederates,” (*edinomyshlenniki*) Gavriil Popov in Moscow and Anatoly Sobchak in Leningrad, were elected mayors of the “dual capitals” and, “as if to underscore the repudiation of socialism,” in the same elections, the Leningraders voted to change the city’s name to St. Petersburg.²⁴

Punctuating many critical instances, when the fate of the revolution hung in balance, huge but remarkably peaceful mass demonstrations in Moscow and, on

a smaller scale, in other cities, and the two national strikes of miners in 1989 and 1991, became another hallmark of the revolution “from below,”²⁵ which culminated in the demonstrations and strikes against the attempted reactionary coup in August 1991. As Harley Balzer persuasively demonstrated in these pages last year, the protests took place in most of Russia’s largest cities, with an estimated two hundred thousand demonstrating in Moscow and St. Petersburg and fifty thousand taking part in the around-the-clock vigil around the besieged seat of the Russian Federation’s government, the “White House.”²⁶

It is hard to argue with Gavriil Popov’s tribute to these men and women:

But the main and decisive factor in the victorious revolution were people themselves. Thousands, hundreds of thousands citizens participated in the revolution. Young and old, men and women, workers and students, Russians and representatives of our other peoples. They voted in the elections. They, time and again, went into the streets. Taking risks for themselves, their families, their loved ones. On workdays and on weekends. In sunlight and in rain. They did not shoot. Or break windows. Or storm the buildings. Or burn cars. And in this opposition, to use Tolstoy’s expression, won those who were stronger in spirit.²⁷

As to the classic great revolutions, far from being “defined” by the “lower strata,” they, in fact, were less “democratic” than the anticommunist revolutions, including that of Russia, with an active minority playing a decisive role in the management of the process. According to Charles Tilly, a leading student of the French Revolution:

Contrary to the old image of a unitary people welcoming the arrival of long-awaited reform, local histories of the Revolution make clear that France’s revolutionaries established their power through struggle, frequently over stubborn popular resistance. Most of the resistance, it is true, took the form of evasion, cheating, and sabotage rather than outright rebellion. But people through most of France fought one feature or another of revolutionary direct rule.²⁸

Furthermore, when in power, the radicals tended to “routinize” their control and to contain “independent action of local enthusiasts”:

For a while those connections [between the state and thousands of communities across the land] rested on a vast popular mobilization through clubs, militias and committees. Gradually, however, revolutionary leaders contained or even suppressed their turbulent partners.²⁹

Familiar with this record, the authors conclude that the “authoritarianism” of the revolutionary government in post-Soviet Russia was “normal.” Although correct as far as it goes, anyone familiar with the record is bound to see that the alleged “radical-authoritarian stage” was of a most peculiar kind. In dealing with political opponents, the Yeltsin revolutionary regime was extremely reluctant to resort to extraconstitutional measures (let alone violence) even when such strategy meant retreat from the crucial elements of the government’s declared economic strategy: the tight monetary and fiscal policies in 1992–93; the privatization implementation schemes; or the slew of vitally needed structural reforms (the buying and selling of agricultural land, the pension reform and the breakup of “natural monopolies” in gas, electricity, and utilities) blocked in 1997–99 by the

leftist plurality in the Duma; or painful compromises following the Duma override of presidential vetoes.

Even the undeniably authoritarian act, the 1993 dissolution of the Parliament—and the subsequent dislodgement from the upper floors of the Parliament's building, by that time abandoned by nine-tenths of the members,³⁰ of several detachments of the heavily armed leftists and nationalists who shot at a passers-by in the center of Moscow—ended in a historically unprecedented manner. One would search hard (and, most likely, in vain) for another revolution, in which, following the amnesty granted by a democratically and freely elected parliament, the handful of unrepentant leaders of a counterrevolutionary rebellion (in essence, losers in a mercifully brief postrevolutionary civil war) were released, unharmed, after a few months in jail to the cheers of their comrades-in-arms. (One of the amnestied, former vice-president Aleksandr Rutskoi, would soon be elected governor of Kursk, a central Russian province.)

Russia's was definitely a self-limiting revolution, tempered by the memory of the country's sanguinary history. It postponed or even sacrificed some of its key objectives to uphold consensus and nonviolence. As the authors correctly note:

The coming to power of the radicals (in August 1991) did not cause the destruction of the democratic mechanisms, [or lead to] dictatorship and terror. The the radicals, who had neither opportunity nor desire to rely on violence and force their ideological stereotypes on the society, were more active in engaging mechanisms of economic and social maneuvering, in "buying" the support of various social segments. Therefore their policies seemed less consistent and more compromise-oriented than in the preceding revolutions. (431–32)

To explain this key deviation from the past practice—the absence of large-scale and sustained violence—the authors suggest that Russia's transition was the first great revolution of the postindustrial era, whereas the "classic" revolutions occurred in agrarian (or industrializing) societies. Greater urbanizations and education and the presence of institutions (primarily elections and referenda) dramatically diminished the need for violence as means of implementing the will of the politically active part of the "masses" and constraining the revolutionary government in implementing its agenda.

Extrapolating from Russia's experience, Starodubrovskaya and Mau venture a well-warranted proposition that future "postindustrial" revolutions also are likely to be distinguished by violence on "limited scale."

What, if anything, can the past revolutions tell us about the future of a post-communist Russia? As is almost invariably the case with those who engage deeply and continually with multifaceted social phenomena, the authors emerged chastened and attuned to the fundamental unpredictability of the particulars in the events of such scale and complexity.

The Future

Indeed, perhaps the only thing the authors seem certain of is the enormously long road to stabilization and the political and economic volatility that accompanies the journey. Starodubrovskaya and Mau have found that the results of revolutions

are never known in advance and may take decades to reveal themselves. Even the “classic” revolutions, the effects of which, in retrospect, are as obvious as they are enormous, unfolded for decades before stabilization. With the society “fragmented” and imbalanced, postrevolutionary polities pass through a number of different regimes, which may be ushered by minirevolutions.

In England, the authors suggest 1745 (or almost a century after the beheading of Charles I), the year when last rebellion was suppressed, as the end of revolution. (One could note also that it took thirty years from the execution of the king to implement the Habeas Corpus Act, a cornerstone of the future British democracy.) In France, the first stable political regime that embodied the ideals of the Revolution was the Third Republic, established in 1870, or eighty-one years after 1789. The gadfly of the French Revolution’s historiography, François Furet, argued that the “open wound” did not close until de Gaulle’s 1959 coup d’etat and the establishment of the “monarchical republic,” which finally reconciled ancien régime and revolution. One is reminded of Chou Enlai’s famous quip in response to a question about the French Revolution: “It is too early to tell.”

In the short run, the authors feel that Russia is likely to go through its own version of postrevolutionary “bonapartism”: a seemingly “steady” but ultimately “unstable” regime, liable to “oscillate” between various social groupings and to forge new political coalitions to reproduce itself. Although, Starodubrovskaya and Mau continue, “bonapartism” may acquire “democratic forms,” it is, an authoritarian regime that sacrifices the democratic reconciliation of “deep” competing interest to the short-term semblance of stability, thus making “possible (if not, indeed, probable)” periodic political crises and “reproduction in instability.”

The authors corroborate their prediction by a quote from a contemporary Russian political observer whose 2002 assessment is both very much in line with the “bonapartist” argument and remarkably prescient with regard to the evolution of the Putin regime:

The system of power legitimization that is being forged—a de-facto appointment of the successor of the President or a governor followed by plebiscitarian confirmation—strengthens a private character of power. . . . It is also the key factor of its long-term instability, since in such an arrangement the elections stop being a mechanism for impersonal and public agreement among [conflicting] interests.³¹

One sign of important and lasting scholarship is that, in addition to prompting application of its concepts and methods to areas outside the original design, it suggests conceptual amendments by highlighting the limits of its own explanations. Today, *Velikie Revolutsii* is the most comprehensive and definitive application of multifaceted structural analysis to the latest Russian Revolution. Whatever limits of the book’s explanations, they arise not from the authors’ oversight, but from the limitations of the grand theoretical perspective itself.

The Gaps in the Structuralist Explanations

The unanswered questions are many and important. To begin, both the memoirs of the most prominent reformers and the consensus among Western experts³² show clearly that until 1988–89, virtually no one perceived the Soviet situation

to be an urgent, life-threatening economic, political, or social calamity that would warrant a “revolution from above” (as opposed to a slowly unfolding, “creeping” crisis of which the Soviet leadership had been aware and with which it had learned to live and manage in the past two decades). The Soviet Union had known far greater predicaments and coped without sacrificing the totalitarian state’s grip on society and economy, much less surrendering them. Thus, it is impossible to explain the origins of the revolution (which, like every great revolution, started “from above”) solely (or even mainly) as a response to an “objective,” “structural” danger.

While the increasingly visible economic deficiencies, waste, and shortages undoubtedly contributed to the reforming impulse, no matter how much the leadership was preoccupied with the economy, the Soviet Union had enough resilience to justify traveling the same road as before—perhaps only with louder marching music and a more rigid protrusion of the goose-stepping leg. Such certainly appeared to be the essence of Yuri Andropov’s policies, which this author labeled elsewhere “police renaissance.”³³ Indeed, recast as “acceleration,” these approaches were faithfully implemented by his protégé, Mikhail Gorbachev, throughout the first eighteen months of his reign.

The history had bred confidence. There was far more to Gorbachev’s initial pronouncements than the sterile and cynical propaganda of the official “line” or willful blindness when, a few months after coming to power, he told a high level meeting that the “strategic direction of the restructuring” ought to be “deep and comprehensive utilization of the advantages of socialist economy” and, in politics, called for “further strengthening of democratic centralism,”³⁴ a euphemism for the rule of one party that brooks no internal dissent. In an apt quote reproduced by the authors, Gorbachev told the secretaries in charge of economy in the Central Committees of the Warsaw Pact nations: “Some of you look at the market as a life-buoy for your economies. But, comrades, you should think not about the life-buoy but about the ship. And the ship is socialism.”³⁵

In 1985, the Soviet Union possessed much of the same natural and human resources it had ten years before. There was no devastation from a natural disaster or epidemics. True, the oil prices had plunged but, adjusted for inflation, were not lower than in early 1970s and needed only time to go up (as they surely did). As Peter Rutland astutely put it:

Chronic ailments, after all, are not necessarily fatal. The weakness of [Soviet] economy is obviously a prime candidate in explaining the collapse. However, although the economy experienced a declining rate of growth in the 1970s, it was still growing. The real breakdown only began after 1988, and this was as much a product of political processes as their cause.³⁶

Mass poverty was nothing new to the regime: things were much worse in the 1930s and 1940s. Food rationing, too, had been practiced before (and indeed, had never stopped since the early 1930s in many provinces), and, while resented by some, was accepted as normal by the generation that grew up during or after World War II.

As Cuba, North Korea, Iraq under Saddam Hussein, in addition to Stalinist Rus-

sia or Mao's China have amply shown, in totalitarian regimes the connection between popular deprivation and change of policies is tenuous at best and usually results not in liberalizing reforms but in heavier repression.

With the "objective" economic factors central to structuralist explanations falling short of a satisfactory explanation of the revolution, other structural causes do not seem to fill the gap either. The Soviet Union in the mid-1980s was hardly crumbling under external pressures. True, Afghanistan increasingly looked like a long and protracted war, but for a five million-strong armed force, the losses there were negligible. The bloody, drawn-out pacification of Lithuania and Western Ukraine after World War II sustained well-founded hopes for an eventual victory by the sheer grinding power of the mammoth military preponderance unrestrained by domestic or international public opinion. Similarly, the Reagan Doctrine put considerable (and often painfully embarrassing) pressure on the perimeter of the empire and its clients (for instance Nicaragua or Ethiopia) but the reversals there, too, were far from fatal.

As a precursor to a potentially costly competition, Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) indeed was crucial—but not as a sign of a pending military defeat. Like the vocal U.S. opponents of the program, the Kremlin knew that effective deployment was decades away. The enormous costs did seem to matter a great deal in later policy changes—only after the new leadership began to pay attention to domestic public opinion,³⁷ which was to be adversely affected by beggaring of the standard of living, which the contest over SDI surely would have entailed.

Regarding the state's worsening international position as another powerful independent variable in the structuralist catalogue of revolutions' causes, in 1985–87, the Soviet Union was at the height of its world power and influence, anchored in the strategic nuclear parity with the United States. It is worth recalling that so strong was the conviction in the permanence of the Soviet power in general and its occupation of East Germany in particular, that the West German elites and public alike were determined to "march through the [East German] institutions" for generations, with hope of cajoling and bribing Berlin and its Moscow masters into tiny and incremental changes and rapprochement. Following the West's lead, Eastern European elites seemed prepared to tolerate Soviet domination and occupation indefinitely, while some of its leading dissidents aspired only to make "Mittel Europa," a "bridge" between the Soviet-owned East and the democratic West.

As one of the most astute students of the Soviet regime's past and present, Adam Ulam, noted, "We tend to forget that in 1985, no government of a major state appeared to be as firmly in power, its policies as clearly set in their course, as that of the USSR."³⁸

If not a response to an obvious economic crisis requiring extraordinary measures or to the pressure from the outside, might not Gorbachev's revolution from above (1987–89), later joined by the one from below (1989–1991), be the result of a plot: convinced enemies of the regime coming to power, who in the preceding three decades of their steady rise through the ranks, concealed their true colors and now acted on them to destroy the system?

Alas, as an explanatory variable, so elaborate and skillfully concealed a plot

is even less fit to explain the Soviet collapse than economic or international crises. While aware of the system's inefficiency, the mendacity, the corruption, and the indignity it inflicted daily on the people, on coming to power in 1985, none of the future radical reformers—Gorbachev, Yakovlev, Ryzhkov, and Shevardnadze—had any doubts about the essential stability of the existing order and wished only to make “corrections”³⁹ in the Soviet political, economic, and social arrangements by removing some of its most oppressive, offensive, and degrading features. Gorbachev saw his task as “cleansing socialism from the alluvia” of Stalinism and Brezhnev’s “stagnation.” Even Yakovlev, whose critique of the Soviet socialism was by far the most comprehensive and thought-out among the top Soviet leadership at the time, rightly notes that his remarkably candid December 1985 memos to Gorbachev were “contradictory and inconsistent: now rejecting the Soviet socialism, now calling for the betterment of this system.”⁴⁰

Alas, as an explanatory variable, so elaborate and skillfully concealed a plot is even less useful in explaining the Soviet collapse may only in part be attributed to the anticommunism of many prominent Sovietologists who tended to exaggerate the stability and legitimacy of the Soviet regime. Although the ideological bias (and perhaps even more so scholarly ambition for establishing new approaches by “revising” the established paradigm) clearly played a role in some cases, as far as the regime’s long-term survival was concerned, the consensus of the “Sovietological community” seems to stem largely from the conclusions reached by a standard method of placing available knowledge in the context of the regime’s history. The result was the expectation of continuity, or, in the worst-case scenario, a very long and gradual decline. While the scholars disagreed, often sharply and vociferously, on the size and depth of the problems, virtually no one felt them to be endangering the Soviet Union’s survival in the short- or even medium-term.

Those who were unsympathetic to the Soviet regime were just as puzzled. George Kennan would write later that, reviewing the entire “history of international affairs in modern era,” he found it “hard to think of any event more strange and startling, and at first glance inexplicable, than the sudden and total disintegration and disappearance . . . of the great power known successively as the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union.”⁴¹ François Furet concluded in *The End of An Illusion*, his rather gleeful post-mortem of “the idea of communism in the twentieth century” by stating, “the manner in which first the Soviet Union and then its empire fell apart remains mysterious.”⁴² Richard Pipes, perhaps the leading antirevisionist historian of Russia, called the revolution “unexpected,”⁴³ and several top Sovietologists who published in a conservative magazine perhaps the single best essay collection on the Soviet Union’s demise, titled the issue “The Strange Death of the Soviet Communism.”⁴⁴

In February 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev told the workers of the Lenin Tractor Plan in Minsk: “When they say today: ‘Gorbachev is concentrating power in his hands’—this is nonsense. More power and more possibilities than the General Secretary of the Central Committee had [in 1985] had not been and will not ever be possessed by anyone in any state.”⁴⁵

He was right: the power was there—but suddenly missing was the will to deploy it. Large-scale repression, coercion, and violence became morally and politically unacceptable. Why?

It is in explaining this, and many other, rejections of formerly established practices that made the revolution possible that the “structuralist” theories of revolutions come up dry. The “meta”-processes and trends in economy, politics, institutions, and the international environment of prerevolutionary societies and states are necessary to explain the upheavals yet, in the end, not sufficient.

Nothing in history is automatic or inevitable, and because something did happen—and, in retrospect, happened for good reasons—does not mean that it had to happen and, moreover, should have happened the way it did. To use Charles Tilly’s distinction, a “revolutionary situation” is different from a “revolutionary outcome” and only a tiny fraction of the former evolve into the latter.⁴⁶

The latest Russian Revolution was no exception: there were plenty of “structural” reasons (most of which the book under review explored masterfully) *why* the Soviet Union should have collapsed as it did—yet fail to explain satisfactorily *how* the processes began.

How, that is—in the absence of a cataclysmic change in the material, institutional condition, or international condition (defeat in a war and occupation, an epidemic, a financial crisis, or famine, for example)—in less than three years, did a state and an economy, ridden with large and visible faults, failures and deficiencies yet appearing viable and lasting both to the overwhelming majority of its citizens, their leaders and outside experts, suddenly begin to be seen as shameful, illegitimate, and intolerable by enough men and women to effect and sustain a revolution?

The how requires a different set of concepts and tools. Indeed, it calls for a different perspective.

It appears that in every great revolution, mediating between the movement of the tectonic plates of what Marxists call the “basis” and neo-Marxists call “structures” (economy, class, war, and institutions) and the politics they shape is an intangible yet very real and indispensable agent and conductor of the “structural” impulse. This medium is new ideas, ideals, and values that motivate men to act.

No matter how weighty and numerous the “objective” (“why”) factors are, modern revolutions are hard to explain without postulating the “hows”: the emergence of an alternative set of visions about what constitutes a just society, a legitimate political order and politics’ ends, a dignified life, and, in the case of major powers, a proper place in the world and relations with other nations—in sum, an alternative political, social, cultural and even economic ethos.

Unlike structuralism, the perspective that explores ideas and values in the origins and course of revolutions is far from being even a marginally coherent “school.” Yet Isaiah Berlin—perhaps the most celebrated “archaeologist of ideas,” whose entire oeuvre seems to have been intended for the illumination of the connection between what people thought and valued and the great changes they wrought in the ways they lived and governed themselves—could have written this school’s manifesto when he avowed that:

these great movements began with ideas in people's heads: ideas about what relations between men have been, are, might be, and should be; and to realize how they came to be transformed in the of a vision of some supreme goal in the minds of the leaders . . . If we are to understand the often-violent world in which we live (and unless we try to understand it, we cannot expect to be able to act rationally in it or on it), we cannot confine our attention to the great impersonal forces, natural and man-made, which act upon us. The goals and motives that guide human action must be looked at in the light of all that we know and understand; their roots and growth, their essence and above all their validity, must be critically examined with every intellectual resource that we have.⁴⁷

This is not the place to provide a description, taxonomy, or analysis of the vast literature about the "ideological" causes of revolutions. Yet a few examples should be sufficient to clarify the point and establish a link to the matter at hand. There is, of course, Max Weber's explicit correction to historical materialism in postulating the central role of values (or ideals) in the origins of the world's greatest economic revolution: the birth of capitalism out of "the Protestant ethic."⁴⁸

Similarly, in his pioneering study of the ideas that inspired the American Revolution, Bernard Bailyn demonstrates how attitudes, which imparted meaning to the American colonists' perception of post-1763 events, coalesced in an "integrated group" decades before "any of the famous political events of the struggle with Britain" took place.⁴⁹ In the pamphlets circulated in the colonies he found "not merely positions taken but the reasons why positions were taken; . . . the assumptions, beliefs, and ideas—the articulated world view—that lay behind the manifest events of the time."⁵⁰ Bailyn concludes that:

The American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy.⁵¹

In a characteristically fine piece of intellectual history, Robert Darnton explored underground publishing in the French ancient regime and found it revolutionary in two respects. First, the works of the philosophes "articulated and propagated a value system, or an ideology, that undermined the traditional values Frenchmen inherited from their Catholic and royalist past."⁵² Second, despite its having "no coherent political program or even any distinctive ideas of its own," the often scandalously salacious antiaristocratic Grub Street literature (especially the libelles, or pamphlets) portrayed the "social rot . . . consuming French society."⁵³ While the decades of Enlightenment had undercut the "elite's faith in the legitimacy of social order," the libelles "spread dissatisfaction deeper and more widely among the 'general reading public.'"⁵⁴ The result, according to Darnton, was "ideological discontent welled up with other currents to produce the first great revolution of modern times."⁵⁵

Placing the latest Russian Revolution within what Darnton called "the social history of ideas"⁵⁶ is made all the more tempting by the origins of the Soviet ancien régime, the society it created, and the modes of legitimization by which it sustained itself.

The primacy of ideas in the emergence and maintenance of the Soviet socialist-enterprise is extraordinary. It is hard to find in modern history another

instance in which ideas and the relentless will of relatively few men convinced of the rightness of these ideas (what Robert Service calls “intentionalism”⁵⁷) shaped a nation’s destiny so decisively and for so long, molding and trimming the economic and social structures to conform to the founding credo.⁵⁸ As the late Martin Malia, puts it:

It should be completely obvious that in October 1917 it was not the Russian working class but a political faction of ideologues that seized power. Without their millenarian intoxication, the Soviet regime could hardly have achieved the prodigies of social transformation and mass violence to which it immediately proceeded.⁵⁹

Similarly, Stalin’s 1929–34 “revolution from above” was nothing if not the implementation of an ideological agenda. Although couched in economic terms, it could not possibly be explained in economic terms (with its costs clearly prohibitive by any rational economic analysis), it clearly was driven by ideological priorities. François Furet suggests a connection between the central role of ideas in the establishment and maintenance of the Soviet regime, and its demise:

Bolshevism was compatible with nationalism, as Stalin had shown all along, even with some autonomy restored to the market—as a temporary expedient, of course—as Lenin had thought to do with the NEP. But Bolshevism had no flexibility whatsoever in matters of ideology . . . Even Khrushchev had to kill Nagy. Brezhnev put up with Ceaușescu and Kádár, but not with Dubcek. Gorbachev took up what Nagy and Dubcek had begun, but on a far wider scale, in the center of the empire: the reforms and the renaissance of Bolshevism were mixed with the principles that Bolshevism has sought to destroy in October 1917. He pretended to renovate the communist regime, but had no other ideas than those borrowed from the Western tradition. . . . When reference to the West gradually became a philosophy shared with Sakharov, unifying nomenklatura and intellectual opposition, there was nothing left of the Communist idea . . . In a space of a few months, the Communist regimes were forced to make way for ideas that the October Revolution had believed it was destroying and replacing: private property, the market, individual rights, “formal” constitutionalism, the separation of powers—the whole panoply of liberal democracy. The failure was total, for it wiped out the original aspiration.⁶⁰

Still, the powerful historical justification (and Isaiah Berlin’s plea) notwithstanding, the dominance of the structuralist tradition among several generations of Western and Russian historians and political scientists has ensured that books and articles that examine the latest Russian Revolution as a history of ideas are but islands in the sea of exegesis on economic, institutional, and “social” causes.

Idea-Centric Explanations

In addition to the weight of a ruling theoretical paradigm, this state of affairs may also be explained by practical considerations of methodology. Paul Hollander noted that “the intangibles of human belief, motivation, and will” are not likely to be “in the forefront of scholarly interest because [they are] difficult to observe and prove, especially in comparison with more tangible, even measurable social facts as declining productivity, the decay of public health, and lost or inconclusive wars.”⁶¹

Among those few who have braved the methodological hazards were leading

sociologists of the Russian Revolution, Nikolai Lapin and Lyudmila Belyaeva, who proposed an elegant way to combine the structural and the “value” approaches:

In order to understand man’s actions in a transitional society, one has to solve two problems: to uncover the dependence of social behavior on the objective processes . . . and to discern independent logic, by which man’s internal world lives. Yet doing so will still not be sufficient . . . There arises a third, and no less difficult problem: how to merge these two “parallel” sets—determined and free behavior—in one flow, one picture . . . To approach the solution [one should] isolate in the latter set a special element that connects the two sets: a perception by man of objective process from the point of view of his own, personal situation.⁶²

Robert K. Merton has formulated the potentially enormous power of such a “personal” perception in classical sociology through the famous “Thomas theorem,” which states “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”⁶³ John Lewis Gaddis unwittingly applied this theorem to the Soviet Union’s demise when he wrote that “the events of 1989–1991 make sense only in terms of ideas. There was no military defeat or economic crash; but there was a collapse of legitimacy. The people . . . suddenly realized that . . . [the] emperor had no clothes on.”⁶⁴

Few developments illustrated the primacy of the ideological, rather than economic, causes more vividly than the Soviet and Russian post-Soviet disarmament, unprecedented for a great power undefeated on the battlefield and unoccupied by victors. The speed and depth of the late-Soviet and Russian demilitarization reminds us that resources devoted to defense are decided on not by accountants, calculating what a country can or cannot “afford,” but stem from the perception of national priorities by the countries’ leaders (and, in democracies, peoples). The priorities, in turn, are shaped by their domestic political agendas, as well as the fears, hatreds, or ambitions in world affairs. China, with half of post-Soviet Russia’s per capita GDP, has been increasing its defense budget by 8 to 10 percent annually for the past fifteen years. There has been no noticeable excess wealth that somehow enabled North Korea, Cuba, Iran, or, until recently, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq to “afford” their armies, wars or research and development of nuclear weapons.

Why did the “definition” of Soviet reality and, with it, the state’s priorities shift so dramatically? Why and how did what used to be perceived as normal, legitimate, and healthy suddenly become intolerable and in need of urgent redress in the eyes of a significant part of the elite (including key decisionmakers)? What accounts for so cardinal a change in the perception first by the elites and then by the politically active segment of the population (which, as in every revolution, was a distinct minority)? These queries are central to the study of the origins of the Russian Revolution.

Among the research that began addressing these issues is Judith Kullberg’s survey of the Moscow elite. “The formation of a new dominant ideology,” Kullberg concludes, was “an integral part of the political and social upheaval that began in 1985.”⁶⁵ An elaborate statistical analysis of attitudes in a sample of Moscow party workers, leaders of new political parties, and military officers on

the eve of the August 1991 coup has established a startling ideological shift, with “almost no support” for the “political hegemony” of the Communist Party and “very little support for the basic features of Soviet-style socialism.”⁶⁶ According to Kullberg, from “a radical reformulation of orthodox Marxism-Leninism,” perestroika led to the formation of “distinct, internally consistent and coherent world views,” which included at least a “partial embrace of central tenets of Western liberal philosophy,” such as fundamental human rights and the importance of checks on state power.⁶⁷ Correlated with almost every other preference, the support for individual rights was especially widespread and strong, and was a “very desirable” or even a “central” goal for the majority of the respondents.⁶⁸

The “disappearance of Marxist-Leninist ideology,” Kullberg found, contributed to “the collapse of the system”⁶⁹ and “the data support the proposition that El'tsin's dismantling of the CPSU and the USSR and his pursuit of rapid economic reform were made possible by the almost total de-legitimation of the old order among elites.”⁷⁰

The only book-length inquiry in the ideological change among the Russian and Eastern European Communist elites is devoted to the proposition that “not only the political and economic forces that undermined [Communist states in Eastern and Central Europe] but also the part played by particular human beings and their beliefs aided in [the states'] decline and fall,”⁷¹ author Paul Hollander writes.

The book's range is limited because Hollander concentrates on the “supreme echelons of power” because the “erosion of belief” among “ordinary citizens” was “largely irrelevant to the survival of political order,”⁷² he writes. (While true of the 1987–88 “elite” and “intelligentsia” phase of the revolutions, this judgment leaves out the decisive 1989–91 stages.) Still, seeking the link between “the decline and loss of the sense of legitimacy,” and the fall of the Soviet Union, Hollander postulates that although economic problems may have fatally undermined it, the regime's actual end “had more to do with the ways economic weakness was *perceived* and *registered* by the political elite and, less importantly, by the population at large.”⁷³

While no one predicted the collapse even within three years of its occurrence, the scholars, writers, and journalists who came the closest were those for whom the moral, normative component was a defining feature of a political regime, the key to its legitimacy and long-term viability. They were: Andrei Amalrik, Bernad Levin, Richard Pipes, Martin Malia, Alexander Stromas, and, with a bit of vacillation, Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁷⁴

At the end of 1989, the author of this article, too, described the destruction by *glasnost* of “legitimizing mythology” of the Soviet regime—Lenin, the October Revolution and World War II among them—and concluded that “once declared naked, idols are even less usable than kings,”⁷⁵ thus, dooming the polity whose legitimacy is sustained by the ritualistic worship of those idols. Similarly, in his magisterial foray into the politico-economic history of the world, Yegor Gaydar explains the inability of the Gorbachev-Ryzhkov regime to cope with mounting economic problems by the fact that “neither [the government] or the society was convinced of the *legitimacy of the regime* [and hence] its right to develop and implement the

stabilizing policies.”⁷⁶ Gaydar also notes that the disintegration of the Soviet Central and Eastern European systems began with the Soviet leadership’s rejection in principle of the “large-scale use of force” necessary to sustain both “the totalitarian [system of] power, the indissolubly connected with it administrative system of economic management,” and “the vassal regimes” on the other.⁷⁷

Indeed, *The Great Revolutions* itself contains fascinating, albeit scattered, road signs pointing to explanations outside the “structural” paradigm. The authors list the beginning of “cardinal (*printsipial’nye*) changes” in the ideology of the ruling elite among the main preconditions of the revolution (again, however, leaving unexplained the origin of these changes). For instance, they write that “Gorbachev sought to merge the Soviet system with humanitarian principles” and “socialist pluralism,” (a euphemism for the rapidly expanding boundaries of permitted diversity of opinions and public criticism) though still within what Gorbachev used to call “the socialist choice.”⁷⁸ Starodubrovskaya and Mau also see “societal expectations” in the period of 1987–88 as both strengthening the confidence and determination of the reforming elite and as a rapidly solidifying hedge against the reversal of the reforms.⁷⁹

A Revolution of Ideas

The relative dearth of studies devoted to the ideas and values in the making of the latest Russian Revolution⁸⁰ is all the more surprising because of what we already know about the initial motives of those who started the reform. Concerns about economic problems were often no more than a foil for the anguish over the spiritual decline, the corrosive effects of Stalinist past, and a desperate search for answers to the grand questions with which every great revolution starts.

When Mikhail Gorbachev recalls how in 1985 he felt that “we couldn’t go on like that any longer, and we had to change life radically, break away from the past malpractices,” he called it his “*moral position*.”⁸¹

The same “position” is evident in the memoirs of Gorbachev’s first prime minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, for whom the “moral [*nrvstennoe*] state of the [Soviet] society” in 1985 was its “most terrifying” feature:

[By 1985] the stuffiness in the country has reached maximum: after that only death. Nothing was done with any care . . . [We] stole from ourselves, took and gave bribes, lied in the reports, in newspapers, from high podiums, wallowed in our lies, hung medals on one another. And all of this—from top to bottom and from bottom to top. . . . The country was drinking itself into the ground. [People] drank everywhere. Before work. After work. In the *obkoms* [regional party committees] and in the *raykoms* [district party committees]. At the construction sites and on the shop floor. In offices and in the apartments. Everywhere.⁸²

Much like Western historians and political scientists, the Gorbachev cohort was brought up in the Marxist tradition and lacked the conceptual categories (and, one suspects, even the vocabulary) to give coherence to their “non-material” concerns. Yet while the economy was their banner, there is little doubt that Gorbachev and his supporters first set out to right ethical, not economic, wrongs. Unlike their grizzled predecessors who knew firsthand how precari-

ously positioned was the edifice of the house that Stalin built on terror and lies, the Gorbachev group appeared to believe that what was morally right was also politically manageable.

There is hardly a better example of the primacy of the moral component in Gorbachev's opening crusade than the antialcohol campaign, undertaken and sustained in the face of extremely adverse (and mounting) political and economic consequences. In 1985, the state's annual income from the sale of alcoholic beverages constituted between 12 and 14 percent of total budget revenues.⁸³ (In 1990, Gorbachev disclosed that, along with oil exports, the vodka trade sustained the Soviet Union between 1970 and 1985.⁸⁴) Between 1985 and 1988, the anti-alcohol campaign cost the Soviet treasury sixty-seven billion rubles in lost revenue,⁸⁵ almost 9 percent of the 1985 GNP, 17 percent of that year's revenue, and nearly four times the sum spent on health care.⁸⁶ Yet when Ryzhkov objected to the campaign's excesses he was overruled by other members of the Gorbachev "team" because, as they put it, he was "concerned about economy instead of morality" and the "morals of the nation must be rescued by any means available."⁸⁷

In their interviews with Gorbachev, Starodubrovskaya and Mau capture the gap between the "official" "economic" justification for the reforms and their personal meaning to the principles. Having first described how he opted for radical political reform after the failure of "one attempt after another to solve the problems of [economic] modernization within the framework of the existing relations and mechanisms," Gorbachev adds:

The Soviet model was defeated not only on the economic and social levels; it was defeated on a cultural level. Our society, our people, most educated, most intellectual, rejected that model on the cultural level because it does not respect the man, oppresses him spiritually and politically . . . That is why the most important for us [was] everything connected with freedom.⁸⁸

The closest approximation to a well-integrated vision of Russian turmoil as a revolution of ideas is found in articles and interviews by the "godfather of glasnost," Aleksandr Yakovlev. To him, the revolution was an unmistakably normative, conceptual, even cognitive overhaul.

When he returned to the Soviet Union in 1983 after ten years as the ambassador to Canada, Yakovlev's recollection of what he found was much the same as Gorbachev's and Ryzhkov's:

The moment was at hand when people would say, "Enough! We cannot live like this any longer." Everything must be done in a new way. We must re-consider our concepts, approaches, our views of past and our future.⁸⁹

Taking stock of the revolution's achievements seven years later, Yakovlev outlined nothing short of the advent of an entirely new value system, a spiritual Renaissance, a new *Weltanschauung*:

There has come an understanding that it is simply impossible to live as we lived before—intolerably, humiliatingly. Taking root are the realism of worldview and sobriety of thought. The awakening of society is underway. Dignity is being restored. . . . The call to the primacy of morality is in clearly heard. The democra-

tic foundations of the society are being forged . . . And there is much more that, with much screeching, breaks the thousand-year-old paradigm of Russian history, that heralds a step into a new type of civilization.

Already we have something that is irreversible. It lies in the impalpable yet real sphere of spirit. The society will never be the same, for there has been a qualitative breakthrough in consciousness. Irreversible is the deliverance from the myths, stereotypes, self-deception and self-satisfaction, which have poisoned our brains and our feelings for decades. Irreversible is the realization that life fashioned by conformism leads only to the quagmire of lagging behind in history. Irreversible is the gradual return of common human ideals and values, the realization of their moral imperative: freedom of an individual, conscience, decency, kindness, charity. Irreversible is the awakening of the thirst for active life, for the freedom of exploration.

Man is made strong by spirit, and peoples' history is moved by spirit. The spiritual birth of perestroika is painful. But without it renewal of the society is hopeless. This birth has taken place and what perestroika has already accomplished will enter history as one of the moral and intellectual feats of humankind.⁹⁰

It is hard to escape a proposition that what happened to Gorbachev and his allies among the Soviet elite and, two years later, to the millions of their compatriots must constitute one of history's most startling, profound, and fastest transformations of perceptions, attitudes, values. Political choices and, finally, policies followed.

How did this process begin and unfold? What were the key ideas that fueled and shaped it, and through what channels? These are the questions and themes, among others, to be explored by other scholars.

Yet these scholars will owe a great deal to the solid foundation and stimulation supplied by Starodubrovskaya and Mau in their systematic and rigorous analysis of Russia's latest revolution.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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NOTES

1. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

2. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

3. Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

4. See, for example, Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492—1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

5. Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 286.

6. Irina Starodubrovskaya and Vladimir Mau, *Velikie Revolutsii ot Krmomvelya do Putina* (Great Revolutions from Cromwell to Putin), 2nd augmented ed. (Moscow: Vagrius, 2004), 28–29.

7. *Ibid.*, 24.

8. In this causal scheme, the development of the “forces of production” (the economic system) enter into a fatal conflict with the “relations of production” (the existing social and political institutions), a conflict that can only be resolved by the change of the “super-

structure” (political system).

9. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 384–415.
10. A. Maddison, *Monitoring World Economy* (Paris: OECD, 1995).
11. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 431, 428.
12. *Ibid.*, 428–29.
13. Yuri Levada, “1989–1998: desiatiletie vyzhdenykh pereverotov,” *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya* (1999): 9.
14. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 175.
15. Leon Aron, “Structure and Context in the Study of Post-Soviet Russia: Several Empirical Generalizations in Search of a Theory,” *Demokratizatsiya* (Summer 2000): 430–31. For details see John Higley, Judith Kullberg, and Jan Pakulski, “The Persistence of Post-Communist Elites,” *Journal of Democracy* 2 (1996): 135–36.
16. Lech Walesa, “I See the Commies, I see the Clever Guys Doing Well,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 7, 1991, 81.
17. Z. A. B. Zeman, “Václav Havel and Civil Society,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 January 2000, 8.
18. Steven Erlanger, “Havel Finds His Role Turning from Czech Hero to Has-Been,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1999, A12.
19. Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia’s Reforms* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 639.
20. Already in the first semifree national election (to the Congress of People’s Deputies in March 1989), thirty-eight regional party bosses (obkom first secretaries) were defeated. A year later, in the spring 1990 elections to Moscow City Council, the radical Democratic Russia took fifty-seven of sixty-five seats. Forty-five million people voted for Boris Yeltsin in the Russian presidential election in June 1991, giving him 57 percent of the vote in the field of six candidates.
21. Vladimir Viktorovich Sorgin, “Tri prevrashcheniya sovremennoy Rossii” [The Three Metamorphoses of the Contemporary Russia], *Otechestvennaya Istoriya*, no. 3 (2005): 7. See also M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 35, 42–43, 189.
22. Alexander Rahr, “Inside the Interregional Group,” *RL/RFE Report on the USSR*, vol. 2, no. 43 (October 26, 1990): 1.
23. Sorgin, 8.
24. *Ibid.*
25. For instance, on February 4, 1990, two hundred fifty thousand people demonstrated in Moscow for the abolition of Article Six of the Constitution that spelled out the “leading” role of the Communist Party. On January 20, 1991, two hundred thousand protested military intervention in the Baltic republics that had declared their independence, followed in February and March by “vast” demonstrations in Moscow, Leningrad, Yaroslavl, Volgograd and other cities in support of Yeltsin and Russia’s sovereignty. “Revolution in the U.S.S.R., 1989–1991,” in Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone 270 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003). See also Fish, 47–48.
26. Harley Balzer, “Ordinary Russians? Rethinking August 1991,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13 2 (Spring 2005): 193–218.
27. Gavriil Popov, “Igrы patriotov. Chetvyortaya revolyutsiya” [The Patriots’ Games. The Fourth Revolution], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, May 25, 2004, 4.
28. Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 173.
29. *Ibid.*, 176, 169.
30. That explains why, despite what became known as the “shelling of the parliament,” not one Deputy was injured or detained even for an hour after the suppression of the armed rebellion, and many competed for and won seats in the national legislature.
31. T. E. Vorozheykina, “Gosudarstvo i obshchestvo v Rossii” [State and Society in Rus-

sia) in *Kuda Idyot Rossiya?* [Where Is Russia Going?] (Moscow: Moscow Higher School of Social and Economic Studies, 2002), 39.

32. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996); Alexander Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya byitiya* [The Torments of Reading Life] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991) and *Omut Pamiati* [The Whirlpool of Memory] (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001); Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: Istoriya predatel'stv* [Perestroika: The History of Betrayals] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992); Boris Yeltsin, *Ipoved' na zadannuyu temu* [A Confession on a Required Topic] (Riga: Rukitis Publishers, 1990); and Anatoly Sobchak, *Khozhdenie vo vlast'* [A Pilgrimage into Power] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991). For the best single summary of the Sovietological consensus on the eve of the revolution, see Owen Harries, ed., *The Strange Death of Soviet Communism*, a special issue of the *National Interest*, Spring 1993.

33. Leon Aron, *Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 177–81.

34. Mikhail Gorbachev, the speech at the conference at Central Committee of the CPSU on expediting scientific and technological progress, July 11, 1985 (*Pravda*, July 12, 1985).

35. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 179.

36. Peter Rutland, "Sovietology: Notes for a Post-Mortem," in Owen Harries, ed., *The Strange Death of Soviet Communism*, a special issue of *National Interest*, Spring 1993, 121.

37. Public opinion as a factor in the formulation of defense and foreign policies represented nothing less than a fundamental realignment in the priorities of the Russian-Soviet state, in which for four centuries protection and the expansion of the empire completely dominated domestic economic, political and social agendas. The earliest anticipation of this overhaul is contained in Evgeniy Primakov's *Pravda* article of July 1987, where he proclaimed that "the organic link between our country's domestic and foreign policy," adding, rather coyly, that this link had "perhaps never been as clear as it is now." From this admission, in turn, followed "a radical qualitative shift in the USSR's domestic and foreign policy," including the newly-found appreciation for the "interdependence" of the world (something which soon will be even more iconoclastically named "all-human values") and "the imperative . . . to exclude the exporting of revolution." Evgeniy Primakov, "Novaya filosofiya vneshnei politiki" [New Philosophy of Foreign Policy], *Pravda*, July 9, 1987, 4.

38. As quoted in Paul Hollander, *Political Will and Personal Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 87.

39. Yegor Gaydar, *Dolgoe Vremya: Rossiya v mire* [Long Time: Russia in the World] (Moscow: Delo, 2005), 338 and 212–13.

40. Alexandr Yakovlev, *Omut Pamiati* [The Whirlpool of Memory] (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 242.

41. As quoted in Hollander, 1.

42. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 500–1.

43. Richard Pipes, a back cover endorsement of Paul Hollander's *Political Will and Personal Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

44. Owen Harries, ed., *The Strange Death of Soviet Communism*, a special issue of *National Interest*, Spring 1993.

45. Mikhail Gorbachev, "Ni vozvrata, ni ostanovki ne budet" (There Will be Neither a Return nor a Halt), the speech at the Lenin Tractor Plant in Minsk, February 26, 1991 (*Pravda*, February 28, 1991, 2).

46. Tilly, 14, 17, 49, 184, 234–35, 239–41.

47. Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 1–2.

48. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

49. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/Belknap, 1992), 94, 95.

50. *Ibid.*, x.

51. *Ibid.*
52. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 37.
53. *Ibid.*, 35.
54. *Ibid.*, 37.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*, 58.
57. See, for example, Robert Service, *Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 10.
58. Among the best scholarly explorations of the ideological origins of the Soviet state and the role that ideology played in its maintenance and its policies are Leonard Shapiro, *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Alain Besançon, *Les Origines intellectuelles du léninisme* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1977), and Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
59. Martin Malia, “The Archives of Evil,” *New Republic*, November 29 and December 6, 2004, 36. As he put it in his last book, “Fired to ideological incandescence . . . they mounted a coup d’état to seize power in the workers’ name.” *Russia under Western Eyes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 246.
60. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 500–1.
61. Paul Hollander’s *Political Will and Personal Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 276. Furet points to the same phenomenon in fewer words: “The role played by volition is the most difficult to discern; that of objective factors is easier to establish” 497.
62. N. I. Lapin and L. A. Belyaeva, eds., *Dinamika tsennostei naseleniya reformiruemoy Rossii* [The Dynamics of Values of the Population of Russia as It Is Being Reformed] (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1996), 40.
63. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 475.
64. As quoted in Hollander, 277.
65. Judith S. Kullberg, “The Ideological Roots of Elite Political Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 6 (1994): 931.
66. *Ibid.*, 947.
67. *Ibid.*, 946, 931.
68. *Ibid.*, n.22, 951.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. Paul Hollander, *Political Will and Personal Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 1.
72. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
73. *Ibid.*, 276, emphasis added.
74. Owen Harries, ed., *The Strange Death of Soviet Communism*, a special issue of *National Interest*, Spring 1993, especially Peter Rutland, “Sovietology,” 109–23.
75. Leon Aron “What Glasnost Has Destroyed,” *Commentary*, December 1989.
76. Gaydar, 351, emphasis added.
77. *Ibid.*, 355.
78. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 181, 186. For a detailed discussion of “socialist pluralism,” see Leon Aron, “The Search for ‘Socialist Pluralism’” *Global Affairs* (Winter 1989): 104–17.
79. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 182.
80. It is a testimony to the resilience of the structural paradigm that, despite its obvious

inability fully to account for the genesis of the revolution and for much of its course, structural explanations continue to dominate, while ideas, values and ideologies are relegated to the secondary or tertiary categories of explanations.

For instance, Gordon Hahn, in an exhaustive (and at times exhausting) study of “institutional constraints” that led to the failure of the reforms and collapse of the Soviet political and economic system (an analysis which, because its preoccupation solely with the very top of the Soviet political hierarchy, at times reads as a Kremlinological exegesis par excellence) traces what he considers to be a “revolution from above” to the “macrostructural” crisis engendered by “fundamental contradictions between the global scientific-technological revolution that emerged in the 1970’s led by . . . the United States, and increasingly stagnant and obsolete Soviet regime-type.” Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia’s Revolution from Above* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 17, 18.

Although, by contrast, Jack Goldstone, is convinced that what happened in the Soviet Union was a “major” revolution and that behind it “lay a causal pattern similar to that of great revolutions in history” (including the collapse of the political regime, and the dissolution of all major institutions and ideology that supported it); and he cites the huge demonstrations of February 1990, January 1991 and, of course, in August 1991 as undeniable instances of mass participation “from below,” he too feels that the upheaval can be adequately explained within the structural (in his case, demographic) paradigm: the “clogged arteries” of social mobility, (“occupational stagnation” and the surplus of increasingly “frustrated” young, college-educated urban dwellers specialists with higher education) the “heightened competition and frustration” among the aspirants for elite positions; the declining living standards (including the declining quality of medical care and increased mortality) and urbanization. Jack A. Goldstone, “Revolution in the U.S.S.R., 1989–1991,” in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone 261–71 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003).

Similarly, Steven Fish, despite providing an excellent chronicle of the mass political mobilization in the revolution, chooses to “de-emphasize” ideology and “belief systems” in explaining what he calls “a popular democratic revolution,” opting instead for the “statist, institutional” approach in which state power (“rather than beliefs, ideals and policy orientations”) determines both the scope of popular mobilization and the content of popular movements by shaping “political opportunity structures” available to the opposition. M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 27, 189.

From the “value-centric” perspective, the most promising of the structural approaches is that of modernization, which emphasizes urbanization, education as conducive to the inception and dissemination of alternative values and ideals. Thus, in his definition of a revolution, Huntington adds “a rapid and fundamental . . . change . . . in central values and myths” to the replacement of political institutions and social structure. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 264. In this regard, Jerry Hough’s interpretation of the Russian Revolution as resulting from a systemic disequilibrium which, in turn, stemmed from the emergence of a middle class, itself a product of Soviet modernization. Embodying competing values, it supplied the both the foot soldiers and the leaders of the revolution, whose goals corresponded to its aspirations. Jerry Hough, *Democratization and Revolution in the USSR, 1985–1991* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 4, 63–64, 92.

81. M. Gorbachev, interview with ITAR-TASS, October 13, 1992.

82. Nikolai Ryzhkov, *Perestroika: Istoriya predatel'stv* [Perestroika: The History of Betrayals] (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), 33, 94.

83. Vladimir Tremel, “Gorbachev’s Anti-Drinking Campaign: A Noble Experiment or a Costly Exercise in Futility,” *RL Supplement* (RL 2/87), March 18, 1987, 6.

84. Mikhail Gorbachev, “Krepit' klyuchevoe zveno ekonomiki” [To Strengthen the Key Link of the Economy], *Pravda*, December 10, 1990.

85. Ryzhkov, 243.

86. The GNP figure is from Anders Åslund, "How Small Is Soviet National Income?" in Henry S. Rowen and Charles Wolf, Jr., *The Impoverished Superpower* (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1990), 37. The figures for the Soviet budget are from Judy Shelton, *The Coming Soviet Crash* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 9, and for healthcare from Trembl, 12.

87. Ryzhkov, 95.

88. Starodubrovskaya and Mau, 238, 245.

89. Alexandr Yakovlev, *Muki prochteniya bytiya* [The Torments of Reading Life] (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), 31.

90. *Ibid.*, 7–8.