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The Petty Bourgeoisie and its Enemies “Philistinism” and the “Intelligentsia” in the Nineteenth Century

The concept of the intelligentsia

The concept of the intelligentsia has been defined in a number of ways, which often sharply differ from each other. There is no general agreement as to an adequate definition of the concept, nor is there any unanimity about the historical role of the group, which is denoted by that concept. In fact, the various conflicting definitions of the intelligentsia have often had the practical purpose of serving some political or group interest rather than of elucidating the phenomenon in question. Defining certain social elements or concrete persons as members or non-members of the intelligentsia has been, and is, a very value-laden act. Instead of trying to give an all-encompassing definition of the concept, I will present some examples of the usage of the term, which has varied considerably during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The social group, which has been denoted by the term, has changed in composition over the course of time. Rather than try to extract the sociological essence of the group, which called itself the intelligentsia, I will pick out some moments of fundamental change in the social situation of this group. One red thread that runs through the story is the attention given to the tradition of estrangement among the intelligentsia, its opposition to mainstream culture, state and society. The objects of resistance, the conditions of opposition, and the moods of the

intelligentsia changed many times due to state politics, the development of society, revolutions, and the introduction of new ideas. However, certain traditional attitudes seem to have persisted, and I try to chart this development by paying attention to judgments about “philistinism”. The term “intelligentsia” was introduced into the Russian language during the 1860s.¹ Hardly anybody, however, thinks that the social group, which has been denoted by the term, appeared as late as that. Some scholars have traced the beginning of the history of the Russian intelligentsia as far back as the Time of Troubles at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Some have pointed to the men of the Enlightenment in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and still others have concluded that the first Russian intelligent (the Russian term denoting a member of the intelligentsia) was Peter the Great.²

As regards the essence, social role and attributes of the group called the intelligentsia, there have been a number of conflicting views. For some populists (in Russian narodniks—friends of the people), like N.K. Mikhailovsky, the term intelligentsia meant the progressive part of the educated classes. For Peter Lavrov, it meant all critically thinking people. For some Marxists, the intelligentsia was a class, but for both Lenin and Stalin, as well as for post-Stalinist Soviet official ideology, it was a social layer (prosloika), which had no independent class-character, but which reflected the interests of the ruling class. Non-Marxists, like Nicholas Berdiaev, often considered, and even emphasized, that the intelligentsia lacked class-character. This was also the view of the Socialist Revolutionary Party.³

In Brezhnev’s time, the official Dictionary of the Russian Language published by the Academy of Sciences defined the intelligentsia as a “social group, which consists of people, who have got education and special knowledge in the fields of science, technology and culture and who are professionally doing mental work.”⁴ Post-communist dictionaries have more or less returned to the pre-Revolutionary

understanding of the term. A definition from the year 2000 defines the intelligentsia as a

social layer of people, who are professionally engaged in mental, mostly complicated work and with the development and distribution of culture. The concept of intelligentsia is often given also a moral meaning and the group is considered to represent high standards of morality.⁵

The intelligentsia has also been defined by its supposed role of serving the “people” (in Russian narod), by being its “brain” and/or by being the conscience of society.

The intelligentsia has traditionally been considered to consist of individual intellectuals (intelligent in Russian), who are educated, or, more expressly, who share the quality of intelligentnost',⁶ which is something else, and something more than mere education. On the other hand, there have are those who explicitly deny that either education or intelligentnost', which refer to personal qualities of individuals, can be the main criterion of the intelligentsia as a group. Rather, the word “intelligentsia” has been reserved to denote the collective name of that politically active and enlightened group, which, collectively, has a progressive social role and promotes progressive ideas. - Clearly, in this case, there could be members of the intelligentsia, who are not intelligents at all.⁷

It has been thought that the intelligentsia, collectively, felt guilty before the people and was, therefore, obliged to serve it through its knowledge, conscience, and behavior.⁸ In the traditional sense, an intelligent is not just a specialist doing mental work, but also member of a socially active group, almost a lay order, whose members are deeply engaged in the struggle for ethical principles.

The origins

Marc Raeff has maintained that “two major themes have dominated the history of Imperial Russia from the reign of Peter the Great to the Revolution of 1917: westernization (or modernization) and revolutionary ferment.” These developments have been brought about, he considers, by the partly overlapping groups of the nobility and the intelligentsia.⁹ Raeff’s view is well-founded and must be given its due. Here, however, the beginning of the story will be put back to a later date. In the modern sense of the word, the intelligentsia, as a social group, was formed in Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century. The first generation, known as “the men of the forties”, were mostly of noble origin and well-to-do, whereas the next generation, which emerged in the 1860s and were known as “the sons” (and daughters), came from diverse groups within society (the Russian word “raznochintsy” refers to this fact). The birth of the Russian intelligentsia is connected with the flow of Western ideas to Russia, especially German romanticism, which gave rise to the renowned Slavophile controversy. Sometimes the birth of the Russian intelligentsia is dated to the debate, started by the famous “Philosophical Letter,” which was published by Peter Chaadaev in 1836 where he presented the blasphemous idea that Russia had not up to then created a culture of its own, but had merely copied Western European culture.¹⁰ The ensuing debate divided the intellectually active public into two parts, the Slavophiles and the Westerners. Both were armed with Hegelian philosophy, which purported to be the scientific method in philosophy and was to put an end to the intellectual vagaries of romanticism. It soon proved to be the case that Hegel was as well-suited to promoting the extravagant nationalism of the founders of Slavophilism, the Aksakovs and the Kireevskys as he was the totalitarian anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and the libertarian socialism of Alexander Herzen.

Along with Slavophilism, the other great anti-Western political and intellectual movement of nineteenth century Russia was a nationally colored Russian form of socialism, which, in its later phase, became known as narodnichestvo (populism). Its founding father was Alexander Herzen, who emigrated to Western Europe as an avowed westerner, but once there soon became convinced of the superiority of Russian popular traditions vis-à-vis the Western European social institutions. Both Slavophilism and populism bore the hallmarks of romanticism and both stressed the uniqueness of Russia and the necessity of escaping the fate of being turned into a capitalist (bourgeois) society, as had happened in Western Europe.¹¹ For the Slavophiles, Western Europe was understood to have become old and barren, and its creative energies were believed to have been spent, whereas the future would belong to Russia, which was young. Russian socialists too began to believe that their society was not simply backward. Russia, which seemed to lag behind Western Europe, was in fact ahead of it. The West had attained maturity, which was reflected in the birth of the middle class. Maturity, however, was just a step away from stagnation, Herzen concluded. Russia, for its part, could be spared the phase of capitalist development, and socialism could be introduced there on the basis of the traditional village commune (in Russian mir or obshchina).¹² Herzen congratulated the Russians for the fact that the question about socialism, which so deeply divided Western society, was not such a divisive issue in Russia: even the Slavophiles supported it. Russian society was undeveloped, but this just meant that it was free from the ballast of history. A radical transformation was a more realistic prospect in Russia than it was in Western Europe. Russia would never choose the golden mean, *juste milieu*,¹³ but stage a revolution with thoroughgoing social consequences.¹⁴

It was not, however, true that all the intellectuals, “the people with principles,” as they were then called would have supported some form of socialism. There were also the liberal Westerners, whose outstanding

representative, Ivan Turgenev, inveighed against Herzen's views. However, even the liberals could not avoid being in radical opposition towards the powers that be, for the tsarist state with its program of "official nationality" did not recognize the idea of independent political thinking and public opinion. The famous triad of "orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality," which Count Uvarov, the minister of education, presented in 1833, was answered by the adoption of the slogan of the French revolution "Liberty, equality, fraternity" by the educated public.¹⁵

The new-born Russian intelligentsia of the 1840s unanimously supported the idea that there was a substantial cleavage between Russia and "Europe." The main difference amongst them was about the desirable direction of development. The Slavophiles and the Russian socialists supported the idea that the difference between Russian and Europe should persist and even be widened, whereas the Westerners thought that Russian society should become more and more like its Western counterpart.¹⁶

A new social group and political force

It has often been considered that the phenomenon of the intelligentsia is (or has been) something specifically, even uniquely, Russian. This was already a popular view in the nineteenth century. It was assumed that this specificity was caused by unique Russian circumstances, that is, by the absence of the "parental environment of an established bourgeoisie," by a relative "overproduction" of intellectuals, and most of all, by the policies of an oppressive absolutism, which in other civilized countries had already given way to a more popular rule.¹⁷ Overproduction would be a "rational" explanation for the alienation of a whole social group, which constituted the intellectual elite of the country. However, it is also true that the deep personal alienation of intellectuals was not just a typically Russian phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Although it is not possible to measure the effect of this factor, its existence is no less

real for that. It is well-known that many leading intellectuals also experienced this kind of problem in Western Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, it was called the “maladie du siècle,” and the chief concerns of the alienated individuals had an existential rather than a social character, but quite often the problem was also projected onto society. For Herzen and Bakunin, as well as for Thomas Carlyle or Comte de Saint-Simon, social issues were closely intertwined with the problem of alienation (although they hardly used the word) and also quite expressly with personal concerns. In the new post-war cultural context, the individual’s life for many men of letters seemed to be hopelessly devoid of meaning. In order to solve the dilemma, the lonely individual had to be “reconciled with the reality.” In practice this often meant merging with the community. As a member of a greater whole one could attain a meaningful, even eternal, life. Capitalism, which had made “payment in cash” the sole liaison between human beings, as both Karl Marx and Thomas Carlyle defined the new spirit of the age, not only deprived people of the material goods, to which they were entitled, but also of their souls.¹⁸ In fact, social activity often became a way of dealing with personal problems, which had arisen from deeply personal longings. Accordingly, political discourse, even when it was pursued in a most rationalistic, dry-as-dust way, was laden with passions, which stemmed from the inner depths of the human soul.

Alienation, which was caused by the new impersonal order in society, certainly existed in Europe and not only among literary men. Social unrest, which swept across Europe from England to Silesia, very probably had its roots in the newly-established capitalist mode of production.

In Russia the toiling masses had not yet experienced either the vices or the virtues of a modern capitalist economy. Nevertheless, in Russian

literature and society during the first half of the nineteenth century the “superfluous man” figure also loomed large, from Griboedov, Pushkin, and Lermontov to Turgenev and Chekhov. It was not just a literary loan from the West. To some extent it clearly reflected endemic social processes. A whole new group of people, the *raznochintsy*, which belonged to none of the old estates, had now emerged and continued to grow rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Eventually, the group which called itself the *intelligentsia* became more and more alienated from both the state and high society. The social activism of the “people with principles” and “critically thinking people” increased in the 1860s. Clandestine political organizations were born. Both the Land and Freedom (*Zemlia i volia*) of the 1860s and its follower the People’s Will (*Narodnaia volia*) of the 1870s adopted a Manichean position, where the tsarist government was demonized and the simple people, the *narod*, became an object of uncritical adoration. The student youth adopted the new radical ideas en masse and the new word “*intelligentsia*” was introduced to denote all those who were politically active and took the side of the “people.” Being a member of the *intelligentsia* attained a specific meaning. Ivan Turgenev, who did not use the word, depicted a “nihilist” type in his novel “Fathers and sons” (1862). Although the literary type of “nihilist,” represented by Turgenev clearly did not apply to all members of the *intelligentsia*, it certainly gave its stamp to the new generation. The “superfluous man,” or alienated and noble individual, that Pushkin, Lermontov and Turgenev had described- had already been a model for the old generation. The “sons” now developed the alienation still further by adopting an irreconcilable attitude towards the tsarist state and society, which they wanted to remold in a most radical way.

Along with existential and socio-psychological problems, remarkable changes in the social position of the educated classes also took place in Europe. Naturally this happened also in Russia. It would appear that to

some extent, one can explain the radicalism of the Russian intelligentsia by the relative overproduction of educated people and the ever-growing mass of the *raznochintsy*.

The expansion of higher education in Russia was rather rapid. During the nineteenth century the government for some time even artificially retarded the process, in order to keep radicalism in check. But the process could not be stopped; indeed, it accelerated, particularly from 1900 onwards.

The pace of growth was quite impressive. The number of university students, which had been 4125 in 1865, had doubled by 1880. In 1899 the number was 16295.¹⁹ As the number of students increased, more and more representatives of non-gentry elements began to have access to education. However, this “democratization” must not be exaggerated. The nobles preserved their position in the universities remarkably well: in 1880 they accounted for 46, 6 percent of the students at 8 Russian universities, and in 1900 the number was 51,8 percent!²⁰ In 1906 48,4 percent of the university students were still of gentry origin “or scions of civil servants.”²¹

It is true that the social origins of the students in absolute terms does not tell us very much about the group known as the intelligentsia. If we look at the statistics of those who were mixed up in political trials, the following picture emerges:

During the period 1884-1890, 30,6 percent of the people accused in political trials had been of gentry origin. In 1901-1903 the figure was 10,7 percent. At the same time, the figure for offspring of the clergy fell from 6, 4 to 1,6 percent and for honorary citizens and merchants from 12,1 to 4,1 percent. The proportion of people who were of petty bourgeois (in Russian *meshchanstvo*) origin rose from 27, 5 percent to 43,9 percent and that of “countryside estates” rose from 19,1 to 37,0 percent.²² In fact, it seems that the much-abused petty bourgeoisie (as an official estate) was rather the backbone of the political movement in Russia during the

second half of the nineteenth century. The official classification used in Russia in those days does not give a clear idea of the social background of the elements concerned. Some representatives of the “petty bourgeoisie” could well have been, in fact, workers and many “nobles” were in fact starving outcasts of society. However, when we are told that in 1884-1890, 34, 2 percent of the accused in political trials had higher education and 33, 2 percent intermediary education, it is clear that political radicalism in the nineteenth century was an elitist occupation. It was also concentrated in educational institutions. During the 1860s, no less than 60 percent of those who took part in the “social movement” (political activity), were students and in the 1870s their share was 52 percent. Thereafter their share fell and at the beginning of the twentieth century it was somewhat less than 10 percent.²³ The numerical strength of the educated classes grew rapidly.

By the middle of the First World War there were 125,000 higher-education students, of which 30,000 were women. The number of schoolteachers, for instance, grew even faster. In 1900 there were about 60,000 teachers in elementary schools. By 1914 their number had increased to 135,000. The educated classes were also becoming more “democratic,” while a substantial gentry element still survived. The proportion of hereditary nobles among the educated classes had been 23,2 percent in 1880, whilst in 1914 it was 7,6 percent. Adding the offspring of the personal nobility²⁴ would seriously inflate the numbers.²⁵

It goes without saying that not all of those who received higher or intermediary education identified themselves with the politically active intelligentsia. The number of scholars and literary men, who, rightly or wrongly, could, a priori, be conceived as the vanguard of independent thinking, was still very small. At the end of the nineteenth century there were 3,296 professional scholars and litterateurs in Russia, while there were no less than 151,346 civil servants, 204,623 clerks of private industry, and 52,471 representatives of the “military intelligentsia.”²⁶

Clearly, among the cultured classes, representatives of the loyal bureaucracy far outnumbered those inclined to opposition. Among the educated classes of Russia, active fighters against the autocracy must have been in a minority.

The moral dimension

The intelligentsia proper was, however, understood to be an opposition group, which was fighting the autocracy. The influence of this element also far exceeded its numerical strength. Being in irreconcilable opposition to the autocracy and selflessly fighting for the rights of the martyred people, to which the intelligentsia were not supposed to really belong, was an integral part of the myth of the intelligentsia, the key to its self-understanding. It has been stressed that the Russian intelligentsia did not have the same role in society as, for instance, their French counterparts.²⁷ A Russian intelligent was not just a critic of the powers that be or of mainstream culture and society. Still less was he or she merely an educated or learned individual. As a rule, he or she had to fulfill all these criteria, but this alone was not enough. A Manichean picture of the martyred “people” on the one hand and the oppressive state and its supporters on the other, ruled out the prospect of peaceful coexistence and the building of a civil society on a basis of mutual tolerance and compromise.

The underlying moving force of the intelligent, who dedicated his life to the people, was guilt. Only the first generation of the intelligentsia had been preponderantly of gentry origin, but even the later representatives of this group, who were separated from the people by virtue of being educated and freed from the physical toil and brutishness of popular life, retained a feeling of guilt. It is also true that the gentry element among the intelligentsia always remained large. Paradoxically, becoming educated lifted the individual out of the ranks of the “people,” into the

ranks of the intelligentsia, which, for its part, unselfishly dedicated its life to the service of the people. It goes without saying that this model of life had religious overtones and counterparts. The guilt-complex of the Russian intelligentsia and its “obsession with the ideas of collective sin and social redemption engendered a general outlook which can only be described as eschatological,” writes Tibor Szamuely.²⁸

The image of the classical Russian intelligent became, in the “ideal” case, that of a martyr, like Alexander Radishchev, Pavel Pestel, or Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who paid for their opinions with their own freedom and lives. It was not only the champions of freedom of speech and conscience who attracted sympathy. People who had undertaken the task of killing the tsar also received the admiration and sympathy of the mainstream intelligentsia. The People’s Will’s terrorists were hanged by the tsarist state, and subsequently the “official savagery” of the state claimed the lives of many others. The views and convictions of these people could not be overcome by violence; indeed, the effect may very possibly have been the opposite. The example of the martyrs attracted thousands of followers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The students of St. Petersburg University, which, incidentally, was exceptionally aristocratic,²⁹ had shown the way in the early 1860s and soon the students of many other institutions of higher learning became fervent fighters for the freedom of the “people.”

On the mythological level, the idealized self-image of an intelligent can be found in literature. Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s novel *What Is To Be Done?* became holy writ for the Russian radical intelligentsia and the “new people” which it described. The character of Rakhmetov, whose life belonged to the people, and who was also an awe-inspiring man of iron will, was, for many, the ideal intelligent.

The moderate intelligentsia

But not all educated Russians were, or wanted to be, members of this militant intelligentsia. There were always people who were lukewarm, skeptical or inimical towards the radicals. There was always sharp intellectual criticism of the excesses of the radicals. The most devastating critique of the radical tradition was presented by Fedor Dostoevsky, who, in his novel *Memoirs from Underground*, attacked Chernyshevsky's magnum opus with murderous irony.³⁰ His novel *The Possessed* (*Besy*) in fact described the notorious case of Sergei Nechaev, who had made his followers murder a member of the group. The main reason for this collective crime may have been to further the radical cause by welding the culprits still more tightly together in their service of the organization.³¹ Many other luminaries of Russian cultural life, even people considered to be leading progressive intellectuals, were equally unsympathetic to the excesses of the radicals. Ivan Turgenev described how the liberal generation (the "Fathers") had to give way to the radical nihilists (the "Sons"), in whose hands the noble ideas of the intelligentsia degenerated into vulgar blasphemy and hooliganism. Later, Anton Chekhov who had also experienced his own period of social activism became disappointed with the realities of the Russian intelligentsia of his day.³² Leo Tolstoy, whose ethical maximalism and anarchism were extremely radical and served as an inspiration for a part of the radical intelligentsia, at the same time preached non-violence and even non-resistance to evil, which was a far cry from the ideals and practices of the men of action. Tolstoy was not only an enemy of the state, but also of the hierarchies and hypocrisies of civil society. With some justification, he has even been considered a predecessor of the Bolshevik revolution, even though he preached a religion of love.³³

Consequently, the educated, politically conscious classes in nineteenth century Russia were by no means a united tightly-knit revolutionary order, as one might think from reading some anti-intelligentsia pamphlets and treatises. Writers like Tolstoy, Turgenev

and Chekhov described intellectual types, who were conscious of the great social issues (“accursed questions”) of the day without being militant radicals. One example is Levin in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, a man, who deeply felt the wrongs of society, but instead of joining the political struggle, preferred to restrict his activity to his immediate surroundings. For many, self-perfection was a more vital issue than politics. Chekhov’s characters rather typically represented those traits of personality which were understood to constitute so called *intelligentnost’* namely, perceptive and compassionate attitudes towards fellow human beings. Chekhov is important in this respect, because his characters³⁴ are also considered to be typical *intelligenty*, even though they differed considerably from that of Turgenev’s Bazarov or Chernyshevsky’s Rakhmetov, who were the other archetypal *intelligents*.³⁵

It would appear that a kind of mainstream political correctness among the *intelligentsia* wanted to reserve the term “*intelligentsia*” for the active militants, who accepted even the most radical means if they served the struggle against absolutism. Therefore, people like Chekhov, who considered universal human values absolute and inviolable, sometimes even refused to consider themselves members of the *intelligentsia* at all.³⁶ It can be assumed that there were always two *intelligentsia* traditions; one radical and even extremist and another moderate and soft-minded, although the former always seemed to prevail.³⁷ The former gave its stamp to the word “*intelligentsia*,” while the latter represented the values of *intelligentnost’* with its overtones of refined sense of morality, and an empathy and respect for human dignity.

Since the beginning of the 1860s, being a member of the *intelligentsia* had more or less become the equivalent of being in uncompromising opposition to the regime and entertaining a tendency for self-sacrifice. Politics was for the militants, the all-encompassing element of life, and revolution was understood to be the panacea for all problems. After the

abortive 1905-07 revolution, a group of intelligenty came into second thoughts about the clearly self-contradictory nature of the myth of the intelligentsia. They challenged the mainstream and self-complimentary views of the intelligentsia, maintaining that the intelligentsia's social role had been fruitless and even detrimental and that its philosophy was superficial. They published a pamphlet called *Vekhi* (Signposts), which was devoted to criticizing the radical Russian intelligentsia and its moral and intellectual condition. In the opinion of the *Vekhi* group, the staunch, caste-like opposition and rigid articles of faith of the intelligentsia had deprived it of a real role in building society and had instead led it into a futile struggle for a revolution, which would supposedly work miracles and solve all society's problems once and for all. This faith, however, had no foundation in reality.³⁸

The *Vekhi* critique of the intelligentsia after the revolution of 1905 was a major symbolic watershed in the history of the intelligentsia, but it did not have a decisive effect on future developments. The February revolution in 1917 was, once again, largely a creation of the radical intelligentsia. Even though it seems to be the case that the majority of the intelligentsia was inimical to the October coup of 1917 (or "The Great October Socialist Revolution," as it was officially called in the Soviet Union), many authors have expressed the idea that the intelligentsia also has to bear a lot of responsibility for the totalitarian regime, which subsequently condemned Russia to captivity for a period of three generations.³⁹ Tibor Szamuely, the son of a famous Hungarian revolutionary, has concluded that an essential element of Russian totalitarian thinking originated and persisted in the tradition of the intelligentsia.⁴⁰

According to Szamuely, one of the elements of Russian totalitarianism, which gave rise to the Soviet Union, was the Russian state tradition, from the Mongols to Alexander I and Nicholas I, whilst the other was the revolutionary tradition, born of the intelligentsia, from

the Decembrists to the Marxists. Indeed, as Szamuely shows, the Russian intelligentsia does offer an imposing array of revolutionary fanatics with a totalitarian approach; such as, the nihilists of the Young Russia, the conspiratorial principle of Nechaev, and the proto-Leninist idea of a ruling minority-party of Petr Tkachev.⁴¹ Many of the tenets of Russian revolutionaries had been invented by the Jacobins of the French Revolution, or by the utopian socialists of the mid-nineteenth century. According to Szamuely, the important point is that politically the Russian intelligentsia was anti-liberal and hypnotized by the prospect of a miracle-working revolution. It was alienated from society and the state and lived in a world of its own. It never cared about legal forms and guarantees of personal freedom and other liberal institutions. On the other hand, Szamuely points out that the Russian intelligentsia also always believed that the interests of the individual must be subordinated to those of society.⁴² With the exception of the minor current of Bakunin's anarchism, the Russian ideological and social beliefs of the intelligentsia were statist and authoritarian. This was true of Slavophiles and Westerners alike, Szamuely asserts.⁴³

This is a truly devastating critique, but many other authors have, more or less, shared Szamuely's verdict. The Vekhi-almanac in 1909 had already made, essentially, the same analysis. Several critics have subsequently pointed to the unconstructive and alienated attitudes of the intelligentsia. For example, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who, with some other dissidents, published an almanach called *Iz-pod glyb* (From Under the Rubble) in the 1970s, considered himself an heir to the Vekhi-tradition and condemned what he perceived to be the barren radicalism of the intelligentsia.⁴⁴ Solzhenitsyn's massive multi-volume novel *The Red Wheel* (*Krasnoe koleso*) is obviously written from the point of view of a liberal-conservative critic of the intelligentsia. The sympathies of the author are with the Octobrist Party, who wanted to co-operate with the authorities in order to survive the First World War. The radicals, from the SRs and

the Bolsheviks through to the Kadets, who were preaching liberalism, and whose policies in any Western country would have been ordinary liberalism, were represented as destructive forces in Russian society, which had a specific nature.⁴⁵ Not all authors, however, have shared the harsh verdict on the intelligentsia of a Szamuely or a Solzhenitsyn. Isaiah Berlin, a staunch critic of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, has expressed his great admiration for the Russian intelligentsia: “The phenomenon itself, with its historical and literally revolutionary consequences, is, I suppose, the largest single Russian contribution to social change in the world.”⁴⁶ Berlin conceded the totalitarian character of such a self-professed champion of liberty as Mikhail Bakunin, but noted that Alexander Herzen, a socialist and hence a collectivist, always remained a champion of the liberty of the individual and a “sworn enemy of all systems and of all claims to suppress liberties in their name.”⁴⁷

The political and social role of the intelligentsia apart, the representatives of this group have been ascribed a mass of specific positive attributes, which have been denoted by the word “intelligentnost’.” In the opinion of Soviet dissidents during the post-WW2 period, “intelligents” were thought to embody such qualities as morality, honor, pity, conscientious work, decency (*poriadochnost’*) and honesty. It has also been said that an (ideal) intelligent is lacking in aggressiveness and suspiciousness, suffers from an inferiority complex, and has gentle manners.⁴⁸ In short, at least since the perestroika period, it is being commonly believed that the intelligents also represent the quality of *intelligentnost’*. This may, however, be a Soviet and post-Soviet, rather than pre-Soviet idea. Certainly, literary heroes like Dostoevsky’s Verkhovensky and Turgenev’s Bazarov or real-life intelligents like Sergei Nechaev and the People’s Will’s terrorists were not obvious champions of humane and moderate *intelligentnost’* values.

The enemies of the intelligentsia

The intelligentsia, understood politically as a fighting order against absolutism, was, naturally, resisted and detested by large segments of educated society. High society for its part hated those who detested it and disturbed its peace of mind, even though many of its members had relatives among the militant intelligentsia. Respectable people of whatever social origin who were happy to adapt their lives to the framework of the existing order did not like troublemakers. Among educated society, however, the rebellious “friends of the people” became more and more respectable. Even such people who did not share the revolutionary views of the activists, often considered it to be their duty to defend them against the brutality of the regime. A cause célèbre, where this attitude was demonstrated, was the trial of Vera Zasulich, whom the jury declared not guilty of attempted murder, although the evidence against her was clear.⁴⁹ The pressure towards conformism among the educated classes of the nineteenth century Russian society was enormous, as Dostoevsky, among others also testified. He told his publisher Suvorin, that nobody, including himself, would inform the police about a planned terrorist act. Everybody would fear the stigma of being an “informer” more than death.

The liberals would never forgive me. They would torment me, drive me to despair. Is this normal? Everything is abnormal in our society: That is why all these things happen, and nobody knows how to act –not only in the most difficult situations, but even in the simplest. I would have written about this... but one can't do so. In our society one is not allowed to speak about the most important things.⁵⁰

But enemies of the intelligentsia were always present, not only among the well off, but also among the “people” itself, which the intelligentsia wanted to defend. The case of the peasants, who, in the 1870s, had handed over rebellious students, who had tried to preach their revolutionary gospel to them, to the police, is well known. But it was not just the “unenlightened” peasants, who resented the intelligents. Even workers were malevolent and suspicious towards their self-appointed friends. For instance, it would appear that the self-righteousness of some of the intelligents aroused the ire of the more mundane representatives of the people. The huge void between the intelligentsia and the other sections of society even survived the revolution due to such distinctive traits as their way of thinking, which seemed perverse and incomprehensible to outsiders. Their manners were different, as was their mindset, which could be suspected of being patronizing, along with their pretensions to superiority. Ivan Turgenev described in a piece of fiction, how workers (in 1878) did not care a bit about the hanging of an intellectual, who was suffering for their cause, but were only interested in getting a fiber of the hanging rope, because it was supposed to bring good luck.⁵¹

Well-educated people of the older generation resented the arrogance of the new intelligentsia, which it considered half-baked. M. Zheltov wrote in 1890:

We used to have ‘learned people’ as well as ‘educated people’ and besides also such people, who were not ‘learned’ people and not ‘educated’ ones, but in any case ‘wise’ people. But ‘Intelligentsia’ and ‘intelligentnost’ do not refer to the first group, nor the second or either the third one. Any dropout, who has picked up some new-styled sayings and words, often even one, who is a complete blockhead, but uses such words, is considered

to be an 'intelligent' and the whole group of them is being called the 'intelligentsia.'"⁵²

During the Soviet period the word "intelligent" at first was a term of abuse, and up to the end of the Soviet period the concept bore at least some potentially negative connotations. The negative traits of the "intelligenty" were attached to certain traditions of the intelligentsia way of life.

In a dictionary of the Russian language, published in 1935, the term "intelligent" was explained as follows:

Intelligent...(contemptuous): One, whose social conduct is characterized by lack of will, wavering and doubts; Intelligentstvo (cont.) -pattern of thinking, customs (privycki), typical of an I.; Intelligenshchina -the same as intelligentstvo (but still more despising)."⁵³

More recently V.B. Kataev has presented several other derogatory forms of the word "intelligent": "intelliagushka" (intelfrog), "antiligent," "zatykannyi intelligent" (full-stuffed intelligent); "intelligusiia" (intel-gooses).⁵⁴

During the Soviet period the term "intelligentnyi" denoting the virtues of the social group of the intelligentsia, also received pejorative counterpart, "intelligentskii," which denoted the vices of that group, especially as it had been before the revolution. The Dictionary of Russian Language of the Academy of Sciences elucidated the term in the 1980s, citing Lenin: "Solving controversial issues by much shouting, swearing and with un-founded declarations is the typical manner of intelligent (intelligentskie) circles."⁵⁵ A citation from Maxim Gorky puts it in the following way: "It seems to be that in an intelligent-like (intelligentskii) way you are busy with yourself." One of Nikolai Ostrovsky's heroes

assured “I tell you, that derives from her intelligent-like (intelligentskii) soft-mindedness.”⁵⁶

Iu. S. Stepanov, who has studied the contemporary intelligentsia, refers to a term, which bystanders used about the people (intelligents), who marched in Moscow in 1991 to demonstrate against the, ultimately, abortive putsch. For the mob, the intelligents were ochkariki—people, who wore spectacles. In fact, said Stepanov, they did not wear spectacles any more so than the bystanders, but they were the kind of people who “in principle” wore spectacles.⁵⁷

As contemporary authors observed, in the 1920s the epithet “intelligent” could be used as a word of abuse by proletarian-minded youths who despised the over-refined manners or ways of other youths. In this context, its meaning was more or less equal to “petty bourgeois.”⁵⁸ This was the approach of the masses, of those who did not regard themselves as intelligents. The lower ranks of Soviet society did not like being considered inferior by those, who were more educated, well-bred, and quite often got better salary for an occupation, which was rarely physically exhausting and was mostly done in comfortable and tidy surroundings.⁵⁹

This resentment may have something in common with Lenin’s critique of the intelligents: they were whining and wavering, they were upset by the spectacle of the (deserved) slaughter of some thousands of bourgeois bloodsuckers, whereas the proletarians had a more straightforward attitude: when trees are felled, splinters fly.⁶⁰ It was, to say the least, awkward that the whole top layer of the party and state apparatus, Lenin himself included, was not proletarian. A few officials did have proletarian origin, but now they were doing desk-work. They were proletarians only “by conviction.”⁶¹ The opinion surveillance of the secret police made it plain to those in power that despite their wish to be regarded as the “responsible workers,” the masses regarded them as

were “the others” along with “the new bourgeoisie, the “Jews,” the “academics,” the “rotten intelligentsia” and the “little tsars.”⁶²

The negative image of the intelligent in many respects resembled that of his/her counterparts in France and Germany. As Dietz Bering says, “ein Intellektueller” was almost always a derogatory word in the German language. In the Weimar Republic the conservative nationalists and Nazis associated the intellectual with abstract reasoning that is someone devoid of instinct, prone to “negative analytical thinking” (dismissed as “dissection”). An intellectual smelt of rootlessness, decadence, city-life, and Jewishness.⁶³ In France, where the term “les intellectuels” attained notoriety during the Dreyfus-scandal, the same attributes were used.⁶⁴ For the Nazis, the most serious defect of intellectuals was their lacking the capability for action.⁶⁵

The age of Marxist newspeak

The “responsible functionaries (rabotniki)” of the Soviet era were officially considered to be part of the new “working” intelligentsia, which was officially recognized in the 1930s. Actually, the common people did not see a substantial difference between this privileged caste and the “bourgeoisie.” According to some intelligence reports, this view was widespread. It was even called the “people’s truth.”⁶⁶ In other words, the official justification for the privileges of the administrative caste as opposed to the toilers was well-known, but perceptions about everyday practices determined the assessments of the common people.

In the Soviet Union, some remnants of the culture of the pre-revolutionary educated classes seem to have survived. The intelligents retained some of their old traditions in the private sphere and continued to meet each other at certain concerts and libraries. In the Soviet period, this element came to be called the “hereditary” (nasledstvennaia)

intelligentsia and its members probably did not really consider themselves as belonging to the same group as the masses of “party-nominated” intelligentsia. In this context, the term “intelligentsia” obviously obtained a new meaning: to belong to the intelligentsia meant to be cultured and was not a synonym for political engagement –rather the contrary.

For some educated radicals, who did not want to be intelligently at all, but adopted a “proletarian” identity, the intelligently were considered inferior, because of their softness and lack of resolution. In 1937 Stalin stressed that the inevitable, and probably innocent, victims were not the main consideration in social engineering. They were probably unavoidable, but the main point was that revolutionary violence had to hit all the right targets. Not a single “wrecker” was to survive.⁶⁷ It was the humanitarian scruples of the intelligentsia, which were most despised by top Bolshevik luminaries. Lenin had this in mind, when he said that the intelligently were not the brain of the people, but its shit.⁶⁸

For Lenin, who always liked to use Marxist terminology, the intelligents were, first of all, representatives of their “class,” although they were not a class in themselves. Their consciousness was determined by the class they served. Accordingly, the engineers and scientists were, first of all, bourgeois. They might not have been capitalists themselves in any sense, but they had been serving that system and been remunerated by it. They were part of the old society, which had to be turned upside down. In his writings from the early days of the Bolshevik revolution, Lenin considered the bourgeois specialists, who were obviously part of the intelligentsia, as part of the old order, which had to be kept in check and repressed: its property might be partly confiscated, and the masses would be instigated against it to get the spoils, but, on the other hand, the specialists would, in the short term, be paid a better salary than the average worker. This was to be temporary, for full equality was the natural goal of socialism.⁶⁹

However, apart from the specialists, there were also politically active intelligents outside the ranks of the Bolshevik party. As the Bolsheviks, by definition, were the only party which expressed the interests of the proletarians, all the other parties were dubbed “petty bourgeois.” In the case of the SRs, for instance, this had a certain Marxist logic, because the SRs purported to represent the peasants, who, as petty producers, were also “petty bourgeois,” according to Marxist theory. The Mensheviks, Anarchists and other socialist parties, which appealed to the proletariat, were regarded as petty bourgeois by virtue of their “opportunism.” In the case of the Mensheviks, this referred to their unwillingness to take power in a situation, where, according to their Marxist analysis, the conditions for a proletarian revolution had not been satisfied.⁷⁰ In the case of the anarchists, their “opportunism” referred to their propensity to go too far to the left, thus endangering the revolution.⁷¹

“Intelligent” became a term of abuse in the young Soviet country that was the USSR and was more or less fused with the term “petty bourgeois.” This liaison persisted, to some extent, up to the end of the Soviet period. Even though the petty bourgeoisie was annihilated in the Soviet Union as a class, it always existed abroad. The image of the petty-bourgeois political intelligent (the Trotskyites, the SRs, the Mensheviks, and the Kadets) in the Soviet press was repulsive: small men with spectacles and mustaches, often with an umbrella, looked like rats and always had a cowardly air. Incidentally, the image of the bureaucrat, who always had a briefcase with him, was almost identical.⁷²

German Marxists between the world wars considered the vices of intellectuals in much the same way as their Russian brethren: the intellectuals were unruly individualists, who lacked (class) instinct, they were feeble in their revolutionary faith, and were wavering opportunists, proud of their education and learning. Worst of all, they were petty bourgeois and it was from amongst them that fascism obtained its ideologues.⁷³

The petty bourgeois mind: philistinism

The English word “philistinism,” which I have chosen to denote its Russian equivalents, is somewhat problematic. In Russian there are several words, which can be used interchangeably, which have approximately the same meaning as philistine. One of them is meshchanstvo, which originally referred to a social estate of urban kleinbuerger, who were neither peasants nor gentry, nor members of a merchants’ guild. As a rule, the meshchane were extremely poor, often subsisting on the verge of starvation. In 1897 there were 7, 449, 300 members of this estate in Russia and they comprised 44,3 percent of Russian townspeople.⁷⁴ The adjective “meshchanskii” means traits that are typical of the petty bourgeois. The small Soviet encyclopedia in 1930 defined the term as follows:

Restrictedness of views, narrowness of opinions, philistine (obyvatel’-skoe) striving for personal well-being, separateness from the common interests of the collective. The basic cell of the ‘meshchanskii’ way of life is the family.⁷⁵

The Dictionary of Russian language defined the term “meshchanskii” in 1983 as: “restrictedness caused by the interests of the petty proprietor, philistine (obyvatel’skii).” A citation from Chekhov’s letter elucidated the meaning: “There is nothing nastier than the meshchanskaia life with its coins and meals, its absurd discussions and senseless conditional virtues.”⁷⁶ The term “obyvatel” and the adjectival form “obyvatel’skii,” which originally referred just to a permanent resident of a place, has almost exactly the same meaning and can be used interchangeably with, “meshchanin.”⁷⁷

The adjective “melkoburzhuznyi” refers to the same layer of citizens and the psychology attached to it, but also has also a “scientific” use and a scholarly connotation, while “meshchanskii” is reserved almost

exclusively for moral purposes. There is also the word “filister,” which is a synonym of “meshchanin” and “obyvatel’,”⁷⁸ but is rarely used and belongs to a literary or high style.

The English word “philistine” is probably the best equivalent of both “meshchanin,” “obyvatel’,” and “filister,” but sometimes it may be better to translate the term as “petty bourgeois,” keeping in mind that the meanings are not always exactly equivalent.

In the Russian language, there is also a special adjective, “poshlyi,” which refers to the mental world and values of the philistine. The Dictionary of Russian language defines it as “something that is low or trivial in a spiritual or moral sense... unoriginal, banal... contains something indecent, unworthy.” A second meaning refers to something that is “unoriginal, sickening, worn-out, banal... tastelessly rude, vulgar.”⁷⁹ The concept of ‘poshlost’ has been made famous in the West by Vladimir Nabokov, who maintained that it is a uniquely Russian category of understanding. As defined and described by Nabokov, ‘poshlost’ is pretentious sham: “not only the obviously trashy, but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive.”⁸⁰ A modern scholar, Svetlana Boym is skeptical of the supposed Russian uniqueness of the concept and refers to it as “Russian version of banality, with a characteristic national flavoring of metaphysics and high morality, and a peculiar conjunction of the sexual and the spiritual. This one word encompasses triviality, vulgarity, sexual promiscuity and lack of spirituality.”⁸¹ Nabokov holds that pre-revolutionary Russians were especially averse to ‘poshlost’, whereas some nations, like the Germans, were very prone to it, not to mention America, which was just concentrated ‘poshlost’. Boym points out that Nabokov has in mind the criteria of good taste of the Russian aristocracy, which were more or less taken over by the intelligentsia in the second half of the nineteenth Century.⁸² “Ashamed of being too common and unable to be *comme il faut* in the traditional aristocratic sense,”⁸³ the intelligentsia and

especially its radical vanguard, the nihilists, adopted looks that made them look different: short hair for women and long hair for men, untidiness and so on. "Awkwardness and a lack of social grace were turned into signs of authenticity and were cultivated as part of the new revolutionary self-fashioning," as Boym explains.⁸⁴ Boym thinks that the intelligentsia had "peculiar inferiority-superiority complex" and saw itself as the spiritual heir of the aristocratic tradition. The petty bourgeoisie (*meshchanstvo*) for its part, which was part of neither the aristocracy nor peasantry, did not fit to the intelligentsia's romanticized ideal of the common people. Paradoxically, then, the petty bourgeoisie, which was a very normal phenomenon, was considered "perversion and profanation of true Russian folk."⁸⁵

Boym's criticism may be quite correct as deconstruction, but at the same time it unavoidably reflects the point of view of a de-moralized world, where the high and the low in society are no longer strictly separated from each other, and where making value judgments has become a sign of unabashed arrogance, whereas it used to be a *conditio sine qua non* for any civilized person.⁸⁶ This was not the world of nineteenth century Russia. The moralist approach has always been a matter of course for the Russian intelligentsia. It was so already with Herzen, whose *My Past and Thoughts* is a highly moralistic verdict of Nicholas I and the Russian bureaucracy of his time. Emigrants like Nicholas Berdiaev wrote prolifically on moral matters, including the topic of *poshlost'*, in emigration.⁸⁷ Moreover, the moralistic approach persisted among the Russian intelligentsia throughout the entire Soviet period. The Soviet intelligents were quite shocked, when they met a morally complacent West during and after *perestroika*.⁸⁸

The way of life of the petty bourgeoisie is determined by the necessities of private life (*byt*).⁸⁹ Having no higher aspirations than comfort and success for himself and his family, so it was claimed, the philistine indulges in things that may be described by the words

“poshlost” and “kitsch.” In any culture, concepts have their specific contents, which cannot be translated into another culture by using just one word or two. Byt or private life has been considered to be one of these. It is the time one takes for oneself, one’s family and friends. For obvious reasons byt was demonized by the radical intelligentsia. In the 1920s Vladimir Mayakovsky envisioned Karl Marx resurrected, shouting anathema on the philistine byt:

The revolution is strangled up in philistine threads
More terrible than Wrangel is philistine byt
Better
To twist off canaries’ heads, So communism
Won’t be struck down by canaries.⁹⁰

It may be noted that S. Smidovich, using the authoritative forum of the Small Soviet Encyclopedia, proclaimed expressly that it was not canary-birds or curtains, which made a person philistine as such, but the psychology, which placed home and its cares above those of the collective.⁹¹ The family, as an institution, was the root of philistinism (meshchanstvo), but in the Soviet Union, family was already fading away (in 1930) and giving way to other varieties of human community.⁹²

In the nineteenth Century the concept of byt also had another usage. The Slavophiles even assumed that the Russian peasant in his land-commune was living not just for his own sake, but that his byt meant communion with the whole community, unselfishly taking care of the common interest.⁹³

Since time immemorial, or at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the bourgeois, atomized family, and its bourgeois way of life which was despised by the Russian intelligentsia. Indeed, private life and the idea that one’s home was one’s castle where one lives just for oneself were despised by Russian travelers to Western

Europe already as early as the eighteenth Century. A renowned observer of Russia of the beginning of the nineteenth century the Marquis de Custine related that the private sphere was underdeveloped in Russia. Herzen later answered in kind repeating the Russian critique of the isolated way of life and illustrating it with examples of the life of the French bourgeoisie.⁹⁴ It would be rather risky to maintain that the Russian's private life was especially underdeveloped. The great mass of the peasantry lived in much the same way as their colleagues in neighboring countries, or anywhere in the world, as Maxim Gorky used to point out. As modern research has shown, the idea of the Russian peasant's supposedly altruistic, communal way of life was no more than a myth.⁹⁵ Certainly, it seems plausible that, among the educated classes, private life and its "philistine" charms were despised by the Russian intelligentsia more than by its counterparts in many other countries, at least so far as this is reflected in its ideological pronouncements.

As was mentioned above, all segments of the Russian intelligentsia loathed philistinism, as a matter of course. Moreover, the Russian intelligentsia, or at least a substantial part of it, also shared an aversion towards the bourgeoisie in general and was appalled by the prospect of Russia adopting capitalism and developing a sizable class of bourgeoisie.⁹⁶ Very often the words "bourgeois" and "petty bourgeois" were used interchangeably. On the Slavophile side, and not only there, the idea of an innate "anti-bourgeois" nature of the Russian people⁹⁷ had remarkable support from the first half of the nineteenth century down to the revolution and beyond.

It is also true that being anti-philistine was by no means an exclusively Russian characteristic, even though many Russian intellectuals liked to think so.⁹⁸

Anti-bourgeois traditions

There had been several anti-bourgeois currents in Western Europe since the eighteenth century. For the most part they were not exactly political but were content to just criticize and despise the bourgeoisie. Some, however, did have a program for building a better world. The heritage of such currents of thought was instrumental in creating the psychological basis for what has been called “political religions:” communism, Nazism, fascism, anarchism. The “sacralization of politics”⁹⁹ is an age-old phenomenon. To give just a couple of examples, we may refer to the Jesuits in Paraguay, Calvin in Geneva or the Taleban in Afghanistan. It would appear that in every age in the history of humankind there have been people who have been excessively obsessed with existential problems, and others, for whom daily life has been almost their sole concern. Since biblical days, zealots have loathed the lukewarm and imagined a better world purged of blasphemers and the feeble-in faith, preferably by God himself.

Sacral politics with immanent, worldly contents appeared with the French revolution. Jacobinism and its followers from Robespierre to Saint-Just, Babeuf, and Buonarroti developed radical constructions, which J.L.Talmon has called by the oxymoronic name “totalitarian democracy.”¹⁰⁰ It would be wrong to equate such different phenomena as Russian messianism represented by Dostoevsky or Solzhenitsyn, and Russian totalitarianism represented by Lenin or Stalin. Yet all of them are critical of the profane bourgeois way of life and yearn for a higher purpose of existence.

The bourgeois way of life began to be represented as a problem at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Within the upper, enlightened layers of society, the Enlightenment destroyed the naïve faith in religion, and it became clear that man’s eternal existential needs would, thereafter have to be satisfied by other means.

Isaiah Berlin has stressed that the idea of the “artist as a sacred vessel” was exceedingly widespread in the first half of the nineteenth

century. It was a new phenomenon and artists like Mozart and Haydn would have been very surprised if they had been told that as artists they were “particularly sacred, lifted far over other men, priests uniquely dedicated to the worship of some transcendent reality, to betray which is mortal sin.”¹⁰¹ Berlin believes that this idea came largely from Germany. I would risk saying that Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s influence was important here. Fichte’s famous works *Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten* and *Anweisung zum seeligen Leben* explicitly demonstrated the sacred nature of the vocation of the man of letters as the middleman between divinity and the popular masses.¹⁰² Fichte also stressed the importance of turning the divine vision into action: only in action does man become “real.” In fact, people, who lived outside the divine sphere, did not actually exist at all. Their deeds were doomed to perish in history. This also made the idea that a righteous man was stronger than a hundred mean ones understandable.¹⁰³

As we know, Fichte was very popular among the Stankevich circle, which brought together such luminaries of the newly-born Russian intelligentsia like Bakunin, Belinsky, Granovsky, Herzen and Konstantin Aksakov. Bakunin even translated some of Fichte’s works.¹⁰⁴ It was Fichte, who created the idea of the “hero as the man of letters” to use the formulation of Thomas Carlyle, another of Fichte’s pupils.

Fichte’s starting point was individualism, even solipsism, which, in a mental tour de force, was turned into a kind of proto-totalitarian thinking in terms of the greater entity (*Gattung*). The people became the enlarged “me,” which was to serve under quasi-divine leadership in order to be “free.”¹⁰⁵

True, in Russia, Fichte’s popularity was not long-lived; he was soon overshadowed by Hegel, Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, and others. However, the fundamental idea of the divinity of the immanent world, and especially of the people, was to stay in Russian discourse. It may be

that its roots were in the orthodox idea of “bogochelovechestvo,” the deification (theosis) of human beings.¹⁰⁶

When the radical political religion of the French revolution and its diluted Napoleonic continuation resulted in political bankruptcy, the restless souls looked for immanent salvation elsewhere. The subsequent wave of psychological alienation, which was typical for the era of romanticism, has been mentioned above. One should probably stress that the psychology of Europeans of the first half of the nineteenth century had many dissimilarities with that of the 21 century. The human mind was not understood in terms of psychoanalysis, and the individual was not seen as an end in himself, but rather as an incarnation of certain collectively approved vices and virtues, good or ill.¹⁰⁷ As a result of the new intellectual and political situation, a spirit of forsakenness overcame many youthful souls. This was the renowned syndrome of the superfluous man, estranged and forsaken, not just in society, but in the universe. Lord Byron, Stendhal, Mikhail Lermontov, Giacomo Leopardi, Alfred de Musset, Alfred de Vigny, Thomas Carlyle and countless others suffered from the so-called *maladie du siècle*, or paralyzing depression, which offered the prospect of an empty eternity and a senseless world, which offered no possibility of a higher existence.¹⁰⁸

While the bourgeoisie went on living more comfortably than ever and seemed to be happy with its earthly concerns, and insensitive to the sufferings of the proletariat, on whose exploitation its opulence was being built, poetical souls had to find other solutions. On the one hand, they had to solve the existential problem of being forsaken in an empty universe, revealed to humanity by the progress of science. On the other hand, there was the emptiness caused by the erosion of the old society. Capitalist development destroyed the old patriarchal *Gemeinschaft* and substituted for it the new impersonal capitalist *Gesellschaft*, to use Ferdinand Tönnies' famous concepts.

The novel nature of bourgeois society aroused reactions on the part of intellectuals on various levels. A satanic rebellion against God, a cynical play with life and death were the answers given by romantics such as Byron and Lermontov. Others, like Carlyle, or the “prophets of Paris,” Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Comte invented solutions, where the isolation, shallowness, and hypocrisy of the prevailing society was overcome and a return to “community” was achieved in the mutual warmth of communes. Each of the latter authors also developed a kind of immanent religion, where the supposedly true talents and propensities of man were emancipated and which was supposed to quench the metaphysical thirst of man and reconcile both the emotional and rational elements of the human soul.¹⁰⁹ Each of them was destined to recognize that the great majority of their fellow citizens were not interested in their prophecy.

Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Comte, each of whom seems, at least from a twenty-first century perspective, to have been eccentric, and each of whom, indeed, spent some time in lunatic asylum at some point in their life, were, nevertheless, immensely popular across the whole of Europe in their day. If we are to believe Herzen, among the most cogent reasons for their popularity was the fact that they presented an idea of a better, more caring community and, in the case of Saint-Simon in particular, that meant recognizing the importance of the carnal instincts of man, which the hypocritical and suffocating nature of bourgeois society was not prepared to do.¹¹⁰

If we look at nineteenth-century France, we can conclude that there was a lively anti-bourgeois tradition from the Great Revolution of 1789 up to the fin de siècle modernists and beyond. A representative of the 1850s, Gustave Flaubert, described, how bourgeois “grocers” with their frocks and false respectability made him feel physically sick. Flaubert, who occasionally called himself Gustavus Flaubertus Bourgeoisophobus,

characteristically wrote to Gorge Sand: "Axiom: Hatred of Bourgeois is the beginning of all virtue".¹¹¹

Flaubert's aversion towards the bourgeoisie does not, however, approximate the kind of psychology, which was typical for the Russian intelligentsia, Isaiah Berlin asserts. He believes that, unlike French intellectuals, the Russian intelligentsia was convinced of the need for a total commitment to the cause of truth: their attitude to life and to art was identical. The French, by contrast, were happy to think that art was for art's sake and hardly expected that an intellectual to be a moral example.¹¹²

Thomas Carlyle was truly representative of the anti-bourgeois reaction in the Anglo-Saxon world. In a ruggedly Scotch manner he applied the ideas of German romanticism to British realities, pointing out, how unfavorably the profane practices of British society compared with the divine nature of existence. He loathed the "respectability" of the "gentleman" and the "respectable" cant, which also prevented the common man from seeing the grandiose, metaphysical meaning of the world around him. This lack of "reason" was, incidentally, not at all connected with a lack of education, which, in any case, did not offer "reason" to anyone, but, instead, just inculcated intelligence, which only had an instrumental use. True understanding depended on the mindset of the individual, not on learning or education, which did not necessarily provide anything of importance. Thoroughly honest people could always recognize the truth of things delivered to them by great men: the heroes. While the truth always prospered and untruth perished in history, the righteous were also given an eternal life, for their deeds never perished.¹¹³

It was clear, then, that people, who lived in the superficial world of appearances and hearsay and did not dedicate their life to the serving the truth, however austere that might be, were not to have eternal life. In fact they did not even have a temporal life, Carlyle reasoned. From the

point of view of God, which transcended time and place, those gentlemen (and ladies, the philistines of either sex, we could say) did not exist at all.¹¹⁴

Carlyle's views contained elements of many contemporary continental, especially German romantic doctrines from Kant, Fichte, Goethe, and Novalis, to mention a few. It has even been said that Carlyle's thinking was no more than a "resumé de tous les doctrines contemporaines."¹¹⁵ Carlyle did not create a system of socialized politics, but his thinking is pervaded by the idea that all of life, including politics, should retain contact with the mystical essence of reality, and that a person's everyday life should not be allowed to fall to the level of the profane material concerns of the individual. In Carlyle, conquering "happiness" was definitely not possible by material means, if it was possible at all. He reasoned that even if all the bankers, upholsterers and confectioners of Europe would found a joint-stock company to make a shoeblick happy, they would not succeed. Or, they could succeed only for a couple of hours. This was because the shoeblick has a "soul, which is not the same as his stomach."¹¹⁶

Carlyle was cultivating the heritage of Fichte, who, for some time, was very popular both in Germany and in Russia. Carlyle's doctrine, as regards practical politics, was very unclear and its corollaries were hardly compelling for anybody inclined not to believe in it. In this respect, Hegel, who soon became enormously popular on the European continent, was different and was believed to signal the dawn of a new epoch. Hegel's philosophy was greeted as a scientific method, which would render romanticism obsolete.¹¹⁷ Of course, this proved to be wrong. In a certain and very real sense different thinkers like Mikhail Bakunin, and Ludwig Feuerbach, Vissarion Belinsky, Ivan Aksakov, and Alexander Herzen can hardly be denied the honor of being called romantics, even if most of them did not think of themselves in this way. For all of them, politics was not just a case of pragmatic production and

distribution plus administration. Hegel, like his followers, endeavored to explain the essence of the whole world, no less. Accordingly, the absolute justification of any political conclusions, including extreme measures, could, in principle be demonstrated. The Hegelian understanding of the world as a process of progressive history, which was proceeding through revolutions, where different “principles” stood in antagonistic conflict, also easily enabled ideas about the “creative” nature of annihilation, as is the case with Bakunin’s thinking.

Among the Hegelians, Marx and Engels, as well as many of their followers, also retained the spirit of sacral politics in their early writings and, in effect, continued to do so until the end of their lives. Knowing the secret of history armed man with divine understanding and even gave him license to do anything, which could be proved right from this higher point of view. Eternal life was also within reach for people, who fused their personal life with the service of great causes, serving their class or national spirit, which had a mission in the progressive course of history.¹¹⁸

I believe that the modern reader is likely to miss the emotional impact which the most dry-as-dust philosophical systems often had on the readers of the nineteenth century, whom it released from the fetters of conventional morality and metaphysical uncertainty. Ludwig Feuerbach, for instance, did not just show that religion had been invented by men, he also rediscovered the inherent divinity in things immanent, which the human mind had projected to the transcendent world. This is how Feuerbach ends his book *Das Wesen des Christentums*:

So remember God... the man, at every moment, when you eat your bread...But don't forget...gratitude to the holy nature....So one must just interrupt the usual, banal succession of things in order to bring back the unusual meaning of the usual and the religious meaning of life in general. Sacred be, therefore, for us

the bread. Sacred be the wine but sacred also the water!
Amen.”¹¹⁹

The psychology of the author reminds one of the religious experience as understood by William James or, by that matter, the zen-buddhists.¹²⁰ Although becoming conscious of the mystical or transcendental nature of this world did not always lead to political chiliasm, it often did. Feuerbach’s most famous pupil in Russia was Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

Unlike his mentor, Chernyshevsky always wrote in a restrained manner. His very influential novel *Chto delat’?* (What to Do?) is written in an almost mockingly matter-of fact manner. However, its influence among the youth of the day was immense. In fact, the author’s serene style probably just helped give more impact to the radical message of his book. The book, which to later generations seems quite dull, spoke about “new” people, who had begun to behave in a rational way and had organized their mutual relations according to the rules of rational egoism. From Feuerbach, Chernyshevsky had got the idea that only individuals are real, and it is not difficult to deduce that if there is something divine in the world, it must reside in the individual. Chernyshevsky, who spent years in prison and banishment for his ideas, became the archetypal intelligent. He was a martyr, one of those “new men,” whom he had depicted in his novel. It is well-known that Chernyshevsky’s *Chto delat’?* was V.I. Lenin’s favorite book.¹²¹