

Thus, if flies improve their vision and can spot threats at a greater distance, frogs with longer tongues might have an advantage over their less well-endowed cohorts. If one business develops a method of speeding up the delivery of orders to customers, another business may find that it should deliver more slowly (thereby cutting its costs), charge lower prices and attract less time-sensitive customers.

The actual models Kauffman uses are abstract and general, with not a frog tongue or delivery guarantee in sight. He focuses on the question of whether the coevolving populations (or firms, or technologies) will eventually settle down to some kind of steady state, where each population is at an optimum as long as the other ones stay put, or whether they will just keep bouncing around in an endless, chaotic display of one-upsmanship. The results: When the amount of interconnection between the evolving populations is “just right” relative to the internal interconnections among the parts of each system, average fitness for all the populations is highest. Furthermore, in this “just right” zone, the overall system is poised between order and chaos—most of its components most of the time are in a steady state, but every now and then some of them start to evolve in new directions.

Finally, if each population is allowed to evolve its own degree of internal interconnection, holding constant its interconnection to others in the coevolutionary system, each will, as if by an invisible hand, be moved by selection pressure toward the “just right” edge-of-chaos regime. Once again, while the specific details of evolution cannot be predicted, important general features appear to spring up in a lawful manner.

In this case, the models seem to be saying, at least metaphorically, that a freely evolving economy or ecology self-tunes so as to maximize the fitness and survivability of each of its members. I’m not sure just what it would mean in real-world terms for a firm to change the number of internal interconnections it possesses, because I’m not sure exactly what the “parts” of Kauffman’s abstract entities

should correspond to in an economic context. But if a reasonable interpretation is possible, then the result is of great importance.

KAUFFMAN GOES FURTHER, INVESTIGATING how varying degrees of decentralization in a system might affect that system’s performance at accomplishing some overall goal. He became interested in this issue after being prodded by management-oriented people in the orbit of the Santa Fe Institute, who wanted theoretical principles to guide the delayering and flattening of organizational hierarchies and the outsourcing and reengineering of work processes.

His model looks at whether systems evolve better solutions when they are broken into interacting but independently searching “patches,” or when they are combined into one big evolving organism. The latter configuration, which Kauffman charmingly refers to as “Stalinist,” turns out to work well for problems of low complexity, with few conflicting constraints. When problems start to get complicated, where the solution to one aspect can easily foul up another, it turns out to be better to break the system into separate patches.

How many patches are best? Once again, the answer appears to be a “just right” number where the evolutionary pro-

cess is orderly, but on the edge of chaos, so that the system can persist with good solutions but not get permanently stuck on them without looking for better ones. So neither Gosplan nor a population of yeoman farmers is likely to be a good model for a corporation tackling complex problems; the in-between compromises we see all around us probably make more sense than oft-peddled fantasies of giant cross-functional teams or purely “market-based” management, although we might have guessed that without Kauffman’s models.

For anyone—including earnest 14-year-olds—interested in big questions about science, history, and our place in the cosmos, *At Home in the Universe* offers an unparalleled combination of graceful writing, clear exposition, respect for the reader’s intelligence, and the thrill of seeing the world anew. I do not know which, if any, of its ideas will become the seeds of tomorrow’s science, but I cannot escape the feeling that Stuart Kauffman has changed the terms in which thoughtful people will discuss the nature of evolution and natural law. ❖

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Reaching for Roots

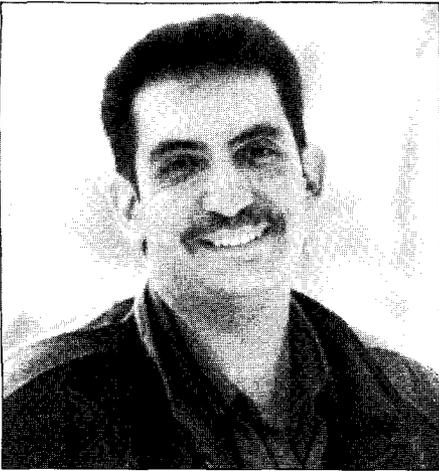
By James G. Lennox

Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical, by Chris Matthew Sciabarra, University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 477 pages, \$55.00/\$18.95 (paper)

DURING THE 1930s, WITH THE United States deep in Depression, with its intellectuals overwhelmingly favoring various forms of statism and collectivism, a few valiant and lonely voices—Isabel Paterson, Albert Jay Nock, Ludwig von Mises, Ayn Rand—spoke out in the name of liberty and individualism. Among them, Rand pushed the defense of individual liberty beyond political philosophy to ethics, and finally

beyond ethics to epistemology and metaphysics. To what extent were her philosophical explorations shaped by the fact that her first 20 years were lived in Russia, during the tumultuous upheavals that eventually produced the Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet Union? That is the question Chris Sciabarra sets out to answer in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical*.

The question is timely. Since the 1994 elections, the name of Ayn Rand has ap-



Chris Matthew Sciabarra: He makes a bold attempt to trace key elements of Ayn Rand's philosophy, and especially her philosophical method, to her Russian roots.

peared repeatedly in discussions of philosophical influences on the free market agenda of the young "radicals" elected to office, and on the think tanks to which they turn. And the quantity of material available to help us answer this question has also been growing in recent years. Some of it—*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* by Leonard Peikoff, *Letters of Ayn Rand*, recently edited by Michael Berliner, the volumes of *The Ayn Rand Library*—is readily available. Other material—preserved taped speeches, radio and TV interviews, and Q & A sessions in lectures—is familiar only to the most avid devotees. Finally, if one focuses on Objectivism as a philosophical system and a cultural movement there is a growing collection of books, essays, and lectures by those who, to greater or lesser degrees, have either been inspired or horrified by the ideas of Ayn Rand.

Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical makes a bold attempt to trace key elements of Ayn Rand's philosophy, and especially her philosophical method, to her Russian roots, and in particular to her years at Petrograd University. Sciabarra displays an encyclopedic familiarity with virtually all of the relevant material, and shows great skill in synthesizing Rand's views on specific topics from passages scattered throughout her novels, essays, notebooks, lectures, and interviews. This is, furthermore, the first study to explore the intel-

lectual milieu of Rand's early, formative years. And, despite its title, it goes well beyond an exploration of Ayn Rand. Commentators of all kinds—advocates, detractors, sympathetic interpreters—are discussed and exhaustively referenced in a comprehensive analysis of Objectivism as a philosophical and cultural movement. Nevertheless, despite these virtues, the book fails to achieve its principal historical and interpretive goals.

A central task for the historian of ideas is to provide a narrative which explains an intellectual innovation, supported by evidence in favor of that explanation. Part of the narrative aims to reconstruct the salient influences on the innovator in question. The historical and cultural milieu provide possible influences and experiences—the problem for the historian is to find evidence of the actual influences on the innovator's purposeful inquiries.

That evidence may be direct or indirect. For example, when, in *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin first introduces the idea of "the struggle for existence," he explains that it can be derived from "the principle of geometric increase." The similarity of his wording to passages in Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* might lead a historian to speculate Malthusian influence. But "geometric increase," after all, was standard mathematical language for exponential growth. A few lines later, however, Darwin refers to his principle as "the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force."

Still, did Darwin read Malthus after seeing the implications of population growth, or did Malthus's writing help him see them? Darwin's *Autobiography* seems to provide the answer, recalling that it was while reading Malthus in October 1838 that this key idea occurred to him. Still, historians are rightly skeptical of personal recollections of events in the distant past. Fortunately, Darwin's research notebooks from 1837–8 survive, and there, in entries from late September of 1838, his notes on Malthus bear theoretical fruit before our eyes.

An initial speculation of Malthus's influence, based on thin, indirect evidence,

has been transformed into a confirmed influence. The next, more difficult, task is to determine the precise nature of that influence. That Darwin's words needed no "reconstruction" to make them sound Malthusian made the initial speculation of influence plausible. As we will see, it is quite otherwise in the case of Sciabarra's speculations about the influence of her Russian roots on Ayn Rand.

THE FIRST CHAPTER INTRODUCES US TO the Russia of Ayn Rand's (then Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum) youth. One influential philosopher after another is described as "profoundly Hegelian." Other Germanic influences on Russian philosophy include Fichte, Kant, Schelling, and Schopenhauer—there are even bizarre fusions of Nietzsche with Christian mysticism and Marxism. Behind pre-Soviet Russian culture, then, are the same philosophers who influenced Weimar Germany. Sciabarra notes that Ayn Rand despised every fundamental characteristic of this culture.

Indeed, this list of German influences reads like Ayn Rand's "most wanted" list. In the title essay of her 1961 book *For the New Intellectual*, for example, Rand refers to "the Witch-doctory of Kant and Hegel" and "the pure Atilla-ism of Marx." In the essay "What is Romanticism?," reprinted in *The Romantic Manifesto* (1970), Rand refers to Schelling and Schopenhauer as "avowed mystics advocating the supremacy of emotions, instincts or will over reason." And in the introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *The Fountainhead* (1968), she describes Nietzsche as "a mystic and an irrationalist." Sciabarra concludes, reasonably, that, Ayn Rand's first published fiction—*We the Living* and *Anthem*—is a "passionate reaction" to this culture.

Yet these ideas are supposed to have also made a positive impression on Ayn Rand's formidable mind, through the influence of the one philosophy teacher she ever mentioned, N.O. Lossky. Lossky was, in fact, one of those who transmitted post-Kantian German philosophy to Mother Russia—early in his career Loss-

ky translated works by Kant and Fichte into Russian. He left Russia three years before Rand did and, unbeknown to both, in the 1950s they lived in New York City, he a professor of philosophy at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and Academy, she at work on *Atlas Shrugged*.

Though the evidence is all indirect, Sciabarra (following up Rand's recollection that a sister of Vladimir Nabokov's was a classmate) convincingly places Alissa in a girl's prep school operated by Lossky's parents-in-law, in which he occasionally taught. Sciabarra is rightly cautious: "It is not impossible that she could have enrolled in one of his college preparatory courses."

The various philosophical currents flowing through post-Revolutionary Petrograd University are briefly summarized before a discussion of the "links between Lossky and Rand" ensues. It opens with a frank admission that "it is almost impossible to establish the exact circumstances of their relationship." The evidence for this connection consists of taped interviews with Rand reported in Barbara Branden's *The Passion of Ayn Rand* and the earlier essay "Who is Ayn Rand?"; conflicting recollections of Lossky's sons, grandson, and a student; Lossky's memoirs; and archival records regarding events at Petrograd during the period from 1917 to 1923.

Though Rand recalls a class in ancient philosophy taught by Lossky, there are no records of him teaching such a course. Furthermore, Lossky was removed by the Soviets from the faculty in 1921, before Rand entered. Sciabarra speculates that he may have given lectures at the university's Institute for Scientific Research which Rand may have attended. While admitting there is no other evidence supporting Rand's recollection, he later concludes: "By another 'accident' of historical circumstance, young Alissa Rosenbaum had been among the very last students taught by Lossky in his native homeland." Similarly, the earlier speculation that Alissa could have learned of Lossky while in prep school later becomes

a certainty. Such upgrading of possibilities into established facts without additional evidence is a persistent feature of *The Russian Radical*.

Part One ends with a brief but thoughtful discussion of Rand's novels, with considerable time spent exploring Rand's attitude toward the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. Sciabarra adds to this topic evidence of a peculiarly Russian understanding of Nietzsche which fits well with Rand's, stressing its Dionysian features while downplaying its critique of Christian morality. In this case Rand herself reports youthful familiarity with Nietzsche's writing. But the direct evidence that the youthful Ayn Rand was positively influenced, through Lossky, by the "dialectical antidualism" of early 20th century Russian philosophy is thin.

In Part Two, however, such influences are taken for granted: "Though Rand rejected much of the content of Lossky's philosophy, her own system retained an exhaustive and dialectical form that reflected her roots," writes Sciabarra. And, later, "[A]s I have demonstrated, Rand's philosophy...was a historical product of her revolt against formal dualism."

Demonstrated is a strong word—and entirely inappropriate here. No evidence that Rand was familiar with Lossky's philosophy has been provided, and only weak, conflicting evidence that she studied ancient philosophy with him. Sciabarra thoroughly discusses the philosophy of Russia's "Silver Age," but provides no direct evidence that it influenced Ayn Rand.

ONE FORM OF INDIRECT EVIDENCE FOR such an influence would be a close similarity between Rand's philosophical method and that of the intellectuals who could have been her teachers. Though indirect, such evidence can be convincing, provided there is systematic, unadorned, and detailed similarity. A central task of Parts Two and Three of *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* is to establish that on topics ranging from the theory of concepts to ethics and aesthetics, just such a close similarity exists.

Ayn Rand's philosophical method is among the most innovative aspects of her thought. Sciabarra characterizes her method as "dialectical," and explains early on what he means. On his understanding, a dialectical method "focuses on relational 'contradictions' or paradoxes revealed in the dynamism of history," yet "refuses to recognize them as mutually exclusive or exhaustive."

The dialectician's aim is to "transcend" such oppositions through "synthesis"—to see those apparent opposites as parts or aspects of a wider whole. Where does one find such a philosophical method in Ayn Rand? "[I]n her rejection of such 'false alternatives' as materialism and idealism, intrinsicism and subjectivism, rationalism and empiricism."

It is true, and an important insight, that Ayn Rand had a keen eye for the shared premise underlying "false alternatives." Behind modern philosophy's alternatives of rationalism and empiricism, for example, she recognized a shared assumption: Abstract knowledge is neither based on, nor applicable to, the perceptible world we live in. Thus, for Objectivism, the fundamental philosophical issue is determining how abstract knowledge is validly derived from perception.

But this is precisely not asserting "that each of the opposing schools of philosophy is half right and half wrong." Rather, this method concludes that both alternatives are fundamentally wrong, because they rest on the same fundamental error. Nor is Ayn Rand's method systematically aimed at "overcoming dualisms." Indeed, Objectivism rests on a number of them: consciousness and existence; reason and force; individualism and collectivism.

Yet the language of Kantian/Hegelian "dialectic," a language Ayn Rand explicitly attacked, is repeatedly used by Sciabarra to characterize her method. In this presentation of her thought, she "transcends opposites," "developing antinomies," "recognizes interpenetration of opposites," "works toward a new synthesis," "traces internal relations." All of this is used as evidence that she is "true to her dialectical roots." Such characterizations

Corporate Rakeovers

By Thomas W. Hazlett

Socketing it to the soulless corporation

ITEM 1. THERE IS A TERRIBLE COMPANY spreading filthy messages to our youth, undermining “family values” and the American way of life. The Florida Baptists are on to them. They have proposed to boycott Walt Disney Co., a corporation that produces titillating movies and extends insurance benefits to domestic partners of Disney World employees. The Florida Baptists are presenting their resolution to the annual nationwide meeting of the Baptist flock—convening in New Orleans.

While my family might prefer Bourbon Street to Main Street, U.S.A., I was unaware that this was in line with orthodox Baptist theology. And, I admit, it came as a bit of a surprise that the corporation that created Mickey Mouse and the Happiest Place on Earth was dangerously close to betraying family values. But I am absolutely certain that the single best place in America to sort this all out is the French Quarter, particularly since the advent of riverboat gambling in Louisiana.

Item 2. The federal government, under the auspices of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is pursuing the legal theory that the reason people patronize the Hooters restaurant chain is *for the food*. Hence, food servers should be judged only on their ability to take orders and distribute prepared dishes. Because those employees now hired for this task have not been known to be outstanding in this dimension—indeed, it is unclear if anyone can recall what, if anything, they ate at a Hooters—the fact that males compose 0.00 percent of the waitstaff is prima facie evidence of discrimination.

Item 3. In the recent movie *Casino*, the viewer receives a basic tutorial on the

gaming industry. The timeline is crucial: The 1970s and early '80s were the good ol' days in Vegas, when mobsters skimmed the take and hotel personnel dutifully crushed the hands of card counters. But, alas, times change: The picture ends with shots of spectacular, gleaming new mega-structures built in the late '80s: Giant corporations funding vast amusements for families. The voice-over laments this tearful farewell to tradition. Gone are the dames, the wiseguys, the scams, the hustles. Those corporate suits came in, and they just ruined the town!

CORPORATION BASHERS COME IN ALL FLAVORS, from the pious to the punks. And each and every one of them appears shocked—*shocked*—to observe that the corporation is soulless. But the entity that so disappoints them, the one that is immoral, or cold-hearted, or mean-spirited—is a *fictitious* person. The corporation can only reliably be accused of one of the Seven Deadly Sins—shameless pandering. It is a slave to consumer demand, and it will ruthlessly exploit whatever the market will bear.

It is not a departure from this view to see that firms often go to great lengths to create images which consumers will note and respect: I have a very good idea of what awaits me should I pop into Disneyland, Hooters, or The Mirage. Nor should consumers be shy about personalizing their corporate grievances when they feel abused.

So please e-mail me if you're considering the purchase of a new boat—I'll delight in telling you which brand not to buy. I don't ascribe any extra ill-will or extraordinary greed to a company's failure to perform. Mere incompetence explains it quite nicely.

After the Hooters' case was filed, an attorney materialized (as if pushed by an invisible hand) to represent a group of

male supplicants seeking restitution. When asked if the restaurant chain had the right to select staff according to the preferences of their customers, he trumped consumer sovereignty with the race card: If a restaurateur decided to pursue a “plantation” theme, the attorney argued, it would be immoral and illegal to hire black men dressed like slaves as waitstaff.

This response recalls Dave Barry's “people will screw dogs” paradigm: The notion, clung to by so many, that pet sexual abuse would run rampant if there were no laws preventing it. But, leaving aside the silly detail that “plantation” theme restaurants are only likely to get funded via a generous grant from the Department of Agriculture or the Small Business Administration, the fact is that “plantation” themes are produced, in highly discriminatory fashion, quite regularly—in Hollywood. Is the counselor-at-law suggesting that whites be hired for slave roles, and sent to make-up for blackface? Or is editorial control over skin color to be asserted by the EEOC, as well? Stop those racist audiences! Out, out, damn history!

To bemoan Disney or Hooters or the new Vegas is to condemn consumer demand itself. The puzzle: Why are folks so obsessed with the idea that someone else may be having a better time? And why do great organizations—the Baptists, the federal government, the Cosa Nostra—get swept up in it?

Then again, why not ride the wave? I've never been, but tonight I'm going to Hooters—for the food. And I shall heed the Baptists' advice—I'll go to the Hooters in New Orleans. After which the whole family can hit the craps table! ♣

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