Second, to be aware that one is doing wrong implies that one is indeed doing wrong, but some philosophers have claimed that blameworthiness merely requires the belief, and not the fact, that one is doing wrong.

Third, blameworthiness seems often to be incurred through negligence, which in many cases involves the failure to be aware that one is doing wrong; indeed, it is this very failure that seems to ground the attribution of responsibility.

On these arguments, it is doubtful that awareness of wrongdoing is necessary for blameworthiness. Yet, as the case of Gwen indicates, it seems that one must satisfy some rather sophisticated mental condition to be blameworthy; just what this condition is, however, remains unclear. Similarly, presumably some other rather sophisticated mental condition must be satisfied if one is to be praiseworthy (in a way that imputes responsibility for one’s behavior). Again, it is controversial just what this condition is. Some philosophers appear to think that simply having good intentions will do; others, such as Kant, insist that one must have doing one’s duty as one’s ultimate objective.

Finally, there is the question of the relevance of mental disorders to responsibility. It is commonly said that suffering from a mental disorder relieves one of responsibility for one’s conduct. But this is far too sweeping. While kleptomania may provide an excuse for theft, it surely provides no excuse for assault; similarly, pyromania may furnish an excuse for arson but not for theft. There must be some close connection between disorder and offense for an excuse to be in the offing. Even then, whether an excuse is indeed available is debatable. Suppose that Holly is a kleptomaniac; why think she therefore has an excuse for theft? One answer is that she literally cannot help stealing. But this seems dubious. More accurate would seem to be the claim that she finds it abnormally difficult, rather than literally impossible, to resist the impulse to steal. But if there is the possibility of resistance, why excuse her for failing to resist? Perhaps she is not to be excused after all, if she recognizes that it is wrong to steal. Or perhaps the unusual strength of the impulse to steal makes it justifiable for her to succumb to it, so that she is indeed not to blame for doing so. Or perhaps she is not justified in succumbing to the impulse but is still not to blame for doing so because of some aspect of her mental state that has yet to be identified; for it is noteworthy that we tend rather to pity people such as Holly than to judge them wicked.

It is safe to say that the grounds for attribution of moral responsibility are complex and that, despite Aristotle’s lasting contributions, the discussion that began with him remains unresolved.

See also Determinism; Fatalism; Moral Sense.

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Michael J. Zimmerman

REVOLUTION. See Religion; Sacred Texts.

REVOLUTION. It is tempting to give a definition of revolution at the outset of an account such as this. This is a temptation to be resisted. The great sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) was right to say that “definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study.” Another great thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), declared that “only that which has no history can be defined.” Both of these remarks are highly relevant to the concept of revolution. It is best to postpone any attempt to define it until one has inquired into its history. As a humanly made event, revolution cannot be seen as a timeless thing, lacking change and variety. Like all human artifacts it has a history, and that must mean change. Our understandings of revolution must be sensitive to those changes. There cannot be any “essentialist” definition of revolution, any account that assumes some permanent, unvarying meaning, stretching across space and time.

This does not mean, on the other hand, that revolution can mean just anything (except, that is, to advertisers and marketing people who announce every new model of a motor car as a revolution). The various European languages have naturalized the word revolution—révolution, Revolution, rivoluzione, revolución—to mean much the same thing. That is because Western societies have shared certain common legacies and certain common experiences. The concept of revolution has reflected that shared tradition. While we should not
therefore expect revolution to carry one unequivocal meaning everywhere, we should at least expect what Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) called “family resemblances” between the various uses and understandings.

Revolution, finally, is a European invention. The meaning that it has in the world today derives from European use and experience. As a particular species of change it had no equivalent in the non-European world. The theory and practice of revolution was carried, along with other European inventions such as industrialism and nationalism, by traders, missionaries, and colonizers along the paths laid out by the European empires, formal and informal. It was learned and studied by non-Western intellectuals in the cities and academies of the West. If, as is indeed the case, revolution has become a worldwide inheritance, that is because Western principles and patterns of politics have become the norm for much of the world.

That some of the meanings in the non-Western world differ from those in the West is only to be expected from a concept that has always, even in the West, been sensitive to particular contexts and particular histories. The Russian understanding of revolution has been different from that of the French, and that too from the English or American, which have in their turn differed from German or Spanish conceptions. So African, Asian, and Latin American ideas of revolution have shown characteristic variations reflecting their different cultures. Even here, however, it is possible to see the same family resemblances that are observable in the Western cases. The fact that revolution has a tradition of use and meaning explains its variability; but it also points to continuities and similarities. The Western origin of revolution has meant that, as an ideal and a practice, it carries a certain basic stamp that enables us to identify and study it as a coherent phenomenon wherever it appears. Not anything can be called a revolution, whatever the claims of either its adherents or detractors.

Classical and Christian Conceptions

Revolution is an invention of Western modernity. In its generally understood meaning today, it was unknown in the ancient world. Nor was it understood in our sense in the European Middle Ages, or in the early modern period. It was only in the eighteenth century, with the American and French Revolutions, that the word revolution acquired its modern connotation of fundamental and far-reaching change.

The ancient Greeks certainly had their fill of violent politics; but they had no word for revolution, nothing that truly corresponds to our modern understanding of it. The commonest terms, used by both Thucydides (d. c. 401 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), were metabole politeias (“change of constitution”), and metabole kai stasis (“change with uprising, change due to factional strife”). Plato in the Republic uses plain metabole (“change”), or occasionally a phrase such as neoterizein ten politeian, usually translated as “to revolutionize (or renew) the state.” But this translation, with its connotation of purpose and novelty, is misleading. Plato (in book 8 of the Republic) is discussing the inevitable decline of the ideal state, first into a timocracy then, though a series of successively determined stages, into an oligarchy, a democracy, and so to tyranny.

In this highly determinist pattern, there is no room for that consciously directed change that we associate with revolution.

The problem indeed is largely one of translation. Stasis, for instance, is regularly rendered by modern translators as “revolution.” Thus book 5 of Aristotle’s Politics is generally treated as a discussion of causes of revolution, while Thucydides, in various parts of The Peloponnesian War, is usually held to have given a brilliant account of the revolutionary condition of the Greek city-states at the time of the war (e.g., book 3, ch. 5: “Practically the whole of the Hellenic world was convulsed... Revolution broke out in city after city.”).

The trouble is that, just as Plato is not speaking of revolution but of the predetermined turns of the political cycle, so Aristotle and Thucydides are not speaking of revolution but of faction or party, and the violent conflicts that spring from them. A condition of stasis is one of party warfare, one, moreover, where though there may be much noise and fury, there is little
real change. *Stasis* derived from words meaning “standing still,” “stationariness,” “bring to a standstill,” and in contexts (e.g., Plato’s *Cratylus*) where it is said to be “denial of movement.” When applied to politics, it conjured up a picture of opponents locked in frenzied conflict, preventing, by the very violence and fanaticism of their mutual antagonism, any real change or any genuine resolution of political problems. In so far as revolution is concerned with fundamental change and the starting of new things, where there is *stasis* there cannot be revolution.

Similarly the widespread classical conception of revolution is of the turns of the political cycle, mirroring, or perhaps instancing, the cycles of growth and decay in nature. It excludes all ideas of true novelty, as well as of human agency. Plato had left the cycle incomplete. The degeneration of his ideal state ended with tyranny. It was left to the Greek writer Polybius, drawing explicitly on Plato, to complete the cycle, and to make tyranny pass back into the ideal state, when the cycle would begin all over again. What drove the cycle was Fate or Fortune (*tukhē*). Revolutions were the turns of Fortune’s impassively revolving wheel—hence inevitable and irresistible, beyond human willing or control. “Such,” wrote Polybius (c. 200–118 B.C.E.), “is the course of political revolution (*politeion anakyklosis*), the course appointed by nature in which constitutions change, disappear, and finally return to the point from which they started.”

The importance of Polybius’s contribution was his influence on Roman writers, such as Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), and through them the whole later classical and early Christian world. The standard terms—*metabole* and *stasis*—from the Greek political lexicon were glossed in Latin as *novae res*, *mutatio rerum*, and *commutatio rei publicae*. But when it came to fitting these phenomena into a philosophy of politics Roman writers were apt to fall back on the Platonic idea of the cycle, as amplified by Polybius. For Cicero, for example, the “revolution” whereby Julius Caesar attained power was an instance of the natural cyclical process described by the Greek philosophers. It marked the turn of the circle—*orbis*—that described political change generally.
Christian writers of the Middle Ages were content to follow this respectable example, the more so as its Stoicism fitted in well with a cosmology that was even less inclined to allow freedom to merely human volition. By comparison with the cosmic “revolution” of Christ’s coming, and the end of human history that it portended, all secular changes among humans paled into insignificance. Platonic conceptions, which in any case tended to disparage the things of this world, were highly suited to this view. The political cycles of the earthly city could be seen as the secondary counterpart to the predominant rectilinear pattern of Providential history, which was preparing the way for the consummation in the heavenly city. It was in fact from the heavens that the word \textit{revolution} descended to enter the earthly domain of politics. Astrology provided the link. The word \textit{revolutio}—from \textit{revolvere}, “to roll back,” “to come back,” “to return in due course”—was a late Latin coinage. St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) used it to refer to the migration of souls. It then came to be applied to the revolutions of the heavens, to the cyclical rotations of the planets and stars in their fixed orbits. The astronomical usage, as in Nicolaus Copernicus’s \textit{De revolutionibus orbium coelestium} (1543), predominated until the late seventeenth century. But earlier it had already come to be applied to human society, through the widely shared astrological belief in the influence of the stars on human affairs. The revolutions of the heavens were the direct cause of revolutions among humans.

This confirmed rather than modified in any substantial way the concept of revolution as the turn of Fortune’s wheel. For not only were the movements of the stars as independent of human agency as the dispositions of Fortune (cf. Hamlet’s “Here’s fine Revolution,” as he muses on Yorick’s skull). They operated according to the same laws of motion as the political cycles of the Greeks. Each movement was preordained and predictable, a step or phase in the complete orbital cycle that returned the star or planet to its original starting point. The revolutions of the stars were therefore as bereft of novelty as the revolutions of the seasons. As Hannah Arendt has written of the astronomical \textit{revolutio}, “if used for the affairs of men on earth, it could only signify that the few known forms of government revolve among the mortals in eternal recurrence and with the same irresistible force which makes the stars follow their pre-ordained paths in the skies” (p. 35). The astronomical conception of political change dominated the uses of the term \textit{revolution} from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. The \textit{rivoluzioni} of the North Italian cities of the fourteenth century—when the term first entered the political vocabulary to denote violent political change—were seen in the perspective...
of the cyclical conception derived from classical antiquity. Most commonly revolution was used in some sense of restoration, the return to a truer or purer or more original state of things. This was the meaning of its use in relation to the pro- and anti-Medicean revolts in Florence in 1494, 1512, and 1527. Widely called rivoluzioni by contemporary observers, the revolts were held by their supporters to bring back the better state of affairs displaced by their rivals. A similar meaning underlay the use of the term révolution to describe the conversion to Catholicism of the French king Henry IV in 1593. By so disarming his enemies, the Catholic League, and causing massive defections to his side, Henry was said both to have brought about an irresistible turn of the wheel of Fortune and at the same time to have restored the kingdom to an earlier condition of health (Griewank, p. 145). In this late sixteenth century usage one sees as clearly as anywhere the persistence of a concept of revolution in which the quality of novelty is conspicuously absent.

The Seventeenth Century

It has been common to see the seventeenth century as the source of the modern idea of revolution. Partly this is due to the fact that seventeenth-century Europe was profoundly shaken by a great wave of rebellions and civil wars. There were revolts in the Netherlands against Spanish rule; major rebellions in France—the Fronde—and in several of the territories of the Spanish monarchy—Catalonia, Portugal, Naples, and Sicily; Scotland and Ireland rose against English domination. Above all there is the English Civil War of 1642–1649, seen by many, such as Karl Marx, as the first of the “great revolutions” of modern history.

Most historians agree that, however bloody the conflicts, most of these rebellions were just that—rebellions, not revolutions. These were traditional uprisings by traditional actors. There was no attempt to create anything new or different. Peasants, townsmen, and disaffected aristocrats appealed to “the ancient and fundamental laws of the kingdom,” to customs, traditions, and the “good old ways”—in other words, to the past—in their struggles with their rulers. The aim was to bring back or to confirm historic institutions—the French parlements and Estates-General, the Spanish Cortes, the Catalan diputació, the English Parliament.

The English Civil War, however, has seemed to many a different kind of conflict, one deserving the name revolution in the modern sense. Did the English not execute their king, abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, disestablish the Church of England, and proclaim a republic? In a more far-reaching way, did the English Civil War not clear the way for capitalist development, so launching England on the path that was to take it to the pinnacle of the world economy? Contemporaries called it “the Great Rebellion,” but should we not be prepared to call it, with Lawrence Stone, “the first ‘Great Revolution’ in the history of the world” (p. 147)?

One needs to attend to the language of contemporaries, and to beware of imposing our often anachronistic interpretations on past events. In relation to the events that occurred between 1640 and 1660, and even to those of 1688, contemporaries largely avoided the newly coined political term “revolution.” When they did use it, they gave it the meaning current in early modern political thought. That is, they employed it with the cyclical connotation derived from its astronomical usage. That is why it so often appeared in plural form, as when Robert Sanderson wrote in 1649 of “the confusions and revolutions of government,” or Matthew Wren in 1650 of “those strange revolutions we have seen.”

Most revealingly of all, what we call the “Restoration” of 1660 was widely hailed as a “revolution.” It was so termed by Lord Clarendon, the first historian of what he called, referring to the events of the past twenty years, the “Great Rebellion.” Thomas Hobbes, in his Behemoth (1668), was also clear that with the return of Charles II in 1660, a political cycle had been duly completed: “I have seen in this Revolution a circular motion of the Sovereign Power, through two Usurpers, from the late King to his Son.” Nor was it just monarchists and conservatives who remained wedded to the traditional concept of revolution. What was later to be sanctified as the “Glorious” or “Bloodless” Revolution of 1688 was also at the time understood to be a revolution in the tra-
ditional sense of the word. The parliamentary Whigs, taking their cue from John Locke, here turned the tables on Clarendon and the supporters of the Restoration by arguing that not 1660 but 1688 was the true restoration, hence the true, final revolution. Charles II, and even more James II, had flouted the fundamental laws and violated the original constitution of the kingdom every bit as much as Charles I and Oliver Cromwell. All had plunged the country into a cycle of violence and oppressive but unstable regimes. Only with the restoration of a truly constitutional monarchy in 1688 had the cycle run its course.

One is entitled, for certain purposes, to argue that the men and women of the seventeenth century knew not whereof they spoke, that when they spoke of “restoration,” we can quite properly speak of revolution in the modern sense. This claim has been especially made for the radicals of the English Civil War, the Levellers and Diggers, who are said to look forward to the socialist and communist revolutionaries of a later century. But why deny the reality to the radicals of the language that they used to describe their actions? When Levellers protested against “the Norman yoke,” this represented to them a real usurpation of traditional English rights and liberties by an alien ruling class. When the Diggers proclaimed communism, this was because, as their leader Gerard Winstanley said, they wished to restore “the pure law of righteousness before the Fall,” to make the earth “a common treasury again.” Along with such groups as the Fifth Monarchy men, the Diggers believed that Christ’s Second Coming, as foretold in the Book of Revelation, was imminent. With it would come “a new heaven and a new earth,” Christ’s millennial reign on earth. These were all convictions sincerely and powerfully held. On what grounds are we to say that they were deluded, that their actions really meant something else?

Millennial imagery and even doctrine are not foreign to modern concepts of revolution. It is even possible to argue, as Melvin Lasky does, that without this millenarian background, the idea of revolution is inconceivable. But revolution is no more religion than it is restoration—not, at least, in the senses that the term has come to hold for us. At some point revolution was stripped of its religious associations and launched on an independent career as a secular concept. This was the accomplishment of the American and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century. It is to them we must look for the birth of the modern concept of revolution.

Inventing Revolution: American and French Revolutions
The pull of the past is nowhere more evident than in the case of the American and French Revolutions. Repeatedly they made reference to the heroic deeds and figures of the past. Rome, the Rome of the Republic, was an inspiration to both revolutions. The revolutionaries frequently saw themselves in the guise of Gracchus or Brutus, opposing tyranny and striking a blow for the liberty of the people. Their painters and sculptors portrayed them in Roman costume. In their speeches they quoted the great Roman orators. They wished to revive the public spirit and civic virtue of the Roman Republic, to make citizens out of subjects.

The American and French Revolutions did in truth both begin with conservative intentions, or at least pretensions. The Americans wished, they said, to go back to the working arrangement that they had had with the British state since the seventeenth century, an arrangement upset by the “innovations” of the British Parliament; the French wished to restore power to the old institutions of the parlements and the Estates-General, in the face of a reforming and “modernizing” monarchy. In both cases the revolution rapidly went beyond these conservative premises, to the consternation of many who began the revolution. A new concept of revolution emerged in the course of these revolutions. Tom Paine, whose pamphlet Common Sense (1776) saluted the American Revolution as “the birth-day of a new world,” went on in The Rights of Man (1791–1792) to see the French and American Revolutions as jointly inaugurating a veritable “age of Revolutions, in which everything may be looked for.”

“What were formerly called Revolutions, were little more than a change of persons, or an alteration of local circumstances. They rose and fell like things, of course, and had nothing in their existence or their fate that could influence beyond the spot that produced them. But what we now see in the world, from the Revolutions of America and France, are a renovation of the natural order of things, a system of principles as universal as truth and the existence of man, and combining moral with political happiness and national prosperity.” (Paine, 1984 ed., p. 144)

Americans, increasingly dismayed by what many saw as the excesses of the French Revolution (though Thomas Jefferson was not one of them), progressively downplayed the significance of their own revolution, giving it a conservative interpretation that dominated all discussion until recently. In this they paid unconscious homage to the defining character of the French Revolution. Fairly or not, it is the French, not the American, Revolution that has come to be seen as the inventor of the modern concept of revolution.

The French Revolution is the model revolution, the archetype of all revolutions. It defines what revolution is. This is a matter of fact rather than of conceptual analysis—or rather, it is a matter of the concept being shaped by the historical experience. For not only was it during the French Revolution that the concept of revolution unmistakably acquired its modern meaning. The French Revolution also established the classic pattern of revolution. It named the revolutionary experience, and wrote the script of the revolutionary drama. It showed, by its own example as well as its attempt to export its revolution, by its ideas as well as its armies, what it is a society must do to undergo revolution. In this sense the French Revolution was not simply the first great revolution. It can seriously be argued to be the only revolution. All revolutions subsequently were indebted to it. It was from the French that they borrowed their concept; it was the French Revolution whose practice they attempted to imitate—even when they hoped to go beyond it.

With the French Revolution, the hesitations and ambiguities of earlier revolutions were swept aside. Revolution now acquired its distinctively modern meaning. It came to mean, not the turns of a recurrent cycle or the reversion to some earlier condition, but the creation of something radically new: something never before
seen in the world, a new system of society, a new civilization, a new world. Moreover it lost—though never entirely—its connotations of something natural, inevitable, and irresistible, something occurring beyond the province of human agency or the possibility of human intervention. Revolution was on the contrary now something quintessentially man-made. It was the action of human will and human reason upon an imperfect and unjust world, to bring into being the good society. This was for the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel the great discovery of the French Revolution: “Never since the sun had stood in the firmament and the planets revolved around it had it been perceived that man’s existence centres in his head, i.e. in Thought, inspired by which he build up the world of reality. . . . This was accordingly a glorious mental dawn. All thinking beings shared in the jubilation of this epoch” (Hegel, 1956 ed., p. 447).

With the example of the French Revolution before them, it became possible for contemporaries to see earlier events as comparable in several important respects, and retrospectively to baptize them as revolutions—often with a polemical purpose in mind. French revolutionaries such as the Marquis de Lafayette, who had fought with the Americans against the British, were quick to refer to “the American Revolution,” by analogy with what they saw as the similarly heroic enterprise embarked upon by the French in 1789. The French historian and liberal statesman François Guizot, in his Histoire de la révolution d’Angleterre (1826), was the first to call the English Civil War a revolution in the modern, that is, French, sense, in his case with the cautionary purpose of championing English moderation against French fanaticism. Dutch historians began to discover in the sixteenth-century “revolt of the Netherlands” rather a “Dutch Revolution.”

Nor did the comparisons remain solely in the political field. The technological and economic developments transforming England in the early nineteenth century were seen in the 1820s as “the industrial revolution.” Later scholars were to speak of “the revolution of the Baroque” and of “the scientific revolution” of the seventeenth century, to refer to the thoroughgoing changes in artistic practice and in scientific thought in that period. They would also speak of “revolutions of humanity,” such as the Paleolithic and Neolithic revolutions, or the “urban” or “agricultural” revolutions. Changes of an epoch-making kind routinely came to be called revolutions, as in “the Roman Revolution,” which produced the principate out of the republic in the first century of the common era.

In all cases what gave the term its meaning was the analogy with what increasingly came to be designated “the Great French Revolution” of 1789. In whatever sphere it was employed, political, economic, or cultural, revolution meant dramatic, fundamental change, change in a radically new direction, a complete change of “paradigm,” to use the term popularized by the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn. Whether, especially in the political realm, the change had to be accompanied by violence, as in the French case, remained a matter of dispute. “Violence is the midwife of the old society pregnant with the new,” said Marx; but Vladimir Lenin, noting this, penciled in the laconic comment, “some births are difficult, others easy.” What mattered in the end was not so much violence as the degree and intensity of the change. Revolution was a speeding up of evolution. It was an action by which men changed utterly the way they had traditionally done things. It looked to the future, not to the past.

In this respect, too, the future belonged to the French Revolution, as much as it inspired a renaming and reimagining of past episodes of change. Not the English or the American Revolution but the French Revolution became the inspiration of the revolutionary movement throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Marx called it “the lighthouse of all revolutionary epochs,” and he remained indebted to its example in his conception of the future socialist revolution. In the understanding of revolutionaries and revolutionary theorists everywhere, to undergo revolution was to imitate the French. The French Revolution displayed the universal “logic of revolution,” the stages or phases through which all revolutions must pass. There would be a “rule of the moderates” followed by “the rise of the radicals,” Girondists followed by Jacobins. Terror would give way to Thermidor, the point at which the revolution ceased its radicalization and tried to achieve a period of stability. As in the French case, this would often lead to a military dictatorship that claimed to safeguard the gains of the revolution. The symbolic dates of the French Revolution marked, for generations to come, the successive phases of the revolutionary process: the “Fourteenth of July” (capture of the Bastille and seizure of power), the “Ninth of Thermidor” (fall of Maximilien Robespierre and the beginning of the period of stabilization), the “Eighteenth of Brumaire” (Napoleon’s coup d’état and the inauguration of the dictatorship). If, as was claimed in the nineteenth century, le nouveau Messie, c’est la Révolution (“revolution is the new Messiah”), it was the French Revolution that had inspired these apocalyptic hopes.

The Revolutionary Idea in the Modern World

The idea of revolution, once invented by the French—Americans having for the most part disclaimed the patent—rapidly became the possession of the entire world. This was partly because the idea was carried on the bayonets of Napoleon’s armies in the French bid to revolutionize the whole of Europe. But the defeat of Napoleon was no barrier to the further spread of the idea. All attempts to repress it only seemed to lend it strength. It inspired a whole series of later revolutions in France, the land of its birth, in 1830, 1848, and 1871. In 1848 practically the whole of Europe—Britain and Russia were almost the sole exceptions—was convulsed by revolution. The idea had a particular appeal for intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe, who embraced it with messianic fervor. In Russia in particular it found fertile soil, so much so that revolutionaries in Western Europe began to look to Russia to give the signal that would light the torch of revolution everywhere.

The idea of revolution as expressed by the French Revolution appealed because of its simplicity and universality. “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” could inspire populations from Brussels to Beijing, from Poland to Peru. Of course there remained the question of how to interpret and apply its terms. Here the main modification to the original idea consisted in seeking to realize liberty and equality in the social as well as the political realm. This was the contribution of the nineteenth-century socialists, supremely in the thinking of Karl
Marx. For Marx, the French Revolution remained to be completed. It had freed the capitalists, the bourgeoisie, but at the cost of turning the mass of workers into exploited and propertyless proletarians. The liberal gains of the French Revolution—and Marx never denied that they were gains—had to be converted into the emancipation of the people as a whole. This would be accomplished by a socialist or communist revolution that would abolish private property and bring about the “free association of producers.” In the final condition of communism, following the transitional “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the state itself would “wither away,” having no necessary function. In this vision of the future, the Marxist concept of revolution fused with that of the anarchists, who had particularly strong followings, through the teachings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) and Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1875), in France, Russia, Spain, and Italy.

It is fair to say that, in one version or another, the Marxist concept of revolution came to dominate not just Europe but the world beyond in the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This was perhaps inevitable, given the massive disruption and distress caused by the relentless march of capitalist industrialization across the globe. The Paris Commune of 1871, which Marx hailed as the first truly proletarian revolution, can perhaps be taken as marking the divide between the older, more purely political, concept of revolution, and the later one that made social and economic transformation the heart of the revolution. Symbolically, the old revolutionary hymn of the *Marseillaise* was replaced by the new socialist anthem, the *Internationale*; the red flag of the socialists replaced the tricolor of the liberals. Not surprisingly, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 gave a massive impetus to this socialist understanding of revolution, as did the later success of socialist revolutions in China (1948) and in Cuba (1958).

The Russian Revolution of 1917 became the type of twentieth-century revolutions, especially in the non-Western world. It seemed to solve the difficult question of how to make a socialist revolution in conditions that, in a strictly Marxist understanding, were highly unpromising. Marx had expected the socialist revolution to begin in the advanced industrial societies, such as France, Germany, or Britain, where the industrial working class or proletariat made up the vast majority of society. Russia, like many other non-Western societies, was at the time of its revolution 80–90 percent peasant. It also had a relatively small and weak middle class. But in the main urban centers, such as St. Petersburg (Petrograd), it had a proletariat that, though small, was highly developed, well organized, and politically very conscious.

The Russian revolutionaries, especially Lenin and Trotsky, elaborated a theory of socialist revolution in which, under the guidance of the proletariat, the mass peasant population would be induced to rise in rebellion and to take over the land, at the same time as the proletariat took over the factories. Together the workers and peasants would coordinate the socialist revolution, after suppressing their common enemies among the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Throughout a significant role was marked out for the worker’s party—in this case the Bolshevik party—as the theoretical organ and directing force.
of the revolution. But it was always stressed that rule by the party was in the nature of a temporary, bridging, operation, mainly concerned with mopping up the remaining pockets of resistance and in preparing the workers for direct rule.

Here then was a new model of revolution, though particularly appropriate for countries, such as Russia, that had not been through a “bourgeois revolution” and had not as a result enjoyed the benefits of liberal or constitutional rule. The proletariat, organized by the party, would in effect carry out a dual or twofold revolution. It would overthrow autocratic or authoritarian rule, here accomplishing the aim of the classic bourgeois revolutions, such as the English and French revolutions; and it would also push through, in a single, uninterrupted sequence, to the proletarian or socialist revolution. Both political and social emancipation would be achieved by the selfsame agency, in the same act of revolution. No wonder that, whatever the misgivings about the course of the revolution in Russia, such a model proved so compelling to those many non-Western countries that saw themselves as standing in the same semi-feudal and backward condition as Russia on the eve of 1917.

But it would be wrong to overstress the differences between the socialist and earlier conceptions of revolution. For Marx the French Revolution of 1789 was always the model revolution, the one that provided the essential terms of revolutionary conflict as a conflict of classes. If the French Revolution was a “bourgeois revolution,” the coming socialist one would be a proletarian revolution. It would differ in that the proletarian revolution would lead to general emancipation instead of the emancipation of only one class. But the form of the revolution, the conditions under which the proletariat would gather its strength and overthrow its oppressors were precisely modeled on the rise of the bourgeoisie in feudal society. Thus both in its form—class struggle—and its intention—liberty and equality, now understood in social and economic as well as political terms—the socialist revolution could plausibly be presented simply as the continuation and completion of the enterprise started by the French Revolution. This was the claim of many prominent socialist revolutionaries. “A Frenchman,” wrote Lenin to a French comrade in 1920, “has nothing to renounce in the Russian Revolution, which in its method and procedures recommences the French Revolution.” Fidel Castro, in his defense speech at the Moncada trial of 1953 (1968), saw the very existence of an independent Cuba as an inheritance of the European revolutionary tradition, and he looked back to the French Revolution to justify his actions and to proclaim the inevitability of revolution in Cuba.

Of course there had to be modifications even to the socialist idea of revolution, especially as it moved beyond its European base and encountered different conditions and different traditions in the non-Western world. The most important amendments were provided by Mao Zedong in China, Vo Nguyen Giap in Vietnam, and Castro and Che Guevara in Cuba—leaders and fighters as well as theoreticians. What especially concerned them was the role of the peasantry in what were overwhelmingly peasant societies. The predominantly urban tradition of revolution had to be rejected. “The city,” observed Castro of the Latin American experience, “is a cemetery of revolutionaries and resources.” In place of the city and the urban workers they looked to the countryside and the organization of the peasants—in their traditional communities, if possible, in the form of mobile guerrilla bands if for whatever reasons this proved strategically dangerous (as for instance it appeared to do so in Cuba and Latin America generally). This was the revolutionary strategy that, often after decades of struggle, led to the success of the Chinese, the Cuban, and the Vietnamese revolutions. These in turn became the inspiration, the “model” revolutions, for other Third World societies. Socialist in form and rhetoric, they quite often—as in many African cases—embodied fundamentally nationalist aspirations in societies seeking to throw off colonial rule.

In the West too, changing conditions brought about modifications to the inherited concept of revolution. Revolution on the barricades began to appear increasingly unreal in societies where sophisticated firepower and counterinsurgency techniques gave states overwhelming power against potential insurgents. The fate of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 gave the clearest indication of this, as did, in a somewhat different way, the failure of the “Prague spring” of 1968. In the face of this, the student revolutionaries in Paris and elsewhere in 1968 turned away from direct confrontation with the state and invented subversive techniques based on ridicule and new forms of cultural opposition. “All power to the imagination”; “Be a realist: demand the impossible”; “I am a Marxist—Groucho style”—such were the slogans on the posters that the students plastered all over Paris in May 1968. Marx was still an influence, but it was Marx the philosopher of alienation rather than Marx the anatomist of the capitalist economy who continued to be an inspiration. In addition, and often taking over, were influences derived from the Dadaists and Surrealists, together with a radical reading of Sigmund Freud.

Revolution has not been a prominent feature of Western societies since World War I—not, that is, revolution as it has traditionally been understood in the libertarian, “left-wing,” versions inherited from the French Revolution. There have been some who have spoken of the Nazi or the fascist revolution, and have tried to offer a “right-wing” concept of revolution. This has to struggle with a whole tradition of meaning derived from the European experience of the past two hundred years. Inequality, authoritarianism, and racism—central elements of fascist ideology—simply have not been part of the revolutionary inheritance, whatever the practices of states, such as the Soviet Union, that claimed the revolutionary mantle. Condorcet’s statement of 1793, that “the word revolutionary can only be applied to revolutions which have liberty as their object,” aptly sums up the predominant and persistent meaning of the concept, as it has been elaborated by successive theorists since the French Revolution.

Nowhere was this demonstrated more forcibly than in the 1989 revolutions, the revolutions that overthrew communist rule throughout Central and Eastern Europe, eventually, in 1991, dissolving the Soviet Union itself. While in the same year the French and other Western Europeans, contemplating with a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm the bicentennial of the French Revolution, appeared disillusioned with the whole idea of rev-
olution, Eastern Europeans embraced it with fervor. Crowds occupied the squares of Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, and Bucharest, forcing, in almost classic demonstration of the power of the people, their rulers to depart. If the West had forgotten its revolutionary heritage, the same had not happened in the East. Moreover, it was not, for obvious reasons, the Marxist or socialist idea of revolution that inspired the East Europeans. In a remarkable reversal, what they looked back to, what was evident in almost every demand they made, was the tradition of the eighteenth-century American and French Revolutions. It was individual rights, a free civil society, and a liberal constitution that were the centerpieces of the programs of 1989.

Do the 1989 revolutions mark the end of revolution in the West, as many have claimed? Are they the final deposit of the revolutionary tradition? This may be too shortsighted a view, even for the West and certainly from the perspective of the world as a whole. In November 2003 the people of Georgia, one of the former republics of the Soviet Union, rose up against a corrupt ruler in a classic display of revolutionary action. Elsewhere in the world—in China, in Latin America, in the Middle East—there are intermittent but persistent revolutionary stirrings. Many of these are now mixed with religion, following the example of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Revolution has always been a changing and many-sided thing. We can be sure there are many surprises in store for us still.

See also Cycles; Evolution; Liberty; Marxism; Scientific Revolution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Krishan Kumar