**Bakunin, Mikhail**, (b. Priamukhino, Russia, 30 May [Old Style: 18 May] 1814; d. Berne, 1 July 1876), Russian anarchist. A nobleman’s heir, Bakunin resigned his army commission to study philosophy in Moscow. Part of the “Stankevich Circle,” he translated Fichte and Hegel and fell under Alexander Herzen’s influence. There followed from 1840 an itinerant revolutionary existence. In Berlin, he shared an apartment with Ivan Turgenev, joined the Young Hegelian party, and penned *The Reaction in Germany* (1842). In Zurich, he travelled with Georg Herwegh, meeting Wilhelm Weitling and other “German communists.” In Paris, he met fellow anarchist and later friend, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and his eventual nemesis, Karl Marx. Sympathy for the Polish cause distinguished him from many Russians *and* Germans, and got him expelled from Paris. In 1848, he attended the First Slav Congress in Prague and made his *Appeal to the Slavs*, demanding continental revolutionary unity to overthrow Russian, Austrian, and Prussian autocracy.

Following Wagner’s 1849 Palm Sunday performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Bakunin approached the conductor, announcing: “if all music were to be lost in the coming world conflagration, we should risk our own lives to preserve this symphony” (ML/E 384). Wagner writes a little of their ensuing discussions, generally of a political nature, Bakunin rejoicing in his “creative passion” for destruction (Bakunin 58). Had Wagner not yet heard of Marx, he most likely would have done so during these walks. Upon Bakunin’s next return from revolutionary Prague, he threw himself into the Dresden uprising, despite disapproving of its amateurism. He proposed centralizing gunpowder reserves in the Rathaus to blow up approaching Prussian troops.

Captured and arrested in Chemnitz with other revolutionaries, including August Röckel but not Wagner, Bakunin received commuted death sentences in Saxony and Austria, before extradition to Russia, where he was held in solitary confinement in St Petersburg’s Peter-Paul Fortress from 1851 to 1857. Released into Siberian exile, he escaped via Japan to San Francisco, whence he resumed his itinerant activities, through London, Lithuania, Stockholm, Switzerland, Lyons, Bologna, etc. Disdaining participation in the corruption of “bourgeois” political life, his anarchistic conflict with Marx’s “scientific socialism” intensified, culminating in expulsion from the First International in 1872. In the wake of this and the Franco-Prussian War (1871), Bakunin wrote *Statism and Anarchy*, perhaps the most complete statement of his beliefs.

Though as coherent a tract as we have from Bakunin, arguably more powerful were: his insistence upon revolutionary activity; his twin passions for destruction (cf. *Götterdämmerung*’s Immolation Scene)and revolutionary fraternity; and his provision of memorable dicta, e.g., inverting Voltaire to say that, if God existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him (Bakunin 128). Bakunin’s charisma impressed Wagner greatly; references persist in Cosima’s Diaries. During his final year, 1876, Bakunin seems, in startlingly later-Wagnerian fashion, to have lost some of the Rousseauvian faith he had held since childhood in man’s natural goodness, remarking from Lugano: “If there were in the whole world three people, two of them would unite to oppress the third” (Carr 478). As rehearsals for the first Bayreuth festival began, Bakunin – on his deathbed – requested the works of Schopenhauer.

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Arthur Lehning (ed.), *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, tr. Steven Cox and Olive Stevens (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973).

E.H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937).