

Introduction

Hegel and Marx

Decisively opened to Western capitalism in the 1990s, the former communist republics have been baptized with blood and soaked in Pepsi-Cola. As I started to write this book, in the summer of 1994, the Canadian Harvey's burger chain and USA's McDonald's were fighting for space on Prague's Wenceslas Square in the infant Czech Republic. Kellogg's announced a Corn Flakes plant opening in Latvia. In the summer of 1996, the great newspaper *Pravda*, founded by Lenin before the Russian Revolution, disappeared. It was closed by its two Greek owners who complained that the newspaper's staff had become lazy and unmanageable. In January 1997, as this book neared completion, the boss of a notorious Moscow gang was shot to death in his BMW 525 sedan a few metres away from Moscow police headquarters. Two bodyguards waited in a small Russian Zhiguli car just behind him. Mr Naumov's brazen slaying was followed by a startling disclosure. His bodyguards were themselves members of an élite paramilitary police unit who were protecting the gang leader under a contract for cash signed by their superior officers.¹

Once Moscow printing presses flooded Europe and North America with bargain copies of Lenin, Engels and Marx. Today they are run by apostles of the Harvard Business School. Jobless ex-Soviet rocket scientists hawk nuclear secrets of the FSU (former Soviet Union) to Western news correspondents and Third World dictators. Where previously their greatest concern may have been with the secret police, foreigners in Moscow risk being mobbed by beggars or murdered by the Russian Mafia. Wealth looted from the FSU by former commissars and industrial *apparatchiks* is laundered in the West and reappears in Russia and the other republics as respectable 'foreign investment'. An expert on the Italian Mafia warns that unless the Russian state learns 'to produce the basic goods and services which are associated with the definition, enforcement and protection of property rights . . . Sicily is a reminder to Russians of the path they are likely to go down'.²

The Soviet superpower has all but become a US client state, and its erstwhile fealty to Marx has evolved into a cruel joke, as illustrated by US investigative reporter Seymour Hersh:

A former senior State Department official provides a graphic description of his visit to a former Soviet republic: 'My image is Harpo Marx. You go to discuss foreign affairs with the Foreign Minister. As you get up to leave, he opens his coat. He's got a bottle of aspirin and a \$3.95 watch for sale.'³

In the United States a fashionable auction house reports there is no longer much demand for artefacts associated with early twentieth-century Marxist revolutionaries. A document autographed by Trotsky went for a song. Marxism has lost its former market value.

Now that the West has less need to compete ideologically with world communism the façade of equality and freedom – never very convincing in any event – is being lifted entirely from social relations. Race riots are common in big European cities. In the USA and Canada equal opportunity legislation is abandoned. The poor are to be jettisoned and the rich allowed to pollute at will. Similar movements are at work in the nations of the European community, and in Australia and New Zealand. Any notion that government should be independent of the business system has been discredited, in theory as well as in practice. In 1995, to cite an instructive example, the world-famed Royal Canadian Mounted Police sold its name and product rights to the Walt Disney Corporation.

In this age of triumphant capitalism can there be any room for the alternative vision of G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx? I will argue in this book that the two thinkers are even more vital now that commissars have become free-marketeers and the Mounties have joined the Mickey Mouse Club. To grasp Hegel's and Marx's continued importance, however, means interpreting their work afresh, and settling accounts with standard assessments of the two thinkers.

Most interpreters suggest Marx (1818–83) is the more important of the two. Apart from the rarefied world of Hegel scholarship, Hegel (1770–1831) is often seen as a strange conservative philosopher who played an ambiguous role in the young Marx's development. Let us look briefly at some of the ways in which their relationship has been portrayed.

Even before 1917 the ideal of Marx's communism inspired many in the West who rejected the capitalist order. Initially the Soviet experiment seemed to confirm this ideal, and helped to anchor radical movements which grew in the Hungry Thirties. The giant war effort mounted

by the Soviets against Hitler attested to communism's strength and relevance. Communist theory and literature thrived. Hegel belonged on every diligent party member's reading list. The Hegelian dialectic, as interpreted by Friedrich Engels and V. I. Lenin, was a staple of debate in party conferences. Orthodox communism took for granted Marx's own account of his relationship with Hegel. In Marx's famous words, he turned Hegel's idealism upside down, and rescued the 'rational kernel from the mystical shell'.⁴

A left opposition to Soviet 'Marxism-Leninism' rooted in Hegelian thought began in the 1920s. Here Hegel appeared more an autonomous thinker than second fiddle to Marx. Hegelian Marxism provided a haven for communists disillusioned with Stalinist betrayal. In the post-Stalinist period the Hegelian influence dwindled among orthodox communists. This ceded to Hegelian Marxists such as Alexandre Kojève, Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse a near-monopoly on left-wing Hegel studies. In the 1960s and 1970s Hegelianized 'Western Marxism' flourished on university campuses and on the left wing of the social democratic movement. 'The Marx-Hegel relationship', noted the French Marxist Louis Althusser in 1970, 'is a currently decisive theoretical and political question.'⁵

Hegelian Marxism apparently went into eclipse by the early 1980s. The varieties of socialist theory that multiplied in the West during the 1980s and early 1990s generally took pride in rejecting much of Hegel's message. The Italian theorist, Gramsci, was a favourite of many Marxists. He filled the void in anti-capitalist cultural and intellectual theory created by Hegel's absence. Another powerful stream of radical theory, analytical Marxism, abandoned much of Marxism's former terrain, and Hegel as well. Led by thinkers like Eric Roemer and Jon Elster, this current of Marxism concentrated on subtle and complex logico-mathematical models loosely based on certain Marxian formulas.⁶

Feminists, I would argue, have done some of the most exciting theoretical work of the last two decades. Many feminist theorists have some sympathy for Marx, finding his categories useful in their own analysis. Few can tolerate Hegel, however. Although earlier twentieth-century feminist writers like Simone de Beauvoir acknowledged their debt to him, ambivalence about Hegel predominates in recent feminist literature. Hegel is seen as a 'phallogocentric or "male rationalist"' philosopher whose writings dwell primarily 'on the white European Christian bourgeois woman, the wife of the male citizen, and ignore[] all differences between women'.⁷

Strangely, the retreat from Hegel made Marxism dependent on a brittle form of millenarianism. Most writers presented no coherent alternative to capitalism, relying instead on an inchoate notion of total revolution, in which few truly believed. Some Marxists fled, opting for the siren call of postmodernism. Indeed, the postmodernist outlook – featuring a blanket rejection of universal or totalizing schemes associated with Hegel – was invented in the 1970s by disillusioned Parisian Marxists, perhaps as a form of consolation for a failed left movement, as Terry Eagleton speculates.⁸

While Marxism lurched away from Hegel, he was embraced fervently by neo-conservatives in the United States. They adopted a modified form of the Hegelian End of History thesis, as set forth by Francis Fukuyama, according to which liberal capitalism is the last, best form of society on earth. From this standpoint, the agenda of history would be the privatization of the entire globe, until nothing remained except what can be itemized on a corporate balance sheet.

Paradoxically, the success of the neo-conservative swing to Hegel brought renewed interest among Marxists. A revival of Hegel among radical theorists may now be under way. I want to suggest that a new generation of thinkers is likely to find Hegel much more conducive to the project for progressive change than anyone could have imagined two decades ago. My argument resembles one put forward by the Hegel scholar, Errol E. Harris: ‘My contention’, he writes, ‘is that had Marx understood Hegel aright he would have found in him much that he (Marx) was seeking, including a basis for socialism that would not have led his followers astray into totalitarian repression of human liberty.’⁹

Life courses

Hegel created his dialectical philosophy in response to a stormy period of reaction resembling our own. He and old friends like the poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) and the political activist Isaac von Sinclair (1775–1815) watched in shock as Napoleon betrayed the ideals of the 1789 French Revolution and established in 1799 what Hölderlin called ‘a species of dictator[ship]’.¹⁰ After 1815 even the compromised liberal achievements of the Napoleonic era were smashed by an axis of reactionary European regimes led by the chief aristocratic-capitalist power, England.

Hölderlin, the first of the great modernist poets, was thrown into a mental asylum, and condemned to live out his days in a wooden tower. Hegel, too, was stung by the icy breath of reaction. Like his friend he retired from active politics, but he did not forfeit his sanity. Rather, as we shall see in this book, he created a political philosophy that could penetrate the terrible twists and ironies of history.

Similar circumstances shaped Marx's world-view. Raised and educated in the fires of a rising continental bourgeois-liberal revolt, Marx took an active part in the 1848 revolutions. In 1849, Marx escaped to England where he lived for the rest of his life. After staying for a period in working-class Soho, he spent some of his most productive years in a quiet suburb of London. The communist revolutionary must have resembled many other middle-class fathers as he watched his children gambol on the green hills of London's serene Hampstead Heath.

Marx's portrait once dominated May Day Parades on Moscow's Red Square, and politicians in the East European Communist republics paid lip-service to his philosophy. Yet Marx was born in Trier, the western-most city of Germany. When the Caesars ruled, Trier was a Roman centre. In modern times, Marx's hometown leap-frogged between Germany and France. Today, road signs around the town are bilingual: German and French. A thoroughly Western figure, Marx was well prepared for the comfortable bourgeois English life. In the mid-nineteenth century Great Britain was scarcely touched by armed dissent. The factories of the great nation were in full swing. When the bearded revolutionary reached his seat in the newly founded British Museum, English goods flooded world markets and London was the centre of global commerce.

In a delightful little tour book entitled *Marx in London*, the historian Asa Briggs repeats the standard line that Marx was relatively unaffected by his quarter-century stay in the mushrooming metropolis. 'He never became so preoccupied with London – or England – that the English connection changed his attitudes and feelings.'¹¹ There are in many large cities small immigrant communities some of whose denizens live entirely separated from the homogenizing city. London was famous as a haven for German exiles, and had its own Little Germany. Was Marx one of those immigrants who remained untouched by their stay in a foreign land?

Indeed he was not. Marx wrote and rewrote *Capital* while he and his wife Jenny Marx (née von Westphalen) raised three daughters

and saw them imbricated in the solid upper middle-class milieu of Hampstead. He prowled London as the city was transformed by population flows and building booms. He witnessed the familiar topography of Little Germany disappear in the upheavals. True, he did not ride to hounds or keep a world-class wine cellar as did his friend and partner Friedrich Engels, who lived a few blocks away in upper-class Regent's Park. However, Marx's eventful years in London gave his thinking an unmistakably English cast. S. S. Praver recounts that Marx's language was filled with English allusions and literary references. The whole Marx family 'professed its admiration for the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë and ranged them above those of George Eliot'.¹² Marx certainly did not end up speaking German with an English accent; but his writings bore the unmistakable imprint of his long residence in London. Perhaps the most striking result of Marx's English sojourn was his abandonment of the philosophical themes that occupied Hegel, and his near-total immersion in political economy.

In a sense Marx lived Robert Louis Stephenson's tale of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. He was the quiet scholar who spent his days at a reserved seat in the British Museum, and the family man who helped raise three girls in the proper manner of the English bourgeoisie. He was also the Hegelian dialectician whose fiery texts transmogrified the workaday English industrial scene into a catechism of revolution.

US historian Jerrold Seigel's magnificent biography *Marx's Fate* contends that Marx spent his final years obsessively revising a system that could not possibly account for the amazing success of Victorian capitalism.¹³ None of his finely constructed models offered an outcome that conformed with hopes for a ground-up transformation of capitalist society. Yet under Hegel's influence, Marx drafted an exploratory blueprint of the new society in the first volume of *Capital*. Perhaps this explains why Marx, in the decade following its publication in 1867, gave priority to new editions of volume 1 of *Capital* rather than to completing the other two volumes of his *magnum opus* (which were put together after his death by Engels). A major argument of this book is that Marx did not go far enough in his Hegelian exploration of a rational society. Marx's ideal of communism offers only a ghostly outline of a system that Hegel had already constructed in detail.

Themes and structure of this book

Terrell Carver offers a useful reminder of the difficulties involved in the relationship of Hegel and Marx. 'Hegel and Marx', he says, 'did not just happen. They are not like Gilbert and Sullivan . . . or even Marx and Engels. They never met and they never corresponded (Hegel died when Marx was 13).' The pairing of the two is necessarily 'a construct or narrative, not a conceptual reflection of a "fact" that cannot be otherwise than it has come down to us through the literature'. The difficulty is compounded by a great contrast in the political environment in which the two men wrote. After moving permanently to London Marx became an independent scholar largely supported by his benefactor and partner, Friedrich Engels. It was almost as though Marx occupied a research chair in some large university, but Marx's was funded by his wealthy friend rather than Exxon or Microsoft. Like Hegel, Marx lived in a climate of reaction, yet, secure in London, he had relatively little to fear from censorship or the secret police. Marx was not compelled to disguise his writings, or to cast ideas in an abstract dimension. Here is another instance in which England made Marx. Hegel's case was quite different. He was an educator without independent means living in an authoritarian state. Hegel and his family relied on income from his jobs in publicly supported schools and universities. A noose of censorship and terror lay around his neck, and around the necks of his colleagues and students. 'Hegelian language', declares Carver,

is deliberately difficult to interpret, for political reasons, not just philosophical ones. Moreover, it is a philosophy, not just because the thinkers were that way inclined, but because any critical consideration of society would have to take place in a suitably circumscribed and abstract frame.¹⁴

I have tried to surmount the problem of censorship by focusing in the latter chapters of this book on Hegel's *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science*, delivered at Heidelberg in 1818–19, but only discovered in the 1980s. Hegel could never speak freely in public; still, for a brief period at Heidelberg and Berlin he was able to outline his political theory in relatively open terms. A few months later, while Hegel was preparing the *Philosophy of Right* for publication, writes Shlomo Avineri,

radical student agitation broke out, Kotzebue was assassinated by the student Carl Sand, the student *Burschenschaften* were suppressed by the authorities, and the Carlsbad Decrees introduced an unprecedented system for the surveillance of publishing and academic life in all German states and primarily in Prussia. There are numerous indications in Hegel's correspondence that because of this atmosphere of intimidation and fear from the intervention of Prussian censorship, Hegel rewrote many passages in the *Rechtsphilosophie* so as to make them more acceptable to the authorities.

Avineri explains that the Heidelberg and Berlin lectures 'provide a key to a reading of some of the more esoteric passages in the published version . . . There appears also a greater degree of continuity between Hegel's early criticism of modern society . . . and his later system'.¹⁵

In chapters 1 and 2, I address the issue of narrative in the relationship between Hegel and Marx. Though Engels was the first to compare Marx with Hegel in his 1859 book review of Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx himself broached the problem in the 1873 Postface to the second edition of *Capital*. Chapter 1 takes a critical look at Marx's account of his connection with Hegel. Then I move to Engels's influential rendering of the relationship in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Contrary to the prevailing view that Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach* offers a distorted perspective, I profess with some reservations that Engels's essay stands as a valuable guide to the two theorists. In the concluding sections of chapter 1, I apply Hegel's dialectic of history, as understood by Engels, to the fall of communism, and the August 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach* points to a consistent line of development linking Hegel and Marx. According to Engels, the mature Hegel retained faith in the radical conceptions of his younger years, and Marx never abandoned the Hegelian themes that marked his earliest writings. Chapter 2 considers a double challenge to Engels's view of the Hegel-Marx relationship. On one hand, Georg Lukács's *The Young Hegel*, written in 1930s Moscow, pioneered the concept of 'reconciliation', a staple of modern-day Hegel commentary. For Lukács, Hegel drifted from the radical liberalism of his early days, ultimately becoming an apologist for Prussian tyranny. On the other hand, Louis Althusser declared that Hegel had little impact on Marx, who weaned himself from Hegelianism very early in his career. Both of these readings hang on a psychology of the human life cycle that Hegel opposed.

The final section of chapter 2 examines Hegel's dialectical account of the stages of life.

The next chapter briefly surveys Hegel's early career as well as some oppositional themes in his writings. Hegel's friendship with the troubled poet Hölderlin throws light, I think, on the young philosopher's intellectual growth. My intention is to show how Hegel's youthful discussion of Christ and Christianity presaged the democratic politics of his maturity. The chapter concludes with an examination of Hegel's thorny concept of the 'external state'.

The fall of communism has renewed interest in the democratic conceptions of Tom Paine (1737–1809) as well as in Hegel's theory of the constitutional liberal state. In chapter 4 I try to show that Hegel may have been influenced by the epoch-making texts of the radical visionary. Tom Paine was one of the most controversial personalities of the age, and it is virtually certain that Hegel was aware of him. We know, for example, that Hölderlin and Sinclair associated with followers of Paine's leading German disciple, Georg Forster. While Paine receives not a single mention in any of Hegel's writings and lectures, I think there are strong parallels between his concerns and those of Hegel. The most striking of these are the separation of civil society and the state, the nature of democratic politics and the fate of the United States of America.

If Hegel's aim was to construct a thoroughly democratic politics, as I think it was, he had to do so under extremely adverse conditions. Chapter 5 chronicles the trials of censorship and persecution that Hegel and his students endured in Berlin, as well as the terrible destiny of Hegel's dearest friend, Hölderlin. Along with his close colleague Eduard Gans, Hegel searched in Berlin for an answer to capitalism's most urgent problem, the scourge of poverty. I look at the solutions the two men offer, and consider the final political disagreement between them that some commentators believe is an indicator of Hegel's conservative politics.

One of the students who sat in Eduard Gans's packed lecture halls in Berlin at the end of the 1830s was a young man from Trier named Karl Marx. The final three chapters of this book consider the conflicted Hegelian legacy Gans may have bequeathed to his eager student. Admittedly, my exegesis of Hegel in these concluding chapters is contentious. Even in the Heidelberg lectures Hegel kept his cards fairly close to his chest, and no single interpretation, least of all mine, can clear the field of all competitors. What Leon Craig says in regard to Plato is equally true for Hegel:

[T]he art of political writing, or rather the political act of writing, entails more than a mastery of the various rational and passionate means of persuasion, more than a talent for crafting beautiful speech, or amusing informative speech. Its paramount requirement is a mastery of equivocal speech.¹⁶

Chapter 6 introduces the key issue separating Marx and Hegel – the concept of private property. This is no dry theoretical dispute, for it involves the contested borderline between civil society and government that is convulsing politics in the West and the former communist world. The second part of chapter 6 surveys what I believe is Hegel's solution to the problem of poverty, the democratic corporation.

A widely held notion about Hegel is that he had no interest in the future, or in what ought to be. Marx, by contrast, had a noble plan in mind for the human race. In chapter 7, I compare Marx's ideal of communism with Hegel's concept of a developing order of liberal democracy. Starting from Fukuyama's End of History thesis, the chapter places the democratic corporation within the overall framework of Hegel's radical political project. The chapter also features perhaps the most disputable element of my perspective on Hegel, the labour theory of property. I confront Jürgen Habermas's model of civil society with Hegel's in the last section of chapter 7.

Every existing state, said Hegel, is a state in time. In the final chapter I apply my interpretation of Hegel's political theory to the conditions of governance in our own period of transition after the fall of communism.