

# MARXISM'S END, OR BACK TO THE BEGINNING?

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## **The Strange Death of Marxism The European Left in the New Millennium**

Paul Gottfried

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*Reviewed by Brent Nelson*

Paul Gottfried's *The Strange Death of Marxism* rapidly surveys the development of Marxist thought in Europe from its high noon under "postwar Communism," through the various excursions made during the post-Stalin era into "Neomarxism," and then unto its final end as "the Post-Marxist Left." Each of the three stages is given its own chapter, the whole being followed by a consideration of whether or not the post-Marxist Left can be considered a "political religion."

Assuming that Gottfried's work is not intended to be more than an exploration of a topic in the history of ideas, it probably should not be seen as a defect that it nowhere directly addresses this question: Is ideology a primary causal antecedent to the great world of sociopolitical action, or is it merely one of the latter's effects? Indications are present in this work that Gottfried accepts the Burkean conservative belief that "ideas have consequences," but he does not offer an estimate of how consequential they can be. The manufacturers of ideologies are somehow more powerful than academic lecturers upon theory, who only hold forth before audiences of bored undergraduates, but how much more powerful are they? No attempt is made at an answer.

These questions may arise in the minds of many readers when they encounter piquant observations such as the following in Gottfried's fast-paced introductory chapter: "If 'cultural Marxism' was an import into American life, it was, like Christmas trees and hot dogs, one that flourished in its new environment. The attempt to treat it as alien ignores certain facts. By the time *The Authoritarian Personality* was brought to Europe, its themes had assumed American New Left and Cold War liberal forms" (p. 11). "Contrary to the opinion that ideological fevers only move across the Atlantic in a westerly direction, the opposite may

be closer to the truth" (p. 12). "It is both anachronistic and naive to insist that Europeans cannot import their political values from here, particularly given the traumatic breaks in European life caused by the devastating wars of the last century" (p. 12). He dismisses Allan Bloom's thesis, in his *The Closing of the American Mind*, "that American universities and American cultural institutions have become captive to noxious foreigners" (p. 15).

As evidence that this outcome in Europe is due to the impact of an American-based ideology, and not a parallel development undergone by all advanced industrial societies, Gottfried notes that Japan has seen a great influx of women into its work force without giving rise to a feminist movement like that in the U.S. and Europe (p. 15). He also observes that feminism is much stronger in Germany than in Italy (p. 15), presumably because the former nation has been subjected to a more intensive campaign of "Americanization." In this process, American-generated ideology seems to command the cultural heights: "The simultaneous development approach to ideology may not be applicable when the influences being studied are going largely in one direction" (p. 15). Here Gottfried appears to give credence to the belief that "ideas have consequences," but gives little insight into the origins and motivations of the carriers of such ideas.

Gottfried first looks at the "Communist High-Water Mark," which was attained immediately after World War II, especially in France and Italy (pp. 27-34). The decline that followed was marked by ideological disputes arising from the search for a new Marxist orthodoxy. In France, Louis Althusser's call for a renewal of Marxist materialist ideology was a response to other Marxists' emphasis on "the early Marx," the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844), who was supposedly a humanist (pp. 36-40). Georg Lukacs was the prototype of these humanist Marxists. In the end, no group pursued a "science of socialism," despite Althusser's call for such.

"While European workers became sociological Communists, intellectuals might be designated as existential ones" (p. 35). The intellectuals, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, shunned sociology because they did not have an adequate response to the problem of "a nonmaterialized revolution" (p. 40). Classic Marxism's problem was an obvious one: The "advanced capitalist countries had failed to collapse under their supposed economic contradictions," while "self-proclaimed Marxist governments were beset by material dearth and badly performing economies" (p. 16). Throughout the 1950s up to the oil crisis of 1973, the earnings of French workers rose. Eventually over 40 percent of the French workforce became public employees. By the 1990s the class of industrial laborers had also begun to dwindle as a proportion of the total population (p. 41). This general movement came later in Germany and was more spasmodic in Italy, but conditions in those countries moved in the same direction: "Furthermore, it was difficult to portray European welfare states, with large public sectors and nationalized industries, as free-market models

of the kind that Marxists could plausibly describe as pure capitalism" (p. 42). In the 1950s, the term "neocapitalist" began to be used in an attempt to explain capitalism's failure to collapse (p. 42).

A new foe was found in American imperialism, the U.S. seen as "the center of a world capitalist empire" (p. 43). This Marxist tactic survives today in a variety of manifestations, ranging from Immanuel Wallerstein's study *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (1961) (p. 45) to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's *Empire* (2000) (p. 46). Modern imperialism is admitted not to be concerned with direct territorial control, presenting itself rather "as a humanitarian enterprise that seeks to make the world 'democratic'" (p. 47). Hardt and Negri "associate 'democracy' exclusively with a world society, from which nation-states will vanish as a relic of the authoritarian past" (p. 49). "Globalization, the breakdown of national differences, and the ideal of equality are all destined to triumph, whether or not the American empire must self-destruct before this can happen" (p. 50).

This latest reading of American imperialism actually sees in it a historical demiurge which will bring about an end at which Marx would rejoice: "*Empire* ends on a suitably happy note, by having the 'multitudes' invade and occupy the incipiently multicultural West, which had heretofore exploited the Third World. This apocalyptic ending turns the nightmarish finale of Jean Raspail's *Camp of the Saints* (1973), in which beggars from the Indian subcontinent overrun Europe, into a consummation devoutly to be desired" (p. 53). The radical left of Europe differs with Francis Fukuyama's vision of the end of history only in seeking an end to American world predominance and to "an identifiably capitalist economy" (p. 53). In other words, the destruction of Western civilization is even more important to these ideological descendants of Marx than the fall of capitalism.

In his chapter on Neomarxism, Gottfried concludes that Neomarxist terms of reference (e.g., "overcoming the past" in Germany) were "attempts to fortify the revolutionary fervor of Marxism after its theoretical basis had begun to weaken" (p. 57). Neomarxists give "undue attention" to "a particular aspect of the Marxist-Leninist tradition, to the neglect of what had been its main tenets" (p. 57). Gottfried cites Jürgen Habermas's concept of "communicative action," liberation theology, and Sartreanism (pp. 58-59) as examples of this practice in which a part of the Marxism of the past is assumed to be enough to sustain its political potency as a whole.

The Neomarxists' revival of the works of Antonio Gramsci (pp. 60-66) is another example of this tactic. Neomarxists took up Gramsci's Hegelian strategy of Marxist revolution as "a long march through the institutions" (p. 63). Gramsci stressed the importance of the agrarian base for revolution, a reflection of the Communist Party's strength in southern Italy with its "retrograde economy" (p. 63). This radical agrarianism was applied to the Third World by the new Gramscian theorists.

The traditionalist conservative philosopher Roger Scruton has observed that “the only way Marxists have made their system work is by disguising Gramsci’s theory of class hegemony as a Marxist idea. By depicting the dominant class as molding popular consciousness, an approach that Genovese famously applied to his examination of antebellum American slave societies, Gramsci was doing something profoundly conservative, affirming the primacy of thought over the material and organizational conditions of production” (pp. 63–64).

Gottfried gives extensive attention to the Frankfurt School (pp. 66–78). The departure of the Institute for Social Research from classic Marxism became evident with the appointment as its director of Max Horkheimer, who called for a “theory of society” different from the one adopted by the young Marx (p. 67), a theory drawing upon Freud as well as Marx, one which could be deployed as a mass therapeutic. Theodor Adorno and others writing in *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), the Institute’s most influential work, examined “the psychological roots of authoritarian and profascist mentalities. This may be their most enduring contribution to the social-engineering Left” in urging “progressive state administrators to deal with ‘latent anti-Semitism’ and other forms of ‘pseudo-democratic’ expressiveness” (pp. 69–70).

Gottfried suggests that the Frankfurt School exemplifies a successful strategy of “cultural Bolshevism,” in which the culture, not the economic structure of a society, becomes the object of a transformational attack. He quotes Wolfgang Caspart, an Austrian critic, as observing that “the cultural Bolsheviks, who seethe with resentment, have altered the climate of opinion [in Europe] and shifted the cultural center leftward but in no way have they damaged capitalism or brought about a revolutionary change in the ownership of the forces of production” (p. 72). In Gottfried’s terms, the Frankfurt School “has incorporated a salmagundi of ideas framed in notoriously murky prose...European leftist intellectuals...had moved beyond Marxism...[U]ltimately they evolved from what has been called Neomarxism into a militantly antibourgeois stance that operates independently of Marxist economic assumptions” (p. 73).

The Americanization of the Frankfurt School followed upon the removal of the Institute from Frankfurt, Germany, to Columbia University. In the U.S., “Ties were developed in the thirties and forties between the Frankfurt School and the American academy and the American publishing industry, and this productive friendship continued to flourish into the sixties and seventies” (p. 73). Gottfried refers to Karen Horney and Eric Fromm as well as Herbert Marcuse as Frankfurt figures who had maximum impact in the U.S. Most significantly, like Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*, “*The Authoritarian Personality*...seemed [for many] an equally useful guide for social improvement” (p. 76). The Frankfurt School’s “war against prejudice was particularly suited for a state and society that accepted the value of politically imposed behavior modification” (p. 76). Gottfried agrees with the observations of Christopher Lasch in his *The True and Only Heaven* (1991) about the Frankfurt School. In

Lasch's view, "the Left had abandoned legitimate concerns about providing family support in order to work against traditional gender roles and religious beliefs. Lasch is particularly upset that the advocates of this therapeutic radicalism had left behind the working class as a reactionary force" (p. 77). The Frankfurt School's "Neomarxism had grown into a Post-Marxist cluster of attitudes and programs that traveled easily in American society...Critical Theory enjoyed the aid of federal and state agencies and the blessings of the media and entertainment industries..." (p. 77).

An early example of the Frankfurt School's tactic of a mass therapeutic was Adorno's "Gruppenexperimente," undertaken in 1949 with funding from the U.S. High Commission in Germany (p. 77). Though this pilot project was not replicated throughout the German society, as the Frankfurt theorists had envisioned, they did leave an enduring ideological footprint in that nation:

Frankfurt School theorists constructed a definition of "fascism" that could be extended rhetorically to anything deemed unprogressive or insensitive. This may not have been their only conceptual achievement, but historically it was their most significant (p. 78).

The next chapter, an examination of the "Post-Marxist Left," concerns the left's response to an unprecedented challenge that has followed in the wake of mass immigration into France and Italy. In those nations, discontent with Third World immigration has pushed workers to support nationalist parties of the right (p. 80). In response, the Loi Gayssot was enacted in France, which criminalizes speech or writing hostile to racial or religious groupings (p. 84). Gottfried describes the "antifascism" of this post-Marxist left, exemplified in the Loi Gayssot, as "Cultural Trotskyism" (p. 85). Somewhat surprisingly, he notes that "Immigration reform for the benefit of Third World populations, followed by laws aimed at curbing discrimination against racial minorities and recognition of feminist and gay rights, began in the United States about ten to fifteen years earlier than in Western Europe" (p. 91). Among the leftists of both France and Germany, "revolutionary economic change has taken a backseat to an ideology of open borders, gay rights, and feminism" (p. 92).

Gottfried believes that Jürgen Habermas is central to this development in Germany (pp. 94-104) and finds particular significance in Habermas's *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* (1976) (p. 21). Habermas has an "enthusiasm" "for Communists as antifascist educators" (p. 103), "antifascism" being almost the sole surviving remnant of classic Marxism. Gottfried gives little reason for the presumably towering influence of Habermas, leaving the reader to presume that it somehow must have arisen from his role as Horkheimer's apostle to the Germans.

In an in-depth look at American-style reeducation as it was implemented in Germany (pp. 104-118), Gottfried adduces a number of items of anecdotal evidence in support of his thesis that the post-Marxist left in Europe is a product of "Americanization." A few of the many interesting details of his

account will be cited here: Major General Robert A. McClure was Dwight Eisenhower's advisor on psychological warfare and from early 1946 director of the Division of Information Control in Berlin. McClure's team did not include a single psychiatrist, but his right-hand man, Murray I. Gurfein, was a follower of the Frankfurt School (pp. 104–105). Kurt Lewin, associated with the Frankfurt School, supported Henry Morgenthau's plan for agrarianized Germany (pp. 105–106). "Contrary to a now widespread supposition, German reeducation did not end with the onset of the Cold War" (p. 107). Gottfried's account draws on the work of Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing, *Charakterwäsche* (1965) (p. 110). He sees particular significance in the reception given to the historian Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, with its thesis of German guilt for World War I (p. 113), as well as President Richard von Weizsäcker's address of May 1985 "in which the entire German nation was accused of complicity in the deportation of the German Jews" (p. 114). British Tories and American neoconservatives welcomed Fischer's thesis (p. 116). Gottfried concludes that "It is not unreasonable to link Germany's present self-contempt and the receptiveness of its declining population to Post-Marxist trends to what the postwar occupation helped establish" (p. 118).

In the last chapter, Gottfried considers to what extent the post-Marxist Left is a "political religion." The reference is to Eric Voegelin's *The Political Religions* (1938) (p. 119), in which Voegelin offered a critique of the ideology of the left as a succedaneous faith. Voegelin's work referred to "the hard tyrannies of Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia" (p. 120), but Gottfried sees in the post-Marxist Left "a less obtrusive form of oppression," what Tocqueville called "the soft despotism" (p. 120), and concludes that the concept of "political religion" is inadequate to explain the post-Marxist Left because of its "self-liquidating aspect." As explained earlier, the multicultural ideology of the post-Marxists is "a deconstructing venture" (p. 24). This is due to "the emphasis placed on large-scale Third World immigration" and the "subreplacement birthrate among native Europeans" (p. 24). Earlier political religions, on the contrary, openly promoted "fecundity" (p. 25).

Gottfried provides a summary of what remains of Marxism:

Except for certain by now instinctive quirks, such as defending Communist dictatorships as humanitarian learning experiences, decrying those who call attention to Communist atrocities, and describing one's opposition as "fascist" and being in need of resocialization, the European Left has become Post-Marxist. It is socialist only residually and does not generally favor the nationalization of productive forces or the confiscation of wealth. What makes the European Left what it is today is at least partly its justification for a quasi-market economy (p. 122).

This justification arises from the fact that "...[A] now tamed capitalism has become the handmaiden of multiculturalism" (p. 123).

American neoconservatives and European leftists now agree in regarding with indifference the future of an ethnically and culturally identifiable West:

"A more homogenized humanity moving across open borders would be equally acceptable to both American neoconservatives and most European leftist intellectuals, however much they may disagree about the United States' present Middle Eastern policies" (p. 125). In support of this insight, Gottfried quotes Claes Ryn's *America the Virtuous*: "A person may endorse capitalism because letting the market do its work is the best way to uproot backward beliefs and related sociopolitical structures" (p. 126).

Political religiousness from the Marxism of the past also survives in the fact that "[w]hile the Marxist agenda of the European Left has changed, what has not is the ill will vented on those who resist its interests" (p. 127). The anti-fascist crusade is as intense as ever in Germany: "The German Left is carrying out a new founding of the Federal Republic, on the grounds that the bourgeois democracy created in 1946 did not go far enough to break with the Nazi past" (p. 131). In Italy, the crusade's fervor is manifested in Umberto Eco's call for "the ethnic reconstruction of the countries of destination [of the immigrants], an inexhaustible changing of customs, the unstoppable hybridization which will statistically alter the color of skin, hair, and eyes of the population" (p. 135).

In his "Conclusion," Gottfried presents what he sees as the dim prospect for any change in what is now tantamount to the reigning ideology of Europe: "...[G]iven the influx of non-Western populations and religions and the declining birthrate of the more indigenous Europeans, there is no compelling reason to think this situation will change" (p. 144). "Nor does it seem possible or even remotely convincing that Europeans can counter the Post-Marxist Left by reading or lecturing about 'values' ... [U]nless a rising or dominant elite would spearhead a campaign against the multicultural agenda, which is the sacred commitment of the Post-Marxist Left and its American counterparts, it is hard to see how such a purpose can be achieved" (pp. 144-145). As an example of what will happen to those who seek to resist this ideological hegemony, Gottfried cites the outlawing of the Vlaams Blok.

The final end of Marxism is unsurprising if one remembers that Marx, at the very moment in 1843 when he announced his discovery of the proletariat as the material force of revolution, also affirmed the priority of the intellectual force of the revolutionary theorists. His elitism found only slightly euphemistic expression in the following terms in his introduction to a critique of Hegel's philosophy of law: "As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy" (Seigel, 108). Perhaps all that has changed is the identity of the material force of destruction, the Third World immigrant of today rather than the proletariat of a century ago. Still, one must wonder why the latter-day "philosophers" do not see that they, too, must perish in the wreckage which they anticipate with delight, something that Marx had certainly never envisioned.

Gottfried's conclusion will seem bleak to most readers, but it is obviously not his intent to produce a polemic against what exists, much less to formulate

a mode of operation for a counter-attack against present realities. The reader who wants Western civilization to survive is left to assume that the situation is almost hopeless. Again, it would be unjustified to criticize Gottfried for his frankness. It would have been good, however, had this slender, but costly, book been somewhat longer, offering a more detailed examination of how this great transformation was effected. The author knows well that ideas are not in themselves prime movers and probably could have presented more than a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes machinations involved in what seems to be the innocent triumph of an idea. Despite that one reservation, this is a book which merits a careful reading and one which should be added to most academic library collections.

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#### REFERENCE

Seigel, Jerrold. *Marx's Fate: The Shape of a Life*. University Park, PA. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978.