Not What We Wanted, But All That We Get

Understanding today's Left and Right with Hegelian dialectics

Merel Scheltema (424634)

Erasmus University Rotterdam

MA Philosophy Now

Supervisor: Dr. G. van Oenen

Advisor: Dr. R. van den Akker

7 August 2022

Abstract

This thesis addresses the opposition between the Left and the Right, using Hegel's philosophy and dialectical method. The approach to Hegel's philosophy taken by Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan was followed. From a Hegelian perspective, the present is not only the present, but also encompasses the past immanent to it. A historical reconstruction of the development of the Left and Right thus allows for analysis of the present as well.

The opposition between the Left and the Right is an ideology that disguises the contradiction that underlies both their positions, which is that social order is unavoidably contradictory since existence itself is contradictory. The opposition between the Left and the Right springs from their stances on what the present social order should be replaced by. The Right sees a resolution of the social order's contradictions in an undisturbed past and the Left in a future when all antagonism is overcome. Moreover, the Right and the Left express two necessary sides to achieving subjective freedom. The communal constraint that the Right emphasizes is necessary to make self-consciousness and appreciation of freedom possible. The contradiction between existence's necessary dividedness and the Left and Right's unacceptance of this is what drives the dialectical development of the social order that they together realize. Both sides of social order, the dialectical Right and the speculative Left, are necessary parts of the dialectic that makes progress of the social order possible.

It is concluded that freedom can only be achieved by discarding ideology and facing the contradictory nature of existence. I argue in favor of McGowan's reading of Hegel that is more radical than that of Žižek in this respect. Instead of accepting contradiction and hoping to someday overcome all contradiction, we must sustain and further contradiction by insisting on non-contradiction. Above all else, we must thus not give up our struggle for freedom but continue to change the conditions of our struggle.

Tags: Hegel, Left, Right, Dialectics, Žižek, McGowan.

"Gentlemen! We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which Spirit has made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete form and acquired a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts that have been current until now, the very bonds of the world, are dissolved and collapsing into themselves like a vision in a dream. A new emergence of Spirit is at hand; philosophy must be the first to hail its appearance and recognize it, while others, resisting impotently, adhere to the past, and the majority unconsciously constitute the matter in which it makes its appearance. But philosophy, in recognizing it as what is eternal, must pay homage to it."

– Hegel, *Lectures at Jena* of 1806, final speech.

"The only thing I'm afraid of is that we will someday just go home and then we will meet once a year, drinking beer, and nostalgically remembering 'What a nice time we had here.' Promise yourselves that this will not be the case. We know that people often desire something but do not really want it. Don't be afraid to really want what you desire."

– Slavoj Žižek, speech at Occupy Wall Street, 2011.

"When the desire for radical social change emerges, it is logical that it should first endeavor to actualize this immanent utopian vision—which is why it has to end in catastrophe."

– Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil* (2014), 36.

Table of contents

List of abbreviations

The titles of Hegel's works most frequently referred to in this thesis, published in English translation, are abbreviated as follows:

Phenomenology	The Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
Philosophy of Right	The Philosophy of Right, translated by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942.
Shorter Logic	Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, translated by W. Wallace, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Introduction

What would Hegel have made of today's struggle between the Left and the Right? In recent years, the internet, bookstores, and academic journals have been flooded with commentaries, analyses, and smear campaigns trying to pin down either side of the opposition.[1] The Left is caricatured as a group of radical Social Justice Warriors that adheres to 'woke ideology' and demands 'political correctness' and conformity to identity politics by punishment of being 'cancelled'. The opposing Right is linked to online 'trolling', misogyny, conspiracy theorists, and white nationalism.

While the voices have become louder, the discussion has not become any clearer. Telling was the debate between Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Žižek that took place in Toronto in 2019. Over 3,000 people had come to witness what had been billed "the debate of the century." The debate was hailed as a 'heroic clash of Titans', in which "hard questions" would be resolved through "real thinking." (Marche 2019)

Peterson had risen to international fame after taking a public stance in a Canadian debate over transgender rights in 2016. He became an internationally known figure after a video of a confrontation between him and student activists accumulated millions of views on Youtube. Peterson's public attack of what he calls "radically politically correct thinking" on university campuses led him to be symbolically situated as reactionary, conservative and right-wing in debates on issues of gender, sexuality, identity, and progressive politics. (Lian 2019, 2; Beauchamp 2018). By his fan base, Peterson is seen as a "courageous intellectual that stands up against political correctness", a "savior of Western culture" who defends free speech, "Virtue," and "Truth" (Lian 2019, 2).

---

[1] See for example Douglas Murray's *The Madness of Crowds* (2019); Yasha Mounk (2018) *The People vs. Democracy*; *Cynical Theories* (2020) by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay; Timothy Brennan's *Wars of Position* (2006); *The politics of fear* (2015) by Ruth Wodak; *Wie Wat Woke* (2021) by Walter Weynes; and many more.

His opponent in the Toronto debate was Slavoj Žižek, who in popular culture is described as "a 'dazzling theorist' and 'a global figure' tackling issues of emancipation, ideology, subjectivity and art, (...) [who] considers himself a political radical, challenging what he sees as the pathologies of modern societies." (Lian 2019, 2) He has been described a "favorite of the millennial left," a "Hegelian leftist," and "most influential leftist in Europe." (Welsch 2020; Hennessy 2022). The debate with Peterson is said to have solidified Žižek's position as 'internet superstar.' It symbolically situated him as Peterson's Leftist antagonist, representing the progressive Left and revolutionary communist principles, while Peterson stands for the conservative Right and traditional patriarchal values (Last 2019, 2; Hennessy 2022). Nonetheless, Žižek's statements regarding issues like identity politics, race and multiculturalism have garnered much criticism from the progressive Left (Welsch 2020; Hennessy 2022).

In this thesis, I analyze the contemporary opposition between the Left and the Right. The goal is to come to a better understanding of what both the Left and the Right entail, having developed through different position throughout history. To achieve this, I make use of (some modern interpretation of) Friedrich Hegel's philosophy. From a Hegelian perspective, the present is not only the present, but also encompasses the past immanent to it. Hence, reflection on historical positions not only makes it possible to analyze the past, but also the present (Žižek 2012a, 20). By tracing the positions that the Left and the Right have worked through, we can come to a better understanding of what the Left and the Right are. We can also assess what is at stake in the struggle between the Left and the Right with the help of Hegel's philosophy as this allows for a systematic uncovering of the contradiction that inhabits both the Left and the Right. Opposition is merely a form that contradiction takes on to provide us with the false image that positions can be stable and undivided; it obscures the inability to ever be undivided. (McGowan 2021, 14-15)

Hegel's philosophy has always been interpreted in vastly different ways. The interpretation employed in this thesis leans on the interpretations offered by Todd McGowan and Slavoj Žižek. Todd

McGowan is professor of film studies at the University of Vermont, specializing in marxist and psychoanalytic film theory. In *Emancipation after Hegel* (2019), McGowan offers a reinterpretation of Hegel's philosophy in which contradiction is the revolutionary core of his work. His reevaluation of the split between the Left and Right Hegelians leads him to present "a new radical Hegel" (McGowan 2019, 6-10). In McGowan's view, drawing on Žižek, the main argument of Hegel's philosophy is that contradiction is inexorable and that emancipation "occurs through contradiction, not as a result of its overcoming." (McGowan 2019, 240) We must thus sustain contradiction rather than wanting to overcome it or dismissing it as a logical failure. (McoGowan 2019, 6-7) McGowan follows Žižek's 'Hegelian critique of Marx', in which a retroversive reading of Hegel through Marx i.e. the subjection of Marx's philosophy to Hegel's system reveals that Hegel's philosophy is more radical than that of Marx (Žižek 1993, 26; McGowan 2013, 42; Hamza 2016, 172).

To come to an understanding of the Left and the Right and the struggle between them, aided by Hegel's philosophy as interpreted by Todd McGowan and Slavoj Žižek, this thesis is built up in three parts. The first part lays the philosophical foundation. Chapter 1 explains Hegel's philosophy of history, and his dialectical method. Chapter 2 argues why Hegel's philosophy is still productive to understand the world in our time, expounding on Žižek's and McGowan's readings of Hegel.

In the parts thereafter, I argue that the Left and the Right can be understood as positions in a dialectical development. To achieve this, I firstly trace the dialectical development of the Left and the Right in the second part, chapter 3. I do this by discussing the positions that the Left and Right have taken on throughout history since the dichotomy's inception in the aftermath of the French Revolution. It must be noted that the historical construction presented in this part is fragmentary and takes big leaps - in time and place - at several instances.

Chapter 4 in the third part reflects on the historical reconstruction provided in the previous part and discusses the positions that the Left and the Right have worked through to develop into the Right

and the Left of today. By appreciating the mediation of these opposites from a Hegelian perspective

(Žižek 2012: 21), I formulate an interpretation of what the Left and the Right are and what is at stake in

their struggle. Based on all this, I argue in the conclusion why the "debate of the century" between

Peterson and Žižek may not have been what we had hoped for, but all that we get.

PART I: HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

1 Hegel revisited

Hegel's philosophy is notoriously difficult to grasp due to the complexity and abstractness of Hegel's prose. Moreover, scholars have interpreted his work in vastly different ways. Analyzing the dialectic between the Left and the Right thus requires that we firstly address the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy and dialectical method that is employed in this thesis in order to come to a better understanding of the Left and the Right and the opposition between them.

The first section of this chapter situates Hegel in his intellectual context. In the second section, Hegel's dialectical method is discussed in more detail.

1.1 Hegel's context

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831) was a major figure in the movement of German Idealism, which runs roughly from the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, to the eclipse of Hegelianism in the 1840s. The work of Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) bridged the two dominant philosophical schools in the 18th century: rationalism - which held that knowledge could be attained only by reason - and empiricism - which held that knowledge could only be arrived at through the senses. In brief, Kant's thesis is that we have no warrant for believing that what is 'outside' the mind looks like the impressions received by the mind; we only know about things-in-themselves by subsuming them under concepts and categories which are not inherent to them. (Plamenatz 1971: 34; Stratton-Lake 1999, 33)

Hegel's answer to Kant is that we can have knowledge of the world-in-itself because the reason that is in us, is in the world itself (Maybee 2016). In the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of*

Pure Reason, Kant writes: "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith (...)." (Kant 1998, 117) Whereas Kant 'made room' for faith in God or absolute otherness that is beyond the reach of our knowledge, Hegel denies this limitation on knowledge and leaves no room for faith in an absolute otherness. (McGowan 2013, 36-37; McGowan 2019, 199) Hegel thus rejects Kant's metaphysics: in his view, there is no objective reality independent of thought. We can use our reason to have knowledge of the world.

Importantly, Hegel does not return to a pre-Kantian realism but develops a new realism through Kant: Hegel takes on Kant's conception that reason speculatively generates conceptions, which is a process driven by necessity and leading to concepts of increasing universality or comprehensiveness (Maybee 2016). As Julie Maybee (2016) writes: "Hegel adopts Kant's dialectical conception of reason, but he liberates reason for knowledge from the tyranny of the understanding."

Whereas Kant affirmed the self-identical otherness that lies beyond reason, Hegel posits that there is no separate realm of things-in-themselves and that otherness thus ceases to be absolute and becomes thinkable (McGowan 2019, 224). There is no reality in-itself beyond phenomena, as Kant had argued. Instead, Hegel inscribes the impossibility to reach the things-in-themselves into the things themselves (Žižek 2019). The moment that an entity appears as identical to itself, the identity introduces otherness into itself. Since an identity cannot separate itself from what negates it, there is no pure self-identity; being itself is divided. (McGowan 2019, 73-74)

In this interpretation, Hegel's conceptions of 'the absolute' and 'absolute knowledge' refer to the knowledge of limit as constitutive for knowledge and for the subject. The absolute is not the overcoming of contradiction, a moment of complete transcendence, but the recognition of the contradictory or antagonistic nature of being, which makes contradiction thus inevitable. (McGowan 2013, 33)

1.2 Hegelian dialectics

Central to Hegel's philosophy is his dialectic method or "speculative way of knowing" (*Philosophy of Right*, 2). It follows from Hegel's absolute idealism that reality is to be found in rational thought. Hence, logic does not only study thought but also reality. As the dialectical method involves being forced from earlier moments to later ones, Hegel considers his method as a "proper exposition [that] belongs to logic" (*Phenomenology* §48) as it is thus driven by necessity, just like logic is (Maybee 2016).

The role of contradiction in Hegel's philosophy calls into question two pillars of traditional logic: the law of identity and the principle of noncontradiction (McGowan 2019, 7). Hegel shows that the law of identity reveals its self-refutation as otherness emerges through the articulation of it (McGowan 2019, 7-8). This is because formulating an identity through a proposition inadvertently reveals how the identity is not purely itself but is dependent on its distinction from other identities (McGowan 2019, 72). The negation of an identity is thus inscribed in the identity itself: identity depends on what negates it. This entails that there are thus no pure self-identical identities in the finite world. Hence, identifying an entity directly or even to fully describe it always leads to misidentification. Rather than try to offer a corrective, Hegel accepts misidentification as the only possible form that identification could take. (McGowan 2019, 30)

The principle of noncontradiction entails that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time. The principle of non-contradiction is related to the law of identity: when one says that an apple is not an apple, one violates the law of identity and falls into contradiction at the same time (McGowan 2019, 7). As we have already discussed above, identity is incapable of being identity without introducing some form of otherness into it, which reveals identity not to self-identical

but divided. When one is thinking and believes to adhere to the principle of noncontradiction, one ultimately discovers that insisting on noncontradiction leads to contradiction. Following the principle of noncontradiction through an analysis of a series of philosophical positions, eventually shows how a position is at odds with itself. This reveals that thinking that believes itself to be free of contradiction must go through contradiction in order to perform its operations. Its formulations of positions necessarily involve the negation of this same position. Rejecting the possibility of contradiction is thus self-contradictory. (McGowan 2019, 18-19)

The perspective on Hegel's relationship to the principle of noncontradiction is determinative for one's understanding of Hegel's project, but commentators on Hegel are divided on this issue. Žižek insists that the whole point of Hegel's philosophy is that one "accepts contradiction as an internal condition of every identity." (Žižek 1989, 6) McGowan argues that this should be taken even further: "The point is not just accepting contradiction but seeing how it drives our thinking and our actions. We don't retreat from contradiction but seek it out." (McGowan 2019, 8) We will discuss this in further detail in chapter 2.

In the following section, we firstly consider the 'three moments' of Hegel's dialectical method. Thereafter, we consider what Hegel's dialectics imply.

1.2.1 The three moments of the dialectic

Hegel himself used the term 'dialectics' rarely and his only extensive, general account of what he means by it is in the chapter of the Encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences that in English is often called the *Shorter Logic* (Stern 2002, 15).

Like other (earlier) dialectical methods, Hegel's dialectical method relies on a contradictory process between opposing sides that leads to a development from less sophisticated concepts to more sophisticated ones (Maybee 2016). The opposing sides in the dialectic are different moments in the

realization of a concept: a concept realizes through the sublation of its earlier determinations. Concepts

are central to Hegel's metaphysics since they are not only the products of human minds but also

constitutive of reality (Wolf 2018, 331-332). This follows from Hegel's absolute idealism which entails

that reality is to be found in rational thought.

Hegel distinguishes three moments in the development of thought, which he identifies as (i)

"the abstract side, or that of understanding"; (ii) "the dialectical, or that of negative reason"; and (iii)

"the speculative, or that of positive reason" (*Shorter Logic* §79, p. 113). The movement between these

moments is driven by necessity: the natures of the determinations themselves force them to pass into

their opposites (Maybee 2016). Contradiction thus animates Hegel's system.

Importantly, the contradiction that forces the movement between the moments is not mere

opposition. In Hegel's dialectics, there is no initial stable position (a 'thesis') that is externally confronted

by something else (an 'antithesis'); instead, the initial position finds itself at odds with itself, and

undermining itself by exposing its own internal contradiction. (McGowan 2019, 13) This process can be

illustrated with an analogy from the Preface of Hegel's *Phenomenology*:

> "The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is
> refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a
> false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These
> forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually
> incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity
> in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this
> mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole." (*Phenomenology* p. 2)

This analogy makes clear that for Hegel, later positions both cancel and preserve earlier

positions in the sense that these earlier positions become included in their new position.

Simultaneously, the blossom could have only realized itself through the negation of the bud; likewise, a

position can never constitute itself without simultaneously negating itself.

The first moment. The first moment is the moment of the understanding, in which concepts have a seemingly stable determination (*Shorter Logic* §80). According to Hegel, consciousness will always find it tempting to erroneously think of concepts as stable and uncontradictory, as we seek to order the world into distinct and self-identical aspects (Stern 2002, 15). However, there is no position that can function as a stable 'thesis'. A position is never an isolated starting point that is subsequently confronted by an external antithesis, as is the case in previous dialectic methods such as the one employed by Socrates. On the contrary, for Hegel, every position ultimately undermines itself because being itself is contradictory (McGowan 2019, 8-9; 13).

The second moment. The second moment is the moment of instability. In this "dialectical" or "negatively rational" moment, "a one-sidedness or restrictedness in the determination from the moment of understanding comes to the fore" (Stern 2002, 16). In other words, the initial position exposes its own internal contradiction. In following its own logic, the position finds itself at odds with itself leading consciousness to "plunge into despair" (McGowan 2019, 13; Stern 2002, 28). The seemingly stable distinctions of the first moment of understanding could not be sustained, and this leads us into incomprehension (Stern 2002, 16).

Robert Stern writes that it is something particular in the nature of the first moment's position, "a specific weakness, or some specific aspect that was ignored in its one-sidedness or restrictedness," that leads it to fall apart in the dialectical moment (Stern 2002, 16). The determinations that were fixed in the first moment destabilize the initial moment itself and this leads it to pass into their opposites (Stern 2002, 16). Others rather characterize it as a particular tension or contradiction within the initial position that ultimately leads to the position's negation - each position encompasses an internal tension that sublates itself into a new constellation. This is the process of "self-sublation."

"To sublate" translates Hegel's German "*aufheben*", which is a verb with a triple meaning: it means to cancel (or negate), to lift up, and to preserve at the same time. In the dialectical moment, the

internal tension within the initial position thus both cancels and (thereby) preserves itself, as it passes into a new and 'higher' constellation. This is like the bud being partly preserved in the blossom that blooms through the bud's refutation.

The third moment. The third moment, the "speculative" or "positively rational", grasps the unity of the opposition between the first two determinations. If we think about this in terms of concepts this entails that after we have been forced to rethink our concepts in such a way as to break down the either/or of the understanding, we arrive at a new conceptual standpoint, from which it can be seen that these concepts can be brought together, thereby overcoming the 'skeptical aporia' of the dialectical stage. (Stern 2002, 15-16).

After we have gone through the three moments of Hegel's dialectical movement, we arrive at a new position which is again a seemingly stable determination in the moment of understanding. We are thus caught in a characteristic movement: starting from one position, we come to see that the tensions within this position lead to the destabilization of the concept that will lead to its self-sublation. Consequently, the concept comes to adopt a new position by undermining the assumptions of the position from which it began. (Stern 2002, 28)

1.2.2 Implications of Hegel's dialectics

Hegel's dialectics shows that a clear opposition between two positions soon reveals itself not to be as clear as it appeared in its first instance. At some point, positions come to express that they are in fact at odds with themselves, and this internal contradiction or tension leads to the position's self-sublation. This leads to the Hegelian view that everything is developing through the paradoxical expression of internal tensions.

Hence, understanding of development only arises through continuous misunderstanding: one has to initially think that one understands in order to gain access to a position of better understanding

through the destabilization and sublation of one's earlier position. In other words, only with the

knowledge that we have achieved in the dialectic and speculative moment can we understand our initial

position from the first moment of understanding.

Notably, Hegel shows that any identity is unable to constitute itself without simultaneously

negating itself. This is because without its relationship to nothing that is evident in becoming, pure being

is indistinguishable from pure nothing. Contradiction is thus the necessary impurity of every identity:

being can never just be itself but requires its contradiction in order to be. (McGowan 2019, 9)

Hegel's dialectic could be seen as a hike in the mountains. Every time you enter a viewpoint, you

think that you now overlook the entire surroundings. This euphoria endures until you notice a path that

could bring you even further up the mountain to an even higher and better viewpoint. Because the hike

has changed your view on the mountain, it has changed the goal (Žižek 2014, 36), and you take the path

to the higher viewpoint. Once you have arrived there, and have taken in the even more breathtaking

view, you again notice a path that could bring us even further up the hill - and so on.

Crucially, Hegel has shown us that it is impossible to ever reach the top of this mountain and

have a complete view. However, this inability to reach the top is what constitutes the climb in the first

place. Modern philosophy after Hegel is likewise characterized by the acknowledgement of the radical

non-conjunction of thought and being, of ideal and reality, a "constitutive lack of identity".

2 Reviving Hegel

One of the main critiques toward Hegel is that his thought is teleological and constitutes an impasse to political and social change (Hamza 2016, 167). In this view, a problem with Hegel's system is that it is self-referential; in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel traces the development that culminates in the last chapter as the moment in which absolute knowledge of reality, and thereby absolute freedom, is finally achieved.

For Hegel, philosophy arrives at absolute knowledge of reality when it recognizes that "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational." (*Philosophy of Right*, p. 10) However, as we have established earlier, absolute knowledge is the recognition of the contradictory nature of being which derives from Hegel's rejection of a reality in-itself that is beyond reason. Since there is no separate substantive realm, otherness becomes thinkable and thereby inscribed into being - being and reason are thus inextricably contradictory. (McGowan 2019, 31-32; 224)

Freedom is the negation of what would otherwise determine the course that the subject pursues (McGowan 2013, 33). So, to be free for Hegel is to refuse to have one's course affected by an absolute other, a being that appears beyond contradiction. Being impressed by such a self-identical being is a barrier to a subject's recognition of his or her freedom. Absolute knowledge reveals to the subject that there is in fact no separate realm of things-in-themselves and thus shows that every being exists through contradiction. (McGowan 2019, 152) Arriving at absolute knowledge thus coincides with achieving absolute freedom as the subject with absolute knowledge no longer relies on a self-identical being to determine the course that the subject pursues.

Hegel's proposition that absolute freedom has been achieved with the arrival at absolute knowledge with his work in early nineteenth century Prussia has divided Hegel's followers. Shortly after Hegel's death, his followers split into two camps over this issue. While the Right Hegelians defended Hegel's philosophy, including his support of the Prussian monarchy and his embrace of Christianity, the Left Hegelians did not accept Hegel's apparent elimination of the possibility of challenging the ruling order. The Left Hegelians posited that Hegel had not taken his own philosophy far enough, so took his dialectical method and focus on the historical development of subjectivity to argue for progress. (McGowan 2019, 1) They interpreted Hegel's statement "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" as a justification and rationalization of the status-quo renounces further political or social change. This is because the absolute is then understood as eliminating any space outside the given reality from which one might contest the status quo. (Hamza 2016, 167; McGowan 2019, 31-32)

The Left Hegelians committed themselves to taking Hegel 'beyond Hegel' to achieve a social order in which the absolute is 'truly' achieved by the reconciliation of all antagonisms (McGowan 2019, 169). Karl Marx, a Left Hegelian, developed dialectical materialism which entails that a substantial future free form contradiction is achievable through the overcoming of class contradictions. Crucially, the acceptance of the substantiality of the future realm of freedom after the proletarian revolution enables one to commit any atrocity for the sake of ushering in this future realm. This future free from contradiction comes to justify any barbarity as an investment in the substantiality of this future, like a noncontradictory, absolute other. In this view, Marx's transformation of Hegel's philosophy justifies the rise of Stalinist terror as an investment in the substantiality of a future in which contradiction is overcome. (McGowan 2019, 5)

2.1 Why it is still possible to be a Hegelian today

McGowan argues that it is precisely the failures of the nineteenth and twentieth century's Left Hegelians in understanding and applying Hegel's philosophy that has created an opportunity to discover a new version of Hegel: the missteps of the Left Hegelians (and Right Hegelians) have cleared the path for a new, more radical Hegel. The combination of Hegel's philosophy and the work of Left Hegelians - especially that of Marx - has created an opening for the rediscovery of a new version of Hegel. (McGowan 2019, 2) Critical in this rediscovery of Hegel has been the redevelopment of dialectics carried out by Slavoj Žižek.

Žižek advocates a radicalization of Marx by uncompromisingly subject him to Hegel's system (Hamza 2016, 172). He asserts that Marx was "too (pseudo-)Hegelian" since he thought of the dialectical process as pointing towards its future resolution (Žižek 2014, 73). This implies deterministic teleology: knowing what comes after the overcoming of the distinction and also knowing how to actualize this overcoming. From this perspective, the future is already written, and we just need to make it real (Last 2018). From a strict Hegelian standpoint however, this stance is untenable since dialectics can only be an operation of free retroactivity: through dialectics, the concept realizes itself, but we can only know this retroactively (Last 2018).

Žižek has referred to this difference between Marx and Hegel as the difference between the 'Gaelic Rooster' and the 'Owl of Minerva'. The Gaelic Rooster stands for those that believe that they hold the truth and know the destiny of historical being, such as participants in the French Revolution or Marxist revolutions. The characterization of the Owl of Minerva is based on a famous line from the Preface of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk." (*Philosophy of Right* p. 13) In *Less Than Nothing* (2012), Žižek makes his analogy of the 'Gaelic Rooster' and the 'Owl of Minerva' explicit in his discussion of the difference between Marx and Hegel:

"in contrast to Hegel, who was well aware that the owl of Minerva takes wing only at dusk, after the fact- that Thought follows Being (which is why, for Hegel, there can be no scientific insight into the future of society) - Marx reasserts the primacy of Thought: the owl of Minerva (German contemplative philosophy) should be replaced by the singing of the Gaelic rooster (French revolutionary thought) announcing the proletarian revolution - in the proletarian revolutionary act, Thought will precede Being. Marx thus sees in Hegel's motif of the owl of Minerva an indica-tion of the secret positivism of Hegel's idealist speculation: Hegel leaves reality the way it is." (Žižek 2012b, 220)

Hegel's Owl of Minerva knows that it is impossible to predict the future, and therefore does not pretend that it can make reality conform to an ideal. Instead, it knows that its moment is not the moment of highest tension when the teleological resolution seems near, but the moment after, when the resolution is accomplished - but misses its goal "and turns into nightmare". (Žižek 2014, 36) This is because, from a strict Hegelian perspective, a teleological process will always go wrong since the intended goal will turn into its opposite. Žižek illustrates this with the reversal of revolutionary emancipation into Stalinist nightmare. (Žižek 2014, 74)

This žižekian perspective on Hegel's philosophy understands contradiction as unsurpassable. People cannot actualize a pre-existing objective structure; to do so they would have to know their place in history - which is impossible since history is constantly reinterpreted. This means that Hegelian dialectics is "the recording of successive acts of re-description of the past and its necessity. There can no longer be a necessary becoming; instead, there is a becoming of necessity, a permanent conversion of necessity into contingency." (Cesarale 2016, 216)

Žižek's interpretation of Hegel's absolute does not eliminate the idea of reconciliation but understands it as a change in perspective on contradiction. Rather than being an obstacle to overcome, contradiction is the nature of being. This entails that no matter how much progress society makes, no social order can overcome the structural fact of contradiction. Antagonism is thus the barrier to society's full self-identical realization, but to recognize the absolute is to know that this barrier against ever

attaining society's realization is at once what makes progress towards it possible. (McGowan 2013, 32-33)

According to Žižek, relations of domination exist not because of contradiction but because society works to hide its own contradictory structure by means of ideology (McGowan 2019, 48).[2] Opposition is merely a form that contradiction takes on. In their attempt to escape from contradiction, subjects find solace in ideologies of opposition. Ideology transforms contradictions into oppositions to establish on the one hand an external enemy to fight and on the other a coherent sense of identity for oneself. Ideologies of opposition thus divide the world into thesis and antithesis; into friends and enemies. Subjects are drawn towards these ideologies because oppositions are much easier to manage and much less threatening to the subject's sense of identity than contradictions are. (McGowan 2021, 14)

Hegel's philosophy systematically uncovers contradiction lurking within opposition to reveal that oppositions are really just contradictions 'in disguise'. Whereas contradictions undermine positions from within and reveal how they fail to attain self-identity through their own logic, oppositions provide the subject with the false image of a stable self-identity that obscures the inability to be undivided. Recognizing this enables us to challenge the ideology of opposition but also forces us to face the inescapability of contradiction and to see the contradictions that inhabit ourselves as well. (McGowan 2019, 14-15)

Nevertheless, confronting the inescapability of contradiction also frees us from the power of authority over us. As long as we do not reach 'absolute knowledge', in other words accept that existence is necessarily divided, we continue to recognize perfect self-identity in some form of otherness, and this

---

[2] Žižek makes use of Althusser's definition of ideology as obscuring social antagonism, which rules out the possibility of a struggle between different forms of ideology. Instead, the struggle will always be between the proponents of the real antagonism and ideology. (McGowan 2013, 52)

otherness will always function as a barrier to our political acts. The political act, as Žižek sees it, thus

places us face-to-face with contradiction and refuses all paths that promise relief from it. (McGowan

2013, 48) Facing contradiction entails letting go of our imagined enemies, which also deprives us of our

image of self-identity (McGowan 2019, 14-15).

2.2 How to be a Hegelian today

Contradiction is thus perceived by both Žižek and McGowan to be the motor that animates

Hegel's system. Accepting this allows for philosophy to take up the task of open historiography: we can

reflect on how the dialectical process has retroactively created its own conditions of possibility. Another

understanding of an event is formulated in such a way that "the event is prior to the unfolding of its

consequences, but this can be asserted only once these consequences are here." (Žižek 2014, 73; Hamza

2016, 166) Žižek writes about this: "the failure of the Marxist revolutions makes it clear that we can no

longer rely on the eschatology of the New-to-come—the future is open." (Žižek 2014, 37)

Building upon Žižek's redevelopment of Hegelian dialectics, McGowan demonstrates the

emancipatory potential of Hegel's philosophy. Emancipation occurs through sustaining contradiction,

not as a result of the overcoming of contradiction. One does so by insisting that the society actualizes

itself through its failure to be self-identical. (McGowan 2019, 240-241) It means accepting the

insubstantiality of whatever authority we worship. By recognizing the structuring role of contradiction

for subjectivity and being, Hegel's philosophy provides an ontological basis for freedom. Rather than

trying to eliminate contradiction, the point of Hegel's dialectics is that we have to find a path to sustain

and further it. (McGowan 2019, 6-7) In this understanding of emancipatory politics, the means is the end

because the end, no matter how ideal, never provides a solution. (McGowan 2019, 244)

What distinguishes McGowan's position from that of Žižek is their attitude towards the principle

of noncontradiction. As stated earlier, Žižek insists that the whole point of Hegel's philosophy is that one

"accepts contradiction as an internal condition of every identity." (Žižek 1989, 6) McGowan argues on the contrary that instead of accepting contradiction - which entails the rejection of the principle of noncontradiction - we have to take the principle of noncontradiction more seriously.

McGowan posits this on the basis that it is precisely Hegel's concern for the principle of noncontradiction that enables him to discover the fact of contradiction. If we claim that we simply accept contradiction, and one allows oneself to say anything, then one can say nothing. Accepting contradiction without struggling against it necessarily involves granting the wholeness of the other's identity which means that the other becomes self-identical and thereby completely alien to the subject seeking to know it. This leads to the failure to see being as divided and self-identity as impossible. If being is identical with itself, political action becomes impossible. (McGowan 2019, 35-36)

Instead, by taking the principle of noncontradiction seriously, we can discover how a position is at odds with itself. This leads to a subsequent position that avoids the contradiction that undid the previous one but that inaugurates a new contradiction. And this entails progress. (McGowan 2019, 18-19) In other words, we should not 'agree to disagree' by accepting contradiction but we should actively think through positions according to the principle of noncontradiction in order to find how those positions are self-contradictory, which enables us to move to increasingly better positions.

So, McGowan's point is that we should find a path to sustain and further contradictions as this allows for progress. Rather than dreaming of a resolution of all antagonism, the task of the philosopher involves tearing down all the false paths of escape that promise freedom from the alienation that comes with the antagonistic nature of the social order. Philosophy is in this view the drive to uncover the intractability of contradiction through the insistence on the principle of noncontradiction. (McGowan 2019, 18-20)

2.3 Utilizing Hegelian dialectics in this thesis

Ultimately, we are left with historical self-reflection, in which philosophy accounts for its own

possibility. This is productive for our current position as well since reflection on the past is ultimately an

'ontology of the present.' (Žižek 2014, 36) The present is not only the present, but also encompasses a

perspective on the past that is immanent to it. We need the rational tools achieved through the dialectic

in order to properly understand the earlier positions - only in retrospect do we properly understand

what has happened, and this proper understanding changes the past moment too. This is why Žižek tells

us that we are inevitably in the 'Hegelian moment', the moment after the moment of highest tension,

when the resolution has missed its goal (Žižek 2014, 36).

Assessing the dialectical development that the Left and Right have worked through thus tells us

about their present positions too, exposing the contradiction within both the Left and Right that

underlies the opposition between them. Discovering this contradiction enables us to challenge the

ideology of opposition. This enables us to see that oppositions are just contradictions in disguise.

(McGowan 2019, 14-15) When we face the contradictory nature of existence, recognize that our identity

is unavoidably at odds with itself, and dispose of the dependency of a self-identical other to dictate our

existence, we free ourselves from the power of authority over us.

From this interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, it follows that a historical moment is not limited

to the present but also includes the way the future appeared to and from this moment. (Žižek 2012a,

20) Hence, analysis of past moments could show us a glimpse of the future as well, since the future's

contradiction is already immanent in the moment we analyze. Nonetheless, this glimpse into the future

is something that we necessarily cannot understand properly in this moment, as it is beyond the horizon

of our thinking (Žižek 2014, 38). Hegel's philosophy thus not allow for assessment of the future, but only

for interpretation of the present and past.

PART II: HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT

3 History of the Left and Right

Through historical analysis of the past, we can come to understand the present. In this chapter, I

reflect on the historical development of the Left and Right. We have become so accustomed to

organizing political opinions and differences in terms of Left and Right that it has come to the point of

becoming a cliché. (Bobbio 1996, 2; Gauchet 1996, 241) Nonetheless, I strive to demonstrate that there

is more to the Left and Right than a mere clichéd dichotomy.

The aim of the historical reconstruction presented in this part is to assess the positions that the

Left and the Right have developed through in order to come to a better understanding of their present

positions. Moreover, this historical reconstruction is meant to demonstrate that the opposition between

the Left and the Right shifts and adapts continuously, revealing that the opposition between the Left

and Right is a mere disguise for the contradiction that is present in both their positions. As we will see,

since identity is necessarily split, those we imagine as our enemies most often turn out to be versions of

ourselves (McGowan 2019, 14). The historical reconstruction provided in this chapter establishes the

foundation for my interpretation of what the present positions of the Left and the Right are and what is at stake in their struggle.

I do not pretend to 'cover everything' in this philosophical reconstruction of the history of the opposition between the Right and the Left. Given the broad historical scope covered in this limited thesis, it is inevitable that this reconstruction is schematic and fragmentary. The historical reconstruction is at times unbalanced, extending on certain elements whereas others are skimmed over which I have deemed less relevant to the central argument of this thesis. In the same vein, for purposes of clarity, the discussion of the dialectical developments of the Left and the Right is divided into centuries as much as possible, starting in the eighteenth century with the birth of the Left and Right dichotomy in the French Revolution.

3.1 Eighteenth century

The period between 1789 and 1848 was dominated by two revolutions: the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. The Industrial Revolution broke out in England, sometime in the 1780s; contemporary with, but slightly prior to the French Revolution. (Hobsbawm 1996, 27-29) New industrialized economies brought about a shift from a largely rural and agricultural population to a largely urban, non-agricultural population and led to widespread discontent among the new laboring poor. (Hobsbawm 1996, 38; 47)

Moreover, the French Revolution of 1789 marked a turning point in European history. Revolutionary aspirations for individual liberty clashed with social equality goals, and the rejection of monarchy and adoption of rules based on reason marked the end of ontologically justified hierarchy. Universal freedom was recognized for the first time and divine power, the authority of some undivided other beyond the reach of knowledge, could no longer justify earthly authority or dictate the terms of

human existence. With the French Revolution, authority became subjected and divided, and thereby

ceased to be authoritative. (McGowan 2019, 217-218)

The Revolution mirrored an Enlightenment perspective on history, which it viewed as open to

guidance by enlightened reason. Rather than as the inevitable realization of a divine design, Hegel saw

the French Revolution as exemplifying the self-realization of the human spirit by having led to the

discovery of freedom, equality, and solidarity. Freedom is recognized for the first time not just as

desirable but as fundamentally inescapable. (McGowan 2019, 219)

The French Revolution was succeeded by the period known as the Reign of Terror in 1793 and

1794, coming with waves of executions and massacres. For Hegel, the Reign of Terror was the logical

outcome of the French Revolution due to the inadequacy of the abstract concept of 'absolute freedom'

handled by the revolutionaries to overcome particular problems. It is the expression of the

revolutionaries' failed attempt to "bring heaven down to earth" which reinstated an abstract self-

identical otherness that neglected the 'earthly real' and ignored the imperfection that comes with the

practical application of the Enlightenment values. (Comay 2011, 56)

From the French Revolution sprung the initial positions that the Left and the Right took on. Next

to that, the two revolutions of the eighteenth century gave rise to four modern ideologies: liberalism,

conservatism, socialism, and nationalism. Of these four, the first three can be linked to the Left and the

Right. In the next sections, I firstly discuss the rise of the Left and the Right in their initial position of

'left-wing' and 'right-wing'. Thereafter I discuss the modern ideologies that emerged from the French

revolution.

3.1.1 Left-wing and right-wing

The terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' appeared during the French Revolution when members of

the French National Assembly divided into supporters of the king - which were seated to the right of the

president - and supporters of the revolution - who were seated on the left (Bobbio 1996, 33). The right-wing sought to preserve most of the king's powers while the left-wing wanted to change the political order by reducing the king's power. According to Norberto Bobbio, it was pure accident that the names given to the two political poles were 'left' and 'right' (Bobbio 1996, 33). He references Jean Laponce, who considers the horizontal axis between left and right as being introduced as a replacement for the vertical axis that was dominant at the time. (Bobbio 1996, 39; Laponce 1981, 8)

When the National Assembly was replaced in 1791 by the Legislative Assembly, the divisions continued. On the right sat the 'conscientious defenders of the constitution,' while 'moderates' gathered in the center, and the 'innovators' sat on the left (Bobbio 1996, 33). In France, the Left has therefore also become known as "the party of movement," while the Right is designated as "the party of order" (Knapp & Wright 2006, 10).

3.1.2 Modern ideologies

Conservatism, liberalism, and socialism are the most influential political ideologies of the post-Enlightenment era. All three ideologies crystallized into definite traditions of thought and practice in the aftermath of the French Revolution, responding to the challenges of modernity that came with the Industrial Revolution and French Revolution. Their postulates are thus the distinctive features of modern life and the intellectual outlook that could have originated only in the post-traditional society of Europe after the dissolution of Christian divine authority. (Gray 1995, 78)

A fourth ideology that has also rose in the eighteenth century is nationalism (Breuilly 2011, 77). Nationalism is an outlook that holds that groups defined as nations have the right to form territorial states of the kind that emerged since the French Revolution (Hobsbawm & Kertzer 1992, 4). Central to nationalism is the assertion that humanity is divided into nations and that nations are worthy of recognition and respect which finds its expression in political autonomy (Breuilly 2011, 77). Nationalism

is not discussed any further in this section, as it is an ideology that is difficult to classify as either Leftist

or Rightist.

Below, the three major ideologies of the post-Enlightenment era - liberalism, conservatism, and

socialism - are described in more detail. Of these three ideologies, conservatism can be tied to the right-

wing, and socialism to the left-wing. As will be explained, liberalism cannot be classified as either right-

wing or left-wing at this point.

Liberalism. Liberalism is the quintessential political theory of the modern age because it was a

version of the animating project of modernity, which was the Enlightenment project (Gray 1995, 85).

The ideology of classic liberalism consists of features that are distinct in all later versions of liberalism

too: it offers a conception of man and society that "is individualist, in that it asserts the moral primacy of

the person against any collectivity; egalitarian, in that it confers on all human beings the same basic

moral status; universalist, affirming the moral unity of the species; and melioristic, in that it asserts the

open-ended improvability, by the use of critical reason, of human life." (Gray 1995, 86)

A liberal outlook sees the social world as consisting out of self-contained individual atoms with

specific ingrained passions and drives. Each individual seeks to maximize satisfaction and minimize

dissatisfaction, and 'naturally' rejects any restrictions of, or interference with these drives. In the pursuit

of self-interest, individuals enter into relationships with each other (social contracts) to avoid chaos and

secure survival. This constitutes society and social or political groupings, and entails that individuals

have to give up some of their inherently unrestricted freedom. From the liberal perspective, it is thus

the task of politics to minimize such interference with the drives of individuals as much as possible.

(Hobsbawm 1996, 235)

Hegel has become viewed as offering a radical critique of some key Enlightenment assumptions

that underly traditional liberalism. For instance, Hegel's philosophy opposes the liberal atomistic (and

undivided) conception of the self and liberalism's negative conception of freedom. It has been argued

that Hegel's political philosophy can be seen as advocating liberalism but with non-liberal philosophical

justifications: it pursues freedom, but its conception of freedom is slightly different from the liberal

definition of freedom as being free from external coercion. (Franco 1997) In Hegel's view, freedom

cannot be achieved by abolishing all external authority but instead requires it to be realized (McGowan

2019, 218-219).

In the eighteenth century, the liberal political doctrine was not coherent, which entailed that it

remained torn between the left-wing and the right-wing. On the one hand, liberals were committed to

popular government and majority rule, which reflected the Enlightenment radicalism. On the other

hand, the belief in government led by an upper-class elite was prevalent among liberals who distrusted

the aptitude of the actual majority - it being the poor - to further the program of middle-class liberals.

(Hobsbawm 1996, 239-240) After the Reign of Terror, liberals shied away from popular democracy,

preferring (constitutional) monarchy instead. The liberal aversion to democracy intensified with the

revolutions of the post-Napoleonic period, especially after the 1830 Revolution. Liberalism and

democracy came to be adversaries rather than allies (Hobsbawm 1996, 240-241)

Conservatism. Conservative thought rose in response to the French Revolution and the Glorious

Revolution in England in 1688. In his study of conservatism, renowned sociologist Karl Mannheim has

characterized conservatism as emerging when something new arises that is perceived to threaten the

established way of life. He writes: "conservatism first becomes conscious and reflective when other

ways of life and thought appear on the scene, against which it is compelled to take up arms in the

ideological struggle." (Mannheim and Wolff 1993, 173)

In the late eighteenth century, that threat was seen in the progressive and rationalist thought of

the French Revolution and bourgeois capitalism. Conservatism is thus characterized by Mannheim as an

intellectual reaction to the perceived threat of radical Enlightenment liberalism. Conservatives started to

express and guard the pre-Enlightenment way of life. Traditions of the nobility, peasants and petty

bourgeois got adopted by the conservatives in their construction of a counter-revolutionary outlook, emphasizing community over society; family over contract; intuition over reason; spiritual over material experience. (Mannheim 1993; Oudenampsen 2021, 111) Conservatism is nostalgic: it longs for the utopia it sees lying in the past, before it was disturbed by forces for radical change.

Moreover, conservative thought is skeptical of the generic humanity and abstract individuality that it sees celebrated in liberalism. Conservatives see individuality as a cultural achievement rather than a natural fact. Central to the conservative doctrine are authority, loyalty, hierarchy and order, rather than equality, liberty and universality which are central to liberalism. From a conservative perspective, relations of authority between rulers and subjects are seen as natural facts of social life. (Gray 1995, 78-79)

By positioning itself in opposition to radical Enlightenment liberalism, conservatism developed from an inarticulate sentiment to a rationally elaborated doctrine. Ironically, through this development into an intelligible doctrine, conservatism became increasingly disconnected from its feudal, agrarian origins, and developed into a modern, urban current of thought. (Oudenampsen 2021, 111-112)

Socialism. Like conservatism, traditional socialism saw the way that life has changed at the hand of modernity, rational individualism, and industrialization as detrimental. Socialists saw communal social forms shattered by the force of individualism and the rise of new classes in society. They broke radically with the liberal assumption that social order is a mere aggregate of individual atoms, motivated only by their self-interest and competition. Moreover, socialists rejected the abstract individualism that they saw represented in liberal thought and returned to the belief that man is naturally a communal being. (Gray 1995, 80; Hobsbawm 1996, 243)

Traditional socialists deemed the increasingly uneven distribution of incomes in this period as the product of the operations of the capitalist system. Nevertheless, socialists were optimistic about the opportunities that industrialism offered for progressing towards a classless, egalitarian society. None of

the new socialists wished to turn the clock of social evolution back as the conservatives wanted: they believed that the solution lay beyond rather than behind it. They perceived of liberalism as a transitional phase in social development, an episode that would be overcome with communism which is the realization of a classless, egalitarian society. (Gray 1995, 80; Hobsbawm 1996, 241-242)

Although the basis for modern socialism originates in the Enlightenment, modern socialism found its theoretical underpinning in the works of Left Hegelian Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels. Modern 'scientific' socialism as developed by Marx and Engels is discussed below in section 3.2.2., which concerns the Old Left and the marxist socialism that underpins it.

3.2 Nineteenth century

From 1792 until 1815, there was almost uninterrupted war in Europe and its colonies (Hobsbawm 1996, 77). The period from 1815 to 1830 is known as the Restoration, it is the period in which the old regimes tried to strengthen their reign and prevent more revolutions (Hobsbawm 1996, 99-108; 114). Ultimately, this failed, and the rest of the nineteenth century became marked by revolutions and the rise of organized political movements. (Hobsbawm 1996, 109-111)

In the following section discussing the position of the Left and Right in the nineteenth century, we firstly discuss the split of Hegel's followers into the 'Left' and the 'Right' camp from 1831 onwards. Thereafter, we discuss the Old Left and the Old Right. As the Russian Revolutions in the early twentieth century are more related to the Old Left than to the New Left of the twentieth century, a broad scope is taken of the nineteenth century which covers the Russian Revolutions as well.

The Left Hegelians form the link between socialism, the left-wing and the Old Left. The Left Hegelians are related to the left-wing that came into being in the aftermath of the French Revolution: both the Left Hegelians and the left-wing supported revolution and change of the status-quo. The Old Left grew out of socialism and furthered the socialist belief that the salvation from the detrimental circumstances caused by capitalism lies in the future rather than in the pre-Enlightenment past. This

socialist outlook can be linked to the left-wing of the eighteenth century: it subscribes the belief that the

present order must be changed in order to reach a better future. Likewise, the Right Hegelians can be

linked to the right-wing and conservatism. Alike the right-wing, the Right Hegelians supported the

existing order by embracing Hegel's defense of the Prussian monarchy and Christianity. They prefer to

return to the stable world before it became threatened by progressive radicalism.

Before moving on, I want to give a brief explanation of the used terminology. The 'Old Left' is a

designation that has come into usage after the phrase 'New Left' was appropriated to designate the

leftist movements of the twentieth century. In response, the Left of the nineteenth century has been

designated as prior, and thus 'Old'.[3] (Hanson 2018; Farred 2000, 628-629) The Old Right is an established

designation for the Rightist conservative movements of the nineteenth century in the United States. In

the United Kingdom, this ideology is usually designated as 'one-nation conservatism' and in Europe, it is

called 'Continental conservatism'. In this thesis, the phrase 'Old Right' is used to cover all these three

Rightist ideologies.

3.2.1 Right Hegelians and Left Hegelians

Immediately after Hegel's death in 1831, two schools emerged that offered radically different

readings of Hegel's political philosophy. These two schools have become known as the Left or Young

Hegelians and the Right or Old Hegelians. (Stern 2002, xi) The schism between the Young and Old

Hegelians was based on solely philosophical grounds, while the distinction between the Left and Right

Hegelians resulted from political and religious differences as well.

The Old Hegelians took Hegel's philosophy conservatively and did not develop it any further

beyond the period of Hegel's personal influence (Löwith 1991, 54). The designation 'Young Hegelians'

---

[3] In line with this terminology of 'Old Left' and 'New Left', twenty-first century supporters of the 'Old Left' have been designated 'New Old Leftists', see 3.4.4.

arose in reaction, to refer to the young generation of Hegel's followers, who had more innovative

tendencies (Löwith 1991: 66).

The schism between the Old Hegelians and Young Hegelians was absorbed by the split that rose

in response to questions of religion and later questions of politics regarding Hegel's philosophy (Löwith

1991, 70). Initially, the two schools were known as the Hegelists (Left Hegelians) and Hegelites (Right

Hegelians). The division into the Left Hegelians and the Right Hegelians was first made by theologian

David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), amplified by Karl Michelet (1801–1893), and has been dominant

ever since. Strauss was inspired by the political division of the French Parliament into 'left-wing' and

'right-wing', drawing on the left-wing advancement of innovation of the social order (Löwith 1991, 53;

Lichtheim 1964, 11). Due to the continuity in the intellectual outlook of the Old Hegelians and the Right

Hegelians on the one hand, and Young Hegelians and Left Hegelians on the other, these designations

have come to be used interchangeably. For reasons of clarity, we maintain the designations Right

Hegelians and Left Hegelians in this thesis.

Right Hegelians. The Right Hegelians followed in the style of Hegel's later years and took his

philosophy in a politically and religiously conservative direction. They reconciled his religious views with

Christianity and took the state as a justification of established religion and politics. They read into

Hegel's historicism the historical inevitability of modern institutions: a state was an Ideal, existing above

and about the people who constituted it. To argue for political change was to attack the Ideal of the

state. The Right Hegelians also embraced the last part of the *Philosophy of History*, which claimed the

Prussian state to be the culmination of progress and the incarnation of the *Zeitgeist*. Accordingly, the

Right Hegelians accepted that advanced European societies of the first half of the nineteenth century

were the summit of all social development, the product of the historical dialectic up to then. (Singer

2001, 109)

Left Hegelians. Contrary to the Right Hegelians, the Left Hegelians saw Hegel's acceptance of Christianity, the (Prussian) state, and the seeming defense of the status-quo as Hegel's failure to carry through the radical implications of his own philosophy. They saw Hegel's philosophy as a demand for a better world (Singer 2001, 109-110). Setting out to realize their radical vision, they rejected the idea that Prussia in the 1830s was the fulfilment of Hegel's philosophy.

The Left Hegelians initially focused on religion as the main barrier to the development of a society in which human abilities could flourish. (Singer 2001, 110) Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) reduced Hegel's God to a projection of humanity. After that, the Left Hegelians moved to the state as their object of critique. The Left Hegelians found it unacceptable that history would have achieved its end in the status quo through Hegel's work. They could not accept that philosophy could not go beyond the comprehension of the contemporary social order as necessary and therefore rational, as this would foreclose the possibility to innovate the current social order. (Lichtheim 1964, 8-10)

Karl Marx, who became the leading intellectual figure of the Left in the nineteenth century (and thereafter), was a Left Hegelian who transformed Hegel's dialectics into dialectical materialism which became the underpinning of the marxist Old Left. Marx took on the Left Hegelian reading of Hegel's philosophy and combined it with English political economy and French socialism to establish his philosophy.

3.2.2 The Old Left

In the early nineteenth century, socialists could be broadly divided into three groups: these were the Fourierists and Saint-Simonians in France and the Owenites in Great Britain. At this point, socialists advocated what later became called 'utopian socialism': convinced that the Enlightenment had shown men to be rational, socialists believed that the truth only had to be proclaimed to be instantly adopted by all men of education and sense and the reorganization of society along collectivist lines to be

realized. (Hobsbawm 1996, 244) At this point, socialism was not yet concerned with a revolutionary struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie; this only came about when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels drew up what they called 'scientific socialism' in their *Communist Manifesto* (1848). Their work transferred the center of gravity of the argument for socialism from rationality or desirability to historic inevitability. (Hobsbawm 1996, 244-245)

Marxism. As a student in Berlin, Karl Marx (1818-1883) became involved with the Left Hegelians and the work of Ludwig Feuerbach. In the early 1840s, Marx met his later companion Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) in Paris. At this time, Marx had arrived at the insight that it was not religion nor philosophy that led to human alienation, but economics. (Singer 2018, 25-27) He derived this from a combination of English political economy, French socialism, and German – Hegelian - philosophy.

The framework of Marx's theory of historical materialism is Hegelian in that it recognizes that history is a single, non-repetitive process which obeys identifiable principles. However, following Feuerbach and other Left Hegelians, Marx dismisses Hegel's idealist conception of history. Instead, he developed a materialist conception of history in which practical human activity rather than thought is the driving force of history. (Berlin 1996, 89; 122-14; Singer 2018, 44) According to Marx's historical materialism, it is not consciousness that determines the social condition of people as he believed Hegel argued, but social existence that determines people's consciousness. In this view, as long as their social condition causes people to be alienated from the produce of their practical activity, they cannot be free. (Singer 2018, 45-46; Berlin 1996, 127)

Marx argued that primitive communism - in which individual interest and community interest were equal - had been divided into classes with the introduction of capitalism. Since then, society has progressed through a series of class divisions. At some point in every stage, the material forces of production come into conflict with the existing relations of production which results in a clash between

economically determined classes. This ushers in a new epoch by the liberation of a hitherto oppressed

class. (Berlin 1996, 125-127; 138)

In Marx's view, bourgeoisie is the last form that the antagonism between the material forces of

production and the relations of production takes (Berlin 1996, 128). In this stage, only the landless and

propertyless proletariat, a product of capitalism, is still oppressed and submerged below the level of the

other classes in society that the proletariat had assisted in shaking of the yoke of the common

oppressor. Marx's historical materialism predicts that the proletariat will eventually engage in social

revolution when economic power becomes increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The

proletariat, following the lead of radical philosophy, would thereby complete the dialectical process by

defeating the bourgeoisie, just like the feudal nobility was defeated before. (Berlin 1996, 139; Singer

2018, 29-30)

After the disappearance of the bourgeoisie, the class struggle would disappear as well, and the

class society would not be replaced by yet another. The state, hitherto controlled by the bourgeoisie as

an instrument, would be dissolved to make way for a communist society. As the condition of class

struggle would end by the abolition of classes, individuals would become free in this class free

communist society (Berlin 1996, 139; Hobsbawm 1996, 244-245; Singer 2018, 29-30) Moreover, the

opposition between individual and community interests, originally split by capitalism, would be

overcome by the abolition of private property. Marx's theory of historical materialism is thus thoroughly

utopian: it sees communism as the goal of history and the resolution of all antagonism that existed

throughout history. (Singer 2018, 79-82)

Communist movement. Marx and Engels were commissioned in 1847 to draft out the doctrine

of the Communist League in London. The result was the *Communist Manifesto*, which was published in

1848. Shortly after its publications, the revolutions of 1848 broke out. The revolutions spread rapidly

throughout Europe, leading to the overthrowing of the monarchy and installment of the Republic in

France. Within six months of its outbreak however, it had become apparent that the revolution had

failed as all overthrown regimes had been restored, except for the French one. (Hobsbawm 1995, 21-22)

The period after 1848 is characterized by the advances of industrial capitalism and of the ideas and

social order it represented (Hobsbawm 1996, 14-15). Socialism's following strongly diminished. Political

organizations dedicated to the working class, like Marx and Engels' Communist League, collapsed or

subsided into insignificance. Trade unions and strikes were legally prohibited everywhere in Europe

except for Britain. (Hobsbawm 1995, 134)

After the failed revolutions of 1848, Marx and Engels were expecting a revolution to break out

in the near future. In 1857, there was an economic depression in Europe that they mistook for the onset

of the final crisis of capitalism that would inaugurate the communist society. This led Marx to work

frantically in 1857 and 1858, worried that his ideas would be overtaken by events. (Singer 2018, 10) The

period would turn out to be his most productive, and in 1867, Marx's major work *Das Kapital* was

published. By 1871, a second edition had to be published and French and Russian translations followed.

(Singer 2018, 11-12)

From about 1860, socialism's following grew again due to political and industrial action

organized by the International Workingmen's Association throughout Europe. The International

Workingmen's Association – later known as the First International – was founded in 1864 in London and

began as a mix of liberal-radical trade-union leaders, left-wing French union militants, and old

continental revolutionaries with incompatible views. Marx soon became the dominant figure in the

association (Hobsbawm 1995, 135-136). Marx's organization eventually broke into two factions in 1872.

From then on, the Marxist and anarchist currents of socialism organized themselves in distinct and

rivaling organizations. The period of the Second International (1889-1914) was a time of the rise and

growth of the labor movement, which by now was a mass movement, supported by organized mass

parties and trade unions. By this time, the doctrine of socialism had become predominantly marxist.

Social democracy. The last quarter of the nineteenth century is marked by a long economic crisis lasting from 1873 to 1895, which has become known as the Great Depression (Colletti 1974, 56). Marxists were again expecting that the economic crisis would result into the breakdown of capitalism (Michielsen 1976, ch. 11 of pt. 1). Nonetheless, the crisis passed, and capitalism had sustained itself (Colletti 1974, 57-59). This gave rise to the 'social democracy' strand within the Old Left: social democrats believe that "overthrowing" capitalism should be replaced by "amending" the Capitalist system in marxist theory. This constitutes a shift from the pursuit of revolution to reformism. (Colletti 1974, 51)

The chief spokesman of the social democrats was Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932). Bernstein enjoyed considerable prestige within the German Leftist party and was from 1883 onwards considered by Engels as the most trusted representative of Marxist theory. (Colletti 1974, 51-52) Bernstein contested a series of points from Marx's doctrine: he asserted that the incorrect prediction of revolution by Marx and the two Internationals sprang from the fatalism and determinism of the materialist conception of history. Moreover, Bernstein argued that democratic institutions erodes class struggle. He observed that where parliamentary democracy was dominant, class differences caused by capitalist exploitation are reduced and eventually overcome. In his view, the state should not be seen as an organ of class rule and the working class should thus not strive to seize power by revolution but should rather seek to reform the state to make it more democratic. The only task for the labor movements should be the improvement of workers' living conditions. (Colletti 1974, 50-51)

Bernstein's revisionism was officially rejected, but in practice it was adopted by virtually all socialist parties in Europe (Colletti 1974, 50-51). With the outbreak of World War I, socialists in Europe became deeply divided. The war brought about deep-felt animosity between the national sections of the Second International and further grew the division between the branches of the social democrats and communists within the Old Left. (Michielsen 1973, ch. 1 of pt. 2)

Stalinist regime. In 1917, revolution broke out in Russia which overthrew Tsar Nicolaas II and established the Republic. Later that year, the October revolution overthrew the government of this Republic and installed a Soviet government under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. In 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was formed. The newly established Communist Party, led by Lenin, took control of the government. Upon Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin overtook Lenin's leadership of the Communist Party. Stalin ruled by terror with a series of brutal policies, which left millions of his own citizens dead. Between 1928 and 1940, Stalin forced collectivization upon the agricultural sector. Those that owned land or livestock were stripped of their holdings and higher-income farmers were rounded up and executed, their property confiscated.

3.2.3 The Old Right

In the late nineteenth century, industrialization had created a commerce-focused middle class and strong industrial working class with a diminished allegiance to old institutions. This resulted in a sharp decline in conservatism's popularity, and conservatives found themselves forced to adopt a defensive role in the face of the Old Left's social innovations. A problem was that the conservatives' chief constituency, the peasantry, was declining in numbers relative to other social groups due to industrialization and urbanization. To establish majorities in parliament, conservative parties therefore had to seek support from a broad electorate. (Senior 2009, 106) To achieve this, conservative parties changed shape and engaged in various alliances throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, with the common thread being opposition against the Old Left and its marxist movements. For instance, the conservatives found allies in the Christian Democrats. These were followers of the political doctrine developed by the Catholic church in response to the anticlerical attacks coming from liberal reformers and working-class socialists. (Senior 2009, 110)

Moreover, conservatism is often linked to classical liberalism, as their followers have often been tactical allies. Classical liberalism was the dominant political theory in Britain from the early nineteenth century until the First World War. Classical liberalism advocates civil liberties with an emphasis on economic freedom. In the late nineteenth century, classical liberalism developed into neoclassical liberalism, which argued for government to be as small as possible to allow the exercise of individual freedom.

Conservatism in the United Kingdom and Continental Europe was strongly influenced by the thought of Edmund Burke, who was at the time chiefly seen as a critic of the French revolutionaries. Next to Burke, John Gray mentions Hegel, de Maistre, Savigny and Santayana as conservatives, given their shared "spirit of reaction against the excesses of liberal rationalism" (Gray 1995, 78-79) De Maistre was a reactionary critic of reason, intellectualism, and universal rights; he praised Russian political culture as a spontaneous growth as opposed to that of Western Europe which had been "scribbled over" by Enlightenment philosophers (Gray 1998: 122).

In the United States, conservative thought has been largely determined by the essentially liberal political culture that resulted from its foundation as a constitutional republic. Rightist thought in the United States is therefore almost exclusively neo-conservative and libertarian, with a "virtual absence (...) of anything comparable to European conservatism (...)." Hence, according to Gray, "United States conservative thought is merely an indigenous variation on classical liberal themes of limited government, individualism and economic progress [reflecting the] near-ubiquity in American intellectual culture of individualist, universalist and Enlightenment themes." (Gray 2010: 166)

Eventually, conservative parties throughout Europe sought to attract voters by identifying themselves with nationalist sentiments. By the end of the nineteenth century, this nationalist strategy was adopted by virtually all conservative parties. This gave them increased popular appeal in an era of intensifying nationalism, but it also contributed to a climate of rivalry that culminated in the outbreak of

World War I in 1914. (Senior 2009, 106) After the war, conservative parties became the standard-

bearers of frustrated nationalism in countries like Germany and Italy (Senior 2009, 112).

3.3 Twentieth Century

In the period between the First and Second World War, three political-economic doctrines rose:

liberal democracy, social democracy, and fascism. Liberal democracy rested on center-Right coalitions of

middle-class consolidation and was aimed against the socialist working classes. Under the interwar

conditions of rising tensions due to the upsurge of on the one hand communism and on the other hand

fascism, coalitions of middle-class consolidation turned to liberalism and democracy in an effort to

stabilize social order. (Luebbert 1991, 1-2; 8) The rise of fascism after World War I was a backlash to the

threat of socialist revolution which became prevalent after the Russian Revolutions (Hosbbawm 1994,

124) Nonetheless, during the 1920s, and especially during the 1930s in the midst of the Great

Depression, political liberalism was in retreat. At the time, it was assumed that the threat to liberal

institutions came from communism. According to Eric Hobsbawm, it however came exclusively from

fascism. (Hobsbawm 1994, 109-112)

The forces overthrowing liberal-democratic regimes were geared against revolution,

authoritarian, and nationalistic. In the 1930s, fascism appeared in its Italian form and later in its German

form of national socialism. (Hobsbawm 1994, 112-113) Fascism was triumphantly anti-liberal, combining

popular elements of the two prewar nonliberal ideologies: conservatism (especially its nationalism) and

socialism (Kurth 1999, 5; Bobbio 1996, 107; Sternhell 1983). Hence, the slogan 'neither right nor left' of

the French fascist movement, which is seen as a predecessor of Italian fascism (Bobbio, 1996: 107)

Fascists were, as Hobsbawm called it, the "revolutionaries of counterrevolution", radically appealing to

the past and traditions but also marked by modernity (Hobsbawm 1994, 118).

Žižek sees fascism characterized by its "its open avowal of antagonism." (Žižek 2020, 38) He writes: "The basic fascist idea is that of the class piece: each class should be recognized in its specific identity and, in this way, its dignity will be safeguarded and antagonism between classes avoided." (Žižek 2020, 29) From this perspective, antagonism is present in fascism in the recognition of each class in its specific identity, treated as a quasi-natural fact of life. (Žižek 2020, 29-30) It introduces a figure of the enemy to neutralize the struggle between the classes. (Žižek 2020, 48) This figure of the enemy functions as an obstacle to be overcome by the expulsion or destruction of those it deems obstructive to ideal society. For example, the figure of the enemy of German Nazism was the caricature of the Jew. (Žižek 2020, 38; 47)

So far, we have seen that before World War II, the Left was linked to socialism, in particular marxist communism, and that the Right was linked to conservatism. In the nineteenth century, the Right became linked to nationalism, and classical liberalism, next to its continuing link to conservatism. This made the Right a convenient wheelbarrow for fascism, as the Right's traditionalism, nationalism, and authoritarianism served the interest of the German and Italian nation-state. The choice of fascists for a partnership with the Right was however opportunistic; fascism should thus not be considered part of the Rightist ideology. (Levy 1999, 114)

The decisive defeat and conquest of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in World War II removed fascism as one of the possible political-economic doctrines rose, with only capitalist liberalism and marxist communism remaining. (Kurth 1999, 6) The former is associated with the Right and the latter remains tied to the Left.

After the Second World War, an ideological conflict emerged in various places in Europe, but particularly in intellectual Paris, the cultural and intellectual meeting point in Europe. Intellectuals questioned whether the Marxist lens was still adequate to understand the postwar political and economic conditions. The central question they asked themselves was: 'should one distance oneself

from Stalin and from Soviet communism?' This seemed even more appealing in light of the rapid

restoration of the political and social order on the basis of American-style liberalism. Many felt that in

this new historical situation, a choice had to be made between only two options: either the alliance of

capitalism and liberalism or its opposite, communism. This amounted to an intellectual 'leap of faith':

daring to be radical and believe that communism will turn out to be the right side of history, or not. (Van

Oenen 2022)

3.3.1 The New Left

The New Left emerged in the late 1950s in Britain and Continental Europe, and in the long 1960s

in the US. There are significant differences between the development of the New Left movements on

either side of the Atlantic. The American New Left was defined by the cultural and students' struggles of

the 1960s. The British New Left retained its links to the political institutions of the Old Left, it was less

populist and more organized around central intellectual institutions such as academic journals. (Farred

2000, 627-628) In Continental Europe, the New Left first emerged in West Berlin and reached its heights

in the May 1968 student and workers' demonstrations, which temporarily shut down the city of Paris.

This uprising found following throughout Europe.

Despite their differences, the New Lefts shared a commitment to the significance of culture as a

transformative political practice, they observed how the postwar ideological landscape had changed and

pointed out the shortcomings of the Old Left. The movements influenced, shaped and informed each

other, and were also influenced by radicalism in other parts of the world. (Farred 2000, 628)

The British and European New Left. The New Left in Britain and Continental Europe emerged in

1956 out of the three crises that marked that year: the Suez crisis, Kruschev's denunciation of Stalin, and

the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The crises have historically been understood as ushering in a

reconceptualized notion of radicalism in Western Europe and the United States, opening the way for

new currents in Leftist socialist thought that could be both anti-Stalinist and anti-imperialist. (Gotzler

2019, 2)

Old Left organizations found themselves unable to articulate the shifting roots of political

disaffection among the working-class constituency that had largely been lifted from conditions of

deprivation and poverty, which had functioned as a postulate in the Left's political rhetoric. In these

circumstances, the Left found itself in search of a new political rhetoric. This led to the emergence of the

New Left. (Gotzler 2019, 3)

The New Left was shaped by a renewed socialism, an anti-Stalinist politics that believed in an

ideologically reconfigured and empowered working class. (Farred 2000, 634) The new movement that

emerged in the Left rejected the grand historical narratives and universalist tendencies of the Old Left.

Instead of believing in the inevitability of a marxist revolution to come, the New Left looked toward

political accounts that were more deeply grounded in the activities of the working class. This New Left

also broke with the Old Left's adherence to the Communist Party policy and with its top-down

organization (Farred 2000, 628-629)

The New Left movement saw merit in exploring the radical potentialities of popular culture, a

political terrain that had largely been disregarded by the Old Left. One of the objectives of the New Left

was to open up 'areas' in politics, in other words, to get previously ignored issues and ideas on the

political agenda. A focus point of the New Left theory and movement became the role of ideology in

maintaining repressive social structures. (Feró 2020, 46; Kiss, 2018: 45) This new focus garnered a

thorough rethinking of the classical Marxist cultural theory, resulting in theoretical efforts to re-

integrate the new configurations of power and identity in postwar society. This reintegration was

accomplished with the help of Antoni Gramsci's critiques of 'vulgar economism' which provided

concepts like 'hegemony.' (Gotzler 2019, 6)

The attention for popular culture furthermore manifested itself in the rise of Cultural Studies as

an academic discipline, initially in Britain (Farred 2000 629). The theoretical contributions that grew out

of the debates between Marxism and culturalism led to the major theoretical synthesis characteristic of

work at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the United Kingdom, which consisted, in the

first place of a new definition of the political that incorporated cultural processes. A central figure in this

was Stuart Hall. (Gotzler 2019, 6) Cultural Studies took the intellectual lead in mediating between the

New Left and the new social movements that emerged out of it (Farred 2000, 629).

In Britain and Continental Europe, the New Left movement reconceptualized the class struggle

and, spurred by the spectacular successes of student movements in the 1960s, created youth as a

serious political category (Farred 2000, 630). Important for the European New Left was the Situationist

International, which was established in 1956 under leadership of Guy Debord. The Situationist

International was an international organization of social revolutionaries made up of avant-garde artists

and intellectuals that aimed at reinterpreting classical marxism to formulate a modern and

comprehensive critique of mid-twentieth century capitalism. Influential were the publications of

situationists Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday

Life*, which shaped the ideas behind the May 1968 protests in France that temporarily shut down the city

of Paris and spread to other European countries afterwards. Another often noted influence on the New

Left and the revolts of 1968 is the work of Herbert Marcuse, which influenced radical intellectuals and

political activists in both Continental Europe and the United States.

The American New Left. In the United States, the New Left was a reaction to the political, social,

and cultural consensus in American life during the 1950s (Gosse 2005, 189). It manifested itself in the

proliferation of activist movements and was marked by a radicalized liberalism. The starting point of the

radical reform and cultural revolution in Cold War America was the mass movement by black Americans

(Van Gosse 2005, 20). Inspired by the success of this Civil Rights movement, other movements spread

across America in the late 1960s (Gosse 2005, 3). The various struggles of the 1960s provided the 'new

social movements' - groupings organized around single issues such as gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual

orientation, issues that were up to then ignored in mainstream politics - with their fundamental

ideological building blocks. (Farred 2000, 630) Some movements declined when their goals were

reached but other movements, such as the women's rights and gay and lesbian rights movements, kept

growing through the 1970s and beyond. (Gosse 2005, 7)

During the 1970s, New Left movements in the United States were absorbed in the mainstream

political order and into the fabric of American society (Gosse 2005, 8). Movements pushed their way

into the political, academic, and media arenas, which led to the New Left's penetration into electoral

politics through the Democratic Party (Gosse 2005, 187-190). The New Left's influence on the politics of

the Democratic Party came to prominence in the 1972 McGovern campaign. The presidential elections

in 1976 however broke the Democratic party in many pieces: it became a party for brokering a wide

range of interests, from those of radical socialists to those of capitalist liberals (Gosse 2005, 193-194). In

the 1980s and 1990s, the Democratic Party became known as a coalitional vehicle for progressive

constituencies such as feminists, LGBT-people, environmentalists, and people of color (Gosse 2005,

194).

Much of the New Left had grown out of the colleges and universities, and many returned in the

late 1970s with a determination to institutionalize a new scholarship. These Leftist academics saw

themselves as waging a political struggle with real consequences for American society. (Gosse 2005,

200) The New Left's project to take over the academy was notably successful as sectors of the

humanities and social sciences were radically reformed from inside, as scholars with left-wing

backgrounds achieved commanding positions. (Gosse 2005, 190) Rightist conservatives fought to erode

the influence of the academic Left with the assault on so-called 'political correctness' from the 1990s

onwards. (Gosse 2005, 200)

The New Left started to run out of steam on both sides of the Atlantic when the working class

started distancing itself from the New Left's agenda, no longer seeing themselves reflected in its political

doctrine. In the period that the New Left was at its height, the constituency of the Left had been

radically changed: from mainly white, largely male, unionized working class of 1958 to a multiracial,

composed of considerable numbers of women. For the metropolitan New Left, the grand narrative of

class struggle had been politically inefficacious which left the traditional Leftist constituency of the

working classes astray. The New Right grasped this opportunity by addressing the traditionally Leftist

working class constituency in a way that reconciled their political identities with nationalism. (Farred

2000, 634)

3.3.2 The New Right

After World War II, the Rightist alliance of nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism revived as a

promise of both economic growth and democratic freedoms. By now, the Right had become completely

separated from its associations with the old aristocracy which had existed via conservatism. Instead, it

emphasized the raising of living standards through a market economy and the provision of a wide array

of social services by the state. The Right was now characterized by liberal individualism complemented

with free-market capitalism and a fierce opposition to communism. (Senior 2009, 113)

The New Left revolutions of the long 1960s had been met with fierce anger and resistance from

the Right. Ultimately, the New Right emerged as a "backlash" to the rise of the New Left. (Gosse 2005,

188) Hence, the postwar consensus did not only give rise to the New Left, but also to the New Right in

the 1970s and 1980s. The earliest backlash of the New Right against the New Left occurred in the United

States, exemplified by Richard Nixon's victory over the New Left's candidate McGovern in 1972

(Oudenampsen 2021, 3). Similar tendencies to those in the United States thereafter manifested

themselves throughout Europe. In the 1980s, with much the same political rhetoric, Margaret Thatcher

and Ronald Reagan in Britain and the United States set out to break up the postwar consensus among

labor movements, government, and business. They were both successful at attracting the historically

Leftist constituency of the working classes in a way that reconciled workers' political identities with their

realigned place in the nation's discourse. (Farred 2000, 633-635)

Merijn Oudenampsen asserts that the New Right rose primarily as an Anglo-American Rightist

movement that brought together free market capitalism and cultural conservatism in a fusion of

neoliberal and neoconservative ideas. On the European continent, he argues, the New Right also rose,

but in a more diffuse and fragmented manner. It manifested itself in the shift of the political spectrum to

the right in 1980s, and in the rise of populist right and far-right groups. (Oudenampsen 2021, 10-11)

According to Oudenampsen, this occurred due to the adoption of Anglo-American New Right ideology

by European center-Right parties. In his view, the Right in Continental Europe from the 1960s onwards

should therefore be appreciated as a branch of the New Right. (Oudenampsen 2021, 12)

In the 2000s, especially since the 9/11 attack, the New Right grew in popularity. New Right

advocates working for the American government became known to the general public as the initiators

of the War on Terror following the 9/11 attack in 2001, leading to neoconservative ideas to spread

throughout the West. In Continental Europe, the New Right was also achieving electoral successes,

exemplified by the success of Marine Le Pen of the Front National in the French Presidential elections in

2002, and the rise of Pim Fortuyn in 2001 and 2002 in the Dutch political arena. (Piotrowski & Mikecs

2015, 10)

As said, the ideology of the New Right has been described as a complex fusion of neoliberalism

with neoconservative ideas, seeking to restore the free market and traditional forms of moral authority.

This was held together by a fierce opposition against the New Left. (Oudenampsen 2021, 10) In the rest

of this section, I discuss the strands of neoliberalism and neoconservatism separately.

Neoliberalism. The intellectual and political movement known as neoliberalism is a central

reference point for the New Right. The neoliberal movement contains a lot of internal diversity and

disagreement. According to Oudenampsen, neoliberalism emerged as a reaction the Great Depression in

the 1930s, as a response to the perceived shortcomings of classical 'laissez-faire' liberalism and the

emergence of Keynesian economic planning. (Oudenampsen 2021, 54-55) The basic idea of

neoliberalism is that the state should be limited in its role in modern society apart from securing private

property rights and contracts (Albo 2002, 46).

The Mont Pèlerin Society, which was founded in 1947 on the initiative of Friedrich Hayek to

revive classical liberalism in the postwar era, provided an international network for spreading neoliberal

ideas (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009, 4). Next to Hayek, other notable members of the organization were

Frank Knight, Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, George Stigler and Milton Friedman. Knight, Stigler and

Friedman are also known as prominent members of the Chicago school of economics, a highly influential

neoclassical school of economic thought that rejected Keynesianism in favor of monetarism until the

mid-1970s, and thereafter turned to new classical macroeconomics.

The economists of the The Mont Pèlerin Society targeted democratic socialism and

Keynesianism, rejecting central planning and government intervention in the economy. Interestingly,

Hayek explicitly rejected conservatism (which is generally linked to the Right), from which he explicitly

removed himself in the preface of his most notable work *The Road to Serfdom* and in his essay *Why I am*

not a Conservative in his book *The Constitution of Liberty*. Although Hayek noted that the conservatism

of Thatcher and Reagan at the time shared views on economics with classical liberals, he saw

conservatism as wanting to "stand still" whereas liberalism embraces the free market because it "wants

to go somewhere." (Hayek 2021, 346-347)

Angus Burgin traces the hardening of neoliberal attitudes towards state intervention to the

influence of Friedman, who took over the leadership of the Mont Pèlerin Society aroung 1960. Friedman

argued that the Great Depression had been caused by the government intervention in the economy in

the 1920s. He asserted that laissez-faire economic policy is more desirable than government

intervention in the economy, and emphasized more on the benefits of impersonal market forces as the

best way to secure personal liberty and welfare than other members of the Mont Pèlerin Society did.

(Burgin 2012, 153-5; 178)

It must be noted that neoliberalism, next to being a central strand of influence on the New

Right, from the 1990s onwards became equally practiced by Third Way social democratic governments

throughout the West. Hence, neoliberalism in the form of free-market globalized capitalism and policies

of deregulation, privatization, and social austerity became embraced by both the Left and the Right.

(Albo 2002, 47) We come back to this in 3.4.1 below.

Neoconservatism. Neoconservatism is a political doctrine with a lot of historical and political

heterogeneity.[4] It emerged in the United States in the early 1970s, in response to Roosevelt's New Deal

and the rise of the New Left in the 1960s (Vaïsse 2010a, 8). A group of New York-based liberal

intellectuals moved to the Right in response to these developments, which they disgruntledly perceived

as a 'leftward turn of American liberalism'. This first generation of neoconservatives can be considered

centrist on socio-economic issues and conservative on cultural issues and geared against communism.

(Vaïsse 2010a, 7-9)

The second generation of neoconservatives also rose in the early 1970s in reaction to the New

Left, this time inside the Democratic Party, after McGovern lost to Nixon. They saw the electoral defeat

of their party as a result of the abandonment of the 'silent majority', in particular culturally conservative

blue-collar workers, who felt sidelined in favor of a 'rainbow coalition' of students, blacks, Hispanics,

---

[4] French scholar Justin Vaïsse has subdivided the American neoconservative movement into 'three families of neoconservatives' with distinct political and intellectual logics. (Oudenampsen 2021: 78; Vaïsse 2010a: 6; Vaïsse 2010b: 1)

women and homosexuals. (Oudenampsen 2021, 79) The group pleaded for a return of the Democratic

Party to the defense of law and order and family values, progressive domestic policies, and anti-

communism (Vaïsse 2010b, 2-3). As they failed to win the favors of the Democratic Party, these

neoconservative Democrats crossed the party line to the Republic Party. They went to work for the

Ronald Reagan administration, where they successfully pushed for an intensification of the Cold War.

Thereafter, neoconservatism became a fixture of the Right. Given this history, conservative Irving Kristol

defined neoconservatives as 'liberals mugged by reality'. (Oudenampsen 2021, 79; Vaïsse 2010a, 275)

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, neoconservatism was declared impotent because the

original communist enemy had been lost. Influential in this regard was Francis Fukuyama's essay *The

End of History?* (1989), which he later expanded into a book with the same title (1992). Basing himself

on Hegel's philosophy of historical development, Fukuyama argued that the world had arrived at a new

historical epoch now that the Cold War has ended with the victory of capitalism and liberal democracy

over communism.

3.4 Twenty-first Century

We have seen that in the twentieth century the New Left and the New Right rose in the United

States, the United Kingdom, and Continental Europe. The New Left emerged from the renunciation of

the doctrine of the Old Left in the 1950s, disposing the Old Left's Stalinist associations and belief in the

inevitability of a marxist revolution. Class struggle was reconceptualized to adapt to the Left's new

constituency which was no longer the classic white, male, and unionized working class but metropolitan,

multiracial, and composed of a considerable number of women. The New Left was also characterized by

a focus on the role of ideology and new configurations of power and identity, which led to the

establishment and spread of cultural studies in academia.

The New Right emerged as a "backlash" to the rise of the New Left. At the behest of Thatcher in and Reagan, this new Rightist movement set out to break up the postwar consensus in the United Kingdom and the United States, and the Welfare State it had constituted. The New Right's doctrine was a fusion of neoliberalism with neoconservative ideas, seeking to restore the free market and traditional conservative values. The neoconservative strand was marked by its disapproval of the 'leftward turn of liberalism' and its animosity to the Left.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and thereby the collapse of the opposition between liberalism in the West and communism in the Soviet Union (Murray 2019, 1-2), the Third Way emerged throughout the West. The Third Way reconciled liberal economic policies with center-Left social policies under the banner of social democracy. Although the Third Way is predominantly linked to the Left, I contend that the Third Way is neither Leftist or Rightist; it is an unstable settlement out of which new Leftist and Rightist positions emerged.

The twenty-first century period after the dominant Third Way is marked by the triumph of both the Alternative Right and the Progressive-liberal Left. Firstly, the Progressive-liberal Left moved to the fore after the global financial crisis of 2008. Soon thereafter, in 2010s, the Alternative Right rose. Both these positions embrace capitalist liberalism. Arguably, the opposition between the Alternative Right and the Progressive-liberal Left moved to new terrains - that of culture and identity - because of their mutual acceptance of capitalist liberalism. The rise of the Alternative Right is generally linked to the Presidential election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016 - the election could be seen as a symptom of the Alternative Right's relative dominance at the time.

More recently, arguably since Trump became president in the United States and the EU Referendum in the United Kingdom led to Brexit, two new positions of the Left and Right emerged. These positions, that I call the New Old Right and the New Old Left, represent the development occurring in both the Left and the Right in which critics of the Progressive-liberal Left and Alternative

Right reject these positions and instead long back to the grand narratives of the Left and Right from

earlier centuries.

In the following sections, we firstly discuss the Third Way which was predominant in the period

1990s to the 2000s. Thereafter, I discuss the Progressive-liberal Left, the Alternative Right, and the more

recent New Old Left and New Old Right in turn.

3.4.1 Third Way

The Third Way emerged out of the dissolution of the Cold War battle between Stalinist

communism and capitalist liberalism, the increasing globalization, and the embrace of neoliberal

economics throughout the West. These events were initially met with enthusiasm by the New Right,

implying in their view the Right's victory over the Left's communism and social democracy. Their claimed

victory was however unjustified as modernized social democratic regimes were triumphing in the 1990s

throughout the West (Lovecy, 2000: 50, 53; Whyman 2005, 2).

Under the banner of the Third Way, neoliberalism and social democracy was embraced by

regimes of different political stripes throughout the West. It is for instance associated with the program

of former chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schröder's Social Democratic Party (SPD). The Third Way

doctrine can also be observed in the 'Strong and Caring' ('Sterk en Sociaal') political program adopted by

the Dutch Labor Party (PvdA) of Wim Kok, who was the Prime-Minister of four 'purple' coalitions

(between social democratic PvdA, conservative liberal VVD and social liberal D66) in the period from

1994 to 2002 (Whyman 2005, 7-8). Moreover, in Britain, New Labour under the leadership of Tony Blair

secured two landslide election victories, whilst Bill Clinton's two-term presidency in the USA overturned

twelve years of Republican presidency (Whyman 2005, 2; 5-6).

Third Way supporters share the perception that globalization and technological development

have rendered previous forms of social democratic strategy powerless. To respond to this, Third Way

advocates propose social and economic policies to enhance international competitiveness. The Third

Way can thus be defined as a strategic reaction to the challenges perceived in globalization, proposing

neoliberal economics and a reconceptualized form of social democracy. According to the Third Way

doctrine, states are meant to facilitate the opportunities of individuals within global markets and not

seek to protect them from the consequences of global market forces. (Whyman 2005, xi)

The social democracy that had emerged as a revisionist movement within the Old Left at the end

of the nineteenth century has been absorbed by Third Way theorists, who considered it to be the best

political organization. Social democracy was stripped of its marxist economic roots; In its place came the

New Right's neoliberalism and its endorsement of capitalist globalization and policies of deregulation,

privatization, and social austerity. (Albo 2002, 47) Social democracy shifted from Leftist to center, no

longer seeking a middle ground between revolutionary and non-revolutionary forms of marxist

socialism, or between the extremes of communism and capitalism (Whyman 2005, 5). Instead, it was

embraced by both the Left and the Right, who both accepted neoliberalism as well.

The Third Way takes a markedly different approach to the role of the state than traditional

Leftist social democracy. The state is viewed as a 'social investment state' that enables individuals to

successfully compete in the global labor market, tames capitalism, and promotes economic growth

(Whyman 2005, 13-14). Third Way supporters therefore no longer see the state as authoritative but rely

upon the ability of the civil society to act as a 'self generating mechanism of social solidarity' (Giddens

1998, 11). The state had to be reconfigured into a "state without enemies." (Giddens 1998, 70)

Anthony Giddens, considered the most influential Third Way theorist, has argued that ideas

from both the Left and the Right should be flexibly crafted into a Third Way since "no one any longer has

any alternatives to capitalism." (Giddens 1998, 43-44; Weltman 2004, 84) The Third Way's blurring of

the ideologies of the Left and Right garners a distant, critical attitude towards adversary politics

between Leftist and Rightist parties, advocating a political style characterized by flexibility, compromise

and pragmatism (Weltman 2004, 84). Giddens explicitly supports 'conversational' politics and speaks of

the Third Way as a "pragmatic attitude towards coping with change" (Giddens 1998, 68).

The Third Way is not an ideology, but rather a 'practical phenomenon' or 'strategic program' to

solve perceived problems (Whyman 2005, 5). The emphasis of the Third Way is on the practicality, but it

lack a well-developed theoretical core (Whyman 2005, 1-2). In this sense, the Third Way can be seen as

advocating 'post-ideological politics' or in other words 'politics of non-politics'. For this reason, Stuart

Hall has called it "the great moving nowhere show" (Hall 2017). Accordingly, Žižek characterized recent

decades as an age of 'post-politics,' in which "politics proper is gradually replaced by expert social

administration." (Žižek 2022) A recent example of the Third Way doctrine is the political program of the

center-Right conservative liberal party VVD, the largest party in the Dutch parliament since 2010. The

leader of the VVD and prime minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, is known for his rejection of grand

narratives and embrace of a 'managerial' approach to social issues. (Oudenampsen 2019)

By advocating a politics without adversaries, the Third Way has come to position 'adversary

politics' as its adversary (Weltman 2004, 84-85). Instead of adversary politics, a consensual mood is to

be achieved among the political parties by excluding those that are not willing to commit to this mood

of 'universal inclusiveness' (Gray 1993; Weltman 2004, 84-85). This can be illustrated by reference to a

phenomenon in Dutch politics, which is that even though the number of parties in the Dutch parliament

is record high, the ideological differences between parties is historically low. As a consequence, Dutch

voters find it difficult to differentiate parties from each other, because of the increasing homogeneity of

political programs. (Lievisse Adriaanse & Retera 2022)

The Third Way started to be challenged following the Great Recession in 2008, which had given

an impulse to the re-emergence of the Left in the form of the Progressive-liberal Left. in the 2010s, the

Right also came to the fore again as the Alternative Right. Even though Third Way politics is still quite

dominant throughout the West, it has become more implicit; the general feeling that a consensus has

been achieved has been replaced by the forceful opposition between the Progressive-liberal Left and

the Alternative Right.

In my view, the Third Way has been able to remain a dominant force in electoral politics

throughout the West because the struggle between the Progressive-liberal Left and the Alternative Right

is no longer taking place on the terrain of traditionally political issues such as economics and the role of

the state but has shifted to culture and identity as core issues of conflict. This has led to a situation in

which electoral politics appears depoliticized while other terrains of social life appear more politicized

than before.

3.4.2 The Progressive-liberal Left

The Leftist position that I call the Progressive-liberal Left has come to the fore after the financial

crash of 2008. The name for this movement is built up of several elements. So far, the Left has been

continuously linked to a tendency towards social innovation in accordance to the belief that a better

world lies in the future. This has been a central tendency of the Left since its inception in the aftermath

of the French Revolution and has remained implicit but present throughout the development of the Left

to the present day. In light of the Left's focus on progress, calling this Leftist movement 'progressive'

may thus appear to be a tautology. In the twenty-first century, the designation 'progressive' has

however achieved a particular connation which has not yet been engrained to the Leftist position.

Nowadays, progressivism is used to refer to cultural progressivism. A movement is called progressive

when it is "a social or political movement that aims to represent the interests of ordinary people

through political change and the support of government actions." (Cambridge Dictionary 2020) The

designation is becoming more popular as well to characterize the Leftist Democratic Party in the United

States, which was earlier usually referred to as 'liberal' (Kurtzleben 2021). Arguably, 'progressive' has

become more popular as a designation since liberalism has become the lens through which all politics is

refracted since the collapse of grand narratives at the turn of the century.

Moreover, the twenty-first century Leftist position is 'liberal' in the sense that it has embraced

capitalist liberalism (neoliberalism). There are clear parallels with the social democratic and neoliberal

outlook of the Third Way, which supports the view that this Progressive-liberal Left has emerged from

the Third Way unstable settlement. Moreover, the movement I have called the Progressive-liberal Left is

often linked to institutionalized liberal democracy, which is seen as key for the identity politics that is at

the heart of the Progressive-liberal Left (Heyes 2020).

Due to the Progressive-liberal Left's embrace of the Third Way doctrine of economic liberalism

and social democracy, and its dependency on ideological foundations that have been laid in the decades

before, it has been difficult for researchers to pinpoint the movement and its doctrine. A compelling

explanation of the roots and growth of the Progressive-liberal Left is provided in *Madness of Crowds*

(2019) by Douglas Murray. Interestingly, Murray's account is strikingly Hegelian even though Murray

explicitly rejects the Hegelian idea that resolution of distinctions is the motor of historical progress.[5]

Murray asserts that after the collapse of the grand narratives - liberalism and communism - due to the

ending of the Cold War from which liberalism rose as the victor, people were deprived of grand

narratives that give life meaning (Murray 2019, 1-2).

According to Murray, ideas that sprung in the 'fringes of academia' from the mid-twentieth

century onwards spread throughout the mainstream since the financial crash of 2008. In his view, the

Progressive-liberal Left as a movement came to the fore as it provided a soothing ideology to

generations of people that no longer have access to ideologies propagating alternatives to capitalism,

---

[5] Murray writes: "The Hegelian dialectic only advances by means of contradiction and therefore all the complexities – one might say absurdities – met along the way are welcomed and almost embraced as though they were helpful, rather than troubling, to the cause." (Murray 2019, 58)

but coincidingly do not have great love for capitalism (Murray 2019, 2). This generation has accepted the

view that there is no longer any alternative to capitalism; it has become a natural given to them.

Nonetheless, capitalism is seen as undesirable since its benefits to most people have become few.

Murray writes: "it isn't hard to work out why a generation who believe they may never own a home

could be attracted to an ideological world view which promises to sort out every inequity not just in

their own lives but every inequity on earth." (Murray 2019, 2)

Murray identifies three strands at the core of the Progressive-liberal Left's doctrine: 'social

justice', 'identity politics', and 'intersectionality'. Social justice is the movement's goal, it is what society

would look like ideally, after all distinctions are overcome. Murray is critical of this, writing that "even

the term itself is set up to be anti-oppositional." (Murray 2019, 2-3) From a Hegelian perspective, there

is merit to Murray's critique: social justice is envisioned by the Progressive-liberal Left as a self-identical

otherness that is beyond reach and authoritative, justifying all actions in its pursuit. By extension, this

entails that the freedom of supporters of the Progressive-liberal Left is limited due to the authority they

ascribe to social justice.

Identity politics is the way in which the struggle for social justice achieves its following (Murray

2019, 3). Eric Kaufmann has defined identity politics as "the belief that identity itself (...) is and should

be a fundamental focus of political work." It politicizes areas that were not previously considered

political, such as "sexuality, interpersonal relations, lifestyle and culture." (Kaufmann 1990, 67) Identity

politics is grounded on the idea that some social groups are oppressed due to one's identity, which

makes one vulnerable to cultural imperialism, violence, exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness

(Young 1990, 9). This entails the mass-mobilization of people based on claims about the injustices done

to particular identity groups (Heyes 2020). Most research on the ideology of the Progressive-liberal Left

focuses on identity politics, or expands the notion to include the whole Progressive-liberal Left

(Bernstein 2005, 47).

In order to formulate strategies to overcome the stigmatization and oppression of particular identity groups, identity politics employed by the Progressive-liberal Left starts from analyses of forms of social injustice and oppression linked to one's identity. Murray refers to this as 'intersectionality', which he defines as "work[ing] out each and every identity and vulnerability claim in ourselves and others and then organize along whichever system of justice emerges from the perpetually moving hierarchy which we uncover." (Murray 2019, 3) This is done on the basis of a philosophical canon that takes up questions about the nature, origin and futures of the identities being defended (Heyes 2020). Intersectionality is a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1990s to describe the overlapping of oppression arising from the multiplicity of identity groups that an individual belongs to. Literature connected to intersectionality provides theoretical tools to explore unique intersections of oppressed identities. (Pluckrose & Lindsay 2020, 56-57)

Mary Bernstein's overview of research on identity politics provides a useful systematization of the earlier foundations of the Progressive-liberal Left. She identifies three approaches to the Progressive-liberal Left's identity politics - it is either seen as an offshoot of marxism; as the new social movements of the American New Left; or as the application of ideas from postmodernist academia. (Bernstein 2005, 48) These three foundations of the Progressive-liberal Left are interrelated since the new social movements of the twentieth century were to great extent inspired by marxism because of its focus on marxist cultural theory and the legacy of the Old Left. Furthermore, as we have seen, the New Left and academia are closely linked since American New Left academics have actively fostered their political agenda in academia and the whole New Left was strongly influenced by the (philosophical) works by academic intellectuals.

Murray and other critics of the Progressive-liberal Left such as Jordan Peterson, and Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay often make a direct link between the Progressive-liberal Left and the academia from which literature on which intersectional research is based has emerged. In the first place

critics point to the 'Left Academy' and Cultural Studies of the New Left. As we have seen, the Leftist

academia of the twentieth century extends upon marxism from the nineteenth century and Hegelian

philosophy. For example, the cultural marxism developed by Antoni Gramsci has been influential on the

New Left's intellectual foundation. (Murray 2019, 3; Pluckrose & Lindsay 2020, 103)

The historical development of the Left has given rise to the Rightist claim that the doctrine of

the Progressive-liberal Left is 'cultural marxist' or 'postmodern neo-marxist', and that Hegel should be

considered a Leftist philosopher (Lindsay 2021; Pluckrose & Lindsay 2020). Such claims however confuse

the intellectual influences on the different positions that the Left has worked through since the

nineteenth century. For example, Žižek points out that even though the theory of postmodernism

emerged out of marxism, it did so as a critique - the phrase 'postmodern neo-marxism' therefore does

not make any sense (Žižek 2020, 465-466). Rightist claims thus erroneously conflate the positions that

Left has worked through since the nineteenth century into one coherent and stable Left.

The identity politics at the heart of the Progressive-liberal Left has been the target of critique

from marxist commentators as well, who see identity politics as "the capitulation to cultural criticism in

place of analysis of the material roots of oppression." (Hayes 2020) Nancy Fraser has systematized this

distinction between earlier Leftist positions and the recent Progressive-liberal Left by dividing claims for

social justice in two types: claims for the 'redistribution' of resources and claims for the 'recognition' of

cultural difference. She relates the former claim for redistribution to class politics social democracy, and

the latter to identity politics and multiculturalism. She characterizes the goal of the politics of

recognition is wanting to establish a "difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or

dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect." (Fraser 1998, 1)

In the framework that I present in this thesis, the politics of recognition is employed by the

Progressive-liberal Left. The marxist critique of the Progressive-liberal Left has led to the rise of the New

Old Left, which I briefly discuss in section 3.4.4 below.

3.4.3 The Alternative Right

        With the ending of the Cold War, the Third Way became the dominant force in (electoral)

politics in the 1990s and 2000s. In the 2000s, the youngest offshoot of the New Right rose in popularity

after the 9/11 attack. In my view, this offshoot of the New Right developed into a new Rightist position

in response to the rise of the Progressive-liberal Left after the Great Recession in 2008. Due to the

Progressive-liberal Left's shift in emphasis from class politics to identity politics, the Right's repositioning

vis-a-vis the Left brought about a shift toward the terrain of culture and identity as well. The social

conservatism of the Right became more pronounced in the face of the Progressive-liberal Left's

progressivism. Next to a focus on identity and culture, this new Rightist position retained the New

Right's concerns for the advance of social neoconservatism and economic liberalism.

        Since the 2010s, issues on the terrain of culture and identity were apprehended and politicized

in the struggle between the Left and the Right. Examples of politicized issues are immigration, (higher)

education, and policies on fighting climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Conflicts about diversity

and representation of women and minorities in popular culture also rose, exemplified by the global

online Gamergate harassment campaign in 2014 and 2015, which was an online 'backlash' against the

rising representation of women and minorities in video game culture.

        I have called the social conservative Right that rose throughout the West in the twenty-first

century the Alternative Right as this is the name most used to refer to this movement. The Alternative

Right is a Rightist, anti-globalist movement that offers a radical 'alternative' to traditional or

establishment conservatism. The movement operates primarily online with offline outlets. The core

belief of Alternative Right supporters is that either 'white identity' or 'Western civilization' is under

attack from the Progressive-liberal Left and the Third Way liberal democratic hegemony. (Hermansson,

Lawrence, Mulhall & Murdoch 2020, 2; 256) This has given rise to anti-Enlightenment ideas that

manifest themselves in general opposition to, among other things, feminism, LGBT-people, and

members of racial and religious minorities (Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall & Murdoch 2020, 2).

In my view, the Alternative Right can be separated into the alt-right - which is concerned with

protecting the white race - and the alt-lite - which is concerned with protecting Western culture.

Although they share the same animosity against the Left and the liberal rights, freedoms, and

movements connected to it, the alt-right and the alt-lite approach this issue from different angles.

Central to the alt-right is the concern with race. The alt-right sees the Progressive-liberal Left as

threatening to the white race, which they advocate to protect. Renowned figures of the alt-right in the

United States are Richard Spencer and Jared Taylor. In the Netherlands, the Erkenbrand society could be

considered alt-right as well (Bahara & Kranenberg 2017). Differently from the alt-right, the alt-lite sees

the liberal consensus as a threat to traditional Western culture and is therefore supportive of some form

of Western chauvinist nationalism (Hermansson 2020, 2). The English Douglas Murray, the French think

tank GRECE, and the Dutch intellectual Paul Cliteur could be seen as alt-lite.

The major figures of influence on the Alternative Right are Oswald Spengler, Julius Evola, Francis

Parker Yockey, Alain de Benoist, and Sam Francis. (Rose 2021, 11-14) Spengler is considered the

'intellectual godfather' of the Alternative Right. He was a German historian who became known for his

controversial book *The Decline of the West* that was published in two volumes in 1918 and 1922. In this

book, Spengler theorizes that cultures have a limited life span of around a thousand years of flourishing,

and a thousand years of decline. (Rose 2021, 21-23) Spengler was convinced that the decay and death of

European culture was due (Hermansson 2020, 12). In *The Hour of Decision*, which was published in 1933,

he predicted a crisis that would test the West by confronting it with a 'colored world-revolution'

entailing the demographic and economic rise of 'colored' nations, which would come to compete with

the 'white world.' (Rose 2021, 18-19)

Julius Evola was an Italian philosopher and esotericist who is known for his anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, and anti-liberal philosophy. He is considered the most influential intellectual on the European radical right of the twentieth century (Rose 2021, 61-62). Through 'mythic thinking' and esoteric readings of ancient and modern texts, Evola claimed to demonstrate that there is natural inequality among humans, entailing that society should be hierarchically organized (Rose 2021, 12). His thought was utopian in an antiliberal sense: he imagined a world of unchanging order and inequality, in which all authority was absolute, a world of absolutely fixed and certain meanings (Rose 2021, 41). Evola believed that such a social order once existed and would exist again. (Rose 2021, 62) Notably, president Trump's advisor Steve Bannon was known to be familiar with Evola's ideas.

The 2016 election of Republican candidate Donald Trump in the United States has been pointed out as an electoral success of the Alternative Right. Steve Bannon, the founder of the Alternative Right platform *Breitbart News*, became Trump's chief strategist and senior advisor. As president, Trump brought ideas from the Alternative Right into the mainstream. Trump's election was followed by increasing violence at events from the Alternative Right, for example the 'Unite the Right' rally that took place in Charlottesville in the United States in August 2017, which degenerated into violence and antagonism between the Alternative Right supporters and (Progressive-liberal Left) counter-protestors.

The Alternative Right also grew in Europe but again in a dispersed and fragmentary way. It could be discerned in what has been considered the rise of 'right-wing populism' in Europe. In the historical reconstruction presented in this thesis, this right-wing populism could be linked to the Alternative Right's shifted emphasis to culture and identity, which expressed itself in a stronger emphasis on social conservative elements. As such, the hard Euroscepticism that led to Brexit in the United Kingdom and the rise of Thierry Baudet's party Forum voor Democratie in the Netherlands could be seen as successes of the European Alternative Right.

3.4.4 The New Old Left

Within the Left, a group has recently come to the fore that argues that the Left is fighting the wrong causes by abandoning class politics for a siloed identity politics (Chomsky, Derber, Moodliar & Shannon 2020, 71). They point to the fact that since the New Left's emergence in the mid-twentieth century, wealth inequality in Europe and the US has expanded instead of diminished. Minorities may have gained louder voices, but true emancipation through better distribution of wealth has in their eyes not been achieved. In the view of these Leftist critiques, the Progressive-liberal Left's concern for identity politics with its focus on culture and identity is blinding the Left for larger economic and political forces that require the Left's attention.

This critique of the Progressive-liberal Left's alleged over-emphasis on identity politics has given rise to what has been called the 'New Old Left'. The New Old Left is a reconceptualization of the Leftist social democracy movement which was concerned with class-based politics and the fight against economic inequality and working-class discontents, rather than the issues related to feminism, queer politics, and anti-racism, that were central to the Progressive-liberal Left's doctrine. They see identity politics as depoliticizing for it the draws attention away from the attack on capitalism toward struggling against social and cultural issues that leave economic oppression unchanged. (Hayes 2020)

Nancy Fraser's earlier mentioned disambiguation of the politics of 'redistribution' and 'recognition' is clarifying in this respect: the New Old Left advocates for a return to politics of redistribution over the Progressive-liberal Left's politics of recognition. Fraser herself is also critical of identity politics because it is based on the view that injustice is ingrained in identity constructions that the people to whom they are attributed want to reject. On the contrary, injustices of distribution require redistribution that aims to make the group in its totality obsolete. (Fraser 1997, 19; Hayes 2020)

The dichotomy between recognition and redistribution, or the cultural and the economic, has been challenged by those who insist that the intersectional politics of gender, sexuality, and race had

always been engaged and understood through the structures of capitalism (Butler 1997; Walters 2018).

These supporters of the Progressive-liberal Left have pointed out how Progressive-liberal Leftist

movements like #MeToo or Black Lives Matter have not shied away from the economic components to

their analyses. (Hayes 2020)

Supports of this New Old Left doctrine are American politicians Bernie Sanders and Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez, and intellectuals like Nancy Fraser, Francis Fukuyama, Thomas Piketty, Noam Chomsky,

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello. Slavoj Žižek could also be linked to the New Old Left, given his call for

the revival of communism, but he does not support a return to the Old Left's social democracy but

rather advocates for a reconceptualization of the Leftist ideology rooted in marxism and class politics.

3.4.5 The New Old Right

A Rightist movement that is finding more followers recently is what I call the New Old Right. This

movement is traditionalist conservative and classical liberal. A key characteristic is that followers of this

movement want an orderly, new world that puts an end to the chaos of recent decades which they see

as the product of a Leftist hegemony. The New Old Right is different from the Alternative Right in that

concern for identity and culture is not at the center of its doctrine. Instead, its supporters call for the

return from the politicization of all elements of life to traditionalist conservative concerns (Burgis,

Hamilton, McManus & Trejo 2020, 81).

Dominant in the New Old Right is its traditionalist conservative strand. Sometimes referred to as

classical conservatism, traditionalist conservatism is a modern ideology that emerged as a political and

intellectual doctrine in the mid-twentieth century and has grown in following since. Traditionalists value

social ties, custom and tradition above individualism. They believe in the existence of universal and

timeless truths and place a strong emphasis on the significance of enduring moral principles that are

expressed via certain natural laws. Theoretical reason is regarded as of secondary importance to

'common sense' and practical reason. Traditionalists think that social change spontaneously arises from the community's traditions rather than as a consequence of deliberate, reasoned thought. Hierarchy and authority are seen as naturally given in society.

Jordan Peterson could be linked to the New Old Right, as he places strong emphasis on convention, natural hierarchy in society, and the existence of universal truths over individualism. For example, this can be observed in his public defense of the existence of biological sex differences over the idea that sex and gender are social constructs. Moreover, his *12 Rules for Life* is an indictment of the collapse of traditionalism and the various social hierarchies it supported, and a call for the return to customs and natural hierarchy and authority (Burgis, Hamilton, McManus & Trejo 2020, 65). The 'Never Trump movement' in the United States could also be seen as an expression of the rise of the New Old Right. Figures in this movement, such as Roger Scruton and Bill Kristol, see the Right's doctrine represented by Donald Trump's politics as a turning away from 'genuine' conservatism and classical liberalism. They call for a return to classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. (McManus 2018)

PART III: HEGELIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT

4 Tracing the dialectical development of the Left and Right

This chapter reflects on the historical reconstruction provided in the previous chapter and

presents an interpretation of the position of the Left and Right, and the struggle between them, based

on a modern interpretation of Hegel's philosophy that was explained in the first part of this thesis.

The first section reflects on the historical reconstruction of the development of the Left and the

Right provided in chapter 3. In the second section and third section, I formulate an answer to the

question what the Left and the Right positions entail and provide an interpretation of the struggle

between these two positions.

4.1 The dialectic of Left and Right

The previous chapter provided a historical reconstruction of the development of the Left and

the Right from their inception in the aftermath of the French Revolution to recent years. The two

positions came into existence under the designations 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' - the left-wing was

marked by its desire to change the social and political order, while the right-wing preferred the situation

before the revolutionaries had come to challenge it. Next to that, the Industrial Revolution and the

French Revolution gave rise to the major modern ideologies: liberalism, socialism, conservatism (and

nationalism). Both socialism and conservatism rose out of opposition against Enlightenment liberalism; whereas conservatives wished to return to the pre-Enlightenment social order, socialists believed that the solution to the problems of their time lay in the future, after obstacles would have been eradicated. Hence, conservatism became associated with the right-wing and socialism linked to the left-wing. Liberalism was at this point connected to neither of the two positions.

The nineteenth century is marked by the revolutions that trampled the established order throughout the West. We firstly discussed the split between Hegel's followers into the Left Hegelians and the Right Hegelians; these designations were coined by David Friedrich Strauss who was inspired by the French distinction between the left-wing and the right-wing. It is therefore unsurprising that the same distinction between the Left Hegelians and the Right Hegelians can be discerned as between the left-wing and the right-wing: the Right Hegelians retained Hegel's apparent embrace of the established order while the Left Hegelians interpreted and transformed Hegel's philosophy to make it suitable for advancing social change.

From these Left Hegelians, Karl Marx went on to formulate his theory of material dialectics which - in brief - held that capitalism would be replaced by communism through working class uprisings. This provided socialism with an argument of historic inevitability and grounded marxism in what I have called the Old Left. In the late nineteenth century, social democrats rose in the Old Left, advocating for reformism by democratic means instead of revolution. Social democracy was eventually accepted by all Leftist parties in Europe. The Right in the nineteenth century, which I have called the Old Right, was at the time heavily influenced by anti-revolutionary conservatism and became linked with classical (economic) liberalism and nationalism.

In the interbellum period in the twentieth century, liberalism was subdued by fascist movements that were against social revolution, authoritarian, and nationalistic. Fascism linked conservatism and socialism and rejected liberalism. I therefore do not see fascism as a Rightist

movement, although fascism became linked to it as the Right's conservatism, nationalism, and authoritarianism made it a convenient partner for fascists. After the Second World War, fascism was sidelined - the Right became associated with economic liberalism and conservatism, and the Left with marxist communism.

The New Left emerged from the 1950s onwards throughout the West. Despite the differences between the New Left in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Continental Europe, the branches of the New Left shared a commitment to the significance of culture as a transformative political practice and considered the Old Left's doctrine to have become incapable of dealing with the post-war conditions. The New Left gave rise to social (student) movements that were undergirded by and fostered Leftist academics. The New Right emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a backlash to the rise of the New Left. The doctrine of the New Right was now characterized by economic liberalism, opposition to communism, and social conservatism, described as a fusion of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. It thus retained its conservatism and opposition to the Left, and a close tie to economic liberalism.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of the twentieth century, the opposition between capitalist liberalism in the West and communism in the Soviet Union collapsed; capitalist liberalism had triumphed over communism. The collapse of the great narratives ushered in the Third Way in the 1990s and 2000s, in which a hybridization of Rightist economic liberalism and Leftist social democracy into a depoliticized political program aimed at strategically taming problems arising from globalization. Capitalist liberalism was now fully endorsed by both the Right and the Left.

After the financial crash in 2008, the Progressive-liberal Left took on shape. In the doctrine of the Progressive-liberal Left, the marxist preoccupation with class was disposed of and replaced by identity politics with the aim to attain social justice. To fight social injustices that hit certain identity groups, a specific philosophical canon was invoked to work out the particular nature, origin and futures of the identities. This canon consists of marxist literature, works by (Parisian) academics from the 1960s

and 1970s, and newer staple works geared towards the promotion of identity politics, for example

Kimberlé Crenshaw's *On Intersectionality* (2017). The Progressive-liberal Left is concerned with struggles

for 'recognition' whereas the Leftist movements from before the Third Way had been concerned with

issues of 'redistribution' (Fraser 1998).

In reaction to the rise of a new Left position again emerged a new Rightist position, which I have

called the Alternative Right. This twenty-first century Rightist position came to the fore in the 2010s,

having emerged from the New Right but marked by its shift to identity politics and cultural issues in

reaction to the Progressive-liberal Left's doctrine. The Alternative Right can be separated into two

strands, the alt-right and the alt-lite, which are concerned with protecting the white race or Western

culture, respectively.

Recently, new Rightist and Leftist positions that I have called the New Old Left and the New Old

Right have gained following. These two positions express the development occurring in both the Left

and the Right in which critics of the Alternative Right and Progressive-liberal Left call for a return to the

grand narratives of the Left and Right positions of earlier centuries, disposing of the focus of identity and

culture of the Progressive-liberal Left and the Alternative Right. The New Old Left finds inspiration in the

social democracy revisionism of the Old Left, wanting to shift the attention of the Left back from identity

politics to class struggle. The New Old Right wishes to return to traditional conservatism and classical

liberalism.

4.2 What are the Left and the Right

We have seen in the first part of this thesis that ideology transforms contradiction into

opposition to provide the false image that positions can be stable and undivided. Ideologies of

opposition distract us from the fact that there is no pure self-identity and that being itself is divided. The

opposition between the Left and the Right is such an ideology of opposition that disguises the

contradiction that underlies both their positions. This contradiction is that social order is antagonistic. No matter how hard we strive for it, there will always be contradictions that bar our society from realizing its fullest potential. In other words, the antagonisms in social order will never be completely resolved - we will have to make do with our imperfect, contradictory present social order.

This contradiction emerged with the Enlightenment. When Enlightenment removed the undisputable authority of the absolute state and of Christianity over social order, it gave way for a perspective that no longer saw the present order as naturally given and irrefutable but as encompassing tensions and problems that should be resolved. With Enlightenment came the possibility to create an idealized view of what social order should look like and identify in what ways the actual social order differed from this utopian view. Hence, the ideologies of the Right and the Left were born. Both envision a social order that is unsplit again, either by returning to the time before Enlightenment or overcoming the contradictions brought about by Enlightenment.

The opposition between the Left and the Right springs from their stances on what the present social order should be replaced by. The Right sees a solution to today's problems in a past that was still undisturbed by the problems it sees in the present order. This disruption must be undone in order to return to the social order of the past. The right accuses the revolutionary projects of the Left of spoiling the social order of the past. This explains the Right's opposition to the Left - the Left's projects entail a continuous distancing from the past's utopia. On the contrary, the Left believes the ideal social order to lie in a future in which all antagonism is overcome. Hence, both the Left and the Right are marked by their desire to overcome the contradictions of the present by either disposing of disruptions of the past or obstacles to future resolution. It is however impossible to overcome the present's contradictions since existence is inherently split.

Next to bringing the ideologies of the Left and Right into existence, Enlightenment has also established the conditions that make their goals unachievable: it has removed the possibility to rely on

an absolute other to dictate our existence, and has forced us to become responsible for the organization of social order. The inability to accept that a self-identical, ideal social order has become forever unachievable since Enlightenment has led to the inception of the Left and the Right.

The ideologies of the Left and on the Right create the false image of a self-identical, unsplit other that is beyond reach, to which authority can be ascribed and which provides justification for all actions in the pursuit of them. These self-identical others are the undisrupted past for the Right and the uncontradictionary future for the Left. From a Hegelian perspective, both the Left and the Right thusly do not provide a doctrine of freedom. Freedom can only be attained by recognizing that contradictions will always bar society from realizing itself.

While strategies like the Third Way, the acceptance of multiculturalism, and conversational 'post-political' social democracy do not turn to either the past or the future for salvation, but have their sight set on the present, they still do not achieve the overcoming of contradictions. This is because these strategies do not offer a solution to the antagonisms but rather settle to strategically manage or tame them - this does not lead to freedom but only to self-deception. From this perspective it is unsurprising that out of the tensions within the depoliticized Third Way settlement the radical Progressive-liberal Left and Alternative Right emerged.

This interpretation of the Left, Right, and liberal consensus makes a new perspective on adversary politics possible: the essential political question should no longer be "are you Leftist or Rightist?" but rather "is the present social order 'in a crisis' or not?" The answer to this question is - as Žižek would say, 'of course,' - neither and both at the same time. This is because social order is inescapably antagonistic and hence perpetually 'in crisis'.

While they have retained the particular past- or future-orientation inherited of the historical Left and Right, the Left and Right of today are struggling on the terrain of identity politics instead of the traditional terrain of class struggle. Nonetheless, the recent rise of the New Old Right and the New Old

Left reveal that conservatism and communism are alive and well; only time will tell what will emerge

from the tensions within and between these positions.

Moreover, the general acceptance of liberalism since the end of the Cold War that ruled out

communism as a grand narrative has resulted in the acceptance of capitalist liberalism by both the Left

and the Right. Arguably, this has resulted in a shift of the struggle between the Left and the Right

towards contradictions *within* liberalism, the opposition now being between the Progressive-liberal

Left's progressive liberalism and the Alternative Right's 'anti-Enlightenment' authoritarian liberalism

(Žižek 2020, 11). This could be linked to 'the liberal problem' that John Gray mentions in *Liberalism*

(1995).

Gray describes the liberal problem as the problem of "specifying terms of peaceful coexistence

among exponents of rival, and perhaps rationally incommensurable world views." (Gray 1995, 85) As we

have seen, Rightist conservatives have been continuously concerned with the question how society

must be held together in the face of the liberal individualism that the Left pushes for. The Right is

concerned with the way in which individualism threatens community and tradition which keeps social

life intact and thereby freedom possible. On the contrary, the Left is concerned with advancing the

freedom of individuals. As an example of the inner antagonisms of the liberal project, Žižek points to

"the tension between liberals who are ready to condone racist and sexist jokes on account of the

freedom of speech, and the [political correctness] regulators who want to censor them as an obstacle to

the freedom and dignity of the victims of such jokes." (Žižek 2020, 458)

In his philosophy, Hegel brings rational autonomy and communal solidarity together by showing

that individualism and community are two sides of the same coin: you need the state in order to achieve

self-consciousness and appreciate freedom. Moreover, you need constraint in order to achieve

subjective freedom. Hegel leaves the liberal ideal intact while disposing of the liberal rationale, replacing

it with a rationale based on the necessity of communal constraint. (Franco 1996, 836) The Left-Right

dialectic thus also represents Hegel's thesis that liberal freedoms can only be achieved through illiberal constraint. Hegel's philosophy shows us that liberalism is in fact self-contradictory and that the difference between liberalism and illiberalism is false. Given that both individualism and community are essential to the achievement of subjective freedom, the Left and Right's take on liberalism also reveal to be false.

4.3 What is the struggle between Left and the Right about

From its inception in the French Revolution, the Right has emerged in opposition against the Left: the rise of the revolutionary Left in the eighteenth century brought the Right into existence by reflecting and discriminating itself from the Left. It came to guard the status-quo, the way of life before the Leftist revolutions. Crucially, the Right's existence and substantive doctrine have from the Right's inception been determined by the Left, as the Right's justification for existence is its reactionary opposition against the Left. This means that the Right cannot avoid situating itself in opposition to the Left, entailing that the Right is inevitably determined by the Left.

The contradiction between existence's necessary splitness and the Left and Right's unacceptance of this is what drives the dialectical development of the social order that they together realize. Social order is continuously destabilized by the Left pointing out the fundamental contradiction immanent to it and rising to overcome this contradiction. The Right reacts to the Left's disruption, as the Left's innovations entail further distancing from the idealized past. The Left's destabilization of the social order leads the Right to reflect on itself and situate itself again in opposition to the Left.

In the Right's reaction to the Left's disruption of social order, the contradiction that the Left struggled against is sublated through the Right's acknowledgement and negation of the Left's position. In other words, the Right's reaction does not only negate the Left's initial position but also preserves it within the Right's new position. The Right's sublation of the Left's leads to a new and higher unstable

settlement. In effect, the Left and the Right together continuously achieve higher standards of social

order.

Of course, dialectical development also rises out of contradictions and tensions internal to each

position. This is especially the case for the Left. This could be exemplified by the sublation of the Old

Left's doctrine by the New Left and the subsequent sublation of the New Right's focus on class by the

Progressive-liberal Left. The Left is speculative; it is destabilized by its own internal contradictions. The

Right is dialectical; it is the mirror through which the Left's portrayal of society is refracted, which leads

to society's transformation into a higher standard.

For example, the dialectic development of the Left and Right was apparent in the twentieth

century when the New Left's social movements of the long 1960s destabilized the American post-war

consensus by pointing out that there still existed widespread inequality and unfreedom among

minorities in the social order, to which the white middle-class majority had been oblivious. The Left's

destabilization of the social order led the Right to reflect on itself and resituate itself in opposition to the

Left, which led to the sublation of the Left's position. This changed the conditions of the struggle

between the Left and the Right, bringing about historical progress.

Crucially, the Right and the Left are in fact two sides of one and the same thing. Let us consider a

quote from Žižek:

> "As Hegel points out, this last position itself has two forms, dialectical and speculative, and
> everything hinges here on the opposition between dialectical and speculative thinking—one
> might say that dialectics remains negative, while only speculation reaches the highest positive
> dimension. Dialectics which is not yet speculative is the vibrant domain of the tremor of
> reflection and reflexive reversals, the mad dance of negativity in which "all that is solid melts
> into air"—this is dialectics as eternal warfare, as a movement which ultimately destroys
> everything it gives birth to." (Žižek 2014, 31)

Social order thus has two forms, the dialectic Right and the speculative Left. The Right remains

negative, while the Left pushes for innovation. Through the Right's sublation of the Left's position, the

Left-Right dialectic makes the social order reach higher standards of emancipation, freedom, and

equality in society. The Right is thus the 'enemy that turns out to be a version of ourselves' as McGowan

describes it - it is the essential negative, the necessary nothing against which we can identify ourselves.

(McGowan 2019, 3; 15) The Right situates itself radically and purposefully opposed to the position that

the Left takes on it. Hence, the Right's reason for existence is opposition. Both sides of social order, the

dialectical Right and the speculative Left, are necessary parts of the dialectic that makes progress of the

social order possible.

Conclusion

This thesis was concerned with coming to a better understanding of the present Left and the Right, and the struggle between these two positions. Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan's interpretation of Hegel's philosophy has been used to achieve this, which allowed for the systematic assessment of the contradiction underlying the Left-Right opposition. From a Hegelian perspective, reflection on historical positions not only gives rise to a better understanding of the past, but also for analysis of the present. Hence, a historical reconstruction of the Left and Right's development provided insight into the positions of the present Left and Right. We have thus traced the development of the Left and the Right since their invention in the French Revolution.

The historical reconstruction revealed firstly what the positions of the Left and the Right entail and secondly what the nature is of the struggle between them. Regarding the first, I have argued that the opposition between the Left and the Right is an ideology that disguises the contradiction that underlies both their positions. The opposition between the Left and Right rises from their stances vis-a-vis the present social order: both see the present as unsatisfactory and problematic and aspire for its replacement for something better. The Right wants to return to an undisturbed past while the Left believes that the perfect social order lies in the future, after all contradictions have been taken away. Underlying this opposition is that contradictions in social order are unavoidable, which entails that society will always be barred from realizing its fullest potential. We will never be able to reach a perfect, undivided social order and will have to make do with our ever-unsatisfactory, contradictory reality. Moreover, I have argued that the Right and the Left express two necessary sides to achieving subjective freedom. The communal constraint that the Right emphasizes is necessary to make self-consciousness and appreciation of freedom possible.

Regarding the second question, about the nature of the struggle between the Left and the Right, I have argued that the Right and the Left are two sides of social order. The Left is speculative; it is destabilized by its own internal contradictions. The Right is dialectical; it sublates the Left's position, which leads to progress of the social order. Hence, the speculative Left and the dialectical Right are both necessary parts of the dialectic that makes social progress possible.

In *A Left that Dares to Speak its Name* (2020), Žižek argues that capitalism is to blame for the "anti-Enlightenment madness" that he sees gaining grounds in the present social order (Žižek 2020, 11). He asserts that "what we need today is a Left that dares to speak its name, not a Left that shamefully covers up its core with some cultural fig leaf." (Žižek 2020, 16) Žižek is critical of the development that class struggle is being blended with the 'other struggles' that are concerned with social identity rather than class. In the face of this, Žižek urges his readers to "abandon the socialist dream of 'just' capitalism and to envisage more radical "communist" measures." (Žižek 2020, 26-28) In other words, Žižek calls on Leftists to let go of the socialist idea that current society can be slowly but steadily transformed into one that is just. Instead, Leftists must converge to 'radical communist ideals', which in his view means not to be afraid to draw radical conclusions and to take matters in our own hands.

Hence, even the revolutionary philosophy of Žižek does not echo the radical Hegel we have presented in this thesis: Žižek too continues to believe in a utopia in the future, when all contradictions have been broken down. He condemns the contemporary Left for not having an alternative to the contemporary "stupefying consensus", calling on the "remaining radical Left" to find ways to formulate a new Leftist vision of Europe. (Žižek 2020, 40-41) Žižek's cry for change echoes the speech he gave on Wall Street during the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 (Žižek 2011). This shows us that, while he is accusing Marx of being too 'pseudo-Hegelian' (Žižek 2014, 73), Žižek himself is also vulnerable for the seduction of the 'Gaelic Rooster's' promises of teleological resolution.

Perhaps Žižek is a 'radical optimist' rather than the 'radical pessimist' that he claimed to be in his debate with Jordan Peterson in 2019. Of course, he sounded pessimistic when he said that we are slipping towards 'apocalypse'. But I think that he implied something else with this than Peterson did when he agreed with Žižek. Although the word 'apocalypse' is popularly used as a synonym for catastrophe, the Greek word apokálypsis from which it is derived, means 'revelation'. While Peterson probably meant to use the former meaning, I think Žižek - as a truly dialectical thinker - took on both meanings of 'apocalypse' in his comment. In Žižek's view, we must reach 'rock-bottom', all-out catastrophe before it is revealed to us that we need radical communist action to achieve a truly just society. Only an earth-trembling event will be able to overturn the dialectical downward spiral of capitalism and make true communism accessible. Therefore, Žižek accuses us of not taking matters in our own hands, even when the present urgently demands this from us.

Even though he has acknowledged the impossibility of dialectical teleology that comes with a dialectical perspective, Žižek shows that he cannot help but hope for salvation in the future. Just like it is a tough pill for Žižek to swallow, such a truly pessimistic perspective may not be what we wish for. Instead, we want to be comforted by the idea that our struggle for freedom will eventually lead to the overcoming of distinctions and the attainment of true freedom. The "debate of the century" between Peterson and Žižek may thus not have been what we had hoped for, but it is all that we get: we hoped for resolution, offered by the final answers to "hard questions" reached through the clash of antithetical "titans" Žižek and Peterson, who represented the Left and the Right. From a dialectical perspective however, this is unattainable as distinction is inherent to being and thought - this cannot be overcome.

Žižek would argue that we 'deserve' such irresolution due to our inability, unwillingness or ignorance that keeps us from forcing a resolution through communist revolution. I think a different viewpoint would suit us better: instead of becoming demotivated by the knowledge that we will never be able to find resolution and 'true' freedom, we should turn our attention to the incremental

achievements that we have and can still achieve through dialectical development. So I follow

McGowan's more 'radical' philosophy: we find freedom by recognizing that existence itself is

contradictory and this is therefore insurmountable - nevertheless we must maintain the 'law of

noncontradiction' and struggle to resolve contradictions and not simply accept them as we would do

when we agree to disagree or hide in depoliticized consensus politics. Only then are we able to work

further through contradictions and promote emancipation.

Be mindful: this does not advocate for apathy. As Todd McGowan writes in *Emancipation after*

Hegel (2019), we must go further than mere acceptance of contradiction. Instead, we must take

seriously that contradiction is what drives our thinking and actions: we thus have to actively fight

contradiction. Insisting on non-contradiction ultimately leads to more contradiction, which furthers the

dialectic development by continuously moving to new positions that avoid the previous contradictions

but welcomes new ones. Furthering the dialectic thus furthers our emancipatory achievements.

(McGowan 2019, 6-7; 15-16)

Philosophy's task is thus to insist on non-contradiction rather than reluctantly accepting

contradiction or hoping to ultimately resolve it as Žižek does. Rather than trying to eliminate

contradiction, we have to find a path to sustain and further it. Above all else, we must thus not give up

our struggle for freedom but continue to change the conditions of our struggle.

References

References to Hegel

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1942. Philosophy of Right. Translated with notes by TM Knox. Oxford:

Oxford University Press.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1975. *Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.

Translated by W. Wallace. 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Translated by AV Miller. Oxford: Oxford

University Press.

Academic references

Albo, Gregory. 2002. "Neoliberalism, the State, and the Left: A Canandian Perspective." *Monthly Review*,

no. 1: 46-55.

Anderson, Kevin. 1995. *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: a critical study.* University of Illinois Press.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1996. K*arl Marx: His life and environment*. 4th edition. Princeton: Princeton University

Press.

Bernstein, Mary. 2005. "Identity politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 31 : 47-74.

Brennan, Timothy. 2006. *Wars of position: The cultural politics of left and right.* New York: Columbia

University Press.

Breuilly, John. 2011. *The Oxford handbook of the history of nationalism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bobbio, Norberto. 1996. *Left and right: The significance of a political distinction*. Translated an

      introduced by Allan Cameron. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burgin, Angus. 2012. *The great persuasion: Reinventing free markets since the depression*. Cambridge:

      Harvard University Press.

Burgis, Ben, Conrad Bongard Hamilton, Matthew McManus, and Marion Trejo. 2020. Myth and

      Mayhem: A Leftist Critique of Jordan Peterson. Hampshire: John Hunt Publishing.

Butler, Judith. 1997. "Merely cultural." *Social text* 52/53: 265-277.

Cesarale, Giorgio. 2016. "Between Schelling and Marx: The Hegel of Slavoj Žižek: A Review of Less than

      Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism by Slavoj Žižek." Review of *Less than*

      Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism, by Slavoj Žižek. *Historical Materialism*

      24, no. 2 (2016): 205-227.

Chomsky, Noam, Charles Derber, Suren Moodliar, and Paul Shannon. 2020. *Chomsky for Activists.* New

      York: Routledge.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. 2017. On intersectionality: Essential writings. New York: The New Press.

Colletti, Lucio. 1974. *From Rousseau to Lenin*. New York: New York University Press.

Comay, Rebecca. 2011. *Mourning sickness: Hegel and the French revolution.* Redwood City: Stanford

      University Press.

Farred, Grant. 2000. "Endgame identity? Mapping the New Left roots of identity politics." *New Literary*

      History 31, no. 4: 627-648.

Feró, Dalma. 2020. "The Post-politics of Recognition in Hegemonic Struggles: The Road from the New

      Left Movements to the Crumbling of Liberal Hegemony." Intersections. *East European Journal of*

      Society and Politics 6, no. 1.

Franco, Paul. 1997. "Hegel and liberalism." The Review of Politics 59, no. 4: 831-860.

Fraser, Nancy, 1997. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Post-Socialist" Condition.* New York:

    Routledge.

Fraser, Nancy. 1998. "Social Justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition,

    participation." In *Discussion paper // Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung,*

    Forschungsschwerpunkt Arbeitsmarkt und Beschäftigung, Abteilyng Organisation und

    Beschäftigung. No. FS I 98-108.

Fukuyama, Francis. 1989. "The end of history?" *The national interest* 16: 3-18.

    Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man.* New York: Free Press.

Gauchet, Marcel. 1997. "Right and Left". In *Realms of memory: conflicts and divisions*, edited by Pierre

    Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman. New York: Columbia University Press.

Giddens, Anthony. 1998. *The third way: The renewal of social democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gosse, Van. 2005. *Rethinking the new left: An interpretative history*. 1st edition. New York: Palgrave

    Macmillan. Accessed via:

    https://books.google.nl/books?id=Tv_MCwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=nl&source=gbs_ge

    _summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

    Gotzler, Steven. 2019. "Years in Cultural Studies: 1956—The British New Left and the 'Big Bang'

    Theory of Cultural Studies." *Lateral* 8, no. 2.

Gray, John. 1995. *Liberalism.* Concepts in social thought. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gray, John. 2010. *Gray's anatomy: Selected writings*. London: Penguin UK.

Hall, Stuart. 2017. "The great moving nowhere show 1998." In *Selected Political Writings*, pp. 283-300.

    Durham: Duke University Press

Hamza, Agon. 2016. "Going to one's ground: Žižek's dialectical materialism." In *Slavoj Žižek and*

    dialectical materialism, pp. 163-175. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hayek, Friedrich A. 2001. *The Road to Serfdom.* Routledge classics. 1st edition. London: Routledge.

Hayek, Friedrich August. 2021. "Postscript: Why I am not a Conservative." In *The Constitution of Liberty*,

Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hermansson, Patrik, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simon Murdoch. 2020. *The international alt-right:*

Fascism for the 21st century?. New York: Routledge.

Heyes, Cressida. 2020. "Identity politics." in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition),

edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed via:

https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/identity-politics/.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1994. *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*. New York:

Vintage Books.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1995. *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875.* London: Abacus.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1996. *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848.* New York: Vintage Books.

Hobsbawm, Eric J, and Kertzer, David. 1992. "Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe today." *Anthropology*

today 8, no. 1: 3-8.

Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of pure reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kauffman, L. A. 1990. "The anti-politics of identity." In *Identity politics in the women's*

movement. Edited by Barbara Ryan. New York: New York University Press.

Khader, Jamil. 2013. Introduction: Žižek Now or Never: Ideological Critique and the Nothingness

of Being. In *Žižek now: Current perspectives in Žižek studies.* Edited by Jamil Khader, and Molly

Anne Rothenberg. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Knapp, Andrew, and Vincent Wright. 2006. *The government and politics of France*. London: Routledge.

Kurth, James. 1999. "War, peace, and the ideologies of the twentieth century." *Current History* 98, no.

624: 3-8.

Laponce, Jean. 1981. *Left and right: The topography of political perceptions*. Toronto: University of

Toronto Press.

Last, Cadel. 2019. "Žižek and Peterson: Demonstrating the Importance of Higher Order Dialogue."

International Journal of Žižek Studies 13, no. 2.

Levy, Carl. 1999. "Fascism, national socialism and conservatives in Europe, 1914-1945: issues for

comparativists." *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 1 (1999): 97-126.

Lian, Ania. 2019. "The Toronto debate: Jordan Peterson and Slavoj Žižek on ethics and happiness." *The

European Legacy* vol. 24, no. 6, 644-650.

Lichtheim, George. 1964. *Marxism: An historical and critical study.* London: Routledge.

Lovecy, Jill. 2000."New Labour and the "Left that is left" in Western Europe." *New Labour in Power*: 49-

65.

Löwith, Karl. 1991. *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The revolution in nineteenth century thought*.

Translated by David E. Green. New York: Columbia University Press.

Luebbert, Gregory M. 1991. *Liberalism, fascism, or social democracy: Social classes and the political

origins of regimes in interwar Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mannheim, Karl. 1993. *From Karl Mannheim.* New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Maybee, Julie. 2016. "Hegel's dialectics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020

Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed via:

https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/hegel-dialectics/.

McGowan, Todd. 2013. "Hegel as Marxist: Žižek's Revision of German Idealism." In *Žižek now: Current

perspectives in Žižek studies.* Edited by Jamil Khader, and Molly Anne Rothenberg. Cambridge:

Polity Press.

McGowan, Todd. 2019. *Emancipation After Hegel*. New York: Columbia University Press. Apple Books.

Michielsen, Leo. 1976. *Geschiedenis van de Europese arbeidersbeweging.* Accessed 16 July 2022, from:

https://www.marxists.org/nederlands/michielsen/1976/geschied/.

Mirowski, Philip, and Plehwe, Dieter. 2009. *The road from Mont Pèlerin: The making of the neoliberal*

thought collective. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

Mounk, Yascha. 2018. *The People vs. Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Murray, Douglas. 2019. *The madness of crowds: Gender, race and identity*. London: Bloomsbury

Publishing.

Oudenampsen, Merijn. 2020. *The rise of the Dutch new right: An intellectual history of the rightward*

shift in Dutch politics. London: Routledge.

Piotrowski, Grzegorz, and Daniel Mikecs. 2015. "What are Easter European social movements and how

to study them?" In *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics: Social*

movements and contentious politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Vol. 1, No. 3: 4-11.

Plamenatz, John Petrov. 1971. *Ideology.* New York: Springer.

Pluckrose, Helen, and James A. Lindsay. 2020. *Cynical theories: How activist scholarship made everything*

about race, gender, and identity—and why this harms everybody. Durham: Pitchstone

Publishing.

Rose, Matthew. 2021. *A World After Liberalism: Philosophers of the Radical Right.* New Haven: Yale

University Press.

Senior, Heather. 2009. *The Britannica guide to political and social movements that changed the modern*

world. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group.

Singer, Peter. 2001. *Hegel: A very short introduction.* Vol. 49 of *Very short introdutions*. Oxford: Oxford

University Press.

Spengler, Oswald. 2006. *The decline of the West.* New York: Vintage Books.

Spengler, Oswald. 2006. *The Hour of Decision.* London: Routledge.

Stern, Robert. 2002. *Routledge philosophy guidebook to Hegel and the phenomenology of spirit.* London:

    Psychology Press.

        Stratton-Lake, Philip. 1999. "Kant's Transcendental Idealism." In *The Edinburgh encyclopedia of*

    continental philosophy. Edited by Simon Glendinning. London: Psychology Press.

Vaïsse, Justin. 2010a. *Neoconservatism: The biography of a movement.* Cambridge: Harvard University

        Press.

Van Oenen, Gijs. 2022. *Culturele Veldslagen.* Amsterdam: Boom.

Walters, Suzanna. 2018. "In defense of identity politics." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*

        43, no. 2: 473-488.

Weltman, David. 2004. "Political identity and the Third Way: Some social-psychological implications of

        the current anti-ideological turn." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 43, no. 1: 83-98.

Weynes, Walter. 2011. *Wie Wat Woke.* Kalmhout: Pelckmans.

Whyman, Philip. 2005. *Third Way Economics: theory and evaluation*. New York: Springer.

Williams, Robert R. 1992. *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the other.* Albany: State University of New

        York Press.

Wodak, Ruth. 2015. *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean.* New York: Sage.

Wolf, William C. 2018. "Rethinking Hegel's Conceptual Realism." *The Review of Metaphysics* 72, no. 2:

        331-370.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The sublime object of ideology.* London: Verso Books.

Žižek, Slavoj. 1993. *Tarrying with the negative: Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology.* Durham: Duke

        University Press.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2012a. "Is it still possible to be a Hegelian today?" In *Filosofisk Supplement.* Accessed via:

        https://filosofisksupplement.no/forfatter/slavoj-zizek/

Žižek, Slavoj. 2012b. *Less than nothing: Hegel and the shadow of dialectical materialism.* London: Verso

Books.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2014. *Absolute recoil: Towards a new foundation of dialectical materialism.* London: Verso

Books. Apple books.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2019. "Can One Be a Hegelian Today?" *The Philosophical Salon*. Retrieved 10 July 2022,

from https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/can-one-be-a-hegelian-today/.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2020. *A left that dares to speak its name: 34 untimely interventions.* Hoboken: John Wiley

& Sons.

Non-academic references

Lievisse Adriaanse, Mark & Retera, Denise. 2022. "Meer partijen dan ooit, maar steeds minder te

kiezen." *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (NRC)* Retrieved 21 July 2022, from

https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/03/19/meer-partijen-dan-ooit-maar-steeds-minder-te-kiezen-

a4102936?t=1657460521

Bahara, Hassan, Kranenberg, Annieke. 2017. "Hoe de extreemrechtse groepering Erkenbrand zich

opmaakt voor de strijd om een blanke natie." *De Volkskrant.* Retrieved 28 July 2022, from

https://www.volkskrant.nl/uitgelicht/hoe-de-extreemrechtse-groepering-erkenbrand-zich-

opmaakt-voor-de-strijd-om-een-blanke-natie~bebc1e89/

Beauchamp, Zack. 2018. "Jordan Peterson, the obscure Canadian psychologist turned right-wing

celebrity, explained." *Vox.* Retrieved 16 July 2022, from

https://www.vox.com/world/2018/3/26/17144166/jordan-peterson-12-rules-for-life

Hanson, Victor. 2018. "The Rise Of The New Old Left." *Hoover Institution.* Retrieved 24 July 2022, from

https://www.hoover.org/research/rise-new-old-left

Hennessy, James. 2022. "Jordan Peterson and 'Kung Fu Panda': How Did Slavoj Žižek Go Mainstream?"

      VICE. Retrieved 16 July 2022, from https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7gqxx/jordan-peterson-

      and-kung-fu-panda-how-did-slavoj-žižek-go-mainstream

      Kurtzleben, Danielle. 2021. "More And More Democrats Embrace The 'Progressive' Label. Here's

      Why." *NPR.* Retrieved 27 July 2022, from https://www.npr.org/2021/09/13/1035971261/more-

      and-more-democrats-embrace-the-progressive-label-heres-why?t=1658932790667

Last, Cadel. 2018. "Chapter 4 – Is It Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today? (Part 1)." *Cadel Last.* Retrieved

      10 July 2022, from https://cadelllast.com/2018/03/25/chapter-4-is-it-still-possible-to-be-a-

      hegelian-today/

Lindsay, James. 2021. "Hegel, Wokeness, and the Dialectical Faith of Leftism." *New Discourses Podcasts*

      via Youtube. Accessed 29 July 2022, from

      https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf4R0gX7g3w&t=6418s&ab_channel=NewDiscourses

Marche, Stephen. 2019. "The 'debate of the century': what happened when Jordan Peterson debated

      Slavoj Žižek." *The Guardian.* Retrieved 28 July 2022, from:

      https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/20/jordan-peterson-slavoj-zizek-happiness-

      capitalism-marxism.

Oudenampsen, Merijn. 2019. "De visie van Mark Rutte." *Merijn Oudenampsen.* Retrieved 29 July 2022,

      from https://merijnoudenampsen.org/2019/03/31/de-visie-van-mark-rutte/.

Vaïsse, Justin. 2010b. "Why neoconservatism still matters." In *Perspective* from the Lowy Institute for

      International Policy.

Welsch, Erin. 2020. "Why Is Žižek?" *Medium.* Retrieved 18 July 2022, from

      https://medium.com/@ramman_erin/why-is-%C5%BEi%C5%BEek-92ef5f8c7e4d

Žižek, Slavoj. 2011. "Slavoj Žižek Speaks at Occupty Wall Street: Transcript." *Impose Magazine.* Retrieved

28 July 2022, from: https://imposemagazine.com/bytes/slavoj-zizek-at-occupy-wall-street-

transcript

Žižek, Slavoj. 2022. "From Cold War To Hot Peace." *Project Syndicate.* Retrieved 28 July 2022,

from: https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/hot-peace-putins-war-as-clash-of-civilization-

by-slavoj-zizek-2022-03?barrier=accesspaylog.