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Hegel on the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist Aftermath

Abstract

Hegel's philosophy of revolution has been widely studied and much debated. Some scholars see Hegel as a tiresome defender of existing political orders, while others point to his enthusiastic, if partial, support for the French Revolution, as well as for many modern revolutions or insurrectionary movements, both ancient and modern. Following this last line of argument, my paper attempts a Hegelian interpretation of the Russian Revolution, taking into account important aspects such as the subversive dynamic of Hegelian political concepts, the relationship between class and state in Hegel's political philosophy, the overwhelmingly anti-feudal character of the Russian Revolution, and, finally, the stabilisation and distortion of the Russian Revolution under the Stalinist regime, which, in Hegelian terms, can be seen as a new form of absolute freedom (terror) aimed at solving the main social dilemma of modernity identified by Hegel in his Elements of the Philosophy of Right, namely poverty.

Keywords

revolution, alienation, poverty, contradiction, dialectic, freedom, necessity

Introduction: Hegel and revolution

Following Marx's analyses, Lenin struggled with Hegel's philosophy and found it surprisingly insightful in anticipating materialism in general and dialectical materialism in particular (Lenin, 1976). However, he did not apply Hegel's political philosophy thoroughly to understand the Russian Revolution of 1917; Marx's political economy was sufficient. To my knowledge, no one else did,[1] even though Hegel was highly influential in Soviet philosophy and connections between his philosophy and various aspects of Leninism and Soviet politics are definitely not lacking (Löwy, 2007, 5–15; Pavlov, 2016, 157–189).

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With the exception of Emiliano Allesandroni, (ed.), *La Rivoluzione d'Ottobre e il pensiero di Hegel* [*The October Revolution and Hegel's Thought*], Milano, Mimesis International, 2022. However, this collection explores especially the process of how different subversive groups from the late Tsarist Empire (narodniks, anarchists etc.) came to being under the influence of European radical literature, Marxist, in general, and how this particular literature was influenced by Hegel. Also considered is the interpretation of a prominent member of the Frankfurt School, Theodore Adorno, of the Bolshevik Revolution, refined with the help of Hegelian logic. Finally, the book includes a chapter analysing the rise of the Bolshevik party as a form of expanding political consciousness. As a historical vehicle of the spirit, the party is thus torn between the social freedom it craves and the political necessity needed to generate and contain it - a truly Hegelian contradiction. But despite the rather metaphorical title, this book does not provide a systematic analysis of the Russian Revolution as a concrete political and historical event, as my article does.

This paper fits into the context of the rediscovery of Hegel, especially in the last decades, as an autonomous critical thinker (Losurdo, 2004; Monahan, 2017; Buchwalter, 2015; Buchwalter, 2012) and not just as a verbose, confuse and even 'mystical' predecessor of Marx better left aside, like Karl Popper has impetuously labelled him (Popper, 2013). The primary aim is to apply some of the basic tenets of Hegelian political philosophy to the unpredictable yet highly influential political event that was the Russian Revolution. The secondary aim is to contribute to the consolidation and expansion of the above-mentioned literature.

Starting from Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution (Hegel, 1977, 355–363; Hegel, 2003; Ritter, 1984; Comay, 2011, Bourke, 2023, 155–169), my endeavor is to offer a possible Hegelian analysis of the Russian Revolution that is not strictly confined to Hegel's political philosophy, but engages his whole philosophical system. It does so by taking into account the relation between social classes and state found in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (2003), the anti-feudal character of the Russian Revolution, more prominent than the antibourgeois one, which brings it closer to the French Revolution that Hegel was familiar with, and by investigating Hegel's concept of rabble in connection to the efforts made by the young Soviet state in order to transform it into a proper social class. Last but not least, the paper takes into account the process of state consolidation triggered by the Stalinist regime which basically stabilized and 'institutionalized' the 1917 revolution by strongly diminishing and reorienting its revolutionary ethos. For Hegel, the political ability to keep social contradictions in check and allow them to develop in such a way that they do not become harmful and disruptive to society as a whole is the most important and distinctive characteristic of a state, a state that consolidates itself as institutionalised political will through law.

A Hegelian analysis of the Russian Revolution is important for several reasons. First, it provides an opportunity to test Hegelian political concepts on major historical events - and contemporary events too - and to examine their durability, nuance and adaptability. Second, it extends the aforementioned rediscovery of Hegel as an immensely important political and social philosopher (see Bourke, 2023, 225–256). Third, it also enriches the existing historical literature on the Russian Revolution, placing it in a new and challenging context. Furthermore, Marxism, as it developed in 19th century Europe, has to a large extent influenced Russian revolutionary thought. Since Hegel had such an influence on Marxism, it is fair to say that the Russian Revolution, and even its Stalinist outcome, are both political and historical events (and processes) - with a clear Hegelian intellectual genealogy. However, this recognition tends to complicate rather than clarify matters. Are Leninism and Stalinism forms of Marxism, or are they radically different political ideologies that merely make less and less convincing use of Marxist terminology? While important works agree on the former (Harding, 1996, 220–225), others argue in favour of the latter (Walicki, 1995). This paper also endorses Leninism and Stalinism as endemic forms of Marxism, although, in terms of Soviet studies, it does so from a "revisionist", not a "totalitarian" perspective (see, for example, Copilaș, 2023, 11–13).

Six main features of Hegel's analysis of the French Revolution are identified in this paper:

a) its already mentioned anti-feudal character;

b) the stressing of both political and individual new found universal freedom;
c) the overall subversive dynamic of political concepts used by the French Revolution and internalized within the Hegelian political philosophy;
d) a religious ambiguity – the old mystical Christian religion of the ancient regime is thoroughly criticized by Hegel, but so is the French Revolutionary approach to religion, considered too one-sided and individualistic;
e) Hegel's concept of *rabble,* useful in order to evaluate the social dimension of the French Revolution;
f) Hegel's approach to revolutionary terror, that can be rather easily extrapolated from the French to the Russian case.

In various combinations, all these six elements are used to advance the argument for a possible Hegelian interpretation of the Russian Revolution. Finally, the concluding section highlights the importance of the concept of revolution for Hegel's political philosophy, along with some almost insurmountable frictions generated by the impossibility of fully integrating the former into the latter.

Hegel and the French Revolution

As Manfred Riedel has shown, despite Hegel's overall reformist and centrist political intentions (some of them will be developed as the essay unfolds), his concepts, especially the political ones, are inherently unstable (Riedel, 1984, 174–175). Hegel tried to capture the philosophical essence of the state at a time when, under the influence of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, traditional political concepts were undergoing massive and irreversible changes. This is why, although he tried to preserve in his works traditional social and professional classes (peasants, merchants, organized in guilds, and civil servants – the last one being referred to in his early works as the class devoted to the universal (Hegel, 1975; see also Hegel, 2003, 227–239) – his major political ambition of helping to create a reformist German state with the help of the emancipatory innovations brought about by the French Revolution while avoiding in the same time its excesses and crimes may seem, two centuries ahead, optimistic (Hegel, 1990, 217–274; Hyppolite, 1973, 52–53; Marcuse, 1955; Lukács, 1975; Avineri, 1994, 3–4, 34–61). New political concepts entailed by the French Revolution – human rights, citizenship, democracy, freedom, progress – infused old or relatively old political concepts like monarchy, tradition, estates, guilds - with a subversive ferment that went way beyond Hegel's hopes and expectations. Consequently, we can employ his political philosophy as part of his larger philosophical system in order to study the Russian Revolution and to advance findings that Hegel himself would have probably dismissed, even if not entirely.

The French Revolution, arguably the most important political event Hegel witnessed in his lifetime, succeeded in radically transforming political thought and practice. If political philosophy up to Kant generally conceived of the subject as acting in an inevitably heteronomous environment, according to laws and developments not of its own making, Hegel's political subject overcomes Kantian heteronomy by being both the premise and the result of a given "system of ethical life" in which recognition through labour and labour

through recognition constitute one of the most powerful rational tendencies shaping modern societies by channelling them through inherently, though not necessarily transparent, emancipatory goals (Hegel, 1979, 125–126, 134–135; Hegel, 2003, Ritter, 1984, 157–158, Hyppolite, 1973, 37–38).[2] This gigantic historical process, and Hegel does not get tired of mentioning it, is structured by inescapable contradictions and will never manage to fully supersede them, for contradiction, as argued in the *Science of Logic*, is "is the root of all movement and life; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, is possessed of instinct and activity" (Hegel, 2010a, 382; see also McGowan, 2019).

There is, as Ritter has observed, a kind of constructive ambiguity in Hegel's interpretation of the French Revolution. Although he reluctantly acknowledges the right of peoples to eventually rebel when governments have utterly failed them (Hegel, 2006, 218–224; Hegel, 1998, 91) – even if this means a temporary upheaval for the stability of the state, which is logically and ontologically prior to and therefore superior to the individual citizens who articulate it (Hegel, 2003) – revolution has an ambiguous place in his political philosophy because, as Kant noted, it ultimately remains a violent disruption of the law, which states have a fundamental ethical duty to avoid (Comay, 2011, 27, 37). Consequently, Hegel's critique of social contract as an abstraction that renders particular individuals as founders of a political order – not, dialectically, the other way around, as the German philosopher argues – becomes clearer (Hegel, 1975). However, "there is politically no longer any possibility of turning back from the Revolution and what it has achieved. Every present and future legal and political order must presuppose and proceed from the Revolution's universal principle of freedom. Against this, all reservations concerning its formalism and abstractness lose their force" (Ritter, 1984, 52). And through the revolution, individuals become political subjects, paving the way for one of the basic political tenets of modernity: a state that is incapable of treating its subjects with dignity is a failed, questionable and also replaceable state, because particularities (individuals, families) cannot access the universal on their own, as arbitrary and accidental abstractions, but only through the ethical order to which they belong (Hegel, 2006, 220; Hegel, 2003, 219–226; Walicki, 1995, 176). If this ethical (political) order betrays its claim to universality, then its main purpose is invalidated. Consequently, even if the State is prior to the individual, it cannot develop its universality against the individual, but only through and for the individual, in the same way that intellect (the particular that cannot comprehend the world dialectically and is incapable of looking beyond its own narrow personal interests) is both a negation of and a precondition for reason (Hegel, 2003, 287; Hegel, 2004, 23).

While maintaining the revolutionary principle of freedom of both moral singularity and ethical totality to interact in more and more meaningful and rewarding ways, Hegel, although a convincing critic of aristocratic privileges turned oligarchical (Hegel, 2009, 65; Stewart, 2002, 99, 153) – is nevertheless unhappy with the French Revolution's Jacobin side, since its excesses hamper the 'rational' side of this global-historical event. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, absolute, unmediated freedom becomes terror, a universal void of contradiction, becoming and alienation in which excessive susceptibility accompanied by frequent executions are established as norms (Hegel, 1977, 355–363; Hegel, 2009, 23; Hyppolite, 1974, 458; Bourke, 2023, 155–158; Walicki, 1995, 30). According to Hyppolite, terror thus drives a new social

and political dialectic, a new form of struggle for recognition between master and bondsman, replacing the old master (aristocracy) with a new one (bourgeoisie) willing to risk its own life to succeed (Hyppolite, 1974, 460–461). The former servant, the bourgeoisie, is now master in relation to the proletariat. For Hegel, this proves that isolated individuals, however rational and emancipated, cannot chaotically and violently replace existing political structures with their aspirations: it is up to the state to govern properly and to ensure the timely implementation of necessary reforms (Marcuse, 1955, 91).

Moreover, the French Revolution is criticized for its un-dialectical approach to religion, which can contribute a lot to the stability and self-understanding of communities if it is not dogmatic and self-sufficient (Hegel, 1961, 317). Nevertheless, the revolution – along with the revival of the ancient republican spirit, which Hegel is so fond of – is proof enough that reason is the ruling force of the sensible world, despite the latter's presumed contradictions; but in order to be truly successful, reason must dialectically absorb and at the same time transcend phenomenal appearances and older forms of consciousness (Marcuse, 1955, 6; Lukács, 1975, 71). As the embodiment of the rational Idea, Spirit is the main ontological driving force of the sensible world, despite the major shortcomings and inconsistencies that seem to invalidate its existence (Hegel 1977).

However, young Hegel is, albeit cautiously, way more open to political radicalism than older Hegel, as Hyppolite noticed (1973, 39). I will return to this point later. The following quotation, brimming with oratorical effect, can even be interpreted as an indirect endorsement of Jacobinism, not only of the French Revolution in general, for without Jacobin excesses the Revolution would ultimately have failed:

> "In monarchy the people was an active power only in the moment of battle. Like a mercenary army, it had to keep order not only in the fire of battle, but also had to return at once to perfect obedience after victory. We are accustomed by experience to see a mass of armed men enter upon command into a regulated fury of carnage, into lotteries of life and death, and then return equally upon command to calm. The same was asked of a people which had armed itself. The command was liberty, the enemy tyranny, the supreme commanding authority a constitution, subordination obedience to one's representatives. But there is a great difference between the passivity of military subordination and the rage of insurrection; between the order of a general and the flame of enthusiasm which liberty establishes through all the veins of a living being. It is this sacred flame which strained all nerves; it is for this flame, it is to enjoy it, that they exerted themselves. These efforts are the enjoyment of liberty, and you wish the people to renounce them. These activities, this endeavor on behalf of the public, this interest in the active principle, and you wish the people to throw itself more into inaction and torpor." (Stewart, 2002, 105)

When criticizing the liberal philosophy underlining the social contract as abstract individual wills unable to attain universality since ethical universality has always been prior to arbitrary and contingent phenomenological accidents – Hegel also offers arguments useful for justifying the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution:

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For an analysis of how Hegel's "spiritual" foundation of work is conveyed into Marx's critique of modern workforce as commodity and, later on, into Foucault's denunciation of both Hegel and Marx's abstract theorizing of work as failing to reveal the relational and omnipresent power mechanisms of modern biopolitics that do away with the idleness of poverty by subjecting it to subtle and almost inescapable time-controlling strategies that pervade both the professional and the personal lives of workers – see Just, 2017, 441–446.

"In this way all states were established, through the noble force of great men. It is not [a matter of] physical strength, since many are physically stronger than one. Rather, the great man has something in him by [virtue of] which others may call him their lord. They obey him against their will. Against their will, his will is their will. Their immediate pure will is his, but their conscious will is different. The great man has the former [i.e., their pure will] on his side, and they must obey, even if they do not want to. This is what is preeminent in the great man – to know the absolute will [and] to express it – so that all flock to his banner [and] he is their god. In this way Theseus established the Athenian state. And thus, in the French Revolution, it was a fearful force that sustained the state [and] the totality- in general. This force is not despotism but tyranny, pure frightening domination. Yet it is necessary and just, insofar as it constitutes and sustains the state as this actual individual." (Hegel, 1983, 155)

Here, Hegel hints very transparently to the Napoleonic phase of the French Revolution, to the necessity of preserving and reinforcing the disruptive revolutionary dynamic by concentrating it in the hands of a single, historical individual, acting as a vessel for the awakened world spirit. Due to the political and historical burden this individual is caring, his progressive dictatorial becoming is very probable. This, as will be argued further, might also have been, up to a point, the case of Stalin, although in very different historical circumstances.

Moreover, in his private correspondence, Hegel again alludes to the fact that the revolutionary gains of the French Revolution are not appreciated by society, while the immediate losses are perceived as much more intense and even harmful. This position can also be interpreted as a slight hint in the direction of coming to terms with some Jacobin excesses for the greater political purpose of strengthening the French Revolution as a whole:

"That which is presently lost people believe they possessed as a treasure or divine right, just as, on the other hand, what is being won will be possessed with a bad conscience. Their thoughts on justice are as wrongheaded as their opinion on the means, or on what makes up the substance and power of spirit. They seek it in circumstances bordering on the completely ridiculous, overlook what lies closest at hand, and take the very things that lead directly to their ruin to be excellent supports. Thanks to the bath of her Revolution, the French Nation has freed herself of many institutions which the human spirit had outgrown like the shoes of a child." (Hegel, 1984, 122–123)

Furthermore, Hegel's staunch private criticism of the French oligarchy and absolute monarchy was already mentioned (Hegel, 2009); along with his general critical openness towards different revolutionary projects, both ancient and modern (Losurdo, 2004, 99) and, last but not least, his overall discontent towards social and economic injustices (Hegel, 1983) – all these elements advance the case of a (generally young) Hegel more prone to and sympathetically engaged, to a certain extent, of course – to Jacobinism. In a recent work regarding Hegel's interpretation of revolutions, not just political, but social and cultural ones as well – Richard Bourke has rightfully observed: "as early as 1794, Hegel had condemned the 'complete ignominy' of the Robespierre faction […]. Yet it is a mistake to conclude that he favored the measures of any other party. For instance, nothing in his writings serves to buttress the Girondins" (Bourke, 2023, 156).

As political contradictions, revolutions somehow mirror ontological contradictions that inhabit the development of being itself (see McGowan, 2019). The shape of contradiction may result in unforeseen and potentially regrettable outcomes, yet its historical necessity is widely accepted. Therefore, although the role of revolution in Hegel's political philosophy is somewhat incongruous, as previously stated, its constructive role in social development

is beyond question. The phenomenology of revolution is of secondary importance to its contribution to the dialectical advancement of spirit. This is where the Jacobins come in, playing their part and ensuring the success of a social and political process that is indispensable for achieving and preserving the main tenets of modernity: freedom, recognition, solidarity, progress.

It seems plausible to suggest that this recently identified, cautious Hegelian acceptance of Jacobinism could be extended to the case of the Russian Revolution with reference to Bolshevism. This proposition will be developed and supported with arguments in the following sections of this paper.

Class and State in Hegel's Political Philosophy: Prerequisites for a Hegelian Analysis of the Russian Revolution

Within the state, social classes interact and give rise to what Hegel theorised as "civil society", a vacillating stratum of society situated between the domain of the family and official institutions. Far from being a kind of political synthesis of the social whole, as the concept is usually portrayed in contemporary literature, Hegel's civil society is actually commercially infused. It represents the sphere of the rising bourgeoisie, aided in its ascent by the legal systems of modern states. With the disappearance of the strict social hierarchy of the Middle Ages, everyone can, to a certain extent, become the master of his own destiny, regardless of his social origins. This result, however, inevitably increases competition and, with it, the capitalist atomisation of modern society, of which Hegel was so painfully aware (Bourke, 2023, 176–177, XIV; Walicki, 1995, 14, 25). Civil society, with its private ends, relates to universal political freedom endorsed by state institutions as something rather exterior or, in Hegel's terms, as necessity (Marcuse, 1955, 409). In this case, liberty is not yet "understood necessity" (Lenin, 1976, 181). This partial alienation of civil society is not something entirely supersedible, as in the case of Marxist dialectic that opens up to a future world without classes and states (Hyppolite, 1973, 89). On the contrary, alienation in general may occasionally become epistemologically "self-enriching", as history unfolds (Walicki, 1995, 43, 83).

An interpretation of Hegel's analysis of classes must begin by understanding the traditional political philosophy he was familiarized with, not with the Marxist concept of classes. In the early 19th century classes were not divided mainly between rich and poor people, but between themselves and the state containing them, state perceived by Hegel as the carrier of universality that must rise above conjectural social tensions in order to preserve and continue its own ethical substance (Blunden, 2021, 230–231; Hegel, 1983, 155; Hegel, 1979, 163). Marx's proletariat is still a long way to go. Until then, we must manage Hegel's concept of rabble, a sort of social debris bringing together precarious individuals from all classes due to the fierce competition entailed by the capitalist political economy of the modern era. Rabble represents one of the most important unresolved problems of the modern era; it is up to the state to tame this "wild animal" that is capitalism and to reduce this regretful social outcome while coming to terms with the fact that it will never be able to completely resolve the problem (Hegel, 2003, 265–267; Hegel, 1983, 139–140; Hegel, 2004, 127–128; Hegel, 2009, 44; Comay, 2011, 140–141; Marcuse, 1955, 78–79; see also Dunayevskaya, 1958, 33–34; Buchwalter, 2015). In Rebecca Comay's words, "Hegel is not Marx. The rabble is not the proletariat, communism is not on the horizon, and revolution is not a solution"

(Comay, 2011, 141). Thus, in psychoanalytic terms, revolution seems to represent for Hegel the Lacanian Other: its symbolic nexus is both incompatible with and indispensable for his political philosophy.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the rabble and Marx's concept of the lumpenproletariat. Both are social categories that have not yet achieved the status of proper social classes, and their prospects of developing in that direction are rather dim. Both are produced by the inadequate social policies pursued within different political orders. And finally, both are uncomfortable to deal with on the eve of revolution, since their weak to non-existent political consciousness is more of a threat than a reliability for the immediate goals of political change that revolution brings. Moreover, Hegel's rabble is to some extent compatible with Marx's concept of the "reserve army of labour" developed in the first volume of *Capital* (1990).

Hegel's concepts of class and rabble are useful because they apply to both the French and especially the Russian Revolutions. In the case of the French Revolution, their usefulness arises because the Revolution was born out of frustration, poverty and a gross contempt for social problems on the part of the aristocratic political elite; in the case of the Russian Revolution, class and rabble are important because, as in the case of its French counterpart, it was born for essentially the same reasons, but, as will be argued later, in a very different context and out of a more sophisticated and class-aware political consciousness.

The French rabble is different from its Russian counterpart, because the two revolutions are different events, born in different circumstances. As has already been argued, French society was much more developed than Russian society on the eve of the revolution. The French sans-culottes, on the one hand, do not meet the necessary criteria to be qualified as rabble: they were urban proletarians who, despite their occasional shortcomings, contributed a great deal to the cause of the French Revolution. The Russian peasants, on the other hand, who deserted from the Tsarist army and stormed the Russian cities, expecting a profound agrarian reform but not too eager to contribute to it through political engagement, fit more neatly into this category. Nevertheless, as will be argued below, the Bolsheviks were able to organise them to some extent and use their anti-feudal radicalism for the overall aims of the revolution. First, as Red Army soldiers fighting in the civil war. Second, as reinvented proletarians who, displaced within Russian cities, would accept the goals of industrialisation without causing too many problems for the authorities, at least not political problems. Thus, while the French rabble was almost negligible during the revolution, the Russian rabble posed a far greater challenge to the Bolsheviks, a challenge that intensified the already authoritarian tendencies within this revolutionary faction.

Each social class is for Hegel a universal in itself, posited against another universal (Hegel, 1979, 152–156). Young Hegel occasionally referred to classes as "potencies" carefully managed by the state in order to maintain a certain social equilibrium. Revolution is not the answer, as stated above, because "actual authority" cannot be replaced by "possible authority" until citizens do not become proper political subjects, learning to differentiate and also to place into perspective the speculative relation between particular, private interests, and the common good (Hegel, 1975; Hegel, 2004, 134; Hegel, 2009, 44). Furthermore, if each class is for Hegel a form of incipient universality, a potency contradicting other potencies while all of them being negated by the

universal tranquillity of the state – how long will it take until this rather abstract interpretation of political order is understood not as an act of balancing between social classes, but as a simulated equilibrium through which a certain privileged class manages to pervade the state and to use it in accordance with its specific universality, a universality that, as Laclau and Mouffe argued (2001), is not necessarily a simulated one, but the only possible starting point of a mature democracy that acknowledges mediation, representation and ideological limits as inherent to any political project? The fact that Hegel's concept of class is deeply tied to the political economy of modern societies also contributes to this outcome of gradually eliminating the metaphysical elements existing in Hegel's understanding of the political in favor of a more class oriented one.

After all, Hegel has convincingly indicated that universalities are only accessible through particularities, as reason exists only through intellects, freedom only through necessity, infinity only through what is finite. Why should not political universality exist also through class universality? Hegel is definitely aware that the modern political order is a bourgeois one and that its claim for more and more liberty are often just disguised private interests (Hegel, 2003, 329–330). But he fails to systematically connect capitalism with the bourgeoisie as he strives to maintain a sort of superior difference of the political with reference to both economy and society. Still, "the revolutionary nature of Hegel's dialectic (which Marx noted) is unmistakable. Although the implications of Hegel's system are conservative, the advance of the dialectic is revolutionary, whatever Hegel's intention may have been" (Hyppolite, 1974, 398–399; see also Dunayevskaya, 1982, 3–7; Walicki, 1995, 193). It is precisely these implications we will insist upon as the case of a Hegelian interpretation of the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist aftermath progresses further.

The Russian Revolution: More Anti-Feudal than Anti-Bourgeois

In her classic work *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Theda Skocpol vividly presents some of the major differences between revolutionary France and revolutionary Russia. She begins by noticing that, before the political upheaval, 18th century France was way more active in European economic international relations than 19th century Russia. Despite their communal traditions, French peasants were also deeply engaged in commercial relations and thus incomparably more prone to economic liberalism than their Russian counterparts. Private landed property was not redistributed by revolutionary French peasants, as it happened in Russia, where "peasant holdings" were stabilized "at a generally impoverished level" and where "communal control", "inimical to individual entrepreneurship" was intensified (Skocpol, 1987, 221–223). Furthermore, Russia's international situation was definitely more fragile and chaotic in the eve of the revolution, and the Red Army was created with much more efforts and less resources than France's revolutionary army from the early 1790s. Last but not least, Russia's task of rapid industrialization under single-party control within a deeply hostile international environment was far more challenging than anything revolutionary France had experienced. Of course, it was conducted especially after the "new economic policy" has ended in the late 1920s. This

is why the liberal phase of the French Revolution was genuine, while the liberal, social-democratic (Menshevik) phase of the Russian Revolution resembled, taking into account Russian social and economic structures at that time – a rather accidental phase or, in Marxist terms, a super-structural component without a structural social correspondent (Skocpol, 1987, 206–207, 216; Ferro, 1972; Ferro, 1985, 274; see also Figes, 1996, 153–154, 384).

Consequently, since spirit occurs in history in the form of different events, each event is unique and cannot be experienced twice (Hegel, 2003). The similarities between the French and the Russian Revolutions are therefore only formal and do not allow us to offer more than a prudent and rather debatable Hegelian account of the Russian Revolution. Still, Hegel's dialectical method remains handy in this endeavour. Even if it was portrayed as a proletarian revolution in Soviet propaganda writings, the Russian Revolution consisted of multiple superposed revolutionary events. The rural, anti-feudal dimension of the revolution was more pronounced than the urban, anti-bourgeois one, since almost 80% of the population consisted of peasants (Câmpeanu, 1986, 59–60). Here is Hegelian feature a) of the French Revolution presented in the introductory section applicable to the Russian Revolution.

To further complicate things, numerous aristocrats and capitalists have offered financial support to subversive anti-tsarist organizations (Dan, 1964, 20–21). The consequences of this multi-layered revolution were to be felt all through the Stalinist period that basically stabilized and "institutionalized" the revolution in a functional, yet ruthlessly authoritarian form. Moshe Lewin had therefore many reasons to characterize Stalinism as a form of "agrarian despotism". He meticulously observed how the social foundation of the Bolshevik party had undergone deep changes in the first decade after the revolution and how civil-war military experience was once again put to use by Stalin in the early 1930s in order to enforce collectivization in the countryside and industrialization in the newly "ruralized" cities, after it was becoming clearer day by day that the New Economic Policy (NEP) had exhausted all its resources and became unmanageable (Lewin, 1995, 48, 82–83, 316–317; Lewin, 1994, 92–93; Lewin, 1975, 482–483). If it was to be truly effective, the NEP had to be centered, as Nikolai Bukharin argued, on producing and selling cheap goods in order to overcome peasant reluctance to sell agricultural products for the urban market. But an underdeveloped and vulnerable state like the Soviet Union in the 1920s, acting within a hostile and changing international context, was not up to such a task (Skocpol, 1987, 221–225; Lewin, 1975, 326–334). Therefore, Stalin chose the harder, but almost unavoidable path of collectivization to overcome peasant resistance and to industrialize the country basically on the expense of its largest social category (Lewin, 1994, 118–119). As one of Stalin's biographers observed, the result was both triumph and tragedy: land collectivization posed such a challenge to Soviet administration that even the German invasion during World War Two was not able to match (Volkogonov, 1991).

As argued above, political intricacies aside, the French Revolution was not confronted with such social challenges as the Russian one. Yet here lies a Hegelian opportunity: social dialectical transformations put into practice with the aim of bringing about and consolidating a new ethical order that would better represent and above all replace social tensions. In close association with the French Revolution, the Russian Bolsheviks saw themselves as modern Jacobins (Figes, 1996, 357–359). As already mentioned, Hegel was not

found of Jacobins, but he nevertheless acknowledged their indispensable role in the French Revolution, while complaining about German passivity in relation to revolutionary France (Ritter, 1984, 53; see also Avineri, 1994, 7–8). It is true that his impatience was reformist, not revolutionary, but it can also be understood as not entirely rejecting a revolutionary outcome in the German principalities of the time.

Since the Russian Revolution was essentially an anti-feudal one, even if the Russian autocracy was nevertheless different from its Western counterpart since it developed in a way more centralized political regime and its sense of individual property was also considerably lower (Figes, 1996; Trotsky, 1936) – Hegel may have felt inclined to welcome it from this point of view. Especially because Bolshevik revolutionaries, trying desperately to gain popularity, did not unilaterally oppose religion, like their French counterparts did. On the contrary, due to its secular corruption and association with the privileged classes, peasants themselves were hostile towards the Russian Orthodox Church. The Bolsheviks

> "… did take over the church lands, but only as part of a general campaign against large estates, not as an action against the church as such. Similarly, although there were measures against the counter-revolutionary activities of the clergy, the exercise of worship was left alone, while civil marriage and separation of church and state were measures that all of the socialist parties, and even the Kadets, had proposed. These measures were none the less resented as discriminatory – for many centuries the church had regarded itself as persecuted if it were deprived of its position as the established religion, or even if it were prevented from persecuting in its own way." (Ferro, 1985, 65)

Since the Russian Church showed strong feudal and oligarchic tendencies, and especially resorted to miraculous apparitions and events in order to strengthen trust and devotion, in particular among the peasants, it is not difficult to understand why Hegel dismissed it as fostering anti-progressive forces and anti-rational attitudes that had nothing to do with his understanding of religion: a symbolic order, confined to subjectivity in modern times, which still could and should contribute much to the development of an integrated and dynamic society, not to the maintenance of a spiritually and politically underdeveloped one (Hegel, 1988). Consequently, here lies the Hegelian feature d) of the French Revolution presented in the introductory section, and to some extent applicable to the Russian Revolution as well – anti-religious sentiments – a feature the Bolsheviks managed better than their Jacobin homologues, since their approach to the Russian Orthodox Church was more moderate, balanced and ultimately more dialectical.

Furthermore, Hegel's philosophy of Christianity is, as McGowan argued, inseparable from his social philosophy and, most importantly, contains its own brand of radicalism that should not be overlooked. Thus, along with political revolutions, Hegelian theology contributes in its own rights to different processes of emancipation and should not be considered as an impediment in this regard (McGowan, 2019). However, as stated above, this was not the case of the Russian Revolution. Here, Bolshevik political compromises aside, the church played a deeply reactionary role.

Stalinism as the New Absolute Freedom

Since man is for Hegel the "product of its own reason" (de Laurentiis, 2014, 636), Soviet collectivization and industrialization were not necessarily (only)

irrational processes, but, politically speaking, rational ones, to the extent they represented, albeit major social sacrifices, a solution to the Soviet Union's huge underdevelopment problem and recurrent episodes of famine and violence (see Câmpeanu, 1988, 158; for Soviet type economic planning see Mandel, 1986, 5–37). This rationality is nevertheless brutal and harmful to particularity because, just like in the case of the French Revolution, but in a whole different context, it is imposed by the new Stalinist master, to use Hegel's master-bondsman metaphor in order to explain the event – namely the centrist Bolshevik faction that managed to survive and afterwards win the civil war, risking of course its own life – upon the new bondsman (the rest of the society), which was not willing to risk its life to the end, but only sporadically and for its own limited needs and without considering the needs of the new ethical order as its own. The new bondsman must therefore work for the new master and, since work is, according to Kojeve, reason in its unconscious advancing universality and mastery an ontological "impasse" (Kojève, 1980), a new dialectic emerges, one that will eventually advantage the bondsman, up to a point, only to enthral him deeper in the transition period following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This is proof enough, for the purpose of the present paper – of the seditiousness of Marxist political concepts employed by the Russian Revolution, Marxist political concepts that would be latter used to contest and undermine the Soviet political order itself. Just like political concepts used in revolutionary France – human rights, citizenship, democracy, freedom, progress – advanced beyond their immediate power struggle purposes and gathered different political "lives", so did Marxist concepts like proletarian revolution, class consciousness, alienation, dialectic, emancipation, structure, superstructure and so on. Our Hegelian feature c) of the French Revolution presented in the introductory section has arrived: the inherent subversiveness of political concepts developed in revolutionary France and employed by Hegel to edify his own political philosophy. As previously mentioned, this is a common feature for both French and Russian Revolutions. I am well aware that all political concepts are dynamic and their contents may vary in time; however, this is especially true for concepts employed by the French and Russian Revolutions, concepts that soon begun to be used against the immediate purposes intended by revolutionary elites.

Furthermore, the first paragraph of the present section contains also Hegelian feature b) of French Revolution announced in the introductory section and extrapolatable to the Russian Revolution: the commitment towards political and subjective freedom that is also a general ethical drive towards true infinity, to use another Hegelian concept; a commitment unable to advance in the absence of master-bondsman dialectic. This may seem counterintuitive, since the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist aftermath thoroughly oppressed individual, "bourgeois" freedom; even so, Hegel might have added, the master-bondsman dialectic advanced in this particular case on the bondsman's side: in Tsarist Russia, to use the international analogy present in the *Principles of Right*, only one was free – best case scenario, only a few were free – namely the tsar, his freedom being therefore volatile, costly and sometimes definitely savourless; in revolutionary Russia and shortly after, in Stalinist Soviet Union, definitely more were free although that freedom, conditioned and mediated from so many contradictory and shaky positions, appeared mostly as necessity to those experiencing it. Moreover, since there is no freedom for

bondsmen in the absence of freedom for masters, the new Stalinist master quickly stepped in to fill the dialectical void, thus propelling the whole ontological situation into a new perspective.

Following this Hegelian train of argumentation, the Soviet state struggled and managed, to a certain extent, to turn Hegel's rabble – via Marx – into a social class in its own rights. It alphabetized the population, especially the peasants, of whom more than 50% were illiterate at the beginning of the 1930s (Lewin, 1975, 25), and enforced the production of new concepts, new dialectical singularities, within a new ethical order. As Jacobinism was a radically revolutionary faction with its own genealogy, so was Bolshevism and later Stalinist Bolshevism; despite its numerous and dreadful excesses, one nevertheless must acknowledge that "it has satisfied some social demands and honoured at least some of the revolution's promises" (Fitzpatrick, 1984, 161; see also James, 1980, 43). Hegelian feature e) of the French Revolution outlined in the introductory section is therefore useful to investigate the Russian Revolution as well.

The new absolute Stalinist freedom was gradually converted into a new form of revolutionary terror. Here is Hegelian feature f) of the French Revolution announced in the introductory section relevant for the Russian Revolution as well. But, compared to the Jacobin terror of the French Revolution, the Stalinist terror was more mediated, more dialectical and also, in historical perspective, more harmful than its predecessor. This newly unleashed freedom of absolute reason is relentless in its transformative urge, but definitely not as void of contradiction and not as objectively indifferent to particularities as the Jacobin terror. Furthermore, the historical figure of Stalin is associated by Isaac Deutscher with that of Napoleon (Deutscher, 1949, 345), and Hegel was a profound, yet not uncritical admirer of Napoleon, who was able to preserve, expand, and "institutionalize" the French Revolution (Hegel, 1984, 173, 295, 302, 317, 328, 377, 587, 602) – even if he did not eventually manage to prevent the restoration of the previous political regime, as Stalin did. However, while Napoleon represents the empire against which the French Revolution is opposed, Stalin does not represent Tsarism against which the Russian Revolution is opposed. This confirms once again Hegel's revolutionary dialectic of historical events as unique, despite their formal similarities.

Moreover, the transformation and consolidation of ethical orders advances sometimes, and Hegel is keenly aware of that – despotically, against isolated individuals and their non-speculative, abstract and solely phenomenological understanding of reality (Hegel, 1983). As Marc Ferro observed, in case of the Russian Revolution,

> "Within the Bolshevik party, the victors had never claimed to be particularly democratic, but in any event, for the apparatus of state, which was not necessarily Bolshevik, there could be no question of' democratic liberties' being used as a pretext to weaken or shake the state, or have it change hands. For this apparatus of state the matter was one not of morality, or even of politics, but of simple survival. It therefore kept up its guard. In Russia, it was not even necessary to have Bolshevism in October to lose a certain concept of democracy." (Ferro, 1985, 274)

This Hobbesian side of Hegel is not, however, a justification of *raison d'état* and political realism with its secret diplomacy, neglect and even contempt towards particularity. It is just a historical acknowledgement of the unavoidable contradictions between the ethical, political and the moral, individual realm of "beautiful souls" and "unhappy consciousnesses" (Hegel, 1977; see also Walicki, 1995, 462) – along with the dialectical need to appease them as

much as possible, not to render them eternal and cynically abandon them as metaphysical.

Conclusion: Objective Idealism and Revolution – Incompatibility, Indispensability, and Beyond

This paper linked Hegel's analysis of the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist aftermath through five main (and other secondary) features clearly identified in Hegel's writings on the topic: a) the main anti-feudal character of both the French and the Russian Revolution; b) newfound universal valences for political and subjective freedom applicable, in different parameters, to both French and Russian Revolution; c) the seditious dynamic of political concepts used by both French and Russian Revolutions which give credit to Hyppolite's already quoted remark, "the revolutionary nature of Hegel's dialectic (which Marx noted) is unmistakable. Although the implications of Hegel's system are conservative, the advance of the dialectic is revolutionary, whatever Hegel's intention may have been" (Hyppolite, 1974, 398–399). Therefore, despite Hegel's whatever personal intentions, the Hegelian revolutionary dialectic of political concepts can fruitfully be employed to analyse the Russian Revolution as well; d) religious issues present in both revolutions that are definitely approachable on the premises of Hegelian philosophy of religion; e) Hegel's concept of rabble, useful in order to evaluate the social dimension of both the French and Russian Revolution, and f) revolutionary terror, a Hegelian issue extractable from the French Revolutionary context into the Russian post-revolutionary context of rampant Stalinism – the final and "imperial" dimension of the Russian Revolution, just like Napoleonic imperialism represented the final stage of the French Revolution.

As already mentioned, Hegel did not agree with Jacobinism, but he nevertheless reluctantly recognised its role in the preservation of the French Revolution. It is very likely that he would have come to a similar conclusion in relation to Bolshevism and even Stalinism in relation to the Russian Revolution. In the compelling words of Domenico Losurdo, "every revolution in the history of humanity was supported and celebrated by Hegel, despite his reputation as an incorrigible defender of the established order" (Losurdo, 2004, 99). At the same time, Hegel was not an admirer of dictatorships and autocratic political regimes. Above all, he was a true defender of freedom, without being politically naive (too idealistic). As argued above, many elements of his political philosophy and logic can be used to credit the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist aftermath. But there are also directions in his system that contradict such an approach. For instance, modernity's insistence upon particularity, upon "subjective spirit", as Hegel refers to it in his *Philosophy of Mind* (Hegel, 2010b, 29–219) – that has the same right to negate the state as the state has to negate it, since the fundamental basis of any state are proper educated citizens who are entitled to their opinions, lawful initiatives and to be part of a pluralistic cultural, social and political environment in the absence of which philosophy itself becomes impossible (Hegel, 2003; Hegel, 1995, 94–100).

Lukács's Lenin might have been right all along when he stated Hegel's objective idealism which will always render consciousness superior to the material world that produced it, even if it understands itself as immanent to that particular world – "cannot, if it remains true to its premises, evade the claims of religion" (Lukács, 1975, 184; see also Walicki, 1995, 169). Therefore, in the last

instance, unexpected and radical political events will never find a comfortable place in Hegel's system. The "cunning of reason" he advances in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (1998), may seem to contradict this assertion at first. But this is nevertheless a historical process itself, having little to do with political phenomenology. Thus revolution, be that the French or the Russian one, for that matter, is never properly integrated within Hegelian political philosophy, as Ritter pertinently observed (1984, 52). Sometimes it may seem to contradict it to the point of incompatibility but, at the same time, Hegelian political philosophy cannot do without it. Relying on Hegelian dialectic, Herbert Marcuse pointed out, maybe a bit too optimistic – the generally expanding integrability of dominant political and social ideas (Marcuse, 1955, 285), just as Jacob Taubes concluded, with the help of Hegelian theology, that redemption is ultimately available to everyone, according, of course, to the efforts one is willing to take in this direction (Taubes, 2004, 97–114). As process, not necessarily as a confined political event, revolution, or, to use a milder term, emancipation – pervades established social orders both from above and from below. The master-bondsman dialectic is proof enough in this regard. In whatever guise available to whatever era, negativity is here to stay.

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Emanuel Copilaș

Hegel o ruskoj revoluciji i njenoj staljinističkoj ostavi

Sažetak

Hegelova filozofija revolucije naširoko je proučavana i o njoj se mnogo raspravljalo. Neki znanstvenici vide Hegela kao smarajućega branitelja postojećih političkih poredaka, dok drugi ističu njegovu entuzijastičnu, premda djelomičnu, podršku Francuskoj revoluciji, kao i mnogim modernim revolucijama ili pobunjeničkim pokretima, kako starim tako i modernim. Slijedeći ovu posljednju liniju argumenta, moj rad nastoji dati hegelijansko tumačenje ruske revolucije, uzimajući u obzir važne aspekte kao što su subverzivna dinamika hegelijanskih političkih koncepata, odnos između klase i države u Hegelovoj političkoj filozofiji, izrazito antifeudalni karakter ruske revolucije, te, konačno, stabilizacija i distorzija ruske revolucije pod staljinističkim režimom, koji se, hegelovski rečeno, može promatrati kao novi oblik apsolutne slobode (teror) usmjeren na rješavanje glavne društvene dileme modernosti kako ju je identificirao Hegel u svojim Osnovnim crtama filozofije prava, naime siromaštvo.

Ključne riječi

revolucija, otuđenje, siromaštvo, kontradikcija, dijalektičko, sloboda, nužnost

Emanuel Copilaș

Hegel über die Russische Revolution und ihre stalinistischen Nachwirkungen

Zusammenfassung

Hegels Philosophie der Revolution wurde umfassend studiert und zuhauf debattiert. Einige Gelehrte halten Hegel für einen ermüdenden Verteidiger der bestehenden politischen Ordnungen, während andere auf seine enthusiastische, wenn auch partielle Unterstützung der Französischen Revolution sowie zahlreicher moderner Revolutionen und Aufstandsbewegungen sowohl des Altertums als auch der Neuzeit verweisen. Dieser letzten Argumentationslinie folgend, unternimmt mein Aufsatz den Versuch einer hegelschen Interpretation der Russischen Revolution. Dabei werden belangreiche Aspekte in Erwägung gezogen, wie etwa die subversive Dynamik der hegelschen politischen Konzepte, der Konnex zwischen Klasse und Staat in Hegels politischer Philosophie, der überwiegend antifeudale Charakter der Russischen Revolution und letztendlich die Stabilisierung und Verzerrung der Russischen Revolution unter dem stalinistischen Regime, das, in hegelschen Begriffen, als eine neue Form absoluter Freiheit (Terrors) erachtet werden kann, die auf die Lösung des bedeutsamsten gesellschaftlichen Dilemmas der Modernität abzielt, das Hegel in seinen Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts identifiziert hat, nämlich der Armut.

Schlüsselwörter

Revolution, Entfremdung, Armut, Widerspruch, Dialektik, Freiheit, Notwendigkeit

Emanuel Copilaş

Hegel sur la Révolution russe et ses conséquences staliniennes

Résumé

La philosophie de la révolution chez Hegel a été largement étudiée et fait l'objet de nombreux débats. Certains chercheurs voient en Hegel un défenseur rébarbatif des ordres politiques existants, tandis que d'autres soulignent son soutien enthousiaste, bien que partiel, à la Révolution française, ainsi qu'à de nombreuses révolutions ou mouvements insurrectionnels, tant anciens que modernes. Suivant cette dernière ligne d'argumentation, mon article s'applique à produire une interprétation hégélienne de la Révolution russe, en prenant en compte des aspects importants tels que la dynamique subversive des concepts politiques hégéliens, la relation entre classe et État dans la philosophie politique de Hegel, le caractère massivement antiféodal de la Révolution russe, et, enfin, la stabilisation et la déformation de la Révolution russe sous le régime stalinien, qui, en termes hégéliens, peut être considérée comme une nouvelle forme de liberté absolue (terreur) visant à résoudre le principal dilemme social de la modernité identifié par Hegel dans ses Principes de la philosophie du droit, à savoir la pauvreté.

Mots-clés

révolution, aliénation, pauvreté, contradiction, dialectique, liberté, nécessité