

Rethinking Hegel with Lukács

A Critical Examination of Hegel from The Standpoint of The Critique of Political
Economy



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The Title of My Thesis Project

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My dissertation is a theoretical and philosophical work that re-examines Hegel's analysis of economics through a historical-materialist lens, primarily engaging with the perspectives of Marx and Lukács. My aim is to analyze Hegel's economic writings, particularly with the aid of Georg Lukács, to understand the extent to which Hegel aligns with the tradition of pre-Marxist and Marxist philosophy, and to delineate his vision of an emancipated society.

The central theme of this research is a thorough examination of various categories of political economy: labor, value, money, commodity, law, freedom and necessity, alienation, property, tool and language, consciousness, and self-consciousness. By employing these categories, I will develop, discuss, and interrelate the observations of Hegel and Marx, guided by Lukács's explanations. These core categories are drawn from diverse works by Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lukács, and their selection will be further elaborated and justified within the dissertation based on these foundational texts.

The economic perspectives of both Hegel and Marx warrant a detailed discussion. Specifically, Hegel's concept of economics will be contrasted with his predecessors, his contemporary thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and his successors.

Building on Lukács's works, I will delineate the distinctions between Hegel and other representatives of German idealist classical philosophy, as well as economists like Adam Smith and Dugald Stewart. This analysis will investigate the degree to which Hegel transcended the standpoints of classical political economy and liberalism. While Lukács's monograph on the young Hegel illuminated previously unknown aspects of Hegel's philosophy, intensive research into Hegel's engagement with economics remains a notable gap in left-wing Hegelian scholarship. As a complementary comparison to Lukács's "The Young Hegel"—which historically was the first to theoretically discuss Hegel's economic writings—my dissertation will also engage with Birger P. Priddat's book, "Hegel as Economist."

This inquiry will be addressed by rediscovering Hegel's social philosophy, drawing upon the foundational work of Georg Lukács—an often-overlooked but significant Hegelian—and other successors. This approach seeks to fill a void that Lukács's research on Hegel, and the contributions of Lukács's predecessors like Marx and Engels, could not entirely address. To achieve this, I will incorporate the writings of both classical and contemporary thinkers, including Birger P. Priddat, Raya Dunayevskaya, Andreas Arndt, Pirmin Stekeler, and dozens of others who have made substantial contributions to this field. In this context, I will critically elaborate on Hegel's positions on liberalism and the French Revolution, his concept of the correspondence between generality and particularity in relation to social issues, and his critique of a conservative school of historical thought.

The early economic writings of the young Hegel, forming a basis for a critique of classical political economy, along with his critique of national economics in Jena's "Realphilosophie" and other works, are not merely revolutionary in his youth and then completely contradicted in his later writings. Like Lukács, I perceive a fundamental continuity in Hegel's work and in Lukács's research on Hegel, despite apparent contradictions within both Hegel's philosophy and Lukács's interpretation as a Hegelian. My dissertation will extensively highlight Lukács's writings and his contribution to the revitalization of Hegelianism, particularly in their relation to the critique of political economy.

In "Elements of the Philosophy of Right," Hegel discusses the system of needs within the section on civil society (*societas civilis*), which he equates with the state (*Staat* or *res publica*). He expands upon the classical economic distinction between *oikos* (household or family) and *polis* (state) to include bourgeois society or the system of needs (cf. Siefert, 2011, p. 17ff). Hegel posits that individual freedom in the bourgeois state, as a particularity, can only be realized within a generality under the order of the state, which he sees as the sole bearer of authority. Herbert Marcuse, referencing Engels, suggests that this dialectical sublation of bourgeois society into the state signifies a standstill of dialectics (cf. Marcuse, 1969, p. 97ff; Marx, Engels, 1975, p. 266f).

The contemporary social imperative to re-examine Hegel stems from the fact that bourgeois society has evolved in a direction distinct from Hegel's vision. On the one hand, there is a pervasive economic inequality, leading to a widening gap between rich and poor. On the other, we observe an inward consolidation of the state and outward militarization. These two developments, which are more aligned with non-Hegelian conceptions of bourgeois society and the tradition of liberal economic thinkers, fundamentally clash with Hegel's principle of the system of needs and his concept of radically democratic recognition between citizens and the state itself.

Lukács, however, emphasizes that Hegel is the first significant German thinker, in contrast to Kant and his predecessors, to seriously and critically engage with the questions of industrialization, national economy, and the French Revolution (cf. Hegel 1970, 818f; Lukács 1967, 492ff). Unlike Kant, Hegel establishes a novel connection between economic categories and the category of modern natural law, "which demonstrates the relationship between political economy and 'formal' law (which until then had essentially been equated with Roman private law)" (Riedel 1974, 826). Furthermore, Hegel adopts a viewpoint that no longer restricts the mutual dependencies of the individual and society, with their "view of needs and work, to a 'social estate'" (Riedel 1974, 826), but rather considers them within a broader context. In doing so, he articulates a concept of society "that makes further adherence to the traditional doctrine of estates impossible" (Riedel 1974, 826).

Hegel's conception of bourgeois society, intrinsically linked to his understanding of the economy, lays crucial foundations for a philosophical understanding of social relations that can transcend the confines of bourgeois society. Lukács elaborates on these passages in "The Young Hegel" (cf. Lukács 1973, 495ff). Hegel's early writings contain what is historically the first known draft of the "Critique of National Economy." Even if Hegel's elaborations do not fully approach Marx and Engels' "Critique of Political Economy," Lukács identifies numerous similarities (cf. Hegel 1967, 188ff; Marx and Engels 1979, 192ff; Lukács 1973, 503ff).

Hegel's economic analysis represents a "materialist" examination of labor, tools, and language, echoes of which can later be found in Marx (cf. Göcht 2014, 209ff; Habermas 1974, 800ff)—a topic that will be explored in depth in this dissertation. While the full impact on his later writings is complex to definitively assess, it's evident that his economic work significantly shaped them, thereby indirectly contributing to Marx and Engels' insights. Lukács's examination of Hegel in "On the Ontology of Social Being" highlights both the brilliance of Hegel's thought—his ability to philosophically articulate and understand the contradictions of his time—and the inherent contradictions within Hegel's philosophy itself, which ultimately becomes ensnared in the dead end of bourgeois society (cf. Lukács 1984, 468ff).

Hegel's dialectic is premised on an unfinished negation of negation. In relation to bourgeois society, this philosophy enters into a self-contradiction. Within bourgeois society, Hegel perceives the end of negation, rather than the initiation of a new one (cf. Marx, Engels 1975, 21:266ff). Lukács provides a more detailed examination of what Marx and Engels recognized (cf. Marx and Engels 1971, 633ff). A second contradiction in Hegel lies in his endorsement of Enlightenment doctrine—which he also acknowledges as contradictory—and the French Revolution, precisely because of the Enlightenment, yet he declares this revolutionary path superfluous for Prussian Protestant society (cf. Lukács 1984, 475ff).

With the aid of Lukács's "On the Ontology of Social Being," these contradictions will be examined and explored in greater detail: Can Hegel resolve this contradiction elsewhere? What starting points does he himself provide for this, even if he does not explicitly transfer them? To what extent can Hegel be understood as a philosopher of social emancipation despite these inherent contradictions?

Short Biography of Hassan Maarfi Poor

Hassan Maarfi Poor identifies as a Lukácsian Marxist and a left-wing Hegelian. Currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Heidelberg, his thesis, 'Rethinking Hegel with Lukács,' aims to develop a comprehensive critique of the capitalist mode of production

by interpreting Hegel's legacy through a Lukácsian framework. Maarfi Poor seeks to address what he perceives as a scholarly gap—Hegel's critique of political economy—arguing that it has been underexplored by Hegelians, Marxists, and anti-Marxists alike. Beyond academia, Maarfi Poor is a political activist with over two decades of experience advocating for the emancipation of the oppressed internationally. His political struggle seamlessly integrates activist work with intellectual activity; since 2004, he has been a prolific writer of essays, commentaries, reviews, and pamphlets, alongside contributions as a blogger, columnist, author, and speaker. His philosophical and political writings are central to his work. As a staunch Marxist with radical and revolutionary views, Maarfi Poor has faced persecution from the "Islamic State" (Iran) and has lived in exile since 2008.