



Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx

By Stathis Kouvelakis

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Throughout the nineteenth century, German philosophy was haunted by the specter of the French Revolution. Kant, Hegel and their followers spent their lives wrestling with its heritage, trying to imagine a specifically German path to modernity: a “revolution without revolution.” Trapped in a politically ossified society, German intellectuals were driven to brood over the nature of the revolutionary experience.

In this ambitious and original study, Stathis Kouvelakis paints a rich panorama of the key intellectual and political figures in the effervescence of German thought before the 1848 revolutions. He shows how the attempt to chart a moderate, reformist path entered into crisis, generating two antagonistic perspectives within the progressive currents of German society. On the one side were those socialists—among them Moses Hess and the young Friedrich Engels—who sought to discover a principle of harmony in social relations, bypassing the question of revolutionary politics. On the other side, the poet Heinrich Heine and the young Karl Marx developed a new perspective, articulating revolutionary rupture, proletarian hegemony and struggle for democracy, thereby redefining the very notion of politics itself.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This ambitious tract on the formation of Karl Marx's ideas brings together disparate currents in an original and multifaceted reading. Combining intellectual history and biographical narrative, with a hemming and hawing distrust of both modes, Kouvelakis re-evaluates the cultural context of Marx's ideological development, and the constellation of personalities that made it possible. Poet Heinrich Heine, the "first ironic German," gains some footing in Kouvelakis's evaluation, while Engels recedes a bit, and the primacy of the 1848 French Revolution's effects on the thought of 19th century German philosophy in general remains unquestioned. Overall, the book produces the effect of bright webbing strung between the people and events of a pivotal time, as the ancien regime of Europe segued convulsively into modernity, winding pathways of thought leading always towards the explosive event of revolution. Admittedly, some of this effect might be a result of unwieldy translations: "I have chosen to approach the early Marx's trajectory as a theoretical event that is utterly incomprehensible when it is considered apart from the sequence that precedes it (chronologically, to begin with, but also in the order of my exposition) yet is radically irreducible to it." And that's only the second half of a weighty, establishing thought. For scholars of Marx or European philosophy, and those accustomed to labored, academic prose, this book offers a fresh methodology and original interpretation of Marx's achievements.

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Review

"Quite simply the best study of the 'young Marx' (pre-1848) and his immediate predecessors I have ever read."—*Science & Society*

"Perhaps the first truly original new version of [Marx's] formation since Auguste Cornu's monumental postwar history ... but also a new theory of what is structurally most central and distinctive in Marx's achievement, namely the unique political nature and powers of the proletariat."—Fredric Jameson, from the Preface

About the Author

Stathis Kouvelakis is a reader in political theory at King's College London. He is author and editor of many books, including the *La France en révolte. Luttres sociales et cycles politiques* (Textuel, Paris, 2007), *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Haymarket, New York, 2009) and *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth* (co-edited with Sebastian Budgen and Slavoj Žižek, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007), a book translated in German, Italian, Spanish and Turkish.

Fredric Jameson is Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature at Duke University. The author of numerous books, he has over the last three decades developed a richly nuanced vision of Western culture's relation to political economy. He was a recipient of the 2008 Holberg International Memorial Prize. He is the author of many books, including *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, *The Cultural Turn, A Singular Modernity*, *The Modernist Papers*, *Archaeologies of the Future*, *Brecht and Method*, *Ideologies of Theory*, *Valences of the Dialectic*, *The Hegel Variations* and *Representing Capital*.

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