

**To cite text:**

Browning, Gary. 2024. "Hegel and the End of the End of Grand Narratives." *Philosophy and Society* 35 (2): 243–256.

Gary Browning

## HEGEL AND THE END OF THE END OF GRAND NARRATIVES

### ABSTRACT

Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) announces the end of grand narratives and the advent of postmodernity. The two go together. Moreover, they both involve the renunciation of Hegel and his philosophy. Hegel is condemned as the arch-exponent of grand narratives, framing a speculative theory that effaces difference and creativity in the interests of an overweening closed system. The popularity of postmodernism waned by the end of the twentieth century. Its rejection of grand theory was seen as neither novel nor unproblematic, in that analytic philosophy had long criticised theoretical speculation and the claims of postmodernism to put an end to large-scale theories were increasingly seen as unconvincing as theories of the historical development of globalisation and colonisation proliferated. The end of the end of grand narratives allows us to review how we might consider grand narratives today. The argument here is that they are to be seen as helpful and productive if engaged with in a critical spirit. More particularly, it is argued that Hegel remains a highly relevant theorist for today's world if his thinking is seen as open-ended rather than being fixed and closed.

### KEYWORDS

Hegel, Grand Narratives, Lyotard, Postmodernism, dialectic, difference.

## Introduction

The end of grand narratives was declared at the end of the 1970s. The timing of Lyotard's signature dismissal of grand theorising and the rationalist assumptions of the modern world was perfect. The disintegration of state socialism, the demise of Keynesianism, continued Anglo-American philosophical scepticism over speculative metaphysics, and a simultaneous rise of assertive strands of cultural pluralism, combined to cast doubt on philosophical traditions claiming general truths. The claims of reason clashed with particular aspects of the present, which did not fit with supposed rational essences and unities. The triumph of postmodernism was short-lived. Its impact was less momentous than its sloganizing. By the end of the century, its appeal was waning. Its decline in popularity reflected discrete and contrary causes. On the one hand, with the



passage of time, the novelty of its standpoint seemed less evident, and, on the other hand, doubts about the strength of its claims deepened. Criticism relating to the power and reach of reason had long been maintained before the advent of postmodernism. British empiricism was a persisting down-to-earth tradition, dedicated to undermining the claims of speculative reason. Well before the heyday of postmodernism, Lyotard himself had delivered a series of sceptical verdicts on the standing of philosophical truth, and his references to historic arguments of Wittgenstein and Kant in his later work indicate a philosophical pedigree for postmodernism. At the same time, doubts over the strength of the claims for postmodernism grew as the energy of the new creed dissipated. Lyotard, himself, in *Postmodernism Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, and in later essays, admitted that he had overcooked the notion of narratives. He cast doubt himself on a neat reading of the postmodern as representing a historical succession to modernism, and warned against inflating the idea of narrativity (See Lyotard 1992: 29). Likewise, critics noticed how the very notion of the end of grand narratives implied a grand ending to history, which simultaneously drew upon and denied the validity of grand entrances and exits on the stage of history (See Connor 1997: 27 and Browning 2000: 21–40). Hence, for a variety of reasons, grand narratives refused to die. Indeed, one aspect of postmodernism that remains of value is its inspiration to consider and refine grand theory. It provokes defenders of grand narratives to analyse more closely the conditions of their possibility.

The continued relevance of grand narratives is underlined by the persistence of big questions and global developments. The ongoing aggrandisement of capital, the global reach of corporations, persisting inequalities within and between states and the historical implications of colonialism demand the re-reading of grand narratives, particularly in respect of an author, such as Hegel, who produced a notable large-scale theory of history. If Hegel is not to be granted an uncritical reading, critical readings of his works can reveal how he continues to be relevant to the task of interpreting the world. Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault focus upon Hegel in their critiques of modernity, and yet, in the aftermath of postmodernism, Hegel retains a relevance, particularly if his thought is read in a critical, open spirit, which refuses the absolutist guise by which postmodernists identified him. If Hegel, in response to postmodern critique, is read in an open non-absolutist spirit then he can continue to offer sanctuary for critical insightful readings of the late modern world. The call for the end of grand narratives rightly prescribes that there is to be no final reckoning with the problems and vicissitudes of modern society. Hegel's subtle reading of the latter, however, recognises the inescapability of its problems, while exploring possible ways of reducing its tensions, and offers a considered analysis of the modern conundrums with which we are involved. Ironically, a postmodern critique of Hegel, with its characteristic stress upon difference and particularity, can provide the incentive to read Hegel as open to the divergent and the dissident, while maintaining the connectedness of experience that confronts us. Hegel is a theorist, who can be interpreted as at the same time pointing to the

precarity of individualism, and the possibility of recognising and developing a common public good.

In this essay, we examine the credentials of Lyotard's postmodern critique of Hegel. Lyotard assumes an absolutism in Hegel's thought which is not justified by the openness of Hegel's thinking, which, against Lyotard, can be read as allowing for difference and a lack of closure. Moreover, the project of providing an overall philosophical review of experience, which takes account of diversity and experiential inter-connections, remains a reasonable project. It makes sense to fit things into an overall picture. In her late novel, *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), Iris Murdoch frames a novel, a major theme of which is the immense value of the writing of a text setting out a grand theory of politics, even if, in her later thinking, she herself retreated from recommending a form of collectivist radical democracy in favour of a sceptical liberalism, which guaranteed individual rights. Throughout her philosophical and literary career, Murdoch recognised the value of metaphysics and grand-scale thinking, notwithstanding the current philosophical criticisms of speculative metaphysics and broad thinking about politics. In defending Hegel against postmodernism, we can appreciate the value of Murdoch's defence of grand texts of social theory, even if at the same time, and like Murdoch, we can see the point of their critique.

## Hegel as a Focus for Postmodern Critique

Grand narratives served as a metaphor for Lyotard's critique of the essentialism that he identified as the defining feature of modern thought. As Fraser and Nicholson observed, his critique of grand narratives focused upon their functioning as meta-narratives whereby understanding the world involves so many patterns, which in turn can be seen as framing a meta-pattern of those patterns (Fraser and Nicholson 1988: 376). In a letter referring to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Lyotard takes Hegel to be a classic exponent of this framing of an immense meta-pattern. He observes, "Hegel's philosophy totalizes all of these narratives (metanarratives) and in this sense, is itself a distillation of speculative modernity" (Lyotard 1992: 29). It is true that Hegel was a systematic philosopher, whose philosophy, from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* onwards, rested upon the commitment to reflect upon consciousness so as to recognise the layers of thought within experience. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel avers, "The completeness of the forms of unreal consciousness will be brought about precisely through the necessity of the advance and the necessity of their connection with one another" (Hegel 1971: 137). Philosophical thinking, for Hegel, constitutes the comprehensive and considered reflection back upon thought patterns that emerge within experience. Hegel did not even stop at nothing in his drive to reflect upon our concepts, and to see their interconnections. Hence, nothing is not to be considered apart from being and the particularities of being. Nothing is nothing special in its conceptuality. Nothing is included within Hegel's notion of the infinite, which is "beyond beginning

and end” (Hegel 1987: 149). For Lyotard, it is a profound mistake to locate differences in an overall scheme of things. To do so is to reduce the significance of differences, which is what Lyotard accuses Hegel of doing.

Lyotard critiques Hegel for misrecognising diversity by imposing a philosophical scheme upon diverse phenomena. Schemes imply a sameness, which does injustice to the particular. In *Just Gaming*, Lyotard expressly denies that justice is susceptible of being understood in terms of a formula, whereby different claims are integrated with one another (Lyotard 1985: 30). The sophists were right to deprecate general schemes of justice. A system of thought, such as Hegel’s, misses out on the sheer particularity and distinctness of things. The supreme virtue of thinking for Lyotard is not the Hegelian capacity to link concepts and forms of experience, but rather to be inventive in thinking something new, and breaking through frameworks of thought to register distinctness and the incommensurability of concepts and forms of life. For Lyotard, sameness is an enemy and what is needed is inventiveness and a normative relishing of difference.

Lyotard critiques modern thinkers for their prioritising identity over difference. Essences proliferate, purporting to unify reality, and, in the process, differences are glossed over. Even an avowedly post-metaphysical theorist such as Habermas is taken as privileging the pursuit of consensus over dissensus, and hence denies the power of difference (Habermas 1987: 1–23). Lyotard strikes out against recognising and valuing consensus. Dissensus matters for Lyotard, normatively and descriptively. Differences resist unifying manoeuvres. Styles of thinking and acting are not the same. Describing, ordering, disputing and joking are not of a piece. Lyotard’s commitment to difference is affiliated to Derrida’s notion of *différance*, and Derrida identifies *différance* by its opposition to Hegel’s treatment of difference, which joins contradictory standpoints in a series of syntheses. In an interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta in *Positions*, Derrida maintains that *différance* resists the Hegelian move to raise concepts by resuming them in a subsuming one, “If there were a definition of *différance* it would be precisely the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian *relève* wherever it operates” (Derrida 2004: 38). In *Glas* Derrida highlights the conservatism and inappropriateness of what he takes to be Hegel’s taming of differences by juxtaposing the radicalism of Genet’s homosexual otherness with Hegel’s conservative treatment of marriage as uniting the sexes (for juxtaposition of the father in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* and sexuality in *Saint Genet*, see Derrida 1986: 13–15).

Grand narratives were pronounced dead by Lyotard. Like Derrida, he assumed that the dissonant would disrupt any fixed totalizing system. Sheer difference is not to be trammelled by the monotony of a one-dimensional scheme of things. The dissonant disrupts the epistemological and normative claims of grand narratives. This is true even for those grand narratives, such as Marxism, which challenge the established order. For Lyotard, as for Derrida, the identification of labour with value in capitalist exchange is to deny the libidinal in pursuit of an imaginary essence (Lyotard 1993a: 95–103, and Derrida 1994:

206–9). Meanwhile, Lyotard diagnosed contemporary society as concentrating attention upon the pragmatics of what will work to maximise performance. The sociological imperative of the contemporary world is to maximise performativity, to make things more complex and to enable time to be saved so that more can be produced. What is actually to be done does not matter. The point is to maximise what we do. Against the backdrop of this remorseless performativity, and his own sense of an incommensurability of differences that demand to be recognised, the ghosts of grand narratives are of no consequence. In *The Differend*, a dense text subsequent to *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard urges that there is no overall frame of language whereby judgments ranging across particular forms of language can be maintained. He follows the logic of this thought to its conclusion. It means that the truth of his own understanding of meta-language notions, such as the notion of a *differend*, cannot be explained as a general truth. Like Kant's assessment of aesthetic judgments in the *Third Critique*, the capacity of a *differend* to suggest differences, which underpins our multiple genres of discourse, can be intimated, but not demonstrated. Just as a beautiful scene or the immensity of a mountain might be intimated by aesthetic judgments of beauty and sublimity, so political disagreements are not to be resolved by demonstrable argumentation (Lyotard 1988: 101–105).

Conflicts between perspectives, for Lyotard, are irresolvable by meta-argumentation. It is this perspectival character of perspectives, their mutual incommensurability, which renders conflict chronic. This incommensurability, underlying an enduring disputatiousness, establishes a language of the political, for the political implies the lack of clear criteria to decide upon things.<sup>1</sup> The political is constituted by the incommensurability of the judgments informing its practices. Hence, all engagements, which involve discordant irresolvable elements, are political. Notably, Lyotard maintains that the struggle between workers and management is a clash of perspectives that is not susceptible of argumentative resolution. Workers in an industrial dispute can combine and express solidarity in a struggle against management. They are liable to highlight exploitation and the injustice of practices that fail to meet their demands. They will be opposed by management or business owners, who appeal to arguments relating to the need to maintain or increase profits and to achieve efficiency in the face of unreasonable demands by the workforce. For Lyotard, there is a stand-off in this conflict, which many involved in industrial disputes will recognise. It is a political struggle without a pre-formulated script ensuring or presaging victory for the proletariat. Marxists might see the conflict as perhaps forming part of an overall set of historical developments signalling the demise of capital, or heightening the consciousness of workers in recognising their true interest. Hegel would see conflicts between classes as indicating the inadequacy of particular perspectives, which in turn implies the imperative of

---

1 In his *Political Writings* (1993b) Lyotard recognised how a variety of differences, including ethnic and colonial differences evident in the Algerian war of independence, cannot be easily assimilated to an integrative overall Marxist perspective.

superseding the stalemate by achieving a more inclusive standpoint. Hegel's response to the problems developed under market conditions was to look to corporations and the civil service to establish non-partisan ways of alleviating problems. Lyotard, in contrast, sees and emphasises irresolvable conflict and incommensurability.

## Hegel after Postmodernism

Lyotard's critique of grand narratives turns upon his insistence upon sheer difference. It is true that differences matter and that they are ubiquitous. Normative judgments differ from descriptive terms, jokes from exhortations, political economy from aesthetic experimentation and sexual behaviour from business partnerships. We cannot assume, with Habermas, that consensus can be reached between disputants. The dispute over Palestine does not lend itself to compromise. Conflicting and plausible claims are made for the same area of land, and opposing views are maintained relentlessly, and armed conflicts yield endless bloodshed. Yet pure differences do not exist, they always assume a point of sameness, or we could neither conceive of them nor discuss them. To conceive of otherness is to see it in some sort of relationship to what is other than other. The dismissal of grand narratives implies, mistakenly, that we do not require a wider picture to focus upon particularities, and different standpoints. Hegel's perspective, his form of grand narrative, makes sense of differences by drawing upon wider contexts. Large scale integrative theories, such as Hegel's, bring together aspects of the world, which are connected while being different. Differences do not preclude connections. Political economy does not operate outside a cultural frame, which sets limits on how welfare might be conceived and goods distributed. Aesthetics is not divorced from everyday life. Surrealism makes a point about reality, even if it is critical of standard forms of logic. It registers a point about the standardisation and monotony of forms of practical life. Art can imagine the exigencies of practical life and contributes to the economy. Without responding to normative demands, such as delivering general welfare and establishing equality, a market cannot obtain legitimacy. There are connections between forms of experience. Sometimes these forms of life are in apposition, at other times in opposition.

In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel responds to connections between forms of experience. He recognises how modern civil society creates problems, observing how "...despite an excess of wealth civil society is not rich enough, i.e. its own resources are insufficient to check excessive poverty and the creation of a penurious rabble" (Hegel 1967: 150). In the intervening years since Hegel's death, his sense that the emerging market economy brings problems for the community has only intensified. The advent and subsequent waning of neoliberalism refocuses attention upon shortcomings of the market. Markets cannot exist in pure form; they require frameworks in which to operate. Banking systems can, and indeed, have collapsed, as the basic trust on which they depend needs to be supported continuously and adequately by non-market



foundations. Likewise, poverty is not to be eradicated or lessened automatically by a trickle-down effect of the market. Hegel was right to look to state action, such as welfare provision, the stimulation of demand and public education, to remedy defects of the market. If his reliance upon corporations to furnish co-operative awareness of mutual needs appears dated, then the need to establish and work with institutions and organisations attending to the public good in ways that supersede a mere aggregation of individuals, remains alive and important.

A controversial aspect of Hegel's thought, which Lyotard critiqued as representing the core of his grand narrative, is his large-scale conception of philosophical history, whereby the meaning of particular historical episodes is related to a wider appreciation of historical development. For Hegel, pragmatic or reflective histories provide limited historical perspectives, and are framed in terms of limited conceptions. Hegel's overall philosophical history is framed in terms of the key concept pertaining to human activity, namely freedom. Freedom is expressed in history because it is in the nature of freedom to be developed and realised. Without freedom historical action is inexplicable, and yet the full meaning of freedom cannot be ascertained without recourse to historical development. Retrospectively, the meaning of a historical development, in which freedom has been realised, can be gleaned. For Hegel, the ultimate meaning of history is tied to this revelation of freedom. In his *Philosophy of Right* freedom is his starting point, but Hegel recognises that even if freedom is central to political life, at times, historically, human beings have been regarded as slaves, and the truth of freedom is to be recognised in historical development in which slavery is abolished (Hegel 1967: 48). Hence, the present is not divorced from the past philosophically as well as historically. Philosophical history is needed to understand the world (see Hegel 1956: 17–18). To imagine a present without a past is impossible, and to establish pertinent connections between present and past is to understand a situation concretely. For Hegel, the most important connections between past and present are philosophical ones, which supervene on historical events so as to reveal their ultimate meaning. Our hold on the past is framed by the present, and the past bears upon the present. The past is a construction from present experience, and possible future directions shape how we conduct ourselves in the present. Grand narratives link aspects of our present experience to the past and open us up towards an unknown future. They are vital in enabling an understanding of our situation. Jay Bernstein commented perceptively on how the self of self-consciousness is constituted by the practices and frameworks in which it is situated, and hence a grand narrative is the appropriate form of self-knowledge. In 'Grand narratives', he observes, "Self-consciousness in its full sense, which of course can never be complete, requires the self to traverse the conditions of its own comportment in and towards the world, which is just as Heidegger, Hegel and others have argued, to recollect and appropriate the traditions to which the self in question belongs ... narrative repetition, grand narration, just is the collective form of human self-consciousness" (Bernstein 1991: 120).

The relevance of a broad and philosophical perspective on historical development is evident in the aftermath of the end of grand narratives towards the end of the last century. As postmodernism rose and fell, other currents of theoretical and real-world activity were happening, which raised questions over postmodernism's assumptions and in turn demanded a return to grand narratives. Global theory represented reflection on large-scale historical development that was conducted in various styles. Global theorists from Giddens to Hardt and Negri engaged in large scale theorising that presume general developments in history that resemble what was critiqued by postmodernism (see Giddens 1990: 20–30). Indeed, Hegel can be seen as a notable precursor of contemporary global theory (Browning 2001a, and Browning 2011b).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the dominance of neoliberalism at the outset of the twenty-first century in Western economies and in the Global South has been understood and critiqued as a large-scale historical development, which has impacted upon the present. In recent years, the persistence of colonialism as a general historical force has been urged in decolonial critiques of political attitudes and practices in the West, which, ironically given Hegel's positive support for colonialism, recall Hegel's notion of unfolding historical trends (Sandew 2017). Recent political theorists, such as Hardt and Negri might repudiate Hegel, dismissing what they perceive to be his invidious teleology, but in their own theoretical practice they adopt historical perspectives which, like Hegel's, order the past in terms of its development into a form within the present. Likewise, decolonial critics of the present echo Hegel in highlighting the significance of historical legacies, which they take to be of supervening significance in the present.

Both the rationale underlying grand narratives, and the problems associated with their postmodern critique, have become clearer since postmodernism has declined in popularity. Lyotard's rejection of grand narratives suffers from internal tensions. His reading of Hegel, for instance, represents a very particular and controversial construction, whereby Hegel is taken to be an absolutist, imagining a subject, *Geist*, larger than and distinct from empirical individuals. *Geist* is held to exert an imperial control over the world and the course of history. This postmodern version of Hegel runs counter to sympathetic scholarly readings of Hegel, in which Hegel's *Geist* is not distinct from the patterns of meaning, with which human beings engage in a variety of cultural and historical contexts. Hegel's metaphysics does not replace human activities and history, but rather represents a synoptic undogmatic reading of events and practices, making sense of their inter-relations within an overall framework of meaning (see, for example, Pinkard 2000, Hardimon 1997 and Browning 1999).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the presumptions of Lyotard's postmodernism are decidedly

2 See Browning (2011a: 42–82) for an account of how global theory draws upon philosophical predecessors. More particularly, note the review of Hegel as a global theorist in the above (Browning 2011b: 42–61).

3 But note that I am critical of Hegel's reading of the history of philosophy, particularly Greek philosophy. See G. Browning (2013) *Plato and Hegel: Two Modes of Philos-*



questionable. His thought does not stand outside history, as the renunciation of grand narratives implies. In fact, Lyotard imagines history as taking shape according to the construction and his own deconstruction of comprehensive systems of knowledge. The end of grand narratives is itself a sort of narrative, which is neither local nor minor. Perhaps it is a variant of critical theory or Hegelian Marxism, in that Lyotard, in his reading of the present, mirrors the Frankfurt School in emphasising the overweening role of the instrumental in exerting pressure on all areas of life to save time or to enhance performativity. Lyotard observes, “This is the way in which Marxism has not come to an end, as the feeling of the differend” (Lyotard 1988: 171). Lyotard’s theoretical formulations of postmodernism can be seen to be either variants of critical theory or venturing into new territory but with the proviso that grand claims, redolent of Hegel, are being made. Moreover, the assumption that language games in *The Postmodern Condition* or phrases and genres of discourse of *The Differend* are discrete non-communicating forms of activity, is questionable. For instance, Lyotard’s separation of normative from non-normative language is far from clear-cut. In retrospect, postmodernism can be seen as responding to a particular historical conjuncture, when state communism in Europe was falling, and ethnicity and gender as markers of identity were becoming more visible. Rather than expressing a fundamental truth, postmodernism represented a stage in history, which can perhaps be best comprehended by a Hegelian overview of how forms of understanding succeed one another in history.

Of course, reflection on the continued value of grand narratives and the shortcomings of postmodernism, does not insulate grand narratives from criticism. A positive value of postmodern critique is that it provokes critical engagement with grand narratives. Grand narratives must operate at a high degree of abstraction if they are to offer large-scale explanations of developments in theory and practice. However, the price of abstraction is often a loss in capacity to deal meaningfully with concrete particular empirical developments. A general theory might suggest lines of historical development and affinities between forms of phenomena. Hegel, for instance, traces historical patterns of individualism and subjectivity in art, economics, religion and the provision of legal rights. However, he offers neither failsafe predictions on particular empirical developments, nor uncontroversial readings of the world. His endorsement of the nuclear family and heterosexuality, and his dismissal of non-European civilisations, are now rightly criticised on philosophical, historical and moral grounds. Critique of grand theory also rightly raises questions over how we might establish and corroborate the frameworks of explanation that are enabled by means of grand narratives. Teleological commitments to a future, which holds past and present tightly to a speculative overview, are to be avoided. Hegel is best seen as a critical theorist, whose philosophy is framed via critique of prior and rival theories and aspects of reality where inner and external tensions point to the need for developments that incorporate partial

problematic forms of theory and practice within higher, more inclusive unities. Hegel's dialectical arguments are framed by immanent criticism of styles of thought and empirical developments, which are open to experience and preclude dogmatism. His philosophy operates at a level of abstraction that admits, but does not anticipate unpredictable concrete historical developments. The internal dynamic of his argument depends upon his identification of internal tensions and interrelations within and between conceptual worlds. For instance, Hegel recognises the significance of rights, contracts, the rule of law and markets, and yet he sees these components of modern social and political experience as requiring their intricate and careful incorporation within an ethical community, in which representative forms of corporate life are maintained (Hegel 1967: 105–110).

## Conclusion

Revisiting the postmodern call for the end of grand narratives can be instructive. What was the motivation for the postmodern repudiation of grand narratives? How plausible was the postmodern case for their demise? “The end of grand narratives” was more a slogan than a considered argument, and was used metaphorically by Lyotard to stand for a critique of modernist claims to provide clear rational knowledge of a complex world. Lyotard, himself, recognised that he was perhaps inflating the claims of narratives both on the part of modern theorists and in his own call for little narratives to play a role in orienting thought and action. The postmodern project, as a whole, tended to overplay the novelty of its questioning of grand theory. Analytic thought, in many guises, had adopted a critical sceptical approach to theory and the growth of science and the decline of metaphysics since Kant contributed towards an uneasiness over grand theory. Throughout the twentieth century, a general scepticism towards metaphysics and theory developed. At the same time, postmodernism exaggerated the rationalism of a diverse set of modern theorists, to which it contrasted its own supposed novelty. Hegel, for instance, is a rationalist in that he purports to provide a synoptic and systematic account of reality. But there are limits to Hegel's rationalism. He recognises that the contingent practical world is not susceptible of precise theoretical understanding, and he acknowledges that historical developments are not to be predicted. His understanding of reality allows for the unforeseen and concrete imperfections. However, Hegel's synoptic perspective holds out the reasonable prospect of comprehending how areas of social life bear upon one, so that the family, the market, the state, religion and art all reflect individualism and a persisting sense of universal meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Iris Murdoch was a modern twentieth century philosopher, who embraced Continental and Anglo-American analytic styles of philosophy (See Browning

---

4 For a reading of Hegel as a communitarian, restraining market practices, see M. Hardimon, (1997) *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*.

2018: 1–27). She was preoccupied with the realities of modern life, and observed the erosion of myths in the ongoing intensification of modern society. The loss of mythical formulations, for Murdoch, affects politics, religion and philosophy, in that metaphysics, ideology and supernaturalism contract under the impact of modern sceptical empiricism. Murdoch recognises the modern impulse to limit the reach of reason and imagination, yet aims to revive metaphysics in the interest of seeing things as a whole. Her post-war novels track the state of play in modern social, political and intellectual life. Her philosophy and novels show how postmodern critiques of grand narratives are far from novel in that they register the recessiveness of metaphysical claims and the waning of supernatural and ideological beliefs. In her first novel, *Under the Net* (Murdoch, 2002) the laconic European, Hugo Belfounder, rejects the claims of theory, and shows a Wittgensteinian scepticism towards general explanation. Likewise, the philosopher Dave Gellman is constantly impugning his students for longing for metaphysics, while the lead character Jake Donaghue is a socialist, but feels that its justification is problematic in modern circumstances. While familiar with signs of cultural dislocation in modernity, Murdoch herself aimed to revive metaphysics, most notably in *The Sovereignty of Good* (Murdoch 1970), where she develops a Platonic form for morality, and in her late and imposing *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, where a metaphysical sense of reality as a whole underpins morals (Murdoch 1992: 504–513). For Murdoch, metaphysics plays a continuing role in orienting our thinking, though she maintains that it should be conducted in a non-dogmatic and critical form. Hegel is relevant to Murdoch's enterprise. She recognises the problems with Hegel's philosophy while appreciating its richness. He is seen by her as "...a paradigmatic metaphysician, whose work can contribute to reviving metaphysics in the late twentieth century" (Browning 2022: 227).

In Murdoch's late novel *The Book and the Brotherhood*, a number of post-war Oxford graduates establish a *Gesellschaft*, a society, which is dedicated to creating and promoting a grand book about politics. They entrust one of the characters, David Crimond, a radical iconoclast, to write a wide-ranging speculative book on the political. Time goes by. The book is not written, and the novel's characters, who have shifted to the right politically, have no continuing interest in a wholesale critical reading of the present. Meanwhile, they have bankrolled Crimond, whose behaviour is wild and morally problematic. What are they to do in a world that has turned against grand theory, and where leftist views are no longer fashionable? Should they end the enterprise? The leader of the group of friends, Gerard Hernshaw, reluctantly, allows the continued financing of Crimond's enterprise. To the surprise of Gerard and the reader, the book turns out to be excellent. Gerard finds it stimulating, because it makes him think. The ghost of his youth returns to haunt him, but it is not unfriendly. It is a ghost that provokes him to rethink his ideas and to engage in a dialogue with the grand narrative he has nurtured. The moral seems to be that we should engage with grand narratives, for even if they are not to be accepted uncritically, we need to think with and against them, to sharpen our thinking.

While we might now be at the end of the end of grand narratives, the historic critique of grand narratives is valuable, like grand narratives themselves. Hegel offers a classic grand narrative in that it enables a broad understanding of the course of history and the role of politics in historical development, and while Murdoch adopts a critical approach to Hegel's speculative philosophy, she recognises that such an enterprise possesses value.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first century, it remains important to think through our situation from a number of vantage points. We live in a world of interconnected activities, where the present emerges from past developments. To understand our situation requires framing wide-ranging ideas about politics, embracing past and present, and the different sides of social life, to allow for a critical synoptic reading of our identity and possibilities. Lyotard is sceptical over the possibilities of finding agreement between distinct perspectives. This scepticism is neither wild nor unconsidered, but divergences presuppose a measure of common ground, and politics is about working with what we share, to develop perspectives that can accommodate differences. Hegel's struggle for recognition is an absolute conflict to the death between different individuals, but ultimately Hegel takes the conflict to highlight how differently situated individuals are driven to achieve a common recognition of their identities. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is an elaborated review of the public conditions that are necessary to achieve equilibrated social recognition between modern individuals conscious of their differences. We should read it critically, but with a sense of its merits, and we should not allow postmodern critique to condemn Hegel's writings to be mere museum pieces. If we read his grand narrative critically, it will help us make sense of our lives within the modern world.

## References

- Bernstein, Jay M. 1991. "Grand Narratives." In: D. Wood, ed. *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Browning, Gary. 1988. "Hegel's Plato: The Owl of Minerva and a Fading Political Tradition." *Political Studies* 36 (3): 476–85.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *Hegel and the History of Political Philosophy*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *Lyotard and the End of Grand Narratives*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. "What is Wrong with Modernity and What is Right with the *Philosophy of Right*." *History of European Ideas* 29 (2): 223–239.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011a. *Global Theory from Kant to Hardt and Negri*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011b. "Hegel: Global Theory and Recognition." In: Gary Browning, ed. *Global Theory from Kant to Hardt and Negri*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2013. *Plato and Hegel: Two Modes of Philosophizing about Politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2016. *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018. *Why Iris Murdoch Matters*. London: Bloomsbury.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2022. "Murdoch and Hegel." In: S. C. Panizza and M. Hopwood, eds. *The Murdochian Mind*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Connor, Stephen. 1997. *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1986. *Glas* (trans.: J. P. Leavy and R. Rand Lincoln). London: University of Nebraska Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (trans.: P. Kamuf). London: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta." In: Jacques Derrida. *Positions* (trans.: A. Bass). London: Continuum.
- Fraser, Nancy and Linda Nicholson. 1988. "Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism." *Theory, Culture and Society: Special Issue on Postmodernism* 5 (2-3): 373–394.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. F. Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hardimon, Michael. 1997. *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1956. *The Philosophy of History* (trans.: J. Sibree). New York, NY: Dover Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1967. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (trans.: T. M. Knox). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969. *Hegel's Science of Logic* (trans.: A. Miller). London: George, Allen & Unwin.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1971. *Phenomenology of Mind* (trans.: J. B. Bailie). London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Liotard, Jean- François. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (trans.: G. Bennington and B. Massumi). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. *Just Gaming* (trans.: W. Godsich). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (trans.: G. Van Den Abbeele). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. *The Lyotard Reader* (ed.: A. Benjamin). Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985* (eds.: Julian and Morgan Thomas). London: Turnaround.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993a. *Libidinal Economy* (trans.: Grant I. Hamilton). London: Athlone.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993b. *Political Writings* (trans.: B. Readings and K. Geiman). London: UCL Press.
- Murdoch, Iris. 1970. *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *The Book and the Brotherhood*. London: Viking.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. *Under the Net*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Pinkard, Terry. 2000. *Hegel: A Biography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sandew, Hira. 2017. "Decolonizing Knowledge Production." In: M. A. Peters, ed. *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Singapore: Springer.

## Gerit Brauning

### Hegel i kraj kraja velikih narativa

#### Apstrakt

Liotarovo *Postmoderno stanje: Izveštaj o znanju* (1984) najavljuje kraj velikih narativa i dolazak postmoderne. To dvoje idu zajedno. Štaviše, oboje uključuju odricanje od Hegela i njegove filozofije. Hegel je osuđen kao glavni eksponent velikih narativa, uokvirujući spekulativnu teoriju koja briše razlike i kreativnost u interesu preteranog zatvorenog sistema. Popularnost postmodernizma je opala pri kraju dvadesetog veka. Njeno odbacivanje velike teorije nije viđeno kao ni novo ni neproblematično, jer je analitička filozofija dugo kritikovala teorijske spekulacije, a tvrdnje postmodernizma da se stane na kraj teorijama velikih razmera bile su sve više viđene kao neubedljive budući da su se širile teorije istorijskog razvoja globalizacije i kolonizacije. Kraj kraja velikih narativa omogućava nam da razmotrimo kako bismo danas mogli da razmatramo velike narative. Argument ovog rada jeste da ih treba posmatrati kao korisne i produktivne ako se bave u kritičkom duhu. Tačnije, tvrdi se da Hegel ostaje veoma relevantan teoretičar za današnji svet ako se njegovo razmišljanje posmatra kao otvoreno, a ne kao fiksno i zatvoreno.

Ključne reči: Hegel, veliki narativi, Liotar, postmodernizam, dijalektika, razlika.