

**CONSIDER THIS**

**Gone, and Being Forgotten**

**Why are some of the greatest thinkers being expelled from their disciplines?**

By RUSSELL JACOBY

How is it that Freud is not taught in psychology departments, Marx is not taught in economics, and Hegel is hardly taught in philosophy? Instead these masters of Western thought are taught in fields far from their own. Nowadays Freud is found in literature departments, Marx in film studies, and Hegel in German. But have they migrated, or have they been expelled? Perhaps the home fields of Freud, Marx, and Hegel have turned arid. Perhaps those disciplines have come to prize a scientific ethos that drives away unruly thinkers. Or maybe they simply progress by sloughing off the past.

A completely unscientific survey of three randomly chosen universities confirms the exodus. A search through the philosophy-course descriptions at the University of Kansas yields a single 19th-century-survey lecture that mentions Hegel. Marx receives a passing citation in an economics class on income inequality. Freud scores zero in psychology. At the University of Arizona, Hegel again pops up in a survey course on 19th-century philosophy; Marx is shut out of economics; and, as usual, Freud has disappeared. And at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Hegel does not appear in philosophy courses, Marx does not turn up in economics, and Freud is bypassed in psychology.

The divorce between informed opinion and academic wisdom could not be more pointed. If educated individuals were asked to name leading historical thinkers in psychology, philosophy, and economics, surely Freud, Hegel, and Marx would figure high on the list. Yet they have vanished from their home disciplines. How can this be?

A single proposition can hardly explain the fate of several thinkers across several fields. However, general trends can inform separate disciplines. For starters, the ruthlessly anti- or nonhistorical orientation that informs contemporary academe encourages shelving past geniuses. This mind-set evidently affects psychology. The American Psychological Association's own task force on "learning goals" for undergraduate majors makes a nod toward teaching the history of psychology, but it relegates the subject to an optional subfield, equivalent to "group dynamics." "We are not advocating that separate courses in the history of psychology or group dynamics must be included in the undergraduate curriculum," the savants counsel, "but leave it to the ingenuity of departments to determine contexts in which students can learn those relevant skills and perspectives." The ingenious departments apparently have dumped Freud as antiquated. A study by the American Psychoanalytic Association of "teaching about psychoanalytic ideas in the

undergraduate curricula of 150 highly ranked colleges and universities" concludes that Freudian ideas thrive outside of psychology departments.

The same antihistorical imperatives operate effectively, if with less force, in economics and philosophy. Again, generalizations can be made only with qualifications, but economics departments, like psychology departments, tend to be fiercely present-minded. Their basic fare consists of principles of economics, macroeconomics, microeconomics, finance, game theory, and statistics. To be sure, often the departments offer lecture classes on the history of economic thought, which survey economic thinking from the Greeks to the present. But in this sprint through the past, Marx shows up as little more than a blur. At the University of California at Los Angeles, for instance, students devote less than a week to Marx in a course on the history of economic theories. One scholar of Marx estimates that in more than 2,000 economics departments in the United States, only four offer even one class on the German revolutionary. In 1936, Wassily Leontief, who later won a Nobel in economic science, gave a seminar on Marx in Harvard's economics department. No such seminar is given now.

Compared with economics, philosophy prizes the study of its past and generally offers courses on Greek, medieval, and modern thinkers. Frequently, however, those classes close with Kant, in the 18th century, and do not pick up again until the 20th century. The troubling 19th century, featuring Hegel (and Kierkegaard and Nietzsche), is omitted or glossed over. General catalogs sometimes list a Hegel course in philosophy, but it is rarely offered. Very few philosophy departments at major universities teach Hegel or Hegelian thought.

Philosophy stands at the opposite pole from psychology in at least one respect. In most colleges and universities, it is one of the smaller majors, while psychology is one of the largest. Yet, much like psychology, philosophy has proved unwelcoming for thinkers paddling against the mainstream. Not only did sharp critics like Richard Rorty, frustrated by its narrowness, quit philosophy for comparative literature, but a whole series of professors have departed for other fields, leaving philosophy itself intellectually parched.

That is the argument of John McCumber, a scholar of Hegel and Heidegger who himself decamped from philosophy to German. His book *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Northwestern University Press, 2001) savages the contemporary American philosophical profession and its flight from history. He notes, for instance, that 10 years after the 1987 "breakthrough anthology" *Feminism as Critique*, not one of its contributors, from Seyla Benhabib to Iris Marion Young, still taught in a philosophy department. The pressures that force — or tempt — big names such as Rorty and Martha Nussbaum to quit philosophy, McCumber observes, exert equal force on those outside the public eye. He charges, for instance, that senior editors dispense with peer review and run the major philosophy journals like private fiefdoms, and that a few established professors select papers for the discipline's annual conferences. The authoritarianism and cronyism drive out mavericks.

Psychology without Freud, economics without Marx, philosophy without Hegel: For disciplinary cheerleaders, this confirms intellectual progress. The cloudy old thinkers have made way for new scientific researchers. But at what cost? The past innovators shared a fealty to history. "We are what we are through history," stated Hegel; and Freud,

for all his biological determinism, believed that one must master the past to master the present. Yet today we lack the patience to dig too far, or perhaps we lack the patience to unravel the implications of discoveries into the past. We want to find the exact pill or the exact gene that provides an instant solution. Psychology transmutes into biology. To the degree that a chemical imbalance results in depression, or a gene gives rise to obesity, the effort to restore health by drugs or surgery cannot be faulted. Yet an individual's own history may play a decisive role in those disharmonies. We triumphantly treat the effect as the cause. As a practical measure, that approach can be justified, but it avoids a deeper search.

The flight from history marks economics and philosophy as well. Economics looks more and more like mathematics, in which the past vanishes. Sometimes it even looks like biopsychology. A recent issue of the *American Economic Review* includes numerous papers under the rubrics of "Neuroscientific Foundations of Economic Decision-Making" and "Cognitive Neuroscientific Foundations of Economic Behavior." But can we really figure out today's economic problems without considering whence they came? Philosophy nods toward its past, but its devotion to language analysis and logic-chopping pushes aside as murky its great 19th-century thinkers. Polishing philosophical eyeglasses proves futile if they are rarely used to see.

No doubt there has been progress in those fields, but is it possible to advance without any idea of where one has been? Without a guide to the past, the scholar, like the traveler, might move in circles. Moreover, should the giants of the past be dispatched so coolly and mechanically? Culture is not like an automobile that should be junked when old and decrepit. I don't see how we can be educated — or consider ourselves educators — if we consign to the dustbin, say, Freud's exchange with Einstein on war, Marx's description of "the cheap price of commodities" that batters down national boundaries, or Hegel's notion of the master/slave relationship. Those ideas should be addressed, not parried; taught, not dismissed.

To be sure, other fields adopt the thinkers that psychology, philosophy, and economics have sent packing. Yet that itself is a problem. Instead of confronting recalcitrant thinkers on their own terms, the new disciplines slice them up. Freud turns into an interpreter of texts, Hegel into a philosopher of art, and Marx into a cinema theorist. That saves them from oblivion, but at the price of domestication. Freud no longer excavates civilization and its discontents but merely unpacks words. Hegel no longer tracks the dialectic of freedom but consoles with the beautiful. Marx no longer outlines the movements of capital but only deconstructs the mass spectator.

Driven out of their original domains because they are too ungainly or too out of date, Hegel, Marx, and Freud succumb to an academic makeover. In the mall of education, they gain an afterlife as boutique thinkers.

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