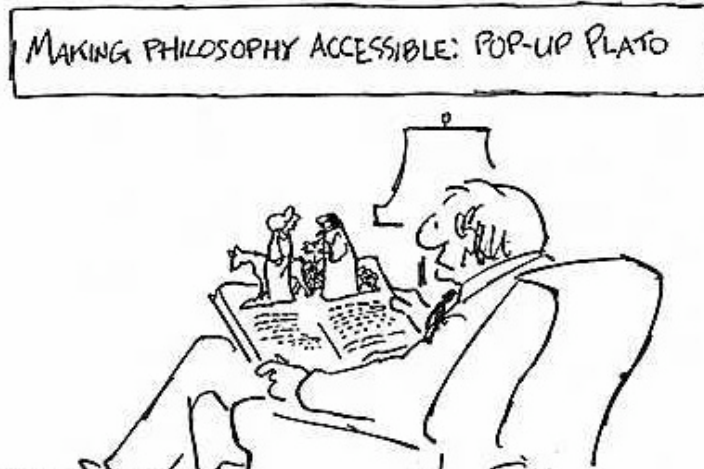


THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

Nov '08

Nº 497



GONE, AND BEING FORGOTTEN

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

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. 📖

From The Chronicle Review, Volume 54, Issue 46.

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Rembrandt's Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer

MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES

*A review of Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey:
A Biography, by Alberto Manguel*

Joseph Tartakovsky

It is said that the young Alcibiades, visiting a grammar school around 430 B.C., asked the teacher for a volume of Homer and, hearing there was none, struck the hapless teacher and left. Ancient geographers like Strabo thought to learn their art from the blind bard; Stoics studied what they considered Homer's didactic allegories. Military commanders pored over his lays so as to avoid Agamemnon's errors and mimic Odysseus's guile. Socrates called Homer the "best and most divine" of poets, and Plato's dialogues, for all their censure, refer to him, by one estimate, 331 times. Plutarch claims that Aristotle himself prepared an edition of the Iliad for his pupil Alexander, who kept the book "with his dagger under his pillow, declaring that he esteemed it a perfect portable treasure of all military virtue and knowledge." A 2nd-century B.C. marble relief depicts Homer as Father of Humankind, crowned by Time and Space themselves.

Alberto Manguel's slim "biography" is a literary history of Homer's epics, half criticism, half Britannica entry. In each of 22 short chapters, averaging ten pages apiece, he examines an angle of the Homeric phenomenon: the question of his existence; his reception by Greek philosophers; his heirs Virgil and Dante; the agonies of St. Jerome and Augustine of Hippo in reconciling him with Scripture; the excavation of Troy; his role in French debates between anciens and modernes; and his lessons on war and peace. Manguel flits about in time, but the progression is roughly chronological, from Homer's heroic age to our insistently anti-heroic one. The epics, thought to have been composed in the 8th century, have had few rivals in the inspiration of pedantry: an ancient scholar named Demetrius of Scepsis amplified 62 lines from the Iliad's Catalogue of Ships into 30 volumes. But Manguel, a critic, novelist, and translator born in Argentina and now living in France, writes with intelligence and curiosity. For a man of letters who has edited 23 anthologies and is reputed to possess a library of 30,000 volumes, he mostly avoids ostentation.

Manguel's intent is to show that, for over 2,500 years, countless members of the species have found "in these stories of war in time and travel in space...the experience of every human struggle and every human displacement." The Iliad and Odyssey, which can be thought to represent the two great metaphors of life, a battle and a journey, are the "books which, more than any others, have fed the imagination of the Western world." In the 8th century A.D., Byzantine schoolchildren were still expected to have much of the Iliad

by heart. Six hundred years later, during the Renaissance, Homer remained the cornerstone of every ambitious library. A friend sent Petrarch a Greek manuscript of Homer, which the father of humanism treasured despite ignorance of the language. “Your Homer lies mute by my side,” Petrarch wrote his friend, “while I am deaf by his, and often I have kissed him saying: ‘Great man, how I wish I could hear your words!’” In 1580, Montaigne declared Homer one of the three “most excellent of men,” alongside Alexander and the Theban general Epaminondas. Dr. Johnson observed in 1765 that “nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new-name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.” Even today, it is possible that Homer the poet is better known than Homer the cartoon character.

Votaries of the “man of a thousand faces,” in Manguel’s play on Christopher Marlowe’s phrase, constitute a gallery of literature’s great and lesser figures, from Herodotus to Racine to Tennyson to Derek Walcott. Manguel discusses works that but for Homer wouldn’t exist, from the plays of Aeschylus (who claimed his labors were mere “slices from the great banquets of Homer”) to the Arabic Sinbad tales, from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* to Joyce’s *Ulysses*; he assigns equal space to obscurities like Jean Giraudoux’s *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* (1935) and Timothy Findley’s *Famous Last Words* (1981). But even immortal Homer has critics. Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* sniffed at him as a relic of barbaric antiquity. Speaking for roughly 75 generations of schoolchildren, Churchill observed in *My Early Life* (1930), “Mr. Gladstone read Homer for fun, which I thought served him right.”

Homer is Greek to me, as to most, which can make the selection of a translation nearly as important as the decision to read him in the first place. Manguel nominates two English versions for acclaim: Alexander Pope’s (*Iliad*, 1715-1720; *Odyssey*, 1725-26) and the late Robert Fagles’s (*Iliad*, 1990; *Odyssey*, 1996), using the latter for his citations. As Manguel says, Fagles is rightly “praised for his accuracy and modern ring”; others (like me) prefer Pope’s music and nobility. Fagles himself served as associate editor in preparing the definitive Twickenham Edition of Pope’s Homer, masterpieces he declared “impossible to equal.” Compare the rough-hewn Fagles, then the stately Pope, rendering the passage in *Iliad*, Book XVI, that depicts Achilles and his tribesmen, whose withdrawal from the fighting had been disastrous to the Greeks, girding themselves at long last to rejoin the war:

Prince Achilles, ranging his ranks of Myrmidons,

arrayed them along the shelters, all in armor.
 Hungry as wolves that rend and bolt raw flesh,
 hearts filled with battle-frenzy that never dies—
 off of the cliffs, ripping apart some big antlered stag
 they gorge on the kill till all their jaws drip red with blood,
 then down in a pack they lope to a pooling, dark spring,
 their lean sharp tongues lapping the water's surface,
 belching bloody meat, but the fury, never shaken,
 builds inside their chests though their glutton bellies burst—
 so wild the Myrmidon captains, Myrmidon field commanders
 swarming round Achilles' dauntless friend-in-arms

Achilles speeds from tent to tent, and warms
 His hardy Myrmidons to blood and arms.
 All breathing death, around their chief they stand,
 A grim, terrific, formidable band:
 Grim as voracious wolves that seek the springs
 When scalding thirst their burning bowels wrings
 (When some tall stag, fresh-slaughtered in the wood,
 Has drenched their wide, insatiate throats with blood)
 To the black fount they rush, a hideous throng,
 With paunch distended, and with lolling tongue,
 Fire fills their eye, their black jaws belch the gore,
 And gorged with slaughter, still they thirst for more.
 Like furious rushed the Myrmidonian crew,
 Such their dread strength, and such their deathful view.

In recounting disputes over Homer's existence, the nature of his instruction, or his compatibility with monotheism, Manguel maintains an amused neutrality. But on occasion he asserts himself. When Émile Zola calls Homer's heroes "nothing but gang bosses," for example, Manguel labors to show the complexity of Homer's portrait of humanity and the sorrows of war. Homer can bathe his warriors in gore and fury, but they also appear in the most touching domestic poses. Here from *Iliad*, Book VI, is the scene in which Hector bids farewell to his infant son, as his wife Andromache looks on, before he returns to the great fray outside Troy's walls (again, Fagles, then Pope). In all poetry, writes Pope, there "never was a finer piece of painting than this":

In the same breath, shining Hector reached down
 for his son—but the boy recoiled,
 cringing against his nurse's full breast,
 screaming out at the sight of his own father,
 terrified by the flashing bronze, the horsehair crest,
 the great ridge of the helmet nodding, bristling terror—

so it struck his eyes. And his loving father laughed,
 his mother laughed as well, and glorious Hector,
 quickly lifting the helmet from his head,
 set it down on the ground, fiery in the sunlight,
 and raising his son he kissed him, tossed him in his arms,
 lifting a prayer to Zeus and the other deathless gods:
 "Zeus, all you immortals! Grant this boy, my son,
 may be like me, first in glory among the Trojans,
 strong and brave like me, and rule all Troy in power
 and one day let them say, 'He is a better man than his father!'—
 ...So Hector prayed
 and placed his son in the arms of his loving wife.
 Andromache pressed the child to her scented breast,
 smiling through her tears.

Thus having spoke, th' illustrious chief of Troy
 Stretched his fond arms to clasp the lovely boy.
 The babe clung crying to his nurse's breast,
 Scared at the dazzling helm, the nodding crest.
 With secret pleasure each fond parent smiled,
 And Hector hasted to relieve his child,
 The glitt'ring terrors from his brow unbound,
 And placed the beaming helmet on the ground.
 Then kissed the child, and lifting high in air,
 Thus to the Gods preferred a father's prayer.
 "O thou! whose glory fills th' etherial throne,
 And all ye deathless pow'rs! protect my son!
 Grant him, like me, to purchase just renown,
 To guard the Trojans, to defend the crown,
 Against his country's foes the war to wage,
 And rise the Hector of the future age!
 So when triumphant from successful toils,
 Of heroes slain he bears the reeking spoils,
 While host may hail him with deserved acclaim,
 And say, 'This chief transcends his father's fame':
 ...He spoke, and fondly gazing on her charms,
 Restored the pleasing burden to her arms
 Soft on her fragrant breast the babe she laid,
 Hushed to repose, and with a smile surveyed.
 The trouble pleasure soon chastised by Fear,
 She mingled with the smile a tender tear.

Homer famously suffered the occasional nod, but Manguel, apparently wide awake, threatens in some chapters to put his readers fast asleep. When his march through literature arrives at Goethe, Schiller, and the German Romantics, things begin to get heady. Then Nietzsche swaggers onstage, mind-boggling as ever. He is followed by Freud, who psychoanalyzes Achilles' subconscious and deciphers Homeric symbolism. Enter Carl Jung to obscure

things further by clarifying Freud. By this point Manguel is producing sentences like the following:

For Jung, this meant that Homer unconsciously identified with Nature, creating by analogy an association between the subject poet and his thematic object, lending it his creative power and representing it in a certain way because that is the way it shapes itself with him.

The reader yearns for the clarity of the non-Teutonic chapters and recalls, with improved understanding, the epigraph gracing one of them, from Swift: “As learned commentators view / In Homer more than Homer knew.” But taken all in all, the book shows why Homer will continue to mesmerize. By the end, the reader understands Manguel’s awe:

How astonishing that, in a language we no longer know precisely how to pronounce, a poet or various poets whose faces and characters we cannot conceive, who lived in a society of whose customs and beliefs we have but a very vague idea, described for us our own lives today, with every secret happiness and every hidden sin. 📖

From the Claremont Review of Books - June 2008

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THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

published weekly for its members by the

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE GREAT IDEAS

Founded in 1990 by Mortimer J. Adler & Max Weismann

Max Weismann, Publisher and Editor

Ken Dzugan, Senior Fellow and Archivist

A not-for-profit (501)(c)(3) educational organization.

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