



BOOK REVIEWS

Debate

David Graeber and David Wengrow's book *The Dawn of Everything*, (Allen Lane, 2021) was published to critical acclaim as a new explanation of the origins of humanity.

Here we publish two reviews, by **Anthony Bradley** and **John Molyneux**, with differing takes on it.

The Dawn of Everything: Lessons for the Left

Anthony Bradley

Most of us have a linear notion of the history of social development. First, many believe, were the hunter-gathers, people who lived precariously in small tribes and ate whatever they could find or kill. At some point our ancestors switched to agriculture and then, much later, modern industrial society emerged. The timeline for these changes is inevitably vague; there is often, too, the implicit (or explicit) suggestion that these transformations are on the whole beneficial, and that we, modern humans, are the lucky benefactors of this long process of gradual improvement. It is this teleological and apparently intuitive narrative which *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (2021), a wide-ranging, popular synthesis of research from archaeology and anthropology, sets out to dismantle. 'Primitive' cultures are, for Graeber and Wengrow, much more diverse, complex and variegated than the sweeping caricatures we generally hold of them. This book touches on a number of areas of immediate relevance to the radical left, most notably private property, the nature of the state, inequality, and the potential for, as well as (pre-) historical occasions of, fundamental social reorganisation.

None of this should be any surprise to those familiar with the more famous of the book's co-authors, David Graeber, who died in 2020, shortly after the work was finished. A key figure in the Occupy movement, Graeber was a long-time anarchist activist and member of the Industrial Workers of the World (better known as the 'Wobblies'). He is also widely reputed to have coined the

slogan, 'We are the 99%'. From its inception, then, *The Dawn of Everything* was never going to be the panegyric to modern capitalism and liberal democracy which has become the standard fare of broad stroke histories of humanity, best exemplified in Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humanity* (2011). Unlike Harari and other writers in this genre, Graeber and Wengrow are leading experts in their respective fields of anthropology and archaeology. As a result, their work feels both remarkably original and refreshingly well-informed, and, for this reason alone, it no doubt merits serious attention from anyone interested in the questions it poses.

What may come as a surprise to those on the left, especially its more reformist tendencies, is Graeber and Wengrow's problematisation of the concept of inequality, a term the authors see primarily as a tool for those 'who assume from the outset that no real vision of social transformation is even on the table.'¹ Instead of sorting countries or communities into those which are 'egalitarian' and others which are 'inegalitarian', Graeber and Wengrow argue that the presence or otherwise of basic freedoms offers a more productive framework for thinking about differences between societies than limited empirical measurements like the Gini coefficient. The authors identify three key liberties, none of which they see as existing for the majority in modern capitalism or in preceding feudalism:

1. the freedom to move away or relocate from one's surroundings;
2. the freedom to ignore or disobey commands issued by others; and
3. the freedom to shape entirely new social realities, or shift back and forth between different ones.²

They do, however, document their existence in a range of different forms of social organisation throughout history. Provocatively, they argue that it was colonial encounters with such emancipated societies in North America which provided the intellectual impetus which helped generate the Enlightenment and, ultimately, the French Revolution. European settlers were shocked to come into contact with radically free and highly democratic cultures in which no-one had the ability to coerce anyone else to do anything they did not wish to do. This was not the case for all indigenous societies; many were predicated on brutal systems of slaveholding, exploitation and warmongering, as in Europe. Nor did this mean that these free societies were entirely equal; differences in status and individual rank did exist, but one's position on the social pecking order did not

make it possible to economically abuse those below. The key benefit of thinking in terms of freedom rather than equality is that it eliminates the ambiguity inherent to the idea of ‘equalitarianism’. Instead of comparing abstract figures on income and mortality which tell us little about what living is *actually like*, Graeber and Wengrow’s turn to liberty recentres, in Marx’s terms, man’s ability to make his ‘life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness’³ as the fundamental measure of emancipation; a view which ought to be discomfiting for the more economic and authoritarian of his self-proclaimed disciples. Such a reorientation also offers a momentous challenge to liberal progressives who claim – less convincingly each day – that we have reached the acme of human social development and that there is no need for any kind of radical change which could upset this delicate balance. It also equips genuine leftists with the rhetorical tools necessary to take on right wing arguments that socialism would impinge on freedom, or that hierarchical domination is the only right and natural form of social organisation.

Social organisation

Likewise, Graeber and Wengrow’s perspectives on private property and the state are likely to prove perplexing for much of the left and right alike. While one review has already claimed that Graeber and Wengrow’s principal enemy is the state,⁴ it would be much more accurate to say that the authors of *The Dawn of Everything* are highly sceptical of the usefulness of the state as an analytical concept, arguing that, in most cases, it is a misleading modern projection which does little to help us understand how ancient and indigenous social organisation actually functioned. While such a view may at first appear incompatible with a Marxist analysis which insists on the state as an essential apparatus of class domination, it can in fact liberate this position, allowing for the state to be conceived not merely in narrow terms of ‘government’, ‘civil service’, ‘law’ etc. but rather all the entire diffuse mechanisms of class war, the ‘private’ and ‘public’ elements of which are in practice impossible to disentangle. Graeber and Wengrow’s discussion of private property will also be strange territory for many accustomed to conventional Marxian lines of thought, arguing that, rather than emerging due to changes in the mode of production, private property has at its root a disastrous overspill of the sacred: ‘the object is set apart, fenced about by invisible or visible barriers – not because it is tied to some supernatural being, but because it’s sacred to a specific, living human individual.’⁵

Their emphasis on the capacity for self-conscious decisions around production in ‘primitive’ societies is the key difference between Graeber and Wengrow’s analysis of the wide span of human history and that of Marx, who

thought the ‘tribal’ mode of ownership necessarily limited these societies to hunting and fishing.⁶ For example, rather than judging the advent of agriculture to have brought about a corresponding new form of social organisation, Graeber and Wengrow argue for the widespread existence in free societies of ‘play farming’ which did not create the division of labour Marx and Engels believed it ought to have.⁷ As such, a serious defence of traditional Marxist views on ‘primitive’ societies against *The Dawn of Everything* and the research it draws upon is a daunting task, if not one which is entirely insurmountable. That Graeber and Wengrow are a better source is without question, drawing as they are on a much richer bank of experience and expertise than Marx ever could, confined as he was to the reading rooms of the British Library and hindered by the limitations of a nineteenth century education. It is therefore vital for socialists to make sure we are not repeating centuries old, unverified banalities about ‘primitive societies’, but that we are always working towards integrating new arguments and research into our broader theoretical perspectives.

Critical to *The Dawn of Everything* is a rejection of any totalising vision of history. Intrinsic to this is a disavowal of any notion of ‘origins’. As societies have taken so many disparate and disconnected forms, there cannot be, in any meaningful sense, any one single beginning to any of the human social phenomena discussed above. How (or whether) to integrate this viewpoint into traditional historical materialism is an open and difficult task. The prospect of its completion purging Marxism of any trace of Edenism and teleology is a welcome one.

In terms of practical activism, the greatest deficiency of the book is its lack of a feasible political programme. While acknowledging that societies can become ‘stuck’ in inequitable forms of social organisation, Graeber and Wengrow do nothing to outline for us how we might make modern capitalism come ‘unstuck’. They do, however, allude to such (not always peaceable) changes in past societies, such as Taosi in modern day China, which they see as plausibly the earliest known site of an urban social revolution. While it is perhaps too much to expect an explicit endorsement of the need for revolution in a work of mainstream non-fiction written by two professional academics, some sense of what pragmatic action the authors would advise based on the information and arguments presented would have been a natural conclusion to a book like this. What good, after all, is a diagnosis without a prescription?

Yet what *The Dawn of Everything* offers us more than anything else is hope. The world, Graeber and Wengrow insist, can be changed: capitalism is not the logical end point of history, nor is liberty a mere utopian dream. This book, as well as being genuinely encyclopaedic in its

breadth of knowledge, is a bulwark of optimism. In times like these, that is what is truly essential.

All that Glistens is not Gold

John Molyneux

This book makes large claims for itself. First there is its title, *The Dawn of Everything*, and then the statement that ‘In this book we will not only be presenting a new history of human-kind, but inviting the reader into a new science of history, one that restores our ancestors to their full humanity.’ {P.24}⁸ These claims are exaggerated. This book is not a history of humanity. It says nothing at all about the origins of humanity or of homo sapiens (a period of perhaps three million years overall and maybe 300,000 years for homo sapiens) or about the development of Chinese or Indian civilisations beyond their earliest phases, the Persian or Roman empires, the Mongol Empire, the Black Death, the conquest of the Americas, the rise of capitalism, the French or Russian or Chinese revolutions, the two world wars or indeed almost anything in modern history⁹. Nor is it a ‘science of history’, new or old.

What it is, in fact, is a series of polemics, illustrated by numerous stories and examples, against what the authors see as the dominant view of one segment of the early history of humankind (often called ‘pre-history’ because prior to written history), namely the transition from foraging to agriculture/urban societies. This character of the book gives rise to its major strength and one of its major weaknesses. The strength is that it contains a multitude of descriptions of the life and behaviour of indigenous peoples which are by turns intriguing and challenging. Its weakness is that it does this in a very unsystematic way, often with no clear time line indicated, so that the reader, unless they already possess massive anthropological and archaeological knowledge, is often left wondering whereabouts in human history we are supposed to be. Moreover, this element of confusion tends to facilitate the superficial plausibility of the case being made.

The main ostensible target of these polemics is what Graeber and Wengrow (GW) see as the ‘Rousseauian’ view of the nature of early human society which they often characterise as ‘that societies before the advent of agriculture were ‘confined to small, egalitarian bands’ [p.4]

but which they also repeatedly refer to, dismissively, as ‘a state of innocence’ or a ‘Garden of Eden’¹⁰. GW also reject what they see as the main alternative to the Rousseau view, that of Thomas Hobbes, that life in the state of nature was ‘a war of all against all’ and ‘nasty, brutish and short’ which they describe as even worse. But most of their energy goes into combating Rousseauism. This, in itself, is a problem because in their critique of the Rousseauian view they are implicitly attacking another theory of early human history, that of Marxism. and they do this without ever either properly setting out the Marxist theory or systematically confronting it.

Iroquois

The Marxist account of pre-history has its roots in Marx’s notes on the anthropological studies of the Iroquois Native Americans by Henry Morgan which were then developed by Engels into the famous *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. This in turn was built on in the 1930s and 1940s by the eminent archaeologist, V. Gordon Childe, and by subsequent Marxist anthropologists such as Eleanor Burke Leacock¹¹ and Richard B. Lee¹². The most important features of this account were a) the role of labour in the process whereby humans differentiated themselves from animals and ‘mankind made itself’¹³; b) that neither class divisions, nor the oppression of women, nor the existence of the state were eternal features of human society – and thus attributable to human nature – but arose historically after a prolonged period of classlessness or primitive communism as a result of the transition from foraging to agriculture and the generation of substantial surpluses over and above what was necessary for subsistence.¹⁴ The evidence presented by GW in their extended polemic against Rousseau and his legacy, also constitutes a challenge to the Marxist account, in that they describe a number of pre-agricultural, foraging societies, particularly the Kwiakutl, the Yurok and the Chapusa, which were characterised by substantial inequality (including slavery) and were plainly not ‘primitive communist’.

Forager societies

Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale, in their critical review of the book, maintain that GW’s examples are exceptions to the typical forager societies. The Kwakiutl, for example, were fishers in an area of such abundance that it generated huge surpluses which permitted class inequality to emerge. They say that ‘Unfortunately, Graeber and Wengrow fail to engage with the enormous body of new scholarship on human evolution’ which shows that ‘for at least 200,000 years, [humans] lived in egalitarian societies

where men and women were equal too.’¹⁵ To this I would add that it is a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the Marxist account to see it as envisaging a rapid or sudden transition from classless foraging to class divided agriculture. On the contrary as Martin Empson states ‘the process was a long drawn out one that took millennia’¹⁶. In such a transition there would be bound to be numerous hybrid cases, false starts and steps in one direction followed by steps in the opposite direction and the examples given by GW are all drawn from this transitional period. The already noted absence of a clear timeline or systematic presentation tends to mask this. They do not refute or disprove the argument that humans lived in rough equality for the vast bulk of their history.



V. Gordon Childe

The Dawn of Everything is also an indirect attack on Marxism in a broader sense in that at every turn they reject materialist explanations of social development i.e. explanations that **begin** with the material conditions in which human beings produce their means of subsistence,¹⁷ always preferring explanations based on culture and ideas. For example that ‘Inuit lived the way they did because they felt that’s how humans ought to live’ (p.108); or ‘To farm or not to farm: it’s all in the head’(p.242); and ‘cities begin in the mind’ (p.276). In philosophical terms GW exhibit a consistent preference for radical ‘idealism’ which has always been a strand in bourgeois thought. But it is also linked to the authors’ anarchism in that anarchists, beginning with Bakunin and continuing all the way through

to the Occupy movement have always been irked by the ‘boring’ Marxist emphasis on objective conditions and seen the revolution as some combination of individual will power and mass spontaneity. Above all GW want to emphasise that ‘there is no single pattern’ (p.115) or ‘no consistent pattern’ (p.116); human freedom can just erupt in any place and at any time in history if people ‘choose’ it.

The great weakness of this approach is that while people’s culture, ideas and choices must always be part of any historical explanation, if they are the starting point and the finishing point then they are just left hanging with no answer to **why** that was a certain people’s culture or ideas. To give a more recent example than those given by GW, how do we explain why, in the American Civil War, the South was pro-slavery and the North was anti-slavery? Can we just say it was their different ‘cultures’ or their different morality or their different interpretations of the bible? Or did those differences, as Marxists argue, have their roots in the different economic conditions in the North and the South - industrial capitalism requiring (‘free’) wage labour versus plantation production resting on slavery?

There are other things I don’t much like about this book. I don’t like the way they dismiss the questions about the origin of inequality and of the state. In the case of inequality, I think it’s because they really believe that inequality and private property have always been there and maybe always will be.¹⁸ In the case of the State they simply divert the question of origin by saying that there is no consensus definition of the State¹⁹, but this is just casuistry. If states now exist, which they clearly do, they either have always existed or they have an origin. I think that in many of their descriptions of indigenous and prehistoric societies they build speculation on speculation in a way that exceeds the evidence they present or reference. Often the account begins with ‘it seems that’

or ‘it might have been the case that’ but a couple of paragraphs later those qualifications have been forgotten. And occasionally they present good stories, precisely because they are good stories, but which are not in fact true. For example they claim May Day was chosen as international workers day because ‘so many British Peasant revolts had historically begun on that day’ (p.117). But they didn’t. the three main peasant revolts in English history were in 1381 (the Peasant Revolt), 1450 (Jack Cade) and 1549 (Kett’s Rebellion). None of them started on 1 May.²⁰

But leave these objections aside. The main point is that this book is a challenge to the Marxist theory of history but not in the end a convincing one.

¹ Graeber, David and Wengrow, David. *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Allen Lane. Great Britain, 2021. p.7.

² Ibid. p.503.

³ Marx, Karl. 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844' in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. W.W. Norton and Co. New York, 1978. 2nd Ed. p.76.

⁴ Lindisfarne, Nancy and Neale, Jonathon. 'All Things Being Equal'. <https://annebonnypirate.org/2021/12/16/all-things-being-equal/>. Published: 26/12/2021, accessed: 15/03/2022.

⁵ *The Dawn of Everything*. p.159.

⁶ Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. 'The German Ideology' in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. p.151.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The final phrase in this sentence is important- and typical in that repeatedly our authors suggest that their account of history is not only truer than virtually all accounts that have gone before but also morally and politically superior (less racist, less condescending etc) and at the same time more 'fun'.

⁹ Here the obvious contrast is with Chris Harman's *A People's History of the World*, London 1999, which manages to cover all of the above.

¹⁰ This is disingenuous 'straw manning' as what the advocates of forager equality believe existed was not 'a state of innocence' or a 'Garden of Eden' but simply societies without classes or gender oppression.

¹¹ See Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance*, Chicago. 2008. GW discuss the encounter between the indigenous Montagnais-Naskapi and the colonising Jesuits but fail to reference Leacock's path-breaking study of this. They mention Leacock in passing elsewhere but refer to her as a 'feminist' anthropologist and don't mention that she was a Marxist.

¹² Richard B. Lee, *The !Kung San*, Cambridge 1979.

¹³ The most famous text in this regard is Frederick Engels, 1876 essay 'The Role of Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man,' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>. But the fundamental idea is present in Marx and Engels from the beginning - i.e. before they or anyone else knew much about human pre-history. In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 Marx wrote, the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labour,' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>. In *The German Ideology* they wrote. 'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.' <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a2>. This idea was also the inspiration for the pathbreaking archaeology of V. Gordon Childe in *Man Makes Himself*, London(1936).

¹⁴ The principal classic text for this is Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>. The best more recent summary, in the light of modern archaeological and anthropological findings, is Chris Harman, 'Engels and the Origins of Human Society'. *International Socialism Journal* 65, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1994/xx/engels.htm>

¹⁵ Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale, 'All Things Being Equal,' <https://mronline.org/2021/12/20/the-dawn-of-everything-gets-human-history-wrong/>

¹⁶ Martin Empson, *Land and Labour*, London, 2014, p.30.

¹⁷ I stress 'begin with' because it is no part of genuine Marxism to deny the role of culture, ideas, politics etc. in history but is a very familiar bourgeois trop to denounce materialist explanations as crude economic determinism.

¹⁸ This is not argued in a sustained way but there are many hints in this direction as in 'If private property has an 'origin' it is as old as the idea of the sacred, which is likely as old as humanity itself'. (p.163) Or, in relation to Bali, 'In principle there are no equals {because we are all different -JM] and most Balinese would argue that in the greater cosmic scheme of things, this must always be true'. (p.320) . I suspect GW agree the view they attribute to 'most Balinese'.

¹⁹ Again there is only the barest mention of the Marxist theory of the state (despite the vast literature on the subject). And why would anyone, let alone avowed anarchists like GW expect there to be consensus on this hot topic.

²⁰ As Lindisfarne and Neale note in passing 'The reader should be warned that their use of evidence is often not reliable.'

The Origins of Racism

Joe Moore

.....

Eric Williams. *Capitalism and Slavery* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2021) £9.99

The republication of Eric Williams' classic *Capitalism and Slavery* will be welcomed by all those fighting racism. Not only does it give the lie to the view that slavery evolved as a result of racism but it definitively proves the opposite, i.e., that racism was invented to justify the enslavement of millions of African people. However, the main thesis of the book is explained by Williams in the preface, where he says the book "*is strictly an economic study of the role of Negro slavery and the slave trade in providing the capital which financed the Industrial Revolution in England and of mature industrial capitalism in destroying the slave system.... It is not a study of the institution of slavery but of the contribution of slavery to the development of British capitalism.*"

Williams was born in Trinidad and Tobago in 1911. As a young man he became active in the struggle for national liberation and after independence, Williams became the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. As a student he studied under the renowned Caribbean Marxist C.L.R. James.

In the opening chapter of the book Williams shows that the European colonisers used all available unfree labour in the Caribbean and on the American continent. This ranged from Native Americans, indentured European labourers and convicts, enslaved Africans and finally indentured workers from the Indian sub-continent. The origin or skin colour was not an issue, as long as a profit could be made. The enslavement of African people however was on an industrial scale. Moral justification was provided by the Church of Rome, when it divided the non-European world between the two earliest colonial powers, Spain and Portugal and gave its imprimatur to the enslavement of African people.

Another excuse given at the time was that African people were more accustomed to working in tropical climates, unlike Europeans. Williams dismisses that argument by referencing the example of Australia where white people were able to work under similar climatic conditions.

The main focus of Williams's work is on the super profits made from slavery and the slave trade. The book is full of

facts and figures. In the second chapter he outlines the extent of those profits. One example is that of a ship leaving Bristol in 1730 and transporting 270 slaves across the Atlantic, an enterprise which earned a profit of between £7,000 and £8,000, exclusive of the return from ivory also transported. This is one of many examples given which shows the astronomical profits generated and the consequent development of the ports of Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow and London into major wealthy urban centres.

Massive profits were made from the cultivation of sugar, coffee, cotton, tobacco, rice and indigo. But it was the sugar profits that generated vast fortunes, which were then invested in emerging capitalist enterprises. Williams explains in great detail what was called 'the Triangular Trade'. Ships left Britain laden with manufactured goods, anything in fact that could be used to barter for human beings. Also included in these cargos were instruments of restraint and torture such as handcuffs, leg-irons and chains. These were used on the Middle Passage to hold in bondage the enslaved people. Weapons were also exported to the African rulers who worked with the slave traders, resulting in increased armed conflict on the continent. It is worth listing in full the range of goods exported to Africa in 1787 as chronicled by Williams; "*cotton and linen goods, silk handkerchiefs, coarse blue and red woollen cloths, guns, powder, shot, sabres, lead bars, iron bars, copper kettles and pans, earthen and glass ware, beads, silver and gold rings, spirits and tobacco.*"

Middle Passage

Most readers will be aware of the Middle Passage and its cruelties. The famous graphic of the slave ship Brookes, showing human beings packed like sardines, was used by the British Anti-Slavery Society as a propaganda poster. The final leg of the Triangular Trade was the transportation of the plantation produce back to Britain to be manufactured into finished products. These were both consumed in Britain and exported. The profits were then reinvested into manufacturing facilities. Thus was the Industrial Revolution kick-started. According to Adam Smith "*the profits of a sugar plantation in any of our West Indian colonies are generally greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America.*"

According to Williams the sugar planters were "*the biggest capitalists of the mercantilist epoch.*" The wealth of these planters was used to finance industrial expansion in Britain. The West Indian planters as well as the slave traders had the ready resources to finance the agricultural revolution as well as the construction of huge factories that were required to accommodate the newly invented machinery needed to supply emerging markets. An example was the finance

required by James Watt, the inventor of the steam engine. In school we were taught to regard Watt as this great scientific hero who almost single-handedly invented and constructed the steam engine. Williams however tells us that it was capital accumulated from the West Indian trade that financed Watt. Capital advanced by Lowe, Vere, Williams and Jennings, later the Williams Deacon Bank, now a part of the NatWest Group. Planters were subsequently the first to use the steam engine on their plantations before it was adapted in Britain to power factories and railways.

The book is full of interesting detail of how the geopolitics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries influenced the slave trade and the role played by planters in the British Empire. The tension between the planters and the emerging American bourgeoisie, who traded with the French, became one of the causes of the American revolution. Williams also chronicles in depth the tension between those who championed trade monopolies, the planters, as opposed to the emerging industrial capitalist class who demanded free trade. There could only be one winner. It is significant that the victory of the free traders occurred at the time when slavery was abolished within the British Empire.

Towards the end of the book Williams again makes reference to the fact that his study does not talk about the horrors of slavery and the slave trade. Neither does he analyse the role played by those enslaved in its abolition, except for a few references to Haiti. It is no coincidence that Wilberforce's Act was passed a few years after the Republic of Haiti being declared. Or that slavery itself was abolished as an immediate response to Sam Sharpe's rebellion in Jamaica.

Classic

Williams's book should be read as a companion volume to the great work of his former teacher, C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. The enslavement and murder of millions of African people by the imperial European powers was one of the great crimes against humanity. A crime whose effects are still evident today both in the treatment of the Windrush generation by the British establishment and the fact that a Black Lives Matter movement had to be set up in the US.

We learn two great lessons from *Capitalism and Slavery*, that the racism we know today was invented to justify slavery and that the same slavery generated the fortunes that financed the birth of capitalism. Or as Marx put it "*if money comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek then capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.*" If we want a world free of racism, then we need to overthrow the system that gave

birth to it. *Capitalism and Slavery* should be on the bookshelf of every revolutionary and anti-racist.

The German Ideology

Christopher DeVeau

.....

.....

Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx. *The German Ideology: A New Abridgement*. Tom Whyman (Repeater Books, 2022) £12.99

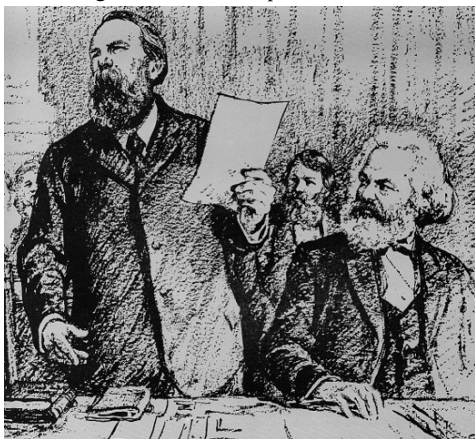
A new abridgement of *The German Ideology*, edited by Thomas Whyman, is a creature twice if not three times Frankensteined into life. The provenance of the text (a lengthy jeremiad against the group of philosophers known as the Young Hegelians, written sometime around 1845–46 but only first published by the Marx-Engels Institute in 1932) has been in dispute for some years. The official narrative of its history—that it was written by Marx and Engels but put aside after they failed to find a publisher—has been increasingly contradicted by evidence for a more troubled origin story—that it was in fact cobbled together by an editor at the Marx-Engels Institute from notes left by the pair, among other less salutary contributors, and never originally existed as a coherent text at all. Don't fret. This new edition stakes its claim that questions of pedigree are essentially beside the point for a text that lays out Marx and Engels' materialist theory of history "not only for the first time, but more lucidly than they would ever manage again." As such, Whyman takes this as an excuse for a bit of editorial licence, reshaping the text for the benefit of students and layreaders, cutting back on the original text's chapters critiquing Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer (which together make up the bulk of all previous abridgments), and expanding the presence of the chapter critiquing Max Stirner and his philosophy of Egoism (usually overlooked if not left out altogether in previous abridgments, but which in fact makes up the single largest chunk of the original manuscript; part of this new edition's job is to ask why this is).

Innovation

This review will focus entirely on this edition's main innovation, namely the centering of the Stirner chapter and

Whyman's editorialising around it, except to say that what is left of the Feuerbach chapter (the Bauer chapter is excised in its entirety) seems deftly edited to include all the important points and supports the main thrust of the book without labouring the casual reader unnecessarily.

Whyman's reading of the text runs as follows: "In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels diagnose the philosophy of Hegel and his successors as being in some sense the product of their mistaken identification of ruling-class ideology with objective reality—a mistake that will turn even the most ostensibly 'radical' thought into reactionary tilting at windmills." After an introduction to the main players in then contemporary German philosophy (in brief depicting GFW Hegel, the most influential philosopher of Marx's time, as trying to resolve certain longstanding contradictions in philosophy by placing abstract "reason" above all other historical forces) this line of attack takes centre stage in Marx's critique of Max Stirner.



Engels and Marx

Engels seems to have been initially quite taken with Stirner's book *The Ego and Its Own*, saying in a letter of November 1844 that Stirner's Egoism "is taken to such a pitch...that it cannot sustain itself for even for an instant in its one-sidedness, but must immediately change into Communism." Marx, evidently, was less enthusiastic, and his Stirner is a man with his anatomy stuck firmly in the Hegelian finger trap who believes the only way out is through. The kernel of Stirner's thought is contained in the notion that all people, subject to the tyranny of a falsely generalised idea of "Man," are trapped in the middle of vicious oppositions ("individual vs. collective interest" being a primary one). These oppositions, Stirner maintains, will all be overcome when we rid ourselves of the false conceptions and realise our "true" natures as individual egoists driven only by the desire for self-fulfillment, and restructure human relations accordingly. In brief, according to Marx, he locates human suffering in the realm of ideas,

then cons himself into thinking he's found the solution when he implores us simply to stop believing in them. It is at times almost possible to hear the authors groaning.

Criticisms

It's possible to see the root of Engel's initial enthusiasm, as Stirner is apt enough in his identification of some of the contradictions inherent in capitalist ideology that led to such a fix. But Marx's criticisms of his attempt to escape these contradictions are damning. (It's said that Marx and Stirner were occasional friends; if true, Stirner had no need of enemies. Whyman himself loses track in the footnotes of the sheer number of Marx's derisive nicknames for the poor man, of whom Whyman informs us, "Even his wife claimed later to have never particularly liked him.") The thrust of Marx's argument, which he comes back to again and again and which forms the centrepiece of Whyman's arranging of the text, is that Stirner's critique fails because it does not root itself in the material conditions prevailing in the real world, being distracted instead by Hegelian ideals that have nothing to do with life and can persist only in the rarified atmosphere of abstract thought. As such, Stirner, even though seeming at times to critique Hegelian thought, recapitulates it in his own thinking, having essentially failed to recognise the ruling-class ideology that pervades both. This is illustrated any number of ways, among them in Stirner's critique of Communism as appealing to a generalised "common interest" that he claims runs counter to human beings' "true" nature; to which Marx replies that "common interest" is in fact a fabrication of the ruling class, which looking to capture the excess value of workers' labour for itself, transforms its own set of interests into a "common good" to which all are subject. Far from being dissolved by some kind of Hegelian rationality, such conditions will simply be destroyed when we overthrow the material mode of production that upholds them by means of a workers' revolution. As Whyman himself stresses, the Marxism of *The German Ideology* is not rooted in any kind of abstract thinking, but is rather based exclusively in consideration of the economic conditions that actually exist for workers in the present moment (no matter when the present moment may be). If the communist revolution really takes place, it will not be because it was destined to by abstract forces of history or rationality, but simply because it could, the material conditions for it having been set by capitalism.

Penalty

This abridgment then is a worthy if occasionally strained creation. Whyman's attempt to craft a version of the text that will appeal to layreaders and students (among the former of whom the reviewer counts himself) is at times overly ambitious: the evident impatience in Marx's

criticisms can be thrilling, but it is too often obvious that we are reading notes rather than a fully worked out tract, and Marx's responses to frequent extracts from Stirner's writing can at times be bewildering, even with the help of liberal editorial footnoting. This charge should not carry too heavy a penalty: among others, Whyman takes on the task of condensing and explaining the currents of German philosophy at its historical peak of obfuscation. That he doesn't always quite succeed is still a considerable accomplishment, and speaks to the depth and earnestness of his scholarship. What's left (weighing in at a reasonably limber 195 pages plus another 30 for a kind of cliff-notes "abridgement of the abridgement") is a fairly comprehensive early defence against common yet persistent misunderstandings of Marx's ideas, and a timely enough reminder that abstract theory-making is inevitably destined to miss the point.

Music and Capitalism

Colm Stephens

.....

Sabby Sagall. *Music and Capitalism. Melody, Harmony and Rhythm in the Modern World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, New York)

As a title for this learned work, 'Music and Capitalism', is at once both an ultra-ambitious and somewhat modest. The title is more ambitious than the work itself because, as the author explains at the very beginning, he confines himself and his arguments to western 'art music' (which is ambitious enough in its own right) and sadly – but not surprisingly – has to omit any treatment non-European or of popular styles of music on the grounds of lack of space and expertise.

But the title displays a modesty too. Sagall treats not just classical music and its relationship with capitalism but also reviews the *development* of both music and society and social relations from plainchant and other church music in medieval feudal and Renaissance Europe through the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras of European music and finishes with Modernist music of the first half of the twentieth century. Such a broad sweep contains an immense amount of detail and spans more than four centuries of music and history. It must be emphasised that this is an academic book published in a series on 'Critical Theory and

Radical Practice' (series editor, Stephen Eric Bronner) and so is not aimed at a general audience. Full disclosure warrants the noting too that this reviewer is neither a musician nor a musicologist but just an average lover of music!

Sagall opens with a shortish chapter on the universality and origins of music – here he introduces his basic arguments. The first (theoretical) assumption underlying the analysis is that there is a correspondence between a society and its music. This for Sagall is not just the relationship between dominant ideas or issues of the society and the types or formats of music performed and listened to at any one time. Nor is it just the influence of these ideas on the subject matter of songs or operas but that the music itself reflects the socio-economic and political contexts in which it was composed.

For example, it is not sufficient to explain the development of Baroque musical styles that were less rigid than the earlier church music by the rise of a bourgeois class in seventeenth century European cities and towns with its increasing demand for secular music for the theatre or opera or state occasions. For post-Reformation composers like Bach and Handel – whether devote Protestants or not – having challenged the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church it was natural for them to challenge the strict conventions of medieval or Renaissance music. For Sagall the relative freedom of the music to 'wander' across notes and keys displayed by Baroque composers was an expression of the 'growing freedom of movement across the world – the voyages of discovery and the emergence of national and international markets.'

Equally advances in new musical technologies or instruments are not enough or maybe not even necessary to explain the evolution of musical styles. The supplanting of the cembalo and harpsicord as the primary keyboard instruments by the piano in the eighteenth century barely gets a mention in relation to the Classical style of the era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Instead the arguments centre on ideas such as the freeing of the bass line from its 'role of service' to the treble line reflected the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of the revolutionary period.

The main body of the book is divided into four chronological chapters on the Late Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modernist styles, each of which could easily stand alone as slim volume in itself – such is the level of detailed treatment of the music and the composers in each of the periods. In these four long chapters Sagall introduces the relevant musical style, its history, characteristics, developments, forms and genres. This is useful for those non-musicians who are perhaps more familiar with the socio-economic or political history of the relevant periods than music theory. The second part of each chapter is a review of the output and style of a selection of the major composers of each of the periods. In total thirty-one composers – all men, ranging from JS Bach to Benjamin Britten – are considered in various levels of detail as befits their perceived importance. The third part of each chapter is

where the ideas and arguments are synthesised. Here Sagall lays out in turn the social and political influences on each of the major composers and styles.

Classical

Readers of this journal may well have more initial interest in the period of the Classical style marked by revolutions in Europe and America than in the Romantic style that dominated music in the nineteenth century and the 'era of reaction that restored or consolidated the old regimes' following Waterloo. Or they may even turn first to the final chapter on the interplay of modernist styles with the history of the first half of the twentieth century. Here events and developments may be more familiar and relatable than in the Baroque period. For example, the adoption of atonality in the early years of the twentieth century by Schoenberg and the second Viennese School is analysed as an expression of the disunity of the 'criss-crossing multiplicity' of ethnicities, languages and nationalist ambitions that undermined the Austro-Hungarian Empire that ultimately led to its defeat in World War I and subsequent collapse.

However, Sagall draws together beautifully the various threads of the Romantic period in music that roughly spanned the nineteenth century. It therefore coincides with a huge and sweep of history which includes revolutions and workers' revolts, their defeats and subsequent re-establishment of autocratic regimes and, crucially, the enormous social changes brought about by the industrial revolution and the apparently unstoppable march of capitalism. The Romantic composers rejected the logical and rational arguments of the Enlightenment that had inspired the Classical composers to strive for harmonious proportions. Instead they reacted to the defeats of the revolutions and the restoration of monarch by turning away from rationalism, and embracing 'mystery, fantasy, remoteness, the infinite, the nocturnal and the supernatural.' In musical terms this meant a style that was open and loose with fewer limits placed on the imagination which accompanied a celebration of the individual. In this period an instrument for an individual, the piano (with its very significant technical advantages over the older keyboard instruments), does become the 'home' for the music. Sagall brings out clearly the contradictions of the demand for artistic individualism with the rejection of the economic individualism of the developing capitalism by the same Romantics.

In the second half of the century the influence of folk music played an increasing role as nationalist ideas took hold in the provinces of the different empires that dominated Europe. Dvořák's Slavonic Dances are examples. But, as we know, Dvořák did not confine himself to his native Bohemia and when he travelled in USA he studied Native American melodies and African-American plantation songs and spirituals – elements of which he incorporated into his ninth symphony, 'From the New World'. This prompts questions

about the influence of the other non-European cultures on the music in Europe. These 'exotics' seemingly don't even warrant a mention in the chapter on the Romantic style. Strange when we remember that this was the period of huge colonial expansion by the European empires. Perhaps 'Lakmé', 'Les Pêcheurs de perles' and 'Madama Butterfly' had no influence on the music of the day? In fact, the geographical focus throughout the book is firmly on central Europe (Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Hungary) which is only widened out to include Eastern European and Russian composers and their music in the treatment of the later Romantic and Modernist styles.

Analysis

In the final chapter a small number of American and British composers are considered too. However, the reader will search in vain for the compositions of Falla, Villa-Lobos and Piazzolla or any mention of Spanish, Latin American or guitar music. The Modernist chapter ends more or less at World War II or, at least, does not consider any composer who was not active before the war and so we must forgo Sagall's analysis of the music of Stockhausen, Glass and Reich for example. In considering these limitations, we should remember to the author his acknowledgement of the restrictions of space and time in his introduction and not demand too much of one scholar and one study. We noted earlier that female composers are completely absent from the book. At least an analysis of their relative obscurity in the music world in the period is warranted in such a study.

Many of the ideas on the interaction of society and politics with music have doubtless been aired before – Sagall leans on an impressive bibliography. However, it is unlikely that such a study of the music itself and its forms, the social context and crucially the interplay of these things which covers the development of European 'art music' over such a period is so methodically laid out before the reader. Other works tend to limit themselves to one of the eras or styles. Important too is that it has been done with the clear, rational and analytical eye of a Marxist scholar.

However, the book is not a Marxist polemic or call to arms or revolution. Rather it is a dispassionate analysis albeit with the underlying compassion of a socialist. Even the anti-Semite, Wagner, gets fair treatment (he was on the barricades in Dresden in 1848!) So it is up to us, the readers, to determine and take the action necessitated by the analysis. Perhaps the first step is to popularise the ideas and widen the arguments to other art forms and genres of music. One modest proposal might be for the organisers of the annual 'Marxism' conference to include more content relating to the arts and society – this reviewer always found such meetings most inspirational.

Since the study concludes rather abruptly without a summarising chapter – or *coda* in musical terms – the reader can turn back and re-read the opening chapter. Here Sabby Sagall displays all his talents and breadth of knowledge drawing on anthropology, evolutionary science, archaeology, history, sociology and more in summarising the ‘Necessity of Music’ from the dawn of humanity – inspiration enough to make the heart sing.

The UDR Uncovered

Joe Moore

.....

**Micheál Smith. UDR Declassified (Merrion Press, 2022)
€18.95**

In 1920 the British parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act. This piece of legislation enabled the British establishment to partition Ireland against the wishes of the majority of the people. The 1918 general election saw Sinn Féin win the majority of seats throughout the island of Ireland. Sinn Féin stood on an abstentionist platform and in January 1919 an independent parliament, Dáil Éireann was established in Dublin. This was followed by an armed campaign by the IRA against the British presence in Ireland, as well as mass workers’ struggles, including the establishment of soviets throughout the country. In order to maintain a level of control over the country Britain partitioned Ireland.

During the War of Independence loyalist vigilante groups consisting of members of the Ulster Volunteer Force and demobbed soldiers carried out a sectarian murder campaign against the Nationalist / Catholic community in the north eastern part of the country. They were aided and abetted by members of the B Specials, a sectarian force that operated only in the north. This force was an auxiliary to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), itself a colonial paramilitary police force established in the 19th century as the eyes and ears of the British establishment in Ireland. It played a major role in suppressing the Fenian rising of 1867 and was

to the fore in carrying out mass evictions in the 1880s and 1890s. After partition, an Irish Free State emerged in the south with the six north eastern counties remaining as part of the United Kingdom. In the north the RIC was renamed the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) who together with the B Specials ensured that the king’s writ ran in the new statelet. For a full account of the Irish independence struggle and partition I would recommend two books by Kieran Allen “*1916: Ireland’s Revolutionary Tradition*” and “*32 Counties: The Failure of Partition and the Case for a United Ireland.*” This situation continued until the late 1960s when the Catholic / Nationalist community rebelled. The Battle of the Bogside in Derry in August 1969 saw the defeat of the hated B Specials. This was the beginning of the end for this sectarian force. The B Specials were disbanded to be replaced by a new British army regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR).

Micheál Smith’s book tells the story of the regiment. What is unique about Smith’s work is the fact that he uses official documents, from the Northern Ireland Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister’s office, to expose the true nature of the UDR. From its beginning in 1970 it attracted loyalist paramilitaries as well as members of the disbanded B Specials. The UDR is unique as a British army regiment in that it never served outside Northern Ireland, it was on continuous active service for more than any other regiment in the British army and was at one stage its largest regiment.

The documents accessed by Smith tell a tale of murder, shootings, bombings, assault, rape and theft of weapons and explosives over the regiment’s 22-year existence. Despite this litany of horror, the regiment was retroactively awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross in 2006 by Queen Elizabeth. From its inception there was a seamless relationship between the UDR and loyalist death squads. Members of both the UDA and the UVF joined the UDR in order to receive training in the use of firearms and explosives. Serving members of the UDR stole weapons for use by loyalists. Weapons were also stolen with relative ease from UDR bases.

Smith quotes official documents that chronicle the efforts made by civil servants, politicians and military staff to hide the volume of such thefts. One such series of documents relate to questions raised by Bernadette Devlin MP in the House of Commons.

Smith follows the trail of destruction left by a Sterling sub-machine gun, serial number UF57A30490, stolen from the UDR. Until the gun was finally recovered by police, it had been involved in attacks that led to the deaths of 11 people. Amongst those charged in relation to these killings were

members of the UDR, RUC and the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve. There was never an investigation into how the gun was stolen or who within the UDR was responsible.

The most high-profile example of the collusion between the UDR and loyalist paramilitaries came to light in the aftermath of the Miami Showband massacre. The Miami Showband was a Dublin based dance band that performed south and north of the border. On July 31st 1975, the band was returning to Dublin after playing a gig in Banbridge. Their van was stopped at an apparent military road block which was however operated by the UVF, some of whom were also UDR members. A bomb was placed on the bus. It exploded prematurely killing two UVF members. Their comrades opened fire on the band members, killing three of them and seriously injuring the remaining two. The massacre was the work of the infamous Glenanne gang, an alliance of members of the UVF, UDR and RUC. It is thought that this death squad murdered over a hundred people in the 1970s. It was also responsible for the car-bombing of Dublin and Monaghan in 1974.

Another UVF death squad that included a UDR member was the Shankill Butchers, responsible for the gruesome murders of at least twenty four Catholics.

The evidence unearthed by Smith proves conclusively that all this information was known by both the British military and political establishment. So why was the UDR allowed to continue to operate for so long? Perhaps part of the answer is contained in the following comments made by veteran republican Tommy McKearney, quoted by Smith *“As local men, they were able to distinguish between various accents that are so distinctive to a Northern Irish ear, but would not resonate with regular soldiers reared in Britain...some UDR members were even able to recognise young republicans by family resemblances to older relatives. They had, too, the ability to differentiate between families sharing similar names... In closely mixed rural areas, members of the UDR or RUC Reserve were intimately familiar with the rhythm and pattern of life in their district.”* In other words, the UDR, like the RIC of old, were the eyes and ears of the British authorities, despite their links with loyalist death squads.

The UDR was finally wound down in 1992. The fall of the Berlin Wall was used as an opportunity by the British establishment to streamline its armed forces. The UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers were amalgamated to form the Royal Irish Regiment. Lenin in *“State and Revolution”* mentions Engels’ reference to the state consisting of

“special bodies of armed men.” The research carried out by Micheál Smith demonstrates the extent to which the state will go in order to protect the status quo. The book leaves us with the question, how can we defeat the capitalist state, if it will resort to such methods in order to defeat armed insurrection? The answer lies in the mass mobilisation of the working class and all oppressed groups. To quote veteran socialist and civil rights activist Eamonn McCann *‘the state fears the sound of marching feet, more than the sound of gun fire.’*

TAX HAVEN IRELAND



**BRIAN O'BOYLE
AND KIERAN ALLEN**

€15
inc. postage

To order email: rebel.books2020@gmail.com

*'Possibly the best book to have been written about
one of the world's biggest and most dangerous tax havens.'*

- Nicholas Shaxson, author of

Treasure Islands: Tax Havens and the Men who Stole the World