

# Dreaming of Dystopia: Liberal Democracy, Class Conflict and the Struggle for Recognition

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## Abstract

Liberal Democracy has been the hegemonic political ideology for decades, its adaptability and protection of individual freedoms has so far kept class and identity conflicts in check. Rooted in Hegelian idealism, modern liberalism is underpinned by strong social and national forces.

However, through Karl Popper's critique of historicist political philosophy, my research project finds that modern liberal democracy suffers from the same

Developing this argument, I find that liberalism's internal socioeconomic contradictions completely constrain universal and reciprocal recognition of individuals. Therefore failing to satisfy the basic human desire to be valued equally with peers. This leads to social and economic instability as megalothymia – the desire to be superior – is not controlled through equality.

Furthermore, while liberal democracy provides the foundations of recognition, its Hegelian roots trap humankind in a dream; it restricts the avenues of acceptable progress and ultimately leads to the assimilation of dystopian characteristics through the misappropriation of a desire for superiority.

## Research Question

The Struggle for Recognition:  
Why Modern Liberal Democracy  
Fails to Reconcile Class Conflict.

## The Struggle for Recognition

Hegel argued that the realisation of human freedom was the ultimate purpose of history, which could only be achieved through a perfect state. This perfect state was the product of a struggle between the masters and slaves of society. The slaves, having risen to challenge the masters, are able to win universal recognition from the masters which removes the feudal hierarchy.

Marx develops this concept into his dialectical materialism, arguing that constant internal contradictions will eventually cause the fall of capitalism and through a system change, a socialist system will be created.

## Objectives

As we enter the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ideological alternatives to Liberal Democracy that are not a regression from the present conditions appear elusive. This project is a development of Francis Fukuyama's seminal 1989 work, 'The End of History'.

In his work, he argues that with the end of Marxism in Russia and other major communist societies by 1989, that states appeared to be going 'post-history', as the ideological struggle that had lasted centuries had finally ended with Liberalism being the sole victor (Fukuyama, 1989).

This work defined the 1990s, however it has come under increasing scrutiny as the idealism of the post-Cold War era descended into both the financial crisis in 2008, and the various social and political crises since, deeply questioning whether liberalism in its current form is viable long term.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to contribute to the growing academic discussion about the position of modern Liberal Democracy in history and whether it sufficiently recognises individual rights. My research is left-leaning, but also embraces an objective look at both Marx and Hegel to determine where the present political situation is.

## Conclusions

This research project concluded that:

- Hegel and Marx suffer from being at the polar extremes of their beliefs. The commonly discussed options of reformation or revolution is a loaded question which does not properly respect individual human agency and places too much emphasis on universal laws which cannot be applicable to rational individuals.
- Western liberal democracy in its current form is unsustainable. Major economic and social crises will only continue to deteriorate social conditions as the irreconcilable internal contradictions of both liberalism and capitalism make universal equality even more unlikely. Climate crises and conflicts will only become more common as both liberal and non-liberal states go through an assimilation of dystopian characteristics, while not addressing the core issues of climate health.
- Liberalism as a political philosophy will become largely redundant, as the ruling bourgeoisie class will go through a process of both oppression and then reformation in order to avoid a social revolution. While individuals may have an effect, the contradictions within the system will be the determining factor for social progress.
- Finally, liberal democracy cannot reconcile class conflicts as it has not overcome the feudal master and slave dialectic. While Fukuyama believed that states were passing into a post-historical phase at the end of the Cold War (Fukuyama, 1989), the rise in identity politics and socioeconomic movements in the early to mid- 2010s is evidence that the struggle for recognition has not been resolved. Therefore, this paper concludes that the struggle is irreconcilable under liberal democracy, which will lead the world into another epoch with a renewed struggle for individual recognition.