

Young Sidney Hook

YOUNG
Sidney Hook

MARXIST AND PRAGMATIST

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

The University of Michigan Press
Ann Arbor

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FOR

MARGARET DORSEY PHELPS

AND IN MEMORY OF

CHARLES DEXTER PHELPS, M.D.

(1937–1985)

He found the works of Sidney Hook sublime,
And planned to read Karl Marx when he had time.
—Granville Hicks, 1938

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Preface to the Paperback Edition

Sidney Hook refused throughout his life to allow his first and best book on Karl Marx to be reprinted. Whether it is because I am still sufficiently young and foolish, or because my opposition to social injustice only deepens over time rather than receding, I am pleased to see that enough interest exists in *Young Sidney Hook* to warrant its republication in paperback. In the belief that books reflect their moment of production, I have not altered the text in the slightest. I wish, however, to acknowledge the wisdom of two criticisms.

The first came from a few professional philosophers who thought the book ought to include more on the technical aspects of pragmatism. Initially I resisted this point, feeling that pragmatism was already at the center of the argument, interwoven throughout. I thought of the book as standing adjacent to a number of other intellectual histories of American pragmatism, and did not see any need to replicate them. However, I now believe the criticism warranted. To remedy it, I have appended an article of mine—"Pragmatism and Its Critics," originally for Scribner's *Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*—to provide readers with an overview of the pragmatist tradition.

The second criticism was made by my friend, the late Daniel Singer, European correspondent for *The Nation*. On finishing *Young Sidney Hook*, Daniel told me he understood my reluctance to condemn Hook for heresy,

but he wished I had drawn a difference between a heretic and a renegade, so as to more sharply criticize Hook for turning into the latter. This useful distinction, which Daniel drew from a classic essay by his mentor Isaac Deutscher, I have since thought might have lent greater clarity to my analysis in the concluding chapter.

In recent years, I have defended and extended my thinking about Hook. I wrote the historical introduction to Hook's 1933 book *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* when it was reprinted by Prometheus Books in 2002, as well as several essays on Hook's philosophy and politics: "Left Hook, Right Hook: The Rules of Engagement," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (12 July 2002); "The Rise and Fall of Sidney Hook," *New Politics*, no. 34 (winter 2003); "Why Wouldn't Sidney Hook Permit the Republication of His Best Book?" *Historical Materialism* 11:4 (2004); and "Flexibility and Revolution," in *Sidney Hook Reconsidered*, ed. Matthew Cotter (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 2004). Readers who seek to acquire supplementary detail on Hook may wish to locate these writings. I can attest, however, that their interpretation of Marxism and pragmatism in Hook's early thought does not differ fundamentally from that provided in the following pages, by which I stand.

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS
Mansfield, Ohio

Acknowledgments

The writing of a biography may be less social than some forms of human production, but it is social nonetheless. My debts begin with several mentors who expanded my sense of the possibility of the past and guided me through the various incarnations of this biography. At Reed College, among many fine teachers, Ray Kierstead, Richard Fox, Julia Liss, and, above all, Casey Blake inspired me to take up cultural and intellectual history. At the University of Oregon, Howard Brick pointed me in the direction of Sidney Hook and, after I had warmed to the topic, provided me with valuable insight, criticism, and encouragement at every stage. Blake and Brick were exemplary teachers and advisers, and I continue to learn a great deal from each. At the University of Rochester, Robert Westbrook, Daniel Borus, and the late Christopher Lasch, whom I admired, further deepened and challenged my understanding of twentieth-century American intellectual history. My courses and conversations with Westbrook, along with his exacting and astute (if hieroglyphic) marginal notes, were particularly crucial to refining my thinking on American pragmatism.

Reconstructing Hook's life would have been far more difficult without the aid of those who shared their personal memories with me. His widow, the late Ann Hook, and his two sons, John B. Hook and Ernest B. Hook, were very gracious. Ernie Hook not only read the entire manuscript but

spent virtually an entire day on the phone, giving me his reactions and advice without the slightest gesture toward censorship. Against the many horror stories of families thwarting the efforts of biographers, the Hook family stands as shining counterexample, especially since my political assessment of Sidney Hook is not shared by them, in the main.

Others who by various connections knew Sidney Hook between the 1920s and 1950s were very helpful and forthcoming, among them Daniel Bell, Theodore Draper, Sender Garlin, Albert Glotzer, Corliss Lamont, Freddy Paine, Meyer Schapiro, Morris U. Schappes, Diana Trilling, David Weiss, and B. J. Widick. In the case of a controversialist like Hook, the cooperation of such personal witnesses cannot be taken for granted. On several occasions I found my inquiries declined, often because of the suspicion or presumption that a biographer will automatically grind axes for his subject. The experience has convinced me that no biographer of Sidney Hook will satisfy every reader, though I hope through the exercise of rigorous, independent judgment to have repaid those who trusted me with their memories and perceptions. They have, no matter what, my gratitude.

Many who did not know Hook personally but lived in political proximity to him gave me assistance on various historical points. Survivors of the revolutionary anti-Stalinist socialist groups of the 1930s, including the American Workers Party and the Trotskyist movement, helped me to understand that experience: Alexander Buchman, Leon Goodman, Morris Lewitt, Ted Selander, and Mark Sharron. Herbert Aptheker, Dorothy Healey, and A. B. Magil, all Communists in the 1930s, answered my questions. Minor queries on the American Communist Party were answered expertly by historians Maurice Isserman and Harvey Klehr.

The principal research for this work lay in Hook's many published writings, for which Barbara Levine's *Sidney Hook: A Checklist of Writings* (1989) was indispensable. Hook's correspondence is scattered far and wide; a complete list of repositories consulted appears in the appendix. The most important collection by far is the Sidney Hook Papers at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University, where 185 boxes of Hook's personal papers and effects have been immaculately organized and catalogued in the superb register compiled by archivists Dale Reed and Rebecca Mead (1991). Many archivists assisted me, but Reed's help with a steady stream of requests over the years merits a special note. Grants from the University of Oregon Department of History, the Graduate School of the University of Oregon, and the Dexter Perkins Fund of the Department of History at the University of Rochester made my research possible. Above all, the generosity of my mother and father permitted me to reach the people who knew Hook as well as the archives that hold ma-

terial on him. For all that my parents gave and continue to give me, including a love of learning and commitment to the public sphere, I dedicate this book to them.

In addition to Howard Brick and Robert Westbrook, the following people read the manuscript in whole or in part: Casey Blake, Daniel Borus, Joseph Fracchia, Jack Maddex, Jeffrey Ostler, Daniel Pope, and Alan Wald. Wald and I have had countless sharp, and therefore extremely useful, disagreements about the history of the intellectual left. He generously shared with me his substantial, thorough correspondence with Hook, now to be included in the Hook Papers at the Hoover Institution for use by other scholars. Because I began my research after Hook's death, I am indebted to S. A. Longstaff, Howard Brick, and Theodore Draper for permitting me to see the notes they took during interviews they conducted with Hook for their own research. I imposed upon Joseph Fracchia and Celia Applegate to translate from German, Michael Donnelly from Russian. Sally Hollier helped with a last-minute scramble for photographs. Peter Agree, my editor at Cornell, wisely paired the manuscript with Robert Cummings and Gregory Sumner, readers whose astute criticism proved immensely useful in the process of revision.

One area of agreement between pragmatism and Marxism, as the young Sidney Hook realized, is their mutual conviction that theory has little value without some connection to lived experience. This book is no exception. The understandings of socialism and democracy expressed in these pages owe much to my friends and comrades. In *Solidarity* and on the editorial board of *Against the Current*, especially, my politics have been tried, tested, refined, refuted—and in the end enhanced immeasurably. I am confident that the issues addressed by this biography are not of antiquarian interest, that they have a direct and practical import which will become apparent when popular power and social justice are again placed on the stage of history by egalitarian movements from below.

Last but always first, Carol Hollier accompanied me across the continent and back, assisted me in my research, and made it all worthwhile. With her by my side, I have written history under circumstances of my choosing. Serendipitously, our daughter Emma Eleanor arrived as this manuscript was making its way across the copyeditor's desk. Nothing adequately expresses the happy revolution Emma has brought to our lives, turning everything upside down, sometimes literally, and reaffirming my hope and wonder at the untold possibilities of the new.

Addendum, 2005. In my acknowledgments to the first edition I should have thanked Scott McLemee for pointing me toward Granville Hicks's doggerel, and I am glad to rectify that glaring omission now. Regarding this

new University of Michigan Press edition, I would like especially to state my gratitude to editor Jim Reische for his enthusiasm and leadership, and to Alan Wald for bringing the book to the Press's attention. My family has grown in these eight years, so let me take the chance to express to Carol, Emma, Nowelly, and Rosa that you continue, against all odds, to fill me with personal conviction in the promise of the world.

CHRISTOPHER PHELPS

Eugene, Oregon, and Mansfield, Ohio

Abbreviations

Only the most frequently cited names and collections are abbreviated. A complete list of collections consulted appears in the appendix.

COLLECTIONS

Dewey Papers	John Dewey Papers, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Morris Library, Special Collections
Hook Papers	Sidney Hook Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California
Hook-Dewey Collection	Sidney Hook Collection of John Dewey, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Special Collections
Wald Collection	Private Collection of Professor Alan Wald, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

NAMES

JD	John Dewey
SH	Sidney Hook