

January 8, 1987

Dear K[]

That was a most Marxist-Humanist manner of starting a new year by addressing that magnificent letter to myself, Lou and Peter; didn't you go to a party somewhere or sometime or have a hangover? It may not be the whole answer, but it certainly is true to a very large degree that we seem to avoid "the difficulty of concretizing the dialectic implicit in each event." One can't concretize, that is to say, work out a dialectic on the basis of a single event; rather it is the generalization that flows from a series of events. But what has to permeate each Marxist-Humanist is that the first negativity, i.e., the first reaction, the immediacy of the event, particularly on the part of an intellectual is most often wrong. The greatness of it is that as a dialectician you know that it isn't only because the event is a single one but that you the person are just reacting, so the point is that you yourself must be disciplined enough to wait for second negativity, which means that you know that "opinion" is not an Idea.

What is of the essence is that when something subjective is also objective, it isn't only individual. You'll be surprised to know for example, that one of these very learned Hegelian scholars to whom I've been writing has puzzled me for years by always being interested in "source" and "roots", so that finally one day I asked him whether he attributes anything to the "environment"--in the particular case his own, which is rich and safe and Brahmin and goes for roots and sources; and mine, which is a godforsaken Ukrainian village in the periods of revolutions and counter-revolutions who are interested instead in "process", "Absolute"? The point about roots is that Marxists took over that and it was a great thing to say: The Root Cause Is.... It certainly was a favorite of Luxemburg. The trouble is that even as important as root for class struggle and ground is for the beginning of an Idea of freedom, it is only the totality--a totality that is a new beginning--that completes the house with a roof and doesn't stop at the ground.

This is where archival continuity and Black Dimension is so pivotal and yet is not totality. Here is what I mean: (Incidentally I don't know what Peter and Eugene told you about the relationship of the 1960s Notes on all the works on Hegel to the Afro-Asian pamphlet or the Phenomenology.)

There is no direct connection between all the works of Hegel and any single work like the Afro-Asian pamphlet or FFSABT. The relationship rather is that the Dialectic as containing the movement through contradiction and then still have us confront negation of the negation permeates all movement in both thought and activity. But the working out in each case has to be on the concreteness of that event, that task, in that environment, and in all cases have the Universal be most concrete. For example, your quotation about "the dead form of the Spirit's previous state" is both Hegelian and Marxian and speaks of how the past weighs us down. But at the same time the freedom in the specific struggles of the past show you a continuity so that you see the Subject, like for example the peasantry, whether it is of the fifteenth century of the new Third World as both pivotal and continuous.

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I want to jump to our changed perception of Lenin's philosophic ambivalence both because something can be both right and wrong at the same time, depending upon what the focus is on, and because that happens to be a very large part of what we were talking about Jan. 3, 1987 now that we're not preparing anymore, but have to do the biweekly. You will be getting a new bulletin in just a few days that will have both my speech and Eugene's and the whole discussion-- I believe there were 28 of us--as well as what I passed out in relationship to my correspondence with non-Marxist Hegelian scholars to which I just added a Dear Colleagues note. Naturally, I'm not going to try to abbreviate all of this in one letter, and indeed I've already written too long for the time I have. But the question of Lenin, whom I have considered the Marx of the 20th century and one who was the only one who made a successful revolution, has had a second rebirth philosophically in 1947-48. I had been disagreeing with CLR James on Hegel and had translated as early as 1943, while I was working in the Library of Congress on the Russian question and as CLR was on the way to St. Louis, Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks. But I did not consider that I was capable enough to translate the whole Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic. By 1948, however, I was so dissatisfied with everybody using some random notes on the philosophic notebooks without having it in full in English, that I decided Lenin should be heard exactly as he wrote it. I then compared Lenin's Notebooks with CLR James' Notes on Dialectics, and it all came out in favor of Lenin and not CLR James.

By then I was involved in the Miners General Strike and my philosophic correspondence dealt with the relationship of Hegel to Marx's Capital as I began working on Marxism and Freedom, then called "Marxism and State-Capitalism."

Everything changed all over again when Stalin died and ^{an} incubus was really removed from the heads of the Russian workers. It was then, 1953, when I broke through on the Absolute Idea, and to my shock also was disagreeing with Lenin (read the excerpt from the May 12, 1953 Letter on the Absolute Idea that I quote in the Introductory Note to the Letters to non-Marxist Hegelian scholars.) Still, there was absolutely nothing greater among revolutionaries on Hegelian dialectics than Lenin, and there is no doubt that we ourselves couldn't have broken through on the Absolute Idea if two things hadn't happened: One, the age of the 1950s, and Two, everybody (and of course that includes myself) must re-study not only the greatness of Lenin but the negative features, as we had shown when we broke with the concept of the elitist party.

It is only now, now being the period I've decided to write a new book on the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy, that I went back to, literally page by page if not word by word, of the Doctrine of the Notion, especially the two final chapters. And it's only 1/3/87 that I'm able to begin sharing and discussing, and waiting for the Dialectic to flow. Sorry that I can't go into all the questions you raised, but I must get back to the book.

Yours,

Ray

P.S. I'll be giving a copy of this letter to Lou and Peter.

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