

July 15, 1958

Dear H.M.:

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The absoluteness of my silence is not to be construed as proof of the fact that the Absolute Idea has lost its grip on me, but only that the practical everyday life of an author whose publisher is so small as almost to unite with the politicians to silence the work* and thus burdening her with all the "promotional" work as well. But, outside of an appearance on TV next week for University of Detroit, I have nearly nothing to do till Fall when I appear at Cooper Union. In any case I grasp what momentary lull there is in my tours and lectures to resume where I left off when

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MARXISM & FREEDOM ended our correspondence. I will begin with what will not be contested, I believe: the dialectical relationship of subject and object in the process of history as the center of Hegel's Absolute Method. Or, to put it differently, the conception of reality as totality, the unity of inner and outer; the relationship between the whole and the parts which constitutes the passage from existence to reality. But the real world, even when Hegel is the Prussian philosopher glorifying the state as the combination of the ideal and the real, is not Plato's republic with its "philosopher-kings"; to Hegel not even kings can substitute for philosophers and thus, just as the Christian Hegel lets "revealed Religion" play second fiddle to philosophy, so the state philosopher Hegel leaves state as "Objective Mind" remain on the doorsteps, not in the inner sanctum of "Absolute Mind."

Now Marx criticized Hegel for not having really surmounted the duality of thought and being, of theory and practice, of subject and object; that his dialectic, no more than Kant's, could in its mystical shell be the actual, interior dialectic of the historic process, but was just froth appearance, "the origin" not the actual history of man. He insisted that under the circumstance Absolute Spirit was mere appearance so that, even when he had "people" as content, the expression was restricted that alien man, the philosopher, and that in fact, it is always after the fact that absolute spirit make history, so that it is not only Nature which is "unconscious" and does, through necessity, what Logic accomplishes freely, but Absolute Spirit as well accomplishes the real movement unconsciously, "For in effect the absolute spirit does not become conscious of itself as creator of the world until after the event and its making of history only exists in the consciousness, in the opinion and representation of the philosophers, in the speculative imagination." But when "corporeal man" standing on his own feet, the maker of his own history and his own thoughts then first will self-knowledge and knowledge coincide, the proletariat being both subject and object of knowledge and maker of history.

There is no argument with Marx's materialism, nor did the mature Marx separate his dialectics from his materialism, but in the young Marx, when the need of the hour was to free oneself and the whole generation from mysticism, did underplay (because he did not know the early works?) Hegel's insights to "peoples" and not just consciousness and self-consciousness, who receive the heritage of history as "natural principles" and "have mission of applying it." In any case, I am not here interested in what Marx did or did not see (to that we will come later) but what

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our age can and must see and to which it has a contribution to make.

To return to Hegel, first as Absolute Knowledge appears in PHENOMENOLOGY, where he sums up the movement from Descartes' "I think therefore I am" through Spinoza's abstract unity in Substance to Leibnitz's recoil from this abstraction to the Individuality of--may I add?--commercial, pre-1789 capitalism which Kant anticipated and developed further after the French Revolution as abstract freedom, or Individual Will; all good men get together and work out contradictions according to a general will. Hegel continues with his rejection of the Absolutes of other philosophies when the millenium did not follow the French Revolution and we had Fichte's analysis of Reality as Ego, Schelling's "intellectual intuition" (of which Hegel says "Substance by itself would be void and empty intuition") and Jacob's "reactionary" (my emphasis) reestablishment of Absolute as faith alone. To this Hegel adds "However, Spirit has shown itself to be neither mere withdrawal of self-consciousness into pure inwardness nor mere absorption of self-consciousness into Substance... Spirit is the movement of the self which empties (externalizes itself) and qua subject..." We'll, what does it accomplish "qua subject"? (1) it "wound up process of embodiment"; (2) History was born anew to combine with science of the ways in which knowledge appears and ended up as absolute spirit, but (3) "the process of releasing itself from the form of its self" which is supposed to be "the highest freedom and security of its knowledge of itself" does not make it as happy as the ending of PHENOMENOLOGY would have it appear for it will reappear as Absolute Idea in Logic and Absolute Mind in the Encyclopaedia and there we will see, not the work of art with its "double-tongued equivocal character of what they gave out as certainty", but (1) "individuality purified of all that interferes with its universalism, i.e., freedom itself;" (2) freedom not as a possession but as a dimension of being; in a word (3) Absolute Mind as the actuality of freedom. The philosopher both protest too much when he keeps repeating knowledge is the Olympus when all the time he comes down to earth and its freedoms and lack of them. That is why I said, in MARXISM AND FREEDOM, that "Translated materialistically, the fact that Nature has gone through the same dialectical development as Idea shows there is a movement from practice to theory as well as v.v."

With your indulgence, therefore, I wish to ~~return~~ look at the real world of ours and spell out this movement from practice to theory for it is only there where we'll get the new insights,

"the new impulses" emerging from the objective movement and the maturity of our age which will compel us to make concrete what was only general to Marx); (1) the period of the 1930's--not of Hitler for I am consider not the development of counter-revolution but of revolution--the French Sit-Down Strikes, the American CIO, the Spanish Revolution all adding up to new forms of workers' control of production. That is to say, the climax in the Spanish Revolution and occupation of factories by workers showed the workers were moving from Soviets or political control to actual management of production by themselves. (2) the period of the 1940's; National Resistance Movements, including Negro demonstrations, wartime and post-war general strikes, including GI movements for return home, ending in the flocking of the millions into the Communist Parties

All this signified, not "backwardness" of workers, but new political form to work out both freedom from occupation and economic slavery; the fact that that "double-tongued" enemy--Communism in Western Europe--won the allegiance is only one more manifestation that this is an age of absolutes, and that the counter-revolution is not only in the innards of the revolution but vis. And because the two are so tightly linked we had stalemate. But with the period of 1950's and Automation new grounds were laid for overcoming this total contradiction. Where state capitalism posed, but only in general, and only for theoreticians or those where Communism actually ruled over production, the question of the new type of workers' revolt and the return to Marx's theories of alienation, Automation made it concrete, evoking the question: What kind of Labor Should Man Perform? If that was a cry in the wilderness during the miners' strike against continuous miner, it began to be heard 3 years later during recession, and, above all, that year it was united with the cry for political freedom out of totalitarianism in the East German Revolt.

From then on there should have been no rest for the theoreticians until they had broken through on that Absolute Idea and absolute freedom in the manner in which Marx broke through the mystical shell, and in the concrete manner Lenin, confronted with "transformation into opposite" made his own ~~trans~~ re-transformation with "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war." But, no, the Kantian ought remained exactly as abstract as Kant had it--and no Marxist would move to make the abolition of division of mental and manual as concrete for our age as Marx had made "the general absolute law" of capitalism concretely mean for the movement the mobilization of "the new passions and new forces" for the establishment of the new society. The greatest deterrent to the indispensability of the theoretician is the theoretician himself who flees to anything from Existentialism to Zen-Buddhism and from "war guilt" to psychoanalysis--anything, anything at all to avoid the responsibility of the Marxist theoretician to be where the workers are.

For anyone bound for "adventures of the Hegelian dialectic", the Absolute Kind lies beckoning, but, no, we go back to repeating the old about the de-humanization of ideas that Hegel is reproached with. Now, I admit that the humanism of Hegel is not the most obvious element in the Hegelian philosophy, although I maintain that today we should see it as its innermost essence. Naturally, the academic tradition that operates on Prof. Wildebrand's assumption that the generation that could understand Hegel's PHENOMENOLOGY, has died cannot help the youth of our epoch grasp the grandeur of the vision of the most encyclopaedic mind of Europe who wrote: "Within the short span of man's own life, an individual must learn the whole long journey of mankind. This is possibly only because the universal mind is operative in every individual mind and is the very substance of it." It is true that Hegel himself did throw a mystical veil over his philosophy by treating it as a closed ontological system, but he also warned against those who become the self-styled "representatives" of a philosophical work who, he wrote, "are like the dead burying the dead." He put his own faith in the public instead, not alone because of its modesty, but because "it is the nature of truth to force its way to recognition when the time comes."

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You once told me that what I wrote in the first letters in 1955 on the Absolute Idea and what appeared in MARXISM AND FREEDOM were miles apart and, in a sense, it is. No public work, popular or unpopular, can contain the intricacies of thought as they develop in their abstract form before they become filled with more concrete content. And no doubt also part reason of leaving it in its undeveloped state was finding none but "dumb workers" agreeing while the theoreticians were shying away. But I do mean to follow up the book with further development and I certainly would love to have your help, no matter how sharply critical in breaking through those murky categories. At least you shouldn't merely keep silent. I will await to hear from you before I go any further.

Yours,

*Did you notice the paragraph in the last issue of American Economic Review on MARXISM AND FREEDOM. It surprised me that an economic journal should be the one to stress the humanism.

"The book centers on the frequently neglected or misunderstood aspects of Marxian thought; its thorough-going commitment to the humanist tradition of all earlier revolutionary and socialist movements and of German classical philosophy. The crucial significance of Marx and Engels of this basic orientation is demonstrated by a close scrutiny of their works. The student of Marxism will appreciate the appendices presenting first English translation of important but little known philosophical statements by Marx and Lenin. The volume includes a preface by Herbert Marcuse."

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