

10/27/64

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Dear HM:

Since you once asked me why I "translate" Hegel when I know "the original" (Marx) well enough I assume you thought that since my writings and activity were political my veritable obsession with Hegel's Absolute Idea was ..an obsession. I am exaggerating, of course, but it is only because I hope you'll permit me to write in this informal way an outline of a chapter of my new work (which I now lean to calling "Philosophy and Revolution) that deals with "Why Hegel? Why Now?"

The chapter is to have three sub-sections: Marx's Debt to Hegel; Lenin's Ambivalence toward Hegel and Shock of Recognition; the philosophical problems of our age. The first sub-section will connect with M&F but greatly expand why Marx couldn't "shake off" Hegel as easily as he shook off classical political economy; once he transcended it, then his "economics" became, not a political economy, but Marxism, a philosophy of human activity. This was true in every single respect from the theory of value and surplus value, through rent as a "derivative" rather than making the landlord class as fundamental a one as the new capitalist class, to capital accumulation and its "law of motion" bringing about its "collapse." In all these labor was seen as the living subject bringing all contradictions to a head and making socialism "inevitable"; at no point were economic laws independent of human activity. Regarding the Hegelian dialectic, on the other hand, despite its recreation in Marxism, or what you laughingly refer to as "subversion", that is to say, transformation of dialectic from "a science of logic" to "a science" of revolution, his "attachment" to Hegel remained. This was not because Marx began as a "Left Hegelian", nor even because the Hegelian dialectic spurred him on his own voyage of discovery ("thoroughgoing Naturalism or Humanism"). Indeed, when his break first came from Hegel, he used classical political economy to counterpose reality to "idealism", especially of the Proudhonist variety. Yet the adieu to classical political economy was complete; the adieu to Hegelianism was not.

Take the very first, and most thorough and profound attack on Hegel's Philosophy of Right--the very critique which led to nothing short of his greatest discovery--the materialist conception of history--a lesser man, a lesser Hegelian than Marx, would at that point have finished with Hegel. Marx, on the contrary, proceeded to the critique of the PHENOMENOLOGY and the ENCYCLOPAEDIA, and when he broke off at the last section on "The Philosophy of Mind" to stick with what he called "that dismal science"--political economy--and engage in class struggle activities, First International, which took the rest of his life, he still hungered to return to a presentation of "the rational form of the dialectic." Indeed, at every turning point, he returned to "the dialectic." You recall how happy he sounded, in 1858, in his letter to Engels when he explained that he "accidentally" came upon his library of Hegel's works and there got some "new developments" which are helping him complete Critique of Political Economy (and of course you can see the results all through the Grundrisse). Again, in (1861-63) when he first reworked it as CAPITAL and makes the most crucial decision on the economic presentation--not merely to break with Ricardo on land rent but to take out from Volume I all that would become Volume III and thus eliminate all relations between landlords and workers, leaving them "pure" with capitalists alone. And yet again, in 186

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when he restructured CAPITAL to include The Working Day and actually break with the very concept of theory, both the move to the profound analysis of reification at the point of production and the fetishism of commodities, again illumined by the real Paris Commune, were still in the tightest wrappings of Hegelianism.

This is exactly why Lenin wrote that it was impossible to understand CAPITAL, "especially its first chapter" without the whole of the SCIENCE OF LOGIC. And in that first chapter, when you need Hegel most is where Stalin, in 1943, decided to make his theoretical break by asking that that chapter be eliminated in the "teaching" of ~~Marx~~ CAPITAL. And, again, the last writing we have from the pen of Marx (Notes on Wagner and the analysis of the critiques of his own economics) the constant repetition is to "the dialectic." In a word, Marx never forgot his indebtedness to Hegel because it was not a debt to the past, but a vital, living present expressing as well the pull of the future.

The new I wish to bring in here will bring in a justification for the abstractness of Hegel since there are points, critical points, turning points, when the abstract suddenly can become the concretely universal. CAPITAL is concrete, an empiric study, a phenomenological as well as logical-economic analysis which "exhausts itself" in the one topic it is concerned with: capitalism. But LOGIC is "without concretion of sense", "applies" to all sciences, factual studies, so that when a sudden new stage is reached, and the old categories won't do, there is always a new set of categories in LOGIC as you move from Being to Essence to Notion. That is why Lenin, who long before he knew the whole of the Logic, knew the whole of Capital, and wrote most profoundly of all the three volumes, nevertheless, suddenly, when the ground gave way before him as the Second collapsed, found new "only" in LOGIC. That is to say, that abstract category "unity, identity, transformation into opposite", and such others as "self-transcendence" meant something so new to him as in the understanding of CAPITAL and its latest stage, imperialism, that he was willing to say none, including himself, had understood Capital at all before that specific moment of grasping the Doctrine of the Notion in general, and the breakdown of opposition between objective and subjective that he got from the Syllogism in particular.

What I am trying to say is that the minute the actual cannot be expressed in old terms, even when these terms are Marxian ones, it is because a new stage of cognition has not kept up with the new challenge from practice which only philosophy seems capable of illuminating--old, abstruse, abstract Hegelianism made him see what the concrete terms in CAPITAL did not--that monopoly capital was not only a "stage" of centralization of capital, but a "transformation into opposite" which demanded a total reorganization and undermining of old categories, including that of labor.

This section that should lead to the second sub-section on Lenin's ambivalence to Hegel, both before the shock of recognition in 1914 and, unfortunately, after that shock, at least publicly. The duality in Lenin's philosophic heritage can no longer be put into a footnote, as I did in MARXISM AND FREEDOM. This ambivalence has allowed the Chinese as well as Russian Communists to pervert Marx's Humanism by quoting both Lenins alongside of each other as if they were one unchangeable Lenin who never experienced a sharp break with his own philosophic past. Once, however, this is cleared it is precisely Lenin, the Lenin of 1915-24, who allows us to jump

off from the 20th rather than the 19th century precisely because his most startling and most meaningful aphorisms were expressed in "Subjective" Logic and he is so enthusiastic as he equates (with literal equation signs) subjectivity with freedom. You'll recall also that Lenin's Notebooks stress that philosophy (Logic, 1813) expressed "the universal movement of change" first, and only afterwards (1847) did Marx express it in politics (The Communist Manifesto) whereas natural science (Origin of Species, 1859) came still later. And while it remains for our age to concretize Lenin's restatement of Hegel's appreciation of the Practical Idea "precisely in the theory of knowledge" for "Cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it", it is Lenin who put out the marker: "The continuation of the work of Hegel and Marx consist in working out dialectically the history of human thought, science and technology."

It is obvious to you, I am sure, that I do not take your position on technology. I am so Hegelian that I still consider that subject absorbs object, and not object subject which then becomes its extension. My preference of "ontology" to "technology" in the age of automation may be said to be due to the awe I feel when confronted with the dialectic of human thought, but this would not be the whole truth since human thought is inseparable from human activity and both result from the overpowering urge to freedom. Allow me, please, to express this within the range of the types of cognition in the dialectic itself:

In inquiring ~~xxxxx~~ cognition we face an objective world without the subjectivity of the Notion. In synthetic cognition, the objective world and subjectivity co-exist (and like the fragility of "peaceful co-existence" ~~xxxxxx~~ which fears movement, so in this laying of the objective world and subjectivity side by side, there can be no transcendence.) But now watch, the idea of cognition and the practical Idea no sooner unite, then we are ready for the plunge to freedom. Hegel begins at the bottom of page 475 (SCIENCE OF LOGIC, VOL. II) to review again, not dialectic "cognition" but the Absolute Method, the form of the Absolute Idea, the new stage of identity of theory and practice that we have reached as we leave behind the previous forms of cognition. (Don't forget, either that two short pages after we view "the objective world whose inner ground and actual persistence is Notion", we reach "the turning point" (p.477) and learn that the "Transcendence between Notion and Reality... rests upon this subjectivity alone.)

It appears to me also that Hegel is right when he feels it absolutely necessary that the Method begin with abstract universality, abstract self-relation, the in-itselfness of the Absolute. (pp.469-472), which leads, though "the concrete totality which... contains as such the beginning of the progress and of development", to differentiation within what I would call the achieved revolution. I might as well here continue politically for I see Hegel as he finishes with subjective idealism to be finishing with reformism for whom the goal is always in the future, and shifting all his attack on the intuitionists--Jacobi, Schelling, Fichte, especially Jacobi whom he calls a "reactionary" (Encyclopaedia, par.76)--or the type of abstract revolutionism for whom, once an "end", a revolution has been reached, there is no more negative development or mediation. All that, to them, that seems to be done is an organization of what has been achieved and they go at this organization in so total a way they choke the

be posited as particular, but if the particular is posited as the universal, it becomes isolated or, to use Marx's expression, gains "the fixity of a popular prejudice."

Even the bourgeois philosopher, John Findlay (whose book, despite its barbs against Marxists, I found fascinating) sees the revolutionary in Hegel as he concludes his praise of him "as the philosopher of 'absolute negativity', the believer in nothing that does not spring from the free, uncommitted, self-committing human spirit." (Hegel: A Re-Examination, p. 354.)

We certainly can no longer, as did Lenin, keep "our" philosophic notebooks private. We live in the age of absolutes, and freedom as the innermost dynamic of both life and thought demands the unity of philosophy and revolution.

Yours,

*The finest attack on organizational vanguardists I have read anywhere is in Hegel's "Philosophy of Religion", in his attacks on the Church--what a totalitarian, monolithic party medieval catholicism was! Whoever it was who said that he who turns his back on history is doomed to relive it must have our age in mind!

P.S. Please return that chapter 5, or whatever I called the dialectics of liberation. I seem to have misplaced my original copy--or had I sent it to you previously too? In any case I need it, though where that one concentrated on Africa, I am now all for the contradictions of Japan and the dream to get there.