

January 3, 1969

Dear Will,

First of all, let me compliment you for your letters of December 15th and 17th, 1968 as well as the page-by-page notes for yourself on that first chapter in the book on Hegel. There is nothing routine about this compliment when you recognize that only when Lenin had himself achieved his philosophic reorganization had he recognized that Plekhanov, although he had written hundreds and even thousands of pages on the Hegelian dialectic, had not actually studied what Lenin called "the dialectic proper", that is to say, the dialectic as elaborated in the Science of Logic itself, you will recognize ~~the~~ your labors with the chapter on Hegel's works are so important. This has nothing to do with whether your statements are "correct" or "incorrect". What is important is that, instead of going to the "easy" chapters on Marx and the class struggle etc., you are trying to break through the Hegelian categories directly. Also, your page-by-page notations will be of great value to me when I start the final writing.

By way of introduction to the central questions you pose on Man as Subject and the relationship of Method, I should like to point out that what appears to you as "digressions" are, in fact, method. I detest "name dropping" in philosophic works especially and I am, especially, conscious of that in a work such as Philosophy and REvolution, since the work is directed toward the proletariat. Therefore, if I am compelled to mention other names than Hegel, such as Fichte and Schelling, it is because none but these names represent so concrete an "inevitable development" in every philosophic turning point that there is no way to escape mentioning the names in order to show the movement of ideas. Thus, the question of traditions which has always been maliciously attributed to Hegel instead of Fichte and Schelling is, in fact, an attack on the mechanical conceptions of all Marxists since Marx up to 1915. This thesis - antithesis - as synthesis has plagued the movement and blinded it to seeing transformation into opposite instead of synthesis, so that none were prepared for the collapse of the second international. This is why Lenin was so insistent that one, and only one, "category" is crucial to any single period and that his et cetera et cetera that on a dialectic principle was transformation into opposite.

(This does not mean that some of the digressions I made are not better done without. I'm stressing the opposite in order to have you recognize that, as method, digressions aren't always digressions but rather the true course of history. Or, as Hegel stressed, the sum total of "accidents" make up the course of history.)

Now then, you asked about the most difficult of all questions in philosophy when you asked "how to connect man as subject and method". The first difficulty in answering derives from the fact that there is no answer, or rather that there are several answers, all equally valid and yet completely opposed. Moreover, there is no way to know which is correct at any one time because the proof is in the practice. When a Sartre places all of his emphasis on "contingency" alone, as if there was nothing inevitable or "pre-determined", he is very wrong and yet contingency is crucial to any Hegelian-Marxian concept of inevitability and necessity which is truly not pre-determined, nevertheless inevitably emerges out of its own dialectical development.

Let me see whether I cannot re-state this in clearer terms. Man as subject determines the final outcome, shapes the course of history, anticipates its future development. At the same time, not only is he himself a product of history, and bound by it, but in the dialectic, that is to say

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development through contradiction of his relationship to the objective situation as well as the relationship of various class forces, the new dialectic that emerges out of this confrontation of conflicting forces may be something altogether different than what the man's pre-conception was.

Thus, there can be no simple answer to what is method because each situation as well as each man has its own dialectic. Thus, there is a dialectic to thought. There is a dialectic to the objective situation. There is a dialectic in history and in each historic period. There is a dialectic or self-development in man. And not a single one of these forms of development is unrelated to the other. For example, you seem to think that it was a digression to speak of Aristotle's Absolutes when it was difficult enough to come to grips with Hegel's Absolutes. But, since neither Aristotle nor Hegel were exactly proletarian revolutionists, it was necessary to show that the division between them was nevertheless so great that one could be "stood right side up" (not "upside down"). The reason this was so was the difference in the historic period. In Aristotle's time there was not only the division between the ^{masters} and the workers, but the workers were slaves and Aristotle, therefore, could not conceive them as self-developing subjects so that when he spoke of Absolute, he meant contemplation of all the wonders of the world that the "thinkers" could enjoy. With Hegel, who lived in the period of the French Revolution, where the sans culottes were very active, indeed and this movement from below penetrated even into the Ivory Towers of Philosophers, especially the philosopher, genius Hegel. Therefore, though consciously, he, too, thought of Absolute as that unity of theory and practice that the philosophers understood best, Absolute was no longer contemplated, but active; no longer limited to but one class but could, through labor, achieve a dimension beyond himself.

When Marx got to standing Hegel "right side up", that is to say disclose that the dialectic of thought was, in fact, the dialectic of history, that the "consciousness" could not possibly exist outside of man and that, therefore, the ~~struggles~~ struggles of consciousness and self-consciousness were ~~man's~~ man struggling, indeed classes in conflict ~~that~~ — that all of these struggles emanated, not from mythical battles, or even philosophic ones, but were rooted in the mode of production in any single historic period, Marx was doing a great deal more than standing Hegel "right side up". All of the Second International — and I am here including all because Lenin, too, was then a member of the Second as it was the only Marxist International — got from Marx's modest statement about his relationship to Hegel was that now they did not need Hegel anymore; that now they "knew" that it was the class struggle, and not the struggle of consciousness and self-consciousness, that was at the root of the evils of capitalism etcetra etcetra etcetra. The result was that dialectic was reduced to a catechism about the class struggle, a denigration of theory, and, above all, a complete failure to see what new emanated from the specific stage of class struggle which characterized their period and did not characterize Marx's period.

Dialectics is a spontaneous development, not a logical necessity and yet both logic and necessity are integral to this spontaneous development. It is not that Hegel "got man ... into the dialectics". It is that the history of thought and the history of man are so interrelated, it is impossible to have history without man and it is what forced Hegel into a dialectic far beyond his own consciousness. But to get beyond something, one must first reach the level of that something. And the Marxists had not reached the level of Hegel, though they were all materialists and not "idealists".

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I believe there is some confusion on the question of Notion. The Doctrine of Notion is the doctrine where Being in Essence have united, where the unity of Theory and Practice have achieved the Absolute. It is also what, to a Marxist but not to Hegel, meant the realization of Freedom for unity of theory and practice cannot be achieved other than in the process of revolution and the movement to a new society. (Hegel did place Freedom and Reason as the two most fundamental, dynamic "eternal" strivings of man but, to the extent that he limited his Freedoms to thought, the Doctrine of the Notion remains in a rarified atmosphere.)

The concept of Notion is the concept of totality, that is to say when you see all aspects, ramifications, and implications. Notion is not fetish. Fetish is the idolatry of a thing, rather than a person. If a person is degraded, or, to use the strictly Marxian phrasology, reified, i.e. made into thing, then clearly we are dealing with a perverse society. What Marx did in that superb section on the "Fetism of Commodities" was to take that ordinary thing of exchange, a commodity, and show that it was not just the unit, the being of capitalist wealth. That was only its appearance. Nor, was it only a production relationship, essential and more fundamental as a production relationship is when contrasted to market exchange. In truth, we were all slaves to what appeared so simple a thing as a commodity, precisely because it appeared so simple. We were accepting this thing without (1) realizing that, in fact, what we were dealing with was an explicitive relationship of production, a product of alienated labor. That, and not exchange, was the Essence. But, (2) above even that Essence stood the Notion, only instead of this being a unity of theory and practice in the sense of something superior, it was "the very fantastic form" in which human relations appeared as things because that is truly "what they are" UNDER CAPITALISM. In a word, Marx had split the concept of Absolute into two: the Absolute that would be the new society were "the new passions and new forces" that would uproot the old and construct the new; the Absolute of the existing society was this perverse relationship of man to thing, where machine dominated man. It is the duality in this concept of Absolute which makes it so very difficult to grapple with and yet without which we cannot advance at all.

Finally, there is the question of negativity. Of all the categories of Hegel, none is greater, none is grueh a repudiation of the formal Absolute, none is so absolutely crucial to Marxists. First of all, you can see the absolute contradiction in the term, "absolute negativity". If something is Absolute, it most certainly cannot be negated, at least if you think Absolute is God and Hegel did think so. If something is negated, then it certainly isn't absolute; it has just been "abolished". And yet there it is, both words are Hegel's. Both are a necessary new beginning for Marxism, for a New social order, for negation of "all olds" (to use a Maoist expression) and the creation of the new. It is that second negation, without which the abolition of the old society would lead not to Humanism but to a relapse into some form of the old. Lenin tried to get around the absoluteness of the contradiction here by showing each stage is an Absolute, that in every such absolute, there is a relative when it is related to another stage that once again repeats the cycle, but always on a higher level. In a word, the only thing that is Absolute is motion itself.

Please forgive me for not getting into concrete situations. I feel that if we got to those too fast, we would not really grasp method so that each of us could apply it by himself. It is better to be confused, in doubt but stubbornly persisting, than to come to ready-made conclusions too fast and then one day the damn will break and you will see. Anything else is what Hegel called a "pillow for intellectual sleep".

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March 7, 1969

Dear Friends:

I am rushing to complete Part III before I depart on the lecture tour. I wish to tell you about a possible restructuring of the form of the book insofar as Parts II and III are concerned.

As I was working on Part III, I began to feel that, instead of "isolating" the chapters, Leon Trotsky, Mao Tse-tung and Sartre in Part II, "Alternatives", they should form an integral part of Part III. These authors of other "Subjects" and other roads to revolution should, instead, become part of the "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation", and, therefore, be placed alongside the corresponding revolutions or failures of revolutions in our epoch.

Thus, the chapter on Trotsky could end Part I, "Why Hegel? Why Now" since, though formally recognizing the relationship of philosophy to revolution, Trotsky got so stuck in "the fixed particular" that he failed to follow the self-movement of both thought and practice to the stage of development that followed the death of Lenin.

At the other extreme, Mao, as a true original master of substitution, with no orthodox Marxian theory to guide him, acted as if the guerrilla can "take the place of" social revolution.

If I do "merge" Part II into Part III then it may also be possible to deal with Fidel Castro after all, since both of these theoreticians of guerrilla warfare would be analyzed at the very point when we discuss the African Revolution and the Black Revolution in America. It is impossible to make a decision now because so much will depend upon the tour, especially the philosophic conference for ourselves that we will hold in each locality. But I think you should know my train of thought and that you should read Part III with that in mind.

Part III now consists of two chapters: "The African Revolutions and the World Economy" and "New Passions and New Forces". I am not very sure, under the circumstances, how and if the chapter on Jean-Paul Sartre can fit into Part III, though he, too, is best seen, not so much in the period immediately following the conclusion of World War II, but rather during the last decade.

The main point is to view the book as a whole. Therefore, no matter how roughly the draft has been written -- and the final chapter is not only rough but a mere outline of what it may become after the tour -- we can discuss the matter comprehensively when finally I get to your particular locality. Each of you, I hope, will have read the whole before I come.

Even if you have not discussed the whole collectivity, it is important that you read it individually. No doubt I will also give one public lecture on the book.

Yours,

PAYA

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Centre

July 5, 1969

Dear Friends,

I have just completed the preparation for transmittal to the library archives the history of our development as an independent philosophic-political tendency on the world scene. The documents now number ten, spanning over a period of twenty-eight years, i.e. from the first document, entitled "Russia is a State Capitalist Society". Besides these ten volumes there are, of course, the volumes containing bound copies of Correspondence (October, 1953 to March, 1955) and News & Letters (1955 to 1969), plus the books and pamphlets we have published. In a word, the ten volumes are solely studies, resolutions, publications relating to these studies that appeared in bourgeois or other publications. And, some unpublished documents: one volume of Marx's archives that I have roughly translated for myself but that have never been translated or published in English, from the Theories of Surplus Value to the final (1881) document we have from Marx's hand. The other volume of unpublished writings consists of some of the material that I handed in as part of the original 1941-1942 analysis of the Russian economy. The exciting part about that is that it allowed me to entitle the whole body of ideas over this quarter of a century MARXISM-HUMANISM.

Here is what I mean. When I first spoke to the archivists I had thought that 1941-1955 would have to be called "State Capitalist Tendency" and only from the establishment of News & Letters could I call the tendency Marxist-Humanism. The actual compilation ^{to be} a voyage of discovery, for I found that one of the unpublished manuscripts called "Labor and Society", written in 1942 had actually based itself on the Humanist essays. They were then totally unknown in this country; my quotations were from the Russian and since I was quite self-conscious on the question of philosophy that I felt I did not then comprehend in full, my whole stress was on the fact that the Russian analysis was not a question of Russia, but a question of the role of labor, and especially so in a supposedly workers' state. By the time, in 1947, those essays were translated from the original German and mimeographed then, we did reproduce the section, Labor and Society, but without a date, so that it appeared as if written in 1947 instead of 1942 (I happen to have been in France during that period and was unaware what they were doing here). In any case the titling of the volumes of archives, newspapers, pamphlets and the book reflects philosophically and politically a quite consistent, historic as well as American-rooted and black dimension that spans a period impossible for anybody to dispute.

Annex is stenciling the introductory note as well as the content pages and I imagine it will take a week before this is stencilled, mimeographed and sent to you. I am sorry that this, having taken two weeks of my time, has delayed the presentation of the perspectives for our plenum. But Tuesday the rough draft is being presented to the REB and it will then be stencilled to ~~not~~ initiate discussion, not by bits and pieces, but as an over-all view. Still we're not actually late because pre-plenary discussions are not like convention discussions, i.e. take thirty instead of sixty days.

Yours
Asya

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