

"Pls" One-sided affair *Enlightenment*

1977 folder

Karel Kosik DIALECTICS OF THE CONCRETE

consists of 4 chapters:

- I. Dialectics of the Concrete Totality
- II. Economics and Philosophy
- III. Philosophy and Economy
- IV. Praxis and Totality

Pseudo-Concrete

In the 1st chapter, KK takes issue with world of the pseudo-concrete, the constant manipulation of man, wherein he brilliantly exposes the gulf separating man's fetishized praxis (which is not identical with the revolutionary-critical praxis of mankind) (p.2). It's clear throughout the chapter ^{his analysis of the} that the world of the pseudo-concrete is the philosophic articulation of the attack on the bureaucratized world in which he's living: Czechoslovakia. When he defends philosophy, he is actually reintroducing the dialectic as the revolutionary pivot of Marxism in its opposition to the ~~new~~ so-called concrete, the phenomenal, the immediate. He insists that "cognition is dialectics itself" and "philosophy is an indispensable activity of mankind because the essence of things, the structure of reality, the thing itself, the being of existence, do not show themselves directly and immediately" (p.4). We must also keep in mind that this was ^{published} precisely at the time of the famous Franz Kafka conference, when the whole dissident movement was identified with Kafka's works as the ~~anticipation~~ anticipation of the horrors of totalitarianism that they were living through at the moment.

To ~~the~~ sharpen the difference between the analysis of the commodity in Marx's Capital and the "simple" thing that people think a commodity is, Kosik stresses, in discussing fetishism, that "a commodity is an 'absolute reality' for the capitalist society because it is a unity of all determinations, the germ of all contradictions, and as such can be characterized in Hegelian terms as the unity of being and not-being, of differentiated and undifferentiated, of identity and non-identity." (p.16)

"Dialectics is not a method of reduction, but a method of spiritual and intellectual reproduction of society, a method of unfolding and explicating social phenomena on the basis of the objective activity of the historical man" (p.17).

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When KK shows what happens to philosophic categories, he is again hitting out indirectly at the bureaucratized view of concrete totality; the dialectic concept, "the dialectics of concrete totality is not a method that would naively aspire to know all aspects of reality exhaustively and to present a 'total' image of reality with all its infinite aspects and properties. Concrete totality is not a method for capturing and describing all aspects, features, properties, relations, and processes of reality. rather it's a theory of reality, as a concrete totality" (p.19)

The essence of his reexamination of the concept of concrete totality is really a way of making the philosophic clashes stronger too, but instead of naming any bureaucrat in Czechoslovakia as a pseudo-idealist he names Jaspers and refers to the debates between Lukacs and Jaspers in 1926.

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CH. II Economics and Philosophy is hardly what economics is considered in a rigorous sense. It's first an attack on Heideggerian existential categories, like Care. The everyday life and history is again not strictly historic, and yet you often meet an expression which brings you up to the fact that in back of this man's abstractions must be a lot of concrete thought. For example, on p.48, he says "The world of everyday familiarity is not a known and recognized one. In order to present it in its reality, it has to be written out of fetishized intimacy and exposed in alienated brutality. Experiencing the workaday life naively and uncritically, as though it were a natural environment, shares a substantial trait with philosophical nihilism...To behold the truth of the alienated everyday

one has to maintain a certain distance from it."

The same type of "pure" philosophical approach holds when he discusses metaphysics of Science and Reason, as well as metaphysics of concrete culture. In the latter section, there are points that you can hold onto, and they turn out to be very excellent critique of the argument of Labriola and Plekhanov as "a one-sided approach smacking of Enlightenment" (p.61).

He really shows that type of approach to art and culture is the vulgarest of materialisms. The essence is once again the stress on "Marxism is no mechanical materialism that would reduce social consciousness, philosophy and art to 'economic conditions' and whose analytical activity would entail revealing the earthly kernel of spiritual artifact... consciousness is not reduced to condition; rather attention is focused on the process in which a concrete Subject produces and reproduces a social reality, while being historically produced and reproduced in it himself as well" (p.69)

(Look especially at pp.76-77, where the critique of Plekhanov on art ends with: "It lacks the 'human sensory activity' which cannot be reduced to 'psyche' or to the 'spirit of the times'").

III Marx's CAPITAL

Chapter III, on Philosophy and Economy is

The most important chapter, in fact, the crucial one for the whole book, both because it is a rigorous focus on a concrete work--Marx's CAPITAL--and because the discussion of Man rather than worker turns out not to be what the Paul Piconns interpret it to be--an evasion

of the class struggle.] 1st, KK takes up the many and varied interpretations of Marx's text and its so-called popularization: "The history of a text is in a certain sense the history of its interpretations: every period and every generation emphasizes different aspects of it... and accordingly reveals different meanings of the text." (p.94)

And again: "The history of interpretations of Marx's CAPITAL shows that every interpretation covers up a particular concept of philosophy, of science and reality, of the relation between philosophy and economy, and so forth, which informs both the expectation of individual concepts and thoughts and the construction of the work as a whole." (p.95)

When KK does refer to phenomenological analyses of CAPITAL, he states that Lenin had not read the PHENOMENOLOGY, which is wrong. But the point he's trying to make is that you can't "reduce" CAPITAL to either just PHENOMENOLOGY or just LOGIC, much less a literal reading of the expression: "to abolish philosophy"; the point is, the inner logic of CAPITAL itself. "The intellectual development of a thinker or of an artist therefore cannot be investigated by thoughtlessly relating his life-story or by unproblematically 'commenting on his works or opinions'" (p.99)

There are quite a few criticisms of Marcuse, especially on the question of the fact that of Marxism being the transition to a new and totally different field, from philosophy, i.e., "social science." (There is one very high praise of HM, especially an article by him on the concept of labor, but that significantly is from the early period, NEGATIONS, 1933.) He considers that a "dissolution": "On p.104, there is quite an excellent analysis of the dissolution of Hegel's system: "Historical research has correctly pointed out that the disintegration of Hegel's system resulted in no intellectual vacuum: the very term 'disintegration' conceals and masks

a wealth of philosophical activity which gave rise to the two important philosophical orientations of Marxism and Existentialism. The shortcomings of these observations is that they consider Hegel the pinnacle and synthesis, compared with whom Marx and Kierkegaard necessarily appear one-sided..."

(Note 12, p.128, refers back to the text on p.104, where he talks about the dissolution of Marx. "In all instances, Marxist sociology apparently has to be complemented by a Non-Marxist philosophy, by Kant, Darwin, or Mach." KK thereby does beautifully therefore both on Max Adler and Karl Kautsky of WWI vintage, and though he does not reduce them quite so low, on Horkheimer and Marcuse of WWII vintage and the Frankfurt School.)

KK is also quite excellent on reification, and the attempt to reduce Marx's theory as if it were only a question of the social vs. the individual. "In other words, they are false images. Man is walled in his socialness. Praxis which in Marx's philosophy had made possible both objectivation and objective cognition, and man's openness toward being, turns into social subjectivity and closedness: man is a prison of his socialness" (p.106). KK insists that subjectivity in Marx's philosophy, far from being anything as mechanical or simplistic as individual vs. social, is an actual revolutionary element of the Subject creating history.

Kosik then proceeds to the question of the construction of CAPITAL. (It is here, and not where I 1st stated it, that KK refers to VIL not having known PHENOMENOLOGY, Note 118, p.129.)

Kosik - p.6

(Another real opposite of what Piccone) force-out of Kosik's use
of Man rather than worker appears on p.110, where he shows the exploit-
ation resulting in

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The final Chapter, on Praxis and Totality, unfortunately returns to the abstract forms in which most of it has had to be expressed, though it has some very pointed statements on both history and freedom and praxis:

"Praxis is both the objectification of Man and the mastering of Nature, and the realization of human freedom" (p.159). When KK says "in history Man realizes himself" (p.145), he is saying that even freedom, once it's ~~made~~ into an abstraction, has no meaning, that it can only mean concrete freedom in the manner in which Marx expresses it in the CM, that the

freedom of the individual is the basis of the freedom of all.

"Only when man is included in the design of reality and when reality is grasped as the totality of nature and history will the conditions for solving the philosophical problem of man have been created." (p.152)