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HEGEL'S LEGACY

ABSTRACT. This paper deals with some aspects of the relationship between Hegel and Marx and with their influence on the development of Marxism. The story is largely, though not entirely, one of misunderstandings and misappropriations, lost opportunities, unnoticed slippages, wrong turnings and blind alleys. As a result the project which unites Hegel and Marx, and, indeed, is the driving force of their work, has fared less well than it might have done. This, to state it in the most general terms, is the project of a dialectical theory in the service of human freedom. Anyone interested in that project who wishes to gauge its current standing and prospects will need to understand its strange history. The history also contains elements of deep continuity and unity of thought, at least where Hegel and Marx themselves are concerned. Yet even these have been subject to distortion and forgetting by Marx's successors. The discussion will try to do justice to them too.

KEY WORDS: Hegel, Marx, Marxism

A natural starting point for this discussion is provided by Marx's break with Hegel. The central issues at stake in it were made abundantly clear by Marx himself, and they still lie at the heart of the debate over the meaning of Hegel's philosophy. They may be introduced by saying that they concern the ontological status of Hegelian "Spirit" and the Hegelian "Idea". It will suffice for present purposes, and not be seriously contentious, if one assumes that while the Idea is the fundamental, universal category of Hegel's ontology, Spirit is the Idea as it manifests itself in human consciousness and society, its expression in human life. The alternative readings that are available at this point are in general terms clear enough. It will sharpen the presentation of them if another factor is introduced into the account. The Idea, Hegel frequently assures us, is the philosopher's name for God. Hence, on one interpretation, the fundamental principle of his ontology is to be identified with the God of traditional theism, the personal creator who is independent of, and superior to, his creation. On the alternative view, the Idea is in essence the God of pantheism; that is to say, the universe as such, conceived as an impersonal, unified whole. Spirit, the Idea as it reveals itself in human affairs, is, on the first view, an autonomous centre of subjectivity and action, a non-human, super-person who intervenes in, and shapes, our history. Alternatively, it appears as co-extensive with, and exhausted by, the realm of human consciousness and action, as distributed over and embodied in the totality of human selves, and as



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wholly constituted by that distribution and embodiment. For convenience, and in line with convention, one may speak of a “transcendent” and an “immanent” interpretation of Spirit and the Idea.

Where Marx stands on all this is not in any doubt, at least in its general outlines. He reads Hegel transcendentally as a prelude to rejecting him. Some well-known formulations will suffice to make the essential point. The account in *The Holy Family* declares that, in Hegel’s conception, history becomes the history of “an *Abstract* or *Absolute Spirit*”, a Spirit “*far removed* from the real man”, a “person apart”, a “metaphysical subject of which the real human individuals are merely the bearers”. This “metaphysical monster” is said elsewhere in the work to be “the *restoration of the Christian theory of creation* in a *speculative, Hegelian form*”.¹ In a “Postface” to the first volume of *Capital* we are told that, for Hegel, “the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject” under the name of “the Idea”, is the creator of the real world, and the real “world is only the external appearance of the Idea”.² Marx’s Hegel, it appears, is a Hegel whose ontology of transcendence is but the speculative expression of orthodox Christian theology.

It is plainly not possible to settle the issue between immanence and transcendence here, nor is it necessary for the purposes of the argument to do so. Some considerations that favour the immanent side will emerge in the course of the discussion, but these are not in any sense decisive. For one thing, there must remain a residual stock of formulations that seem incontrovertibly to favour the opposition, and so the debate can be sustained indefinitely on a diet of suitable quotations. Of course, if the Hegel Marx rejects is not the true Hegel, it follows that the Marxist intellectual tradition, and more especially the branch of it usually known as Hegelian Marxism, is founded on a mistake. This conclusion is not needed either for present purposes. It suffices for the themes of lost opportunities and frustrated development to note that the interpretative choices were available in essentially the same form to Marx as they are today. This is to say that then, as now, the transcendent approach had something of the quality of a rearguard action, stubbornly maintained against the main thrust, both, as it were, quantitative and qualitative, of the textual evidence. A glance at the historical setting of Marx’s ontological break will serve to bear out these claims.

¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 93–94, 100, 161.

² K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, tr. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 102.

It should be borne in mind that Hegel had been subjected to accusations of pantheism, and, what was not always clearly distinguished from it, atheism, from the early 1820s onwards. Thus, he had been obliged to defend himself, though rather uneasily and unconvincingly, in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia*.³ The defence is less than wholly successful because the pantheism from which he distances himself is of the caricature 'every secular thing is God' kind. It failed to silence his critics. To the powerful evangelical party at Court, in particular, he remained an object of deep suspicion. It did not prevail in his lifetime, but after his death Schelling was, notoriously, called to Berlin by the King to root out "the dragon seed of the Hegelian pantheism".⁴ A sense of the gap between Hegel's system and Christian orthodoxy was by no means confined to the orthodox. As Walter Jaeschke has pointed out, "[C]ontemporaries had an entirely different picture of the various tendencies of the [Hegelian] School from that offered by our current perception, which is that it was the Old Hegelians who preserved the pure doctrine". On the contrary, it was, he notes, "the right-Hegelian interpretation" which, in forcing Hegel into line with traditional Christian doctrine on the personality of God and the immortality of the soul, was regarded as "progressive". What later became "the centre and the moderate left" seemed, by contrast, "to adhere obstinately to the standpoint of the system".⁵ Thus it was the Old Hegelians who were seen as the innovators. Their opponents, who denied that any injection of transcendence were needed to make the system work, were, from this standpoint, the true conservatives.

It should also be recalled that the young Marx had models of immanence close at hand in the intellectual circles in which he moved. Most obviously, there was Bruno Bauer's reading of absolute Spirit as human self-consciousness. In the blast of irony entitled *Trumpet of the Last Judgment over Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist*, he had declared that "God is dead for philosophy" and that "self-consciousness is the only power in the world and history, and history has no other meaning than the becoming and development of self-consciousness".⁶ Whatever the crudities and limitations of Bauer's account, it plainly offers an alternative to thinking in terms

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, tr. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 302–313.

⁴ W. Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 294–295.

⁵ W. Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr. J.M. Stewart and P.C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 372.

⁶ *The Young Hegelians*, L.S. Stepelevich, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 178; *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, F.C. Beiser, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 394.

of the history of an absolute Spirit ‘far removed from the real man’. This is not, of course, to suggest that Marx’s interpretation is merely idiosyncratic or perverse, but simply that it was in no sense forced upon him in the circumstances of his time. The option he chose has in any case its own antecedents and sources of inspiration. Above all, there was the seductive example of Ludwig Feuerbach and his transformative logic of subject and predicate.

This is the logic Marx echoes in asserting that “Hegel at all times makes the Idea the subject, and makes the proper and actual subject the predicate”.⁷ Feuerbach had used the technique of reversing Hegel’s terms in his programme of disclosing the true relationship of theology, philosophy and anthropology. In a work which greatly influenced Marx, he declares that “the secret of *theology* is *anthropology*, but the secret of *speculative* philosophy is *theology*”.⁸ In implying that the deepest secret of Hegelian speculation is anthropology, Feuerbach seems not far away from Bauer. At times the affinity emerges plainly in his language, as when he insists that “[T]he necessary turning point of history is the open confession that the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the [human] species.”⁹ The work of both thinkers may be seen as fitting comfortably within the “dialectical humanism” which marks the early phases of the reception of Hegel’s thought.¹⁰

The crucial difference between Bauer and Feuerbach lies in their understanding of their relationship to Hegel. The human immanence which Bauer grasps as the esoteric meaning of his work is affirmed by Feuerbach as a radically anti-Hegelian conception. In taking this view, Feuerbach, and, following him, Marx, are in essential agreement with the Old Hegelian interpretation of Hegel’s ontology. What the Old Hegelians labour to read into Hegel in order to celebrate it is, however, proclaimed by Feuerbach and Marx as grounds for his rejection. This serves to illustrate the complications which attend the taxonomy of Old and Young Hegelians. It has, as it were, to operate in two dimensions, in terms of how Hegel is seen and in terms of whether one likes what one sees. This makes for some odd alliances and oppositions. From the standpoint of the present discussion, however, it cannot but seem unfortunate that, on central issues of inter-

⁷ K. Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’*, tr. A. Jolin and J. O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 11.

⁸ “Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy”, in *Young Hegelians*, op. cit., 156.

⁹ L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, tr. G. Eliot (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), 270.

¹⁰ See J.E. Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Towards Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

pretation, Marx should have aligned himself with Feuerbach rather than Bauer. It was the first decisive step on a path which has led the Marxist intellectual tradition far from its theoretical roots. Instead of a sustained, organic development which takes up and takes forward the accumulated riches of the past, there is an abstract and sterile rupture, paving the way for further such ruptures in the future. What has been lost is the possibility that Marxism might have evolved as the true dialectical overcoming, the *Aufhebung*, of the Hegelian system. To focus this greatest of missed opportunities more sharply, one should consider some exemplary instances of how things went after Marx.

MARXISTS ON HEGEL

It is natural that attention should focus on Hegelian Marxism, and specifically on what is for it the key area of the philosophy of history, an area whose importance for present concerns has already been signalled. The greatest figure in the movement is Georg Lukács, and his major direct contribution to it is *The Young Hegel*. It is all too easy to exhibit this work as being incoherent in its understanding and assessment of its subject. On the one hand, Lukács seems plainly aware that history is, for Hegel, solely the work of human beings. He remarks that “respect and even reference for the realities of history form the foundation of Hegelian philosophy”. Hegel’s sense of reality is displayed most keenly in an understanding of economic problems which was crucial “for the emergence of a consciously dialectical mode of thought”. Above all, he grasps “the problem of *work* as the central mode of human activity”. Hence, it comes as no surprise to be told that

[T]he main thrust of Hegel’s view of history . . . culminates in the concrete realm of human praxis; it aims at achieving a philosophical understanding of the real historical process that necessarily led to the establishment of modern civil society.¹¹

Hegel’s realism is, it appears, of the very best quality, the quality specific to a historical materialism.

Alongside this strain of judgement in *The Young Hegel* there is, however, another, and in the end predominant, strain to be set. Thus, we read of Hegel’s “wholesale mystification of the historical process”, and of “his hypostatisation of a ‘spirit’ which acts as the conscious principle in which it is grounded”. Even more drastically, we are told that since, for

¹¹ G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, tr. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), xxvii, 172, 301, 361.

Hegel, “nature and history are the products of a ‘spirit’”, history must “realise the purpose which the ‘spirit’ had posited as a goal from the outset”. In consequence, Lukács continues, “the whole process is thereby transformed into a pseudo-movement”. Hegel, he concludes, “lost his way in the miasmas of idealism where a mystified demiurge carried on its ‘activities’ ”.¹² This strain of judgement clearly echoes, even in the detail of its expression, the verdict of Marx cited earlier.

It is true that Lukács believes he has theoretical reasons for taking such a view. Chief among them is the assumption that the teleology which is undeniably built into Hegel’s conception of history requires a positing subject. This assumption is at work in the formulations quoted above, and is made even more explicit elsewhere in Lukács’s work.¹³ It fails, however, to register the full significance of what he is also, at another level, aware of, namely the role of ‘internal teleology’ in Hegel’s thought. This is not the teleology of the labour process, dealing instrumentally with tools and materials, but rather that of an immanent impulse of the subject matter itself. It is essentially Kant’s ‘purposiveness without purpose’ or, one should add, a purposer. The failure to come to terms adequately with this theme in Hegel has a more general significance for Hegelian Marxism, but the issues involved cannot be explored further here.¹⁴ The point to note for the present is that, quite apart from any dubious theoretical considerations, there is, for Lukács, the inescapable and overwhelming authority of the model provided by Marx’s break with Hegel. This ensures that he is in the end unable to carry through the best insights of *The Young Hegel*. It is what makes the book a flawed work of genius rather than the complete *Aufhebung* of all that went before and the resolution of its contradictions, the crown of the dialectical sequence, Hegel, Marx, Lukács.

A similar double-mindedness is to be found in a second major work of the Hegelian Marxist tradition, Herbert Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution*. Marcuse recognises that for Hegel “the world is in its very essence the product of man’s historical activity”. Moreover, the concept of labour is, he affirms, “not peripheral in Hegel’s system” but is “the central notion through which he conceives the development of society”. Elsewhere, Marcuse pays tribute to Hegel’s realism, a realism that is founded, it appears once again, on materialism. “At its roots”, we are told, “the *Philosophy of Right* is materialist in approach”. In the *Philosophy of History*, for

¹² Ibid., 357, 362–363.

¹³ G. Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Labour*, tr. D. Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1980), 54–55.

¹⁴ See D. Lamb, “Teleology: Kant and Hegel”, in *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*, S. Priest, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 173–184.

its part, the historical development is, Marcuse declares, “conceived as one in which man makes himself the actual subject of the historical process”.¹⁵ There is no hint in all this of any irruption of transcendence into human history, and no hint that such an irruption might be necessary.

Marcuse's final and, as it were, official judgement is, however, quite other than, and impossible to reconcile with, these insights. Hegel, we are told, “tends to dissolve the element of historical practice and replace it with the independent reality of thought”. A “historical conception” of “the notion” is constantly overwhelmed in his philosophy by “the ontological conceptions of absolute idealism”. These conceptions ensure that, while the world mind is the “hypostatic subject” of history, it is itself but “a metaphysical substitute for the real subject, the unfathomable God of a frustrated humanity”.¹⁶ Once again, the echoes of Marx's depiction of his break with Hegel seem unmistakable. For Marcuse, as for Lukács, the canonical authority of that depiction is in the end irresistible, however much their detailed insights may expose the shakiness of its foundations.

To get a glimpse of what is, at least potentially, a more fruitful strategy, one should turn to a thinker who is certainly no less subject to Marx's authority than are Lukács and Marcuse. In the *Philosophical Notebooks* Lenin resolves “to read Hegel materialistically”, and explains: “that is to say, I cast aside for the most part God, the Absolute, the Pure Idea, etc.”. The suggestion that now arises is that it may well be more fruitful, from a historical materialist standpoint, simply to cast these notions aside, without seeking to interpret them, than to interpret them in the transcendent manner of Marx. For it may be more likely to enable one to unearth the substance of what, from that standpoint, is valuable in Hegel. It may, at any rate, be said to have done so for Lenin. His strategy of reading leads to a conclusion which he announces with unmistakable surprise and excitement:

[M]ovement and “self-movement” (this NB! arbitrary (independent), spontaneous, *internally-necessary* movement), “change”, “movement and vitality”, “the principle of all self-movement,” “impulse” (Trieb) to “movement” and to “activity” – the opposite to “dead Being” – who would believe that this is the core of “Hegelianism” of abstract and abstruse (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism??

This sense of a revelation leads Lenin on to a hyperbolic and notorious claim:

¹⁵ H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 39, 78, 126, 184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 161, 234.

[It] is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx.¹⁷

These are all, of course, fragmentary remarks, never intended for publication. The line of thought they mark is, nevertheless, of great interest and fertility. It fits precisely with the approach favoured in the present discussion to suppose that Lenin had indeed reached to the core of Hegelianism. All that is lacking on his part is the realisation that what he had thus identified, the spontaneous, internally necessary self-movement, *is* the Hegelian Absolute. There is nothing left over which needs to be cast aside in a materialist reading. To have taken this further step would have been to unlock all the resources of Hegel's system and put them at the disposal of historical materialism. That Lenin did not take it may be seen from one point of view as not the least of the missed opportunities which bulk so large in this account. That in a deeper sense, in view of who he was and his historical situation, he could not possibly have done so shows rather the ramified, stultifying effects of the orthodox Marxist view of the Hegel-Marx connection.

POLITICS OF SPIRIT

The question that now arises is what the implications of this historical sketch are for the idea of a dialectical, emancipatory theory. To pose the issues as sharply as possible, one must ask what are the politics of transcendent, as contrasted with those of immanent, Spirit. The reception of Hegel's thought can once again offer some pointers. To take an obvious instance, the Old Hegelians plainly knew what they were doing in trying to bring him into line with religious orthodoxy. They were well aware that success in this would make for a coherent fit with their own social and political conservatism, while interpretations such as that of Bauer raised practical as well as theoretical dangers. There is, however, a multitude of examples through which the basic relationships here might be explored. A particularly illuminating perspective on them is offered by a modern writer, Charles Taylor.

This is so in large part because of the highly self-conscious and architectonic character of his reading of Hegel. For Taylor, Hegelian "*Geist*" is a "cosmic spirit" which is emphatically not to be identified with the

¹⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 38 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972), 104, 141, 180.

merely human, one whose "self-expression and self-awareness" is "something infinitely higher than our own". This has profound implications for the central thesis of Hegel's philosophy of history, namely that history is the development of the consciousness, and the actuality, of freedom. For the freedom in question, it now appears, is "something immeasurably greater than the freedom of finite spirits". Thus, Taylor wishes to distinguish Hegel sharply from thinkers such as Rousseau or Kant who "defined freedom as *human* freedom". For Hegel by contrast, the thought or reason whose service is freedom "turns out not to be that of man alone, but rather that of the cosmic spirit which posits the universe", a spirit which Taylor, quite understandably, identifies with God. Putting the point in philosophical language, it is that Hegel is "not talking of the idea of merely human freedom, but rather of the cosmic Idea".¹⁸

Taylor is quite clear and explicit as regards the social and political correlates of this doctrine. They derive, as he points out, from its displacement of the centre of gravity of the idea of radical autonomy "from man to *Geist*". "What is conservative, or at least non-revolutionary, in Hegel has its source", we are told, "in the thesis that the rationality of the real is not that of man, but of *Geist*". It is the view of "cosmic spirit as the subject of history" which, Taylor notes, "rules out the possibility of a revolutionary praxis founded on reason". Hence it is that Hegel "sets his face firmly against any further revolutionary transformations", believing instead that "history had come to some kind of plateau, on which the need for revolution was past".¹⁹ The triumph of cosmic *Geist* ensures, to put the matter crudely, that in the world of modern capitalism we are already living at the end of history.

Against the background of this interpretation of Spirit, Taylor's account of Marx's break with Hegel is wholly consistent and predictable. It becomes clear why, as he tells us, "the young Hegelians and particularly Marx saw the rejection of Hegel's *Geist* as the essential step from his philosophy to theirs". What they required was an "anthropologizing of Hegel" which does away with "the cosmic subject of history", and with "the reason whose cunning is always beyond men's understanding at the time". By substituting "man" as the subject of history they allow for the time when "the transformations he is bringing about are finally fully understood by him", that is, "the epoch of the proletarian revolution".²⁰ It seems plain that Taylor is endorsing the substance of Marx's understanding of

¹⁸ C. Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 88, 92, 93, 373, 375.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 388, 424–426.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 425.

Hegel's ontology, and, hence, of his conception of what was at stake in his repudiation of Hegel. Reactionary metaphysics has to be discarded to make room for revolutionary politics. To take a different view of Hegel's metaphysics from that of Marx and Taylor is, obviously, to open up other ways of conceiving of its political implications. What is revolutionary in Hegel will then turn out to have its source in his metaphysics of immanence, and specifically in the thesis that the rationality of the real is, and can only be, that of the human Spirit.

The discussion should now turn to the social and political vision that is projected by the idea of immanent Spirit. If the goal of freedom ceases to be displaced on to a non-human subject, and has to be realised wholly within the confines of human life, how, one should ask, is its realisation to be conceived? What institutional arrangements are required for that purpose? This is a large question to which nothing like justice can be done here. There is, however, a line of thought it may be fruitful to pursue. It begins by noting that the weight of Hegel's dealings with these matters falls overwhelmingly on the universal character of the freedom that comes about in history. In a superficial, but still suggestive, way, this is borne out by his standard classification of the successive historical epochs into those in which freedom is attributed to "one", "some" and, finally, "all". The theme is more usefully spelled out in such passages as the following:

[T]he substance of the Spirit is freedom. From this, we can infer that its end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject to follow its own conscience and morality, and to pursue and implement its own universal ends; it also implies that the subject has infinite value and that it must become conscious of its supremacy. The end of the world Spirit is realised in substance through the freedom of each individual.²¹

This passage encapsulates the movement of thought that now concerns us, from Spirit to a radically universalistic and egalitarian vision of freedom.

There is a general point of a negative kind which will serve to fix the issues more sharply. It is that the freedom now in question is emphatically not realised in the society depicted in Hegel's major work of political theory, the *Philosophy of Right*, and that he is far from supposing that it is. To see this, it suffices to be reminded of the "ethical corruption" of the rich in that society, the spiritual impoverishment of the workers tied to a particular kind of work and cut off from its "wider freedoms", and the alienation of the rabble who seethe with "inward rebellion against the rich, against society and the government". Above all, there is the spectacle of large-scale poverty which takes the specific form, Hegel declares, of an injustice done to one class (*Klasse*) by another. Thus, the subject groups

²¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 55.

are condemned to live in systematic injustice and unfreedom. To suggest that each individual member of this society is accorded recognition of their "infinite value" would be absurd. It is notorious also that Hegel has no solution to offer for the greatest problem he depicts, that of poverty. Indeed, he acknowledges that no solution is possible within the given social framework, and takes his leave of the problem by simply consigning it to the workings of time.²²

It seems obvious that Hegel's predicament flows inescapably from his basic premises and could be resolved by abandoning them. In particular, there is his commitment to private property, including private property in the means of production, and thereby to the capitalist market system. Indeed, some writers have supposed that there is an esoteric Hegel who in this instance had taken the necessary steps already.²³ The image of him as a secret communist, or even as a radical, but uncandid, critic of bourgeois property relations, is, however, hard to sustain. For his attachment to the institution of private property is deep and principled. It is for him indispensable as the objective embodiment of personality and, thereby, of freedom.²⁴ Apart from all theoretical considerations, he had early come to the view, which he never relinquished, that "[T]he fate of property has become too powerful for us to tolerate reflections on it, to find its abolition thinkable."²⁵ As the context makes clear, it is individual private property he has in mind. The point is that, in view of its status as the manifest destiny of his time and place, reflection on its abolition could be only a form of wishful thinking or the elaboration of an abstract "ought", a project with no place in dialectical theory. Thus, in the *Philosophy of Right* he remains in the grip of a truly iron dilemma. The institutional arrangements he depicts there cannot be the true home of freedom, and yet he has no alternative to suggest in their place. It follows that he quite literally does not know how freedom is concretely to be realised. In a certain sense it is, of course, true that he ought to have been a socialist. This would at any rate have averted his dilemma in the form in which it has been presented here. It is equally true that he was not, and, in virtue of his historical situation and personal convictions, could not have been. That the graphic realism of his picture of capitalist society should, nevertheless, point this direction out so plainly to

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 222, 265–267.

²³ See G. Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone Press, 1981); D. MacGregor, *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

²⁴ *Elements*, op. cit., 73.

²⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 221.

others may be regarded by socialists as not the least of his services to the cause of human emancipation.

ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY

The relationship of Hegel to Marxism is by no means simply one of ill-judged rupture leading to separate development. To suppose this would be to miss the important sense in which Marx understood Hegel better than any of the other Hegelians, Old or Young, the sense in which he remained always a Hegelian and in which his Hegelianism permeated classical Marxism. It is, therefore, also the sense in which, to echo Lenin, Marx and Marxism cannot be understood without understanding Hegel. The key issue is the role of theory, its relationship to its object and the connection between theory and practice. The basic Hegelian thesis is that theory is the bringing to consciousness and self-consciousness of the hidden movement of reality. This is an essential part of what makes it dialectical, as opposed to being merely explanatory, contemplative or utopian. Hence, there is truth in the stock formula that what Marx takes primarily from Hegel is the method of dialectics. Method should not, however, be taken as signifying any determinate and uniform set of procedures. The essence of the dialectical method is simply what Hegel calls “surrender to the life of the object”, and the thinking of that life in systematic, discursive form.²⁶ This is the conception that is involved when he tells us that philosophy is “its own time comprehended in thoughts”.²⁷ What Marx’s work seeks to comprehend in thoughts is the revolutionary movement that is the emergent reality of capitalist society.

The basic Hegelian thesis finds metaphysical expression in the demand of the young critic of Hegel that “petrified conditions must be made to dance by having their own tune sung to them”.²⁸ In Marx’s later writings the image of theory as the ‘voice’ or ‘expression’ of the revolutionary movement is regularly invoked. Thus, the socialists and communists who are “the theoreticians of the proletarian class” are said to have no need “to seek science in their minds”, but have only “to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece”.²⁹ Such a view becomes standard in the work of the major figures of Hegelian Marxism.

²⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 32.

²⁷ *Elements*, op. cit., 21.

²⁸ K. Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 247.

²⁹ K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), 109.

Karl Korsch declares that “the Marxist system is the theoretical expression of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat”.³⁰ Lukács for his part maintains that “the theory is the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself”.³¹ These formulations encapsulate the authentic Hegelian ingredient of Marxism, the conception of theory as the self-consciousness of a dynamic reality.

That Marx conceives of his own work in these terms, and that his inspiration in doing so is Hegelian, should be borne in mind for a number of reasons. Most of all it enables some puzzles to be cleared up which would otherwise be intractable. An example may be given which will advance the main line of argument. This discussion has offered a perspective on the striking antipathy Hegel displays towards the business of criticism, the business of finding reasons for changing or rejecting something by pointing out its defects. Such fault-finding is routinely regarded by him as facile, vain, pointless, juvenile and mean-spirited.³² Marx's sympathy with this strain of thought and sensibility is shown most clearly in the discussion of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Proudhon's fundamental error, according to Marx, is his insistence in imposing on Hegel's dialectic “the dogmatic distinction between good and bad”, and then setting the problem of how to eliminate the bad side. This “cuts short” the dialectical movement: “the categories are deprived of all spontaneity; the idea ‘ceases to function’; there is no life left in it”. For Hegel, by contrast, “dialectical movement is the co-existence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category”. Thus, the movement is the work of the contradictions themselves, accomplished without the mediation of negative appraisals. With Proudhon's fixation on such appraisals, the substance of Hegel's dialectic is lost and nothing remains “but the language”:

[D]ialectics has ceased to be the movement of absolute reason. There is no longer any dialectics but only, at the most, absolutely pure morality.³³

For Hegel and Marx, on the other hand, what is required of the dialectical thinker is not to moralise the immanent movement of reason and of reality but to surrender to it and seek to articulate it, to ‘become its mouthpiece’.

On a larger scale, the Hegelian conception of theory shows itself in Marx's refusal, whenever he addresses the matter self-consciously, to allow

³⁰ K. Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, tr. F. Halliday (London: New Left Books, 1970), 42.

³¹ G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, tr. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 3.

³² See, e.g., *Phenomenology*, op. cit., 3; *Lectures*, op. cit., 66.

³³ *Poverty of Philosophy*, op. cit., 98–99.

a normative dimension to his own work. This refusal has been a scandal to some readers, and the occasion in recent years of intense and inconclusive debate. Most of the issues supposedly at stake in the debate will evaporate at once if one recognises that Marx can quite consistently deny that his science is constituted as a critique of capitalist society, while personally detesting that society on normative, and specifically moral, grounds. The issue of the logical status of the theory needs to be separated from that of the values of the theorist. It has to be admitted, however, that insisting on this distinction in the present context gives rise to an urgent question. For if Marx's science is not essentially a critique of capitalism, how is its service of the cause of human emancipation to be conceived? It appears that its practical significance does not consist in an aspiration to supply reasons for acting to change its object. Hence, one must ask in what this significance does consist. What, to put the question still more sharply, constitutes it as socialist science?

It is not possible to pursue this question at length here. All that can be done is to indicate the general form the answer must take.³⁴ If the theory lacks a normative dimension, it must somehow be conceived of as bearing on practice just in virtue of its cognitive content. It has, one seems obliged to say, to be thought of as serving to form and transform the subject who grasps that content. It must do so through providing the subject with a scientific understanding of itself and of its situation in the world. In the case of Marx's science the subject is the proletariat. It has to be thought of as acquiring class consciousness, and ultimately a socialist consciousness, through its developing ability to penetrate the fog of appearance and illusion that surrounds it in the capitalist world. This is the basic Marxist version of the Hegelian doctrine that self-knowledge is, in and of itself, a practical force. The self is altered just in being known, or in becoming the object of deeper, more systematic knowledge. Since, in such a case, object and subject are one, the knowledge is transformative of the knower also. Thus, Spirit's development in history is presented by Hegel as a process of self-making through the acquisition of new, higher forms of self-consciousness. Within Marxism the general theme is, as one might expect, to be found at its most explicit and developed in the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*. It is, however, firmly captured in a passage from Marx which serves as an epigraph to the essay on 'Class Consciousness' in that work:

[T]he question is not what goal is *envisaged* for the time being by this or that member of the proletariat, or even by the proletariat as a whole. The question is *what is the proletariat*

³⁴ For a fuller discussion see J. McCarney, *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism* (London: Verso, 1990), chs. 6–10.

and what course of action will it be forced historically to take in conformity with its own *nature*?³⁵

The modality we have to deal with here is not that of normative reasoning but that of ontological necessity, of what the proletariat is forced to do in conformity with what it is, with its own nature. Theory activates this necessity by disclosing to the proletariat what its nature is and what the truth is of the world in which it must live and act. Therein lies its practical efficacy and significance.

TRANSITION TO CRITICAL THEORY

The dialectical conception of the relationship of theory to its object is the true legacy of Hegel to Marx. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is by no means a lasting legacy so far as Marxism is concerned. Indeed, in the work of the archetypal Western Marxists, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, one may study the process of its explicit rejection. It is in this context that one should set the aim of *Reason and Revolution* "to show how the inner workings of Western philosophy necessitated the transition to the critical theory of society".³⁶ Counterposed to that aim, one should set there also Marcuse's enduring belief that Korsch and Lukács represented the "most authentic" current of Marxism.³⁷ The key document must, however, be Max Horkheimer's programmatic essay on "Traditional and Critical Theory". It contains, on the one hand, some impeccably dialectical formulations. Thus, it speaks for a conception in which "the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class", and for the "idea of a theory which becomes a genuine force, consisting in the self-awareness of the subjects of a great historical revolution". At the same time some crucial positions occupied by Marx and Lukács have begun to be abandoned. This is most evident in the persistent concern to detach the fate of critical theory from that of their revolutionary subject: "even the situation of the proletariat is, in this society, no guarantee of correct knowledge". There is no "social class by whose acceptance of the theory one could be guided". The conclusion to be drawn is that in the end "the critical theory has no specific influence on its side, except concern for the abolition of social injustice".³⁸ It is impossible not to recall

³⁵ *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., 46.

³⁶ *Reason and Revolution*, op. cit., 253.

³⁷ Reported in D. Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 69.

³⁸ M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, tr. M.J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 212, 213, 215, 231, 242.

here that this particular concern is consistently scorned by Marx as a form of motivation, and that he deliberately took every possible step to avoid having to appeal to it.³⁹

Horkheimer's essay offers, one should note, its own version of the curious tendency to face two ways at once which has haunted this discussion. The direction towards which it ultimately points is, however, clear enough. It is towards the relaunch of socialist theory as an essentially normative undertaking, addressed to everyone in general, or at least to all who are capable of attending to the deliverances of practical reason. With the passage of time the critical theory of the Frankfurt School came, however, to be addressed more specifically to the intellectuals, a group whose emancipatory potential figures scarcely at all in classical Marxism.⁴⁰ This development may be said to close a circle in the history of thought. For it should be seen as a return to a standpoint which Marx had left behind in his youth, to the revolution of critical consciousness of which the Young Hegelians had declared themselves to be the prophets and vehicles. The leading figures of the School were well aware of this pattern of movement. Such an awareness informs Adorno's taking to task the attitude to criticism of the mature Marx:

[I]n his youth he had demanded the "ruthless criticism of everything that exists". Now he mocked criticism. But his famous joke about the Young Hegelians, his coinage "critical criticism" was a dud and went up in smoke as nothing but a tautology.⁴¹

It is plain that Adorno understands very well, while deploring, the fact that Marx's mature theory is not essentially constituted as criticism of anything, still less everything, that exists. Elsewhere, Adorno makes the Young Hegelian connection even more explicit, as when he concedes that in the critical theory of society "one is forced back almost inevitably to the standpoint of Left Hegelianism, so scornfully criticised by Marx and Engels".⁴² He cannot, of course, be held responsible for the fact that at a still later stage this acute sense of the history was to be lost. In our own time Marx's theory is quite routinely assumed or asserted, at least by those who grasp that it must have a practical, and not merely explanatory,

³⁹ See, e.g., K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, n.d.), 182, 375–376; K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 18.

⁴⁰ This development culminates in H. Marcuse, "Protosocialism and Late Capitalism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis Based on Bahro's Analysis", in *Rudolf Bahro: Critical Responses*, U. Wolter, ed. (White Plains: M. E. Sharpe, 1980), 24–48.

⁴¹ T.W. Adorno, "Resignation", *Telos*, 35 (Spring 1978), 166.

⁴² T.W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, tr. G. Adey and D. Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), 128.

significance, to be a systematic critique of capitalism. This view displays the usual mark of the hegemonic, namely that no need is generally felt to support it with arguments or evidence. It is, moreover, so widespread that any citing of illustrations will be unnecessary, even invidious. Yet it is in essence a return to a distortion imposed on Hegel by his progressively minded followers, a distortion which it was Marx's great achievement to unmask and overcome. It is plainly necessary to be a dialectician, or a devotee of soap opera, to do justice to this expanse of intellectual history with its improbable twists, unprepared disappearances, bouts of amnesia, farcical repetitions and returns from the dead.

There seems little point in lamenting, or assigning blame for, these developments, and to do so would in any case show an undialectical spirit. Instead, they have to be understood as themselves reflecting the movement of objective reality in the period in question. What underlies the transition to the critical theory of society, and indeed to Western Marxism in general, is clearly indicated in Horkheimer's essay. It is a failure of nerve as regards the identification of the revolutionary subject, following a loss of confidence in the subject identified by Marx and Lukács, the proletariat of advanced capitalism. There is surely no need to labour the point that their identification cannot now be restored, at least in its original form. To suppose otherwise could only be to shut one's eyes to the subsequent course of history or to wish it away, a proceeding even more at odds with the spirit of dialectical thought. For anyone who is not content to fall back on social critique – that is, in practice, to abandon dialectics for morality – a problem arises at this point. It is the problem of how theory can continue to be both dialectically integrated with the immanent movement of reality and serve the cause of human emancipation. This is perhaps the central question that confronts anyone who now wishes to work in the intellectual tradition founded by Marx. All that can be done here is to suggest a way in which the burden of it may be eased. The suggestion is that there is still something more that socialists may learn from Hegel.

LEARNING FROM HEGEL

An indication of what that is was given in the discussion of Taylor's view of Marx's ontological break. It lies in the contrast he draws attention to between a cunning which is always beyond "men's understanding" at the time and transformations which are fully understood by those bringing them about. Taylor is clearly correct in associating the second part of this contrast with Marx and the Marxist tradition. It is a standard theme, at least of classical Marxism, that the revolution which inaugurates socialism

is uniquely the revolution of self-consciousness. Among its many expressions in Marx's work, there is the statement in the *Manifesto* that, in contrast to all previous historical movements, "the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority".⁴³ The theme is captured in a light disguise in Engels's insistence that the German working class movement is the heir of classical German philosophy.⁴⁴ Moreover, a sense of "the unique function of consciousness in the class struggle of the proletariat" is a central pillar of the intellectual structure of *History and Class Consciousness*.⁴⁵ In this tradition, one might say, reason has to be realised in consciousness as the prelude to being realised in the objective world.

The picture Hegel paints is strikingly different. In it historical actors are never fully self-aware, nor is the true historical meaning of what they do ever available to them at the time of acting. Even the most perceptive, the "world historical individuals", move in a setting which is neither blankly opaque nor wholly transparent but in which, as one seems obliged to say with Taylor, they see through a glass darkly.⁴⁶ To note this contrast is to be made aware of what is only superficially a paradox, that Marx is in a certain sense more of an idealist than Hegel. The sense is that which is crucial for Marx's own understanding of idealism, in which it is distinguished by the vital role it assigns to ideas in determining the course of history. What Hegel substitutes for self-conscious understanding in this role is, of course, as Taylor also indicates, the "cunning of reason".

The device has nothing mysterious or arbitrary about it in Hegel's scheme. On the contrary, it is directly grounded in, and required by, his basic ontological principles. At their core there is the thesis that just as reason or thought "constitutes the substance of external things, so it is also the universal substance of what is spiritual".⁴⁷ In the form that is historically significant, reason is present in human beings as a "universal unconscious instinct".⁴⁸ Hence, it is enabled to serve as the force that gives an immanent shaping pressure, an inner directedness, to historical development. Thus, for instance, it is what makes the world historical indi-

⁴³ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), 140.

⁴⁴ F. Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy", in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Volume 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 402.

⁴⁵ *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., 68.

⁴⁶ *Hegel*, op. cit., 393.

⁴⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, tr. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 57.

⁴⁸ *Lectures*, op. cit., 76.

viduals irresistible to their contemporaries, thereby laying the foundations for their astounding achievements. In so far as these individuals pursue personal goals that promote the ends of rational spirit, they speak with the true voices of their followers, revealing to them the secrets of their own hearts, bringing their hidden rationality closer to the light of day. Hence it is that people “flock to their standard, for it is they who express what the age requires”.⁴⁹ In this scheme all higher levels of self-consciousness are the fruits of historical action, not its presupposition or guiding light. They come on the scene with their revelation of meaning only when the episode in question has run its course. This is, moreover, what is signified by the image of the Owl of Minerva. It is by no means an image of quietism or of the impotence of theory. The function of the Owl is to embody the self-awareness of a way of life that has grown old and to prepare the ground for what will succeed it. The image is, after all, one of diurnal sequence in which the fall of dusk is eventually followed by a new dawn. Thus, the awareness that theory expresses at the end of one historical day is the starting point for the continuing struggle of Spirit on the next.

Hegel's position, in addition to being in a technical sense less idealistic is, it now appears, in an everyday one more realistic than is that of Marx. For if the stretch of history that separates us from both of them demonstrates anything, it is surely that the revolution of self-consciousness is never going to happen. It is as reasonable to expect to be saved by a god. Seeing through a glass more or less darkly is the only kind that is possible in history, and we shall never encounter individual or collective actors whose practice is fully informed by a scientific grasp of their situation. Hence, it may be well to turn to the more modest standards set by Hegel for what a dialectical emancipatory theory can achieve in its relationship with practice. What is evidently needed, to put the point more concretely, is some version of the cunning of reason. It is, of course, a device with which Marx was perfectly familiar.⁵⁰ Indeed, it plainly figures, though not by name, in his analysis of how British imperialism was “the unconscious tool of history” in bringing about “a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia”.⁵¹ Instead of such isolated and opportunist, or at least not fully theorised, uses, it needs to be placed explicitly at the centre of the conceptual field and to be generalised in its application; that is, to be extended to the revolution of socialism as well as that of capitalism. These steps will, however, bring with them some problems.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 83–84.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., *Capital*, op. cit., 285.

⁵¹ K. Marx, “The British Rule in India”, *Surveys from Exile* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 307.

For it should be borne in mind that the cunning of reason is not literally a device in the sense of a neutral instrument which is always ready to hand. Its use by Hegel presupposes, as the discussion has shown, a set of theoretical, and specifically ontological, assumptions. The question is how much of this groundwork has to be taken over for the kind of transfer now being proposed to be successful. It seems likely that a concept of Spirit as incorporating, and driven by, an impulse of reason, is indispensable. If, however, Spirit is read immanently and anthropologically in the way outlined earlier, this will not present a theoretical difficulty, but at most a shock to conventional ways of thinking and classifying. The real problem is whether one needs the assumption that reason is the substance not just of 'spiritual' but also of 'external' things. It is whether one has to take on the full Hegelian idealist ontology, its vision of the world of nature as well as that of human society. To put it another way, in the terminology suggested at the start of this paper, the issue is whether Spirit can after all be detached from the Idea so as to form the basis of a viable, self-contained theory. This is rather obviously, however, a complex, many-faceted issue which would have to be the subject of a separate inquiry from that conducted here.

THE WAY AHEAD

This paper has tried to explore some aspects of the relationship between Hegel and Marxism for the light they shed on the project of a dialectical, emancipatory theory. The emphasis has been on the legacy to that project of Hegel and of the common ground he shares with Marx. Something should be said in conclusion about the very extensive elements specific to Marx which it needs to preserve and take forward. They have in part an overtly philosophical character. For there is, perhaps surprisingly, nothing in Hegel to match the philosophical anthropology of Marx's early writings. Yet such a theory is essential for a comprehensive anthropological interpretation of Spirit. The task of dialectical synthesis that is indicated here still remains in all essentials to be achieved. What is still more obviously important to incorporate in it is the explanatory power of Marx's analysis of capitalism. In this case it is not merely that, for more readily intelligible reasons, there is nothing remotely comparable in Hegel. There is also the specific value of the analysis in exposing and counteracting a large-scale misconception, indeed a fantasy, to which Hegel is subject. This is the fantasy of the rational state in capitalist society, the illusion that the contradictions of that society are susceptible to a political solution. That Hegel came to feel unease on the matter himself is shown by his, at least partial, awareness that the scheme of the *Philosophy of Right* founders on

the rocks of injustice, alienation and poverty. There is also the evidence of his late and deep pessimism over the creeping invasion, more especially in France and Britain, of the political realm by the values and interests of civil society.⁵² This development, with its implication of the primacy of economic forces, is, of course wholly in line with, and indeed may be seen as a starting point and inspiration for, Marx's analysis.

Any judgement made from within the historical developments with which it deals has to be tentative and qualified. From our present vantage point in history, however, it seems hard to deny that, on the issues now in question, Hegel's unofficial suspicions and Marx's official convictions are well founded. Among the mass of confirmations of this, one may cite the apparent inability of the public realm in advanced capitalist countries to withstand the tide of commodification and privatisation. More significant still, there is the helplessness of the nation state in the face of the now fully emergent logic of the global market. In this area in particular, Marx continues to speak with the greatest directness to our situation, and to offer the best basis for getting an explanatory grip on it. He was sharply aware of the "world market" as the end state in which for the first time "all contradictions come into play", and in which crises are "the urge which drives towards the adoption of a new historic form".⁵³ These insights have admittedly a programmatic, indeed a premature, character, and Marx was never in fact to carry through the systematic study of "the world market and crises" which he projected. With the full emergence of what he was able only to anticipate, the time is surely ripe to complete his programme. If so, no greater theoretical contribution to the dialectic of human freedom could be conceived.

The story sketched in this paper is essentially one of lost opportunities: but these do not, one should finally note, carry the tragic burden of being lost for ever. We still live in the world in which they arose, the world of modern capitalism to which Hegel and Marx are indispensable guides. The contradictions to which Marx refers remain wholly unresolved, while on the other hand, we have no clear view of the workings of "the urge which drives towards the adoption of a new historical form". This situation calls for neither bravado and hollow presumption nor for renunciation and despair. The one is as much a postdated cheque drawn on cognitive resources we do not actually possess as is the other. Once again, the more relaxed Hegelian view of what may properly be demanded

⁵² See J. Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, tr. J. Viertel (London: Heinemann, 1974), 170–194.

⁵³ K. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, tr. M. Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 227–228.

of these resources will be helpful to bear in mind. We do not, and cannot, know where we are placed in history, and so have no compelling reason for supposing that the time is more inhospitable to our efforts than any other would be. It is also worth recalling a maxim of which, as the *Philosophy of Right* and *Capital* can testify, both Hegel and Marx were characteristically fond. “*Hic Rhodus, hic salta,*” it enjoins us; that is to say, “Here is Rhodes, jump here”.

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