

**Letters on
Hegel's Absolutes
of May 12
and 20, 1953**

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Editor's Note

Dunayevskaya's 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes first appeared in mimeographed form in 1955 as part of the pamphlet *Philosophic Notes*. These Letters were reproduced, in mimeographed form, in 1956 and (in excerpts) in 1974. The text that follows is a reproduction of the 1953 Letters as prepared by Dunayevskaya for publication in the 1955 *Philosophic Notes*. No changes or insertions have been made, except for correcting obvious typographical errors. We have taken the liberty of adding page references to all the quotations from Hegel in brackets.

We have provided in the footnotes a complete list of the changes introduced by the author into the text of the 1953 Letters between their first appearance in 1955 and their subsequent re-issuing in mimeographed form in 1956 and 1974. All footnotes were added in 1989 by the editors.

The Letter of May 12, 1953

May 12, 1953

Dear H:¹

I am going to take the plunge and if it turns out that I have behaved like a bull in a china shop—well, I simply have to take my chances or I will never get to sleep nights at all.² There is no concrete problem that I meet daily, no matter how minor, that doesn't send me scurrying to the LOGIC and by now I'm so drunk with it all that I brazenly shout that in the dialectic of the Absolute Idea is the dialectic of the party and that I have just worked it out.

Just like that. I have taken the plunge.³ But I will restrain myself from beginning with the conclusions and the differentiation of us from Lenin and even us from 1948⁴ but I will have you bear with me as I go

¹ "H" stands for "Hauser," the organizational name used by Grace Lee Boggs in this period; "W," the signature at the end, stands for "Weaver," the organizational name used by Raya Dunayevskaya in this period.

² This sentence does not appear in the 1956 edition.

³ The first two sentences of this paragraph do not appear in the 1956 edition.

⁴ The phrase "even us from 1948" refers to a 1948 manuscript by C.L.R. James, then co-leader with Raya Dunayevskaya of the

through the whole last chapter of the *Logic*. However, before I do so, let me state what I am *not* doing: 1) I am not touching upon the mass party; the workers will do what they will do and until they do we can have only the faintest intimation of the great leap. 2) This is not 1948, but 1953; I am not concerned with spontaneity versus organization, nor with Stalinism which the workers will overcome.⁵

I am concerned only with the dialectic of the vanguard party of that type of grouping like ours, be it large or small, and its relationship to the mass.

Let's begin with the beginning: "The Absolute Idea has now turned out to be the identity of the Theoretical and the Practical Idea. . . ." (p. 466 J&S; 824M; 548W)⁶ At this moment this means to me that the party is the

"Johnson-Forest Tendency" within the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). James' manuscript, first called the "Nevada Document," has since been published in book form as *Notes on Dialectics* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980).

⁵ In the 1955 edition, this paragraph reads as follows:

But I will restrain myself from beginning with the conclusions, and the differentiation of us from Lenin and even us from 1948, but I will have you bear with me as I go through the whole last chapter of the *LOGIC*.

However, before I do so, let me state what I am *not* doing: 1) I am not touching upon the mass party; the workers will do what they will do, and until they do, we can have only the faintest intimation of the great leap. 2) This is not 1948, but 1953; I am not concerned with spontaneity versus organization, nor with Stalinism which the workers will overcome.

⁶ Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Vol. II, translated by W.H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers (New York: MacMillan, 1929); all quotes in the following text are from this edition. The first parenthetical page citation refers to Vol. II of the Johnston & Struthers translation, designated hereafter as "J&S"; the second is to the translation by A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969) and is designated as "M"; the third is to the German edition, published as Vol. 6 of Hegel's *Werke*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), and is designated hereafter as "W."

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identity or unity of the activity of the leadership and the activity of the ranks. "(E)ach of these by itself is one-sided and contains the Idea itself only as a sought Beyond and an unattained goal; each consequently is a synthesis of the tendency, and both contains and does not contain the Idea . . ." (p. 466 J&S; 824M; 548-49W)⁷ And further down on the same page we have the warning that the Absolute Idea "contains the highest opposition within itself."

While the staggering truth of this last phrase sinks in, I will make one more quotation from that page: "The Absolute Idea is the only object and content of philosophy. As it contains every determinateness, and its essence is to return to itself through its self-determination or particularization, it has various phases. It is the business of philosophy to recognize it in them. Nature and Spirit are different manners of presenting its existence. . . ." (p. 466 J&S; 824M; 549W)

Because the party is the only object and content of our philosophy here, I wish to make two jumps here. One is to contrast to the manner in which Other is explained on this page where "Notion . . . as person, is impenetrable and atomic subjectivity; while at the same time it is not exclusive individuality, but is, for itself, universality and cognition, and in its Other has its own objectivity for object." (p. 466 J&S; 824M; 549W) Here then Other is the proletariat outside. What I wish to contrast to it is the description of Other when the Notion is further developed on p. 477 where Other turns out to be, not the proletariat outside, but the party itself.⁸ Hegel says:

⁷ In the 1956 edition Dunayevskaya added the words "Hegel continues," preceding this quotation.

⁸ In the 1956 edition this paragraph reads as follows:
Because the party is the only object and content of our

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"The second or negative and mediated determination is at the same time the mediating determination. At first it may be taken as simple determination, but in truth it is a reference or relation; for it is negative—the negative, however, of the positive, and includes the latter. It is not therefore the Other of a term to which it is indifferent, for thus it would be neither an Other, nor a reference or relation; it is the Other in itself, the Other of an Other. It thus includes its own Other, and so is contradiction, or the posited dialectic of itself." (pp. 476-77 J&S; 834-35M; 562W)

The other jump that I referred to that I wish to make is to leave the *Logic* for a moment and go to the last chapter in the PHENOMENOLOGY. In that chapter on Absolute Knowledge Hegel writes: "The object as a whole is the mediated result (the syllogism) or the passing of universality into individuality through specification, as also the reverse process from individual to universal through cancelled individuality or specific determination." (p. 790B; 480M; 550H)⁹

philosophy here, I wish to make two jumps here. One is to contrast the description of Other on this page to that on p. 477. On p. 466 he defines Motion "as person (which) is impenetrable and atomic subjectivity; while at the same time it is not exclusive individuality, but is, for itself, universality and cognition, and in its Other has its own objectivity for object." Here, then, Other is the proletariat outside. On p. 477, however, Other turns out to be, not the proletariat outside, but the party itself.

⁹ Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, translated with an Introduction by J.B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931). All quotes from Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the following text are from this edition. The first parenthetical page citation refers to the Baillie translation, designated hereafter as "B"; the second refers to the translation by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and is designated as "M"; the third refers to the German text as edited by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952) and is designated as "H."

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Take a second look at the phrase, "the mediated result" and remember that our object is the party and that we are working out the triangular relationship, not only politically but philosophically; that, syllogistically speaking, the party is the totality, the mediated result of the three layers¹⁰ and at the same time it is what it is by its relationship to the proletariat outside, on the one hand, and to the universal of socialism, on the other hand, except that the two are now not "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" but interpenetrated.

Hegel goes on (p. 804): "Spirit is the movement of the self which empties (externalizes) itself of self and sinks itself within its own substance, and *qua* subject, both has gone out of that substance into itself, making its substance an object and a content, and also supersedes this distinction of objectivity and content." (p. 804B; 490M; 561H)

So Socialism too as it "externalizes" itself in parties, and in this case I mean not the vanguard grouping but the Paris Commune, the Soviets, the CIO, and so is Hegel talking of history: "The other aspect, however, in which Spirit comes into being, *History*, is the process of becoming in terms of knowledge, a conscious self-mediating process—Spirit externalized and emptied into Time." (p. 807B; 492M; 563H) But he does not leave it at history (which includes historic development for

¹⁰ C.L.R. James developed a concept of "three layers" after the Johnson-Forest Tendency left the SWP, patterned on his interpretation of Vol. IX of Lenin's *Selected Works*. The term "first layer" referred to the "intellectual leadership"; "second layer" referred to the "experienced politicians"; "third layer" referred to the rank-and-file workers, women, Blacks and youth who were seen as representing the masses outside. With her 1953 philosophic breakthrough, Dunayevskaya worked out the totally new concept of the relationship between the "movement from theory" and the "movement from practice that is itself a form of theory."

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us not only of the above, but the historic development of the party 1903, 1920-3, now). He ends Absolute Knowledge with: (p. 808)

"The goal, which is Absolute Knowledge or Spirit knowing itself as Spirit, finds its pathway in the recollection of spiritual forms (*Geister*) as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their spiritual kingdom. Their conservation, looked at from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is *History*; looked at from the side of their intellectually comprehended organization, it is the *Science* of the ways in which knowledge appears. Both together, or *History* (intellectually) comprehended (*begriffen*), form at once the recollection and the Golgotha of Absolute Spirit, the reality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which it were lifeless, solitary, and alone." (p. 808B; 493M; 564H)

Now the way I see this connect with the *Logic* (p. 466 J&S; 824M; 548W) where I left off before I began jumping around, is that where the "various phases" could have meant stages of development within the party such as 1903, 1920-3, etc., the recognition of the different manners of the existence of Absolute Idea as Nature and Spirit, or the country and something like the CIO rather than a "strict party" meant you are a fool if you cannot recognize the party in that for that is socialism just as at one time it was sufficient to define it as "electricity plus soviets."¹¹ The world concepts, the American roots, and us. We will come back to that, but now I wish to return to Hegel as he develops his Absolute Idea logically. On the next page (467) he

¹¹ This refers to Lenin's 1920-21 view that "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country." See Lenin's *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), Vol. 31, p. 419 and p. 516.

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writes: "Thus the logical Idea has itself as infinite form for content. . . . As opposed to form, content appears as Other and as given. . . ."

"The Absolute Idea itself has only this further content, that the form-determination is its own perfected totality—the pure Notion. . . . What remains therefore to be considered here is not a content as such, but the universal element of its form—that is, the method." [p. 467 J&S; 825M; 550W]

In the party both as political organization and as the realization of the theory of knowledge, the "form-determinations" or form of relations between leaders and ranks, between the various layers, and within each layer tells the whole story. *There is no content outside of that.* Or, once again to stick close to Hegel, "The method therefore is both soul and substance; and nothing is either conceived or known in its truth except in so far as it is completely subject to the method. . . ." [p. 468 J&S; 826M; 551-52W]

Hegel brings this development of method to a climax by contrasting sharply what it is to inquiring cognition where it is "in the position of a tool, of a means which stands on the subjective side, whereby the method relates itself to the object" [p. 469 J&S; 827M; 552W] to what it is in the dialectic: "But in true cognition the method is not merely a quantity of certain determinations: it is the fact that the Notion is determined in and for itself, and is the mean only because it equally has the significance of objective, so that, in the conclusion, it does not merely achieve an external determinateness through the method, but is posited in its identity with the subjective Notion." [p. 469 J&S; 827M; 553W]

It is directly after this that Hegel discloses to me the

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secret of something that I have been chewing over like a dog does a bone, for many a moon--the intuition of the leader which he calls "internal intuition." First, let's watch the process of arriving at *internal intuition*: 1) method only has to have a *beginning* and so that is where we must begin 2) but this beginning (and he warns later that "neither in actuality nor in thought" is there any beginning "so simple and abstract as is commonly imagined") is *not* "the immediate of sensuous intuition" which "is manifold and individual." 3) no, this beginning is "internal intuition." [pp. 470, 471 J&S; 827, 828, 829M; 554, 555W]

Secondly, note the contrast between "the immediate of sensuous intuition" and which comes from that which is, from the way, we would say, the *third layer lives*, and "the internal intuition" of the leader which comes from the way he *thinks*.

Jam these two opposites together, and you will first understand a sentence back on p. 467: "The self-determination therefore in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak . . ." (p. 467 J&S; 825M; 550W) in a word, the self-development of socialism, objectively and subjectively, gives off impulses which come one way to the leader, another way to the *class* as a whole, but what is important is that it is *determined to appear* "to hear itself speak." And the beautiful part about the "internal intuition" is that this "beginning must be inherently defective and must be endowed with the impulse of self-development." [p. 471 J&S; 829M; 555W]

So that, finally, we reach Hegel's conclusion that nothing in life or in thought has a beginning so simple as is imagined but that "every beginning must be made from the Absolute, while every progress is merely the exhibition of the Absolute. . . . The progress is therefore

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not a kind of overflow, which it would be if in truth that which begins were already the Absolute; rather the progress consists in this, that the universal determines itself and is the universal *for itself*, that is, is equally also individual and subject. It is the Absolute only in its completion." (pp. 471-72 J&S; 829M; 555-56W)

So although we began with the universal of socialism and although we have seen socialism in the various phases of the Commune, the Soviets, the CIO, it is not yet IT for it can be it "only in its completion." The new society will not be until it is; now we see only intimations, approximations, but it is nevertheless all around us, in the lives of the workers and in the theory of the party, so until the solution of the conflict and the abolition of the division, we are back to *stages of development*: "cause is the highest stage in which the concrete Notion as beginning has an immediate existence in the sphere of necessity; but it is not yet a subject which, as such, preserves itself also in its actual realization." (p. 472 J&S; 830M; 556W)

Here I wish you to remember that in this page and in the next is where Lenin made his own 16-point definition of the dialectic, the essence of which was three-fold:¹² 1) the transformation of anything into its opposite (collapse of 2nd International); 2) the absolute in every relative which is the transition to something else (Monopoly as eve of socialist revolution); and

¹² See Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), Vol. 38, pp. 220-22. Also see Appendix B of Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom, from 1776 until Today* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), pp. 349-50, for the first English translation of Lenin's "Abstract of Hegel's 'Science of Logic,'" as there are significant differences between Dunayevskaya's translation and that of the later editions. Hereafter, the editions are cited as "Lenin, CW, Vol. 38" and "RD, App. B," respectively.

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3] thought reflects reality (objective world connections). That we can fit Lenin in too here *historically* can now be seen from the fact that in the previous section on The Idea of Cognition Lenin had gone *further*, saying that "Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates,"¹³ but when he reached the Absolute Idea it was not the creativity that he developed but the objective world connections *because to him in 1915 the Idea as "objective truth" of necessity predominated over any actual reconstruction of society, or the 1917 "socialism looking at us through all windows."*¹⁴

We, however, can go further, and not only further than Lenin but further than we ourselves did in 1948 when the Nevada Dialectics so profoundly held forth on the positive in the negative. But holding fast to the positive in the negative then meant *only the general development of socialism through overcoming Stalinism*, whereas now we can be more concrete, at least in relation to our own organization where the mediating determination is a negative "but the negative of the positive and includes the latter." Now you can see why some 11 pages back¹⁵ I called attention to this further determination of Other as "its own Other . . . the posited dialectic of itself" [p. 477 J&S; 835M; 562W]: "—The first or immediate term is the Notion *in itself*, and therefore is the negative *only in itself*; the dialectic moment with it therefore consists in this, that the *distinction* which it implicitly contains is posited in it. The second term on the other hand is itself the determinate entity, distinction or relation; hence

¹³ Lenin, CW, Vol. 38, p. 212; RD, App. B, p. 347. Both editions quote Lenin's aphorism fully as: "Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it."

¹⁴ See Lenin, CW, Vol. 25, p. 363.

¹⁵ See page 26, above.

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with it the dialectic moment consists in the positing of the unity which is contained in it." (p. 477 J&S; 835M; 562W)

We have reached the *turning point* despite the unity or the party as a totality, since "The negativity which has just been considered is the turning point of the movement of the Notion. It is the simple point of negative self-relation, the innermost source of all activity, of living and spiritual self-movement, the dialectic soul which all truth has in it and through which it alone is truth; for the transcendence of the opposition between the Notion and Reality, and that unity which is the truth, rest upon this subjectivity alone.—The second negative, the negative of the negative, which we have reached, is this transcendence of the contradiction, but is no more the activity of an external reflection than the contradiction is: it is the innermost and most objective moment of Life and Spirit, by virtue of which a subject is personal and free." (pp. 477-78 J&S; 835-36M; 563W)

NOW STAND UP AND SHOUT PERSONAL AND FREE, PERSONAL AND FREE, PERSONAL AND FREE AS LENIN SHOUTED LEAP, LEAP, LEAP WHEN HE FIRST SAW DIALECTICAL DEVELOPMENT TO BE THAT AND ALSO THE OBJECTIVE WORLD.¹⁶

I will return to freedom, and where our age proves it has abolished the distinction between theory and practice and that which is the preoccupation of the theorists freedom out of one-party totalitarianism¹⁷ is the preoccupation of the great masses, but now I must

¹⁶ See Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 33, p. 123; *RD*, App. B, p. 330.

¹⁷ In the 1974 edition the phrase "freedom from out of one-party totalitarianism" is separated off with dashes.

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still stick close to Hegel for when he reaches that point he goes not into paeans of freedom but an attack on all old radical parties from the Social-Democracy (Kant to Hegel) to the SLP¹⁸ (formalists to Hegel) and he does not let go until the method itself extends itself into a system: (p. 480)

And on p. 482 he says "The method effects this as a system of totality. . . . This progress determines itself, first, in this manner, that it begins from simple determinatenesses and that each subsequent one is richer and more concrete." It has not been in a straight line, but an approach both rearward and forward so that now we can see "In the absolute method the Notion preserves itself in its otherness, and the universal in its particularization, in the Judgement and in reality; it raises to each next stage of determination the whole mass of its antecedent content, and by its dialectical progress not only loses nothing and leaves nothing behind, but carries with it all that it has acquired, enriching and concentrating itself upon itself." (pp. 482-83 J&S; 840M; 569W)

So that none of the other philosophies (parties to us) just degenerated or died, but their achievements have been incorporated in the new philosophy or party and this new has been enriched "concentrating itself upon itself" for we have that new source, the third layer.¹⁹

Now watch this: "Each new stage of exteriorization (that is, of further determination) is also an interiorization, and greater extension is also higher intensity." (p. 483 J&S; 840-41M; 570W) What a more perfect

¹⁸ "SLP" refers to the Socialist Labor Party.

¹⁹ In the 1974 edition the phrases *philosophies (parties to us)* and *new source, the third layer*, are underlined.

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description of going outward with B,²⁰ and becoming richer inward and more intense.

"The highest and acutest point is simple personality," continues Hegel, "which, by virtue alone of the absolute dialectic which is its nature, equally holds and comprehends everything within itself because it perfectly liberates itself . . ." [p. 483 J&S; 841M; 570W] So we are back at liberation and until the end of The Absolute Idea that will be the theme, liberation, freedom and an absolutely uncompromising, Bolshevik attack on impatience. If you are right and the Unhappy Consciousness should somehow go as part of Abernism—and I agree with you there—then nevertheless I will not let go of Leland.²¹ Just listen to the absolutely devastating analysis by Hegel, and remember Hegel does it as he has already approached freedom and we met that type when we approached independence:²²

p. 484: "That impatience whose only wish is to go beyond the determinate [whether in the form of beginning, object, finite, or in any other form] and to be immediately in the absolute, has nothing before it as object of its cognition; but the empty negative, the abstract infinite,—or else a would-be absolute, which is imaginary because it is neither

²⁰ "B" refers to Charles Denby's *Indignant Heart*, first published in 1952. An expanded edition was published in 1978 as *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (Boston: South End Press); a new expanded edition was published in 1989 by Wayne State University Press.

²¹ Martin Abern, one of the founders of Trotskyism in the U.S., died in 1947. In a 1953 document entitled "Our Organization," Dunayevskaya characterized "Abernism" as "cliquism, unprincipled combinationism, gossip and intrigue." Leland was the organizational secretary in 1951-52 of Correspondence Committees, the organization to which Dunayevskaya belonged from 1951 to 1955.

²² The Johnson-Forest Tendency "approached independence" in June, 1951, when it left the SWP and formed a new organization, Correspondence Committees.

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posited nor comprehended." (p. 484 J&S; 841-42M; 571W)

I am shaking all over for we have come to where we part from Lenin.²³ I mentioned before that, although in the *approach* to the Absolute Idea, Lenin had mentioned that man's cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it but that *within the chapter* he never developed it. Objective world connections, materialism, dialectical materialism it is true, but not the object and subject as one fully developed—that's what he saw. Then he reaches the last paragraph: "For the Idea posits itself as the absolute unity of the pure Notion and its Reality, and thus gathers itself into the immediacy of Being; and in doing so, as totality in this form, it is Nature." (p. 485 J&S; 843M; 573W)²⁴

There Lenin stops—it is the *beginning* of the last paragraph—and he says: "This phrase on the last page of the *Logic* is exceedingly remarkable. The transition of the logical idea to *Nature*. Stretching a hand to materialism. This is not the last phrase of the *Logic*, but further till the end of the page is unimportant."²⁵

But, my dear Vladimir Ilyitch, it is not true; the end of that page is important; we of 1953, we who have lived 3 decades after you and tried to absorb all you have left us we can tell you that.

Listen to the very next sentence: "But this determination is not a perfected becoming or a *transition* . . ." (p. 485 J&S; 843M; 573W) Remember how transition was everything to you in the days of Monopoly, the eve

²³ In the 1974 edition the phrase, *where we part from Lenin*, is underlined.

²⁴ In the 1974 edition this paragraph has vertical double lines drawn alongside it.

²⁵ Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 38, p. 233, RD, App. B, p. 352.

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of socialism. Well, Hegel has passed *beyond* transition, he says this last determination "the pure Idea, in which the determinateness or reality of the Notion is itself raised to the level of Notion, is an absolute *liberation*, having no further immediate determination which is not equally *posited* and equally Notion. Consequently there is no transition in this freedom. . . . The transition here therefore must rather be taken to mean that the Idea freely releases itself in absolute self-security and self-repose." (pp. 485, 486 J&S; 843M; 573W)

You see, Vladimir Ilyitch you didn't have Stalinism to overcome, when transitions, revolutions seemed sufficient to bring the new society. Now everyone looks at the totalitarian one-party state, *that* is the new that must be overcome by a totally new revolt in which everyone experiences "absolute liberation." So we build with you from 1920-3 and include the experience of three decades.

But, H, (Hauser, not Hegel) I have not finished yet, not that last paragraph in Hegel, nor my summation, for we must retrace our steps to the paragraph before and as we do, let's keep in mind Marx's last chapter of *Capital* (Vol. I). Hegel writes: "In so far the pure Idea of Cognition is enclosed in subjectivity, and therefore is an impulse to transcend the latter; and, as last result, pure truth becomes *the beginning of another sphere and science*. This transition need here only be intimated." [p. 485 J&S; 843M; 572-73W] And then he goes into how the Idea posits itself and is liberation. That, he says, he cannot fully develop here; he can only intimate it.

Now you will recall that that is *precisely* what Marx does in the *Accumulation of Capital* when he reaches the laws of concentration and centralization of capital

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and socialization of labor. He says he cannot develop these, but he can give an intimation, and this intimation turns out to be that 1) the ultimate would be centralization of capital "in the hands of one single capitalist corporation" 2) that it would not matter if that occurs peacefully or violently, 3) but that with the centralization grows also the revolt, and it is not just any revolt but one that is "organized, united, disciplined by the very mechanism of capitalist production."²⁶

H, are you as excited as I? Just as Marx's development of the form of the commodity and money came from Hegel's syllogistic U P I, so the Accumulation of Capital (the General Absolute Law) is based on The Absolute Idea.²⁷

Remember also that we kept on repeating Lenin's aphorism that Marx may not have left us "a" Logic, but he left us the logic of *Capital*.²⁸ This is it—the logic of *Capital* is the dialectic of bourgeois society: the state capitalism at one pole and the revolt at the other.

At one stage we tried to divide socialization of labor from revolt, the former being still capitalistic, and the latter the beginning of socialism. We didn't get very far because that socialization was capitalistic but revolt liberates it from its capitalistic integument. Marx, however, dealing with the dialectic of capitalist society did not make the negation of the negation any more

²⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906), Vol. I, pp. 836-37. Also see the Marx Library edition, translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 929.

²⁷ This refers to Hegel's syllogism "Universal-Particular-Individual"; see "The Notion" in Hegel's *Science of Logic* (pp. 234-57 J&S; 600-22M; 273-300W). See also Marx's *Capital*, Vol. I, chapter 1, "The Commodity," and chapter 25, "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation."

²⁸ See Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 38, p. 317; *RD*, App. B, p. 353.

concrete, but, on the contrary, in the last chapter returns to the origins of capitalism.

Now we are ready to return to the last few sentences of the *Logic* ending with "But this next resolution of the pure *Idea*—to determine itself as external *Idea*—thereby only posits for itself the mediation out of which the *Notion* arises as free existence that out of externality has passed into itself; arises to perfect its self-liberation in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, and to discover the highest *Notion* of itself in that logical science as the pure *Notion* which forms a *Notion* of itself." [p. 486 J&S; 843-44M; 573W]

(Please, Hauser, can you get a hold of a copy of *Philosophy of Spirit* or is it *Mind*? I am brazen enough to want to swim there too. I have an instinct that we couldn't get very far there when we tried it before because we equated *Mind* to party, but now that I believe the dialectic of the *Absolute Idea* is the dialectic of the party, I feel that *Mind* is the new society gestating in the old, and I feel sure we could get a lot of very valuable dialectical developments there, and what is so significant about that also is the building of the new within the old makes it possible to stop jumping from high point to high point but rather to follow concretely since this new is in the *daily struggle*.)

Somewhere in the letters about Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks* it is stated that Lenin was aware of the gap between his *Universal* ("to a man") and the concrete Russian proletariat, where we are more aware of the identity of the *Universal* and the concrete American proletariat. What, further, these two years of our organization showed was the high stage of social consciousness of the new layers attracted to us: they practice in the paper before they join and yet they

appreciate *leadership*. Perhaps I'm stretching but I feel that in the Absolute General Law when Marx was developing the dialectic of bourgeois society to its limit and came up with the revolt "united, organized, and disciplined" he also set the limits to the dialectic of the party which is part of bourgeois society and will wither with its passing as will the bourgeois state. It appears to me when objective and subjective are so interpenetrated that the preoccupations of the theoreticians of the man on the street is *can we be free when what has arisen is the one-party state, the assertion of freedom, "personal and free" and full liberation takes precedence over economics, politics, philosophy, or rather refuses to be rent asunder into three and wants to be one, the knowledge that you can be free.*

Do you remember the letter of May 20, 1949: "We are poles apart from Hegel but very close to him in another respect. As materialists we root man in his environment, but now that the real history of humanity is about to begin, the Hegelian concept of speculative reason, comes to life with us, as never before, though on our basis."²⁹

W. (Raya Dunayevskaya)

²⁹ This statement is from a letter of C.L.R. James to Grace Lee Boggs (see *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, Wayne State University Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, #1613).

The Letter of May 20, 1953

May 20, 1953

Dear Hauser:

Please do not interpret this as any prodding of you to commit yourself on my analysis of the Absolute Idea; it is only that I cannot stand still and so rushed directly to the *Philosophy of Mind*. I then reread the Preface, Introduction, and Absolute Knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, the Introduction, Three Attitudes to Objectivity, and the Absolute Idea in the *Smaller Logic* and the Absolute Idea in the *Science of Logic*.³⁰ After that I read from cover to cover Lenin's phenomenal Vol. IX³¹ which is the Absolute Idea in action, reread Marx's *Accumulation of Capital* and the *Fetishism of Commodities* in Vol. I of *Capital*, the final part in Vol. III, and *The Civil War in France*. All this I did on my own time, so to speak, that is to say,

³⁰ In the 1956 edition this sentence reads as follows:
I then reread the Preface, Introduction and Absolute Knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Mind*; the introduction, Three Attitudes to Objectivity and the Absolute Idea in the *Smaller Logic*, along with the Absolute Idea in *Science of Logic*.

³¹ This refers to Vol. IX of Lenin's *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1943).

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between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. after putting in very full days and evenings in concrete org. activity.³² I note these facts only in order to show how this Absolute Idea has me coming and going. Along with keeping all these in the back of my head then as I read the *Philosophy of Mind* I made up the following outline of the development of the vanguard party and its relationship to the mass movements:

The party as a "simple" class instrument—
Communist League, the First International
(reflecting 1848 class struggles and the Paris
Commune)

The party as divider of *tendencies* within
Marxism—Lenin's party of 1903-17 (1905 & 1917
revolutions)

The party as divider of politics from economics—
The German Social Democracy (trade union
aristocracy of labor and 1914 betrayal)

The party as different social layers—1920—(in
Russia Lenin to leaders and ranks; in Germany
ranks to leaders)³³

The party as suppresser of ranks and destroyer
of revolutionism—Stalinism—(Spanish Revolution,
CIO, National Resistance Movements) 1923-53³⁴

³² In the 1956 edition this sentence starts a new paragraph and reads as follows:

All this I did on my own time, so to speak, that is to say, between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m., after putting in very full days and evenings in concrete activity.

³³ In the 1956 edition this paragraph reads as follows:

The party as different social layers—1920 (in Russia, Lenin to leaders and ranks; in Germany, ranks to leaders).

³⁴ In the 1956 edition this paragraph reads as follows:

The party (Stalinism) as suppresser of ranks and destroyer of revolutions—Spanish Revolution, CIO, National Resistance Movements. 1923-53.

Now ourselves, '41-'50—clarification of ideas, elaboration of theory, eyes on *mass movements*. '51-'53—life in party and third layer as source of theory. Something *totally new* appears—

100 years becomes practically no more than mere background for listening and digging—B,³⁵ Woman, Youth—all come from ranks—something like the Great Beginning in Russia. What is so remarkable is that it comes *not* as direct result of any revolution, but rather as the accumulated experiences and feelings and social thinking *when* placed in the proper theoretic and climatic atmosphere of live people.

To this the paper is the climax not alone because it has never been but because it *could* never have been. Only one who *knew* it could be could go through the toil of the negative, the labor and suffering, of not a single break in the cadre of the "continuators" of Leninism. *And* (Note the "and" rather than a "but") only when it did *appear* can we have perspectives that we have. This therefore is not just a general interpenetration of objective and subjective but one so concrete that it is impossible to say where theory leaves off and practice begins. *This can be so only because the elements of the new society are everywhere in evidence.*³⁶

³⁵ "B" refers to Charles Denby's *Indignant Heart* (see footnote 20).

³⁶ In the 1956 edition this paragraph reads as follows:
Now ourselves: 41-50—clarification of ideas, elaboration of theory, eyes on *mass movements*. 1951-53—life in party and third layer as source of theory. Something *totally new* appears: 100 years becomes practically no more than mere background for listening and digging—*Indignant Heart*, Woman, Youth—all come from ranks. Something like the Great Beginning in Russia.
What is so remarkable is that it comes *not* as a result of any revolution, but rather as the accumulated experiences

First now you are where I was as I read the *Philosophy of Mind* which, to me, is the new society. That's what materialistic reading of the final chapters of Hegel means to me.³⁷ (To say the end of Hegel is highly idealistic is to deny that the dialectical laws apply in their *totality*. Perhaps I am very rash but that is how I *feel* at this moment. Unfortunately, in this field I can do no more than feel for I most certainly have no knowledge or practice and I am totally dependent on you.)³⁸

I limit myself to the following sections of the *Philosophy*: Introduction, Free Mind, Absolute Mind.³⁹

In the Introduction Hegel states what the three stages

and feelings and social thinking when placed in the proper theoretic and climatic atmosphere of live people. To this our paper is the climax not alone because it has never been, but because such type of paper *could* not have been born before. Only those who *knew* it could be could have gone through the toil of the negative, the labor and suffering and not a single break in the cadre of the "continuator" of Leninism.

And (Note the "and" rather than a "but") only when it did appear can we have the perspectives that we have. This, therefore, is not just a general interpenetration of objective and subjective, but one so concrete that it is impossible to say where theory leaves off and practice begins. This can be so only because the elements of the new society are everywhere in evidence.

³⁷ In the 1956 edition the first two sentences of this paragraph read as follows:

First now you are where I was as I read the *Philosophy of Mind*, which, to me, is the new society. That's what a materialistic reading of the final chapter of Hegel means to me.

³⁸ In the 1956 edition the final two sentences within the parentheses do not appear.

³⁹ In the 1974 edition this sentence reads as follows:

I will limit myself to the following sections of the *Philosophy of Mind*—Introduction, Free Mind, Absolute Mind.

in the development of the Mind are:⁴⁰ 1) in the form of *self-relation* where "the *ideal* of totality of the Idea" is, it is "self-contained and free."⁴¹ 2) Moving from the Mind Subjective he comes to the second stage or "*the form of reality*" and in this objective world "freedom presents itself under the shape of necessity." 3) From Mind Objective⁴² we reach Mind Absolute "that unity of mind as objectivity and of mind as ideality and concept, which essentially and actually is and for ever produces itself, mind in its absolute truth." (para. 385)

Hegel continues (para. 386): "The two first parts of the doctrine of Mind embrace the finite mind. Mind is the infinite Idea, and finitude here means the disproportion between the concept and the reality—but with the qualification that it is a shadow cast by the mind's own light—a show or illusion which the mind implicitly imposes as a barrier to itself, in order, by its removal, actually to realize and become conscious of freedom as *its* very being, i.e., to be fully *manifested*. The several steps of this activity, on each of which, with their semblance of being, it is the function of the finite mind to linger, and through which it has to pass, are steps in its liberation. In the full truth of that liberation is given the identification of the three stages—finding a world presupposed before us, generating a world as our own creation, and gaining freedom from it and in it. To the infinite form of this truth the show purifies

⁴⁰ In the 1956 edition this sentence begins as follows:

In the *Introduction* Hegel states what the three stages in the development of Mind are:

⁴¹ Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, translated by William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), para. 385; all quotes from the *Philosophy of Mind* in the text are to this edition, which is a translation of the 1830 edition of this work. All references are cited according to paragraph numbers in Hegel's text.

⁴² In the 1956 edition a comma appears after the words "Mind Objective."

itself till it becomes a consciousness of it.

"A rigid application of the category of finitude by the abstract logician is chiefly seen in dealing with Mind and reason: it is held not a mere matter of strict logic, but treated also as a moral and religious concern, to adhere to the point of view of finitude, and the wish to go further is reckoned a mark of audacity, if not of insanity, of thought."

(Remember "soviets in the sky"?)⁴³

If we go from this audacious thinking directly to the Free Mind or end of Section 1 of Mind Subjective, we will meet with free will in a new social order: "Actual free will is the unity of theoretical and practical mind: a free will, which realizes its own freedom of will, now that the formalism, fortuitousness, and contractedness of the practical content up to this point have been superseded. By superseding the adjustments of means therein contained, the will is the *immediate individuality* self-instituted—an individuality, however, also purified of all that interferes with its universalism, i.e. with freedom itself." (para. 481)

In a word, not the free will of the Ego, the unhappy consciousness, but the free will of the *social* individual, "an individuality. . . purified of all that interferes. . . with freedom itself." (para. 481)

To get to the "will to liberty (which) is no longer an *impulse* which demands its satisfaction, but the permanent character—the spiritual consciousness grown into a non-impulsive nature," (para. 482) Hegel

⁴³ Irving Howe, writing in a Workers Party discussion bulletin (Vol. I, No. 9, March 28, 1946) attacked the Johnson-Forest Tendency for allegedly romanticizing American workers, charging them with creating "soviets in the skies."

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cannot avoid *history*, the concrete development:

"When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind, and that as its very actuality. Whole continents, Africa and the East, have never had this Idea, and are without it still. The Greeks and Romans, Plato and Aristotle, even the Stoics, did not have it. On the contrary, they saw that it is only by birth (as, for example, an Athenian or Spartan citizen), or by strength of character, education, or philosophy (—the sage is free even as a slave and in chains) that the human being is actually free. It was through Christianity that this Idea came into the world." (para. 482)

(I'll be d---d if *for us* I will need to stop to give the materialistic explanation here. I'm not fighting Hegel's idealism but trying to absorb his dialectics. Anyone who *can't think* of the Industrial and French Revolutions as the beginnings of modern society, or *know* that when will to liberty is no longer mere impulse but "permanent character," "spiritual consciousness" it means and can mean only the proletariat that has absorbed all of science in his person, that person-better not try to grapple with Hegel.)

Then a rejection of property, the "have" of possession, and directly to the *is* of the new society: "If to be aware of the idea—to be aware, i.e., that men are aware of freedom as their essence, aim, and object—is matter of *speculation*, still this very idea itself is the actuality of men—not something which they *have*, as men, but which they *are*." (para. 482)

We are ready for the Absolute Mind. I will limit

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myself to the concluding four paragraphs, 574-577.⁴⁴

Hegel begins his conclusions about philosophy which "is the self-thinking Idea, the truth aware of itself" by referring us to the Absolute Idea in the *Smaller Logic*, and there Hegel issued a warning, "It is certainly possible to indulge in a vast amount of senseless declamation about the idea absolute. But its true content is only the whole system of which we have been hitherto examining the development."⁴⁵

Back to para. 574: "the logical system, but with the signification that it is universality approved and certified in concrete content as in its actuality."⁴⁶

I'm here reminded of that total Introduction to the *Smaller Logic* (or perhaps it is time to begin calling it by its right name, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, since the *Smaller Logic* is Part I of it and the *Philosophy of Mind* that concerns me now Part III) where he says "the Idea is not so feeble as merely to have a right or an obligation to exist without actually existing." (para. 6) And most certainly Socialism "is not so feeble as merely to have a right or obligation to exist without actually existing." Quite the contrary the new society is *evident* everywhere, *appears* within the old.

⁴⁴ In the 1974 edition this sentence reads as follows:
I will concentrate on the concluding four paragraphs,
#574-#577.

⁴⁵ Hegel's *Logic* (Part I of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*), translated by William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), para. 237, Zusatz.

⁴⁶ In reissuing excerpts of the May 20, 1953 Letter in mimeographed form in 1986, Dunayevskaya included the first half of the first sentence of para. 574. The full sentence in Hegel reads:

This notion of philosophy is the self-thinking Idea, the truth aware of itself (para. 236)—the logical system, but with the signification that it is universality approved and certified in concrete content as in its actuality.

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Let us return to Hegel, still para. 574, "In this way the science has gone back to its beginning: its result is the logical system but as a spiritual principle: out of the presupposing judgment, in which the notion was only implicit and the beginning an immediate—and thus out of the *appearance* which it had there—it has risen into its pure principle and thus also into its proper medium."

This appearance "gives the motive of the further development." (para. 575) So, like all rational thinkers, we are back at the form of the syllogism: "The first appearance is formed by the syllogism, which is based on the Logical system as starting-point, with Nature for the middle term which couples the Mind with it. The Logical principle turns to Nature and Nature to Mind." (para. 575)

The movement is from the logical principle or theory to nature or practice *and* from practice not alone to theory but to the new society which is its essence: (Note scrupulously how this development, this practice, *sunders itself*).

"Nature, standing between the Mind and its essence, *sunders itself*,"⁴⁷ not indeed to extremes of finite abstraction, nor itself to something away from them

⁴⁷ In her 1974 lecture to the Hegel Society of America, entitled "Hegel's Absolute as New Beginning," Dunayevskaya noted that "A.V. Miller, the new translator of Hegel, called my attention to the fact that in the Wallace translation 'sie' (them) is mistakenly read as 'sich' [itself]." Dunayevskaya elaborated upon this in her 1986 "Letters to non-Marxist Hegel Scholars" [see *Supplement to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection*, Vol. 13, #11219]: "[Miller] pointed out that Wallace had translated *sie* as if it were *sich*, whereas in fact it should have read '*sunders*' not *itself* but *them*. That, however, was not my problem. The *sundering* was what was crucial to me; the fact that Nature turns out to be the mediation was certainly no problem to any 'materialist'; the form of the transition which was departing from the course of necessity was the exciting part."

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and independent—which, as other than they, only serves as a link between them: for the syllogism is *in the Idea* and Nature is essentially defined as a transition-point and negative factor, and as implicitly the Idea." (para. 575)

Thus the sundering of practice has been neither to mount the "extremes of finite abstraction" nor as mere link between practice and theory for the triangular development here means that practice itself is "implicitly the Idea."

"Still," continues Hegel, "the mediation of the notion has the external form of *transition*, and the science of Nature presents itself as the course of necessity, so that it is only in the one extreme that the liberty of the notion is explicit as a self-amalgamation." (para. 575)

By all means let's follow Hegel and hold back from skipping a single link. But also let us not forget that this is only the first syllogism, while "In the second syllogism this appearance is so far superseded, that that syllogism is the standpoint of the Mind itself, which—as the mediating agent in the process—presupposes Nature and couples it with the Logical principle. It is the syllogism where Mind reflects on itself in the Idea: philosophy appears as a subjective cognition, of which liberty is the aim, and which is itself the way to produce it." (para. 576)

Here then Mind itself is "the mediating agent in the process." I cannot help but think of Marx concluding that the Commune is "the form at last discovered to work out the economic emancipation of the proletariat,"⁴⁸ and of Lenin in Vol. IX⁴⁹ saying that the

⁴⁸ See Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 334.

workers and peasants "must understand that the whole thing now is *practice*, that the historical moment has arrived when theory is being transformed into practice, is vitalised by practice, corrected by practice, tested by practice," and on the same page (420): "The Paris Commune gave a great example of how to combine initiative, independence, freedom of action and vigour from below with voluntary centralism free from stereotyped forms." And so I repeat Mind itself, the new society, is "the mediating agent in the process."⁵⁰

This is where Hegel arrives at Absolute Mind, the third syllogism: "The third syllogism is the Idea of philosophy, which has self-knowing reason, the absolutely-universal, for its middle term: a middle, which divides itself into Mind and Nature, making the former its presupposition, as process of the Idea's subjective activity, and the latter its universal extreme, as process of the objectively and implicitly existing Idea." (para. 577)

No wonder I was so struck, when working out the layers of the party, with the Syllogism which disclosed that either the Universal or the Particular or the Individual could be the middle term. Note carefully that the "middle which divides itself" is nothing less than the absolute universal itself and that, in dividing itself into Mind and Nature it makes *Mind* the presupposition "as process of the Idea's subjective activity" and *Nature* "as process of the objectively and implicitly existing Idea."

Here, much as I try not once again to jolt you by

⁴⁹ This refers to Vol. IX of Lenin's *Selected Works*.
⁵⁰ In the 1974 edition this paragraph has vertical double lines drawn alongside it; this paragraph was not included by Dunayevskaya in the 1986 excerpts of the May 20, 1953 Letter.

sounding as if I were exhorting, I'm too excited not to rejoice at what this means for us. But I'll stick close to Hegel and not go off for visits with Lenin and Marx. *Hegel* says that the two appearances of the Idea (Socialism in the form of the Commune and the Soviets) characterizes both its manifestation and in it precisely is "A unification of the two aspects":

"The self-judging of the Idea into its two appearances (para. 575, 576) characterizes both as its (the self-knowing reason's) manifestations: and in it there is a unification of the two aspects:—it is the nature of the fact, the notion, which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition. The eternal Idea, in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself as absolute Mind." (para. 577)

We have entered the new society.

W. (Raya Dunayevskaya)