

June 23, 1957

Dear Olga:

Your letter of the 19th was very welcome both because in the open admission that you had been thinking of LA only from its negative aspect and your modesty regarding the contents page of Marxism and Freedom in its final shape have cleared the air for the plenum and pre-plenum preparations in LA as a positive contribution.

At the moment, however, your letter has impelled me to address to you some thoughts on Mao's speech for it was precisely your serious attitude, irrespective of its modest shape, that helped shape that chapter on our Age of Absolutes and Hegel's Absolutes, and not be a mere impulse to shape for "simplification" either. You understood the philosophical problem best precisely because you looked at the concret masses not as subject who would not be able to understand what you understood so well but could not express; rather that both you and even Hegel had some probing to do in depth before the problem appeared objectively in a way that the intellectual would finally get the illumination from the worker.

As I was reading Mao's "revelations" on how contradictions continue to exist under "the people's republic" with even "people" redefined, I remembered Leontiev with his admission that value still operated in Russia, with even "Chapter I" of Capital redefined as something of the "past". But while it is true that Mao does with the philosophical concept of contradiction the same thing that Leontiev did with the economic concept of value--some-where in a footnote in Volume I Marx laughs at the bourgeoisie philosopher for understanding every sort of senseless contradiction but being a stranger to the Hegelian contradiction which is the source of all dialectic--this is 1957, not 1943, and it is China, not Russia. What is new in the date and the country is what we have to grapple with. In 1943 Russia was about to win a war and was telling its workers there will be no difference in their conditions of labor. In 1957 the whole world, even the dominant rulers who are aiming for war if that is what is needed for world mastery, are scared senseless that they might all be blown off the earth. In a way it bears a parallel to the rise of Nazism when the depression so shook up the world and the workers were in such violent revolt that even Fascism had to call itself National Socialism.

Moreover state capitalism in an industrial country is one thing and something else again in so vast an underdeveloped country as China--Mao says 500,000,000 of its 600,000,000 million population is peasant! They must still talk about their bowl of rice and ask the bourgeois intellectual's collaboration, something like some of the Tsarist officers who were given a place under political leadership of the CP in Russia in those bitter communist war years.

Philosophically it is a very great advance indeed for a Mao to put contradiction, even though they make it meaningless by its application to all so it applies to none, in the center of his speech. My dear Olga, Grace didn't go beyond that in her philosophic section --neither in Dialectics and the Fate of Humanity in 1947 when revolution was in the air nor in 1950 when Hegel got put into our thesis only to have him equivalent

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to development through contradiction while the age of absolutes remained an abstraction.

Do you remember when you came up to NY for a few days to work with me on one stage of the book--it was the time when the new article in the Russian journal of philosophy suddenly took issue with Hegel and claimed Marx considered the unity of opposites as "greater than negativity", denying the Hegelian negation of the negation as central to Marx. I said then, wasn't it peculiar that they all bandy about unity of opposites so freely just in order to evade the resolution of the contradiction and face the absolute idea. MAO now says Lenin said some marvellous things on contradictions. It only goes to prove that what was central for Lenin in 1915 is not for us for today, except as methodology. Nothing, absolute nothing short of Absolute Idea are the Communists afraid of any more. How we have them beat now!

If you will bear with me, we will before we reach, Mao and the special place Hegel assigned to him in the Spirit of Self-Estrangement, go through the previous stages of alienation:

1) In Self-Consciousness, the Unhappy Consciousness or Alienated Soul arises as "a personality confined within its narrow self and its petty activity, a personality brooding over itself, as unfortunate as it is pitifully destitute." (p.264) and Hegel continues on the very next page "Through these moments --the negative abandonment first of its own right and power of decision, then of its property and enjoyment, and finally the positive moment of carrying on what it does not understand--it deprived itself, completely and in truth of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom or reality in the sense of its own existence of itself." I have brought this down in a footnote in the book to a description of the ex-radicals who can find no place for themselves either in or outside of the bourgeois fold and end up on the green couch. You can put in ~~various~~ characters you yourself know and get your own illumination.

2) In Reason alienation takes the form of "The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit"; "The heart-throb for the welfare of mankind passes therefore into the rage of frantic self-conceit, into fury of consciousness to preserve itself from destruction; and to do so by casting out of its life the perversion which it really is, and by straining to regard and to express that perversion as something else." (p. 397) If not J, then any faint-hearted Marxist or labor bureaucrat will do, including Khrushchev.

3) But Mao he doesn't appear till "Spirit in Self-Estrangement--the Discipline of Culture" which "constructs not merely one world, but a twofold world, divided and self-opposed." (p.510) And just look how Hegel follows Mao through with his discovery of contradiction so long as there is "unity": "The equilibrium of the whole is not the unity which abides by itself, nor its inwardly secured tranquility, but rests on the

estrangement of its opposite. The whole is, therefore, like each single moment, a self-estranged reality." (p.511) And 2 pages further on Hegel continues: "The sphere of spirits at this stage breaks up into 2 regions." The one is the actual world, that of self-estrangement, the other is that which spirit constructs for itself in the ether of pure consciousness, raising itself above the first. The second world, being constructed in opposition and contrast to that estrangement, is just on that account not free from it."

That is what Mao is blind to--he thinks he can construct 2 opposite worlds and as soon as he assures it "100 flowers can bloom", even if he does deny any flower the right to be a second party which is "bourgeois", then thereupon he has assured his poverty-stricken land "unity." Marx, in his Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic, where he speaks of how many fields of exploration lay hidden in Hegel if only critically understood, points precisely to this spot which Hegel calls "The Noble Type of Consciousness" and at another place "This type of mind is the heroism of service" and, finally "such a type is the haughty vassal; he is active in the interests of the state-power"; "This estrangement, however, takes place in language, in words alone, and language assumes here its peculiar role...it is the power of utterance qua utterance which, just in speaking, performs what has to be performed...Speech, however, contains this ego in its purity; it alone expresses I, I itself." (-.528)

It is equivalent, in economic terms, to the Fetishism of Commodities which kept even classical political economy which had discovered labor as the source of value its prisoner. Throughout that remarkable first chapter in Capital Marx keeps talking of the perverse relationship under capitalism where dead dominates living. In Hegel "this entire sphere of perversion" of the spirit in self-estrangement, ends with; "This type of spiritual life is the absolute and universal inversion of reality and thought, their entire estrangement the one from the other; it is pure culture. What is found out in this sphere is that neither the concrete realities, state power and wealth, nor the determinate conceptions, good and bad, nor the consciousness of good and bad (the nonconsciousness that is noble and the consciousness that is base) possesses real truth; it is found that all these moments are inverted and transmuted the one into the other, and each is the opposite of itself." (p.541)

That opposite Mao did not grasp, nor could he, since this state he is leader of has its own dialectic of development, irrespective of the noble consciousness of its leader. Just as every single thing has its own dialectic of development, so the various stages of alienation go through their transformations. Or rather vice versa since "the moving and creating principle" (to use Marx's expression for the principle of negativity) is this very negativity. Neither Khrushchev nor Mao can escape this, but that each has tried a different aspect of it because of the compulsion from the objective movement and the subjective aspiration of their working people denotes the true absolute of our age, the counter-revolution in the very innards of revolution and (and that is the vision of the future) the revolution in the innards of their counter-revolutionary states. Wait till the book appears and we go to battle.

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