

Jan. 1970

Dear Mikailo Marković:

Thank you very much for your letter of the 2nd and commentary of my chapter on Hegel which I just received. I hope it will start a continuing dialogue between us. Back in 1965 when I noted your essay in the international symposium on Socialist Humanism I was so enamored with your statement that one of the main reasons for the failure to develop the dialectic by Marxists being due to the fact that they posed the question defensively and not from the point of view "of its self-development" that I wrote you to Yugoslavia. When I received no acknowledgment I dropped the attempt as I am always very careful when writing to comrades in East Europe. As soon as I heard from Frady Perman that you were here and that he knew you I again attempted to reach you, and as soon as he has completed making arrangements for us to meet in person I hope we will finally have gotten into direct contact.

I had thought he would deliver to you not only the chapter on Hegel but the ones on Marx and Lenin since they are part "Why Hegel? Why Now?" and I enclose them herewith. The other two parts to the draft of the book, Philosophy and Revolution deal with "Alternatives": Trotsky, Mao, Sartre; and "Economic Reality and the Dialectics of Liberation": The African Revolutions and the World Economy, and New Passions and New Forces which will take up the new forces of revolution, including black revolution and youth revolts in this country. Naturally I would be most happy to get your views on the whole. I do not believe there is a more urgent problem for Marxist-Humanists than to work out a new relationship between theory and practice, and to do so not on a national but on an international plane. My dream originally had been to collaborate with a Polish or Czechoslovak theoretician but I need hardly tell you what happened there in 1968 to crush that dream.

Now to your concrete commentary, which, of course, I shall take into most serious consideration in the rewriting of the draft which I am now involved in with the aim of finishing it in time, the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth and 200th of Hegel's. I feel that Marxists have always been on the defensive because Hegel was a conservative Prussian bourgeois philosopher. Marx couldn't have fully developed Historical Materialism without first breaking totally the closed system of Hegel's Absolutes. But once he did so, and worked out his own dialectic from the praxis of the proletariat, he did find he had to return to Hegel's dialectic which he openly stated (and not only as a young man but directly in Capital) was "the source of all dialectic." And dialectic, I need hardly tell you, was not only method but critique of existing society even in Hegel's hands, which is why Marx insisted that Hegel had thrown over a mystical veil over actual historic relations, and pointed to the sections on Unhappy Consciousness, Noble and Base Consciousness, etc. as containing the critique of "civil society." (Incidentally, Unhappy Consciousness, Stoicism and Scepticism are separate areas; all three are forms of "Freedom of Self-Consciousness", but whereas Unhappy was critique of medieval religion as well as almost any consciousness that can find no home either in old or newly-arisen society that did not come out as originally conceived, Stoic is specifically for "freedom" "in age of bondage", and Scepticism can lead either to actual Reason if it rids itself of "Ego" or revert to cynicism.)

What Marx, after rejecting Absolute, did was to split it into "general absolute law" of capitalist exploitation, on the one hand, and "new passions and new forces" on the other. What I am trying to say is that even though we all must start from Marx, and learn from Lenin, no one can answer the problems of our age but those who live in it, and the absolute has special significance for us because the counter-revolution has been found within the revolution, and has caused the void in the revolutionary movement since the rise of Stalinism. When I pointed to the rediscovery of Marx's Humanism by Existentialists I was pointing to non-Marxists. (I happened to have translated them evidently at the time you had, and I certainly want to refer to your book in the new book.)

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With the death of Stalin and new movement from practice signalled by the East German Revolt in 1953, the challenge, it seemed to me, was not only for the right of national independence (and we were all very busy hailing Yugoslavia's break from Stalin in 1948) but new theory. In any case, it happened that my first letters on the Absolute Idea in which, for the first time, I saw, not the closed system Hegel was consciously aiming for, but the movement from practice to which Hegel was driven to and was totally unconscious about. I am referring to the structure of the Encyclopaedia --not only from Logic to Nature but from Nature to Mind, were dated 6 weeks in advance of the June 17, 1953 Revolt. The structure of Marxism and Freedom (which I am mailing under separate cover) is wholly based on the movement from practice--actual revolutions from 1776, 1789, 1848, 1871, 1917, 1937, etc.--and the theories that followed, but also called for a new view of the dialectic of thought which does not appear quite as separate from the dialectic of actual class struggles as appears. Naturally, by freedom, meant freedom of thought, especially for philosophers, but he was not totally deaf to actual social revolutions, as is clear not only from his young writings, but directly in Philosophy of Mind.

The question that you raise in relationship to the dialectical progression in Hegel of each stage in the development as "a more complete truth than the preceding one." No doubt I should develop that more, but, frankly, I am concerned more with the new, and what I actually wanted to deal with, but haven't made up my mind on that yet, is that it isn't only the ever higher stage, but that there might also be retrogression, as Hegel shows in the Third Attitude to Objectivity (Jacobi and Intuitionism in general) which seems to come after Empiricism and the Kantian Critique which "should" lead to Hegel, but suddenly we are confronted, instead, with Schelling, Fichte, Jacobi. What I am saying is that in our age when counter-revolutions seem to follow every revolution we must confront the question, the reality what happens after the revolution, instead of being so sure that the next stage is "higher."

O, yes, you are right, action in Hegel, is, again, limited to thought, and if I have not made it clear that activity means activity of thought and that cannot possibly change material thing and uprooting of capitalist society, I must do so without waiting till the reader reaches "Part III." Some of the problems you raised regarding the critique of Hegel needed you will, of course, find in the chapters I enclose when I deal with Marx's Critique, Lenin's etc. Again, you are right that the Lenin quotation on causality does not support my thesis on absolute negativity, but what could have been more "idealistic" than that Lenin who was so 1:1 relationship between objective and subjective in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, shouting so jubilantly to himself in the Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic "Cognition not only reflects the world, but creates it"?

All of this and a great deal more I do hope to have a chance to discuss in person. I look forward very much to meeting you and your wife, and not merely for "Hegel" or the book, but just as comrades. As soon as Fredy will work out the details I hope you will also consider my home your home during your stay in the US.

Yours,

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