

PRE-PLENUM DISCUSSION

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the
N&L
Committee*

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STUDIES IN DIALECTICS OF THE CONCRETE: Absolute Idea as new beginning,
as a new Humanism, as a "new Hegel" --Lou, Chicago

Philosophy is what is most antagonistic to abstraction, and it leads
back to the concrete. --Hegel, History of Philosophy

✓ The first and fundamental thing that one who wishes to adequately un-
derstand and master philosophic teaching of Hegel must do is to ex-
plain to oneself his relation to the concrete empirical world...the
term, 'concrete' comes from the Latin 'concrecere.' 'Crescere' means
'to grow': 'concrecere', to coalesce, to rise through growth.

--Ilyin, The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of
God and of Man

Hegel's Absolutes, especially his reworking of the final result
of his philosophy in the syllogisms at the end of his Philosophy of
Mind the year before his death in 1831, is the subject of Theodore
Geraets' essay, "The Impossibility of Philosophy...and its Realiza-
tion," in the Fall 1984 issue of The Owl of Minerva. Hegel's Abso-
lutes have been the subject of analysis by Hegel scholars since the 1960s.
Prof. Geraets' essay occupies a conspicuous but unenviable position
in the discussion of Hegel's Absolutes, for as his title indicates,
Hegel's dialectic of Notion and Reality is being "articulated" (to use
Prof. Geraets' term) as more a question of Kantian modalities than
as determinations of Hegelian dialectics. It is not philosophy's
reality, but its "never ending process of actualization," in Prof.
Geraets' view, which allows him to abstractly counterpose what in
Hegel's Absolutes makes philosophy impossible and what constitutes
its realization.

Because it is the concrete and not the impossible which is at the
core of Hegel's Absolutes, it becomes all the more imperative to take
seriously Prof. Geraets' observation that Hegel's dialectic "mobil-
izes the efforts of each of us to comprehend our times, the new reali-
ties and new conquests of the sciences." (p.37) However, Hegel's
dialectic, taken thus seriously, cannot escape being taken as any-
thing but a dialectic of the concrete. With that in mind, this es-
say, in response to the questions raised by Prof. Geraets, will look
back at the "labor of philosophizing" of one contemporary thinker
whose practicing of the dialectic as a concrete-Universal has been
a philosophic mobilization to not only "comprehend our times" and
"the new realities," but to change them.

That the very categories which are the subject matter of Prof.
Geraets' essay have centrally intervened in the works of the Marxist-
Humanist philosopher, Raya Dunayevskaya, is not without import for
determining the direction of the renewed discussion of Hegel's Abso-
lutes. Consequently, counterposing Dunayevskaya's projection of
Hegel's Absolutes as "new beginnings" to Prof. Geraets' "articulation"
of them as either categories of the impossible or the expression of
a "process of actualization" will help to illuminate their true deter-
mination, especially their final result in Absolute Mind. The argu-
ment presented here is that though Prof. Geraets wants to grasp Hegel's
philosophy as "essentially historical and innovative, because it mo-
bilizes the efforts of each of us to comprehend our times," he, in

fact, makes such a comprehension impossible; and that Dunayevskaya's view of Hegel's Absolutes not only does disclose the historic-philosophic structure of our epoch but reveals a "new Hegel."

I.

It would appear, at first, that Prof. Geraets's essay, "The Impossibility of Philosophy...and its Realization," attempts to invoke Marx's famous admonition to the Left Hegelians that "you cannot abolish philosophy without realizing it." However, it becomes quite clear that in choosing such a provocative title to discuss the final result of Hegel's philosophy, Prof. Geraets' intention was not to invoke but to dispel any "subversive" relationship that Marx might have to Hegel's Absolutes. For immediately following his description of Hegel's ridiculing the empty abstractions of the Possible and the Impossible as found in the Kantian philosophy, Prof. Geraets resorts to the familiar, and by now unprovocative, counterposing of Hegel to "Marxists of various kinds." The incantation, "Marxists of various kinds," is for the purpose of conjuring up the ^{old} false dichotomy between Marx and Hegel that has come to be associated with Communist ideologues, especially those of the current "structuralist" variety.

Moreover, in a strict philosophic sense, there is certainly more to Hegel's treatment of possibility than what Prof. Geraets cites from the annotation to para. 143 of the Smaller Logic. What the "more" underscores is the fact that Prof. Geraets seems more confident that he has shown "the contradiction, in Hegel's own philosophy" (p. 31) than Marx ever thought he had. The truth is that Marx felt compelled at each turning point in his development to return to Hegel's philosophy in his labors to recreate the Hegelian dialectic as a philosophy of revolution for what Marx called "epochs of social revolution." Indeed, it was Hegel's discernment of the actual in the possible which led Marx to conclude that the greatest contribution of the Hegelian dialectic was that it revealed "transcendence as an objective movement." This is of the essence, for though Marx's Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 show that he did not take up the final syllogisms of Hegel's Absolute Mind, later, when we look at the manner in which Prof. Geraets does treat them, we will see that Marx's profound, critical appreciation and grasp of the Hegelian dialectic did reveal that he had caught, instinctively, its final result, even if he hadn't wanted.

Because the one contribution Prof. Geraets does make with his provocative abstraction, "impossibility," is to impel us to reconsider the relationship of Hegel's concept of actuality to his Absolutes, especially as Hegel distinguished his concept of the actual from Kant's (a distinction which Prof. Geraets disregards), we need to turn briefly to that question, before confronting Hegel's Absolutes in-and-for-themselves.

To Hegel, Kant's characterization of Actuality, Necessity and Possibility as Modalities, rather than treating them dialectically, signified that the Kantian philosophy had not shown "how null and meaningless" the abstractions possible and impossible actually are in philosophy. As against "the import of Possibility which induced Kant to regard it along with necessity and actuality as Modalities" (para. 143), Hegel argues that "it is otherwise with Actuality and Necessity."

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They are anything but a mere sort and mode for something else; in fact the very reverse of that! If they are supposed, it is as the concrete, not merely supposititious, but intrinsically complete." In further distinguishing actuality in his dialectic of the concrete from Kant's modalities, Hegel ends his annotation to para. 143 as follows:

"Whether a thing is possible or impossible, depends altogether on the subject-matter; that is, on the sum total of the elements in actuality, which, as it opens itself out, discloses itself to be necessity."

We thus see that Hegel wants to distinguish his conception of actuality in philosophy from Kant's merely phenomenological view. Why, however, does Prof. Geraets want to make a distinction between Hegel and Marx? Could Prof. Geraets have sensed in Hegel's Absolutes, especially in their final result, the beginning of the Marxian "sub-version" of the dialectic into a philosophy of revolution, as fulfilling the imperative to realize philosophy?

II.

It is necessary, at this point, to turn directly to Geraets' analysis of the Absolute Idea and Absolute Mind, not only to answer these questions, but because the Absolute Idea and the three final syllogisms of Hegel's Absolute Mind contain the final result of the dialectic.

From the start there is the problematic of Prof. Geraets's "articulation" of the Absolute Idea. First, it is not true that Absolute Knowledge is Absolute Idea, in the strict philosophic sense. At each pinnacle, whether in the Phenomenology of Mind, the Science of Logic or the Philosophy of Mind, Hegel necessarily turns thought back upon itself, in what appears to be a "remembrance of things past." In each case, this recollection/summation of the whole course produces different results or arrives at a different content. Each is, however, differentiated in-itself, and in each inheres the impulse and power to transcend, i.e., to make a new beginning.

Secondly, the moment of recollection at the climax of the dialectic would appear to follow the Platonic method of recollecting the Universal forms and ideas out of the movement of the soul. Indeed, Hegel's greatest appreciation, outside of Heraclitus, is for Plato and Aristotle (whose philosophic systems appear to correspond to Hegel's first two syllogisms in Absolute Mind). That appreciation extended to Hegel's use of Platonic terminology when referring to the "dialectic soul" which everything has.

Hegel arrives at the pinnacle of the Logic, however, wherein the whole course of thought is made to undergo a compressed recollection of the forms of the whole movement, not for the subjective reason that Hegel wants to make his philosophy the absolute end of all philosophy. (Nor) is it in order to follow Plato's method. On the contrary, it is at this point that Hegel distinguishes his method from Plato's and Kant's. Hegel's philosophic recollection is not only necessary for the "questions of method," but because his critique of the history of philosophy showed that its Absolutes became fixed as endings rather than fluid, leading to new beginnings. Though it is true that beginnings

in Hegel's dialectic are always made with the Absolute, they only become concrete (in the end) in the process.

Therefore, in order for the Absolute Idea to be, it has to "hear itself speak" and this is its realization. At the moment when the logical course of thought reaches back into-itself, through its philosophic recollection, the Idea takes on the onto-logical life of Being, i.e., it becomes a concrete Notion. There is no transition in this movement, when the Idea realizes itself, rather it "freely releases itself."

Hegel's great achievement is to have deduced the Idea from itself, i.e., the self (being) of the Idea is the movement of thought. As against Plato's immortal mythological forms and Kant's a priori thing-in-itself, Hegel makes finite historical movement the active and creative principle of the dialectic because he has discovered the infinitude of mind as the revolutionary subversion of finite reality. The French Revolution illuminated this relationship of Notion to reality for Hegel. Thus, the Absolute Idea stands as the absolute truth and only authentic standpoint because "history and its process," to borrow Marx's expression, is a ceaseless confrontation with human thought. Its significance revolves around the fact that dialectics has arrived, 2500 years after its birth in Greek thought, at the point where an absolute identity exists between theory and practice, which is at the same time an absolute opposition that entails the transcendence of transition and recollection as the determination of the Idea.

Recollection, at this point, is for the purpose of showing that the human power of thought, in Hegel's view (praxis in Marx's), has now attained the absolute ground form which to begin from itself the development of its own universals. Hegel's reconstruction of thought out of the history of philosophy, in its final result, is not only eight years away from Plato, but signalled a great divide between Hegel and his contemporaries, beginning with Kant. Thus, Hegel's is an idealism at whose pinnacle begins a "new Humanism."

As a consequence, the Absolute Idea and its comprehension becomes itself a philosophic divide in the Hegelian dialectic. The mere totalization of the Hegelian Absolutes -- Phen. of Mind, the Sc. of Log. and the Phil. of Mind -- is insufficient to disclose that divide. Rather, grasping differentiation in the Absolute Idea at the moment of its transcendence, as the "self-liberation" of mind, is the break through in thought needed to fully comprehend the syllogistic self-thinking Idea and its final result. The epochal significance of achieving that breakthrough in dialectics is set forth by Raya Dunayevskaya in her analysis of Lenin's "discovery" of the Hegelian roots of Marxian dialectics in the midst of World War I. Such a breakthrough is, in fact, Dunayevskaya's unique contribution to dialectical reason.

III.

"It is unfortunate that a man can still write today that the absolute is not man."
--Sartre, Situations

In setting the unlikely context for the discovery of the new dialectic of the capitalist-imperialist epoch, Dunayevskaya characterizes

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Lenin, its discover, as the "most militant materialist." The characterization of Lenin as a "militant materialist," at the moment of his encounter with Hegel's "idealism" accentuated the fact that even the subjectivity of the discoverer appears to be at total odds with the discovery. ^{idea to flow from} ~~that~~ ^{concrete} ~~absolute~~ encounter was stated by Lenin himself: "Intelligent idealism is nearer to intelligent materialism than is stupid materialism...Dialectical idealism instead of intelligent; metaphysical, undeveloped, dead, vulgar, static instead of stupid."

According to Dunayevskaya, the ~~absolute~~ ^{eruptive} eruption of capitalist world war and the ~~absolute~~ collapse of world Marxism was the historic ground from which a new beginning emerged, as a consequence of Lenin's return to the Hegelian "dialectic proper" in the Sc. of Log. The new beginning in the dialectic appears in Lenin's study at the point where he recognizes that "Cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it." That, however, was left undeveloped, and was not made the concrete universal of the epoch until it was worked out and projected by Dunayevskaya as a "new humanism."

Again, it appeared that Prof. Geraets had an intimation of the new humanist beginnings in Hegel's Absolutes when he referred to the "subjectivity" of the Idea being in-and-for-itself. When we come to the final syllogism and Absolute Mind it will be clear that that was not his intention: "subjectivity" is used as a substitute for Hegel's "self-thinking Idea." In other words, rather than encountering Hegel at that seemingly stratospheric level, Prof. Geraets reduces Absolute Idea to "subjectivity." That retreat from encountering Hegel on the ground of that most problematic of categories, however, diverts from the kind of absolute confrontation with the power of dialectic negativity that Dunayevskaya contends Lenin experienced (a "shock of recognition") when returned to Hegel. In other words, Hegel's dialectic demands that thought experience a breakthrough in order to grasp its final result. There is nothing quiescent in grappling with Hegel's absolute negativity, is Dunayevskaya's point.

The absolute ~~as~~ Method is the form and movement of the Notion of the subject matter. It is the soul and substance of objective reality. This, on the one hand, is the dual alienation in the Absolute Idea which Marx criticized as disclosing Hegel's uncritical positivism. On the other hand, however, it is the "active side" of materialism which Marx criticized Feuerbach and the materialists for having failed to develop. By not grasping this, Marx concludes that Feuerbach has not grasped the significance of the dialectic as "revolutionary, practical-critical activity." Ironically, Feuerbach's critique of the Hegelian dialectic was that it made philosophy "impossible", also.

The only thing, as we shall see, that would make philosophy an "impossibility" with Hegel would be if his absolutes were not grasped as new beginnings growing out of its final result, the resolution of the contradiction between the Notion and Reality. That kind of grasp entails the resolve of the (social) individual to overcome the barriers to that emergence. The subjective end, expressed in Hegel's formulation on "free mind" as "individuality which lets nothing inter-

to the ordinary sense of the word, in fact, to the...
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fere with its universalism, i.e., freedom itself," signifies that Hegel saw that overcoming in the movement for freedom. Thus, the new beginning deduced from the Absolute Idea is, in embryo, the "logic" of a new social individual. More, then, is involved in the Method of the Absolute Idea than a hermeneutical return to the beginning, or a mere recollection of the past. The intimation in the final two paragraphs of the Absolute Idea (which forms the opening syllogism of Absolute Mind) of new spheres (Nature and Mind) involves a new theoretical practice. Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach spells this out as "revolutionary, practical-critical activity."

The individual resolve to make a beginning on Hegel's new foundation, on the ground of the revolution that Hegel made in Philosophy, is the absolute manifestation of the Idea's true and final result. Upon this rests not only the sublation (absorption) of the Logic which Hegel labored to organize as a new foundation; this entails the sublation of the Hegelian system itself.

Again, the question is not whether Hegel has made philosophy impossible, but whether the world-historic "birthtime" which brought forth the recreation of the dialectic, as a dialectic of negativity, had also produced the social individual to realize, i.e., concretize the absolute-Idea of all philosophy as freedom itself. It is the nature, or rather the maturity of the age, in which a new social individual arises to work out and project the historical/logical imperative of practicing the dialectic of the epoch that makes Hegel a contemporary, according to Dunayevskaya. In other words, Hegel's dialectic is the very structure (and, as such, movement) of Reality, because the dialectic carries its own imperative to transform reality and thought. The movement, then, is from the philosophic abstraction that Marx criticized Hegel's absolutes for having enclosed the individual in, to the social individual who is the resolution of the contradiction between Notion and Reality.

IV

(A note needs to be made concerning Hegel's concept of the new, before going on to Absolute Mind and the final syllogisms. The newness of the Absolute's beginning entails the creation of a new philosophic standpoint through absorbing the old. Thus, in Hegel, the new is more than a temporal designation, it expresses the absolute ground that the logical and phenomenological beginnings that thought must labor through to arrive at its final result as an absolute beginning. -- a new beginning.)

The movement of the Notion has been cognized through the course of the Sc. of Log., it is only, however, in the Absolute Idea that it is re-cognized in-and-for-itself, in its universal activity as Absolute Method. It represents a new kind of totality, for Method becomes the means of exhibiting the self-movement of the Notion as a completed totality. That is to say, the totality of the Notion -- ~~the Notion of totality of Notions -- produces an overcoming of the end which creates a totally new means for comprehending the universal activity of the Idea.~~ This is not only what Hegel meant by philosophy "ending" with his, it is what makes his Absolute Method a path-

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way to the Absolute Idea. It is only with such an "ending" that all future philosophy becomes possible as "the spirit of its time cast in thought."

This explains not only why Hegel labored over the question, "With what must science begin?" but why he concludes in the Absolute Idea that the entire course of the Logic was to found a new beginning for thought. Thus, the doctrine of Hegel's Absolute Idea is a doctrine of new beginnings in the philosophical sciences. If the beginning of the Logic is determined by the final result of what flowed from it, the absolute as new beginning is determined by what has led up to it. There is no room for any a priori separation of ends and means because method begins from what has made it absolute, the universal activity of absolute negativity.

All of Hegel's Absolutes contain differentiation. Hegel, thus, makes two beginnings, one concrete (empirical), the other abstract (logical). The dialectic of the former is phenomenological, in that it moves from the concrete to the general with Absolute Knowledge as the final result in the Phen. of Mind; the other is ontological, and moves from an abstract universal to the concrete universal with the Absolute Idea as the final result of the Sc. of Logic. The Ency. of Phil. Sc. contains the syllogistic uniting of these two beginnings, and, as such, is the final result of the new beginning that culminates in the Logic as Absolute Idea.

For the Idea of Philosophy to return to itself on the ground of a new beginning is the self-thinking Idea which has absorbed the Logic as a principle of mind. This act of self-reflection is a logical/historical mirror which brings us back to the Absolute Idea as a social and historical principle, a new epochal imperative. Thus, the final result of the Absolute is not only a social individual but a new human society, a whole new human dimension. The social individual has absorbed Absolute Idea as the Notion/Reality dichotomy which elicits the Method for overcoming the opposition.

Finally, Hegel explains the subject's absorption of the Notion and Reality as the determination of a new social individual, who even unifies time and space in a new way:

"...the word 'have,' employed in the perfect tense, has quite peculiarly the meaning of presence; what I have seen is something-not merely that I had, but still have, something, therefore, that is present in me. In this use of the word 'have' can be seen a general sign of the inwardness of the modern mind, which makes the reflection, not merely that the past in its immediacy has passed away, but also that in mind the past is still preserved." (para. 450; zusatz)

Marx, as profoundly, formulates this as "time is the space of human development."

V

"...the greatness of the Hegelian philosophy of its final result -- the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle -- lies in the first place in the circumstances that Hegel...grasps... the collective action of man, only as a result of history."

--Marx, "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic"

Handwritten notes on the left margin: "From the Phen. of Mind", "11 over 11", "Methodological", "13/11/18".

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We now turn to Hegel's final result in the Phil. of Mind where the universality of free mind interpenetrates that of time/space in Nature. Immediately, we see that not only is the figure of the first syllogism -- Logic-Nature-Mind -- the description of the Ency. of Phil. Sc., it is the externalization of the Idea as Nature. Because the movement and determination of this syllogism is the source of the syllogistic movement, and has become problematic in its interpretation, it will be helpful to quote Hegel's view of the "dialectic of Nature." The following passage recalls Hegel's formulation on dialectics as a quadruplicity rather than a triplicity which appears in the penultimate section of the Absolute Idea, just preceding the Idea's transition to Nature.

"...the cause why that which in the rational conclusion is merely three-fold, passes in nature to the four-fold, rests in what is natural, because what is thought is immediately the one, becomes separated in Nature. But in order that in Nature the opposition should exist as opposition, it must itself be a two-fold, and thus, when we count, we have four... (W)hen we apply it to the world, we have nature as mean and the existent spirit as the way for nature: when the return is made, this is the absolute Spirit."

Nature-Mind-Logic, the second syllogism, contains the dual standpoint or is rather philosophy's transcendence of the phenomenology of mind. Thus, the sublation (absorption) of the natural standpoint of the first syllogism proceeds via thought's subordination of the phenomenological thing-in-itself in Nature to the philosophical idea of the second syllogism. Mind in the position of mediation in the second syllogism contains both the the phenomenological aspect of mind in relation to its presupposition in Nature, or materialism, and the philosophical aspect of mind in relation to Logic, or idealism. It represents the implicit break down of the syllogistic form itself.

The second syllogism contains equally the problematic of Hegel's Third Attitude to Objectivity, which is presented in the Smaller Logic for the first time, i.e., "immediate knowledge" masquerading in the phenomenal world as philosophy. Thought descends in a reactionary retrogression from the dialectic realization of the Idea to the phenomenological standpoint of the thing-in-itself sans method, i.e., to intuitionism.

Because the freedom of mind found in the first syllogism is still bound by the conditions of natural necessity, it gives rise, in the second syllogism, to two kinds of subjectivity: the subjectivity of Personality which has not superseded the phenomenological world of the thing-in-itself, and to "subjective cognition of which freedom (Freiheit) is the aim, and which philosophy is itself the way to produce it."

Hegel recognizes this splitting of Spirit (Mind) in the Phen. of Mind: "The sphere of spirit at this stage breaks up into two 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. This second world, being constructed in opposition and contrast to that estrangement is just on

that account not free from it." (p.513, Baillie) That such a reactionary and retrograde mode of thought as intuitionism should appear at the penultimate stage of the Hegelian dialectic "far from signifying any sort of 'synthesis', signals a dismemberment" of the dialectic, according to Dunayevskaya. It is what Marxists call the counter-revolution within the the revolutionary movement. If, then, the first syllogism is the source from which the movement issues, the second syllogism, as an absolute splitting in two, is most critical because it contains the greatest pitfall.

That is involved is more than a question of logical or historical development, but is rather a question of methodological comprehension. Indeed, Hegel underscores the "barbarous procedure" of intuitionism as its disdain for method. To comprehend Hegel's absolutes, not as syntheses of a static triadic form, makes imperative the need to grasp the absolute method of a new subjectivity. Hegel's transformation of the philosophies of Nature and Mind into the dialectic discernment of "the nature of the facts" and the "action of cognition" as a single movement, is reduced by intuitionism to pure subjectivism. To Dunayevskaya, "the trap that awaits all who fail to grapple with what transforms philosophy into a science, how it all emerges from actuality -- the historic process -- is that of the transformation of the personal consciousness 'into a fact of consciousness of all and even passed off for the very nature of mind.'" (Philosophy and Revolution, p.21)

The quadruplicity of moments contained in Hegel's premises, to the extent that number is applicable, is the natural, practical figure of mind. The self-determination of the Idea through which it returns to reality is through human actuality, praxis. Nevertheless, Hegel's absolutes arrive at the problematic encountered by any science, that of proof. Since the premises decide the boundary of any problem, we need to look at Hegel's premises in the final syllogisms.

The proof of absolute negativity as movement having a quadruplicity of moments is deduced from the the premise of the first syllogism. It is the moment of the Idea's exteriority as Nature. According to A.V. Miller, the original translator of the Phil. of Mind, Wallace, mistranslated the following key passage: "Nature, standing between Mind and its essence (Logic), sunders itself, not indeed to extremes of finite abstraction, nor itself to something away from them and independent." (emphasis added, LT) Miller notes that Wallace translates "sie" (them) mistakenly as "sich" (itself). Thus, Hegel's actual wording is that Nature sunders Logic and Mind. The logical presupposition of Nature thus contains the highest contradiction within itself in the form of the opposition between the theoretical and the practical idea. At the other extreme, Nature's mediated result, Mind divides itself into its phenomenological and philologic aspects. Nature, therefore, appears in this form as the Idea of transition.

In its determination (power) as transition, the Idea assumes the natural "course of necessity." It is an unelicited power, a being in-itself. Nature is the phenomenological world of transition in which negativity is a pent-up force, which first realizes itself as the law of motion. Upon this first premise, through which dialectic