

Present: All except Bob, excused.

- Agenda:
- I. Why a Special Supplement on "Why Phenomenology? Why Now?": Raya
 - II. Report on Trip to the South: Lou
 - III. Report on N&L, next two issues: Eugene
 - IV. Ongoing Activities and Follow-up: Kevin and Mike
 - V. G&W

I. Raya proposed a still-newer point of departure for N&L. She recalled the fact that when we embarked on the test of the biweekly this year we knew we would never depart from the uniqueness of Marxist-Humanism in having re-discovered the missing link in all of post-Marx Marxism -- philosophy, specifically the Hegelian-Marxian Dialectic. We therefore made it clear when we voted for the biweekly as an 8-pager that there would be at least two special 12 page issues. However, concretely we could only specify the Draft Perspectives issue. Raya now proposed that the "second" 12-pager come first and it be on Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind (Geist).

Raya then began to read the short Introductory paragraph for the special supplement by herself posing the question Why Phenomenology? Why Now? The "Now" seems contradictory only because we've been subjected to six long years of the Reagan retrogression that has been bent on turning the historic clock so abysmally backward as to reach the Depression and militarization for World War III, despite the fact that we are now living in a nuclear world which puts a question mark over the very survival of civilization.

It is true, she continued, that it never fails that at momentous world historic turning points, it is very difficult to tell the difference between two types of twilight -- whether one is first plunging into utter darkness or whether one has reached the end of a long night and is just at the moment before the dawn of a new day. In either case, the challenge to find the meaning -- what Hegel called "the undefined foreboding of something unknown"-- becomes a compulsion to dig for new beginnings, for a philosophy that would try to answer the question "Where to Begin?" This was the reason for a new revolutionary philosophy -- the birth of the Hegelian Dialectic -- at the time the great French Revolution did not produce totally new beginnings in philosophy. It caused Hegel's break with romanticism. His deep digging went, at one and the same time, backward to the origins of philosophy in Greece around 500 BC and forward as the French Revolution was followed by the Napoleonic Era trying to dominate all of Europe.

In a word, the crucible of history shows that the forces of actual revolution producing revolutions in philosophy recur at historic turning points, and thus in the 1840s, with the rise of a totally new revolutionary class -- the "wretched of the earth," the proletariat -- Marx transformed Hegel's revolution in philosophy into a philosophy of revolution. This founding of a new continent of thought and of revolution unchained the Hegelian dialectic, which Marx called "revolution in permanence."

Here, I publish a study of Hegel's first (and what Marx called his greatest) work, Phenomenology of Mind (Geist), written as Lecture Notes for classes I gave in the Phenomenology in the 1960s, as well as a letter I wrote on Hegel's concept of tragedy.

In the near future I will further expand the essay, so that it is not alone the Notes on the Phenomenology as I taught it in the 1960s, but what has occurred in the two decades since, not alone in books like P&R, but what Marxist-Humanism is developing for the 1980s. Put another way, Hegel's work of genius, the Phenomenology, which Marx critiqued in his first discovery of a totally new continent of thought and of revolution that he called a New Humanism (1844), Marx never departed

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from seeing in the negation of the negation the revolutionary critical element. This is seen, moreover, clearly in the "new moments" of his last decade, when he completed his greatest theoretical work, Capital, and proceeded to work on pre-capitalist society (what we now call the Third World), predicting that revolution could come first in those technologically backward countries, rather than the technologically advanced ones. That type of Promethean vision, from the first moment to his final moments in the 1880s in the Ethnological Notebooks and in the 1882 introduction to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, cast a beacon for our age to follow.

Great illumination comes from new moments of final decades as a Marx returns to his first philosophic journey of discovery of a revolutionary dialectic and a "new Humanism."

Inherent in all this I found an affinity between the reach made to philosophy in the last two decades of our age, so that I began writing on Marx's final decade as that which left a trail for the 1980s. This too I am further developing for Part II.

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April 21, 1987

Dear Friends,

I need hardly belabor the point, of which we are all very conscious and laboring over, that what is the most difficult of all tasks that has confronted every generation of Marxists, is to work out Marx's Marxism for its age; that has never been more difficult than the one that confronts the decade of the 1980s. We often like to quote that creatively great statement of Hegel about "the birth-time of History." What we fail to see is that the same paragraph that talks of the birth-time of history and a period of transition is likewise one that speaks about the period of darkness before the dawn, and that's what we all have to suffer through-- the darkness before the dawn. Hegel articulated both the darkness and the dawn in the very same paragraph lucidly enough. Yet, because this appears in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Mind, it looks as if it were written in anticipation of the book, whereas, in truth, the Preface was written after the whole work was completed; thus, we do not realize that the contradictory unity first became that translucent after the work was completed.

A today's Hegel scholar, George Armstrong Kelly, who took space out from his book Hegel's Retreat from Eleusis to critique my Marxist-Humanist analysis of Absolute Method as revolutionary, himself had to admit "if Hegel has not literally been to the barricades of strife-ridden cities, or explosive rural foci, he has been in the thick of current ideological combat."

In its way, this, too, will help illuminate 'Why Phenomenology? Why Now?' in the special supplement in this issue of News & Letters now going to press. I am now working on Part II; that will be published in the near future and will focus on the 1980s. Far from being any sort of "update" in the attitude of what was analyzed in the 1960s, it is expressive for the imperativeness of that missing link, philosophy, both as challenge to post-Marx Marxists and as unique contribution of Marxist-Humanism alone to Marx's Humanism...

Yours,

Raya

P.S. Perhaps I shouldn't have taken for granted, but spelled out, what actually was present in Marx's 1841 Doctoral Thesis as he developed the section on the Fetishism of Commodities in Capital. The "new moment" in what we now call the Third World emerged first in Marx as he was to embark on the path of discovery of his new continent of thought and of revolution, and it re-appeared in the last moment.

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