

June 1, 1961

Dear Jonathan:

I hope that I will receive from you before you depart for vacation abroad that chapter on China I was especially interested. Meanwhile, I felt you should know more about the context in which I intend to put in, both the political and philosophic context. I trust you have followed the additions to the British edition of my pamphlet on A.A. but actually as the Afro-Asian pamphlet was in its 1959 framework, I put sufficiently on "the China Road", to show how I mean to counter-pose the self-activity of the African revolutionaries to the administrative and actual exploitative shackles of state capitalism plus the misnamed "commune" militarized forced labor. This, expanded greatly, will be my first part of the new book on Marxist Humanism and the underdeveloped economies within, however, the struggle for world power between the US & USSR context.

Now then heretofore I concentrated on PHENOMENOLOGY in my letters to you in getting that "haughty vassal", Mao, set right as the new type of bureaucrat who has "sacrificed" for the state, and doesn't appreciate that the people equate his "absolute freedom" to anything but "absolute terror." I may have also told you that I had asked another friend of mine who was working on Viet Nam as to the allegedly backward peasants who nevertheless recognized the bureaucrat in that tender visage of Ho-chin-minh and fled south, though north was a much more likeable "anti-imperialist".

It is time to go straight to the most "abstract" part, essence, of Hegelian philosophy, "The Absolute Idea" of his SCIENCE OF LOGIC, to show how we live in the age of absolutes, and that the "subject" (Man, though he is dehumanized in Hegel as mere thought) has already absorbed all "objectivity" (science, world stage of technology, past history) and now the new society depends all his "subjectivity" (not petty-bourgeois ego, but what Hegel calls "the individual, purified of all that interferes with his universality", and Marx calls "the social individual" who, however, is the only proof of the freedom of all, so that never again are we to counterpose "society" to the "individual" since he is the social entity.")

Follow through that last chapter (Vol. II, pp. 466-486), the most exciting 20 pages in all the world's literature, philosophical or "real":

1) Hegel begins by saying that we have reached the Absolute Idea (from now I'll just refer to it as A.I.) which "has turned out to be the identity of the Theoretical and the Practical Idea" and that this can be seen in the fact that "The Notion is only Seele but also is free and subjective Notion, which is for itself and therefore has personality." (p. 466)

[Now many have stopped here and therefore I must warn you against that word "personality", so popular a word now both with African leaders and De Gaulle. In that very same paragraph, nay, sentence, Hegel goes on to explain that this personality "is not exclusive individuality, but is, for itself, universality and cognition, and in its Other has its own objectivity for object." The key word is "Other". It will turn out to be "its own Other" for otherwise we would once again be confronted with a subject and its "other" (or opposite) as object whereas the whole of the Logic depends on doing away with the opposition of subject and object, and the greatness of Hegel is that, although he worked only with thought, he got that "other" worked out not as a "have"

12813

a possession, an object, but as an "is", that is a dimension of the human being. Until we do reach that point, and we still have 19 pp. to go, the "personality" is not much higher than Fichte's Absolute Ego. The key word, "Other", then will turn out to be the universality of the individual and until that moment we are barely on the threshold of the new society (that is what Absolute Idea is, you know).

Next he equates Logic to "the self-movement of the Absolute Idea... The self-determination therefore in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak." (p.457)

The identity of history with logic so that the whole of the development has merely been the unfoldment of this Absolute sounded as the pinnacle of idealism in the 19th century. Indeed, were it not for the fact that Marx turned Hegel right side up and we could see that it wasn't "God" who "posited" himself on earth and the freedom of man came as a consequence, but, vice versa, that the struggles of man for freedom changing with each method of production to be on a higher level, finally created the material foundations for total freedom and a new society via the class struggle, (those two absolute opposites (labor and capital) that thus get resolved through abolition of the one)--until Marx, in a word, Hegel couldn't tear himself out of theology, despite the fact that in his philosophy Religion takes a back seat to Philosophy.

By the beginning of the 20th century "Self-Determination" became much more famous as self-determination of people, rather than ideas. But this shouldn't mean, either that action "takes the place of" ideas, or that anything less than the unity of theory and practice can "evolve into" a new society. If all we'll hear is Castro's voice, and not the people speaking, we do not get either the self-determination of the Cubans as people or the Cubans as thinkers who have finally overcome that most monstrous fact of alienated labor that Marx showed got its apogee in the division between mental and manual labor.

It is because thought is so close to life that Hegel could, in isolating thought but carrying its development through to its logic conclusion, come to the conclusion that it is all a question of method. The Second International was fast on the trigger, and tried to isolate method as a tool that could be "used" by anyone, and therefore could never create or, more precisely, have the proletariat create a dialectic of its own, but retreated to Kautskism and "men of good will" solving contradictions --and ended by sending worker to shoot worker across battle lines drawn up by their bourgeoisie. Hegel here stresses that because logic is self-movement, that therefore "the logical Idea has itself as infinite form for content." In a word, you cannot abolish difference between content and form unless this self-activity is its content. Only then, does content "as such" vanish and "the universal element of its form" is "the method" (p.467.)

And only then can Hegel draw the conclusion: "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 method; it is the peculiar method of each individual fact because its activity is the Notion." (p.468)

Activity, self-activity; determination, self-determination; movement, self-movement; method that is movement, source and action, thought and practice thus becomes Absolute Method, not in heaven, but among the earth people struggling for total freedom.

Now let's break this Absolute Method down to see how it is subject, method, and object, and not a mere tool "to be used". Hegel says that, while we "must begin from the beginning," (p.469) the beginning is nothing as simple as is usually imagined for it must be both simple and universal, and not just "abstract universality" but be "concrete universal," "that is, that which in itself the concrete totality, but not as posited or for itself" (p.472) for "It is the Absolute only in its completion." (p.473)

To reach completion we therefore begin with an immediate that has been mediated but still is one-sided. You can call it first negation or analytic but you know that to be objectively universal it must also be synthetic. It is in the unity of the two moments that we will reach the "dialectic moment", and it is here too, that we will first meet "Other" as "its own Other", thus:

"This equally synthetic and analytic moment of the Judgment, by which the original universal determines itself out of itself to be its own Other may rightly be called the dialectic moment." (p.473)

It is at this point that Lenin, you will recall from the Philosophic Notebooks at end of M&F, bursts into the definition of dialectic, singling out no less than 16 elements--objectivity, manifold relations, development, tendencies, unity of opposites, struggles (including contradictions and impulses), unity of synthesis and analysis, summation, totality, the singular and the universal, each and the whole, transitions, new sides, deepening appearance and essence, causality and universality, content and form, negation of negation, only to sum up the whole at end as "simply" "doctrine of opposites"---

When something is as rich as the dialectic, it is indeed hard to define it as any one thing, or as 16 things, because for each age it is different, that is to say, it is all the things and more, but the one element that gets singled out as having gained by contact with the present can only be proven in life. Hegel himself, for example, to stress the primacy of Thought singles out its unity with Being: "The object in its existence without thought and Notion, is an image or a name; it is what it is in the determinations of thought and Notion."

For Marx it was his 3 volumes of CAPITAL plus the Paris Commune. For Lenin it was "the transformation of opposite" of both capital (into monopoly or imperialism) and labor (into aristocracy of labor) which finally however got resolved ("negation of negation") in the Soviet, or Russian Revolution plus "State and Revolution". For our age it is the unity of theory and practice, or the answer to the question of "what happens after", plus "the subjectivity that has objectivity in it." So let's get to that stage:

First here we will have to watch the second negation; all the difference between revolutionaries and compromisers, which means those who retrogress in the end to the old, not forward to the new, lies in the distinction between first and second negation, that is to say, it is not just the abolition of the old, or the revolution, but the transcendence to what Marx (pp.319-320, M&F) called "positive Humanism, beginning from itself", not stalling at the 1st negation, or transcendence, such as communism, or atheism, for "Only by the transcendence of this mediation, which is nevertheless a necessary supposition, does there arise positive Humanism from itself." And why Marx insisted (p.303) that "communism, as such, is not the goal of human development, the form of human society."

negation

O.K. let's get to that second ~~statement~~ as Hegel sums it up: "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." (p.477)

We have reached the point in the A.I. which no other age could quite see in all its concreteness as we do when we look at the African Revolutions that have truly nought of "material foundation" and yet are so far advanced as to fight for freedom without a single look backward, and while Mao's China's shortcuts may entice their leaders, it certainly doesn't them who know that abolition of opposition of Notion and Reality does in truth rest upon them alone, and because it does "rest upon this subjectivity alone" little Guinea dared say "No" to empire-builder DeGaulle.

Another reason that only our age can see is that no one previously, not even Lenin, could think of stopping to emphasize this passage and its paeon to "personal and free"; "The second negativity... 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." (p.478) And again: "The beginning was the universal; the result is the individual, the concrete, and the subject; what the former is in itself, the later now is equally for itself." (p.479)

Nor is there any longer a difference between inner and outer: "Each new stage of exteriorization (that is, of further determination) is also an interiorization, and greater extension is also higher intensity." (p.483)

Finally, since "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" (read: another society), THEREFORE transition is no longer "a perfected becoming" but "is an absolute liberation... Consequently there is no transition in this freedom." (p.485)

All the rest of that last paragraph sings of freedom as RELEASE ("the Idea freely releases itself" (p.486), and "By reason of this freedom the form of its determinateness is utterly free—the externality of space and time which is absolutely for itself and without subjectivity." Because having absorbed objectivity it no longer exists "as mere objectivity", but "arises to perfect its self-liberation in the Philosophy of Spirit". (p.486)

It is most important, for our age, to understand why, instead of going on with the paragraph on liberation, Lenin had stopped at the very first sentence in it, which read: "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) Lenin disregards the rest of the paragraph, stressing that the "Smaller Logic" indeed ends with this sentence, and then remarks "Stretches a hand to materialism." Further: "It is remarkable: in the whole chapter on "The Absolute Idea" there is almost not a single word on God (scarcely a 'godly notion' slips out even accidentally) and moreover--this NB--the chapter almost

does not contain idealism specifically, but its main object is the dialectic method. The sum and summation, the last word and gist of the Logic of Hegel is the dialectic method--that is extremely remarkable. And another thing: in the most idealistic work of Hegel there is most materialism. 'Contradictory' but a fact!"

That is true, but it is not the whole truth, or, to be precise, it is not the whole truth for our epoch. We needn't prove the materialism of Hegel but rather the idealism (materialistic idealism, but idealism nevertheless) of Marx which has been so perverted by the Stalins, Maos and Khrushchevs. When the "what happens after" revolution's success has become that monstrous opposite, state capitalism, it is "freedom," the "release," "the personal and free", the truth which rests upon "subjectivity alone" that comes to the forefront, and all else are but first negation which must again be transcended and "only by transcendence of this does there arise positive Humanism, beginning from itself". Our task is to concretize this, just this Marxist Humanism.

Jonathan, I trust, this will help sharpen up the points of Mao's China as no solution whatever either for itself or for the road on which Africa must embark.

Do you think you can find time to make copies of this letter for me? I would like to use it as basis for my actual writing of that chapter on the Absolute Idea in my book. If you cannot, then please share this copy with Dick. O, yes, I asked Allen please to show you a letter I wrote him so that you can copy of the names of some of my friends in England I want him (and you) to meet.

Yours,

Ray

12817