

COPY (10/30)

October 16, 1960

Dear HM:

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I hope I may intrude upon you with some on the Absolute Idea. You may find it useful even for your present purposes since you are dealing with sociology and technology and Nikolai Bukarin is the father, though I doubt he would like that strange progeny of Mills, Rossiter, Mallet, of all menahenists, and these are my "enemies" as I proceed to work out the philosophic foundations (the Hegelian-Absolute Idea and Marx's Humanism for the present day struggles for freedom in the underdeveloped economies, a sort of counterpart to MARXISM AND FREEDOM which limited itself to the present-day descent from ontology to technology, it should help to sharpen up the edges.

At once I must make so bold with historic background as to include both the African and Hungarian Revolutions, even as, suddenly, without anyone bothering to explain why, Latin America too is included among "backward countries," although their populations are not African but of European stock, nor do they lack either an "educated class" or railroads or aeroplanes through "jungle country." The one element of truth in the designation of "backward" pertains to the economy but since I take man, not the "economy as such," as subject, I would like at once to make clear what is the "thesis" I use from Hegel's final chapter. It is to be found on p. 467: "The self-determination therefore in which alone the Idea is, is to hear itself speak." The self-determinations of people are, surely, no less important than the self-determination of the Idea, is no accident that Nagy, the Petofi intelligentsia, and the Hungarian Workers Councils all fought its ideological battles by unfolding Marxist Humanism and this same discovery appears in Senegal where Leopold Senghor, for all his apologia for De Gaulle, unfolds the same banner. (I do not recall whether I sent you my review of Senghor's "African Socialism," but I'll find a ~~copy~~ copy somewhere and send it to you.)

Now, in detail, to the unfoldment of the Absolute Idea in Hegel's Logic, all the way glancing at which point in it, at the various historic stages in the development of the Marxist movement, the Marxists "got caught." The significance of that first paragraph on p. 466, for Lenin at end of 1914, was that the unity of the theoretic practical idea applied not so much in action as "precisely in the theory of knowledge..." You may recall that just 5 pages before he reached that chapter, where Hegel dealt with "The Idea of the Good," Lenin stressed the actuality of the Idea and "non-actuality of the world" by writing: "Alas. Man's cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it." But Lenin did not develop precisely that aspect, as we shall see, when we reach the end of the chapter.

That same first paragraph of the A.I. contains the stopping point of today's African intelligentsia. If you are versed in their constant reiteration of the "African personality," you will recognize them easily enough in Hegel: "The Notion is not only Seele but also is free and subjective Notion, which is for itself and therefore has not exclusive individuality, but is, for itself, universality and cognition, and in its Other has its own objectivity for object." Without that personality too would only be "error and gloom, opinion, striving, caprice, and transitoriness..."

All the Marxists of the 2nd International, (Lenin up to 1914 included) at very best stopped on p. 467 (if even we give them credit that is of having grappled with Hegel himself instead of some tertiary summary

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of him) when Hegel speaks of "the universal element of its form--that is the method." As to vulgarization of that "method" surely had not only the Cynics and Sphists in mind a few pages hence (p. 473) he says the dialectic "was often quite neglected by those who were fullest of him in their speech. The Second International not merely neglected the dialectic, but perverted it into a sort of polish for their organic Kantianism.

Because all Marxists, not including Marx himself, do like to stress method rather than AI, thus pinpointing the putting of Hegel right side up, it is necessary to linger a bit here. Although he stresses (p.468) that "nothing is either conceived or known in its truth except in so far as it is completely subject to the method," he separates himself at once from those who would degrade method to a tool, as analysts do: "In inquiring cognition the method is likewise in the position of a tool, of a means which stands on the subjective side, whereby the method relates itself to the object. In this syllogism the subject is one extreme and the object the other...The extremes remain distinct because, subject, method, and object are not posited as the one identical Notion..." (p.469)

In contrast, therefore, Hegel proceeds to define method for true cognition: "it is the fact that the Notion is determined in and for itself and is the mean only because it equally has the significance of objective..." (p.469) The transition here is to get back to the determination of the method. "First we must begin from the beginning..." and the beginning, Hegel informs us to the consternation of philosopher and engineer alike, "must be inherently defective and must be endowed with the impulse of self-development."

The self-determination of the IREX Idea, as that of peoples, far from being worlds apart, cannot be seen in their fullness, "in and for itself" apart from each other. It is in this respect that I just get fed up with Marxists who keep harping on "method" as if it meant opposition to A.I., or, better put, want "to throw out God and the Absolute Idea" so that Idea (ideas) too is buried. In "Historical Materialism," for example, Bukarin speaks of "society" as if indeed it was matter, dead matter. Perhaps I better follow the way of Hegel in this too and refuse to have anything to do with vulgarizers. His admonition that the vulgar refutation "is left to itself" (p. 474) reminded me of the Ghost of Hamlet's father telling him all about the corruption of the court, the murder and the vengeance he should seek, nevertheless admonishes him against taking action against one of the conspirators, his mother: "Leave her to heaven." If only we had some "heaven"...

What is important, says Hegel, is the source of the "prejudice" against the dialectic, i.e., that it seems to have only negative results; and therefore what is of the essence is "To hold fast the positive in its negative, and the content of the presupposition in the result, is the most important part of rational cognition." (p.476.) It is here, where he deals with the second negative, or mediated determination, the negative "of the positive, and includes the latter," where Hegel stresses the subjective "for the transcendence of the opposition between Notion and Reality and that unity which is the truth, rest upon subjectivity alone."

We are entering the whole section where even the Lenin of post 1914 found "not clear" and I believe that the fact that we live in 1960, not in 1914, and the fact that we witness both the advanced proletariat's battles with automation as well as the colonial freedom struggles, can help us break it down. I am not underestimating Lenin's conception of "the positive in the negative." One who led 1917 needs no minor League defences.

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Long before he read Hegel on subjectivity, Lenin saw "Masses as Reason." But if he saw that truth as long back as 1905, and was preparing to repeat that on a much grander historical scale, why then did this turning point of the movement of the Notion appear obscure to Lenin?

Hegel, on his part, hit out against the whole triplicity construction of the dialectic here, saying "If number is applicable, then the whole course of this second immediate is the third term... now, since the former (the first negative) is itself the second term, the third term may now be counted as fourth, and the abstract form of it may be taken as a quadruplicity in place of triplicity...." (p. 478) Lenin's note here: "The distinction is not clear to me; is not the absolute equivalent ~~is~~ to the more concrete?"

Yes and no, says Hegel, as I read him. It is concrete but it is equally subject: "The beginning was the universal, the result is the individual, the concrete and the subject." It is subject he had in mind as soon as he had reached the turning point in the movement of the motion, ~~but~~ stressing that "transcendence of opposition between Notion and Reality, and that unity which is truth, rest upon this subjectivity alone." He first stressed that transcendence of contradiction which "is the innermost and most objective moment of Life and Spirit by ~~its~~ virtue of which a subject is personal and free." And as Hegel moves to the climactic, after method is extended to system, ~~and even though you must enter other spheres--Nature and Mind--he cannot refrain from saying that we have ended with transitions, have entered "absolute liberation" (p. 485) "The transition here therefore must rather be taken to mean that the Idea freely releases itself in form of its determinate is utterly free...the Notion arises as free existence that out of externality has passed into itself; arises to perfect its self-liberation..." (p. 486)~~

Now all this "personal and free" "individual," "liberation," "release," "utterly free," "self-liberation" cannot possibly mean only the philosopher finding his absolute, as he shows in the Philosophy of Mind when his own mind wanders to the struggles against slavery. (Nor do I feel like fighting with Hegel over whether Christianity or actuality brought freedom of man into the world; the Old Man was great enough & even if he did reside in ivory towers, they were awfully crowded ones--so much so that today's freedom fighters in Africa find room there too.)

In all unfairness to Lenin, I must here jump to Khrushchev and his state philosophers who are supposed to have, according to Wetter and Klein and all the specialists in "Soviet Survey," "reconstituted" the law of the negation of the negation, "which had been thrown out as a feature of the dialectic" by Stalin. No doubt it is true that "negation of negation" was too close for comfort to a totalitarian society--for Khrushchev as much as for Stalin, ~~however~~ however. What is of more specific note is that Soviet science, in Stalin's time, had not yet achieved that break-through that it had need of that law to justify "acceptance of theory of relativity and rejection of idealistic interpretation in Bohr." With missile thrust and automated production achieved, they have need of the law for the natural sciences as they practice them.

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Science is not my fort, and in any case, subjectivity is not for the vulgarly materialistic. The self-developing "subject"--the proletariat--not just negation of negation "in general" is the enemy, and when Karpushin asked that the Early Essays of Marx be once again included in the Complete Works of Marx, it was not to re-establish the law of the negation of negation, but to attack, pervert, destroy if he can Marxist Humanism where Man, not Absolute Idea, became the subject of all humanity's development and the dehumanization of Ideas be once and for all stopped when even so great a philosopher as Hegel must perforce return to positivism.

Now then to return to Lenin--the jump to Khrushchev's Russia was only to show what can happen to a non-worked-out aspect of dialectics--Hegel made him see all the leaps where there was gradualness, all the self-movement where there was external reflection of the "International" or established socialist party the value of a theory of knowledge that has within it "all the world-connections", the motive force in the ideal as well as the real, but the individual, the "personal and free", how could that arise as concrete until after 1917 did not bring a new world social order? Something has to be left for our age, no?

In any case, where Bukharin remained in Teleology, Lenin passed on as saw Hegel laying the premises for historical ~~negation~~ the transformation of the subjectivity of purpose end to external object was only first negation, opposition of subjective negation takes place ~~through~~ the means, while second first and second negation, indeed, resides the relation between vulgar and dialectical materialism, for the vulgar materialist never gets beyond opposition of subjective end to external object. But the materialist in Lenin so overwhelmed him at this point of historic revelation that, you will recall, he wanted to stop where "Hegel stretched his hand to materialism" as he "ended" with Nature. Since that was so in the Smaller Logic, but there was another very important paragraph to go in the Science of Logic, the dividing point for our epoch is precisely on this free, individual, total liberation who show, both in thought and struggles, what they are aiming us and thus compelling me in any case to read and reread that Absolute Knowledge, Absolute Idea, Absolute Mind as each developing struggle on the world scene deepens.

I'll stop at this point and tell you that if you are interested and wish to comment on this, I'll continue to forward various thoughts-in-process as I work on my new book--and am just "dying" to go to Africa.

Yours,

Rayak

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