

Feb. 2, 1961

Dear Ras:

The letters make so much more sense to me after rereading them several times that I'm not too discouraged at getting bogged down in the "Notes" which I'm sure require just MUCH MUCH more reading and study.

What got me excited was that I thought I had finally understood a little of the new emphasis on "subjectivity." I kept remembering that in the discussion after your first lecture of the series that you had said that we had to stop being afraid of the word. I think my first trouble was simply not understanding the Hegelian word and getting it confused with the psychologist's term. In other words, when Hegel speaks of subjectivity, he means as related to his "Subject." To me this is objective subjectivity (if there is such a thing). Subjectivity meaning human beings actively doing something. The subjectivity which we think of as "bad" is the individual who begins with himself and determines everything else from that narrow vantage point. The subjectivity which is the "objective" kind (to me) is the human being beginning with the world and finding his unique and precious relationship both to it and to himself from that both broad and deep vantage point.

If that is true, then it makes a big difference whether you understand "Universal, Particular and Individual" as beginning with the Universal and ending with the individual -- or whether you begin upside down with the Individual and try to derive your Universal from that. The existentialists seem to me to do precisely this latter. They are "subjective" in this "bad" sense -- and arrogantly so. But there are those who are "subjective" in the opposite degree -- from too much false humility. Starting with themselves, or what they think they are, they see only their "limitations" -- instead of starting with the world they were born into, and seeing what are their responsibilities.

This is the organizational importance I think of getting rid of the subjective subjectivity and grasping the objective Hegelian subjectivity.

What puzzled me for a long time was your statement that Lenin, even though he saw "masses as Reason" as far back as 1905, and led 1917, could not see (i.e. develop) this section in Hegel which stressed the subjective. Lenin's "to a man" seemed at first to me to be the ultimate in grasping "self-developing" Subject. After rereading and jumping from one letter to another I wonder if this is it:

When Lenin spoke of "to a man" he meant every man must take his part in managing production and managing the state as well. But he still kept the Philosophic Notebooks to himself. Today it is not only insufficient, but the masses will not allow themselves to be limited to even that, grand as it is as a vision and still unattained anywhere as it is. XXX While Leopold Senghor cannot shine Lenin's shoes I imagine in many, many, many ways -- Senghor just because he is in Africa in 1960 must speak to his political party about philosophy, in a way Lenin in 1914 or 1917 might speak only to himself.

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As I see it this was still a sort of division between theory and practice. It was unified in Lenin, but not in the Russian masses.

But since the Foreword to the Philosophic Notebooks, written in November 1955, just about said all that ("where Lenin, in 1915, could keep his philosophic discoveries in private notebooks, we could not do so in the 1950's ... Our age has so matured that we must begin with the workers themselves participating in the working out of the philosophic, that is to say, total outlook.") what is new in the way you are saying it now? What is new in your statement that "the individual, the 'personal and free' could not arise as concrete until after 1917 did not bring a new world social order." (your letter to HM Oct. 16).

I feel that what is new is your emphasis on the word "could not arise as concrete". In other words, as early as 1953 and your letters to Hauser you had this stopping point of Lenin's. I could hardly believe that date when I read those letters again! But it was just theoretical. It wasn't until even way after the first TW on African Revolution 2 years ago that you knew that Humanism had been raised concretely, as a fact, in both Hungary and in Africa. So that the difference by now, 1960-61, is that whereas you could write in that Foreword to the Notebooks in 1955 "That is the reason the recent series of lectures have been undertaken before the writing of the book..." and that "It is high time to abolish the division between the 'theoretical leaders' and the 'rank and file' as well as between 'the inside' and 'the outside'" your concreteness then was in relation to the writing of the book and to our organization. But now the concreteness envelopes the whole world, and is not theory, but fact.

If any of this make sense so far, it may be that I even got a glimmer of light from that section in your letter to HM of Oct. 16 on triplicity and quadriplecity, although I must say I certainly sympathized with Lenin when he said, "The distinction is not clear to me." In 1957 ~~XXXXXX~~ you gave a lecture to Detroit local on the Hegel chapter of M&F and in W. Va. I transcribed the tape of it. I reread it last night and found you spent a good deal of time on ~~XXX~~ the fact that you felt the Phenomenology superior to the Science of Logic because in Phenomenology he had four divisions and in Science of Logic had only thesis antithesis and synthesis. (I don't think you still feel this way, but what interested me was your emphasis on how important the 4th was.) What I wonder right now is whether what is involved in the fact that Lenin did not see the distinction is that he could not see that the workers making the revolution was not the same thing as the workers successfully constructing the new society. And that the absolute (the new society) was NOT just the workers making the revolution more concrete, but workers themselves becoming something quite new -- not only "to a man" but each man a unity of theory and practice. And that it was the failure here that accounted for the subsequent failure of 1917 to bring a new world social order. Thus it was important that Lenin thought Hegel ended extending his hand to "nature (practice, materialism), and did not see the importance that after that Hegel continued and went back to Mind again.

The net result of all this "wandering" on my part, however, was what it means to us organizationally, at this stage when we are all supposed to be concentrating in building the organization -- membership-wise. I hope that is not degrading the level of the discussion. I don't think it is. Because I suddenly see this new book as a "recruiting" weapon in a way I did NOT see M&F. What I mean is this: the whole emphasis on "subjectivity" to me places an equal emphasis on the importance of the responsibility of each individual in the world to take his stand, to fill his own shoes, etc. You say that you will not as in M&F blast out only against Russia, but must strike out at all the intelligentsia, with naming of names, (in your letter to Saul of Oct. 17). In that same letter one of the most exciting paragraphs to me was the one where you showed how we must project ourselves into all fields, including science, "because the unity of man's struggles for freedom and the "unified field theory" and the leaving of this earth for outer space unfolds a truly divine becoming of man -- provided he does not annihilate himself in a nuclear holocaust."

To me that put it more sharply than ever before. Certainly more sharply than in M&F where the theoretician was challenged to meet in theory the practice and movement to theory on the part of the "freedom fighters" everywhere. I rather feel that the new book will spell out that "challenge" much more concretely to the intellectuals. Even much more organizationally.

(That is the sense I mean "recruiter" to have. We expected the world to read M&F and bang on our doors to join us, without too much further work on our parts. I don't think we will be lulled into any get-rich-quick dreams like that again.)

It is not just the exciting vision of the "divine becoming of man" (whatever that means to others, to me it means such new dimensions to each and every human being that we won't recognize him at all) but the fact that it is not automatic -- that it won't just come -- in fact if it doesn't come what WILL come is our complete annihilation. There's where the "enormity of the responsibility" comes in for me.

That is why I see this new book as being not only the counterpart to M&F for the underdeveloped countries, but the logical, necessary development of M&F which had in embryonic form -- from the quotes in the frontispiece to the warning of "arx that the individual IS the social entity" to the chapter on Lenin and his "to a man" to the last line "The totality of the crisis demands, and will create, a total solution. It can be nothing short of a New Humanism" -- every element that you can now develop not alone from theory but from life itself.

I hope something of this makes a little sense -- because I was excited at the idea that something had sunk in. And floored at the idea of how much more there is to read, re-read and re-read again. It is hard to even comprehend how much reading and rereading on your part went into the letters which have summarized all this and translated the works and made Hegel "easier to understand." !!