



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Marx's Critique of Hegel as Part of the Effort to Escape from Metaphysics

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ABSTRACT

Nietzsche and Marx each criticized Hegel from an allegedly post-metaphysical perspective as part of the effort to “escape” from metaphysics. This study settles on Marx, and considers answering the following questions about his thought: is it possible to “escape” from metaphysics in a way he suggests? Are his criticisms of Hegel persuasive? What is at stake in his critique of Hegel?

Keywords: Hegel; Marx; Metaphysics; Capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

In the *Economic and Philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote that the outstanding achievement of Hegel's Phenomenology is primarily that Hegel grasps the self-creation of man as a process and that he, therefore, grasp the nature of labor and conceives of objective man (true, because real man) as a result of his *own labor* (Marx & Engels 1988). The idea of human nature as an artifact is apt to seem puzzling especially when detached from the great drama of the spirit, which the idealist philosophy had presented. As early as 1844 Marx, following Feuerbach attempted to avoid philosophy. The central aims of his thought from this period remain the same right through the *German Ideology*, the text often regarded as the canonical source of Marx's and Marxist's materialism. There had been a growing body of scholarship that cleaves Marx's thought into two; a younger Marx, whose thought is philosophical, a Young Hegelian, and a mature, older Marx who walks away from and despising Philosophy. This study will defend the position that there isn't exactly an early Marx and a late Marx. That there is no *Materialist* Marx, and there is no Marx that ascribes to a

Metaphysical view—even in the *German Ideology*. Rather what we find in all of Marx's Texts stemming from this period, amounting critique of the *status quo*, the *present*, while altogether avoiding the dilemmas central to philosophy in the modern era. The overriding core of all of Marx's thoughts appears to be the exposure and the dismantling of the process of the formation of false ideas.

HEGEL AND THE QUESTION OF METAPHYSICS

Hegel had, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, spoken in terms of the necessary development of spirit towards the idea. While it is true that this *Spirit*, [*Geist*] and this *Idea* were abstract things, and not to be confused with any individual consciousness, I think that it is impossible to conceive them in other than spiritual terms. Marx's thought is grappling with the attempt to overcome the intellectual difficulties that stand in the way of expressing Hegel's vision materialistically. This is evidenced later in Marx's philosophy being called dialectical materialism. It was Feuerbach however who first indicated for Marx, the way out of this conundrum. In the choice of the path taken, both Feuerbach and hence Marx take an aspect, an element, a *moment* of Hegel's total and comprehensive system and dwelt on it. It had been said of Hegel that his system is so comprehensive, so total and encompassing web that whatever road one takes away from Hegel, at the end of *your* journey, you find Hegel already there waiting.

It would appear that Feuerbach; and therefore Marx took aspects, unconnected moments of Hegel's thought and pushed these in different directions, loading them with static meanings other than Hegel had given them. For instance, for Marx, the entire movement of history is, therefore, both its actual act of genesis (the birth act of its empirical existence) and also for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its coming-to-be (Marx & Engels 1988). What Marx says of Primitive communism, he practices in his critique of Hegel that it 'seeks a historical proof for itself—a proof in the realm of the existent—among disconnected historical phenomena....tearing single phases from the historical process and focusing attention on them as proofs of its historical pedigree ...so that the process contradicts its claims (Marx & Engels 2009). The forming of the five senses is a labor of humanized nature. "The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present" (Read 2004, p. 74).

The logical 'movement which the phenomenology like the rest of the system exhibits, is throughout the logic of the 'side' or 'aspect' or 'moment', of that, which, while it can be legitimately distinguished in some unity, and must, in fact, be so distinguished, nevertheless represent something incapable of self-sufficiency and independence, properties which can only be attributed to the whole into which side, aspect, moment, enter, and a reference to which is accordingly 'built into' each such side (Findlay & Miller 1977). According to Marx, "Feuerbach, both in his *Theses*, in the *Anecdotes* and, in detail in *the Philosophy of the Future*, has...overthrown the old dialectic and philosophy" (Marx & Engels 1988, p. 143). "Feuerbach is the only one who has a serious, critical attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who made genuine discoveries in this field. He is...the true conqueror of the old philosophy" Marx & Engels 1988, p. 144). Sense-perception must be the basis of all science. On Hegel's basic assumptions,

however, Negation, in a wide sense that covers the difference, opposition, and reflection or relation, is essential to conception and being: we can conceive nothing and have nothing if we attempt to dispense with it. But negation in this sense always operates within a unity, which is not as such divisible into self-sufficient elements but is totally present in it and all of its aspects and we conceived nothing and have nothing if we attempt to dispense with this unity. This unity is in a sense of the former or primary negation: it changes what in a sense *tried* to be an independent element into a mere aspect or moment....the distinctions are still there, but only as moments and no longer as independent elements (Hegel 2007).

After the death of Hegel, his doctrine did not die, but like that of Jesus of Nazareth, splintered. And each splintered group of disciples took a life of its own often in mortal conflict with the other like the heretical sects of old, parodying truncated versions of the Master's thought. The Hegelian school was in this case for the most part split into the *right* and the *left-wing* Hegelians, often termed the *Old* and the *Young* Hegelian. The Old Hegelians stood guard to defend the thought of Hegel as he left it. They were more orthodox, as they tried to theologize Hegel. The young Hegelians on the other hand including figures like Strauss, Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach was out to change reality and the *status quo*. At the beginning of Hegel's introduction to *Philosophy of Rights* (Hegel 1991), while introducing the subject matter of the *philosophical science of rights* and the actualization of that concept, Hegel has this to say about philosophy: that it has to do with *Ideas*, therefore not with what is commonly dubbed 'mere concept.' On the contrary, it exposes such concepts as one-sided and false, while showing at the same time that it is a concept alone (not the mere abstract category of the understanding which we often hear called by the name) which has actuality, and further that it gives this actuality to itself. All else apart from this actuality establishes through the working of the concept itself, is an ephemeral existence, external contingency, opinion, unsubstantial appearance, falsity, illusion and so forth. The shape which the concept assumes in the course of its actualization is indispensable for the knowledge of the concept itself. They are the second essential moment of the *Idea* in distinction from the first, i.e. from its form, from its mode of being as a concept alone (Schmidt 2013). In the footnote to this paragraph, Hegel explains that the concept and its objective existence are two sides of the same thing, distinct and united like the soul and body. Hence the determinate existence of the concept is its body. The unity of determinate existence and the concept is the *Idea*. The unity is not a mere harmony but rather a complete interpenetration. Nothing is alive which is not in some way or other *Idea*. The *idea* of right is *freedom* and if it is to be truly understood, it must be known both in its *concept* and in the determinate existence of that concept (Hegel 1999).

In paragraph two of the introduction, he says the truth is that in philosophical knowledge the necessity of a concept is the principal thing and the process of its production as result is its proof and deduction (Hegel 1999). While the rupture of the Hegelian school was originally theological in origin, there was also a far-ranging political and philosophical character to it. The split did turn on a phrase of Hegel's: *the real is rational and the rational is real* (Hegel 1999). This statement is further explained and defended in the encyclopedia § 6. Note that Hegel is not saying that what exists or is

'real' is rational. Rather by 'actuality', he means the synthesis of essence and existence. On this conviction, Hegel says that the plain man like the philosopher takes his stand, and from it, philosophy starts in its study of the universe of mind as well as the universe of nature. If reflection, feeling, or whatever form subjective consciousness may take, looks upon the present as something vacuous and looks beyond it with the eye of superior wisdom, it finds itself in a vacuum and because it actually only in the present, it itself mere vacuity. If on the other hand, the idea passes for 'only an idea' for something represented in an opinion philosophy rejects such a view and shows that nothing is actual except the idea. One that is granted, the great thing is to apprehend in the show of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present. For since rationality (which is synonymous with the *Idea*) enters upon external existence simultaneously with its actualization, emerges with an infinite wealth of forms, shape, and appearances. Around its heart, it throws a motley covering with which consciousness is at home to begin with, a covering which the concept has first to penetrate before it can find the inward pulse and fill it still beaten in the outward appearances. But the infinite variety of circumstance which is developed in this externality by the light of the essence glinting in it—this endless material and its organization—this is not the subject matter of philosophy. To touch this at all would be to meddle with things to which philosophy is unsuited; on such topics it may save itself the trouble of giving good advice (Hegel 1999).

The Hegelian *right* preoccupied themselves with the *real* world as it is, while the *left* rejected it in favor of a better world that they *ought* to transform the current one into. Hence Marx's last *theses* on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Balibar 2017, p. 17). Marx sees this change as rooted in an inversion, a righting of Hegel, putting him on his feet. In Feuerbach's writings, especially *The Essence of Christianity* (2004), Feuerbach inverted the usual understanding of the relation between God and human beings. Marx's righting of Hegel is possible through Feuerbach's inversion of the relation between God and Man. According to Marx, Feuerbach founded genuine materialism and positive science by making the special relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of his theory. Feuerbach had called this special relationship the *species life* (Essence of Christianity) the only man has *species life*, since the only man finds his nature through the recognition of himself as a social, and therefore determined, being. It is this species life that aided in the creation of the materialist version of Hegel's philosophy. In Hegel's words, 'along such tracks,' as 'Plato's recommendation' in *The Laws* (not quite an accurate citation by Hegel since Plato regards it as ridiculous) to 'nurses to keep on the move with infants and to rock them continually in their arms', and Fichte's 'construction' of his passport regulations, 'all trace of philosophy is lost (Schofield 2016). 'Arguably, Hegel's philosophy as a whole might be regarded as an attempt to justify his identification of reality with actuality and vice versa, but his doctrine depends ultimately on his faith in God's providence, his conviction that history is the working out of his rational purpose.

That Purpose is the purpose of the almighty, is not as impotent as to remain a mere ideal or aspiration, and conversely what is genuinely actual or effective in the world is simply the working of that purpose.—It follows that Hegel's identification of

the actual and the rational is not a plea for conservatism in politics. The actualization of God's purpose is not yet complete. (see the *Addition* to paragraph 270, and also his *Philosophy of History*.)

CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE THOUGHTS OF MARX

The theory of self-consciousness emerges in Marx in the following form; the self has three stages, or moments, not historically sequential though Marx does not explain how. The first, *Primitive self-awareness, a man immersed in his Species life*. The second, *Self-alienation or alienation from Species-life*; And third, *Self-realization, or fulfillment in free creative activity* (Brudney 1998, p. 110). Hegel had said that the nature of Spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposite—Matter. The essence of matter being Gravity, while that of Spirit—Freedom. Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit, a truth derived from speculative philosophy. The self-contained existence of Spirit is consciousness. Consciousness for Hegel consists of two elements: first, *that I know*, and second, *what I know*. The two coincides in self-consciousness as Spirit knows itself (Hegel 1953). It is the judgment of its own nature and, at the same time the operation of coming to itself to produce itself, to make itself (actually) into that which it is in itself (potentiality). Following this abstract definition, “it might be said that world history is the exhibition of Spirit striving to attend knowledge of its own nature” (Bonshek 2014, p. 14).

MARX ON CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY OF LABOR

As with Hegel, Marx's theory of consciousness is very anti-individualistic. The self is at every stage constituted through its social activities, in which lies its essence. Marx wishes to say, as with Feuerbach, that this social essence is not a spiritual reality but rather material. He does not regard this social essence as residing in any Hegelian *idea* or spiritual substance. It lies rather in the collective activity which Marx identifies as labor. It is this labor that generates the language, customs, institutions- through which consciousness arises. In the German ideology Marx writes that *life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life* (Rowbotham 2015, 26). Hegel had seen history as the development of consciousness. Marx argues that the fundamental things that develop, and so bring about the movement of history, are not features of consciousness at all, but *material* forces. The development of consciousness is to be explained in terms of the material reality, and that spirit does not explain it. The transformation of history into world history is not indeed a mere abstract act on the part of the "self-consciousness", the world spirit or of any other metaphysical specter, but a quite material, empirically verifiable act, an act the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself, thus 'righting' Hegel (Marx & Engels 1965). I believe that Marx, in making this distinction is aiming to highlight consciousness as an offshoot of a deeper social and economic reality. Consciousness is to be explained, in terms that may not be recognizable to the conscious being himself. So that it could be said that Marx, in moving to the scientific theory of history, steps aside from the first-person to the third-person point of view, a step that indubitably takes him

away from the standpoint of the agent, toward that of the observer. The base of all human institutions is that upon which the forms of consciousness are built, and in terms of which institutions (and the consciousness which derives from them) are to be explained. This base for Marx consists of two parts: first, a system of economic relations, and second, certain active 'productive forces' (Marx & Engels 1965). The existence of any particular system of economic relations is explained in terms of the level of development of the productive forces.

MARX'S THREE STAGES OF HISTORY

Corresponding to the three moments of human consciousness are the three stages of history, each showing a specific stance of man towards his world. These stages are constituted by the forms which social activities take. So that now it is only in labor that man in a *Feuerbachian* manner would transform the world and so define him in relation to it (Marx & Engels 1965). The first stage of history for Marx is that of the natural man. Here nature dominates man. The institutions of private property, that instrument by which nature becomes an object for man, are not yet developed in this stage. But in the second stage, private property is developed and the separation between nature and man becomes prominent. Concomitant is the separation of man from man. Private property, that which generates the institution of exchange and therefore the mode of production is the institution through which man's self-alienation finds expression (Marx & Engels 1965). This stage is synonymous with capitalism.

Capitalism is in turn replaced by communism in which man's mastery of nature becomes complete that the institution of private property is abolished and with it the separation of man from man these transcends man then becomes free from nature, free, in command of nature and at one with his specie life. Man realizes himself. Marx later distances his theory of history from the philosophy of mind, yet his further attempt to give a material basis to dialectics of self-discovery returned, even in later version fears the masks of the drama of subject and object as scripted by Fichte, and its moral significance came to him from Fichte via Hegel through Feuerbach through the concept of alienation (Marx & Engels 1965).

According to Marx, there is some kind of 'internal' relation between alienation and the institution of private property. Liberal economics had considered human nature to be something settled. The economic man of a liberal economy is not a historical being. But that this is motivated by desires and their satisfaction which, while represented as permanent features of the human condition, where in fact only peculiarities of 18th-century market economy, which in turn is explained by something deeper. Marx wishes to argue that the laws of liberal economics while they direct the movement of property represent the institution of property as permanent so that they discourage the examination of other forms of arrangements in which property and the alienation that comes from it might disappear (Marx & Engels 1965). Here, the rewards and fulfillment of human nature will also change. And if alienation disappears, they will change for the better.

Upon the system of economic relations rises the superstructure of legal and political institutions. These serve to consolidate and protect the economic base and are

also explicable in terms of their sustaining and protective function. Further, the political institution generates its own peculiar 'ideology' (Marx & Engels 1965). This is the system of beliefs, perception, values, and prejudices, which together consolidate the entire structure, and serve both to conceal the changeability and to identify the actuality, of each particular arrangement.

CONCLUSION

My objection here is that Marx shows the state of man to be self-created, but at the same time he presents man's essence as something already, to be 'restored' to (man) himself. If Marx is right, however, a single basic thing. This thing is not consciousness; it is what creates and determines consciousness. It is material since its essence lies in the transformation of nature; it is also social because it exists in the relation between. Marx, in describing this all-important thing as 'labor' aims a return to the political philosophy the concept which describes the condition not of the sovereign, the clerk, the lawyer or property owner, but of the common person whose activities support the 'superstructure' upon which the feed labor is the human essence, and the driven force of history. Labor is that which appears in the fictive forms of market value, it is labor which can be alienated from and restored to itself, determining thereby the happiness and misery of mankind.

Marx, in criticizing Hegel did not abandon philosophy. In his 'critique of the Hegelian philosophy of the state' concerning 261-313, in contribution to the Hegelian philosophy of right: introduction, Marx agrees with Feuerbach's claim that the human is the root of God, but goes even further to say the human being is the root of a human being. His concept of the human being is. Hegel was a very rich and comprehensive thinker. Philosophy reached a peak with him, but that is not saying that philosophy ended with Hegel. Marx has given us the best available description of the alienation of the human spirit in the context of political economy, and of human relationships. His criticism of Hegel and philosophy are persuasive to the extent that they provoke more thought. But I do not think that Marx escapes from Metaphysics. It had been said of Hegel that he is such a comprehensive thinker, a weaver of an all-encompassing web of thought that whatever road one takes away from him, you are sure to find Hegel waiting for you at its other end. As such, Marx stands in a very long venerable tradition of Hegel and the German idealists. In fact, Marx is to be classified as a young-Hegelian, loosely in the footsteps of Feuerbach, a one-time leader of the Young Hegelians. Like Feuerbach, Marx pushed one aspect of Hegel's thought to the limit of the envelope, but that meant leaving neglected others, equally, or more important aspects of Hegel.

Indeed as Engels pointed out, Marx has shown us the way out of German Idealism, though not as Engels envisaged it, and certainly not in the manner that Marx followed it himself. Evidently, it is debatable if Marx himself took the pat he indicated. But Marx had helped uncover geological layers, or as Foucault would have it a genealogy of objective relationships and connections that would for centuries keep thinkers busy in the unpacking. The objects unearth by Marxian thought: both intuitive and reflective, have given rise to contemporary approaches to consciousness i.e. problems and approaches that could not be conceived prior to Marx. The consequences of these are plainly seen in often strange and masked forms. Often they are found in our

inability to explain them from a traditional enlightenment rational paradigm. Movements like existentialism, phenomenology, *Wissenssociologie*, Psychoanalysis and structuralism in the study of culture. For it was Marx who flung open the doors of traditional philosophy thus exploding the myth of discourse on “pure consciousness” as self-activating and creative within the confines of the agent that turns out to be but the individual human being. The objects of the investigation of human consciousness are, as elsewhere imbued with new dependencies and parameters, which are all available to internal investigation and which have given a call for social analysis. Again, as he famously wrote: “It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” Consciousness is a reflection of the political economy (Marx & Engels 1965).

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