

June 25, 1963

Mr. A. James Gregor
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Dear Mr. Gregor:

First let us clear the decks of all interpreters of Marx --not only of Gentile and Lukacs (not to mention the lesser ones of our era) but even of Engels-- and deal with Marx himself. It is of the essence that we do not get diverted by "evidence" of a secondary nature so that we stand up to the challenge of the genius who transcended Hegel not by opposing his idealism but by giving it its human raison d'etre. What he opposed in Hegel was his de-humanization of the ideas. ~~He~~ He did so not merely as a materialist who "proved" ideas could not float between heaven and earth but rather came out of the brain of man --we've had altogether too much of that type of vulgar materialism floating about. Marx did so because even the self-development of an idea occurred historically, as none knew better than Hegel when he wished to know it, when he traced through the history of ideas, when he let an idea stand for a whole historic epoch, when he came to the climax of his system only to find that it was after all subjectivity, the individual but "purified of all that interferes with its universality." In a word, Hegel knew it, and, as philosopher, lived by it, but as politician, as state philosopher-opportunist, as retiree in a self-constructed ivory tower afraid of the personification of the "negative principle"--the immense proletariat--he closed his eyes so tight, or, as Marx put it, established "the lie of his principle" of having consciousness and self-consciousness and alienated spirit be bereft of a personality and therefore exist only in the abstract. Marx as vehemently opposed materialism, not only the vulgar materialism of the Communists, not only the abstract materialism of the "scientists" (political economists included), but also that of Feuerbach who first helped put Hegel on his feet, who could tell you all about circumstances making the man and religion reflecting or perverting the thought, etc. etc. but never saw that before you started educating "others", "the educator must himself be educated." In a word, Marx's Humanism was neither a rejection of idealism or materialism, but the unity of both, not merely standing on earth, but emanating from a Human Being who, while he had his feet planted on this earth, felt the pull of the future on the present so passionately that he was a multi-dimensional being refusing to bow to "reality", that is to the given, but insisted that, with mind and body, he would transform it into something very different, the world of freedom, of the full development of all the talents of men so that he could live his life instead of being compelled to reduce his self-activity merely to a means to live.

*I have never gone into either of the two extremes --those, like Marcuse, who try to blame all vulgarisation on Engels, denying Marx "approved" Engels' works, including Dialectics of Nature, at least as notes; nor those who insist, as the Communists do, that just because they were lifelong collaborators and Marx could not have lived without the support of Engels, that therefore they are "one and the same." I have not done because I believe Engels himself ~~had~~ summed up that relationship when he said that, at best, he and others were "talented", but Marx was a genius, the original thinker whom the others followed. And Engels was a follower, not only devoted, but

13872

Now then you say that my analysis of the Hegelian concept of subject-object and your analysis of the 1844 Manuscripts are similar. This is true, and it is why your article interested me so when it dealt with the cognitive process. Where we disagree, and very, very sharply, is that there is a fundamental difference between the Marx of 1844 and the Marx of 1867-1883. Far from "abandoning" ontology -- I am assuming that we both mean ontology as totality, as world outlook, and not as a closed system of "pure thought" -- Marx created a totally new one. By totally new, I do not mean he abandoned Hegel, but that he transcended him. And by transcending I do not mean anything as vulgar as either the Social Democracy or the Communists have reduced the term to mean being "materialist" and "not idealist", "realist" and not "mystical." Rather I am using it in the pure Hegelian sense of absorption of the past to a point where it is internalized and you do not question it, but you then add that new dimension of your age, only where he thinks he has transcended all other philosophers and his system is "absolute", I consider Marx has done so and humanity arriving for total freedom not as a "have", a possession, but as a dimension of his being which has, once and for all, overcome the dichotomy between mental and manual labor is "the absolute."

How do I "prove" that when you seem so confident you have "considerable evidence" to prove the opposite? Well, all you have to do is to turn to CAPITAL, not looking for the same language, (even though there is a great deal of that too) as that used in 1844 Manuscripts, but looking instead for what is that reality which Hegel failed to face, but Marx did. Hegel's genius is demonstrated in the patience with which he traces ~~the~~ reason through all the forms of consciousness, self-consciousness, reason, spirit, idea, all the way to the absolute. Marx does the same, only he does it with labor. Does labor become any less alienated when, instead of using the word, alienation, Marx has penetrated through to the depths of the human being under capitalism so that he has, first, split the category, labor, into labor as activity and labor power as commodity; when your very ability to labor is nothing but a commodity, something you sell as if you could disjoint your hands from your person and let those enter into the factory all by themselves and earn you a living -- is that not alienation, the most degrading kind. Secondly, you enter the factory, and the alienation is so complete that Marx now doesn't even allow you to retain the word, labor, either. He now proves how you no longer belong to yourself at all by giving you the same nomenclature as to the machines: capital, only where they are "constant", you are "variable", that is to say, you undergo a variation in magnitude and that surplus that you produce gets further alienated away from you, and belong to "another". Thirdly, you not

*(ftn. cont'd. from p.1) understanding. But he wasn't Marx. And anyone who tries to "prove" Marx by quotations from Engels, whether approved or not approved by Marx, cuts himself off from meeting the challenge that a genius sets up for the age. Some empiricists -- I have in mind the great economist Mrs. Joan Robinson who I am quoting "in the plural" -- have told me that they wished Marx who was "too Hegelian" had told all his ideas "to Engels who knew how to write straight English, instead of German English!" Had Engels written them down, etc. etc. etc. -- as if the style and the man can be separated, or the language and the thought, in the manner of a good "statistical" stenographic machine. O, for automation!

(But, though I ask us to have done with all interpreters, I do hope you will allow me to call to your attention the following chapters in my MARKISM AND FREEDOM: III, on Marx's Early Essays; VIII, on the Humanism of CAPITAL, Volume 1; and VIII, on the Logic and Scope of all 3 volumes.)

only become enslaved to another man, the capitalist, your alienation of activity or labor has degraded you to the point where it is not you, though man, who is master of machine, but the machine is master of you, and this thing, this materialized labor, this dead labor "sucks dry the living." Talking about "alienation", what is more perverse in all of Hegel's forms of alienation than this "fantastic relationship where thing masters man"?

As for "picture-theory of reality", my dear Mr. Gregor, if you will forgive me, I will say you couldn't possibly be thinking of Marx; you must still be under the influence of that awfully vulgar "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" of Lenin's which he was compelled to abandon if he were ever to find his own reason out of the collapse of established Marxism of the Second International he so unquittingly "applied" in the philosophic field--or what passed for philosophy. The dualism that permeates capitalism, that tears the insides out of its reality, that is in constant contradiction, whether in the market or factory, whether fighting the class struggle, or blinding itself with own fetishisms so that all it once--when it was revolutionary and creative--knew is now so false that even its theoreticians have become naught but "prize-fighters" for the status quo and apologists for that "11th Hour"--why where is this "picture-theory of reality" leading to except the "Absolute"? Only Marx has broken up Hegel's Absolute into two--the absolute of capitalist development is the collapse, the accumulation of capital at the one hand and "general absolute law of the reserve army" at the other hand; and, in total, absolute opposition to this, the very force that brings about "the negation of the negation" (in Vol. 1, 2, and 3 of CAPITAL!)--the proletariat--ah, its "absolute" are "the new passions and forces for the reconstruction of society." What, pray, is "passive" about such passions and how can such forces be "contemplators", not to mention that "thinking, bleeding Paris" has had its "cognitive process" so fully liberated that they have "discovered at last" not only the economic and political emancipation but realized that it is nothing other than "its own working existence" for the "Communards have no ideals to realize but to set free the elements of the new society." Please read the last paragraph of Hegel's SCIENCE OF LOGIC and see whether the self-liberation of his Idea does either more or less.

Enough for the time being! I shall look forward to seeing your manuscript whenever you send it to me, and I shall be as concrete as possible with the "evidence." I hope too I will have the opportunity to address your seminar--I sure would like the opportunity to give more than one lecture on the relationship of Marx to German Idealism, or, more precisely, as I prefer to call it, "Marx's Debt to Hegel." Meanwhile, I enclose a list of some of my writings plus a chapter, in very rough form, of my new book. The latter ("Subjectivity of Self Liberation") you will please return to me. I have a great deal also on Hegel, but I hesitate to overburden you. I also enclose a piece on the place of your present sojourn, which quite surprised me. Most of my friends there are either in prison or in exile. Back in 1938, not only the Africans, but the Afrikaner were interested in Marxism, and during my stay in Mexico Trotsky wrote the Introduction to the publication, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, which had its publication into the Afrikaner language. But that seems centuries ago, and worlds apart from the present. It may be that by the time you reach Argentina, there will be a Spanish edition of MARXISM AND FREEDOM; an Italian edition (La Nuova Italia, Firenze) has just come out, and the Japanese and Spanish editions are lying with each other as to which country will be first. I look forward to meeting you some time, and talking endlessly...Yours,

13874