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HISTORICAL MATERIALISM 32.3 (2024) 252–281

historical  
materialism:  
research in marxist critical theory  
brill.com/hima

# The Logic Question: Marx, Trendelenburg, and the Critique of Hegel

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Received 2 March 2020 | Accepted 12 October 2023 |

Published online 8 November 2023

## Abstract

This paper provides a reconstruction and analysis of Marx's early engagements with logic, and especially his studies of Hegel's logic, on the one hand, and Hegel's great if often overlooked critic Adolf Trendelenburg, on the other. It itemises the archival evidence that Marx read and planned to compose a Hegelian response to Trendelenburg's devastating attack on dialectics in his 1840 *Logische Untersuchungen* – the work that arguably did more than any other single text to destroy the influence of Hegelianism among German intellectuals at the time. It argues that the young Marx was a more sophisticated reader of Hegel and of philosophy in general than is typically acknowledged. Against the backdrop of these claims, it then proposes a new reading of Marx's work from 1839 to 1842 – one that takes the emphasis off the familiar distinction between materialism and idealism, which was as much an invention of Engels's later interpretations of the early Marx as it was an invention of Marx himself, and places it instead on what early nineteenth-century thinkers would have understood to be the more comprehensive question of logic.

## Keywords

Marx – Hegel – Trendelenburg – logic – materialism – Epicurus – constitution

## Introduction

In this paper, I revisit the familiar topic of Marx's early intellectual development and his materialist critique of idealism and philosophical abstraction.<sup>1</sup> The extant literature on the topic, though voluminous, tends to make sense of it either by reading the work of the young Marx through the lens of his later writings, or in the relatively narrow context of his relationship with the Young Hegelians – a category that some scholars now suggest was as much an invention of twentieth-century research as it was a nineteenth-century reality.<sup>2</sup> In developing my argument, I adopt elements of the contextualising method of the Cambridge School, which proposes we examine texts in the history of political ideas, not as contributions to an ostensibly perennial normative debate concerning the ideal organisation of human society, but as polemical speech-acts or weapons designed to intervene into historically-specific discursive struggles.<sup>3</sup> I also draw on the work of the editors of the second *Marx–Engels–Gesamtausgabe* and the significant amount of new bibliographical research that has taken shape in its wake.<sup>4</sup> My thesis will initially sound strange. I challenge the claim, almost ubiquitous in the literature, that Marx's materialism emerged out of his early engagements with Ludwig Feuerbach, especially in his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' – a manuscript that Marx is typically said to have composed in the summer of 1843. I argue instead that Marx had already developed a substantive critique of philosophical abstraction between 1839 and 1842, well before he became interested in Feuerbach, and when he was pursuing an intensive, documentable, but largely overlooked study of logic. Indeed, I propose that the question of materialism and idealism in Marx's early work can be better understood if we situate it within the framework of logic – a field that looked very different in the early nineteenth century than it does today, and one to which many of Marx's contemporaries would have been inclined to subordinate concepts like materialism and idealism. I further claim that the established narrative concerning

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1 When citing Marx, I follow established convention. MECW refers to *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart). I provide volume and page numbers. MEGA<sup>2</sup> refers to the second edition of the *Marx–Engels–Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz). MEGA<sup>1</sup> refers to the first edition. I provide division, volume, and page numbers. I have occasionally modified the MECW translations. When I do so, I provide the reference to the MEGA as well. All other translations from German, French, and Italian are my own.

2 Lambrecht 2013, p. 175.

3 Skinner 2002.

4 Bellofiore and Fineschi (eds.) 2009; Carver and Blank 2014; Carver 2018, pp. 171–80; Musto 2020.

Marx's reliance on Feuerbach should at the very least be supplemented with an account of his earlier encounter with the work of another, equally if not more important critic of Hegel – the logician and classicist Adolf Trendelenburg.

Because I take issue with an entrenched interpretation of the young Marx, and especially what I take to be an exaggerated emphasis on the difference between idealism and materialism, it is worth beginning with a sketch of how that interpretation took shape. It can, I would suggest, be traced back to what is arguably the first piece of Marx commentary, namely Engels's 1888 *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Written shortly after Marx's death in 1883, this text was also the first scholarly attempt to come to grips with Marx's colossal literary remains.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Engels referred to the 1845–6 manuscripts that would later be rather aggressively edited and published in the first *MEGA* as *The German Ideology*, and to a hastily scribbled-down set of notes that he had discovered among Marx's papers from around the same time and decided to call Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', a slightly edited version of which he also published as an appendix. Supported by this archival evidence, Engels proposed that the group of radical Hegelians to which he and Marx belonged in the 1840s initially accepted Hegel's claim that philosophy reveals the unfolding of reason in history, but that they enthusiastically converted to Feuerbach's position following the 1841 publication of his *Essence of Christianity*. On Engels's account, Feuerbach's materialist inversion of Hegel's idealist dialectic was pivotal to Marx's discovery of the 'materialist concept of history'. But Engels was also writing in the later part of the nineteenth century, well after the vogue for systematic philosophy had elapsed. At least as interested in curating Marx's image for a current reading public as he was in accurately reconstructing the past, Engels thus sought to associate Marx's materialism with the empiricist, positivist, and physicalist ontologies of the natural sciences in ascendance at the time. And in doing so, he ascribed to Marx what now seems like a fairly crude representationalist epistemology, or a conception of truth as an accurate mental representation of an independent reality.<sup>6</sup>

In the second and third decades of the twentieth century, when scholarly editions of Marx's early manuscripts began to appear in the first *MEGA*, the authority of Engels's interpretation began to wane. For those manuscripts made it clear that Marx's criticisms of Hegelian philosophy had been articulated in philosophical terms, and that they did not represent as definitive a

5 Engels 1888; Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 26, pp. 352–98. The pamphlet was a modified reprint of Engels's 1886 review of Carl Nicolai Starcke's *Ludwig Feuerbach* for Karl Kautsky's *Neue Zeit*.

6 Rockmore 2018, pp. 123–33.

repudiation of ‘classical German philosophy’ in favour of a position more amenable to the natural sciences of the late nineteenth century as Engels had suggested. At the same time, the general editor of the *MEGA*, David Riazanov, accepted and sought to reinforce Engels’s narrative concerning the significance of Feuerbach.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Riazanov believed he could locate the moment Marx adopted a Feuerbachian stance, and thus the moment when he turned towards materialism, in a manuscript he had discovered in the archives of the German Social-Democratic Party in 1922 – a systematic commentary on paragraphs 261 to 313 of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* that he published in the first volume of the *MEGA* under the title ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’. While the manuscript itself was not inscribed with a date, Riazanov relied on evidence from the brief intellectual résumé with which Marx began the ‘Preface’ to his 1859 *Critique of Political Economy* to propose that it had been written in the summer of 1843, while Marx was honeymooning with Jenny in the town of Kreuznach, immediately after he had resigned as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* and immediately before he moved to Paris to begin working with Arnold Ruge on their short-lived *Deutsch–Französische Jahrbücher*. And while it did not once mention either Feuerbach or any of his writings, Riazanov pointed to a letter Marx had written to Ruge on 13 March 1843 in which Marx mentioned having read Feuerbach’s recently published ‘Preliminary Theses for the Reform of Philosophy’ and judged them ‘incorrect only in the point that he refers too much to nature and too little to politics’.<sup>8</sup> This piece of evidence led Riazanov to suggest that Marx’s use of an idiom of subjects and predicates in the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’ had been derived from Feuerbach’s use of a similar idiom in his ‘Preliminary Theses’, and that Marx’s purpose had been to apply Feuerbach’s ‘methodological principle’ to the political phenomena he had criticised Feuerbach for overlooking in his letter to Ruge.<sup>9</sup>

As is well known, following the publication of Marx’s early manuscripts, twentieth-century Marx scholarship witnessed a protracted debate over his relationship with Hegel and the philosophical tradition more generally. Some, such as Herbert Marcuse, posited a continuity between Marx and Hegel, especially with respect to ‘the concept of essence’, or endeavoured to locate Marx within a ‘western tradition’ of philosophical reflection that extended back to the ancients and that was oriented around the idea of ‘human flourishing’.<sup>10</sup> Others, notably Louis Althusser, revised Engels’s emphasis on Feuerbach but

7 Marx and Engels 1927–35, *MEGA*<sup>1</sup> 1/2, pp. lxxi–lxxv.

8 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, *MECW* 1, p. 400.

9 Marx and Engels 1927–35, *MEGA*<sup>1</sup> 1/2, p. lxxiv.

10 Marcuse 1968; Marcuse 1972.

kept the thrust of his characterisation of Marx's career by insisting on a sharp 'epistemological break' between Marx's youthful 'philosophical essentialism' and his mature science of the 'social relation'.<sup>11</sup> But whether one argued for continuity or break, the notion that, at a key moment in his youth, Marx had committed himself to Feuerbach's materialism remained firmly intact. In the English-speaking world, the most influential version of this argument was probably the one presented by Shlomo Avineri in his classic study of *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, which essentially rehearsed and reinforced Riazanov's original hypotheses. Thus, and exactly like Riazanov, Avineri foregrounded the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', arguing that it was Marx's 'first systematic work' and the origin of all his subsequent 'thoughts and dilemmas'. And, again like Riazanov, Avineri claimed it had been composed in a sudden burst of inspiration in the summer of 1843, and that its defining feature was its reliance on 'Feuerbachian language' and on Feuerbach's 'transformative method'. More accurately, Avineri claimed that Marx's application of Feuerbach's method to social and political phenomena amounted to an internal or 'immanent critique' of its source, and that his invention of historical materialism could be dated back to this moment.<sup>12</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of this reading of Marx's early development, particularly among those interested in his specifically political thought. For the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' is among Marx's most elaborate discussions of state, law, and constitution. And the consensus among commentators is that it represents a crucial moment when Marx, disillusioned with the struggle for liberal constitutionalism he had pursued in his contributions to the *Rheinische Zeitung*, and with the possibility of achieving progress via discursive rationality and the public sphere, first adopted a radical democratic standpoint, and began to understand revolution as the only viable way forward.<sup>13</sup> However, there is very good evidence to suggest that this

11 Althusser 2005.

12 Avineri 1968, pp. 10–12.

13 Miguel Abensour, for instance, interprets the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' as Marx's 'Machiavellian moment' when he rejects the 'young-Hegelian utopia of the rational state' in favour of a revolutionary conception of 'true democracy' (Abensour 2011, pp. 31, 38–46). David Leopold places it at the centre of his contextual reading of 'the young Marx' and considers it Marx's most profound encounter with the phenomenon of 'the modern state' (Leopold 2007, pp. 11–12, 19–20, 33). Stathis Kouvelakis treats it as the culmination of a 'crisis' that propels Marx 'from the public sphere to revolutionary democracy' (Kouvelakis 2003, pp. 288–94). And Norman Levine presents it as the work in which Marx abandons his faith in 'constitutional monarchy' and the 'Hegelian Centre' for a new, albeit brief commitment to 'democracy' and the 'Hegelian Left' (Levine 2012, pp. 180–204).

narrative is based on a fundamental bibliographical error, that Riazanov was wrong to situate the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’ entirely in the summer of 1843, and that Marx began working on it, or on an earlier version of it, in the spring of 1842. This evidence includes three letters that Marx wrote in 1842 that mention an all-but-complete article on Hegel’s state theory (on 5 March 1842 and 20 March 1842, to Ruge, and on 25 August 1842, to Dagobert Oppenheim)<sup>14</sup> as well as the physical design of the manuscript itself, which suggests that much of it was recopied from an earlier draft, and that it was not composed in a single, continuous session, but in fragments and over a longer period.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, if Marx wrote the elements of the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’ that appear to mirror Feuerbach’s ‘method’ in 1842, he could not have done so under the influence of Feuerbach’s 1843 ‘Provisional Theses’. I develop the argument for an earlier dating of the manuscript in more detail in a separate article.<sup>16</sup> Rather than repeating that set of claims, this paper will focus on Marx’s work between 1839 and 1842. It will show that, during this period, Marx undertook an extensive investigation of logic intended to culminate in a response to the devastating attack on Hegel’s logic mounted by Trendelenburg in his 1840 *Logische Untersuchungen* – a work that, as Frederick Beiser has shown, did more to discredit Hegelianism in the middle part of the nineteenth century than any other single text.<sup>17</sup> It was through these logical investigations, I will suggest, that Marx first developed the ‘materialist’ critique of philosophical abstraction that Riazanov, Avineri, and countless others propose he only discovered under the influence of Feuerbach and in his ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’. A full understanding of Marx’s materialism would thus require at least some familiarity with his early interest in logic.

What follows is broken down into two sections. The first begins by explaining what logic entailed in the early nineteenth century, before the field was revolutionised by symbolic and mathematical logic. I show that Marx appeared on the scene at the height of a movement that Stephan Käufer calls ‘logical radicalism’.<sup>18</sup> This movement, which included both Hegel and Trendelenburg, was critical of the tradition of syllogistic logic devised by the scholastics. While

14 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, pp. 382–3; 393–6; 393.

15 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> 1/3 (Apparat), p. 577. On the MEGA editors’ account, while ‘the manuscript on the critique of Hegel’s philosophy of law is obviously the result of the work of the spring and summer of 1843’ it can ‘be assumed that in one form or another the earlier manuscript of 1842, which has not survived, was used in the drafting of the present one and that it served Marx as a kind of preparatory work’.

16 Barbour 2023.

17 Beiser 2014, pp. 60–9.

18 Käufer 2010.

it derived some of its claims from Kant's transcendental logic, it also sought to rebuild logic from the ground up – both to provide it with a metaphysical foundation, and to place it at the foundations of metaphysics. I then show that Marx was not only familiar with logic in this sense but also incorporated it into his writings. I begin with an illuminating letter that Marx's mentor Bruno Bauer wrote to him on 11 December 1839, when Marx was researching his dissertation on the 'Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature'. The letter indicates that, at the time, logic was one of Marx's central preoccupations. I will go on to show how this preoccupation informed both his dissertation itself and the collection of seven 'Notebooks on Epicurus' that he compiled while preparing it. In the second section, I attempt to reconstruct Marx's relationship with Trendelenburg. I begin with letters written to Marx by Bauer and Karl Friedrich Köppen on 29 March 1841 and 3 June 1841, both of which indicate that he was in the process of composing a Hegelian response to Trendelenburg. If Marx ever finished the project, no manuscript has survived. However, there are traces of Trendelenburg's thought in documents that have survived. I argue, for example, that Marx's lifelong interest in Aristotle was informed by his study of Trendelenburg, who had established his reputation with a critical edition of Aristotle's *De Anima*. I show that Marx was familiar with Trendelenburg's *De Anima*, and that it likely informed his own effort, in an 1840 notebook that the editors call his 'Berliner Hefte', to translate that text into German. I further claim that, while Marx initially planned to challenge Trendelenburg from a Hegelian perspective, he appears to have been swayed by some of the latter's arguments, especially with respect to Hegel's effort to produce a logic 'without presuppositions', or without reliance on intuition, and his confused approach to the problem of contradiction. For versions of these arguments appear in Marx's 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law'. Marx's relationship to Trendelenburg, I conclude, and with the logic question more generally, offers a way of understanding his materialism that is equal if not superior to the received narrative about Feuerbach.

### Logical Lucubrations

Most standard histories of logic begin with Aristotle and note that, by the fourteenth century, the scholastics had rendered Aristotelian syllogistic logic systematic. This logical system was handed down with few modifications until the late eighteenth century. Its defining feature was formality or abstraction. It provided rules for constructing rational syllogisms or inferences without reference to particular content. Kant assumed its longevity was an indication of

its validity. But he also believed that overcoming Hume's scepticism regarding the impossibility of intuiting causality required rules of logic that would operate, not only in the realm of reason, but in that of experience as well. He thus distinguished between 'general logic', by which he meant the traditional syllogistic forms, and 'transcendental logic', by which he meant universal concepts that would apply to all particular content or experiences. Post-Kantian logic broke down along two lines. Those who pursued 'formal logic' accepted Kant's distinction between 'general' and 'transcendental logic'. This also involved accepting Kant's two-tiered ontology, or his separation between phenomenal appearances and the noumenal thing-in-itself. Those who Käufer calls 'logical radicals', on the other hand, sought to bridge this chasm and ground logic in the world.<sup>19</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, the crowning achievement of 'logical radicalism' was Hegel's monumental *Science of Logic*, which was published between 1812 and 1816, and provided Hegel with a reputation robust enough to secure him offers of professorships at the Universities of Heidelberg and Berlin. While in those roles, Hegel composed the three editions of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the first part of which – the so-called 'lesser logic' – was an abbreviated version of his *Science of Logic*. For Hegel, then, logic provided the indispensable frame for his philosophical system, indeed for reality as a whole. It governed and comprehended both the objective and the subjective worlds, both the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit.

The simplest way to begin considering Hegel's notoriously difficult logic is to distinguish it from its predecessors. In traditional syllogistic logic, inferences (syllogisms) resulted in judgements (a subject and a predicate united by a copula), and a collection of judgements would constitute a concept. Hegel held that, on the contrary, concepts are not mere combinations of judgements; rather, judgements divide a prior but unexamined concept – something Hegel believed the German word for judgement (*Urteil*) hinted at, insofar as it could be understood to involve separating something into parts (*Teilung*).<sup>20</sup> For Hegel, that is, thought begins with concepts, which are given *a priori*. But at the same time, the Hegelian concept is not a form that might be defined independent of all content. It is not, as in Kant, subjective as distinct from objective. It is, rather, a combination of form and content. It has determinations from the outset. More precisely, it is a differentiated totality or a unity of contradictory determinations. The purpose of Hegel's logic is to unpack the contradictory determinations of all finite concepts, and to show that, taken together, they

19 Käufer 2005.

20 Hegel 1991, pp. 241–5.



constitute one coherent system that culminates in the infinite, absolute idea. Hegel thus sets out to devise a logic ‘without presuppositions’, or without presupposing any pre-conceptual intuitions.<sup>21</sup> He begins with the thought of pure being, which, he says, entails the contradictory thought of pure nothingness. The movement between the contradictory thoughts of being and nothing is said to generate that of becoming, which comprehends and transcends the contradiction. This dialectic of being and nothing then serves as the point of departure for an elaborate apparatus of dialectical processes that ranges across all possible concepts and ultimately arrives at the absolute idea.<sup>22</sup>

When Marx began reading Hegel in 1837, and when he attended the lectures on logic delivered by Hegel’s student and successor at the University of Berlin, Georg Andreas Gabler, this was the logic he encountered. And given that Hegel’s philosophy was encyclopaedic, when Marx sat down to commence his research on ancient atomist philosophies of nature in 1839, he could not have failed to understand his work as drawing on and contributing to logic in this expansive sense. More concrete evidence that Marx had a particular interest in the topic can be found in an inventory of his personal library prepared by his friend and fellow communist Roland Daniels in 1849. The inventory reveals that Marx possessed numerous treatises on logic, including Wilhelm von Eberstein’s *Ueber die Verschaffenheit der Logik und Metaphysik der reinen Peripatetiker*, which originally appeared in 1800 and provided a sweeping history of the Aristotelian peripatetic tradition, as well as three examples of what Käufer calls ‘logical radicalism’, namely Trendelenburg’s *Logische Untersuchungen*, Johann Eduard Erdmann’s 1841 *Grundriss der Logik und Metaphysik*, and Karl Werder’s 1841 *Logik: Als Commentar und Ergänzung zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*.<sup>23</sup> The latter two, written by a moderate and a radical Hegelian respectively, offered commentaries and elaborations on Hegel’s logic, and their appearance in Marx’s library suggests he was attempting to expand his understanding of the latter via expert secondary commentary. But even more illuminating than the books Marx owned are the comments on logic that appear in a series of letters he received from his intellectual mentor Bruno Bauer between December 1839 and December 1842. While Marx’s side of the correspondence no longer exists, a close examination of Bauer’s offers some important insights.

21 Hegel 1991, pp. 135–45.

22 Houlgate 2006.

23 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> IV/5, p. 305; von Eberstein 1800; Trendelenburg 1840a; Trendelenburg 1840b; Erdmann 1841; Werder 1841. For an important discussion of the influence of Werder’s logic on the Young Hegelians, see Stepelevich 2015.

In the late 1830s, when Marx met him at the University of Berlin, Bauer was a brilliant young Hegelian philosopher, Bible scholar, and political theorist on the cusp of his most prolific period and keen to take on a protégé. In 1839, he published *Herr Dr Hengstenberg*, a short book which was critical of the powerful pietist theologian and Berlin professor Ernst Hengstenberg. To protect him from retaliation, the Hegelian Minister of Culture Karl Altenstein had Bauer relocated to the University of Bonn.<sup>24</sup> Marx's plan was to complete his dissertation and join his friend there, where they were confident that he would find a position as well. Bauer's first letter to Marx, dated 11 December 1839, makes it clear that, as Marx was beginning to work on his dissertation, logic was one of his central concerns. Thus, amidst academic gossip and news about his own research, Bauer sought to provoke Marx into elaborating on the issue. 'That you may tell me something about your logical lucubrations', he writes, 'may I tell you that the good mister [Karl Friedrich] Köppen accuses you of sophistry.'<sup>25</sup> By 'logical lucubrations', Bauer was referring to Marx's habit (also mentioned disparagingly in a 9 December 1837 letter from Marx's father) of studying late into the night by lamplight.<sup>26</sup> The sophistication of Marx's understanding of the topic is revealed a little later in the letter, where Bauer responds to something Marx must have introduced previously:

It seems to me that what you are saying about the logical energies of contravention [*den logischen Energien des Gegenübertretens*; or standing-over-against], etc., is certainly developed by Hegel in its place in the section on method. In essence [*Wesen*] they have the form of reflection and are as such developed from being. Hegel says somewhere that the dialectic of form is only an 'outgrowth [*durchwuchert*]' of the movement of determination, so cannot be emphasised for reflection yet. That is even only possible in essence.<sup>27</sup>

While, in the absence of Marx's contributions, Bauer's meaning remains a little opaque, attempting to reconstruct the conversation is a worthwhile exercise, as it will help illuminate the place of logic in Marx's dissertation. Neither Hegel's *Science of Logic* nor his *Encyclopaedia* includes a 'section on method', so the passage Bauer has in mind is not obvious. But, judging by Bauer's references and terminology, it seems likely that Marx had enquired about the relationship

24 Moggach 2003, pp. 61–5; Heinrich 2019, pp. 273–83.

25 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 336.

26 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 688.

27 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 336.

between thought and being, subject and object, or essence and appearance, and the sense in which they 'stand-over-against' one another. Bauer responds by suggesting Marx consider the transition between what Hegel calls 'reflection' and his full elaboration of the concept of 'essence'.

The transition from 'reflection' to 'essence' is a key element of Hegel's logical radicalism. Hegel explains it in the section of his logic on the 'Doctrine of Essence'.<sup>28</sup> By 'reflection', Hegel means the notion that subjective thought represents or 'reflects' objective being. Reflection thus presupposes an inexorable difference between thought and being, or the realm of appearances and that of essence. As Hegel sees it, this presupposition is characteristic of modern philosophy, including Kant's critical philosophy, insofar as Kant preserves a distinction between phenomena and noumena.<sup>29</sup> Exactly as Bauer suggests, Hegel believes he can overcome this problem by attending to 'the movement of determination', or by treating the relationship between thought and being or appearance and essence, not as static, but as a process that unfolds through stages. Thus, on Hegel's account, knowledge certainly begins with reflection or by assuming a distinction between the distorted way things appear to us, on the one hand, and a true or essential substrate out there in the world, on the other. This, however, is a necessary but insufficient moment within a dynamic process through which we become aware that appearances are determined, not by hidden essences, but by their differences from other appearances. More accurately, for Hegel, an essence is not a substrate hidden behind appearances; rather, it is the totality of appearances as they appear, each of which is determined in turn through negation.<sup>30</sup> This process of determining essence through the negation of appearances constitutes what Bauer calls Hegel's 'dialectic of form', insofar as it rejects the notion that active thought gives cognitive form to a lifeless material content, and treats form and content as fundamentally relational.<sup>31</sup> In his letter, Bauer seems to be correcting Marx on this point, as if what Marx had said about 'the logical energies of contravention' implied that the 'dialectic of form' takes shape on the level of reflection. But for Hegel, Bauer explains, this dialectic is properly an 'outgrowth' of the 'movement of determination'. It therefore cannot be 'emphasised for reflection yet' as it is 'only possible in essence'.

28 Hegel 1991, pp. 175–235. On this section of Hegel's logic, see Pippin 1996. In a crucial article on Marx's doctoral dissertation, Martin McIvor argues convincingly that Marx's understanding of Hegel's concept of essence was similar to Pippin's (McIvor 2008).

29 Hegel 1991, pp. 80–3.

30 Hegel 1991, pp. 199–201.

31 Hegel 1991, pp. 201–4.

If this is a felicitous reconstruction of Marx and Bauer's exchange it might help shed light on some of the more difficult elements of Marx's dissertation. In his letter, Bauer advises Marx to do what is necessary to 'cope with the ragged exam' (that is, finish his dissertation) so that he might 'give [himself] up to [his] logical work unhindered' and 'work on the essence [*das Wesen*] afresh'.<sup>32</sup> But Marx's dissertation suggests that he did not follow that advice, but instead integrated a consideration of essence into his study. For, as Marx explains, both Democritus and Epicurus began with a two-tiered ontology in which reality consists of an essential atomic substrate, on the one side, and the way that essential substrate appears to the senses, on the other. But whereas Democritus remained within the realm of 'reflective' knowledge, or knowledge as a representation of an external reality, and thus fell into 'scepticism' with respect to the possibility of bridging the gap between essence and appearance (or atoms and the senses), Epicurus was able to think the concept of the atom in the Hegelian sense.<sup>33</sup> He thus sought, in a dialectical fashion, to work through its contradictory determinations. Put differently, whereas Democritus insisted on a rigid distinction between essence and appearance and therefore found himself trapped in the same paradox that Hegel identified in Kant, or how one might posit a limit to one's knowledge without transgressing that limit in that very gesture, Epicurus saw the problem clearly, and attempted dialectically to transcend it. Thus, the core of Marx's dissertation, or Part Two, consists of five chapters, each of which narrows in on an aspect of Epicurus's thought that earlier commentators had criticised as contradictory: his theory of the declination of the atom; his ascription of qualities to the atoms; his distinction between *atomi archai* and *atoma stoicheia*; his treatment of time as 'the pure form of the world of appearances';<sup>34</sup> and his theory of the meteors. And in each case, Marx sets out to prove that what others had condemned as contradictory is in fact an essential feature of any consistent concept of the atom. For instance, the declination or sudden random swerving of the atom, which Epicurus had introduced into Democritus's system in response to the

32 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 336.

33 This aspect of Marx's argument is more explicit in his 'Notebooks on Epicurus', where he identifies Epicurus as 'the philosopher of the concept' (Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 410). Importantly, it also represents an, as it were, Hegelian challenge to Hegel's own judgement on Epicurus in his lectures on the history of philosophy, where he proposes that, with Epicurus, 'the necessity of the concept [Begriff] is abolished and falls apart' (Hegel 1833, p. 473) and that Epicurean philosophy 'is not to be regarded as setting forth a system of concepts [Systems der Begriffe], but on the contrary of representations – of sensuous existence as sensuous existence in the ordinary way of looking' (p. 478).

34 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 63.

criticism that it could not account for freedom and change, had been ridiculed throughout the history of philosophy as an arbitrary invention. Marx argues, on the contrary, that it is a necessary and integral aspect of the concept of the atom. For if the atom is that which has no external determination, and if it is said to fall downward in a line, then it would be determined by the line in which it falls. Therefore, the atom, in order to be an atom, must swerve away from its downward trajectory.<sup>35</sup>

On Marx's account, then, while Democritus is trapped in 'reflective' consciousness, Epicurus is able to adopt the perspective of 'essence' and think the concept of the atom in its contradictory determinations. At the same time, his philosophy of nature is insufficient on its own. For, while he advances the science of atomism, precisely because he remains an atomist, and thus committed to some manifestation of a two-tiered ontology, Epicurus cannot fully transcend the contradiction between appearance and essence, subject and object, or thought and being. And this explains why, at the end of the day, he subordinates all knowledge and all science to an ethics of individual tranquility or *ataraxia* – an 'abstract subjectivism', as Marx calls it, which measures truth against the yard stick of personal happiness. But Marx's purpose is not to condemn Epicurus on this score. Rather, he proposes we understand his approach as one moment within a larger dialectical process. And indeed, Marx begins his dissertation by explaining that his study of atomist philosophies of nature constitutes one part of a planned larger work on the post-Aristotelian 'cycle of Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptic philosophy', or those whom we now call the Hellenistic philosophers.<sup>36</sup> As Marx points out, historians of philosophy had typically presented this period as one of decay and decline. At best, it was considered a transitional stage between the great speculative insights of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, on the one side, and the world-historic event of the Christian revelation, on the other. Marx's agenda is to rehabilitate the period, and specifically to show that the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics provide a comprehensive philosophy or 'complete structure' of what Marx calls 'self-consciousness'.<sup>37</sup> And in a sense, this is the most incendiary aspect of his argument, and the moment where he begins to move away from the Hegelian framework. For in Hegel's history of philosophy, the full realisation of self-consciousness relies on Christianity. While Greek and Roman philosophers had initiated the process of separating the individual subject from both the moral substance of the community, on the one hand, and natural

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35 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 49.

36 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 35.

37 Ibid.

determination, on the other, for Hegel only Christianity introduces the inner world of faith required for genuine self-consciousness, and thus the subjective freedom that would come to fruition through history and finally be realised in the modern rational state.<sup>38</sup> Marx, on the other hand, was suggesting that self-consciousness and subjective freedom were already available in the rational philosophies of the ancients, and especially the Hellenistics. And this meant that neither a Christian god nor a Christian state were necessary for freedom. Freedom could be provided by human reason alone.

In this sense, and despite its dense philosophical argumentation, Marx's dissertation had a practical political agenda, and pointed towards a confrontation with the political theology of the established order. This impending struggle was most apparent in the framing of the document, which begins with Marx praising Prometheus as 'the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar' for his stand 'against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity', and ends with a long passage from Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* in which Lucretius celebrates Epicurus as the first to 'raise mortal eyes in defiance' against the gods and the one who 'lifted' humans 'level with the sky'.<sup>39</sup> Such provocations were examples of what, in another letter to Marx, Bauer referred to approvingly as 'the terrorism of true theory'.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Bauer's letters repeatedly counsel Marx to remain circumspect with respect to his radicalism, lest he run afoul of academic gatekeepers and sabotage his chance of securing a position at Bonn. This perhaps explains Marx's plan to develop a critique of Plutarch's religious apologetics and polemics against the Epicureans. For such a project allowed Marx to comment indirectly on similar Christian apologetics circulating in the early nineteenth century. The only existing copy of Marx's dissertation was composed sometime after Marx's doctorate had been conferred. Marx probably intended to send it to prospective publishers. Its table of contents refers to an appendix called the 'Critique of Plutarch's Polemic Against the Theology of Epicurus'. But that appendix is missing. A separate manuscript from around the same time contains a series of endnotes that appear to be related to the missing appendix.<sup>41</sup> In some of them, Marx explicitly connects his attack on Plutarch to nineteenth-century debates. For instance, he counterposes Friedrich Schelling's earlier, more radical writings to his later, conservative and anti-Hegelian views. And he argues that traditional proofs of

38 Hegel 2018, pp. 430–53; Hegel 1995, pp. 1–9.

39 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, pp. 30–1, 73.

40 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 353.

41 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> I/1 (Apparat), pp. 382–7.

God's existence are better understood as '*proofs of the existence of essential human self-consciousness*' or '*logical explanations of it*'.<sup>42</sup> But with respect to the question of logic and Marx's early critique of philosophical abstraction, the far more interesting discussions of Plutarch can be found in the set of seven manuscripts that Marx compiled while preparing to write his dissertation, and that the editors call his 'Notebooks on Epicurus'.

Marx's discussion of Plutarch in the 'Notebooks on Epicurus' is expansive. It takes up half of the Second Notebook, the entirety of the Third, and half of the Fourth, or roughly a quarter of the entire document. But in this context, one passage from the Third Notebook deserves special attention. Here Marx is developing a reading of Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemic *Against Colotes*. He focuses specifically on Plutarch's allegation that Epicureanism avers what we would call relativism. As Marx explains in both his 'Notebooks on Epicurus' and his dissertation, it is a tenet of Epicurus's philosophy that, if I have two different perceptions of the same phenomena, or if I ascribe to it opposing predicates (if, for example, it seems small from a distance but large up close, or hot one moment and cold the next), it is a mistake to search for a single truth hidden beneath these different perceptions, as that amounts to 'myth', which can only generate 'fear', and disturb the 'tranquillity' of the philosopher.<sup>43</sup> Plutarch argues that this tenet denies the difference between being and non-being. As Marx explains, paraphrasing Plutarch, if a 'property changes depending on how it is affected', or if it changes depending on the different ways I sensuously perceive it, then it 'no more is than is not'.<sup>44</sup> Marx responds by proposing that, in making this claim, Plutarch fails to account for 'the dialectic of sense-certainty', by which Marx means Hegel's demonstration in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that our simplest experience of a present space and time (a 'here' and 'now') is mediated by other, absent spaces and times, and thus a relationship between being and non-being.<sup>45</sup> As Marx sees it, Epicurus's affirmation of different sensuous perceptions of the same phenomenon anticipates this dialectic of sense-certainty, while Plutarch's criticisms reveal the inadequacy of his approach. Thus, Marx says, Plutarch's 'question alone suffices to show that he does not understand the matter'. For when Plutarch accuses Epicurus of denying the difference between being and non-being,

42 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 103.

43 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, pp. 69; 418–23. Long and Sedley (eds.) 1987, pp. 84–5.

44 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 458; Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> IV/1, p. 63 (translation modified).

45 Hegel 2018, pp. 60–8.

he speaks of a fixed being or non-being as a predicate. But the being of the sensuous is not such a predicate, not a fixed being or non-being [rather, and as Hegel's dialectic of sense-certainty shows, it is a dynamic relationship between the two – C.B.]. When I separate these, I separate precisely what is not separate in sensuousness. Ordinary thinking always has abstract predicates ready, which it separates from the subject. All philosophers have made the predicate itself a subject.<sup>46</sup>

Ordinary thinking, in other words, also anticipates Hegel's dialectic of sense-certainty. When an ordinary person ascribes a predicate to a subject (such as when they say a phenomenon is large or small, hot or cold), they know that that predicate is not exclusive to that subject, or an immediate manifestation of its being, but an abstraction that can be ascribed to other subjects as well. All philosophers, on the other hand, transform such abstract predicates into subjects, and treat one (abstract) moment in an (actual) process as if it were a fixed foundation for the entire process.

Beyond the extraordinary erudition on display, what is striking about this passage is how similar it is to claims Marx would make later in his 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' and go on to develop in works such as the 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts', *The Holy Family*, *The German Ideology*, and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. As noted in the introduction above, scholars have frequently sought to attribute Marx's employment of an idiom of subjects and predicates in particular to his reading of Feuerbach's 'Preliminary Theses'. But here we see Marx employing the same idiom at least four years prior to the publication of Feuerbach's text. And what is more, we see him using it to mount a powerful attack on philosophical abstraction – one that draws on Hegelian logic, and specifically on the 'dialectic of sense-certainty', in order to challenge 'all philosophers' and privilege instead 'ordinary thinking'. Perhaps the interesting question, then, is not: When and under whose influence did the young Marx abandon idealism or philosophy or Hegelianism and commit himself to materialism? Perhaps it is something more like: When did Marx begin to bring arguments that he had derived from his study of logic to bear on a critique of Hegel? Or: When and how did Marx's study of logic lead him in the direction of a criticism of Hegel, and especially of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*? The next section of this paper will turn to these questions and suggest that the answers lie in part in Marx's engagement with the anti-Hegelian work and thought of Adolf Trendelenburg.

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46 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 458; Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> IV/1, pp. 64–5 (translation modified).



## Offending Philosophy

It would seem that, for Marx, the period from 1839 to the spring of 1842 was particularly fecund. Bauer's letters indicate that, along with his dissertation and 'Notebooks on Epicurus' (which the *MEGA* editors suggest represent only a fraction of his preparatory material for his dissertation),<sup>47</sup> he wrote a theatrical farce called *Fischer Vapulans* (which lampooned the anti-Hegelian theologian Karl Philipp Fischer's 1839 *Die Idee der Gottheit*), a book criticising the position of a group of liberal Catholic theologians called the 'Hermesians' (who were followers of Georg Hermes, whose work had been indexed in 1835, but whose ideas continued to be promoted in German universities, especially the University of Bonn), and a treatise on Christian art that was conceived of as a sequel to Bauer's parody *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment*. Whatever state of completion these works may have achieved, they have all since been lost. We do, however, have a collection of notebooks filled primarily with excerpts from material Marx studied, some of which clearly represent background research for the projects mentioned above. Thus, besides the 'Notebooks on Epicurus', we have a notebook that Marx compiled in Berlin in 1840, or the 'Berliner Hefte'.<sup>48</sup> In it, Marx transcribes passages from Leibniz, Hume, Spinoza, and Karl Rosenkranz's *Geschichte der Kant'schen Philosophie*, probably while preparing to take the exam that would qualify him as a university lecturer. More intriguingly, the same notebook contains the beginnings of a German translation of Aristotle's *De Anima*. We also have five notebooks that the editors have titled Marx's 'Bonner Hefte', as Marx began to compile them while living in Bonn intermittently between 1841 and 1842.<sup>49</sup> These contain excerpts from works on the history of religion and art, which Marx presumably read while developing his treatise on Christian art. Marx scholars have fruitfully mined many of these notebooks. But, with few exceptions, they have largely overlooked Marx's plan during the same period to develop a Hegelian response to Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen*.<sup>50</sup>

47 Marx and Engels 1975–, *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> I/1 (Apparat), p. 882.

48 Marx and Engels 1975–, *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> IV/1, pp. 155–82.

49 Marx and Engels 1975–, *MEGA*<sup>2</sup> IV/1, pp. 287–376.

50 One major exception in this regard is the great Italian scholar Mario Rossi, who recognises the significance of Trendelenburg for both Marx's reading of Aristotle and his relationship with Hegel, although he comes to slightly different conclusions than I do here (Rossi 1963, pp. 56–63, 283–8). Rossi is keen to distinguish Trendelenburg's logical and Aristotelian critique of Hegel from Schelling's 'intuitionistic-Romantic' (p. 58) one and suggests that this 'brings it closer ... to the anti-Hegelian critique of the young Marx' (p. 63). But he vehemently endorses Riazanov's hypothesis regarding the 1843 dating of the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' and the centrality of Feuerbach's 'Provisional

Evidence of this plan can be found in letters Marx received from Bauer and Köppen on 29 March 1841 and 3 June 1841 respectively. The first is the same letter in which Bauer proposes that he and Marx engage in ‘the terrorism of pure theory’. In it, Bauer discusses their plan to produce a new journal to be called *Annals of Atheism*. He notes that, once realised, the project will cause a ‘thunderstorm’, but instructs Marx to observe the ‘strictest silence’ with respect to it in the interim. ‘Trendelenburg’, he goes on to say, ‘will naturally be one of the first offerings you make to the offended philosophy’.<sup>51</sup> The implication is not only that Marx was planning to publish a critique of Trendelenburg in the *Annals of Atheism*, but also that Bauer perceived a direct relationship between atheism, the political project of combating the established order with ‘the terrorism of pure theory’, and the philosophical project of criticising Trendelenburg’s logic. The same issue returns in Köppen’s letter. Köppen makes a handful of satirical remarks about ‘the crazy Dr Schopenhauer’ who ‘declares [his] attack [on Hegel] to be the Last Judgement on Hegelian philosophy’. ‘I am writing you this’, he jokes, ‘so that you have an opportunity to

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Theses’ to its argument (pp. 275–83). Other significant engagements with the issue of which I am aware include recent work by Annik Jaulin and Andreas Arndt (Jaulin 2016; Arndt 2016). Jaulin notes the similarity between Marx and Trendelenburg and posits ‘a certain parallelism’ (p. 111) between their respective interpretations of Aristotle. Referring to the same 29 March 1841 letter I discuss above, in which Bauer says Marx will ‘naturally’ provide a criticism of Trendelenburg in the *Annals of Atheism*, she claims that ‘Marx would not conform to the program fixed for him by Bauer; he even did the opposite of what he “naturally” should have done’ (pp. 115–16). David McLellan speculates that, in his work on Trendelenburg, Marx wanted to ‘demonstrate that Aristotle was dialectical whereas Trendelenburg was only formal’ (McLellan 1973, p. 39). But he provides no references for this assertion. It seems likely that McLellan noticed that the first chapter of the *Logische Untersuchungen* (in which Trendelenburg criticises formal logic) is called ‘Die formale Logik’ and extrapolated mistakenly from there. McLellan’s lack of references has not prevented his speculation from being repeated by otherwise assiduous scholars (Depew 1982, p. 173; Roberts 2017, p. 21, n. 3). Lucio Colletti recognises the substance if not the source of the arguments Marx adopts from Trendelenburg, and especially Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s confusion of logical and real contradictions. He traces this criticism to Kant’s distinction between ‘durch den Widerspruch’ and ‘ohne Widerspruch’ in *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (Colletti 1975). But given the evidence for Marx’s engagement with Trendelenburg, he seems the more likely source. A passing remark by G.V. Plekhanov is also of interest in this context. Plekhanov approves of the way that Hegel’s dialectic involves not only quantitative ‘evolution’ but qualitative ‘leaps’. But he attacks Hegel as an ‘absolute idealist’. ‘Trendelenburg’, he writes, ‘had no difficulty ... demonstrating in his *Logische Untersuchungen* that reference to the idea in reality has never explained anything’. However, ‘in aiming his blows against dialectics’, he ‘actually hit only its *idealist basis*.... This shortcoming was eliminated by the materialist Marx.’ (Plekhanov 1976.)

51 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 354.

honour Schopenhauer alongside Trendelenburg.<sup>52</sup> The insinuation being that Marx should write a criticism of Schopenhauer to accompany the one he was already preparing on Trendelenburg.

As mentioned above, we know from Roland Daniels's inventory of Marx's library that he owned a copy of Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen*. But it is clear that Marx was also familiar with Trendelenburg's larger body of work as well, notably his studies of Aristotle. Trendelenburg established his reputation as one of Germany's preeminent classicists and a leading expert on Aristotle with his 1833 critical edition of Aristotle's *De Anima*.<sup>53</sup> This work was also at the centre of an important renaissance in Aristotle scholarship that took place in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century – one that endeavoured to wrest Aristotle from the grip of the scholastic tradition once and for all, and to reveal him as a philosopher whose ideas had a direct bearing on contemporary debates about the nature of scientific knowledge.<sup>54</sup> It is thus unsurprising to find that Marx refers to Trendelenburg's edition of Aristotle's *De Anima* in his dissertation, where he takes issue with Trendelenburg's claim that only thinkers after Aristotle recognised a basic contradiction in Democritus's philosophy, or the way Democritus here treats true knowledge as something given in sensuous appearances, there as something hidden behind those appearances. 'The opinion of Democritus *concerning the truth and certainty of human knowledge* seems hard to ascertain', Marx maintains:

There are contradictory passages, or rather not the passages, but Democritus' views contradict each other. For Trendelenburg's assertion in his commentary on Aristotelian psychology, that only later authors, but not Aristotle, knew of such contradiction, is factually incorrect. In Aristotle's *Psychology* it is stated: 'Democritus posits soul and mind as one and the same, since the phenomena is the true thing'; in the *Metaphysics*, on the other hand: 'Democritus asserts that nothing is true or that it is concealed from us'. Do these passages of Aristotle not contradict each other? If the phenomenon is true, how can the truth be concealed? The concealment begins only when the phenomenon and truth separate.<sup>55</sup>

52 Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> III/1, p. 361. Köppen directs Marx's attention to Schopenhauer's polemics against Hegel's and Fichte's 'summus philosophus' (Schopenhauer 1841, p. xviii).

53 Trendelenburg 1833. On Trendelenburg's studies of Aristotle, see: Beiser 2014, pp. 23–7; Thouard 2019.

54 Thouard (ed.) 2019; Harting, King and Rapp (eds.) 2019.

55 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 1, p. 38; Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> I/1, p. 25 (translation modified).

These comments are interesting less for the substance of Marx's disagreement with Trendelenburg than for what they reveal about Marx's willingness to challenge him. They suggest that Marx was preparing to present himself as an authority, not only on ancient atomism, but on Aristotle as well – one who could stand toe-to-toe with the reigning champion in the field. And this probably explains why, as mentioned, Marx's 'Berliner Hefte' includes the beginnings of a translation of Aristotle's *De Anima*. For *De Anima* was not only the text on which Trendelenburg had built his reputation. Arguments derived from it were also central to his attack on Hegel in the *Logische Untersuchungen*.

To understand why the young Marx decided to challenge Trendelenburg's arguments, but also how he came to be influenced by those arguments, we must first attempt to summarise that debate between Trendelenburg and Hegel. This involves explaining, not only what separates the two figures, but also what they shared. Like Hegel, Trendelenburg was what Käufer calls a 'logical radical'. He rejected formal logic and sought to root the study of logic in a more robust metaphysics. But while Hegel's system subordinated the philosophy of nature to logic, Trendelenburg was concerned with developing a logic that would reinforce the methods of the natural sciences. And whereas Hegel proposed that logic should be based on *a priori* concepts that condition intuitions, Trendelenburg proposed that logic could not be divorced from intuition, specifically the intuition of motion. The differences and similarities between the two figures come into sharp relief in a chapter from the second volume of the *Logische Untersuchungen* in which Trendelenburg considers concepts and judgements. Hegel and Trendelenburg disagree with the traditional assumption that a judgement involves employing the copula 'is' to link a subject with a predicate. Hegel believes such judgements are preceded and structured by concepts. As noted above, for Hegel, every concept is a unity of contradictory moments; and a judgement does not combine otherwise separate moments but divides a unified concept. Trendelenburg agrees that judgements divide a more fundamental unity. However, that unity is not the concept but the intuition of motion. As Trendelenburg puts it: 'We judge when we think, and in every complete judgement we distinguish subject and predicate.' But 'from this differentiated form, we are driven backwards to a unity, and find that action alone forms the judgement' – a principle that, Trendelenburg proposes, is exemplified in language by 'the so-called impersonal verbs, such as it roars, it strikes, it freezes, and so forth', all of which attest to the possibility of a predicative motion prior to any specific subject.<sup>56</sup> Before there is a distinction between subject and predicate there is a motion, which thinking proceeds

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<sup>56</sup> Trendelenburg 1840b, p. 142.

to represent as if it were a subject so that it may construct judgements. To use Trendelenburg's example, based on our experience of the motion of lightning, we invent the subject 'lightning', and use it to formulate judgements such as 'the lightning strikes'.<sup>57</sup> We think in terms of subjects and predicates. But our experience of motion is more primordial.

Whereas Hegel begins with the concept, then, Trendelenburg begins with the intuition of motion. All of Trendelenburg's specific arguments against Hegel take shape against the backdrop of this basic difference. In his *Logische Untersuchungen*, Trendelenburg's challenge to Hegel begins with his dialectic of being, nothing, and becoming, and his claim to have established a logic 'without presuppositions', as set out in the first section of Hegel's logic on 'The Doctrine of Being'.<sup>58</sup> As Trendelenburg sees it, this dialectic requires that Hegel smuggle into his system something that cannot be given in pure thought, as Hegel maintains, but must be derived from the intuition of motion, which Trendelenburg calls 'the presupposition of the presuppositionless logic'. As pure thoughts, Trendelenburg argues, being and nothing are 'dormant'.<sup>59</sup> Only the introduction of motion can yield becoming. In other words, and as Trendelenburg puts it in an essay designed to summarise the *Logische Untersuchungen*, Hegel's logic implies that 'the self-movement of thought that relates only to itself is at the same time the self-generation of being'.<sup>60</sup> Here logic ostensibly 'receives no rational pre-conceptual content but brings forth the determinations of being from itself'.<sup>61</sup> But this approach tacitly relies on 'the image of local motion'. In Hegel's explicit arguments, Trendelenburg continues, the 'aid of this form-giving intuition was kept hidden. But it was powerful; and once it was admitted it created new sensual vehicles without which pure thinking would not move.' Thus, Trendelenburg concludes that the 'strange but hidden service' of the intuition of motion afforded 'the products of pure thought' the appearance of 'sensuous freshness'. And without this 'strange but hidden service', those 'products' (or Hegel's philosophy in general) 'would have been less than fluttering shadows'.<sup>62</sup>

Along with challenging post-Kantian formal logic, Hegel and Trendelenburg are also critical of the mechanical and arid tradition of syllogistic logic. But Trendelenburg seeks to reaffirm the Aristotelian foundations of that logic.

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57 Trendelenburg 1840b, p. 145.

58 Hegel 1991, pp. 135–45.

59 Trendelenburg 1840a, p. 24.

60 Trendelenburg 1843, p. 1. For a partial English translation of this essay, see Trendelenburg 1871.

61 Trendelenburg 1843, p. 4.

62 Trendelenburg 1843, pp. 12–13.

He frequently takes Hegel to task for confusing the basic Aristotelian principles. Thus, immediately after establishing Hegel's tacit reliance on motion, Trendelenburg challenges Hegel's approach to contradiction or negation. Since Aristotle, Trendelenburg explains, philosophers have distinguished between two distinct senses of contradiction: what he calls 'logical negation' and 'real opposition'. As Trendelenburg writes: 'Either [negation] is considered purely logical, so that it negates what the first concept affirms without putting something new in its place, or it is conceived as real, so that the affirmative concept is negated through a new affirmative concept.'<sup>63</sup> In 'logical negation' there is a contradiction between a statement and its negation in which one must be true and the other false with no third alternative (A or not-A). In 'real opposition', on the other hand, there is a contradiction between two states of affairs in which one excludes the other, but both can also be false, or either true under different circumstances (A or B). In the former, negating an affirmative statement generates nothing affirmative; in the latter, two affirmative statements are opposed, such that the negation of one can leave intact the affirmation of the other. But neither corresponds to Hegel's dialectical contradiction, as neither can result in the affirmation of a new, third term. Put differently, in pure logic or 'logical negation', it is possible to claim that the one term is determined by its difference from another, or through purely logical negation. Being, for example, has meaning insofar as it is not nothing, and nothing insofar as it is not being. But the same is not true in nature or 'real opposition'. For in nature there are no negative terms, only positive facts. The natural existence of a cat, for example, is not to be found in the idea 'not dog', but in an empirical description of a cat.

Given that it was published in 1840, Trendelenburg's *Logische Untersuchungen* could not have been the topic of Marx's and Bauer's discussion of logic invoked in Bauer's letter of 11 December 1839. But a Hegelian could certainly attempt to deflect Trendelenburg's attack by referring to Hegel's theory of the transition from 'reflection' to 'essence'. Trendelenburg maintains that the intuition of motion constitutes an ontological bedrock – that before there is any thought, there is an unmediated intuition of motion. But a Hegelian could respond that this approach remains trapped at the level of 'reflection' in that it treats thought as a passive representation of what exists 'out there' in the world. However, and as Kant shows, to avoid scepticism we must acknowledge that thought is never passive, but actively constitutes experience according to *a priori* forms and categories. For Hegel, Kant was right in this regard; however, he was wrong to then reaffirm the distinction between thought and being, appearance and

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63 Trendelenburg 1840a, p. 31.

essence, or phenomena and noumena. For, as we saw Marx claim with respect to Democritus's atomist physics above, this would require that thought posit a limit to its own activity without transgressing that limit in the same gesture. According to this argument, Trendelenburg's distinction between 'logical negation' and 'real opposition' would only make sense under the rubric of a more original, *a priori* thought – a thought that could not even be characterised as part of the psychological inner world of an individual subject (for such a characterisation would also presuppose a being that is given prior to or outside of the framework provided by the Kantian forms and categories, namely the individual subject), but must be understood in terms of a transindividual 'spirit' that emerges, develops, and comes to realise itself throughout the history of the 'idea'.

Based on Bauer's comments in his letter of 11 December 1839, and on Marx's engagements with logical radicalism and the doctrine of essence in his dissertation, we might be tempted to speculate that this was the direction Marx planned to take in his criticism of Trendelenburg. Barring the discovery of a heretofore unknown manuscript, though, we will never know for certain. At the same time, there is one available text by Marx where the questions of logic and Hegel's philosophy get extensively rehearsed, namely the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law'. As noted, the established reading of this text treats it as the moment when Marx discovers materialism by adopting Feuerbach's 'transformative method'. However, while Marx is certainly critical of the speculative element of Hegel's thought, I would suggest that his overriding concern is less with an opposition between materialism and idealism than it is with the more general question of logic in that expansive sense we have been considering here. The point of the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' is to provide a detailed exegesis of paragraphs 261 to 313 of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Marx transcribes each paragraph and follows most with elaborate commentary. Significantly, in his comments on paragraphs 261 to 271 alone, Marx uses the words '*logische*', '*logischen*', or '*Logik*' no less than twenty-five times – far more often than he invokes the opposition between materialism and idealism. For example, Marx argues that Hegel's various 'definitions of the state' are 'logical-metaphysical definitions', that in Hegel's state theory 'not the philosophy of law but logic is the real centre of interest', that 'the logic does not serve to prove the state but the state to prove the logic', and that Hegel's 'whole philosophy of law is only a parenthesis within logic'.<sup>64</sup>

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64 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 18; Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> 1/2, p. 18–19 (translation modified).

We might go so far as to say, then, that the purpose of Marx's 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' is less to contrast materialism with idealism or to invert subjects and predicates in some Feuerbachian manner than it is to show that, insofar as Hegel's state theory relies on his flawed logic, it is also flawed. If this is a valid suggestion, the relevant questions then become: What aspects of Hegel's logic does Marx characterise as flawed? What arguments does he marshal against them? And what, if any, kind of logic does Marx propose as an alternative? Here Marx appears to develop two, perhaps not entirely consistent lines of thought:

- (1) On the one hand, Marx challenges Hegel from a Hegelian perspective, or attempts to hold Hegel to the consequences of his own claims. He thus counters the abstract or speculative elements of Hegel's logic with the same kind of argument that we saw him use against Plutarch and 'all philosophers' in his 'Notebooks on Epicurus' and suggests that Hegel repeatedly isolates one moment within a process (one abstract predicate of an actual subject) and treats it as if it were the cause, condition, or foundation of that process. For example, Hegel treats 'political sentiment' or the patriotism and public virtue required for citizens to participate in public life as something derived from the idea of the state, insofar as the state is the representative of a universal truth that transcends all particular interests. For Marx, on the contrary, political sentiment or the participation of citizens in public life does not derive from the idea of the state; rather, the state is derived from the participation of its citizens. Marx therefore complains that 'Hegel everywhere makes the idea the subject, and the actual, real subject, such as "political sentiment", the predicate.'<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Hegel begins with an idea of the state as an organic whole, and from this idea attempts to determine the proper relationship between its various institutions. But for Marx: 'The premise, the subject is the *actual differences* or the *distinct facets of the political* constitution.' The subject is, in other words, the different moments within an integrated totality or a process taken together. 'The predicate', on the other hand, 'is their determination as organic.'<sup>66</sup> It is one moment within that larger process. Or again: Hegel argues that 'subjectivity' is 'in its truth only a subject' and 'personality is only a person'. And this would seem to suggest that, for Hegel, ideas cannot exist independent of real content. But according to Marx, this approach still begins with a predicate (subjectivity or personality) and

65 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 11; Marx and Engels 1975–, MEGA<sup>2</sup> 1/2, p. 11 (translation modified).

66 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 12.



treats it as if it were the underlying cause or condition for the totality of determinations that constitute an actual subject (subject or person). As Marx puts it, 'subjectivity is a determination of the subject, personality a determination of the person'; however, 'instead of taking them as predicates of their subjects, Hegel made the predicates independent and afterwards let them transform into their subjects in a mystical way'.<sup>67</sup>

- (2) On the other hand, Marx challenges Hegel from a perspective that he appears to have discovered during his investigation of Trendelenburg. Thus, like Trendelenburg, Marx claims that Hegel's logic involves furtively borrowing empirical intuitions, characterising them as elements of an *a priori* concept, and then proposing that the empirical intuition in question is the realisation of that *a priori* concept. In this manner, and exactly as Trendelenburg argues, Marx maintains that, in Hegel's logic, 'the fact which is taken as a point of departure is not conceived as such, but as a mystical result' and 'the condition is postulated as the conditioned, the determinant as the determined, the producer factor as the product of its product'.<sup>68</sup> Marx's innovation in the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' is to apply this argument to Hegel's state theory – something Trendelenburg does not explicitly do. Thus, Marx maintains that, when developed as a theory of state, Hegel's logic leads to an uncritical affirmation of established institutions. It allows Hegel to present such institutions, not as contingent empirical facts, but as manifestations of a necessary mystical or speculative idea. As Marx puts it: 'The inevitable outcome of this is that an *empirical existent* is *uncritically* accepted as the actual truth of the idea; for it is not a question of bringing empirical existence to its truth; but of bringing truth to an empirical existent, and so what lies to hand is expounded as a *real* element of the idea.' Or, a little later: 'a *particular* empirical existent, one individual empirical existent in distinction from others, is regarded as the *embodiment of the idea*'.<sup>69</sup> Or later again, when Marx discusses Hegel's treatment of the estates as representatives of 'matters of general concern': 'Hegel does not look for an adequate actualisation of the "being for themselves of matters of general concern", he is content to find an empirical existent which can be dissolved into this logical category.'<sup>70</sup>

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67 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 23.

68 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 29.

69 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 39.

70 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 64.

Were these examples insufficient to convince us of a relationship between Marx's arguments and Trendelenburg's, there is one moment where the family resemblance becomes closer still. One of Marx's central claims in the 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' concerns Hegel's use of dialectical logic to portray the established institutions of the state, or the sovereign, executive, and legislative powers (the monarchy, the bureaucracy, and the assemblies) as organically integrated and harmoniously balanced, with each deriving its meaning and legitimacy by way of its negative relationship with respect to the others. Thus, Hegel maintains that all contradictions between the sovereign and the executive can be resolved by the legislature; between the executive and the legislature by the sovereign; and between the sovereign and the legislature by the executive. For Marx, on the other hand, treating the state as a system of dialectical mediations is politically repugnant and logically incoherent. On a political level, Marx maintains, this approach can never resolve the contradictions in question, only paper over them or conceal them behind a false veneer of calm. On a logical level, it operates by pretending it is possible to treat real differences between real institutions, or what Marx calls 'real extremes', as if they were logical differences between logical concepts – to treat the institutions of the state, not as empirical entities, but as manifestations of an abstract idea. However, Marx writes:

Real extremes cannot be mediated precisely because they are real extremes. Nor do they require mediation, for they are opposed in essence. They have nothing in common, they do not need each other, they do not supplement each other. The one does not have in its own bosom the longing for, the need for, the anticipation of the other.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, just as, for Trendelenburg, there is an unbridgeable gulf between 'logical negation' and 'real opposition' (a gulf that, Trendelenburg claims, Hegel unjustifiably uses dialectical sleights of hand to span), so too, for Marx, is there a gulf between the abstract idea, where concepts can be determined via their negative relation to other concepts, and 'real extremes', where there are no negative entities, only positive facts. As noted above with respect to Trendelenburg's version of this argument, we can certainly say, for example, that being has meaning insofar as it is not nothing, or nothing insofar as it is not being – that the concepts of being and nothing are bound together by their difference. But we cannot say that the legislature has meaning because it is not the executive or the sovereign, the sovereign because it is not the legislature

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<sup>71</sup> Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 88.

or the executive, or the executive because it is not the legislature or the sovereign. For these are not logical concepts but real institutions, each of which would continue to exist as real institutions even if the other two suddenly disappeared.

### Conclusion

For Marx, this last point was the most significant. For it implied that, despite what Hegel said about their dialectical interdependence, one might imagine a constitution without a sovereign or an executive – one in which the legislature fulfils all functions of government. In the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’, Marx referred to such a constitution as ‘democracy’. More accurately, he argued that, insofar as it grounds legitimacy in the demands of the people rather than the idea of the state, democracy is not one constitution among many but ‘the *solved* riddle of all constitutions’ – not one particular political form but the hidden condition of all political forms. If, previously, the constitution was assumed to be an abstract order that somehow invents itself, and that precedes and conditions human coexistence, in democracy, Marx maintained, ‘the constitution appears as what it is, a free product of man’.<sup>72</sup> Here it is worth noting that, thirty years after he composed his ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’, when Marx found himself commenting on the Paris Commune of 1871, precisely what he praised was its system of ‘municipal councillors’ elected by ‘universal suffrage’ and ‘responsible and revocable at short terms’, or a political organisation that was ‘a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time’.<sup>73</sup> This, Marx believed, was the form ‘under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour’. It was ‘a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore class rule’ – one that would make it possible to abolish ‘class property’ in favour of ‘free and associated labour’.<sup>74</sup> An entire adult life separates Marx’s detailed exegesis of Hegel’s state theory in the ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’ and his paean to the Communards in *The Civil War in France*. But thanks at least in part to Marx’s forgotten encounter with Trendelenburg, the logic of the latter was fully articulated in the former. This is just one example among many. Indeed, it may be the case that understanding the inner rhythm of all of Marx’s work would require dampening the assumption that it is organised

72 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 3, p. 9.

73 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 22, p. 331.

74 Marx and Engels 1975–2004, MECW 22, p. 334.

around the opposition between materialism and idealism that Engels promoted so successfully, and considering it once again through the lens of logic.

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