Chapter 2

The Theory of Alienation: Marx’s Debt to Hegel

First published in The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution (Detroit: News & Letters, 1965), this article was described in the Foreword to that pamphlet as “the lecture by Raya Dunayevskaya most frequently requested both by college students and civil rights activists because it deals with the problem with which they are themselves grappling—‘Alienation and Freedom.’”

The topic “Marx’s Debt to Hegel,” is neither merely academic, nor does it pertain only to the historical period of Marx’s lifetime. From the Hungarian revolt to the African revolutions, from the student demonstrators in Japan to the Negro revolution in the U.S., the struggle for freedom has transformed reality and pulled Hegelian dialectics out of the academic halls and philosophy books onto the living stage of history.

It is true that this transformation of Hegel into a contemporary has been via Marx. It is no accident, however, that Russian Communism’s attack on Marx has been via Hegel. Because they recognize in the so-called mystical Absolute “the negation of the negation,” the revolution against themselves, Hegel remains so alive and worrisome to the Russian rulers today. Ever since Andrei Zhdanov in 1947 demanded that the Russian philosophers find nothing short of “a new dialectical law,” or, rather, declared “criticism and self-criticism” to be that alleged new dialectical law to replace the Hegelian and objective law of development through contradiction,¹ up to the 21st Congress of the Russian Communist Party where the special philosophic sessions declared Nikita Khrushchev to be “the true humanist,” the attack on both the young Marx and the mystic Hegel has been continuous. It reached a climax in the 1955 attacks on Marx’s Early Essays² in theory. In actuality it came to life as the Sino-Soviet Pact³ to put down the Hungarian Revolution.

One thing these intellectual bureaucrats sense correctly: Hegel’s Concept of the Absolute and the international struggle for freedom are not as far apart as would appear on the surface.

¹ For Dunayevskaya’s analysis of this see Marxism and Freedom, p. 40. —Editor.
² Marx’s Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. —Editor.
³ Once the Sino-Soviet conflict came into the open, Chinese Communism actually dared boast of the fact that it urged Khrushchev to undertake the counterrevolutionary intervention. For the latest Chinese attacks on Marxist-Humanism which it calls the “revisionist” concept of Man, see text of this pamphlet [Mario Savio, Eugene, Walker, and Raya Dunayevskaya, The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution (Detroit: News & Letters, 1965)], p. 39.
I The Ideal and the Real are Never Far Apart

It is this which Marx gained from Hegel. It is this which enabled the young Marx, once he broke from bourgeois society, to break also with the vulgar communists of his day who thought that one negation—the abolition of private property—would end all the ills of the old society and be the new communal society.

Marx insisted on what is central to Hegelian philosophy, the theory of alienation, from which he concluded that the alienation of man does not end with the abolition of private property—unless what is most alien of all in bourgeois society, the alienation of man’s labor from the activity of self-development into an appendage to a machine, is abrogated. In the place of the alienation of labor, Marx placed, not a new property form, but “the full and free development of the individual.”

The pluri-dimensional in Hegel, his presupposition of the infinite capacities of man to grasp through to the “Absolute,” not as something isolated in heaven, but as a dimension of the human being, reveals what a great distance humanity had traveled from Aristotle's Absolutes.

Because Aristotle lived in a society based on slavery, his Absolutes ended in “Pure Form”—mind of man would meet mind of God and contemplate how wondrous things are.

Because Hegel's Absolutes emerged out of the French Revolution which put an end to serfdom, Hegel's Absolutes breathed the air, the earthly air of freedom. Even when one reads Absolute Mind as God, one cannot escape the earthly quality of the unity of theory and practice and grasp through to the Absolute Reality as man’s attainment of total freedom, inner and outer and temporal. The bondsman, having through his labor gained, as Hegel put it, “a mind of his own,” becomes part of the struggle between “consciousness-in-itself” and “consciousness-for-itself.” Or, more popularly stated, the struggle against alienation becomes the attainment of freedom.

In Hegel's Absolutes there is imbedded, though in abstract form, the full development of what Marx would have called the social individual, and what Hegel called individuality “purified of all that interfered with its universalism,” i.e., freedom itself.

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