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Dear Warren Steinkraus:

You are absolutely right both about the inanities and insanities of Reagan-- whom I've called Rambo-on-the-loose-- as the bombing of Tripoli shows. But this note is not about that. Rather, I'm wondering whether you would care to comment on a debate I'm having with myself on the different ways Hegel writes on the Idea of Cognition in the Science of Logic (hereafter referred to as Science), and the way it is expressed in his Encyclopedia (smaller Logic), paragraphs 225-235, with focus on ¶233-235. The fact that the smaller Logic does the same type of abbreviation with the Absolute Idea as it does with the Idea of Cognition, turning that magnificent and most profound chapter of the Science into paragraphs 236-244, ^{and} that ¶244 in the smaller Logic was the one Lenin preferred* to the final paragraph of the Absolute Idea in the Science, has had me "debating" Lenin ever since 1953**. That year may seem far away, but its essence, without the polemics, you actually heard at the 1974 Hegel Society of America conference, from which you edited my paper on "Absolute Idea as New Beginning" in Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy.

Whether or not Lenin had a right to "mis-read" the difference in Hegel's two articulations in the Science and in the smaller Logic, isn't it true that Hegel, by creating the sub-section β , "volition", which does not appear in the Science, left open the door for a future generation of Marxists to become so enthralled with Ch. 2, "The Idea of Cognition" -- which ended with the pronouncement that Practice was higher than Theory -- that they saw an identity of the two versions? These Marxists weren't Kantians believing that all contradictions will be solved by actions of "men of good will".

There is no reason, I think, for introducing a new sub-heading which lets Marxists think that now that practice is "higher" than theory, and that "Will", not as willfulness, but as action, is their province, they do not need to study Hegel further.

* All the references to Lenin are to his Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic, as included in Vol. 38 of his Collected Works, pp. 87-238. Concretely the subject under dispute here is on the Doctrine of the Notion, Section Three, Chaps. 2 and 3, "The Idea of Cognition" and the "Absolute Idea".

** I don't know whether the State University of New York has my Archives, but the 1953 Letters on the Absolute Idea are included in the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection, 12 vols., Wayne State University Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, pp. 1797-1812.

11248

Please bear with me as I go through Lenin's interpretation of that chapter with focus on this sub-section, so that we know precisely what is at issue. Indeed, when I began my talking to myself in 1953, objecting to Lenin's dismissal of the last half of the final paragraph of the Absolute Idea in the Science as "unimportant", preferring ¶244 of the smaller Logic/"go forth freely as Nature"-- I explained that Lenin could have said that because he hadn't suffered through Stalinism. I was happy that there was one Marxist revolutionary who had dug into Hegel's Absolute Idea.

Now then, when Lenin seemed to have completed his Abstract, and writes "End of the Logic. 12/17/1914.", (Vol. 38, p.233), he doesn't really end. At the end of that he refers you to the fact that he ended his study of the Science with ¶244 of the smaller Logic-- and he means it. Clearly, it wasn't only the last half of a paragraph of the Absolute Idea in the Science that Lenin dismissed. The truth is that Lenin had begun seriously to consult the smaller Logic at the section on the Idea, which begins in the smaller Logic with ¶213. When Lenin completed Chap. 2, the "Idea of Cognition", he didn't really go to Chap. 3, "The Absolute Idea", but first proceeded for seven pages with his own "translation" (interpretation). This is on pp. 212-219 of Vol. 38 of his Collected Works.

Lenin there divided each page into two. One side, he called "Practice in the theory of Knowledge"; on the other side, he wrote: "Alias, Man's consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it". I was so enamoured with his "Hegelianism" that I never stopped repeating it. Presently, however, I'm paying a great deal more attention to what he did in that division of the page into two, with these "translations". Thus: 1) "Notion=Man"; 2) "Otherness which is in itself= Nature independent of man"; 3) "Absolute Idea= objective truth". When Lenin reaches the final section of Ch. 2, "The Idea of the Good", he writes, "end of Ch. 2, Transition to Ch. 3, 'The Absolute Idea'". But I consider that he is still only on the threshold of the Absolute Idea. Indeed, all that follows p. 219 in his Notes shows that to be true, and explains why Lenin proceeded on his own after the end of his Notes on the Absolute Idea, and returned to the smaller Logic.

Thus when Lenin writes that he had reached the end of the Absolute Idea and quotes ¶244 as the true end, because it is "objective", he proceeds to the smaller Logic and reaches ¶244, to which he had already referred.

Although he continued his commentaries as he was reading and quoting Absolute Idea from the Science, it was not either Absolute Idea or Absolute Method that his 16-point definition of the dialectic ends on: "15) the struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content. 16) the transition of quantity into quality and vice versa. (15 and 16 are examples of 9)." No wonder the preceding point 14 referred to absolute negativity as if it were only "the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)".

Outside of Marx himself, the whole question of the negation of the negation was ignored by all "orthodox Marxists". Or worse, it was made into a vulgar materialism, as with Stalin, who denied that it was a fundamental law of dialectics. Here, specifically, we see the case of Lenin, who had gone back to Hegel, and had stressed that it was impossible to understand Capital, especially its first chapter, without reading the whole of the Science, and yet the whole point that Hegel was developing on unresolved contradiction, of "two worlds in opposition, one a realm of subjectivity in the pure regions of transparent thought, the other a realm of objectivity in the element of an externally manifold actuality that is an undisclosed realm of darkness", (Miller translation, p.320) did not faze Lenin because he felt that the objective, the Practical Idea, is that resolution. Nor was he fazed by the fact that Hegel had said that "the complete elaboration of the unresolved contradiction between the absolute end and the limitation of this actuality that insuperably opposes it has been considered in detail in the Phenomenology of Mind". (The reference is to p. 611 ff. of the Phenomenology, Bailie translation.)

In the original German the above sentence reads: "Die vollstandige Ausbildung des unaufgelosten Widerspruchs, jenes absoluten Zwecks, dem die Schranke dieser Wirklichkeit unuberwindlich gegenubersteht, ist in der Phanomenologie des Geistes (2 Aufl., S. 453ff.)".

Nothing, in fact, led Lenin back to the Idea of Theory and away from dependence on the Practical Idea, not even when Hegel writes: "The practical Idea still lacks the moment of the Theoretical Idea... For the practical Idea, on the contrary, this actuality, which at the same time confronts it as an insuperable limitation, ranks as something intrinsically worthless that must first receive its true determination and sole worth through the end of the good. Hence it is only the will itself that stands in the way of the attainment of its goal, for it separates itself from cognition, and external reality for the will does not receive the form of a true being; the Idea of the good therefore finds its integration only in the Idea of the true." (p. 821, Miller translation).

In German this sentence reads: "Der praktischen Idee dagegen gilt diese Wirklichkeit, die ihr zugleich als unuberwindliche Schranke gegenubersteht, als das an und fur sich Nichtige, das erst seine wahrhafte Bestimmung und einzigen Wert durch die Zwecke das Guten erhalten sollte. Der Wille steht daher der Erreichung seines Ziels nur selbst im Wege dadurch, dass er sich vom dem Erkennen trennt und die ausserliche Wirklichkeit fur ihn nicht die Form das wahrhaft Seienden erhalt: die Idee des Guten kann daher ihre Erganzung allein in der Idee des Wahren finden."

I'm certainly not blaming Hegel for what "orthodox Marxists" have done to Hegel's dialectic, but I still want to know a non-Marxist Hegelian's viewpoint on the difference of the two articulations on the Idea of Cognition and the Absolute Idea in the Science and in the smaller Logic. What is your view?

11250

Yours, Roy D. Jurgens