

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are widely regarded as titans of philosophy, having influenced thinkers from every country, enemies and allies alike. Equally respected is Georg W. F. Hegel. The opposition between Hegel and Marx, however, is taken for granted. The logical development of Marxism out of Hegelian thought is underappreciated. Also underappreciated is the significance of the mediating role played by Feuerbach. In this short but dense work, R. Georges examines how Marx and Engels' philosophy developed out of Hegel's philosophy, offering a broad survey of Hegel's oeuvre in the process.

Hegel Short Course

A Primer for Marxists

René Georges

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by René Georges

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Introduction

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in August of 1770 in the town of Stuttgart, Württemberg. Hegel bore witness to the era of bourgeois revolutions, and took a particular interest in the French Revolution. He died in 1831, before the revolutionary events of 1848. His life roughly corresponds, then, with the ascension of the bourgeoisie and its fierce struggle against feudal absolutism. As will be seen, his philosophy was heavily informed as well as limited by this process.

Hegel's body of work is too large and complex to be discussed in its entirety in this work. Instead, his most important ideas will be examined with a critical eye, with the intention of weeding out what was revolutionary about his thought and what was idealistic about his thought. The depth of Hegel's insight is matched only by the difficulty of his prose, and so the task is difficult but important.

The importance of Hegel's work cannot be understated. As Friedrich Engels characterized it in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*:

As soon as we realize that [the task of philosophy cannot be done by any single person but rather is the entire historical process towards absolute truth], there is an end to all philosophy in the hitherto accepted sense of the word. One leaves alone "absolute truth", which is unattainable along this path or by any single individual; instead, one pursues attainable relative truths along the path of the positive sciences, and the

*summation of their results by means of dialectical thinking. At any rate, **with Hegel philosophy comes to an end**; on the one hand, because in his system he summed up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even though unconsciously, he showed us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive knowledge of the world.*

In one sense, Hegel represents the end of philosophy as a practice limited in scope. In another sense, however, by finding the “way out of the labyrinth of systems” (and by “systems” Engels is referring to competing schools of philosophy), Hegel dragged philosophy into a new era of struggle. Every philosophy represents a particular class outlook, and the conflict between dialectical philosophy and metaphysical philosophy represents the conflict between the revolutionary and reformist tendencies within the workers’ movement. Revolutionaries, from Marx and Engels, through Lenin and ending with Mao, grasped the essence of dialectics, and so each defeated the respective metaphysics of their day. Marx and Engels, building on the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, destroyed the religious metaphysic which permeated Hegel’s system. In his era, Lenin defeated the metaphysical view of the state, and particularly bourgeois democracy, held by the Social-Democrats. During the Sino-Soviet split in the international communist movement, Mao destroyed the metaphysical view of the Communist Party and identified the internal contraction between the capitalist and socialist roads.

The present work should serve as a primer to prepare one to read Hegel, and if the reader feels the primary sources are too difficult, this will hopefully serve as an adequate survey of his thought. Too often is Hegel reduced to a series of definitions or formulas to be memorized, at the expense of the revolutionary side of his thought. It is through criticism that the practical and revolutionary side of his philosophy is revealed.

This work was written with Marxism in mind, and makes many references that will only be understood by those with some familiarity with the contributions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to philosophy and political economy.

Hegel's ultimate goal was the elevation of philosophy to a science, and in the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* he seeks to accomplish this by grasping the "true shape of truth". This is the essence of the philosophic system of Hegel. He wanted to understand the movement of ideas as they develop from simple to complex, or from a lower form to a higher form. Hence the difficulty of his terminology; what seems to be a random assortment of near-synonyms is in fact a careful outline of the dialectic of thought.

The dialectic is not the only feature that demands attention, although it is the most well-known contribution of Hegel's thanks to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Hegel also provides insight regarding political economy, consciousness, and logic, insights which have been taken up and expanded upon by materialists.

Philosophy is one site of the class struggle. Today, the split is clear: idealism is the outlook of the

bourgeoisie, and materialism guides the proletariat. But in Hegel's day, materialist thought was bogged down by a mechanistic view of development, and therefore was limited and served the bourgeoisie. Hegel's idealist system is totally opposed to this sort of materialism. The bourgeois revolutionary character of Hegel's thought is found in his treatment of all categories as singular moments, and therefore only relative and temporary, as well as in his belief in the movement of humanity as a whole towards absolute self-knowledge.

In Hegel's lifetime, the French Revolution came to pass, and he was possessed by the revolutionary spirit. His lifetime covers the era of the bourgeoisie's struggle against absolutism and the rise of the liberal-democratic state, which is where his philosophy finds its limit. Hegel did not see that these states were also mere moments, and his own political and religious beliefs cast a shadow over his work.

It would be an error, however, to simply say that Hegel's philosophy is wrong. This is a problem he addresses as well--no philosophy can be completely wrong at all times or completely right at all times. Every philosophy is a moment in the development of philosophy as a whole. If philosophy is ever completed, if our knowledge of the world and our thought is absolutely complete, philosophy will cease to exist in its current form and take on that of a mere fact. Not coincidentally, this is the same opinion elaborated by Friedrich Engels in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. If one is a true follower of the Hegelian philosophy, one must admit that Hegel's idealism was only a step in the development towards complete knowledge, and that his philosophy has been sublated.

Hegel's own work has fallen victim to the dialectic. The most devout followers of Hegel could not save his philosophy from the dustbin of history. Only his greatest *critics*, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, in the process of overcoming the limitations of German idealism, have succeeded in preserving it.

Hegel's gift to philosophy was the discovery of its internal contradictions that drive its development. Hegel applied his logic to categories of thought, but these are merely reflections of the real movement of things. The present task is grasping this movement, applying it in all its depth, and through this, discover the laws behind the development of the real world in order to change it.

The frivolity and boredom which upset the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world. -Preface to Phenomenology of Spirit

Chapter 1: Hegel's Predecessors

Hegel wrote extensively on the history of philosophy, and covering the relationship between Hegel and philosophy from the ancient Greeks onward could easily fill several volumes. Therefore, only several important philosophers in the centuries leading up to Hegel will be examined here. [Note that all quotations are from Hegel's *History of Philosophy*, which is not divided into numbered sections, but instead according to names of philosophers, and is available at marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/hpindex.htm]

Hegel's criticism of previous philosophy has two sources: on the one hand, he criticizes materialists for their materialism, which he believes is too mechanistic. (Without a doubt, this is a valid criticism for some of his predecessors.) On the other hand, he criticizes idealists for separating in thought that which is united in reality. The first line of criticism is reactionary, and the second, progressive.

Descartes is one such philosopher whose metaphysics Hegel clearly opposed:

Descartes accepts Being in the entirely positive sense, and has not the conception of its being the negative of self-consciousness: but simple Being, set forth as the negative of self-consciousness, is extension. Descartes thus separates extension from God, remains constant to this separation, unites the universe, matter, with God in such a way as to make Him its creator and first cause: and he has the true perception that conservation is a continuous creation, in so far as creation as

activity is asserted to be separated. Descartes does not, however, trace extension in a true method back to thought; matter, extended substances, stand over against the thinking substances which are simple; in as far as the universe is created by God, it could not be as perfect as its cause. [...] Preservation is, however, unceasing re-production. [...] He thus remains at the point of view of mechanism pure and simple. Give me matter (extension) and motion and I will build worlds for you, is what Descartes virtually says.

Hegel's criticism of Descartes is twofold: on the one hand, he criticizes his separation of elements Hegel believes are united, and on the other hand, criticizes the kernel of materialism in Descartes' philosophy. Hegel's absolute idealism supposes the unity of everything, but this unity is not found in matter. Hegel's criticism, which does proceed from an imperfect foundation, nevertheless is valid insofar as it attacks Descartes' metaphysics. Hegel is correct that there is no such thing as preservation, but only "unceasing reproduction", and that being and nothingness are inseparable. (This theme will be explored in greater detail later. For now, it suffices to say that being is a transient state that necessarily has a positive and negative aspect.) Descartes dualism was an early attempt to provide a philosophic foundation for capitalism, as it posits completely independent entities, that is, minds divorced from matter, confronting each other in the marketplace, and that individuals can sell their labor power on the marketplace without affecting their individuality, since mind and body are two essentially different substances. Hegel's problem with Descartes is with both the

substance and dualism of his substance dualist philosophy. For Marxists, the problem with Descartes is the dualism of his thought, which throws up a barrier between mind and matter which does not exist in reality.

Thomas Hobbes is notable for Marxists as one of the earliest philosophers of the state and as a pre-Marxist materialist. Hobbes' *Leviathan* attempted to explain the rise of the state, although his theory was only partially correct. Hobbes was correct that the state arises out of an insoluble conflict. However, it has nothing to do with establishing or maintaining peace, but rather is an instrument for one class to wage war against another. Hegel's criticism of Hobbes, ironically, takes on a materialist character:

Hobbes maintained that "The origin of all society is to be found in the mutual fear of all its members;" it is hence a phenomenon in consciousness. "Each association is thus formed in its own interest or for its own renown, that is, from selfish motives." All such matters as security of life, property, and enjoyment, are not to be found outside it. [...] Thus their similarity is not derived from the greatest strength; it is not, as in modern times, founded on the freedom of the spirit, or on an equality of merit and independence, but on the equal weakness of mankind; each man is weak as regards others.

Hegel correctly found that the foundation of Hobbes' description of the state, while it describes an objective process that takes place outside of any individual, assumes a particular subjective

characteristic present in all people. In this way, Hobbes' theory is materialist insofar as it posits an objective process which gives rise to the state, but idealist insofar as it attributes this process to an eternal human nature. Hegel's criticism forms the complement to this outlook: he also believes the state is the product of an objective process, but it is a positive process, that of the unfolding of the spirit tending towards freedom, and not the negative process of domination in order to maintain peace by threat of force. This complementary opposition is the result of the opposition between Hobbes' mechanical materialist outlook and Hegel's absolute idealism. (As for Hegel's view of the state and political economy, this will be explored in greater detail later.)

Spinoza, on the other hand, was praised by Hegel for uniting matter and mind in his philosophy. Hegel, however, took issue with Spinoza's monism, which attributed primacy to substance and not spirit:

It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy. [...] Spinoza's defect is therefore this, that he takes the third moment [individuality, whose first two moments are universal and particular] as mode alone, as a false individuality. True individuality and subjectivity is not a mere retreat from the universal, not merely something clearly determinate; for, as clearly determinate, it is at the same time Being-for-itself, determined by itself alone. The individual, the subjective, is even in being so the return to the universal; and in that it is at home with

itself, it is itself the universal.

Spinoza's systematic monism is praised highly by Hegel. However, Hegel takes a strong stance on the question of the relationship between the universal and the individual: for Hegel, the individual subject *is* the universal, a notion which runs counter to Spinoza's thought.

Locke suffers the same shortcoming according to Hegel: "Since the universal as such, the idea of species, is, according, to Locke, merely a product of our mind, which is not itself objective, but relates merely to objects which are germane to it, and from which the particular of qualities, conditions, time, place, etc., are separated, *Locke distinguishes essences into real essences and nominal essences...*" Locke's outlook on the problem of universals is conceptualist, which is opposed to Hegel's immanent realism as well as his absolute idealism, which prioritizes thought over matter, the latter of which is a determinate expression of the former. This is not his sole criticism of Locke, however. Hegel also attacked his ontological standpoint: "We may instance the proposition, 'Whatsoever is, is; and it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be; which of all others I think have the most allowed title to innate.' But this proposition does not hold good for the Notion; there is nothing either in heaven or earth which does not contain Being and non-Being." Once again, Hegel opposes a metaphysical philosopher on dialectical grounds, a critique which any consistent Marxist ought to agree with. Anything being must also contain the potential to not be--for example, the moment a person

is born, they begin to die, and indeed their death is a guarantee. Anything that exists is in the process of going out of existence, and anything dying is transitioning to be something new. In this way, Being and non-Being are united, and Locke's metaphysics collapses under the slightest scrutiny.

George Berkeley's philosophy is intimately connected with Locke's: according to Hegel, "This idealism, in which all external reality disappears, has before it the standpoint of Locke, and it proceeds directly from him. For we saw that to Locke the source of truth is experience, or Being as perceived." Berkeley too was an idealist, but Hegel distinguished himself from Berkeley: "Berkeley calls the other the objects; but these, he says, cannot be what we call matter, for spirit and matter cannot come together. But the necessity of conceptions directly contradicts this Being-within-self of the conceiver..." Berkeley's idealism separated the external world from people's conceptions of it, which Hegel took issue with. In a way, this foreshadowed the polemic between the Russian Machists and Vladimir Lenin. Bogdanov also believed that objects were conceptions derived from complexes of sensations, a notion Lenin (and even earlier, Diderot) opposed with the plain fact that people are matter endowed with the capacities of sensation and memory, and that sensations are merely the matter of human bodies interacting with material phenomena.

This question of the mind is equally present in the work of David Hume and Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy takes the work of Hume as its starting point. Hegel's refutation of Kant's philosophy is ingenious because it takes Kant's own philosophy as its

premise:

Theoretically the Kantian philosophy is the “Illumination” or Aufklärung reduced to method; it states that nothing true can be known, but only the phenomenal; it leads knowledge into consciousness and self-consciousness, but from this standpoint maintains it to be a subjective and finite knowledge. Thus although it deals with the infinite Idea, expressing its formal categories and arriving at its concrete claims, it yet again denies this to be the truth, making it a simple subjective, because it has once for all accepted finite knowledge as the fixed and ultimate standpoint. This philosophy made an end of the metaphysic of the understanding as an objective dogmatism, but in fact it merely transformed it into a subjective dogmatism, i.e. into a consciousness in which these same finite determinations of the understanding persist, and the question of what is true in and for itself has been abandoned.

If the noumenal world is essentially unknowable, then how can Kant know that it is different from the phenomenal world? In fact, this is the premise of his philosophy, that there is a Great Wall between the two. Hegel points out that Kant’s philosophy is self-defeating on account of denying truth, a criticism which is as valid today as the day Hegel wrote it.

Thus Hegel arrives at his contemporaries, Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling. Hegel’s difference with these two idealists was not one of principle, but of form. Hegel believed they failed to

thoroughly systematize their speculative idealism, and that they therefore fell short of establishing a logically thorough, internally consistent philosophy. He says of Fichte:

*As we mentioned above, **the shortcoming in the Kantian philosophy was its unthinking inconsistency, through which speculative unity was lacking to the whole system; and this shortcoming was removed by Fichte.** [...] Now Fichte merely set forth this Notion; he did not bring it to a scientific realization from itself. For to him this Notion maintains and asserts itself as this Notion; it has absoluteness for him in so far as it is merely the unrealized Notion, and thus indeed comes once more into opposition with reality. **The Fichtian philosophy has the great advantage of having set forth the fact that Philosophy must be a science derived from one supreme principle, from which all determinations are necessarily derived.** The important point is this unity of principle and the attempt to develop from it in a scientifically consistent way the whole content of consciousness, or, as has been said, to construct the whole world. Beyond this no progress was made.*

As well towards Schelling:

*What is lacking in Schelling's philosophy is thus the fact that the point of **indifference of subjectivity and objectivity**, or the Notion of reason, is absolutely pre-supposed, without any attempt being made at showing that this is the truth.*

Hegel's philosophy, therefore, has been framed: Hegel represented the culmination of all previous idealist philosophy, which had been tending towards greater internal consistency and more thorough logical proof. The "speculative unity" that Fichte lacked was resolved, as will be seen, through the introduction of the Absolute, which makes his speculative philosophy into a teleology of sorts. Equally, the "indifference" of subjectivity and objectivity is overcome in Hegel's philosophy according to the principle of the Absolute, which develops towards internal self-consistency, that is, perfect unity with itself.

It is for this reason that Engels accepted Hegel as the end to classical philosophy, and marked the beginning of a new era in philosophy. Hegel perfected idealism--no gaps remained to be filled, all idealist philosophers since Hegel have merely rephrased earlier idealists or quarreled over how a particular idealist system ought to be interpreted. Idealism has stagnated. The other trend in philosophy, Marxism, has in contrast enjoyed constant development, with no foreseeable end.

Chapter 2: Ontological Foundation

The relationship between Hegel and his predecessors has been established thus: Hegel's objective was the perfection of idealism, which was to be accomplished through the establishment of a single principle which could unite an entire idealist system, and the derivation of a formal system from this principle.

This principle was uncovered through a dialectical ontology, which contrasted with the metaphysical ontology of all previous idealist systems. Metaphysics is the assumption of the existence of eternal, unchanging categories or relations, with sharp distinctions drawn between them. Dialectics, in contrast, is the study of change and interconnectedness. A simple example distinguishing the two outlooks is human nature. Bourgeois philosophers often ascribe a metaphysical selfishness to humanity, which transcends time and space. Dialecticians naturally take the opposite stance, that there is no fixed human nature, but rather people are capable of changing themselves and if there is such a thing as a "human nature" then it is the inclinations they inherit from their material conditions, which includes their social relations, and is therefore not fixed but rather temporary.

The unifying principle of Hegel's philosophy, and the foundation of dialectics, is the unity of opposites. Hegel lays out his ontology (the outlook on being) thus: "*Being is determined, first, as against another in general; Secondly, as immanently self-determining; Thirdly, setting aside the preliminary*

character of this division, it is the abstract indeterminateness and immediacy in which it must be the beginning.” [§123 *Science of Logic*] Something can only *be* insofar as it is opposed to something else. Put otherwise, something has *objective* existence insofar as it is an *object* for another thing.

The central question of ontology, what does it mean to *be*, has thus been exposed as a false question by Hegel. Nothing can *be*, as *being* is an abstract undifferentiatedness: being is therefore the same as *nothing*. Instead of asking what is *being*, it is a question of what is *becoming*: “Becoming, as this transition into the unity of being and nothing, a unity which is in the form of being or has the form of the onesided immediate unity of these moments, is *determinate being*.” [§183 *Science of Logic*] In other words, being is, by necessity, determinate, that is, possesses limits. By possessing limits, it necessarily has a beginning and an end, and is therefore merely a *moment* in a larger process.

The significance of this principle, simple as it is, cannot be overstated. Any category that is taken as eternal, any relationship in politics that is simply taken for granted, is obliterated by this simple fact, and shown to be a mere moment. This is not to reduce relations or categories to mere “social constructions” or endorse a relativistic outlook: on the contrary, categories and relations are objective, but equally objective is their development into higher categories and relations, which can then be broken down into higher categories and relations *ad infinitum*:

Grasped as thus distinguished, each moment is in this

distinguishedness as a unity with the other. Becoming therefore contains being and nothing as two such unities, each of which is itself a unity of being and nothing; the one is being as immediate and as relation to nothing, and the other is nothing as immediate and as relation to being; the determinations are of unequal values in these unities. [...] Becoming is in this way in a double determination. In one of them, nothing is immediate, that is, the determination starts from nothing which relates itself to being, or in other words changes into it; in the other, being is immediate, that is, the determination starts from being which changes into nothing: the former is coming-to-be and the latter is ceasing-to-be. [...] Both are the same, becoming, and although they differ so in direction they interpenetrate and paralyse each other. The one is ceasing-to-be: being passes over into nothing, but nothing is equally the opposite of itself, transition into being, coming-to-be. [§177-179 Science of Logic]

This simple principle gives rise to infinite complexity, as will be shown. It penetrates into every recess of Hegel's philosophy, and it is only through the *violation* of this principle that Hegel is able to taint his outlook with idealist speculation. If he were to consistently apply this principle, he would have found that all of the former idealist systems were moments in the becoming of philosophy as a science, which can only be completed by bringing philosophy into unity with reality through the materialist outlook, which itself is only a moment in the class struggle. The development of this principle in philosophy is the precursor to uniting philosophy with its opposite,

practice, a feat achieved by Karl Marx.

This is a leap ahead, but in order to understand Hegel, one must understand the starting and ending point, as coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are the points between which the essence of a thing is found. Therefore Hegel can only be understood as the coming-to-be of dialectical thought out of metaphysics, and the ceasing-to-be of idealist philosophy.

Chapter 3: Logic

*People have a feeling that, if thinking passes the ordinary range of our ideas and impressions, it cannot but be on the evil road. They seem to be trusting themselves to a sea on which they will be tossed to and fro by the waves of thought, till at length they again reach the sandbank of this temporal scene, as utterly poor as when they left it. -§19n, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences**

John Stuart Mill defined logic as “the process itself of advancing from known truths to unknown, and all other intellectual operations in so far as auxiliary to this.” [Introduction to *A System of Logic*] In philosophy, logic is the study of the form of truth. Hegel defined logic as the “absolute form of truth, and another name for the very truth itself.” (§19, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*) At the same time, Hegel says that, “Truth is the object of Logic.” (§19, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*) (For Hegel, philosophic truth means not self-contradictory, or put simply, truth is consistency. See §24n, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*) Already it would seem as though Hegel’s logic has tied itself into a knot--how can truth be both the object of logic and logic itself? This unity of subject and object is part of Hegel’s attempt to develop logic to a higher stage, and is in fact unique to philosophy, which has no separation between subject (human thinking) and object (also human thinking) and so takes on the character of a “circle which closes with itself, and has no beginning

in the same way as the other sciences.” (§17, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*)

People often mistake methods from a particular science for the universal scientific method, whether it is cybernetics, structuralism, mathematics, etc. The dialectical method in philosophy is in no way arbitrary, and dialectic is always concrete. It stands opposed to the positivist/empiricist outlook, which can only affirm what exists and is therefore limited by definition. The methodology of science is historically determined, and so science or the individual scientific methods, do not exist outside of the dialectic but are rather a component part of it. The method of philosophy is necessarily different from the methods of other sciences due to the unity of subject and object.

Hegel aimed at nothing short of a revolution in logic. He believed logic should not be dependent on its subordinates, especially math, for its basic principles. In order to move past the limitations of previous logic, Hegel first had to comprehend its limitations:

*This divorce between idea and reality is especially dear to the analytic understanding which looks upon its own abstractions, dreams though they are, as something true and real, and prides itself on the imperative 'ought', which it takes especial pleasure in prescribing even on the field of politics. As if the world had waited on it to learn how it ought to be, and was not! [...] The object of philosophy is an actuality of which those objects, social regulations and conditions, are only the superficial outside. [§6, Being Part One from *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*]*

When Hegel says that real objects, social conditions, and so on, are “only the superficial outside,” he is not alluding to a separate supernatural plane of existence, like that of Plato’s realm of forms. Hegel has said the object of philosophy is truth, of which these real objects are solely the superficial outside. In order to grasp the truth in its entirety, Hegel insists we move beyond mere collection of the facts, and *grasp the essence* of the thing. Since everything is in constant motion and only has an objective existence insofar as it is an object for something else, the truth can only be grasped in the movement/relations of the thing. In other words, the essence of an object is not an arbitrarily chosen characteristic of it, but rather the development resulting from its relation to itself which is necessarily mediated through other objects.

The premise of formal logic is the law of identity, which leads to the laws of noncontradiction and excluded middle. It simply means that everything is identical with itself. A is equal to A, and otherwise, A cannot be equal to not-A. Hegel criticized this for, “Instead of being a true law of thought, is nothing but the law of abstract understanding. The propositional form itself contradicts it: for a proposition always promises a distinction between subject and predicate; while the present one [the law of identity] does not fulfil what its form requires.” [§115, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] In other words, in the law of identity, by making A both the subject and its own object, it implies that it is potentially differentiated from itself. This supposed law can only lead to truisms, and rarely leads to new knowledge. Hegel counterposes

it to the law of diversity:

All things are different, or: there are no two things like each other. This proposition is, in fact, opposed to the law of identity, for it declares: A is distinctive, therefore A is also not A; or: A is unlike something else, so that it is not simply A but rather a specific A. A's place in the law of identity can be taken by any other substrate, but A as distinctive [als Ungleiches] can no longer be exchanged with any other. True, it is supposed to be distinctive, not from itself, but only from another; but this distinctiveness is its own determination. As self-identical A, it is indeterminate; but as determinate it is the opposite of this; it no longer has only self-identity, but also a negation and therefore a difference of itself from itself within it. [§ 903, The Science of Logic]

A concrete example of this new logic, as opposed to formal logic, can be found in the field of economics. Marx inherited the contradictions found in the classical economists and was able to overcome them using Hegel's dialectical logic. (In fact, in the preface to the second edition of Capital, Marx mocked his critics for describing his method as "Hegelian sophistry" while also accusing him of empiricism, and described his method as the "direct opposite" of Hegel's method, which he "turned right side up again.") Economics before Marx could not resolve the contradiction between use and exchange value. Clearly, value has two meanings, the personal meaning (I place a lot of value on water on account of needing to drink it) and the universal meaning (the value of a diamond is

very great on the marketplace.) Nevertheless, these two meanings are clearly independent from each other, and at times even opposed to one another. The Ricardian school understood that labor was the substance of value but failed to grasp how this could give rise to profit. (If goods are on average bought and sold at their value, then surplus value, and therefore profit, seems to appear out of thin air!) On the other side were the subjectivists who denied the labor theory of value, and still do today under the name of marginalism or subjective theory of value, and therefore reject the empirical facts of the marketplace. Using the dialectical method, Marx discovered the internal contradiction in every commodity between use and exchange value, and followed this contradiction through the production process. (Through this, he also discovered the unique position of money as the commodity that unites the two: it is useful insofar as it can be exchanged for other things, and it is exchanged for its unique use as abstract value.) What the metaphysical economists before Marx failed to comprehend was *the commodity's relation to itself is mediated through other commodities*. For example, the value of a coat is an objective fact, but this fact can only be expressed in comparison to something else, such as socially necessary labor time, quantity of linen, or sum of money. Just as well, if a good is either not consumed for use or not exchanged, then it loses its essence as a commodity--the essence of the commodity *is* its internal contradiction, which develops into higher forms, creating the buyer-seller antinomy, and eventually the bourgeois-proletariat antinomy, as well as giving rise to numerous other phenomena, such as fictitious capital, recurring crises,

and so on.

Given this concrete example of the utility of dialectical thought, it is no wonder that Hegel declares logic is “a higher science than we are in the habit of supposing.” [§19n, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*] Formal logic is a closed circle, whereas dialectical logic always seeks to move beyond the apparent limits of a given thought.

The utility of Hegel’s logic, therefore, is not limited to economics. Marx noted that it leads us to the “comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up.” [Preface to the second edition of *Capital*] Hegel as well noted the historic importance of human thought, which raises people above the level of animals by allowing them to change their own circumstances: “Thought, in short, made itself a power in the real world, and exercised enormous influence.” [§ 19n, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*] (Compare this with Marx’s declaration from *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, “The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”) Understood and applied properly, Hegel’s logic is a tool for more profound cognition.

This represents a step forward from the metaphysical idealism of Kant, who believed people can only understand the appearance of a thing and never the “thing-in-itself”. Perception lets people grasp the physical phenomena, that is, the empirical data, but

dialectical logic alone provides the ability to grasp the essence of a thing.

The problem with Hegel's logic, its main limitation, is that it is explained solely using categories of thought. It is impossible to understand Hegel's dialectic without first delving into the categories he uses to describe it. Hegel divides logical thinking into three moments: abstract, dialectical, and speculative. This triad corresponds with the doctrines of being, essence and notion.

Hegel splits being into three moments: quality, quantity, and measure. (From measure follows the second moment of the idea, essence.) At this stage, understanding is limited to immediate perception. Hegel points out the common misconception that, "The sensuous consciousness is in ordinary estimation the most concrete and thus also the richest; but that is true only as regards materials, whereas, in reference to the thought it contains, *it is really the poorest and most abstract.*" [§85, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*] Hegel points out here the limitations of perceptual information, which is really just a chaotic mess of raw data and therefore the *lowest* form of understanding, in opposition to the standpoint of the empiricists. However, this does not mean it is unnecessary or unimportant--on the contrary, this raw data is the basis for the higher forms of knowledge.

The first grade, quality, is "the character identical with being: so identical that a thing ceases to be what it is, if it loses its quality." [§85, *Ibid.*] In other words, it is the thing's basic constitution if it were to exist in a vacuum. The second grade, quantity, is the characteristic "external to being". The difference

between the two is given in the example of the color red, which remains red whether it is a certain quantity brighter or darker. The third grade, measure, is the unity of the first two, “a qualitative quantity.” The measure of a thing is its *quantitative features within certain limits which demarcate its qualities from the qualities of another thing*. To take Hegel’s color example further, red is red no matter how dark or bright: nevertheless, it must remain within certain bounds of darkness/brightness or else it ceases to be red.

All of this is to say that the first stage of understanding is grasping the immediate attributes, determining the relative amount of these attributes, and demarcating them. It is this last step, the understanding passing through another object, which leads into the second moment, that of the essence.

Essence as well is divided into three moments: reflection, appearance, and actuality. The distinction between immediate being and essence is reflection. [§112, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] The internal contradiction that is implied in being is explicit in the essence. [§114, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*]

Reflection is the return to itself after passing through another. In other words, it is understanding something’s relationship to itself mediated through another object. Being is unmediated, whereas essence is mediated. Therefore, being ends and essence begins with mediation through other objects.

Appearance is the existence stated explicitly in its contradiction. [§131, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] Hegel emphasizes that he does not mean

“mere” appearance, but rather the concrete form in which the essence appears. The apparent is the phenomenal. [§132, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] The relationship between the essence and appearance is that of the relation between the universal and the particular, or between the whole and the parts or form and content.

Actuality is “the unity [...] of essence with existence, or of inward with outward.” [§142, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] In other words, if appearance is the concrete form in which the essence appears, actuality is the unity of the two. Essence as it appears is actuality. What is the contradiction between the individual’s appearance and the essence, and what unites them? This is the question that propels the dialectic towards comprehension of the notion. Thus, the three steps of the essence are the process of mediation and the return to itself, beginning with reflection outward, which connects being and essence, and ending with return inward, connecting the essence to the notion. Actuality stands in opposition to the possible, and it is here that Hegel outlines the accident-necessity dialectic, as well as the unity of cause-effect, or action and reaction.

The Hegelian understanding of actuality is directly opposed to the Althusserian understanding of contingency. Louis Althusser attempted to remove the Hegelian dialectic from Marxism, and by doing so deprived it of its revolutionary content, as well as moving towards a position of philosophic pluralism. Hegel’s logic excludes any concept of overdetermination. (That is, the presence of more causes than is necessary to produce the effect.) Hegel

says:

*Not causes, but **factors of causation**, in each of which, just because they are inseparable (on the principle of the identity that the cause is cause in the effect, and vice versa,) the other factor is also equally supposed. [...] The cause assumed to be first is on account of its immediacy passive, a dependent being, and an effect. **The distinction of the causes spoken of as two is accordingly void: and properly speaking there is only one cause**, which, while it suspends itself (as substance) in its effect, also rises in this operation only to independent existence as a cause. [§154-155, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*]*

Thus we see a characteristic of Hegel's logic is the strictest monism. Each level of understanding is both contained within the previous moment and contains within itself the next moment, and being, essence, and notion each lead into the others. While a cause can be broken down into its individual parts, by no means can there be more than one cause, as every link in the chain of development is dependent on every other link. (This means for Marxists that the base *implies* a particular superstructure, without which it cannot function, as it is one of the factors that causes reproduction.) In the case of the factors uniting to form a single cause, it is comparable to various people pushing on one large object. Their individual forces combine into one large force strong enough to move the object--none of the individuals on their own would be able to move the object, and cumulatively they produce only a single cause for the object's movement,

that of the net force.

Notion is defined as “essence reverted to the simple immediacy of being”. [§159, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*] Hegel, in keeping with the other moments, splits this into three parts: subjective notion, objective notion, and idea. The subjective notion means understanding of the universal. Objectivity means understanding how the universal is manifested in the particular. And the idea is the absolute truth, that is, truth that is not relative or mediated. The absolute idea is the highest level of development of knowledge.

“The idea which has being is nature.” [§244, *Ibid.*] So Hegel returns to the beginning, with being, although on a different level from before. Whereas immediate being is disorganized perceptual information, the immediate being contains within itself the potential to be comprehended, and at the end of the process of comprehension is the absolute truth which can be found in the movement of the natural world. In other words, the simple contains within it the complex, and by grasping the complex we return to the simple with a deeper understanding of it.

Hegel’s shorter *Logic* ends with the passage:

We have now returned to the notion of the idea with which we began. This return to the beginning is also an advance. We began with being, abstract being: where we now are we also have the idea as being: but this idea which has being is nature.

This dialectical movement mirrors that of the Marxist dialectic, beginning with primitive

communism, through class society, and ending with full communism, which is a more advanced form of what was found in primitive humanity.

It is important to note that Hegel never uses the categories of thesis-antithesis-synthesis to describe logic or the dialectic. His use of synthesis foreshadowed the philosophical debate in China over the “two combines into one” controversy: “Thus the conclusion only attains to a neutral unity or a synthesis, that is, to a *unity of things that are originally separate and only are externally so conjoined.*” [§1700, *Science of Logic*] In other words, synthesis is unity in appearance, but not in essence. Synthesis is not a category in dialectics because dialectics examines the contradiction *internal* to a category or thing. It is the internal contradiction that determines to what end *external* forces can affect the category or thing. (For example, a seed and a rock can both be given sunlight, water, and fertilizer, but only one will grow into a plant.) The only way synthesis can happen in reality is, as Mao Zedong said in his *Talk on Questions of Philosophy*, synthesis is the “big fish eating the little fish.” Synthesis is not combination or compromise, it is defeat or absorption by its opposite. For a concrete example, during the development of capitalism into imperialism, individual capitals absorbed their competition, and in the process took on a new quality, that of the monopoly, and as more industries developed monopolies, capitalism took on new tendencies in its development.

To summarize all that has been said on the Hegelian logic, it is far more expansive than formal logic, which is limited in its use. The law of identity

found in the classics of philosophy is opposed to Hegel's law of diversity, which reflects the reality of nature and social life. Based on this law, Hegel constructed a logic which is capable of reconciling that which is apparently irreconcilable, and is therefore capable of leading to a higher understanding when it is applied correctly. At the same time, Hegel limited his logic to the study of thought, and so materialists must study the movement of thought while keeping in mind that thought is merely reality reflected in the minds of men. The revolutionary aspect of his logic, the dialectic, is as rich as it is counterintuitive. Counterintuitive because it seems to violate basic principles of common sense, rich because it leads to the recognition of the dissolution of all things and categories into higher things and categories.

Chapter 4: Dialectic

Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work. -§81, Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences

The dialectic is inseparable from Hegel's logical system--the former is the core of the latter. Hegel's logic is the dialectical movement in the realm of ideas, from lower forms of knowledge to higher. It exists independent from any individual consciousness, and is the real movement of nature, in which people are a component part. (There are objective laws which determine the development of people, but it is possible for people to comprehend these laws and to use this understanding to change the world. This is the dialectical relationship between freedom and necessity.) In order to comprehend the particulars of the Hegelian dialectic, it would be advantageous to first get a grasp on dialectics in general through Friedrich Engels' writing on it.

Engels described Hegel's dialectic in *Ludwig Feuerbach* thus:

All that is real in the sphere of human history, becomes irrational in the process of time, is therefore irrational by its very destination, is tainted beforehand with irrationality, and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality. In accordance with all the rules of the Hegelian method of thought, the proposition of the rationality of everything

*which is real resolves itself into the other proposition:
All that exists deserves to perish.*

[...]

*Just as the bourgeoisie by large-scale industry, competition, and the world market dissolves in practice all stable time-honored institutions, so this dialectical philosophy dissolves all conceptions of final, absolute truth and of absolute states of humanity corresponding to it. For it [dialectical philosophy], **nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away, of endless ascendancy from the lower to the higher. And dialectical philosophy itself is nothing more than the mere reflection of this process in the thinking brain.** It has, of course, also a conservative side; it recognizes that definite stages of knowledge and society are justified for their time and circumstances; but only so far. The conservatism of this mode of outlook is relative; **its revolutionary character is absolute — the only absolute dialectical philosophy admits.***

It is important to note here that dialectics does not equal mere relativism, but rather recognizes the temporary nature of ideas as they are replaced by ideas which more accurately reflect reality. It is in fact opposed to relativism, as the dialectical outlook recognizes the existence of an absolute truth which has not been attained, but is possible to approach. Engels mentions the conservative side of dialectics, which has

changed forms since his day. In Engels' time, Hegel and some of his students used dialectics to justify the Prussian state and argue for a unified Germany. Dialectics was equally abused with the intention of defending Christianity. Today, very few bourgeois intellectuals stand by dialectics. The conservative trend in dialectics has its source in the reformist and “peaceful transition” wing of the workers’ movement. For example, modern Chinese revisionist philosophers turn dialectics into a theory of class conciliation:

The mutual coexistence of both sides of a contradiction, developing together because of the preservation of the comparative stability of unity of the contradiction. For example, although there is significant competition among the economies of different countries, the present economic process of globalization should jointly develop on the basis of equality, in a mutually beneficial way. An economic recession of one side is unfavorable to the economic development of the other side. [Marxist Philosophy, edited by Zhu Guoding, excerpt retrieved from <http://marxistphilosophy.org/ChinResContr.pdf>]

The perversion of dialectics comes alongside the abandonment of materialism. “Globalization”, or rather imperialism, cannot develop on the basis of equality, due to the objective laws of capitalist development. Economic recession cannot be avoided, regardless of the policies pursued by bourgeois politicians. This philosophy is a weak attempt to conceal the immense cleavage in the world between oppressed and oppressor nations, and has nothing in

common with Hegelian or Marxist dialectics. Reformists in the European and North American communist parties as well abuse the phrase "unity of opposites" and stress unity in the sense of cooperation instead of mutual struggle. The "dialectics" of the class collaborators are pathetic and shallow, even more childish than the works of the Young Hegelians, who at least grasped the critical nature of dialectics!

This outlook is totally opposed to Marxism. "Dialectics, so-called objective dialectics, prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by *the continual conflict of the opposites* and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature." [Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*] There is no ambiguity whatsoever in Hegel, Marx, Engels, or any other dialectician, regarding the *struggle* of opposites.

Having grasped a positive and a negative example of dialectics, it is time to examine the Hegelian dialectic in its particulars. The idealist dialectic concerns itself with "spirit", as it moves out of itself into the world and returns to itself. As Engels said, this idealist dialectic is a reflection of the actual dialectic in the mind of Hegel.

Since the object is the True and universal, the self-identical, while consciousness is alterable and unessential, it can happen that consciousness apprehends the object incorrectly and deceives itself. The percipient is aware of the possibility of deception; for in the universality which is the principle, otherness

itself is immediately present for him, though present as what is null and superseded. His criterion of truth is therefore self identity, and his behaviour consists in apprehending the object as self-identical. Since at the same time diversity is explicitly there for him, it is a connection of the diverse moments of his apprehension to one another; but if a dissimilarity makes itself felt in the course of this comparison, then this is not an untruth of the object-for this is the self identical-but an untruth in perceiving it. Let us see now what consciousness experiences in its actual perceiving. For us, this experience is already contained in the development of the object, and of the attitude of consciousness towards it given just now. It is only a matter of developing the contradictions that are present therein. [...] Consciousness, therefore, necessarily runs through this cycle again, but this time not in the same way as it did the first time. [§116-118, Phenomenology of Spirit]

The object of attention is itself true, because it is consistent with itself. Nature is never ‘wrong’ in the sense that it is incongruent with itself. Anything that *appears* to be an inconsistency is only an inconsistency in people’s conceptions of nature. (Or, as Hegel puts it, all that is real is rational.) Cognition begins with the senses, and according to Hegel, proceeds by grouping similar sensations together while simultaneously perceiving their differences. This contradiction between the particular object, and other similar objects which produce the same sensations, is what produces the initial development of the concept. Note the expression above that “otherness is immediately present for him”,

meaning there is no isolated perception but always a comparison, either to the previous state (i.e. the transition from silence to loud sound) or to another sensation. No perception exists in a vacuum, and it is the diversity of perception that demands mental organization in order to make sense of the world and change it.

*Thus the singular being of sense does indeed vanish in the dialectical movement of immediate certainty and becomes universality, but it is only a sensuous universality. [...] But these two contradictory extremes [being-for-self and being-for-other, in other words, implicit inner characteristics and explicit characteristics, or individual and universal] are not merely alongside each other but in a single unity, or in other words, the defining characteristic common to both, viz. 'Being-for-self', is burdened with opposition generally, i.e. it is at the same time not a 'being-for-self'. The **sophistry of perception** seeks to save these moments from their contradiction, and it seeks to lay hold on the truth, by distinguishing between the aspects, by sticking to the 'Also' and to the 'in so far', and finally, by distinguishing the 'unessential' aspect from an 'essence' which is opposed to it. [§130, Phenomenology of Spirit]*

Recall the unity of subject and object in Hegel's logic. It manifests here in the dialectic, as every object exists as a 'being-for-self', that is, as a subject with its own internal characteristics, as well as a 'being-for-other', that is as an object for something else to act on. In addition to this unity, there is the unity of the

‘unessential’ and the essential. Hegel criticizes “sound common sense” for creating the illusion of separation of elements and isolation of a “true” element from the supposedly “false” ones. Every object has its essence that defines it, but it is equally defined by its unessential elements since without these there could not be an essential element. By creating this differentiation, the unessential elements become essential, since without them there could not be an essential element to recognize!

The mind, then, reconciles this contradiction by moving from perception to thoughts, which brings perceptions together in the universal:

However, this universal has proved to be one which has returned into itself out of such a conditioned being-for-self. This unconditioned universal, which is now the true object of consciousness, is still just an object for it; consciousness has not yet grasped the Notion of the unconditioned as Notion. [§132, Phenomenology of Spirit]

After moving to this higher stage in the dialectic, the universal is now the object of consciousness, but it is contradicted by all of the particulars which it is made of. The shared essence of the universal is the “universal medium”, but since each individual is different from each other and therefore from the universal as well, this “universal medium” is differentiated from itself. This is the stage at which the idea is sublated. [*Phenomenology...*, §136] The antithesis between individual and universal leads to the “absolute universal”, a universal which is perfectly

consistent with itself and is therefore “inner truth”.
[*Phenomenology...*, §144]

The Hegelian dialectic is, in sum, the “self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement *simply preserves itself*.” [Phenomenology..., §171] It begins with the immediate unity, which is perception, through the development of the idea as its internal contradictions develop, and arrives at universal unity, which contains all of the previous stages within it. [Phenomenology..., §172] For Hegel, this ends up at the creation of Spirit, which is the universal consciousness of a nation. The inner character of the Spirit is the particular life, customs, etc of a nation. [Phenomenology..., §726] Therefore, it has a social character. At the same time, according to Hegel, it means the development of people towards freedom:

*Spirit is the infinite idea, and finitude here means **the disproportion between the concept and reality**, with the qualification that it is a shining within itself – an appearance that the spirit itself posits as a barrier, in order, by its suspension, to have and to know freedom for itself as its essence. The different steps in the activity of the spirit are steps towards its liberation, and in the absolute truth of this liberation these three steps are one and the same: finding a world presupposed, the generation of the world as a world posited by the spirit, and gaining freedom from the world. [Phenomenology..., §305]*

In other words, “spirit” stands in for a perfect understanding of reality, an idea which has no

“disproportion” between itself and reality. It is undifferentiated from itself, and thus has no inner contradiction to drive further development. This is Hegel’s idealism. However, it is not too great a stretch to read materialism into Hegel’s works. “Finding a world presupposed”, in other words, reality exists independent from our minds, is the premise of materialism. The notion of “gaining freedom from the world” is parallel to Marx’s thesis on Feuerbach that, “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it.” It is the “generation of the world as a world posited by the spirit” from the passage above which stands opposed to materialism and places Hegel firmly in the idealist camp.

Hegel sums up the significance and objective existence of the dialectic thus:

I could not pretend that the method which I follow in this system of logic — or rather which this system in its own self follows — is not capable of greater completeness, of much elaboration in detail; but at the same time I know that it is the only true method. This is self-evident simply from the fact that it is not something distinct from its object and content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid which do not pursue the course of this method and do not conform to its simple rhythm, for this is the course of the subject matter itself. [Science of Logic, § 63]

The dialectical method is the only true method philosophy can follow. Thus, abandoning dialectics for metaphysics, as Louis Althusser and countless other Marxists have tried to do, would represent a step backward for Marxism and the elimination of its scientific and revolutionary content. With dialectics comes an end to philosophy proper, as a field of mystifying systems competing with one another *against* reality, and the beginning of a new practice of philosophy. However, there are Marxists other than Louis Althusser who, instead of removing dialectics from Marxism, have attempted to *correct* dialectics. Chief among these Marxists are Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School, who theorized negative dialectics, and Alain Badiou, who theorized affirmative dialectics.

Adorno's negative dialectics was his response to the atrocities of fascism and what he perceived as the tyranny of the Soviet Union. His dialectic has freedom as its aim, and freedom for Adorno is a negative relation. Adorno identifies a contradiction in the traditional view of freedom:

If freedom is posited as positive, as something given or unavoidable in the midst of what is given, then it immediately turns into unfreedom. -Negative Dialectics
Part III (i) False Problem

The gift of freedom given by a state implies the state's ability to take it away. Equally, if freedom is something bestowed on a person, then that person has lost their freedom to declare themselves unfree. Freedom as understood in the liberal democracies of the West is then contradictory at its core. Adorno takes

for granted, unfortunately, the “unfreedom” of the Eastern bloc. Adorno fails to grasp the positive essence of freedom, and falls back into the liberal conception of freedom as being freedom *from* something, either the state or the tyranny of the majority. He plainly states in *Negative Dialectics* Part III (i), “Positive freedom is an aporetic concept, conceived, in order to conserve the being-in-itself of something intellectual in contrast to nominalism and scientification.” Hegel perfectly grasped the positive aspect when in his *Philosophy of Right* he said, “Abstract right is a *right to use force*. A wrong done to this right is a *force exercised against my liberty* realized in an external thing. The preservation of my realized freedom against force must be itself an external act, and therefore a second force, which removes the first and takes its place.” [§ 94] The question of freedom, then, splits into two questions: *who* will be free, and *how* will they protect this freedom? There is no question of constitutional “universal” freedoms, such as “free press”, “speedy trial”, and the like, but rather, a question of forces competing to defend *particular* freedom.

Adorno raises freedom to the level of an absolute, which is metaphysical and not dialectical. In his lectures *History and Freedom*, he refers to “totalitarian tyranny,” borrowing the terminology of the liberal metaphysician Hannah Arendt. Freedom is always concrete, and necessarily has a positive and negative side. The freedom of the bourgeoisie to buy and sell labor is the unfreedom of the laborer who must submit to the whims of the marketplace, the freedom to enjoy the fruits of labor requires tyrannical repression against the bourgeoisie, and so on. Adorno’s negative

dialectics is then rather a metaphysics of freedom and an abandonment of dialectical thought altogether, although he does preserve certain elements of it, such as the dialectical relation between necessity and freedom. For example, he says:

Freedom, to be established in its full dimensions solely under social conditions of an unfettered plenitude of goods, could on the other hand also be totally extinguished, perhaps without a trace. The trouble is not that free human beings act radically evil, as is being done far beyond any measure imaginable to Kant, but that there is not yet a world in which they, and this flashes in Brecht, would no longer need to be evil. [Negative Dialectics, Part III (i)]

Adorno's negative dialectics aspires to freedom, and he correctly recognizes that this must be accomplished in the material realm. However, Adorno is unwilling to accept that freedom demands tyranny. In order to create a world where people "would no longer need to be evil," harsh repression of reactionaries is needed. The other side of freedom is necessity, and Adorno comes close to realizing that this is the dialectic of revolutionary terror. Freedom from absolutism could only be accomplished through the War in the Vendée and with the help of the guillotine, and equally, freedom from exploitation needs the armed working people. Freeing Europe from Nazism necessitated the Red Army, and so on.

In short, Adorno's negative dialectics suffers from the one-sided thinking typical of academics, and consequently cannot be considered dialectical at all.

Alain Badiou's affirmative dialectics is a response to Adorno's negative dialectics as well as Althusser's rejection of dialectics through Spinoza, although he commits many of the same mistakes as the both of them. Badiou, like Adorno, constructed his dialectic in opposition to the Eastern Bloc. The "failure of the State-form of socialism" [*Affirmative Dialectics: From Logic to Anthropology*] necessitated a new dialectical framework according to Badiou. Badiou does this by placing the affirmation before the negation:

*Ultimately, I am saying something very simple. I am saying first that to open a new situation, a new possibility, we have to have something like a new creativity of time and a new creativity of the situation, something that is really an opening. [...] Naturally, among these consequences there are different forms of negation – struggle, revolt, a new possibility to be against something, destruction of some part of the law, and so on – but these forms of negation are consequences of the birth of the new subjectivity, and not the other way around; **it is not the new subjectivity that is a consequence of the negation.** So there is something really non-dialectical – in the sense of Hegel and Marx — about this logic, because we do not start with the creativity of negation as such, even if the site of negativity is certainly included in the consequences of something which is affirmative. [*Affirmative Dialectics: from Logic to Anthropology*]*

Badiou, under the guise of developing a new dialectical framework, rejects dialectics and

materialism. He rejects materialism by placing the mental element before the material social relations, and he rejects dialectics by placing the affirmation before the negation instead of after it. This is in essence a rejection of dialectics because it is the internal contradiction, that is, a negative self-relation, that drives the dialectical movement. By starting out from a position of affirmation, Badiou is adopting a metaphysical stance which pictures a pure subject deformed by external forces, when in reality the effect the external forces create is determined by the internal relation.

Badiou's use of affirmation and negation in the context of a "positive proposition" seems to allude to the notion of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. It is worth noting that this famous formula is only referred to by Hegel and Marx negatively, in their respective criticisms of Fichte and Proudhon. This formula seems to have its origin in the work of Karl Kautsky, particularly *The Materialist Conception of History*. Kautsky, as a notorious metaphysician of bourgeois democracy, should only be examined as a negative example of dialectical thought.

All that has been said on the topic of the dialectic, from Hegel to Marx to modern dialecticians, is summed up in the sentence from Vladimir Lenin's *On the Question of Dialectics*: "*The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts is the essence of dialectics.*"

Chapter 5: Consciousness

Although the fear of the lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom, consciousness is not therein aware that it is a being-for-self. Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is.
-*Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 195

Spirit is the object of Hegel's dialectic, in which each individual consciousness is a part. The Hegelian outlook on consciousness has therefore already been examined to a certain extent. Nevertheless, it is worth a closer look, as Hegel's outlook on consciousness and the relationship between individuals is inseparable from his political outlook.

Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, demonstrates the dialectical relationship between the consciousness of the bondsman and the lord. Consciousness maintains a contradiction between independence and dependence--humans are capable of independent action, but this independent action is limited by and dependent on the actions of other humans. This contradiction is present in thought no less than in practice, although the illusion of independence is even stronger.

Between two minds, each is a mediating force for the other. For the lord, this means the mediating force for his consciousness is his bondsman. However, since he is a lord only insofar as he possesses the bondsman, his self-consciousness is in essence bound to the bondsman. Hegel discovers, then, that the lord is beset by an internal contradiction while the bondsman's

conscience is free:

The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman. This, it is true, appears at first outside of itself and not as the truth of self-consciousness. But just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a consciousness forced back into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness. [Phenomenology of Spirit, § 193]

The lord, by definition, is a negative presence in the world, since his existence requires the subjugation of another person. The fact that he is bound to maintain the feudal system or accept his own demise manifests in his consciousness, which is incapable of freedom. At the same time, the bondsman's servile consciousness contains the potential for real independent consciousness within it, although the lord will naturally struggle against this. Therefore, the two will conflict, as the lordsman demands servitude while the bondsman tends towards the opposite. Of course, for Hegel, this all takes place in the mind, and is stamped with the scarlet letter of idealism. However, the germ of Marxist analysis of consciousness exists here. Compare the Hegelian notion of consciousness with the Marxist relationship between the development of class contradiction and self-consciousness:

The more the normal form of intercourse of society,

and with it the conditions of the ruling class, develop their contradiction to the advanced productive forces, and the greater the consequent discord within the ruling class itself as well as between it and the class ruled by it, the more fictitious, of course, becomes the consciousness which originally corresponded to this form of intercourse (i.e., it ceases to be the consciousness corresponding to this form of intercourse), and the more do the old traditional ideas of these relations of intercourse, in which actual private interests, etc., etc., are expressed as universal interests, descend to the level of mere idealizing phrases, conscious illusion, deliberate hypocrisy. But the more their falsity is exposed by life, and the less meaning they have to consciousness itself, the more resolutely are they asserted, the more hypocritical, moral and holy becomes the language of this normal society. [The German Ideology]

Like the feudal lord, whose consciousness was determined by his social being and simultaneously contradicted it, the bourgeoisie in the era of imperialism finds its real conditions totally opposed to its self-consciousness. Devastating wars are waged in order to keep the peace, crimes against humanity are committed in the name of human rights, and so-called freedom is maintained by an immense police state. The contradiction in social life, between the lord and serf or bourgeois and proletarian, manifests in the ruling class' consciousness as gross hypocrisy and desperate moralizing. Only the oppressed classes, who are the producers, are capable of truly independent consciousness, although in class society it cannot be

realized except through struggle.

Hegel elaborates on this dialectic and analyzes the moments in the development of consciousness:

*In the sphere of Life, which is the object of Desire, negation is present either in an other, viz in Desire, or as a determinateness opposed to another indifferent form, or as the inorganic universal nature of Life. But this universal independent nature in which negation is present as absolute negation, is the genus as such, or the genus as self-consciousness. **Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.***

*The notion of self-consciousness is only completed in these three moments: (a) **the pure undifferentiated 'I' is its first immediate object.** (b) But this immediacy is itself an absolute mediation, it is only as a supersession of the independent object, in other words, it is Desire. **The satisfaction of Desire is, it is true, the reflection of self-consciousness into itself, or the certainty that has become truth.** (c) But the truth of this certainty is really **a double reflection, the duplication of self-consciousness. Consciousness has for its object one which, of its own self, posits its otherness or difference as a nothingness, and in so doing is independent. The differentiated, merely living, shape does indeed also supersede its independence in the process of Life, but it ceases with its distinctive difference to be what it is. The object of self-consciousness, however, is equally independent in this negativity of itself; and thus it is for itself a genus, a universal fluid element in the peculiarity of its own***

separate being; it is a living self-consciousness.

*A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness ; for only in this way does the **unity of itself in its otherness** become explicit for it. [Phenomenology of Spirit, § 175-177]*

Note that for Hegel, consciousness can only be self-consciousness when it confronts its negative, something external which it is independent from. In other words, consciousness is a *social* phenomena. It is not too great a leap from Marx and Engels' declaration in *The German Ideology* that, "*The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production. This production only makes its appearance with the increase of population. In its turn this presupposes the intercourse [Verkehr] of individuals with one another.*" The difference is this: for Marx and Engels consciousness has material conditions as its basis, whereas for Hegel, it is the opposite: "From our point of view, mind has for its presupposition Nature, of which it is the truth, and for that reason its absolute prius.[...] For this reason the essential, but formally essential, feature of mind is Liberty: i.e. it is the notion's absolute negativity or self-identity." [*Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences Part III*, § 381-382] Mind is the *absolute prius* of nature, meaning nature is dependent on mind and not the opposite. This is why Hegel makes liberty the defining attribute of the mind, as for him, the mind is able to transcend its material limitations. (It is no surprise, then, that for the Young Hegelians, liberation was a purely mental act and not a material one.)

As for the three moments of consciousness, once again Hegel describes the development as being driven by the unity of subject and object. In the first moment, consciousness exists for itself. Through desire, consciousness differentiates itself from itself, that is, it has a negative element within itself. Thus in the second moment, self-consciousness posits another consciousness. Through the satisfaction of desire, the third moment, reflection back into itself occurs. The duplication that takes place in the second moment leads to the collision of the two in the third moment, where consciousness develops to a higher stage through conflict between consciousness and its negative, and the process repeats.

The essential feature of mind for Hegel, as has been stated, is liberty. At the same time, a constitution is the “actuality” of liberty. [*Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences Part III*, § 539] Therefore, for Hegel, the individual minds come together in the bourgeois state to form the universal Spirit of a people. Thus, all political conflicts for Hegel are simply the dialectic unfolding out of the minds of the citizens. So Hegel’s idealistic view of the mind, as supposedly the foundation of liberty and tending towards the realization of freedom, ends up transforming into *its opposite* and *serves to conceal the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*, that is, the domination of a few minds over the many.

Hegel’s philosophy of the mind leads to an apologetic analysis of the family, civil society, and the political constitution, which for him are moments in the development of the unity of minds. [*Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences Part III*, § 517] That is, the

family is the “natural mind”, that is, the most primitive and small universal spirit. The families come together in civil society, which is the expression of their “formal universality.” Finally, this universal mind becomes aware of itself and expresses this self-consciousness in a political constitution. For Hegel, this was implicitly a defense of the united German state, which was supposedly the most rational organization of the universal German spirit. However, for Marxists, Hegel discovers here the unity between the so-called “private” and “public” spheres of life. The family is no less a state institution than the police, and indeed the political constitution *does* express the *universal interests of a particular class*. (Recall Engels’ analysis in *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, which almost exactly mirrors Hegel’s description of the family, civil society, and constitution as moments in the development of objective Spirit.)

If we replace mind with class, and describe consciousness as the effect and not the cause of these moments, then Hegel has in fact accidentally elaborated the process of consolidation and reproduction of class relations.

What begins as the individual self-consciousness develops into higher stages through conflict with its opposite, leading up to the universal self-consciousness of a *class*. This universal consciousness finds its expression in different forms. In the era of the bourgeois revolution, the highest expression of bourgeois self-consciousness is in the constitution, which is the bedrock of bourgeois political economy. (At least, in the liberal democracies--less so in the fascist countries.)

The upside-down nature of Hegel's understanding of consciousness, and the movement from particular to universal self-consciousness, leads him to the exact *opposite* of the Marxist understanding of the state. For Marxists, irreconcilable class contradictions give rise to the state. For Hegel, it is precisely the reverse--the state gives rise to classes:

Where civil society, and with it the State, exists, there arise the several estates in their difference: for the universal substance, as vital, exists only so far as it organically particularises itself. The history of constitutions is the history of the growth of these estates, of the legal relationships of individuals to them, and of these estates to one another and to their centre. [Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences Part III, § 527]

Equally, Hegel attributes the division of labor *not* to the development of industrial techniques, but to the development of the “particularity of wants.” [Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences Part III, § 525] Hegel's idealist conception of consciousness leads him to the exact opposite of the truth, which is contained in his philosophy in its germ. He is correct in identifying the development of the state and the development of a complex system of desires with a historical process. Unfortunately, for him, the historical process is the development of Spirit and not the production of human life.

All of this, of course, has profound implications for Hegel's moral and legal philosophy. His bourgeois outlook on consciousness, which takes liberty as its

premise and social intercourse as the force behind its development, leads to similarly idealist conclusions regarding these specific aspects of social life.

Chapter 6: Morality

The dialectic advances from the simple to the complex, and begins at the individual and develops into the universal. Morality, no different from other philosophical subjects, must begin with the basic dialectical principle. Hegel's moral system is the natural development of his dialectical method combined with his veneration of the bourgeois state. As Hegel sums up his view on morality:

The state is the actually, existing, realised moral life. For it is the Unity of the universal, essential Will, with that of the individual; and this is "Morality." The Individual living in this unity has a moral life; possesses a value that consists in this substantiality alone. [§41 Philosophy of History]

Morality, then, is the relationship between each consciousness and the collective. The state is the embodiment of the universal spirit for Hegel. (This conception of the state will be explored in more detail later.) Hegel has made the discovery that morality is both historically constituted and a reflection of already existing relations, although for him these relations are between particular spirits instead of between classes or between the state and the people. Hegel rejects moral absolutes *outside of social practice*, which is where the individual reconciles themselves to the universal Will. This is a step forward from the Christian conception of Commandments, which are fixed in essence. Compare this description of morality with the phrase from *The*

Communist Manifesto that describes the social conditions of communism as a society “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Hegel attempted to raise morality to the level of science by establishing it on empirical grounds. For Hegel, moral life is found in the general orientation of a society and each individual’s relationship to it. In this way, a purely moral society would be one where the universal will is in perfect harmony with itself, and each individual will is perfectly united with it. In other words, where there are no social contradictions remaining, the “heat death” of the class struggle.

Hegel’s morality, therefore, is closely tied to his theory of the state and political economy:

The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognise it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interests and through the co-operation of particular knowing and willing; and individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in the light of the

universal, and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end. [§ 260 Philosophy of Right]

Not only is morality the unity between the individual and the universal will, but this is “concrete freedom” as well, which can only be achieved through the state. Therefore, a stateless people is an unfree people incapable of moral life. (An echo of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, no doubt. Without an organized state, people are in a state of nature, which is presumed by Hobbes to be a state of perpetual war.) At the same time, this moral philosophy demonstrates the path the state takes in its process of withering away, as the universal spirit is made truly universal through the absorption of the non-proletarian classes by the proletariat, and the people “consciously aim at none but the universal end”, making coercion obsolete and leading to the replacement of the administration of people with the administration of things.

There are two sides to Hegel’s ethical system: the bourgeois side, and the dialectical side, which are directly opposed to each other. The bourgeois side, exemplified in the following passage, has developed into Objectivism and similar philosophies today:

In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends – an attainment conditioned in this way by universality – there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, happiness, and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness, and rights of all. On this system, individual happiness, &c., depend, and only in this connected system are they actualised and secured.

This system may be prima facie regarded as the external state, the state based on need, the state as the Understanding envisages it. [§ 183 Philosophy of Right]

Hegel unknowingly recognizes here the dual nature of the bourgeoisie: on the one hand, each individual capital competes with every other individual capital on the market. At the same time, every individual capital has a common interest with the other individual capitals in subjugating the proletariat. So the individual bourgeois need to cooperate with each other politically in order to attain their “selfish ends”, and through the attainment of their selfish ends this cooperation is realized. What Hegel fails to recognize, although it is latent in the other side of his ethical system, the dialectical side, is that this morality has two faulty premises: the existence of a non-class human interest (this “humanist” impulse is incorporated into bourgeois metaphysics, such as that of Arendt), and the existence of freedom under the state for the non-ruling classes. In other words, the system of interdependence in existence does not interweave the happiness of the one with the happiness of all, but rather interweaves the *happiness of the minority with the exploitation of the majority*.

This is precisely the dialectical aspect of Hegel’s morality, which was perfected by Marx and Engels. The state for Hegel is the embodiment of the universal spirit, so for him morality is both historically constituted and a reflection of already existing relations, and morality is simply the individual’s relationship to the state, whose faithfulness to the

majority is taken for granted. For Hegel this served as a defence of the existing Christian ideology, whereas for materialists, who recognize the class nature of the state, it is a critique. For Marx and Engels, morality is ideological, and it is a reflection of social life, but turned from “is” into “ought”. Morality, like philosophy, withers away with the state and class as all the individual interests unite into a universal interest free from contradiction. (Or rather, morality and philosophy take on a new form as the content, the class struggle, will have been overcome.) As Hegel says, morality only exists in the state. The negative side to Hegel’s thought is that without states, there is no morality, as there is no material basis for conflicting interests to give rise to moral conflicts. Marx and Engels’ characterization of morality ironically resembles that of the Young Hegelians, who Marx and Engels ruthlessly criticized. Marx and Engels say:

*The **phantoms** formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, **sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises**. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. [The German Ideology, Part 1, Section 4. The Essence of the Materialist Conception of History, Social Being, and Social Consciousness]*

The dialectical aspect of Hegel's morality, the recognition that it is the product of a particular state of affairs, a concept which was expanded upon by Marx and Engels, who discovered that morality is merely a form whose real essence is material relations, and that morality subsequently has no independent existence. The apparently independent life of morality is a phantom, or as the Young Hegelian Max Stirner called it, a spook. This spook is the product of real material conflicts, which have given rise to various ethical systems. The bourgeoisie follows two ethical trends as a result of their dual nature: the humanist trend which arose against feudal absolutism, and the fascist trend which arose in the struggle against proletarian revolution. The universal spirit is actualized in the state, according to Hegel. For materialists, the universal spirit of the state is *the universal spirit of a particular class that created the state*. Morality then is an attempt to solve the intractable contradiction between the individual bourgeois and universal bourgeois on the one hand and the contradiction between the universal bourgeois and the proletariat on the other. This split in society gives rise to ethical dilemmas. Without this split, which creates the possibility of voluntary sacrifice of the individual interest for the universal interest, as is demanded of some bourgeois and of the entire proletariat, morality cannot exist because there will be no conflict of interest or personal sacrifice to rationalize.

Chapter 7: Aesthetics

As he treats philosophy, so Hegel treats art. That is, he attempts to raise it to the level of science. In this case, the object of the science is art and beauty, both of which are presupposed. Hegel compares this to astronomy, which takes for granted that the objects of its study, the sun, stars, planets, etc exist. Naturally, it is difficult to make beauty the object of a science as it, “has often been regarded as not being absolutely necessary in our ideas but as a purely subjective pleasure, or a merely accidental sense.” (*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, pg. 23, Oxford University Press, translation by T. M. Knox) In this sense, the study of art is comparable to psychology, both in object and method.

Before defining beauty, Hegel outlines three criteria for distinguishing art from other products of labor and nature.

1. *The work of art is no natural product; it is brought about by human activity.*
2. *It is essentially made for man’s apprehension, and in particular is drawn more or less from the sensuous field for apprehension by the senses;*
3. *It has an end and aim in itself.* [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, pg. 25]

The first criteria has two aspects: the work of art cannot be the pure accident of nature, that is, it must be created with some human intention in mind, and the work of art cannot be the pure mechanical reproduction of industry. Hegel admits that workmanship is crucial

to the arts, albeit on a grade with architecture and sculpture requiring the most technical ability, and poetry requiring the least. (It is worth noting that Hegel often refers to the poetry of Goethe, who Marx also admired.)

The second criteria places art *above* nature, on the grounds that a work of art captures a particular aspect of spirit and gives it an independent external life in the form of a sensuous object. Equally, the preservation of particular sense-objects gives art life beyond nature, which is constantly changing. Hegel compares a natural landscape to a landscape painting--the latter distinguishes itself from the former by both keeping one form for as long as the work exists, as well as depending on the subjective interpretation of the landscape by the artist.

The third criteria returns to the first by raising the question of the *necessity* of art:

The universal and absolute need from which art springs has its origin in the fact that man is a thinking consciousness, i.e. that man draws out of himself and puts before himself what he is and whatever else is. Things in nature are only immediate and single, while man as spirit duplicates himself, in that (i) he is as things in nature are, but (ii) he is just as much for himself; he sees himself, represents himself to himself, thinks, and only on the strength of this active placing himself before himself is he spirit. This consciousness of himself man acquires in a two-fold way: first, theoretically, in so far as inwardly he must bring himself into his own consciousness, along with whatever moves, stirs, and presses in the human

breast; and in general he must see himself, represent himself to himself, fix before himself what thinking finds as his essence, and recognize himself [...] Secondly, man brings himself before himself by practical activity, since he has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. [Aesthetics, Vol. 1, pg. 30-31]

For Hegel, art is both contemplative and practical activity. In this way, it is the exact opposite of alienated labor, which estranges people from their essence. Of particular note is the dialectical relationship between man and nature. Humanity is both an object of nature and makes nature its object. For Hegel, then, art is the movement of man out of himself, the externalization of some element of himself in an object, and contemplation of himself through this object. In the process of externalizing a subjective quality, that is, in the process of making art, the subjective quality takes on objective sensuous characteristics, is made concrete. People then recognize (or fail to recognize) themselves in this concrete embodiment of spirit. Also in this passage Hegel observes that man “produces himself”, the echo of which can be observed in the famous passage from *The German Ideology*, “As individuals express their life, so they are. *What they are, therefore, coincides with their production*, both with what they produce and with how they produce.”

If art is the “representation of the Ideal” [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, 263] and the Ideal is perfect harmony between appearance and Concept [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, 155] then Hegel is noting that through art, people strive to create a work that exists in perfect harmony with itself, between “outer form” and “soul.” (This is also why the Ideal cannot be realized in nature, which is constantly in conflict with itself.) Hegel uses the example of a portrait-painter, and distinguishes between a painter who strives for photorealism and an artist who lets go of certain details in order to “portray the true features which express the inmost soul of the subject.” [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, 155] As detailed in the sections on logic and dialectic, in nature, there is constant tension between the individual thing and its universal essence. Art seeks to overcome this divide by expressing the universal through the individual. In this way, Hegel’s theory of aesthetics is perfectly in tune with the rest of his philosophical system.

As for beauty, Hegel defines it as the abstract unity of the sensuous material. [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, 141] Such a description serves to define superficial beauty, that is, beauty without content. Note that both beauty, that is, the quality of the form, and the Ideal, the unity of this with the “soul” that is the content, are described in relative terms. Hegel uses mathematics to illustrate his point about what people find satisfactory, but nowhere does he attempt to describe beauty in terms of specific sense-perceptions or through evolutionary psychological concepts. As with his philosophy in general, art and beauty are *relations of a thing to itself* mediated through the external world. In this case, art is a medium for people to relate to themselves, and

beauty is merely harmony between the individual parts (which includes the ideas as well as formal elements) and between the parts and the whole.

Having grasped Hegel's view of art in the abstract, it is time to examine the existence of art as a social phenomenon. The relationship between art and the public, for Hegel, consists of this: "Every work of art is a dialogue with everyone who confronts it." [*Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, 264] The work of art is mediated through the person, that is, has meaning insofar as it is the product of a particular time and place with its own social relations, at the same time that the work of art is the medium for the consumer to examine themselves. In this sense, Hegel is able to describe art as being in a "dialogue", one which is perpetually expanding as humanity develops new technical means of producing art as well as producing new subjective needs. At the same time, there are objective elements to art, not just in its material factors such as color, pitch, etc, but in its content as well, which remain consistent across all places and times. It is the peoples' relationship to a work of art that changes over time and varies according to place and taste. Hegel does take note of this:

*Confronted with such objectivity in a work of art, the individual must therefore give up the **false demand of wishing to have himself before him in it with his purely subjective characteristics and idiosyncrasies** [...] Many a man seeks in vain in the most beautiful love-songs for his own feelings and therefore declares that the description is false, just as others, whose knowledge of love is drawn from romances alone, do not now suppose themselves to be actually in love until*

they encounter in and around themselves the very same feelings and situations. [Aesthetics, Vol. 1, 280]

Ideally, then, art strives to create a bridge between the objective and subjective parts of being human. It is through this unique feature that art has a profound impact on people, while remaining firmly grounded in the social relations that produced it. For Hegel, who was a product of the end of feudalism and the beginning of capitalism, the highest art was art which depicted the divine, as this was the Absolute, and thus was the highest an artist could aspire to.

Chapter 8: Theology

Theology is the heart of the entire Hegelian system. Hegel takes for granted supernatural categories such as the soul and God, as is to be expected of speculative idealist philosophy. The Spirit that is the premise of Hegel's philosophy is in fact God, which Hegel believes is another term for rationality.

For Hegel, the philosophy of religion concerns itself with the infinite, and so seeking scientific answers in religious dogma is deemed futile. Finite, or to put it otherwise, concrete categories were inadequate tools for examining religion, and so Hegel exempted his religious discussion from the criticism he practiced elsewhere. In this way, Hegel reflects the development of capitalism out of feudalism: it inherited the religious dogma of feudalism, which at times directly opposes the profit motive and technological demands of capitalism, and so bourgeois philosophers had the task of reconciling the two in order to maintain the support of the peasants and feudal remnants against the growing urban proletariat while reorganizing society according to the logic of the market. This contradiction between reason and superstition, or logic and dogma, Hegel attempts to resolve by making God and reason into one:

Here in the Philosophy of Religion it is more especially God, reason in fact, that is the object; for God is essentially rational, rationality, which as Spirit is in and for itself. [...] Religion, however, speaking generally, is the ultimate and the highest sphere of

human consciousness, whether it be opinion, will, idea, ordinary knowledge, or philosophical knowledge. It is the absolute result — it is the region into which man passes over, as into the domain of absolute truth. By reason of this universal character of religion, consciousness must, when in this sphere, have already raised itself above all that is finite — above finite existence, conditions, ends, interests, as well as above finite thoughts, finite relations of all kinds. To be actually within the sphere of religion, it is necessary to have laid these aside. [Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, B. Preliminary Questions]

Therefore, for Hegel, religion is consciousness that has moved beyond everything finite. It is the domain of absolute truth, and therefore beyond all that is finite. But consciousness of the infinite means consciousness of an indeterminate object. At the same time, Hegel demonstrates that indeterminate being and nothing are the same thing. (“Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure being.” [§133 *Science of Logic*]) So, Hegel’s logic underhandedly demonstrates that religious consciousness is the consciousness of nothing, the negation of knowledge! This contradicts the very premise of Hegel’s philosophy, which demands the existence of an Absolute or God. Ironically, the premise of his dialectics is revealed to be metaphysical. Hegel’s theology can only stand on its own logic separate from that of dialectics, in order to avoid the criticism of the entire category of religion which is contrasted by positive knowledge. Hegel does attempt to address this

however:

*If discord has arisen between intellectual insight and religion, and is not overcome in knowledge, it leads to despair, which comes in the place of reconciliation. [...] It follows from this that the knowledge of God is not to be placed in the reason which seeks to comprehend its object, but that **the consciousness of God springs only out of feeling; and that the relation of man to God lies within the sphere of feeling only, and is not to be brought over into thought.** If God be excluded from the region of rational intelligence or insight, of necessary, substantial subjectivity, nothing indeed is left but to assign to Him the region of accidental subjectivity, that of feeling, and in this case it may well be a subject of wonder that objectivity is ascribed to God at all. In this respect, **materialistic views, or by whatever other name you choose to designate them, empirical, historical, naturalistic, have been at least more consistent, in that they have taken Spirit and Thought for something — material, and imagine they have traced the matter back to sensations, even taking God to be a product of feeling, and denying to Him objectivity.** The result has, in this case, been atheism. God would thus be an historical product of weakness, of fear, of joy, or of interested hopes, cupidity, and lust of power. [...] For this reason the older metaphysic has always demonstrated first of all that a God is, and not merely that there is a feeling of God, and thus **the Philosophy of Religion too finds the demand made upon it to demonstrate God.** [Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, B. Preliminary Questions]*

Hegel, if he were totally faithful to his system, would freely admit that God has no objective existence. Whereas his logic demonstrates that objective existence means existence as an object for another, by defining God as absolute Truth, or rationality, or the infinite, he removes the objectivity of God. Hegel wrote, “While the finite required an Other for its determinateness, the True has its determinateness, the limit, its end in itself; it is not limited through an Other, but the Other is found in itself.” [*Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, II b.] Where Hegel sees evidence of God in reason and absolute truth, he is still assuming the very category of God. By making God and truth one and the same, he equates philosophy and the sciences with religion. Hegel is aware of this fact: “Thus religion and philosophy come to be one. *Philosophy is itself, in fact, worship; it is religion*, [...] what distinguishes them from each other is merely the kind and manner of religion we find in each. It is in the peculiar way in which they both occupy themselves with God that the distinction comes out.” [*Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, A 1.] Hegel is correct, but in the opposite sense that he intends. He equates religion and philosophy in order to affirm religion. For Marxists, however, this is a condemnation of philosophy, which for centuries was simply a matter of placing one’s faith in a particular system. (Feuerbach, as will be seen later, developed this contradiction in the Hegelian system further by attempting to develop philosophy out of its negation, a task completed by Marx and Engels.)

It is the theological aspect of the Hegelian philosophy which is the most dependent on

speculation, as Hegel intentionally developed it in opposition to any determinate knowledge. For this reason, it is the least valuable to Marxists, with the exception of its accidental critiques. This aspect's only use is as a negative example of dialectics, that is, dialectics twisted to serve reaction and place limits on what ought to be a universally critical logic.

Hegel admitted in the quote above that the religion is pure feeling, and therefore cannot be examined using reason. Nevertheless, Hegel does attempt to rationalize Christianity, and make it compatible with the rest of his bourgeois outlook. For example, Hegel's political outlook is based on the bourgeois notion of right, and valorizes freedom. This is contrary to the God of the Old Testament, who demanded total obedience and unquestioning sacrifice from his subjects, from the plagues visited on Egypt to commanding Abraham to kill his son. Hegel attempts to sidestep this contradiction by focusing on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and converting God into the concept of purity. (Interesting to note that Thomas Jefferson, whose ideology was also built around the concept of right, created his own Bible composed solely of Jesus' moral teachings.) For Hegel, obedience to God is only valuable insofar as it is voluntary:

Over against commands which required a bare service of the Lord, a direct slavery, an obedience without joy, without pleasure or love, i.e., the commands in connection with the service of God, Jesus set their precise opposite, a human urge and so a human need. Religious practice is the most holy, the most beautiful, of all things; it is our endeavor to unify

*the discords necessitated by our development and attempt to exhibit the unification in the ideal as fully existent, as no longer opposed to reality, and thus to express and confirm it in a deed. It follows that, if that spirit of beauty be lacking in religious actions, they are the most empty of all; they are the most senseless bondage, demanding a consciousness of one's annihilation, or deeds in which man expresses his nullity, his passivity. The satisfaction of the commonest human want rises superior to actions like these, because there lies directly in such a want the sensing or the preserving of a human being, no matter how empty his being may be. [...] This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality,[8] is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form. **The Sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfills the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous. Since the commands of duty presuppose a cleavage [between reason and inclination] and since the domination of the concept declares itself in a "thou shalt," that which is raised above this cleavage is by contrast an "is" a modification of life, a modification which is exclusive and therefore restricted only if looked at in reference to the object, since the exclusiveness is given only through the restrictedness of the object and only concerns the object.** [Chapter 2 *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*]*

The contradiction between reason and

inclination Hegel refers to merits further exploration. What Hegel is really referring to is the cleavage between the individual person and society organized in a way that appeared rational to Hegel, that is, a constitutional monarchy. Such a state, a state of compromise between the weakened monarchy and the ascendant bourgeoisie, preserves the contradictions between the two, which manifests in the ideological realm. The obligations of serfdom and a free labor market are directly opposed, and this conflict presents itself in Hegel's attempt to rationalize Christianity. He resolves the contradiction by positing a *need* which is fulfilled by religion, and that obedience to the law is merely a convenient byproduct of obedience to the Lord. This need is spiritual, emotional, aesthetic, in sum, subjective. Hegel is once again partially correct, in that people have needed religion, which provided (and in some places and for some people, still provides) comfort and a way of understanding arbitrary and cruel exploitation. However, Hegel does not take a critical stance towards this need, which is superseded by higher cultural and political demands as material conditions develop and the oppressed become self-aware. Hegel constructs an impenetrable metaphysical wall between religion, which for him is purely subjective, and the objective world. Due to his idealism, he does not examine the objective elements of religious practice, especially the classes which guide its development and how the consciousness of these classes manifests itself in religion. By making religion into a pure feeling, he essentially *removes it* from the possibility of criticism, since criticism is a relationship between a subject and an object, and Jesus' teachings are explicitly *not*

objective commands but rather pure subjectivity. In fact, Hegel says attempting to transform Jesus' moral teachings into objective laws is by definition profane, as he said, "Against purely objective commands Jesus set something totally foreign to them, namely, the subjective in general; but he took up a different attitude to those laws which from varying points of view we call either moral or else civil commands. Since it is natural relations which these express in the form of commands, it is perverse to make them wholly or partly objective." [Chapter 2 *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*] Hegel seems to imply that the only pure understanding of Jesus' teachings is one devoid of content, and in fact he sees in Jesus the negation of the Commandments, as Jesus renders them superfluous according to him.

All of this is to say that Hegel's philosophy of religion falls apart upon close examination. The speculative side of his philosophy is reactionary, and has long been exploited by conservative Hegelians. However, by demanding religion adhere to its own logic, Hegel inadvertently criticized it in a way different from the deists and pantheists and mechanical materialists that came before him.

Chapter 9: Nature

Hegel's philosophy of nature and natural processes is clouded by his theology. Hegel even expressed disdain for Newton's theory that light is composed of every color, as will be shown. Hegel's Christian ideology prevented him from systematically applying *his own* philosophy on this topic, for the simple fact that they are irreconcilable. As advances are made in the natural sciences, religion becomes more and more redundant. Hegel attempted to philosophize his way out of this quandary, but this required a renunciation of dialectical thought and an acceptance of metaphysics, something Feuerbach touched on in his criticism, which will be examined later.

The contradiction between the correct, dialectical view of nature and the incorrect, metaphysical view of nature can be explained simply. The universe commenced with the big bang, which is assumed to have developed out of a point of infinite density, and will eventually reach the point of heat death. (This prediction comes from the fact that entropy, the amount of energy not available for work, can only increase.) In this way, the entire universe is unfolding out of itself, as all matter has a common point of origin. This is the essence of dialectical development, and is contrasted with the metaphysical view of nature, which posits one or multiple objects as being eternal, and not subject to development. For Hegel, this object is God or the Absolute, but to defend this position, he is forced to assign immutability to natural objects and processes as well, and effectively *renounce* the dialectical outlook.

The dialectical outlook developed out of discoveries in the natural sciences. Observations to this effect go back as far as Heraclitus, who said that it is impossible to step in the same river twice, and this connection was made explicit by Friedrich Engels in *Dialectics of Nature*. There are qualitative leaps in nature, from inorganic matter to organic matter, and from unconscious organic matter to self-conscious organic matter. The unity of opposites, such as the unity of space and time, or light being both a wave and particle, is also derived from nature. Hegel, on the other hand, believed certain observable divisions were eternal. One such example is his attack on Isaac Newton:

According to the familiar Newtonian theory, white, or colourless light consists of five or seven colours; the theory itself can not say exactly how many. One can not express oneself strongly enough about the barbarism, in the first place, of the conception that with light, too, the worst form of reflection, the compound, was seized upon, so that brightness here could consist of seven darknesses, or water could consist of seven forms of earth. [§221 Philosophy of Nature]

White, or colorless light, in fact contains all of the colors in it: the phenomenon of color is the result of objects reflecting or not reflecting certain wavelengths. White light contains all of the wavelengths of visible light--the difference between the colors is one of quantity. Why was this theory so repugnant for Hegel? The answer is found in his overall perspective on the

natural world, which can be summed up thus:

*In this externality the determinations of the concept have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation in regards to each other. The concept therefore exists as an inward entity. **Hence nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only necessity and contingency.** For this reason nature, in the determinate existence, which makes it nature, is not to be deified, nor are the sun, moon, animals, plants, and so on, to be regarded and adduced as the works of God, more excellent than human actions and events. [§193 *Philosophy of Nature*]*

Recall that for Hegel, freedom could only find its expression in the state. [§42 *Philosophy of History*, but also discussed in many other works, including *Philosophy of Right*.] Hegel has therefore implied a separation between human phenomena and natural phenomena. He has abandoned the dialectical outlook by throwing up a wall between humans and nature, and refusing to acknowledge that nature, which knows only necessity and contingency, is the precondition for freedom, and has given rise to it. Freedom is the ability to act outside of necessity, and it is nature that creates the conditions that impose necessity *and* the potential for rising above these conditions.

Hegel is forced to separate humans from nature in order to use social phenomena as the basis for his theological writing. If he were to accept that humans are a part of nature subject to their own tendencies of development, then he would in effect be endorsing the materialist outlook and abandoning his idealism. On

this subject, the relationship between humanity and nature, the insoluble contradiction between dialectics and idealism begins to show itself, and Hegel chose to develop the latter at the expense of the former.

That is not to say his philosophy of nature is completely devoid of contributions to dialectics. It is here that Hegel stresses the supremacy of internal factors over external forces:

*Nature is to be viewed as a system of stages, in which one stage necessarily arises from the other and is the truth closest to the other from which it results, though not in such a way that the one would naturally generate the other, but rather in **the inner idea** which constitutes the ground of nature. **It has been an awkward conception in older and also more recent philosophy of nature to see the progression and the transition of one natural form and sphere into another as an external, actual production which, however, in order to be made clearer, is relegated to the darkness of the past.** Precisely this externality is characteristic of nature: differences are allowed to fall apart and to **appear** as existences indifferent to each other; and the dialectical concept, which leads the stages further, is the interior which emerges only in the spirit. [...] For this determination it is necessary to posit that **the immanent moment of its idea, which brings about its transiency and transition into another existence,** produces at the same time a transformation into a higher concept. [§194 *Philosophy of Nature*]*

This profound distinction between two views of

development, the difference between the notion of *external cause* and the notion of *external forces acting on internal potential*, is in fact the difference between mechanicism and dialectical thought. This is the same distinction between “evolutionary socialists” in the spirit of Bernstein, Kautsky, Deng, and company on one hand, and revolutionary communists on the other. This explodes any notion of “peaceful transition”, which is neither dialectical nor materialist, and today serves as the foundation of all revisionist thought. No process is a matter of linear development--it is rather a question of the immanent characteristics providing many possibilities, one of which is actualized due to the presence or absence of external forces. To put it concretely, both a seed and a rock appear the same, and both can be buried in soil and watered, but only one will grow into a plant, due to internal characteristics--but without the presence of the external factors of arable land and nutrients, or an aberration in these external factors, growth will not occur or be stunted or may even follow a different path. (A principle which was unfortunately taken too far by Lysenko, who was unaware of the immanent limits of development an organism can undergo in a given time period.) This is also how Hegel grasped the essence of a thing, by uncovering the internal characteristics that determine its potential: “An important step towards a true representation of the organism is the substitution of the *category of stimulation by external forces* for the category of the intervention of external causes.” [§282 *Philosophy of Nature*] For Marxists, then, the advance or retreat of the class struggle is not simply the effect of the development or destruction of the productive

forces. Rather, the development or the destruction of productive forces is the external force which acts on the potential within the class struggle.

For example, the first World War brought immense destruction to the productive forces throughout Europe, particularly Russia and Germany. In both countries, the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie reached new heights. Equally, in both countries, the contradiction *within the workers' movement* between the Marxists and the revisionists proved the decisive factor. In Russia, the revisionists were defeated and the proletariat was able to assume power. In Germany, the revisionist Social Democrats came out ahead of the Spartacists, and thus the bourgeoisie was able to continue to rule, *but not in the same way as before*: the failure of the revolution gave rise to a contradiction within the bourgeoisie, the contradiction between liberal democracy and fascism, which ended in the defeat of liberal democracy and the ascension of fascism.

This is not to say that every process is contained in its entirety in the organism. The potential for development is rather the product of past processes, and is only one stage in a larger process of processes. In other words, development undergoes development itself, so long as there is potential for development and an absolute end has not yet been reached. This is Hegel's application of dialectics applied consistently, but also provides a potential gap which he filled with God or the Absolute. Nature is, for Hegel, the process of the unfolding of the idea, which does not follow a predetermined path, but is rather loosely guided by an immanent underlying Absolute, whose realization it

tends towards: “The members of this organism do not contain, therefore, the generality of the process within themselves, they are the particular individuals, and *constitute a system whose forms manifest themselves as members of the unfolding of an underlying idea, whose process of development is a past one.*” [§262 *Philosophy of Nature*]

In sum, Hegel’s philosophy of nature is tainted by the ambivalence contained within his philosophy as a whole: Hegel vacillates between a consistent dialectical outlook and his inclination towards a theological interpretation of everything. Nevertheless, his writing on nature, when he applies his dialectical logic consistently, provides concrete examples of the dialectic, and thus shows its movement in a new light.

Chapter 10: State

Before studying Hegel's view of the state, it is worth reviewing the Marxist theory of the state. The state has a special body of armed men as its basis, (Hegel's correct view of the significance of force as the basis of all other rights will be explored later,) and its purpose is to maintain the rule of the oppressors over the oppressed class, and to facilitate the exploitation of the latter. The state is, in essence, a tool for the minority to exercise dictatorship over the majority, and this character does not change, even though the administration may take the form of a democracy. This is negated through the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which the proletariat and poor peasantry who make up the majority of the population exercise dictatorship over the exploiting minority. The negation of the negation is the withering away of the state as the internal and external enemies of the revolution are defeated and the non-proletarian working classes (intellectuals, petty-bourgeois, peasantry, etc.) are absorbed by the proletariat. This is simultaneously an affirmation of freedom at a higher stage than the sort of freedom experienced by pre-class society people. That is the broad sketch of the dialectical movement of the state today.

Hegel's view of the state as a historical product was ahead of its time, although his idealism and class-collaborationist outlook clouds his writing on the subject. Nevertheless, his exposition of the state laid the groundwork for Marx and Engels and their followers. Of particular note is his description of the

relationship between the family, civil society, and the state, which influenced Marxist works from Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* to Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*.

Hegel's idealism is at times eclipsed by his dialectical outlook. His writing on the state is one such occasion, as he moved beyond basic apologia for bourgeois democracy and grasped the historical significance of the state. To correct Hegel's analysis, one need only replace universal in the sense of all people with universal class interests, that is, the state is the organ for reconciling the individual bourgeois interests with the universal bourgeois interest. Due to the nature of capitalism, competition in the marketplace leads to contradictions between the individual capitals, between short-term and long-term interests, and so on, and the state is the organ through which the bourgeoisie works out these problems. (Hence why liberal democracy is the most common method of government in capitalist countries, as the different capitals acquire representation proportional to their share of the total wealth.) Hegel understood the relevance of this contradiction in *Philosophy of Right*: "The differing interests of producers and consumers may come into collision with each other; and although a fair balance between them on the whole may be brought about automatically, still their adjustment also requires *a control which stands above both and is consciously undertaken.*" [§236] Dialectically speaking, every producer is also a consumer, as they consume capital in the production process, and every consumer must also produce in order to earn money to buy goods to consume. Hegel is referring to people as they confront

each other in the market, but this comment applies broadly to the ruling class. What merits special attention is the last two descriptors. Hegel implies two processes here: the process by which the state separates from and places itself above the people, and the process of the ruling class becoming conscious of its interests.

Hegel, in spite of his brilliant description of the state as a historical entity responsible for managing contradictions among the people which nonetheless stands above them, elsewhere stoops to the worst idealist analysis of the state possible: “Rather, we affirm, are Law, Morality, Government, and they alone, the positive reality and completion of Freedom. Freedom of a low and limited order, is mere caprice; which finds its exercise in the sphere of particular and limited desires. [...] *the State is the actually existing, realised moral life.*” [§40-41, *Philosophy of History*] However, Hegel here sheds light on the process of the bourgeoisie becoming aware of its own interests in the state. Self-consciousness for the oppressors is negative, as has been demonstrated earlier. This means that the bourgeoisie must both maintain a level of ignorance of itself as well as construct an alternative consciousness. This is the “positive reality” Hegel refers to, the “moral life”: values such as freedom are identified with the interests of the ruling class, and in this way they are able to keep reality at arms length while not straying so far from it as to accidentally betray their own interests.

This is how civil society arises. (Here we see the influence of Hegel on Antonio Gramsci through Benedetto Croce.)

Civil society is the [stage of] difference which

*intervenes between the family and the state, even if its formation follows later in time than that of the state, because, as [the stage of] difference, **it presupposes the state; to subsist itself, it must have the state before its eyes as something self-subsistent.** Moreover, the creation of civil society is the achievement of the modern world which has for the first time given all determinations of the Idea their due. If the state is represented as a unity of different persons, as a unity which is only a partnership, then what is really meant is only civil society. Many modern constitutional lawyers have been able to bring within their purview no theory of the state but this. In civil society each member is his own end, everything else is nothing to him. But except in contact with others he cannot attain the whole compass of his ends, and therefore these others are means to the end of the particular member. A particular end, however, assumes the form of universality through this relation to other people, and it is attained in the simultaneous attainment of the welfare of others. **Since particularity is inevitably conditioned by universality, the whole sphere of civil society is the territory of mediation where there is free play for every idiosyncrasy, every talent, every accident of birth and fortune, and where waves of every passion gush forth, regulated only by reason glinting through them. Particularity, restricted by universality, is the only standard whereby each particular member promotes his welfare.** [§182 *Philosophy of Right*]*

The “reason” Hegel mentions here is the logic of the ruling class, which is different under each mode

of production. *Each bourgeois is both the limit and the means for achieving their end for every other bourgeois.* Civil society rests on the state, and not the other way around. This means that the class content, or for Hegel, the ethical content, of the state finds expression in the civil society, which is the bridge between the particular and the universal. In civil society, the particular interests find their expression by way of the universal interest, which acts as a limit. This means that the ideological forms the interests of the ruling class (which are always peddled as the interest of all the people) take on are diverse, and may even take on the appearance of opposition to the ruling class if such an illusion serves a particular individual or group. But by virtue of existing as a limit on civil society, the universal interest implies the existence of territory beyond it. This territory for Marxists is the class struggle, which by necessity cannot stay within the bounds of civil society and the state. For Hegel, this territory beyond is the territory of the criminal and unethical.

This relationship between civil society and the state and the ruling class is ironically the same analysis provided by Louis Althusser in his *On Reproduction*. Even though Althusser rejected Hegel and dialectics late in life, the same conclusions can be arrived at through dialectical analysis. In fact, Hegel himself nearly arrived at the same conclusions as Althusser:

*The infinitely complex, criss-cross, movements of reciprocal production and exchange, and the equally infinite multiplicity of means therein employed, **become crystallised**, owing to the universality inherent in their*

content, and distinguished into general groups. As a result, the entire complex is built up into particular systems of needs, means, and types of work relative to these needs, modes of satisfaction and of theoretical and practical education, i.e. into systems, to one or other of which individuals are assigned – in other words, into class-divisions. [...] The family is the first basis of the state, and classes or estates are the second. [§201 Philosophy of Right]

The process by which the laws and norms of exchange “become crystallized” is the process of the construction of civil society, which is different in every country, but they all have their foundation in the bourgeois state. Also of note here is the conception of the family as the first basis of the state, which develops into classes which is the modern basis of the state. On this topic, Hegel veers into materialist territory, as throughout his analysis of the state (barring exceptional passages regarding moral life and the Absolute,) he describes objective processes that take place regardless of whether or not people are aware of them. It is no wonder, then, that Marx considered Hegel’s philosophy revolutionary at its core, and copied almost exactly his writing on the state.

Chapter 11: Political Economy

The field of political economy can be split into the two spheres of politics and economics. Politics is the expression of economic interests. Economic developments are the result of political decisions. The link that unites these two spheres is the class struggle. However, for Hegel, classes are not exploitative relations, but rather concrete expressions of the Idea. Hegel demarcates classes thus: “(a) the substantial or immediate [or agricultural] class; (b) the reflecting or formal [or business] class; and finally, (c) the universal class [the class of civil servants].” [§202 *Philosophy of Right*] The immediate class roughly corresponds to the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, who work on their own property, and thus their relationship to the means of production is not mediated by a third party. They are capable of producing their own subsistence. The universal class is, otherwise stated, the proletariat, whose labor has a social character and whose existence is, in contrast with the immediate class, necessarily mediated by the other workers and the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is the reflecting class, which mediates the labor of the proletariat by buying their labor power and selling to them their means of subsistence. In this way, Hegel comprehended *idealistically* the relations between the classes under capitalism.

Hegel understood as well the notion of abstract value as the one entity uniting all of these classes, and his influence on Marx shines through in his analysis of the dialectic of exchange in which each party is simultaneously buyer and seller, and that exchange is

always exchange of equal values:

*Contract implies two consenting parties and two things. That is to say, in a contract my purpose is both to acquire property and to surrender it. **Contract is real when the action of both parties is complete, i.e. when both surrender and both acquire property, and when both remain property owners even in the act of surrender.** Contract is formal where only one of the parties acquires property or surrenders it. [...] Since in real contract each party retains the same property with which he enters the contract and which at the same time he surrenders, what thus remains identical throughout as the property implicit in the contract is distinct from the external things whose owners alter when the exchange is made. **What remains identical is the value, in respect of which the subjects of the contract are equal to one another whatever the qualitative external differences of the things exchanged. Value is the universal in which the subjects of the contract participate.** [§76-77 *Philosophy of Right*]*

The ideal element of Hegel's philosophy enters into this analysis when one understands his conception of property. Property is the relation of the will to an object according to Hegel. [§53 *Philosophy of Right*] In a sense, this is correct: property means a person can make use of an object as they please. But property can also be a violation of will: under wage labor, the will of the capitalist predominates over the will of the employee whose labor power has been bought. This is even more true under chattel slavery, where the will of

the slaveowner directly dominates every aspect of the slave's life. Hegel only conceives of the harmony of individual wills, and takes for granted a positive relationship between the individual and the universal will. In fact, on this topic, his description of the relationship between the individual and society at large is repeated almost verbatim by bourgeois apologists today: "In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends – an attainment conditioned in this way by universality – there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, happiness, and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness, and rights of all." [§183 *Philosophy of Right*] This is, of course, an inversion of the real situation today, in which the happiness of many are sacrificed for the interests of a minority. This "system of complete interdependence" is an exploitative one, not an expression of freedom for all, a system whose foundation is bourgeois right, the right to receive equal value in exchange for equal value.

Value can be divided into use and exchange value. Hegel understood this antinomy perfectly, and his analysis of money as the unity of the two is correct, although his idealistic outlook leads him to overemphasize use value to the point of endorsing the subjective theory of value: "The value of a thing may be very heterogeneous; it depends on need. But if you want to *express the value of a thing not in a specific case but in the abstract, then it is money which expresses this*. Money represents any and every thing, though since it does not portray the need itself but is only a symbol of it, it is itself controlled by the specific value [of the commodity]." [§63 *Philosophy of Right*]

Hegel's "system of complete interdependence", that is, the capitalist mode of production, makes sense of exchange by assuming exchange of equal values. For Hegel, however, production has as its basis subjective need, and is not motivated by objective laws such as the pursuit of profit. In this way, then, Hegel *fails* to comprehend the logic of capitalist production, which appears to him to be a happy accident resulting from individual wills.

Hegel takes as his presupposition isolated individual wills pursuing their own selfish ends. This manifests in his political philosophy as the right. Hegel provides us with the insight that "abstract right is a right to use force." [§94 *Philosophy of Right*] He provided the basis for the Marxist understanding of the state, the special body of armed men. Right has no meaning without force, which is its material basis. Rights as ideas written into constitutions are too arbitrary to have meaning, and can only be real insofar as they are enforced by a state. For this reason, force is the *only* right. (Compare this with Mao Zedong's well-known adage that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.) This negative right, the right to coerce, gives rise to positive right, such as the right to private property under a bourgeois dictatorship. Naturally, a right implies a *threat* which must be protected against by force. In the case of a bourgeois dictatorship, this threat is the working people. In the case of a dictatorship of the proletariat, this threat is the non-proletarian classes. *The right, then, is only the abstract expression of a contradiction, and a positive representation of what is in reality a negative relationship between oppressor and oppressed.*

The basis of Hegel's understanding of political economy is the individual will, which finds its concrete expression in labor and is embodied in the result of labor, and recognizes itself in others in the market, where one is exchanged for its equal. The state is also the product of the individual wills coming together to create a universal will, the ethical life of a people. All Marx needed to do to correct the Hegelian conception of political economy was replace the individual will with the commodity, and subjective needs with objective tendencies. The subsistence of the species is the premise of the materialist outlook on history and political economy--without this, there can be no talk of ethical life or the will or ideas at all.

This is not to say that Hegel's writing on the topic is entirely backwards or idealistic. On the contrary, Hegel was not ignorant of poverty and its circumstances: "Not only caprice, however, but also contingencies, physical conditions, and factors grounded in external circumstances may reduce men to poverty." [§241 *Philosophy of Right*] Hegel does not acknowledge that this admission obliterates his entire philosophy: he tacitly acknowledges that the physical phenomena of poverty is the product of other external physical phenomena, and that it is possible for someone's mind to be morally and intellectually rich and for their external circumstances contradict this. This admission, Hegel's ambivalence towards materialism, is especially clear in his analysis of classes: "The first class [the peasantry] is therefore more inclined to subjection, the second [the proletariat] to freedom. [...] Capacity, birth, and other circumstances have their influence in determining to

what class an individual shall belong. But the *final and essential factor in the case is subjective opinion and private freedom of choice.*” [§204-206 *Philosophy of Right*] Hegel admits on one hand that class inclines people towards holding certain attitudes, and that there are objective factors which determine class. He then backtracks and claims class is only the result of subjective factors. This sort of ambiguity permeates all of his writing on the topic, and no doubt contributed to the split between the Young Hegelians and Marx on one hand and the conservative Hegelians on the other.

Hegel’s political economy provided the basis for demystifying politics as commonly understood and demonstrated the way out of the quagmire of parliamentary politics, armed struggle. Of course, he did not *intend* to do so. His political economy, when his own idealist definitions are applied, is apologia for constitutional monarchy. When his own idealist system is negated by the materialist outlook, however, the truth of his observations shines through.

All this at first glance appears very concrete. The relationship between Hegel’s political economic thought and his logic is not so obvious, as the categories and objects they refer to seem unconnected. The connection consists of this: each individual will is differentiated from itself on account of having needs that conflict with the Spirit. The individual will is then compelled to go out of itself into property (a commodity) and returns to itself through this mediation. All the rest sits on this basis, the contradiction between the individual will and their state of necessity. These individual wills come together to form the general will. The categories and their

relationships in his political economic thought are the result of Hegel applying his dialectical logic to what he thinks is the individual economic unit, the individual subjectivity or will. This is what separates the idealist and materialist dialectics, the premise of the individual will or the individual object.

Chapter 12: Feuerbach Responds

The essence of Feuerbach's criticism can be summed up in a single phrase from *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy*: "**Enough of words, come down to real things!**" Feuerbach saw through the religious veil that concealed the "rational kernel" (to use Marx's phrase) of Hegel's system, and developed a new philosophy out of Hegel's.

*Taken in its reality or regarded as real, the real is the object of the senses – the sensuous. **Truth, reality, and sensuousness are one and the same thing.** Only a sensuous being is a true and real being. Only through the senses is an object given in the true sense, not through thought for itself. The object given by and identical with ideation is merely thought. **An object, i.e. a real object, is given to me only if a being is given to me in a way that it affects me, only if my own activity – when I proceed from the standpoint of thought – experiences the activity of another being as a limit or boundary to itself.** [§ 32 *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*]*

In this way, Feuerbach developed the materialist monist outlook, which discarded the dogma of the dualists who separated thought and reality, and the pure idealism of Hegel. Feuerbach believed in a return to the natural world, that is, the world of sense-perception, in order to establish a firm foundation for truth to stand on, as opposed to Hegel, whose philosophy hinged on the existence of the Absolute Idea. With no proof of its

existence other than a self-referential system of logic, the Hegelian philosophy collapsed. Feuerbach understood that thought is its own concrete activity, and that the mind is a product of matter and not the opposite: "Thought can think only that which is because thought is itself an essent, a real activity." [*Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy*] This is directly opposed to Hegel, who raised thought to the level of God, reduced matter to an attribute of thought, and made philosophy into a theological science. Feuerbach, by criticizing Hegel, ultimately criticized all existing philosophy:

The only philosophy that proceeds from no presuppositions at all is one that possesses the courage and freedom to doubt itself, that produces itself out of its antithesis. All modern philosophies, however, begin only with themselves and not with what is in opposition to them. They presuppose philosophy; that is, what they understand by philosophy to be the immediate truth. [...] As far as Hegel is concerned, he is a Fichte as mediated through a Schelling. Hegel polemicized against the Absolute of Schelling; he thought it lacked the moment of reflection, apprehension, and negativity. In other words, he imbued the Absolute Identity with Spirit, introduced determinations into it, and fructified its womb with the semen of the Notion (the ego of Fichte). But he, nevertheless, took the truth of the Absolute for granted. He had no quarrel with the existence or the objective reality of Absolute Identity; he actually took for granted that Schelling's philosophy was, in its essence, a true philosophy. All he accused it of was

that it lacked form. Hence, Hegel's relationship to Schelling is the same as that of Fichte to Kant. To both the true philosophy was already in existence, both in content and substance; both were motivated by a purely "scientific," that is, in this case, systematic and formal interest. Both were critics of certain specific qualities of the existing philosophy, but not at all of its essence. [Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy]

The basis of philosophy is thought. Thinking is abstract self-reflection. Therefore, the antithesis of philosophy is concrete extrospection, that is, physical interaction with the given environment. The philosophy which accomplished this feat, which produced itself from its own antithesis, is Marxism, which is summed up in Marx's thesis on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it." As exceptional as Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel is, it is nonetheless imperfect. Through his criticism of Hegel, he developed philosophy to a higher stage, which is *exactly* dialectical development as originally understood by the ancient Greeks, but every concrete and theoretical development introduces new problems, and Feuerbach, and even Marx, were no exceptions.

The premise of Feuerbach's philosophy is simply the negation of the Hegelian system's:

The new philosophy proceeds from the principle: I am a real and sensuous being. Indeed, the whole of my body is my ego, my being itself. The old philosopher, therefore, thought in a constant contradiction to and conflict with the senses in order to avoid sensuous

conceptions, or in order not to pollute abstract concepts. In contrast, the new philosopher thinks in peace and harmony with the senses. [§ 36 Principles of the Philosophy of the Future]

This principle developed out of the contradiction inherent in Hegel's thought. There is no other way to develop philosophy, as according to Hegel, "The refutation must not come from outside, [...] The system need only refuse to recognise those assumptions; the defect is a defect only for him who starts from the requirements and demands based on those assumptions." [§1288 *Science of Logic*] Feuerbach describes the contradiction thus:

*But precisely for that reason the proof of the Absolute in Hegel has, in principle and essence, only a formal significance, notwithstanding the scientific rigor with which it is carried out. **Right at its starting point, the philosophy of Hegel presents us with a contradiction, the contradiction between truth and science, between essence and form, between thinking and writing. The Absolute Idea is assumed, not formally, to be sure, but essentially.** What Hegel premises as stages and constituent parts of mediation, he thinks are determined by the Absolute Idea. Hegel does not step outside the Idea, nor does he forget it. Rather, he already thinks the antithesis out of which the Idea should produce itself on the basis of its having been taken for granted. It is already proved substantially before it is proved formally. Hence, it must always remain unprovable, always subjective for someone who recognizes in the antithesis of the Idea a premise which*

*the Idea has itself established in advance. The externalization of the Idea is, so to speak, only a dissembling; it is only a pretense and nothing serious – the Idea is just playing a game. The conclusive proof is the beginning of the Logic, whose beginning is to be taken as the beginning of philosophy as such. **That the starting point is being is only a formalism, for being is here not the true starting point, nor the truly Primary.** The starting point could just as well be the Absolute Idea because it was already a certainty, an immediate truth for Hegel before he wrote the Logic; i.e., before he gave a scientific form of expression to his logical ideas. **The Absolute Idea – the Idea of the Absolute – is its own indubitable certainty as the Absolute Truth.** It posits itself in advance as true; that which the Idea posits as the other, again presupposes the Idea according to its essence. In this way, **the proof remains only a formal one.** [Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy]*

Nevertheless, Feuerbach does introduce more premises than simply the existence of an external world. Feuerbach's response to Hegel and his other philosophical works are unfortunately impeded by his religious inclinations. His goal was to bring social relations into the realm of religion, and he believed all history was a history of religion. Marx and Engels ultimately demoted religion to the level of epiphenomena, and studied history according to the existing physical beings and objects and their relations and the broader tendencies at play. Feuerbach, on the other hand, raised religion to the level of absolute:

*The demonstration that the meaning and purpose of God are immortality, that God and immortality are one, **that God, starting out as an independent being, as immortality, ends up as an attribute of man, completes my task and with it this series of lectures. I have tried to prove that the god of nature is nature and that the God of spiritual religion, of Christianity, is the spirit or essence of man. I have been guided by the conviction that henceforth man should seek and find the determining ground of his action, the goal of his thinking, the cure for his ills and sufferings in himself, rather than outside himself like the pagan or above himself like the Christian. [...] God, I have said, is the fulfiller, or the reality, of the human desires for happiness, perfection, and immortality. From this it may be inferred that to deprive man of God is to tear the heart out of his breast. But I contest the premises from which religion and theology deduce the necessity and existence of God, or of immortality, which is the same thing. I maintain that desires which are fulfilled only in the imagination, or from which the existence of an imaginary being is deduced, are imaginary desires, and not the real desires of the human heart; I maintain that the limitations which the religious imagination annuls in the idea of God or immortality, are necessary determinations of the human essence, which cannot be dissociated from it, and therefore no limitations at all, except precisely in man's imagination.** [Lecture XXX, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*]*

Feuerbach takes for granted a particular human nature, and accepts without evidence that humans have

an eternal *need* for a God. In other words, an unwritten premise of his philosophy is the human need for religion. Feuerbach's criticism of religion thus falls flat, as he does not consider that religion is a particular concrete activity bound up with particular social conditions. Feuerbach correctly pointed out that Hegel's philosophy cannot be all-encompassing for the simple fact that time continues to move, and that as new things come into existence, the gulf between Hegelian thought and reality will grow ever-larger until the Hegelian system is exposed as falsehood and obliterated. Feuerbach does not apply this simple yet profound logic to spiritual outlooks, which he gives eternal life, because he also cannot imagine that mankind will overcome their material limits. A mere century after Feuerbach's *Lectures on Religion*, where he explains the need for religion using the example of mankind's natural physical limitation of the Earth's gravity, this physical limitation was overcome! Every single day new scientific discoveries render religion more and more redundant, and they are little more than for-profit corporations today. Equally unimportant is the non-critical aspects of Feuerbach's philosophy.

These limitations should not prevent anyone from grasping the significance of Feuerbach in relation to Hegel and philosophy in general. Feuerbach, through the elaboration of the identity between thinking and being and the explanation of being as primary, laid the foundation for much of what is now considered the sole property of Marx and Marxism. For example, Feuerbach accidentally discovered the unity between theory and practice. (Although Feuerbach uses different terms, he refers to the same relationship when he

discusses the relationship between abstract reasoning and material action, which are each the test of the other.) Compare the following passage with the explanation of the materialist outlook found in *The German Ideology*:

Thus, man becomes conscious of himself through the object that reflects his being; man's self-consciousness is his consciousness of the object. One knows the man by the object that reflects his being; the object lets his being appear to you; the object is his manifest being, his true, objective ego. This is true not only of intellectual but also of sensuous objects. Even those objects which are farthest removed from man are manifestations of his own specific mode of being because, and in so far as, they are objects for him.
[Introduction to *The Essence of Christianity*]

Feuerbach grasped the materialist conception of consciousness, which is dependent on objective conditions, as opposed to the wild speculation of the Hegelians. In spite of all that has been said regarding Feuerbach's opposition to Hegel, though, he nevertheless retains significant elements of Hegel's logic. For instance, the above passage is merely a materialist restoration of the Hegelian notion of identity, that man's essence is inside of him but can only be revealed when it is mediated through external objects. At the risk of excessive repetition, one more passage from Feuerbach deserves study, on account of developing materialism out of the contradiction inherent in all idealist systems. If there is one lesson from Feuerbach that must be comprehended in order to

understand his relation to Hegelian philosophy, it is the following:

*The only question is, why does the Idea take on sensuousness? Why does it cease to be true when it is not real or sensuous? Is not its truth thus made dependent on sensuousness? [...] If value and content are bestowed upon sensuousness by the Idea, sensuousness is pure luxury and trumpery – **only an illusion which thought practices upon itself.** But it is not so. The demand that the Idea realise itself, that it assume sensuousness arises from the fact that **sensuous reality is unconsciously held to be the truth which is both prior to and independent of thought. Thought proves its truth by taking recourse to sensuousness; how could this be possible if sensuousness was not unconsciously held to be the truth?** But since one consciously proceeds from the truth of thought, the truth of sensuousness is acknowledged only in retrospect whereby sensuousness is reduced merely to an attribute of the Idea. But this is a contradiction; for sensuousness is an attribute and yet it lends truth to thought; that is, it is both essential and inessential, both substance and accident. **The only way out of this contradiction is to regard sensuous reality as its own subject; to give it an absolutely independent, divine, and primary significance, not one derived from the Idea.** [§ 31 *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*]*

Thus Feuerbach laid the foundation for the revolution in philosophy led by Marx. Feuerbach exposed the contradiction at the heart of Hegelian

philosophy, which brought forth the principle that is the foundation of Marxism, the primacy of matter over spirit, and consequently, the primacy of practice over thought.

Chapter 13: From Hegel to Mao

Philosophy is the lighthouse which guides us through the class struggle. Hegel kept the flame in the era of revolutionary war against feudal absolutism, and with the entrance of the immortal science of Marxism onto the world stage, it burns brighter today than ever before, as the proletariat advances the class struggle and simultaneously develops Marxism to new heights. Hegel's dialectics exploded many notions that were simply taken for granted. Marx and Engels then brought it out of the intellectual realm, back down to earth, and advanced it. Under Lenin's leadership and guided by the wisdom of dialectical thought, the proletariat took state power for the first time in 1917. Mao Zedong brought this theory to the proletariat, which reached new heights and undertook new struggles during the era of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The dialectic is powerful because it is real, and those who would deny it philosophically will sooner or later have their illusions swept aside as concrete contradictions are exacerbated to the point of open conflict.

There is no eternal category other than the contradiction. Being and nothingness, positive and negative charge, action and reaction, etc, all are dependent on another. In politics, this manifests at every level, including inside classes and parties. Even the least politically-minded person can admit that conflict is the essence of politics, and that it can only be decisively resolved through conquest, not compromise. This is true of the proletariat which finds itself opposed to the bourgeoisie, it is true of

materialism in its fight against idealism, and it is true of the dialectical world outlook in its struggle against metaphysics. It is no coincidence that in his argument against the revisionists, Lenin said, “They have completely failed to understand what is *decisive in Marxism, namely, its revolutionary dialectics.*” [*Our Revolution*, 16 Jan 1923]

Dialectical thought advances alongside the real movement of things. Marx, in his *Critique of Political Economy*, apparently predicted that proletarian revolution would occur first in the industrially advanced countries. (“No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society.”) This prediction was correct: the first dictatorship of the proletariat was established in France in 1871. However, the dialectical transformation of capitalism into imperialism, the transformation of competition into monopoly, turned this principle on its head: the first attempt at revolution occurred in industrially developed France in 1871, but the first *successful* attempt occurred in industrially *backward* Russia in 1917, due to the fact that imperialism was *weakest* there. The 1871 Paris Commune failed partially due to the theory of Blanquism, which failed to properly organize the proletariat under the banner of a vanguard composed of its advanced section. The October Revolution succeeded because it abandoned Blanquism for Leninism. This principle advanced dialectically as well: the Leninist party under the leadership of Khrushchev transformed from a

revolutionary party into a *counterrevolutionary* party, which led to Mao and the Chinese masses *advancing the revolution from outside the revolutionary party* in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The advance of dialectical thought and the development of the real material world, as can be seen, go hand in hand.

If there is one lesson to be gained from this short work, it is this: opposites are united in conflict, and this conflict drives development, and because this principle holds true in reality, it holds true in thought as well. It is not enough to grasp this point theoretically, however. It is a *call to action*. Perceive the contradiction, grasp its development, and obliterate all supposedly eternal relations. This is the essence of dialectics. Or as Mao phrased it concretely, *it is right to rebel*.

