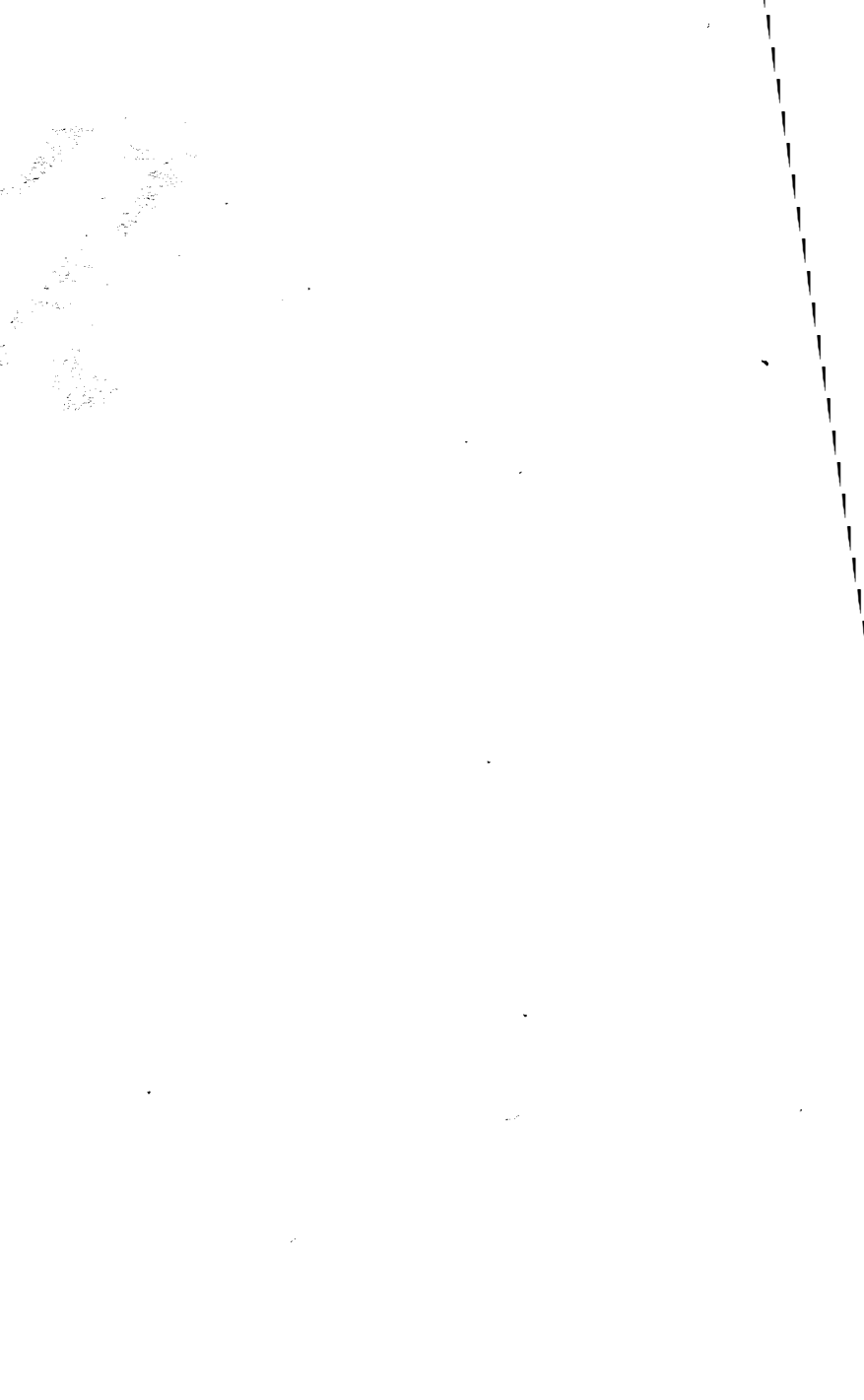


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# Studies on MARX and HEGEL

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STUDIES ON MARX  
AND HEGEL

Jean Hyppolite

*translated, with an Introduction, Notes,  
and Bibliography, by*

JOHN O'NEILL



HARPER TORCHBOOKS  
Harper & Row, Publishers  
New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London

This book was published in hardcover by Basic Books, Inc. It is here reprinted by arrangement. Originally published in French under the title *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* by Marcel Rivière et Cie in 1955.

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First HARPER TORCHBOOK edition published 1973.

STANDARD BOOK NUMBER: 06-131766-7

PREFACE  
to the  
English Edition  
*Jean Hyppolite*

In 1907 the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce published an essay entitled "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel." The time had come, it seemed, to make a final reckoning of Hegel's influence (which was considerable everywhere in Europe except France) and what might survive of his legacy. Croce could not envisage a Hegelian renaissance; he was unable to foresee that by a strange paradox Hegel would become associated with the existentialist current whose precursors had been critics of the Hegelian system. Kierkegaard and Marx had both taken their stand in opposition to Hegelianism. Hegel's absolute idealism transcended history, which it judged, and synthesized all past philosophies in a system which was equally vast and profound. But in that system the individual thinker and the historical individual disappeared. They were vanishing moments in a monumental history which represented the progressive realization of the Absolute. The individual goals and concrete projects of man were not completely ignored; they were recognized as moments, judged and absorbed by a cunning of reason which made use of them in order to concretize its own reality. Man's liberty, its adventures, its risks, its failures or its partial successes, were all contributory to this theodicy.

But there has appeared in France, in Europe, and even in America a philosophical movement, often acknowledging its origins in Kierkegaard, and sometimes in Marx, which attempts to vindicate the rights of existence, the freedom of man in situation, committed to a history whose meaning is ambiguous and without any absolute

guarantee however the risks are calculated. The names associated with this movement in France are those of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the movement being no enemy of Marxism. What it kept from Marxism was only the analysis of concrete historical situations, reflection upon the economic bases of human existence, and especially the necessity of the liberation of mankind through the proletarian suppression of its own historical alienation. About this time the early works of Hegel and Marx were discovered. The genesis of the Hegelian system from the *Theological Writings* (a very questionable title) to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1807, and the origins of Marx and Engel's dialectical materialism from the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, through the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844, to the *Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 (the germ of *Capital*) constituted a genuine revelation for an entire generation. Before developing his system Hegel had described an unhappy religious and historical consciousness reminiscent of themes in Kierkegaard or Feuerbach.

Jean Wahl published *The Unhappy Consciousness in the Philosophy of Hegel*, 1929. The present author translated *The Phenomenology of Mind* into French for the first time and attempted a historical commentary<sup>1</sup> upon its puzzling description of the saga of the human mind as a terrestrial repetition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Even though this work culminates in an absolute knowledge which seems to swallow existence, it remains of value for the concrete detail and diversions in the journey of consciousness. It reveals the relations between individual consciousness and nature and especially with other individual consciousnesses. It provides a description much more than a deduction of the concrete bases of a history constituted by the encounter of individuals in a struggle to the death for recognition, an absolute war which, as in Clausewitz, is conceived as the extreme limit. Indeed, such a struggle would bring human history to an impasse; the war would have to end for want of combatants. That is why at first recognition is not reciprocal; there are masters and slaves, but the slave who works ends by dominating the master because he actualizes his negativity in a product which subsists rather than through the nothingness of death. The product, instrument, tool, machine, indeed, every means becomes a substantial end. History is the work

of each and of all; it provides its own spectacle and representation in religion, in art, and finally one day in philosophy. But the element of tragedy does not disappear; it survives in the relation between consciousness engaged in action and contemplative consciousness. In this *phenomenology*, as Marx understood it, Hegel often described with great fidelity some of the fundamental characteristics of the human condition, in particular, those of the alienation of man through his conditions of work and existence. Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* are nothing else than a commentary on *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

A. Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*,<sup>2</sup> contains lectures, given in the 1930's, that were extremely influential at that time. Going beyond a literal reading, Kojève spoke of Hegel's atheism and Hegel's interpretation of the Napoleonic Empire which at that time (1807) he saw as the fulfillment of the French Revolution.

The discovery of the early writings of Hegel and Marx has enabled West European thinkers to understand in terms other than those of the systematic *Encyclopedia* and the schematic dialectic of Engels what was the meaning of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Marx's *historical materialism*. It has enabled us to raise in a fresh way the problem of the relation between Hegel and Marx. The much too simple idea of a dialectical reversal leading from the monism of the Hegelian Spirit to the materialist monism of Marx has perhaps been revised. It is the theme of alienation and the conquest of alienation which is now at the center of our attention. Actually it had been the inspiration of Marx's early works. But there is an ebb and flow, and the generation which is succeeding the existentialist generation is also taking notice of the great problems of structure that are dominant in Marx's *Capital* and Hegel's *Logic*. Moreover, on this issue, which is closer to the interest of East European commentators, it seems that recent analyses will allow us to pose the problem of the relationship between Hegel and Marx somewhat differently than hitherto.

Having discovered the paths followed by the young Hegel and Marx, we are presently engaged in reflection upon the consequences of these exploratory journeys and upon the great works of their maturity, namely, Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital* (with

its very important first phase in *Critique of Political Economy*, 1859). The tide of existentialism now yields before the rise not of essentialism (displaced forever) but of structuralism. At the moment there are only a few instances of this approach to the structuralist features of Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*; so that we shall draw upon two essays of Louis Althusser published in *La Pensée*,<sup>3</sup> which in our opinion state the issue quite clearly. Marx's conception of the dialectic is not the same as Hegel's if we consider its actual role in his analysis of human society and capital. It is not a case of the same method applied to a system which is just the reverse of the other. Hegel is indeed an idealist and a monist. For him there exists a *single principle*, an indivisible genetic totality which experiences self-division and self-opposition in order finally to be reintegrated with itself (a process which Lenin in his notes on Hegel rightly found very obscure). It involves an *absolute subject* that alienates itself and becomes its own phenomenon in order to reconquer itself. The spirit loses itself and finds itself. The journey of absolute spirit is such that it has already returned at the time it starts out. What we have here is a *theology*, and when East European commentators substitute matter for Hegel's absolute spirit and retain the dialectic of the One which negates itself and recovers itself in the negation of the negation, like Hegel, they are also *theologians*. They preserve in Hegel what Marx felt obliged to reject. They entrench themselves in a dogmatism similar to theological metaphysics.

What deserves admiration in Hegel and even in his *Logic* is his unfaithfulness to this monism, particularly in the doctrine on Essence. There he describes structures in which the essential and unessential are reflected in one another, in which the existential conditions of a dominant contradiction are an element in the contradiction itself. In Marx there is never any question of an absolute subject, Matter or Spirit, which might follow a continuous dialectical development. There are never anything but concrete pre-existing structures. There is no indivisible genetic Totality, but many totalities; for example, human society in the capitalist phase. These totalities are not essences but structures in which, as L. Althusser has shown, the dominant contradiction, for example, between the relations and the forces of production is

reflected in its existential conditions, which are no longer contingent superstructures arbitrarily tied to their infrastructure. The dominant contradiction can shift, can appear in various aspects (Marx was not insensible to these characteristic features of history, as can easily be seen from reading what he wrote on the class struggles in France and the emergence of Napoleon III where the explanation is far from simplistic). Structure is not the appearance of a unique subject but an original ensemble, a totality of a quite different type from Hegel's spiritual principle. It is within its totality that development takes place, whether in phases where antagonism is still only a difference or where it appears as an overt struggle or as an explosion which involves the Totality in a mutation. If one were to return to the often remarkable commentary<sup>4</sup> by Lenin on Hegel's *Logic*, one could rediscover concepts of this order when, for example, he shows the relation between a natural development and a spiritual development, or where, in a typical image, in connection with the logic of Essence he insists upon the importance of the position and movement of every *drop* in a river.

On turning their attention to these studies of structure—and of strategy—Western students are perhaps in closer rapport with East European commentators on the Hegel-Marx filiation. On one point, however, they keep their distance. They reject Engels' dialectical schematism, the monism and determinism that are more Hegelian than Marxian. We may add that these studies of structure—and strategy—which make a science of Marxism, and undoubtedly correspond to Marx's own thinking, seem to us to be lacking where they eliminate the youthful impulses and the existential reflection upon alienation. Indeed, what would be the meaning of history and the significance of the revolutionary movement if it were not clarified in existence through the awareness of alienation and the resolves to surmount it? Jean-Paul Sartre might ask how the for-itself can emerge from the in-itself or from an existence antecedent to consciousness. Marx, who at the time of the Paris Commune had thought the revolt premature and ineffectual, immediately took its part once it had broken out and he was able to see in it the basis of a new revolutionary tradition. There is a universal value for us in reflection upon the re-

lationship between Hegel and Marx. It is not just a historical legacy. It involves a problem that can always be re-examined and which can acquire fresh meaning at any given time in history.

## NOTES

- 1 Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel* (Paris, 1946).
- 2 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, edited and with an introduction by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
- 3 Louis Althusser, "Contradiction et surdétermination," *La Pensée* (December 1962), pp. 3-22; "Sur la dialectique matérialiste (De l'inégalité des origines)," *ibid.* (August 1963), pp. 5-46.
- 4 V. I. Lenin, "Conspectus of Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Philosophical Notebooks, Collected Works*, Vol. XXXVIII (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961).