Introduction

I

The writings contained in this volume were produced by Marx during the two years 1843–4, when he was little more than twenty-five years old. Some were published at once: The Jewish Question, for example, and the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction. Others, like the Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State and the famous Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, were published only posthumously, in 1927 and 1932 respectively. When it is remembered that the complete text of The German Ideology was not printed until 1932 and that The Holy Family, first published in 1845, rapidly became a collector’s item, the reader will understand why Marx’s youthful philosophical work was for the most part only discovered comparatively recently.

It is true that Mehring reprinted some of Marx’s early published work in 1902 (in his Aus dem literarischen Nachlass). But the more important writings remained unknown. And in any case by that time the whole first generation of Marxian interpreters and disciples – including Kautsky, Plekhanov, Bernstein and Labriola – had already formed their ideas. So the Marxism of the Second International was constituted in almost total ignorance of the difficult and intricate process through which Marx had passed in the years from 1843 to 1845, as he formulated historical materialism for the first time.

Up to the end of the last century (and even later) little more was known about this process than what Marx had said of it himself, in a few sentences of the 1859 Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Apart from this, the only basic authority to hand was Engels’s Ludwig Feuerbach (1888): a work in which one of the original protagonists of Marxism provided (or seemed to provide) a most authoritative account of all that was essential, all that was really worth knowing, about their relation-
ship to Feuerbach and Hegel and the part these men played in the formation of Marx’s thought.

A whole generation of Marxist theorists knew next to nothing (through no fault of their own) of Marx’s early philosophical writings: it is vital to keep this fact firmly in mind, if one wishes to understand one decisively important circumstance. The first generation of Marxists approached Marx via Capital and his other published writings (mainly economic, historical or political), and were unable to understand fully the philosophical precedents and background underlying them. They could not know the reasons, philosophical as well as practical, which had induced Marx to give up philosophy after his break with Hegel and Feuerbach; induced him to devote himself to the analysis of modern capitalist society, instead of going on to write a philosophical treatise of his own. The few available texts on this theme, like the Theses on Feuerbach, the Preface (already mentioned) to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, and the Preface to the second edition of volume I of Capital, taken on their own were quite inadequate for this purpose.

This fundamental unease is revealed clearly in the Marxist writings of the Second International. Why had Capital been given priority? Why had Marx devoted all his efforts to the analysis of one particular socio-economic formation, without prefacing it by some other work expressing his general philosophical conception, his overall vision of the world?

The urgency and significance of these questions may be better grasped if one reflects upon the cultural and philosophical climate of the time. Kautsky, Plekhanov, Bernstein, Heinrich Cunow and the others had grown up into a world profoundly different from that of Marx. In Germany the star of Hegel and classical German philosophy had long since set. Kautsky and Bernstein were formed in a cultural milieu dominated by Darwinism, and by the Darwinism of Haeckel rather than that of Darwin himself. The influence exerted upon them by Eugen Dühring is, from this point of view, particularly significant. Plekhanov too was at bottom rooted in positivism – think of the place he accords Buckle in his The Monist Conception of History, for example. The cultural mentality common to this whole generation, behind its many differences, reposed upon a definite taste for great cosmic syntheses and world-views; and the key to the latter was always a single unifying principle, one explanation embracing everything from the most elementary biological level right up to the level of human history (‘Monism’, precisely!).

This is (in barest outline) the context which enables one to understand the remarkable importance of the philosophical works of Engels for this generation of Marxists: Anti-Dühring (1878), The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1888). These works appeared in the later years of Marx’s own life, or not long after his death in 1883, and they coincided with the formative period of the generation to which Kautsky and Plekhanov belonged. Furthermore, Engels not only entertained close personal relations with the two latter but shared their interest in the culture of the period, in Darwinism and (above all) the social extrapolations to be made from it, down to the most recent findings of ethnological research.

Thus, while a philosophical background or general conception could be glimpsed only occasionally and with some difficulty in Marx’s prevalently economic works, in Engels it stood squarely in the foreground. Not only that, it was expounded there with such simplicity and clarity that every single disciple of the period praised him for it. The leading intellectual figures were all in the most explicit agreement on this point: they had all been drawn to Marxism principally by the works of Engels. Commenting on his own correspondence with Engels, Kautsky emphasizes the fact in more than one place: ‘Judging by the influence that Anti-Dühring had upon me,’ he wrote, ‘no other book can have contributed so much to the understanding of Marxism.’ Again: ‘Marx’s Capital is the more powerful work, certainly. But it was only through Anti-Dühring that we learnt to understand Capital and read it properly.’

Later, Ryazanov, too, observed how ‘the younger generation which began its activity during the second half of the seventies learned what was scientific socialism, what were its philosophical principles, what was its method’ mainly from the writings of Engels. ‘For the dissemination of Marxism as a special method and a special system’, he continues, ‘no book except Capital itself has done as much as Anti-Dühring. All the young Marxists who entered the public arena in the early eighties – Bernstein, Karl Kautsky, George Plekhanov – were brought up on this book.’

1. See, for example, K. Kautsky, F. Engels: sein Leben, sein Wirken, seine Schriften, Berlin, 1908, p. 27.
Not only the first generation was influenced in this way. The Austro-Marxists who followed also recognized their special debt to Engels, and underlined no less explicitly the significance his work had had for them. Of the two founders of historical materialism, it was Engels who had developed what one might call its 'philosophical-cosmological' aspect, its philosophy of nature; it was he who had successfully extended historical materialism into 'dialectical materialism'. Indeed, he was the first to employ this term. Even such a sophisticated thinker as Max Adler—a Kantian as well as a Marxist—could write in 1920 that Engels's work contained precisely the general philosophical theory whose absence had been so often lamented in Marx himself. Marx had not had the time to provide such a theory, having spent his whole life on the four volumes of Capital. 'The peculiar significance of Engels for the development and formation of Marxism' lay much more, in Adler's view, in the way in which he 'liberated Marx's sociological work from the special economic form in which it had first appeared, and placed it in the larger framework of a general conception of society, enlarging Marxist thought, so to speak, into a world-view by his prodigious development of its method and his effort to relate it to the modern natural sciences.' A little farther on, he concludes: 'Engels became the man who perfected and crowned Marxism,' not only in virtue of his 'systematization' of Marx's development and formation of Marxism' lay much more, in Adler's view, in the way in which he 'liberated Marx's sociological work from the special economic form in which it had first appeared, and placed it in the larger framework of a general conception of society, enlarging Marxist thought, so to speak, into a world-view by his prodigious development of its method and his effort to relate it to the modern natural sciences.' A little farther on, he concludes: 'Engels became the man who perfected and crowned Marxism,' not only in virtue of his 'systematization' of Marx's thought, but also because his 'creative and original development' of that thought has 'given a basis to Marx's analyses'.

Thus, Engels's theoretical works became the principal source for all the more philosophical problems of Marxism during the whole early period corresponding (approximately) to the Second International. They were vital to an era which was in every sense decisive, the era in which Marxism's main corpus of doctrine was first defined and set out. As well as the oft-mentioned merits of simplicity and clarity, they were full of the limitations inevitable in popular and occasional writings. Nevertheless, their influence was immense. The relationship between formal and dialectical logic, between Marxism and the natural sciences, Marx's relationship to Hegel—these were only a few of the many problems posed and supposedly answered with exclusive reference to statements (often quite casual) in the pages of Anti-Dühring and Ludwig Feuerbach.


This was (naturally) particularly true for problems which had become remote from the general philosophical taste and outlook of the period, and so lent themselves easily to passive acceptance and mechanical repetition: the Marx–Hegel relationship, for example, or the problem of dialectic. Plekhanov is typical in this respect. Although one of the few Marxists of the time with some direct knowledge of Hegel's original texts, he never tried in his own writings to go beyond illustrating or commenting on Engels's judgements on this topic. It was a subject, in fact, where Engels's authority seemed even more unchallengeable than usual. Not only had he personally lived through the experience of the Berlin Left (or 'Young') Hegelians, the group Marx originally belonged to, but more recently he had written a review of a book by Starcke on Feuerbach for Neue Zeit, vividly evoking these youthful years and their atmosphere of Sturm und Drang.

However, it was precisely during those years that Engels and Marx had followed quite different intellectual paths. Only the more historical criticism of recent decades has been able to piece together this divergence with any accuracy. Yet it was undoubtedly important. In 1842, when Marx had come under Feuerbach's influence and already assumed a clearly materialist position, Engels published a pamphlet entitled Schelling and Revelation under the pen-name 'Oswald'. The attitude to Hegel expressed in it was that of the young radical Idealists of the Berlin Doktorclub. They held that there was a contradiction in Hegel between his revolutionary principles and his conservative conclusions. Hegel had chosen to come to a personal compromise with the Prussian state, against his own principles. Once liberated from this compromise, the essentially revolutionary principles of his philosophy were destined to dominate the future. Engels also agreed with the other Young Hegelians at this time in seeing Feuerbach exclusively as a continuer of Strauss's work on religion—even to the point of stating that the former's critique of Christianity was 'a necessary complement to Hegel's speculative doctrine of religion', rather than its radical antithesis. Like

5. See particularly G. Plekhanov, Zu Hegel's sechzigstem Todestag in Neue Zeit, X Jahrgang, 1 Band, 1891–2, pp. 198 ff., 236 ff., and 273 ff.
6. Marx–Engels Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), 1, 2. The rediscovery of this and other youthful writings of Engels against Schelling was made by Engels's biographer, Gustav Mayer.
the other members of the Doktorklub (and unlike Marx) he had not yet grasped the connection in Feuerbach’s work between his criticism of religion and materialism. As his most important biographer has observed, in those years ‘Engels greeted Feuerbach’s work with joy, but without suspecting that it called into question Hegel’s world dominion’.8 Even after the appearance of Feuerbach’s Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft (Principles of the Philosophy of the Future) in 1843—as one scholar has pointed out most acutely—except in the case of Marx ‘it was not Feuerbach’s materialism which determined the new outlook of the Young Hegelians’, not his critique of Hegel but his ethics, in other words the most banal part of his work, and the one most laden with Idealist residues.9

The difference between these positions is clear. For Feuerbach ‘the historical necessity and the justification of the new philosophy [i.e. the ‘philosophy of the future’] therefore spring principally from the criticism of Hegel’, not from further development of his ideas, precisely because ‘Hegelian philosophy is the completion of modern philosophy’ and no more than that. ‘Hegel is not the German or Christian Aristotle—he is the German Proclus. The “absolute philosophy” is the resurrection of Alexandrianism.’10 For the Young Hegelians, on the other hand, the future lay in working out the ‘revolutionary’ principles of Hegelianism itself. They are insistent upon the theme of Hegel’s ‘personal compromise’ with the Prussian state. And this is a position decisively rejected by Marx, not only in the closing pages of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in 1844, but even previously in a note to his Doctoral Dissertation of 1841.11

This is not the place to try to consider in depth the complex question of the different ways in which Marx and Engels arrived at theoretical communism. However, the evidence suggests that Engels made his transition to it primarily on the terrain of political economy, rather than by continuing his critique of Hegel and the old speculative tradition. It was Marx who proceeded in this way—that is, by pushing his philosophical critique of Hegelianism to its logical conclusion. This may well be why, when Engels turned again to write about philosophy forty years later, he was, in doing so, partly to reproduce the ill-digested notions of the early years. He returned, for example, to the idea of a contradiction between Hegel’s principles and his actual conclusions, between the ‘revolutionary’ dialectical method and the conservative system. But there is no documentary evidence at all that Marx ever accepted this idea of the radical Idealist left.

During the era of the Second International (and even more so after it), full and total identity between the thought of Marx and Engels became established as an article of faith. Hence, this concept of a contradiction between the method and the system ended by absorbing and obscuring another one, which looked similar but was in fact quite different. This is the idea expressed by Marx in the Postface to the second edition of Capital (1873), where he distinguishes not the revolutionary method from the conservative system, but two different and opposed aspects of the Hegelian dialectic itself—that is, two aspects of the ‘method’. These are the ‘rational kernel’ which must be saved, and the ‘mystical shell’ which should be discarded.

Later, still another factor contributed to the success of Engels’s thesis. In 1842, the youthful ‘Oswald’ pamphlet defending Hegel against Schelling became known to Bielinsky (who warmly approved) through some important passages the Russian critic Botkin had transcribed from it.12 In the same year it was read by Alexander Herzen, then living in Germany, who knew the Left Hegelian milieu well and instantly took over all of ‘Oswald’s’ most significant ideas and made them his own.13 These seemingly quite minor events were destined to have important consequences. Bielinsky and Herzen were among the most representative figures of the Russian ‘democratic revolutionary’ movement. And Plekhanov and many other Russian Marxists were originally schooled in this tradition. When they later went on to embrace Marxism, it was to rediscover in the writings of Engels an interpretation of Hegel very similar to the one they had already learnt from Bielinsky and Herzen. Since Plekhanov alone had any serious knowledge of Hegel during the time of the Second International and was for long acknowledged

11. MEGA, I, 1/1, p. 64.
by all Russian Marxists (including Lenin) as an indisputable
authority on philosophical matters, it is easy to see how his work
helped consolidate this kind of interpretation.

It should not be forgotten either that Russian social-democracy
differed from the German variety in one relevant respect: whereas
the Germans were never too deeply concerned about strictly
philosophical issues, the Russians paid the most serious attention
to them and actually made them the chief criterion, the test-bed,
of Marxist ‘orthodoxy’ (particularly after the turn of the century
and Bernstein’s revisionist attack). First Plekhanov and then
Lenin carried the definition of this ‘general’ philosophical theory
to its logical conclusion. It was henceforth definitively labelled
‘dialectical materialism’, and seen as a necessary preliminary to
the more ‘particular’ theory of historical materialism. Dialectical
materialism in this sense was extracted from Engels’s writings on
the basis of the assumption (now axiomatic) that the two founders
of historical materialism were one person on the plane of thought.

To understand what this came to mean historically, it is salutary
to consult the heading ‘Karl Marx’ in the 1914 Granat encyclo-
pedic dictionary. The item was written by Lenin, and later on
served as a model for Stalin’s celebrated treatise On Dialectical
Materialism and Historical Materialism. Both the paragraph on
Marx’s ‘philosophical materialism’ and that on his conception of
‘dialectic’ consist entirely of quotations from the works of
Engels.

The reader ought not to conclude that any very dramatic
meaning attaches, in itself, to this difference of outlook on some
points between Marx and Engels. It was only natural, and the
absence of such differences would really have been extraordinary.

Given that contradictions are often met with in the work of a
single author, it is hard to see how they could fail to emerge
between two authors who — making every allowance for their
deep friendship and the many ideas they shared — remained two
distinct people leading very different lives on the basis of different
inclinations and intellectual tastes. The fact may seem almost
too obvious to be worth mentioning. Yet the rigid identification
of the two fathers of historical materialism and the rooted
conviction that all of Engels’s philosophical positions reflected
Marx’s thought were to have notable repercussions when, at last,
Marx’s own youthful philosophical work was published.

This happened, as we saw, largely between 1927 and 1932. The
major early works — the Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State
and the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts — were printed
at that time. By then the crystallization of ‘dialectical materialism’
as the official philosophy of the U.S.S.R. and the European


Communist parties was already far advanced and free debate was
encountering increasing difficulties, even at the most theoretical
level. These were to have a definite influence upon the reception
accorded Marx’s early writings over the next forty years.

The immediate reasons for the resistances and perplexities they
aroused in Marxist circles were certainly of a theoretical nature.
It would be needless exaggeration of the case to ascribe the reac-
tion directly to political factors. Nevertheless, the sheer rigidity of
official doctrine, the rigor mortis which already gripped Marxism
under Stalin, contributed in no small way to the cool reception
which the writings met with when they appeared, to the absence of
any debate about them, and to the manner in which they were
immediately classified and pigeon-holed.

They became, almost at once, ‘the early writings’. The descrip-
tion is of course formally unexceptionable: they were composed,
in fact, when Marx was a very young man of twenty-five or six.
Yet this is approximately the age at which David Hume had already
composed his philosophical masterpiece, the Treatise on Human
Nature, and age was never considered a criterion in evaluating
the work of the Scottish philosopher. The adjective ‘early’
served to emphasize their heterogeneity and discontinuity vis-à-vis
the doctrine of the subsequent period.

This should not be taken to mean that the work of the young
Marx poses no problems, or that there are no differences between
it and his mature works. But the point is that the way in which the
writings came to be regarded was really most unfavourable to
them, and especially to the Critique and the Manuscripts. It
meant that it was impossible to perceive the manner in which they
were related (albeit embryonically) to Marx’s later ideas, or how
they might (therefore) throw new light on the work of his maturity.
Instead, they were seen above all as the remains of a line of
thought which had led nowhere, or into a blind alley (the Holzwege
of Marx, as it were). There is no other explanation — to take only
one particularly significant example — of the decision made in
1957 by the East German Institute of Marxism-Leninism (on the
basis of an analogous decision by the Central Committee of the
Soviet Communist Party) to exclude the Economic and Philo-
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sophistical Manuscripts from the edition of the Marx–Engels Werke and publish them in a separate volume.\(^{14}\)

What made the writings appear so ‘out of line’ with Marxism was—quite independently of their own limitations—they profoundly dissimilarity to ‘dialectical materialism’. They said nothing at all about the dialectics of nature; nothing which prepared the way for Engels’s theory of the three basic dialectical laws of the universe (the transformation of quantity into quality and vice-versa, the negation of negation, the coincidence of opposites); nothing which at all resembled the latter’s conception of, for example, the ‘negation of negation’ as ‘an extremely general—and for this reason extremely far-reaching and important—law of development of nature, history and thought; a law which ... holds good in the animal and plant kingdoms, in geology, in mathematics, in history and in philosophy’.\(^ {15}\) Instead, the reader was faced with a trenchant critique of the philosophy of Hegel, in the shape of an analysis infinitely more difficult and complex than Engels’s simple contraposition of ‘method’ against ‘system’. And in addition, he found a discussion of estrangement and alienation, themes absent from the work of Engels, Plekhanov and Lenin alike.

Just how profound was the embarrassment produced among even the most serious Marxist scholars may be seen from the cases of Georg Lukács and Auguste Cornu. In the preface to the 1967 edition of his History and Class-Consciousness, Lukács recalls the ‘stroke of good luck’ which allowed him to read the newly deciphered text of the Manuscripts in 1930, two years before their publication.\(^ {16}\) This reading showed him the basic mistake he had made in his book (which first appeared in 1923). He had confused the concept of alienation in Hegel—where it means simply the objectivity of nature—with the quite different concept in Marx’s work, where it refers not to natural objects as such but to what happens to the products of labour when (as a result of specific social relationships) they become commodities or capital. ‘I can still remember even today the overwhelming effect produced in me by Marx’s statement,’ he writes.\(^ {17}\)

Now it is true that the mistake in question had invalidated some of the assumptions of History and Class-Consciousness. But the problem at the heart of the book remained as valid as before: that is, the problem of the nature of alienation, which (in the author’s own words) had been treated there ‘for the first time since Marx ... as central to the revolutionary critique of capitalism’.\(^ {18}\) And yet Lukács was to pursue the problem no further—the problem which (before and independently of the Manuscripts) he had discovered to be crucial to the understanding of Capital itself. What prevented him was the habit of reasoning within the framework and categories of ‘dialectical materialism’, and the impossibility of reconciling this with his discovery. It is no accident that his use of the Manuscripts in later work was to be so episodic (like the few pages on them in the last part of Der junge Hegel, for instance), or that the themes of alienation and fetishism were to lose importance in his thought.

The result was a return to the state of affairs before History and Class-Consciousness when (again in Lukács’s own words) ‘the Marxists of the time were unwilling to see ... more than historical documents important only for his personal development’ in the youthful works which Mehring had republished.\(^ {19}\) Another ultimate consequence of this unwillingness was that Marx’s early works, virtually abandoned by Marxists, were to become a happy hunting-ground for Existentialist and Catholic thinkers, especially in France after the Second World War.

The other case, less important but equally significant from our point of view, was that of Auguste Cornu. Cornu’s profound knowledge of the Left Hegelian movement made him perfectly conscious of the origins of Engels’s critique of Hegel in the radical-liberal milieu, on the basis of positions wholly distinct from those of historical materialism.\(^ {20}\) Hence he was in the best possible position to understand the true import of Marx’s criticism of Hegel in the Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State, and to see why (Feuerbach’s influence on it notwithstanding) this study was far more than a mere ‘historical document of Marx’s personal development’. Yet his treatment of this major work consists of a few superficial pages, devoted mainly to Feuerbach’s influence upon it. The obstacles of ‘dialectical-materialist’ orthodoxy, combined with a certain difficulty, common among historians, in tackling theoretical questions, simply prevented him seeing anything more.

\(^{15}\) F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, Moscow, 1954, p. 195.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. xxvi.
This situation has changed little in recent years. Among Marxists, interest in the Critique, The Jewish Question, the Manuscripts, etc., has remained the preserve of a few specialist students of the 'prehistory' of Marx's thought. The old theoretical edifice of 'dialectical materialism' has lost much of its ancient solidity, certainly. However, the newer Marxist thought inspired by structuralism has not only inherited its harsh verdict on the early writings, but threatens to extend it to other works of Marx, now judged equally unworthy of the seal of approval bestowed by 'la coupure épistémologique'.

One may say, therefore, that apart from the work of a few Italian Marxist scholars like Galvano della Volpe (still almost unknown outside Italy), Marx's youthful philosophical works have still not received the attention which they deserve.

II

The Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State was most likely composed at Kreuznach between the months of March and August 1843, after Marx had ceased to be editor of the Rheinische Zeitung. This was the date proposed by Riazanov when he prepared the first edition of the Critique in 1927 as part of the Marx-Engels Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe (MEGA for short). Cornu also accepts this date. Other writers like S. Landshut and I. P. Mayer (who published the work in a 1932 anthology of Marx's early writing) have placed it earlier, between April 1841 and April 1842. However, this seems most unlikely for a variety of reasons there is not space to deal with here, and most scholars have agreed with Riazanov's dating.

The manuscript of the Critique (from which the first four pages have been lost) contains a study of much of the third section ('The State') of the third part ('Ethical Life') of Hegel's The Philosophy of Right. The paragraphs analysed are those numbered from 261 to 313 in the Hegel text (pages 161 to 204 of the standard English edition, edited and translated by T. Knox, 1942). The most immediately striking thing about the essay is that the first part of it (from the beginning down to at least the comments on paragraph 274) is much more a criticism of Hegel's dialectical logic than a direct criticism of his ideas on the state.

The logic of Hegel, says Marx, is 'logical mysticism', a mystique of reason. At first glance this might seem like an anticipation of Dilthey's well-known theses of 1905 on Hegel's youthful theology, which depict him as essentially a vitalist and romantic philosopher. But actually the two positions are quite different. Dilthey sees Hegel's mysticism as a mystique of sentiment, so that his stance is radically at odds with the traditional idea of Hegel the pan-logical rationalist. Marx on the other hand perceives the mysticism as one of reason, deriving from Hegel's all-pervading logic – that is, deriving from the fact that for Hegel reason is not human thought but the Totality of things, the Absolute, and possesses (consequently) a dual and indistinct character uniting the worlds of sense and reason.

The principal focus of Marx's criticism, in other words, is Hegel's belief in the identity of being and thought, or of the real and the rational. This identification involves a double inversion or exchange, claims Marx. On the one hand being is reduced to thinking, the finite to the infinite: empirical, real facts are transcended, and it is denied they have genuine reality. The realm of empirical truth is transformed into an internal moment of the Idea. Hence, the particular, finite object is not taken to be what it is, but considered in and as its opposite (the universal, thought): it is taken to be what it is not. This is the first inversion: being is not being but thought. On the other hand reason – which holds its opposite within itself and is a unique totality – becomes an absolute, self-sufficient reality. In order to exist, this reality has to transform itself into real objects, has to (the second inversion) assume particular and corporeal form. Marx accuses Hegel of substantifying abstraction in his 'Idea', and so falling into a new 'realism of universals'.

Hegel inverts the relationship between subject and predicate. The 'universal' or concept, which ought to express the predicate of some real object and so be a category or function of that object, is turned instead into an entity existing in its own right. By contrast, the real subject, the subjectum of the judgement (the empirical, existing world), becomes for him a manifestation or embodiment of the Idea – in other words, a predicate of the

21. A term used by Louis Althusser to denote what he sees as the 'radical break' between Marx's youthful and his more mature writings. The former express a 'Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideology'. The latter construct the 'basic concepts of dialectical and historical materialism' (see Louis Althusser's Reading Capital, London, 1970, pp. 309-10).
predicate, a mere means by which the Idea vests itself with reality. In his notes on Hegel's paragraph 279, Marx says:

Hegel makes the predicates, the objects, autonomous, but he does this by separating them from their real autonomy, viz: their subject. The real subject subsequently appears as a result, whereas the correct approach would be to start with the real subject and then consider its objectification. The mystical substance therefore becomes the real subject, while the actual subject appears as something else, namely as a moment of the mystical substance. Because Hegel starts not with an actual existent (γενέσεως, subject) but with predicates of universal determination, and because a vehicle of these determinations must exist, the mystical Idea becomes that vehicle.23

As Marx's use of a Greek term suggests, this criticism is similar to one aspect of Aristotle's critique of Plato - as, for example, where the former writes that:

a material differs from a subject matter by not being a particular something: in the case of an attribute predicated of a subject matter, for example, of a man, both body and soul, the attribute is 'musical' or 'white'; and the subject matter of the attribute is not called 'music', but musician, and the man is not a 'white', but a white man... Wherever this is the relation between subject and predicate, the final subject is primary being.24

In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts Marx reformulates this criticism and notes that Hegel's philosophy suffers from the double defect of being at one and the same time 'uncritical positivism' and 'equally uncritical idealism'.25 It is uncritical idealism because Hegel denies the empirical, sensible world and acknowledges true reality only in abstraction, in the Idea. And it is uncritical positivism because Hegel cannot help in the end restoring the empirical object-world originally denied - the Idea has no other possible earthly incarnation or meaning. Hence, the argument is not simply that Hegel is too abstract, but also that his philosophy is crammed with crude and unargued empirical elements, surreptitiously inserted. This concrete content is first of all eluded and 'transcended', and then re-introduced in an underhand, concealed fashion without genuine criticism.

What this means may be seen from the whole argument of The Philosophy of Right, and particularly from its treatment of the state. In the latter, Hegel is concerned with a number of highly determinate historical institutions such as hereditary monarchy, bureaucracy, the Chamber of Peers, primogeniture and so on. His task ought to be to explain these institutions - to investigate their causes in history, find out whether they still have any raison d'être and demonstrate in what ways they correspond to real needs of modern life rather than being mere empty survivals from the past. But actually his procedure is very different. He does not show the rationale of these institutions by using historical and scientific concepts, concepts with some bearing on the objects in question; instead, he starts from an Idea which is nothing less than the divine Logos itself, the spirit-god of Christian religion. Since this Idea is the presupposition of everything but cannot presuppose anything outside itself, it follows that the logico-deductive process must be one of creating objects. Hegel has to conjure the finite out of the infinite, in short. But since, as Marx says in his comment on paragraph 269, 'he has failed to construct a bridge leading from the general idea of the organism to the particular idea of the organism of the state or the political constitution' (and in all eternity would never construct such a bridge), all Hegel can really do is smuggle the empirical world in again, in underhand fashion.26

What emerges is no historical or scientific understanding of the institutions of the Prussian state, but an apologia for them. They emanate directly out of the Idea or divine Spirit, they are its worldly development or actuality - being products of Reason in this sense, they can of course hardly help being totally rational in themselves. As Marx states in his résumé of Hegel's argument for monarchy, the result is 'that an empirical person is uncritically enthroned as the real truth of the Idea. For as Hegel's task is not to discover the truth of empirical existence but to discover the empirical existence of the truth, it is very easy to fasten on what lies nearest to hand and prove that it is an actual moment of the Idea.'27 Hegel shows the institutions of the Prussian state to be gesta Dei, God's self-realization in the world. Hereditary monarchy, the state bureaucracy, the lords who sit in the Chamber of Peers by right of primogeniture - they all reappear in his argu-

27. Below, p. 98.
ment not as historical realities of this world but as incarnations of God’s will on earth.

The state is based on God, according to Hegel. It is founded upon religion (which ‘has absolute truth as its content’). However, ‘If religion is in this way the groundwork which includes the ethical realm in general, and the state’s fundamental nature – the divine will – in particular, it is at the same time only a groundwork.’ While religion contains God in the depths of feeling, ‘The state is the divine will, in the sense that it is mind present on earth, unfolding itself to be the actual shape and organization of a world.’

Thus for Marx the conservative and apologetic character of Hegel’s philosophy is not to be explained by factors outside his thought (his personal compromises with authority, etc.) as the Young Hegelians had tried to explain it. It springs from the internal logic of his philosophy. That ‘transfiguration of the existing state of affairs’ which Marx ascribes to Hegel’s dialectic in the Postface to the second edition of Capital is explained by the manner in which Hegel first makes the Idea a substance and then has to show reality as merely its manifestation. The two processes are intimately linked. As the Manuscripts say, the ‘uncritical positivism’ of the consequences is the inevitable counterpart of the ‘uncritical idealism’ found in the premises. In the Critique Marx writes of ‘the inevitable transformation of the empirical into the speculative and of the speculative into the empirical.’ The formulae are almost the same, and all refer one to the basic mystification of the subject–predicate inversion. The Capital passage states that Hegel transforms thought into an ‘independent subject’ labelled ‘the Idea’; after which the real, i.e. the empirical world, which is the true subject, turns into ‘the external phenomenal form of the Idea’, into an attribute or predicate of this entified predicate. In 1843, 1844, and 1873, therefore, Marx’s argument remains substantially the same.

It is necessary, next, to say something about Feuerbach’s influence on the Critique. That he did have some influence on it is undeniable. The phrase Marx employs where he defines Hegel’s philosophy as ‘logical mysticism’ must surely derive from Feuerbach’s analogous description of it in 1839 as ‘a mystique of reason’. The same might be said of Marx’s idea of Hegelian subject–predicate inversion. As well as in Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity, 1841) we find this idea stated explicitly in Feuerbach’s Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie (Provisional Theses for a Reform of Philosophy, 1842). In March 1843 Marx wrote to Ruge telling him he had read this work and agreed with it wholeheartedly, except for the exaggerated importance it accorded problems of natural philosophy at the expense of history and politics. ‘In Hegel,’ wrote Feuerbach, ‘thought is being; thought is the subject, being the predicate,’ while on the contrary ‘the true relationship of thought to being can only be as follows: being is the subject, thought the predicate.’

But in itself such influence does not mean much. Feuerbach is generally a thinker of secondary importance compared to Hegel. Nevertheless in the 1839–43 period he touched a peak of personal achievement (soon followed by decline) which gives him a significant place in the critique and dissolution of Hegelianism in Germany, and so in the formation of Marx’s thought. His influence on the Critique must not be used as an argument for underrating this work. Marxist scholars who have chosen this tactic were in reality trying to avoid the still thornier problem of reconciling Engels’s interpretation of Hegel with Marx’s. We have already noticed how the latter sticks to the subject–predicate inversion thesis in Capital. In the same place, Marx recalls his youthful studies of 1843 and the fact that he ‘criticized the mystificatory side of the Hegelian dialectic nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion.’

The problem of Feuerbach’s influence is more complicated than appears at first sight. Della Volpe, for instance, insists on the fact that Feuerbach’s criticism (unlike Marx’s) was restricted to reproaching Hegel with ‘empty formalism’. Feuerbach was incapable, therefore, of grasping clearly the necessary relationship between the ‘uncritical idealism’ of Hegel’s premises and the ‘uncritical positivism’ of his conclusions. From this point of view, Feuerbach’s limitations are seen as analogous to those of Kant, who reproached Leibnitz with ‘empty abstraction’ in the Critique of Pure Reason.

But in trying so hard to dissociate Marx from Feuerbach,

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29. Below, p. 98.
della Volpe is probably too severe with the latter. Marx's critique of Hegel is certainly far the more perceptive. Nonetheless, Feuerbach too had his moments of insight. In 1841, for example, he saw very well the relationship between idealism and uncritical positivism in Hegel, when he wrote in *Über den Anfang der Philosophie* (On the Beginning of Philosophy): "Philosophy which begins with a thought without reality necessarily ends with a reality without thought," that is, not sifted and critically examined by the mind. It would certainly not be difficult to find equally explicit remarks elsewhere in his writings of the 1842-3 period.

However, the question of Feuerbach's degree of influence on the Critique still remains a fairly marginal one. Writers who have laid too great stress on it have revealed chiefly their own naivety. That the theme of subject-predicate or being-thought inversion is to be found in Feuerbach does not, of course, mean that it was an invention of his, or in any way peculiar to his thought. It is in fact one of the most profound and ancient themes in philosophical history, and recurs constantly in the debate between Idealism and Materialism. Della Volpe, for example, could properly relate Marx's critique of Hegel to Aristotle's critique of Plato and Galileo's attack on the defenders of Aristotelian-scholastic physics. Moreover, at the points in his *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant does most to demolish the older ontology (for example, in the "Note on the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection"), it is also possible to see a critique of 'real universals'. Hence, the only specific contribution which Feuerbach can be held to have made is a reapplication of one aspect of this tradition in the new context, the way in which he brought it to bear on Hegelianism.

I believe the vital element in this vexed question - the edge which cuts the Gordian knot - must be sought elsewhere. The true importance of Marx's early criticism of Hegel lies in the key it provides for understanding Marx's criticism of the method of bourgeois economics (and this is why he could recall and confirm it after he had written *Capital*). In Chapter 2 of *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), 'The Metaphysics of Political Economy', this connection is brought out very well. 'Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production,' says Marx. While Proudhon, on the other hand, 'holding things upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of these principles'. In this manner, he goes on, 'What Hegel has done for religion, law, etc., Monsieur Proudhon seeks to do for political economy.' First of all by dint of abstraction he reduces 'the substance of everything' into mere 'logical categories'; then, having hyposatized these abstractions into substances, it is not too difficult to retrace his steps and present real historical relationships as the objectification, the embodiment, of such categories. Marx concludes:

If we abstract thus from every subject all the alleged accidents, animate or inanimate, men or things, we are right in saying that in the final abstraction, the only substance left is the logical categories. Thus the metaphysicians who, in making these abstractions, think they are making analyses, and who, the more they detach themselves from things, imagine themselves to be getting all the nearer to the point of penetrating to their core - these metaphysicians in turn are right in saying that things here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas. This is what distinguishes the philosopher from the Christian. The Christian, in spite of logic, has only one incarnation of the Logos; the philosopher has never finished with incarnations.

So backward has study of Marx's work remained on questions like this that the connection between his critique of Hegel and his critique of the methods of political economy is usually seen as confined to this one particular case - that is, to the singular coincidence of themes which Proudhon's work provided for him. But in fact, as Maurice Dobb has pointed out in Chapter 5 of his *Political Economy and Capitalism* (1937), its significance is far wider. 'In making abstraction of particular elements in a situation,' he writes, 'there are two roads along which one can proceed.' The first is that which 'builds abstraction on the exclusion of certain features which are present in any actual situation, either because they are the more variable or because they are quantitatively of lesser importance in determining the course of events. To omit them from consideration makes the resulting calculation no more than an imperfect approximation to reality, but nevertheless makes it a very much more reliable guide than if the major factors had been omitted and only the minor influences taken into account.' The second is the road which bases abstraction 'not on any evidence of fact as to what features in a situation are essential

32. Feuerbach, op. cit., p. 208.
and what are inessential, but simply on the formal procedure of combining the properties common to a heterogeneous assortment of situations and building abstraction out of analogy.\(^3\)

What characterizes this second method (with its indeterminate or generic abstractions, as compared to the determinate, specific ones of the first) is, Dobb says, that – 'in all such abstract systems there exists the serious danger of hypostatizing one's concepts', that is of 'regarding the postulated relations as the determining ones in any actual situation' and so running the grave risk of 'introducing, unnoticed, purely imaginary assumptions' and interpolating surreptitiously all the concrete, particular features discarded in the first place. He continues:

All too frequently the propositions which are products of this mode of abstraction have little more than formal meaning . . . But those who use such propositions and build corollaries upon them are seldom mindful of this limitation, and in applying them as 'laws' of the real world invariably extract from them more meaning than their emptiness of real content can possibly hold.

The resemblance to Marx's argument in the *Critique* could hardly be closer. Dobb observes how for some economists abstractions become independent of all reference to realities, and are then hypostatized into 'laws' valid for all situations, however heterogeneous and disparate these may be. Subsequently the same economists, trying to extract substance from their 'laws', are compelled to bring in 'unnoticed', in underhand fashion, whatever particular content their position requires.

Finally, after referring to Marx's early writings, Dobb concludes:

The examples he (Marx) cited were mainly drawn from the concepts of religion and idealist philosophy . . . In the realm of economic thought (where one might at first glance least suspect it) it is not difficult to see a parallel tendency at work. One might think it harmless enough to make abstraction of certain aspects of exchange-relations in order to analyse them in isolation from social relations of production. But what actually occurs is that once this abstraction has been made it is given an independent existence as though it represented the essence of reality, instead of one contingent facet of reality. Concepts become hypostatized; the abstraction acquires a fetishistic character, to use Marx's phrase. Here seems to lie the crucial danger of this method and the secret of the confusions which have enmeshed modern economic thought.\(^3\)^\(^4\)

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35. ibid., pp. 135-6.

But it is not only in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and other early writings that Marx employs the critique so ably reconstructed here by Dobb. It is no less central to Marx's analysis of the method of political economy in his mature works. What economists do, says Marx, is to substitute for the specific institutions and processes of modern economy generic or universal categories supposed to be valid for all times and places; then the former come to be seen as realizations, incarnations of the latter. His reflections on the concept of 'production' in the first paragraph of the 1857 introduction to the *Grundrisse* are interesting in this connection. In any scientific analysis of the capitalist mode of production, Marx states,

the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity – which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature – their essential difference is not forgotten. The whole profundity of those modern economists who demonstrate the eternity and harmoniousness of the existing social relations lies in this forgetting. For example. No production possible without an instrument of production, even if this instrument is only the hand. No production without stored-up, past labour, even if it is only the facility gathered together and concentrated in the hand of the savage by repeated practice. Capital is, among other things, also an instrument of production, also objectified, past labour. Therefore capital is a general, eternal relation of nature; that is, if I leave out just the specific quality which alone makes 'instrument of production' and 'stored-up labour' into capital.

John Stuart Mill, for example (Marx continues) typically presents 'production as distinct from distribution etc., as encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, at which opportunity bourgeois relations are then quietly smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded'. And this is indeed, he concludes, 'the more or less conscious purpose of the whole proceeding'.\(^3\)^\(^6\)

In other words, logical unity takes the place of real difference, the universal replaces the particular, the eternal category is substituted for the historically concrete. After which – as the 'more or less conscious aim' of the operation – the concrete is smuggled in as a consequence and a triumphant embodiment of

the universal. Both Capital and Theories of Surplus Value develop
this criticism at some length. For example, economists identify
wage-labour with labour in general, and so reduce the particular,
specific form of modern productive work to ‘labour’ pure and
simple, as that term is defined in any dictionary. The result is –
given that ‘labour’ in general is, in Marx’s words, ‘the universal
condition for the metabolic interaction (Stoffwechsel) between man
and Nature, the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human
existence’ – that the light of eternity comes to be cast upon the
particular historical figure of the wage-labourer. Or else
economists reduce capital to a mere ‘instrument of production,
amongst others, with the result that (since production is clearly
unthinkable without instruments and tools of labour) production
becomes unthinkable without the presence of capital.

There is no space to pursue this theme further here. Perhaps the
most suggestive applications of this critical method are to be
found in Marx’s Theories of Surplus Value (the section on economic
crises in Part II, and the section on James Mill in Part III). We
must go on to look at the rest of the Critique.

III

After the critique of Hegel’s dialectic, the next great subject
Marx tackles is that of the modern representative state. As we
shall see, his views here are substantially the same as those he
expressed in The Jewish Question and A Contribution to the
Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction, both pub-
lished in the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher of February 1844
and written soon after the Critique.

This part of Marx’s work displays the same sharp difference
from the stance of even the most radical Left Hegelians. True,
Ruge had published a quite outstanding criticism of Hegel’s
political thought under the title ‘The Hegelian philosophy of
Right and the Politics of Our Time’ in the Deutsche Jahrbücher
of August 1842. And in this article he had commented on Hegel’s
‘transfiguration’ of the empirically given institutions of the
Prussian state into moments of the Absolute. However, the main
burden of his argument remained that of Hegel’s personal and
diplomatic ‘compromise’ – which had turned him, against his

own true principles, into the theorist of the Restoration. Marx’s
view is (as noted above) profoundly different.

Marx knew very well, of course, that the state as Hegel depicted
it differed from the classical form of modern representative state
produced by the French Revolution. The Philosophy of Right is
full of feudal reminiscences derived from the condition of Prussia
at that time. For example – as Marx never tires of pointing out –
Hegel tended constantly to confuse modern social classes with the
‘orders’ or ‘Estates’ of feudal society: the former are socio-

economic in nature, while the latter were also political in nature.
In modern society economic inequality accompanies political
and juridical equality, while under feudalism the landlord was also
a political sovereign, and the tiller of the soil was a subject – that is,
inequality reigned in all spheres between the privileged and their

serfs. Hegel also wanted to retain the medieval corporations (or
guilds), recognized primogeniture, and so on.

Nonetheless, in spite of these strikingly pre-bourgeois or anti-
bourgeois features in Hegel’s thought, Marx does not take him to
be the theorist of the post-1815 Restoration. He is seen, rather, as
the theorist of the modern representative state. The Hegelian
philosophy of law and the state does not reflect the historical
backwardness of Germany but – on the contrary – expresses the
ideal aspiration of Germany to escape from that backwardness.
It is here and only here (on the plane of philosophy rather than
that of reality) that Germany manages to be contemporary with
France and England and stay abreast of the ‘advanced world’.

In A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.
Introduction Marx wrote:

We Germans have lived our future history in thought, in philosophy…
German philosophy is the ideal prolongation of German history.
Therefore, when we criticize the œuvres posthumes of our ideal history, i.e.

philosophy, instead of the œuvres incomplètes of our real history, our
criticism stands at the centre of the problems of which the present age
says: That is the question. What for advanced nations is a practical
quarrel with modern political conditions is for Germany, where such
conditions do not yet exist, a critical quarrel with their reflection in
philosophy.

38. In Prussia as in England, ‘primogeniture’ was the law of land inherit-
ance which allowed the settlement of whole estates upon the eldest son, rather
than division among all the children. It was essential to the maintenance of
the landed class’s power.

It follows from this that Marx’s purpose in criticizing Hegel’s philosophy is not to help create in Germany the political conditions already existing in France and England but rather to criticize these conditions themselves, by demolishing the philosophical structure which expresses them. This interpretation of Hegel as the theorist of modern representative institutions is not only important for the light it throws on Marx’s intentions in 1843. It is important primarily as the one point of view which enables us to penetrate to the heart of Hegel’s problematic.

Hegel tends, as has often been pointed out, to contaminate modern institutions with pre-bourgeois social forms and ideas. But this must not be seen as a symptom of his immaturity, or inability to grasp the problems of modern society. On the contrary, what it does display is his very acute perception of just these problems, and of the urgent need to find corrective remedies for them.

In other words, the central theme of The Philosophy of Right is Hegel’s recognition that modern ‘civil society’, dominated as it is by competitive individualism, represents a kind of bellum omnium contra omnes. It is uniquely torn apart and lacerated by the profoundest antagonisms and contradictions. Hegel’s account of it can leave no doubt on this score in the reader’s mind. In modern civil society the power of egoism reigns, alongside ever-increasing interdependence:

Particularity by itself, given free rein in every direction to satisfy its needs, accidental caprices, and subjective desires, destroys itself . . . in this process of gratification. At the same time . . . [it] is in thoroughgoing dependence on caprice and external accident, and is held in check by the power of universality. In these contrasts and their complexity, civil society affords a spectacle of extravagance and want as well as of the physical and ethical degeneration common to them both.

It is precisely because Hegel’s vision of the contradictory and self-destructive character of modern society is so lively that he tried so hard to resuscitate and adapt to modern conditions certain aspects of the ‘organic’ feudal order which still survived in the Prussia of his day. Hegel sees these more organic institutionalities as an elementary way of compensating for the newly unleashed individualism of bourgeois society: they (the guilds, etc.) must be made to hold society together and effect a basic reconciliation of private interests among themselves. In this way they will prepare the way for the profounder unity which the state will realize between the private and public spheres.

The main purpose of Hegel’s work is to explain how, on this basis, the state can overcome the manifold contradictions of ‘civil society’. The task of a modern state, in this sense, must be to restore the ethic and the organic wholeness of the antique polis – where the individual was profoundly ‘integrated’ into the community – and to do this without sacrificing the principle of subjective freedom (a category unknown to the ancient Greeks, brought into the world by the Reformed Christianity of the sixteenth century). Hegel’s ambition is to find a new mode of unity which will recompose the fragments of modern society. Such fragmentation assumes a dual form. On the one hand there is the separation of private interests from each other; on the other, the private interest of each is constantly opposed to the interest of all the others together, in such a way that a general separation between private interests and ‘the public interest’ takes place. These are two faces of the same problem. The internal divisions of the social order emerge finally as a division between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’, or between society and the state.

It may help the reader appreciate this distinction to refer back to John Locke’s Second Treatise of Civil Government (1690). There Locke maintains that the mutual conflicts of private interests make necessary some appeal to an ‘impartial judge’, located in the institution of ‘civil government’ (as distinct from ‘natural society’). But this civil government must also serve to guarantee the ‘property and freedom’ of private individuals, and so to perpetuate the fragmentation of the underlying economic society which Locke called ‘natural society’, and which Hegel and Marx call die bürgerliche Gesellschaft, civil or bourgeois society.

Hegel obviously disagrees with Locke. As Marx says, ‘The deeper truth here is that Hegel experiences the separation of the state [i.e. Locke’s ‘civil government’] from civil society as a contradiction.’ The Philosophy of Right contains a resolute attack on Locke’s type of contractualist and natural-right theory. Hegel reproaches this tradition above all with perceiving the

40. A similar discussion of Hegel, from a different point of view, can be found in Z. A. Pelczynski’s Introduction to Hegel’s Political Writings (1964): Hegel as essentially the protagonist of ‘radical, rational reform from above’. 41. The phrase originates in Hobbes’ Leviathan (1651), Part I, Chapter 4: 42. Knox, pp. 122-3. 43. Below, p. 141.
state as a means to an end, the means of guaranteeing private rights. It was, in his view, unable to grasp the fact that the state (the ‘public interest’, the universal properly so called) was no mere means, but rather the end.

However, Hegel’s solution does not really overcome the separation of ‘civil society’ from ‘political society’ either. His formula for reconciling the two was of course inspired by the general method outlined above. He again turns the universal into a substance, a subject sufficient unto itself, and makes it the demiurge of reality. This implies that for him movement does not proceed from the family and civil society towards the state, but comes from the state towards society – comes from the universal Idea, which Hegel depicts as having three main internal ‘moments’ (the three powers of the state): monarchical power, the power of government and the power of legislation. Thus, all that seems to be a necessary condition of the state (like the family and civil society) is actually an effect or result of its self-development. It follows, as Marx notes at the beginning of the Critique, that while in reality ‘the family and civil society are the preconditions of the state; they are the true agents . . . in speculative philosophy it is the reverse. When the idea is subjectivized the real subjects – civil society, the family, “circumstances, caprice, etc.” – are all transformed into unreal, objective moments of the Idea referring to different things.’ In reality it is the family and civil society which make themselves into the state. Marx continues:

They are the driving force. According to Hegel, however, they are produced by the real Idea; it is not the course of their own life that joins them together to comprise the state, but the life of the Idea which has distinguished them from itself. . . . In other words the political state cannot exist without the natural basis of the family and the artificial basis of civil society. These are its sine qua non; and yet the condition is posited as the conditioned, the determinator as the determined, the producer as the product.44

We return here to Marx’s main methodological critique of Hegel. But what is truly original in the second part of the Critique is that, pursuing his analysis of Hegel farther along these lines, Marx ends by exposing a radically new level of problem altogether. The Hegelian philosophy is upside-down; it inverts reality, making predicates into subjects and real subjects into predicates. Certainly, but, Marx adds, the inversion does not originate in Hegel’s philosophy itself. The mystification does not primarily concern the way in which this philosophy reflects reality, but reality itself.

In other words, what is ‘upside-down’ is not simply Hegel’s image of reality, but the very reality it tries to reflect. ‘This uncritical mysticism is the key both to the riddle of modern constitutions . . . and also to the mystery of the Hegelian philosophy, above all the Philosophy of Right’, states Marx. He stresses, ‘This point of view is certainly abstract, but the abstraction is that of the political state as Hegel has presented it. It is also atomistic, but its atomism is that of society itself. The “point of view” cannot be concrete when its object is “abstract”.’ And so, ‘Hegel should not be blamed for describing the essence of the modern state as it is, but for identifying what is with the essence of the State.’45 In other words, in describing the existing state of affairs, he connives with and repeats its inverted logic, instead of achieving a critical domination of it.

From this insight there follows a radically new analysis. It is no longer accurate to say only that the concept of the state Hegel offers us is a hypostatized abstraction; the point becomes that the modern state, the political state, is itself a hypostatized abstraction. The separation of the state from the body of society, or (as Marx writes) ‘The abstraction of the state as such . . . was not created until modern times. The abstraction of the political state is a modern product.’46

‘Abstraction’ here means above all separation, estrangement. Marx’s thesis is that the political state, the ‘state as such’, is a modern product because the whole phenomenon of the detachment of state from society (of politics from economics, of ‘public’ from ‘private’) is itself modern. In ancient Greece the state and the community were identified within the polis: there was a substantial unity between people and state. The ‘common interest’, ‘public affairs’, etc., coincided with the content of the citizens’ real lives, and the citizens participated directly in the city’s decisions (‘direct democracy’). There was no separation of public from private. Indeed, the individual was so integrated into the community that the concept of ‘freedom’ in the modern sense (the freedom of private individualism) was quite unknown. The individual was ‘free’ only to the extent to which he was a member

45. Below, pp. 127, 145 and 149.
46. Below, p. 90.
of a free community. In medieval times there was if possible even less separation of state from society, of political from economic life. The medieval spirit could be expressed, Marx says, as one where ‘the classes of civil society were identical with the Estates in the political sense, because civil society was political society; because the organic principle of civil society was the principle of the State’.\textsuperscript{47} Politics adhered so closely to the economic structure that socio-economic distinctions (serf and lord) were also political distinctions (subject and sovereign). In the Middle Ages ‘principlality or sovereignty functioned as a particular Estate which enjoyed certain privileges but was equally impeded by the privileges of other Estates’.\textsuperscript{48} It was impossible therefore that there should have been a separate sphere of ‘public’ rights at that time.

The modern situation is utterly different. In modern ‘civil society’ the individual appears as liberated from all social ties. He is integrated neither into a citizen community, as in ancient times, nor into a particular corporate community (for example a trade guild), as in medieval times. In ‘civil society’ – which for Hegel as for Adam Smith and Ricardo was a ‘market society’ of producers – individuals are divided from and independent of each other. Under such conditions, just as each person is independent of all others, so does the real nexus of mutual dependence (the bond of \textit{social unity}) become in turn independent of all individuals. This common interest, or ‘universal’ interest, renders itself independent of all the interested parties and assumes a separate existence; and such social unity established in separation from its members is, precisely, the hyprostated modern state.

The analysis hinges upon the simultaneity of these two fundamental divisions: the estrangement of individuals from each other, or privacy within society, and the more general estrangement of public from private, or of the state from society. The two processes require each other. They are seen in the Critique, then even more clearly in \textit{The Jewish Question}, as having culminated in the French Revolution, the revolution which established juridical and political equality only upon the basis of a new and even deeper real inequality. ‘\textit{The constitution of the political state},’ writes Marx in \textit{The Jewish Question}, ‘and the dissolution of civil society into independent \textit{individuals} – who are related by \textit{law} just as men in the estates and guilds were related by \textit{privilege} – are achieved in \textit{one and the same act}.’\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} Below, p. 137. \textsuperscript{48} Below, p. 138. \textsuperscript{49} Below, p. 233.

\textit{It was a definite advance in history},’ he insists in the \textit{Critique}, ‘when the Estates were transformed into social classes so that, just as the Christians are equal in heaven though unequal on earth, the individual members of the people became \textit{equal} in the heaven of their political world, though unequal in their earthly existence in \textit{society}.’ The transformation was carried through by the French Revolution, through which the ‘\textit{class distinctions} in civil society became merely \textit{social} differences in private life of no significance in political life. This accomplished the separation of political life and civil society.’\textsuperscript{50}

Heaven and earth, the heavenly community and the earthly one: in the first all are equal, in the second unequal – in one all united, in the other all estranged from each other. Thus we find, already formulated in the \textit{Critique}, the celebrated antithesis central to \textit{The Jewish Question}, the contrast between ‘political society’ as a spiritual or heavenly community and ‘civil society’ as society fragmented into private interests competing against each other. The moment of unity or community has to be abstract (the state) because in the real, fragmented society a common or general interest can only arise by dissociation from all the contending private interests. But on the other hand, since the resultant general interest \textit{is} formal in nature and obtained by abstracting from reality, the basis and content of such a ‘political society’ inevitably remains civil society with all its economic divisions. Beneath the abstract society (the state), real estrangement and unsociability persist.

In both the \textit{Critique} and \textit{The Jewish Question} we find this double-edged process analysed in the terms Marx first used to criticize the Hegelian dialectic. And in both analyses we are led to see a process comprising ‘uncritical idealism’ at work alongside ‘equally uncritical positivism’, an ‘abstract spiritualism’ forming the counterpart to a ‘crass materialism’.

The ‘uncritical idealism’ arises from the fact that, in order to attain the universal equality of a ‘common interest’, society is compelled to \textit{abstract} from its real divisions and deny them value and significance. Civil society, claims Marx, can acquire political meaning and efficacy only by an act of ‘thoroughgoing substantiation’, an act by which ‘civil society must completely renounce itself as civil society, as a \textit{private class} and must instead assert the validity of a part of its being which not only has nothing

\textsuperscript{50} Below, p. 146.
in common with, but is directly opposed to, its real civil existence'. The contrary 'crass materialism' arises from the fact that, just because the 'general interest' has been reached by neglecting or transcending genuine interests, the latter are bound to persist as its true content – as the unequal economic reality now sanctioned or legitimized by the state. One obtains man as an equal of other men, man as a member of his species and of the human community, only by ignoring man as he is in really existing society and treating him as the citizen of an ethereal community. One obtains the citizen only by abstracting from the bourgeois. The difference between the two, says Marx in The Jewish Question, is the difference between the tradesman and the citizen, between the day-labourer and the citizen, between the landowner and the citizen, between the living individual and the citizen. On the other hand, once the bourgeois has been negated and made a citizen the process works the other way: that is, it turns out that 'political life declares itself to be a mere means, whose goal is the life of civil society'. Indeed, 'the relationship of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relationship of heaven to earth. The state stands in the same opposition to civil society and overcomes it in the same way as religion overcomes the restrictions of the profane world, i.e. it has to acknowledge it again, re-instate it and allow itself to be dominated by it.' The political idealism of the hypostatized state serves only to secure and fix the crass materialism of civil society.

The Critique goes on to develop this argument that the modern representative state acts as guarantor of private property, with reference to one particular form of property: landed property regulated by the law of primogeniture (which Hegel sees as essential to the state). The Jewish Question, on the other hand, considers the argument in relation to private property in general (both personal and real) and also to the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' and the principal articles of the constitutions produced during the course of the French Revolution. However, both texts arrive at the same conclusion: that the political constitution of modern representative states is in reality the 'constitution of private property'. Marx sees this formula as summing up the whole inverted logic of modern society. It signifies that the universal, the 'general interest' of the community at large, not only does not unite men together effectively but actually sanctifies and legit-
are upside down, but reality itself. In both places Marx does not confine himself to criticism of Hegel's 'logical mysticism' or of the 'Divine Trinity' of political economy (capital, land and labour) but goes on to explain the fetishism of thought with reference to the fetishism or mysticism built into social reality. Capital defines a commodity (which 'appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing') as being in reality 'a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties', and goes on to employ phrases like 'the mystical character of the commodity', or 'the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production'. Marx makes it clear that the 'veil' is not added by bourgeois interpreters of 'the social life-process, i.e. the process of material production', but belongs to this process, which therefore appears to political economy as what it really is.\footnote{54. Capital, Vol. I, pp. 71, 76 and 80 (translation modified).}

Talking of the relationship between civil and political society we saw how society must 'abstract from itself', must set itself apart from its real divisions in order to attain the plane of common interest or equality. To get man as an equal of other men, one has to ignore him as he really exists in society. Expressions like 'society must abstract from itself' may well have seemed metaphors to the reader. But what Marx has in mind is a process of real abstraction, something which actually goes on in reality itself. That is, a process wholly analogous to the one which he describes in Capital as underlying the theory of value — the process by which useful or concrete work is transformed into the abstraction of 'equal or abstract human labour', and 'use value' is transformed into the abstraction of 'exchange value'. This is not a generalizing operation performed by thinkers, but something occurring within the machinery of the social order, in reality. 'Men do not therefore bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values,' he writes there, 'because they see these objects merely as the material integuments of homogeneous human labour. The reverse is true: by equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being aware of it.'\footnote{55. Capital, Vol. I, p. 74 (translation modified).}

Social labour too must exist in its own right, must become 'abstract labour' set over against concrete, individual work. The latter is represented in Marx's economic analysis by 'use value' and the former by the objectified 'value' of commodities.

The process is always the same. Whether the argument deals with fetishism and alienation, or with Hegel's mystifying logic, it hinges upon the hypostatizing, the reifying, of abstractions and the consequent inversion of subject and predicate. A chapter Marx added to the first edition of Capital while it was being printed, 'Die Wertform' — revised and incorporated, in subsequent editions, in Chapter One, as the section on 'The Form of Value' — repeats the argument once more in its analysis of the value relationship of commodities:

Within the value relation and the expression of value contained in it the abstract universal is not a property of the concrete, the sensuous-actual; on the contrary, the sensuous-actual is a mere hypostasis or determinate form of realization of the abstract universal.\footnote{56. K. Marx, 'Die Wertform', in Marx-Engels, Kleine Ökonomische Schriften, Berlin, 1955, p. 271.} Tailors' work, which is to be found for example in the equivalent coat, does not have, within the expression of value of cloth, the universal property of also being human labour. It is the other way round. Its essence is being human labour, and being tailors' work is a hypostasis or determinate form of realization of that essence. This quid pro quo is inevitable, because the labour represented in the product of labour is only value creating in so far as it is undifferentiated human labour; so that the labour objectified in the value of one product is in no way distinguished from the labour objectified in another product.

And Marx concludes:

This inversion, whereby the sensuous-concrete only figures as a hypostasis of the abstract-universal, rather than the abstract-universal as a property of the concrete, characterizes the expression of value. At the same time it is this inversion which makes it difficult to understand the expression of value. If I say: Roman law and German law are both systems of law, then that is obvious. But if I say: Law, this abstraction, is realized in Roman law and in German law, these concrete systems of law, then the relationship is mystical.
at one and the same time, the inversion ascribed to Hegel’s philosophy in the Postface to the 1873 edition of Capital and the inverted real relationship which determines the exchange value of commodities.

At this point, the full importance of the Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State becomes plain. The criticism of Hegel in that work is — as we saw — the key to Marx’s subsequent criticism of the bourgeois economists. It is no less vital to the understanding of his views on the modern representative state. And it is the prelude to all his later studies, up to and including his famous analysis of the fetishism of commodities and capital. The question following on these observations is an obvious one: given that most contemporary Marxism has dismissed the Critique without serious consideration, what can be the level of its comprehension of even the first few pages of Capital? Of, that is, the sections on the ‘relative’ and ‘equivalent’ forms of value (pp. 35–60)?

Unfortunately it is not possible to pursue this argument further here. Before going on to consider the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, however, it is perhaps worth examining one of the captious objections traditionally levelled at the Critique. As well as accusing it of being unduly subject to Feuerbach’s influence, critics have often insisted that in the Critique Marx figures merely as a protagonist of political ‘democracy’. It is quite true that in his remarks on Hegel’s theory of monarchy Marx explicitly uses this concept. He writes:

Hegel proceeds from the state and conceives of man as the subjectified state; democracy proceeds from man and conceives of the state as objectified man. Just as religion does not make man, but rather man makes religion, so the constitution does not make the people, but the people make the constitution... Democracy is the essence of all political constitutions, socialized man as a particular political constitution; it is related to other forms of constitution as a genus to its various species...

The few Marxist scholars who have bothered to study the Critique have interpreted these statements somewhat oddly. Given that the work as a whole contains a pronounced critique of the separation between ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ and states unequivocally the relationship between the representative state and private property, it is scarcely possible to avoid perceiving that Marx goes well beyond the intellectual bounds of liberal constitutionalism. Auguste Cornu, for instance, concedes that ‘through his Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State, which helped him gain a clearer idea of the relationships between the political State and civil society, Marx arrived at a new world-view, one no longer corresponding to the class interests of the bourgeoisie but rather to those of the proletariat’.

Yet even after recognizing facts like this, Cornu and other critics have tended to reverse their final judgement, and to conclude that after all the Marx of the Critique is simply a bourgeois radical. Cornu goes on to say, in fact, ‘This criticism did not take Marx to communism, however, but to a still very indeterminate conception of democracy,’ with the result that ‘the reforms which he favours, like abolition of the monarchy and of representation by estates, or the introduction of universal suffrage, are still not substantially distinct from the reforms sought by bourgeois democracy’. The confusion is obvious. Cornu is repeating the old mistake — a mistake with deep roots in one sort of Marxist tradition — to the effect that ‘democracy’ and bourgeois democracy are the same thing, as if the latter could really be identified with ‘democracy’ tout court. From an apparently opposite ideological point of view, therefore, he reiterates the idea found in every bourgeois intellectual’s head — that ‘democracy’ is parliamentary government, the division of powers, state-guaranteed equality before the law and so on.

Marx does indeed use the term ‘democracy’. But the sense he gives it is almost the contrary of the one Cornu attributes to him. His meaning of the word is rather that found in the Enlightenment tradition — to the effect that ‘democracy’ and bourgeois democracy are the same thing, as if the latter could really be identified with ‘democracy’ tout court. From an apparently opposite ideological point of view, therefore, he reiterates the idea found in every bourgeois intellectual’s head — that ‘democracy’ is parliamentary government, the division of powers, state-guaranteed equality before the law and so on.


introduction in a true democracy.' In other words, what is really understood by democracy here is the same as, many years later, Marx was to rediscover in the actions of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Hence where Cornu imagines that Marx is demanding bourgeois reforms like universal suffrage, he is in fact formulating a critical analysis of parliamentarism and of the modern representative principle itself. He comments on Hegel's paragraph 309:

The deputies of civil society are constituted into an assembly and only in this assembly does the political existence and will of civil society become real. The separation of the political state from civil society takes the form of a separation of the deputies from their electors. Society simply deputes elements of itself to become its political existence.

Then he continues:

There is a twofold contradiction: (1) A formal contradiction. The deputies of civil society are a society which is not connected to its electors by any 'instruction' or commission. They have a formal authorization but as soon as this becomes real they cease to be authorized. They should be deputies but they are not. (2) A material contradiction. In respect to actual interests... Here we find the converse. They have authority as the representatives of public affairs, whereas in reality they represent particular interests.

At this point one sees how Marx's critique of the separation between state and civil society is carried to its logical (and extreme) conclusion. Even from a formal point of view, the representative principle of the modern state is shown to be a fundamental contradiction in terms. In so far as parliamentary deputies are elected by the people, it is thereby recognized that the source of sovereignty or power belongs in the popular mass itself. It is admitted that delegates 'draw their authority' from the latter — and so can be no more than people's representatives, bound by instructions or by the 'mandate' of their electors. Yet no sooner has the election taken place and the deputies been 'sworn in' than this principle is up-ended: they are no longer 'mere delegates', mere servants, but independent of their electors. Their assembly, parliament, no longer appears as an emanation of society but as society itself — as the real society outside which there remains nothing but a formless aggregate, an inchoate mass of private wishes.

It is hard to avoid looking forward at this point to Marx's later essay The Civil War in France (1871). The 'commissioning' of which Marx speaks in the Critique, contrasting it to the principle of parliamentary representation, is the procedure which was to be observed by the Commune of Paris during its two months of power. There, Marx says in The Civil War, 'each delegate was at any time revocable and bound by the mandat impératif (formal instructions) of his constituents'. In a passage which reads like an extended comment upon point 2 cited above, Marx continues: 'Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business.'

Almost thirty years later, the argument of 1871 clearly recalls that of 1843. What Marx says in The Civil War about the way in which the Commune used universal suffrage to choose delegates should be compared to its almost perfect pendant in the Critique. Discussing paragraph 308 of the Philosophy of Right, where Hegel had posed the alternative that either representation has to employ 'deputies' or else 'all as individuals' would have to participate in the decision of all public affairs, Marx objects that the choice is a false one. In fact:

Either the political state is separated from civil society; in that event it is not possible for all as individuals to take part in the legislature. The political state leads an existence divorced from civil society... the fact that civil society takes part in the political state through its deputies is the expression of the separation and of the merely dualistic unity... Alternatively, civil society is the real political society. If so, it is senseless to insist on a requirement which stems from the conception of the political state as something existing apart from civil society... [for here] the legislature entirely ceases to be important as a representative body. The legislature is representative only in the sense that every function is representative. For example, a cobbler is my representative in so far as he satisfies a social need... In this sense he is a representative not by virtue of another thing which he represents but by virtue of what he is and does.

What Marx suggests is that either there is a separation of state from civil society, and so a division between governors and
governed (deputies and electors, parliament and the body of society) which represents the culmination of the class division within civil society; or else the separation does not exist because society is an organism of solidary and homogeneous interests, and the distinct ‘political’ sphere of the ‘general interest’ vanishes along with the division between governors and governed. This means that politics becomes the administration of things, or simply another branch of social production. And it would no longer be true that ‘all individuals as single individuals’ would have to participate in all of this activity; rather, some individuals would, as expressions of and on behalf of the social totality, just as happens with other productive activities (for example, the cobbler) necessary to society.

It is wholly appropriate that this should be the conclusion of Marx’s argument in the Critique: the suppression of politics and the extinction of the state. In the context of the separation between state and society, the progressive tendency of society—the ‘efforts of civil society to transform itself’—becomes necessarily a wish to ‘force its way into the legislature en masse, or even in toto’. Marx goes on to state:

It is therefore self-evident that the vote must constitute the chief political interest of real civil society. Only when civil society has achieved unrestricted active and passive suffrage has it really raised itself to the point of abstraction from itself, to the political existence which constitutes its true, universal, essential existence. But the perfection of this abstraction is also its transcendence[Aufhebung]. By really establishing its political existence as its authentic existence, civil society ensures that its civil existence is inessential in so far as it is distinct from its political existence. And with the demise of the one, the other, its opposite, collapses also. Therefore, electoral reform in the abstract political state is the equivalent to a demand for its dissolution[Auflösung] and this in turn implies the dissolution of civil society.63

Here is a clearly formulated vision of the disappearance of both ‘state’ and ‘civil society’. But not in the sense of Cornu’s interpretation, which amounts to saying that all this follows from universal suffrage alone. Marx’s conception is rather that the drive of modern society towards full suffrage and electoral reform is one expression of the tendency towards overcoming the separation between state and society (though an indirect one, since it occurs in terms offered by the separation itself) and so towards the dissolution of the state.

It is a fact that (as critics have held) when Marx wrote the Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State he had not yet arrived at theoretical communism. He arrived at this goal in the course of writing it. The text which followed the Critique almost immediately (written at most a few weeks later) was Marx’s Introduction to it, soon published separately. And it invokes the proletariat as both subject and protagonist of imminent revolution.

At this point in his evolution, what strikes us most forcibly is that while Marx has not yet outlined his later materialist conception of history he already possesses a very mature theory of politics and the state. The Critique, after all, contains a clear statement of the dependence of the state upon society, a critical analysis of parliamentarism accompanied by a counter-theory of popular delegation, and a perspective showing the need for ultimate suppression of the state itself. Politically speaking, mature Marxism would have relatively little to add to this.

How true this is may be seen by a comparison with, for example, Lenin’s State and Revolution (1917). As regards the general principles of its strictly political arguments (criticism of parliamentary representation, theory of mandation, delegates subject to recall at all times, disappearance of the state, etc.) it advances little beyond the ideas set out in the Critique. Indeed, something of the latter’s profundity is lost in it. Like Engels, Lenin tends to gloss over one vital part of the theory of the state developed in the Critique (and also in its marvellous continuation, The Jewish Question). Marx’s conception was that the state ‘as such’ is properly speaking only the modern state, since it is only under modern conditions that the detachment of state from society occurs: only then does the state come to exist over and above society, as a kind of external body dominating it. Engels and Lenin, however, tend noticeably to attribute such characteristics to the state in general. They fail to grasp fully the complex mechanism whereby the state is really abstracted from society—and hence the whole organic, objective process which produces their separation from one another. Because of this they do not perceive the intimate connection between such separation and the particular structures of modern society. The most obvious consequence of the confusion is their marked subjectivism and voluntarism, based on their conception of the state as a ‘machine’ knowingly,
consciously formed by the ruling class in deliberate pursuit of its own interest.

The paradoxical fact that Marx's political theory pre-dated (at least in general outline) the development of Marxism proper shows plainly how much he owed to older traditions of revolutionary and democratic thought. He owed much, in particular, to Rousseau (to what extent he was conscious of the debt is another question). It is Rousseau to whom the critique of parliamentarism, the theory of popular delegacy and even the idea of the state's disappearance can all be traced back. This implies in turn that the true originality of Marxism must be sought rather in the field of social and economic analysis than in political theory. Even in the theory of the state, for example, the really new and decisive contribution of Marxism was to be its account of the economic basis for the rise of the state and (consequently) of the economic conditions needed for its liquidation. And this of course proceeds beyond the limits of strictly political theory.

This interpretation may well give rise to some perplexity. However, it does not seem to me too far removed in spirit from the argument put forward by Marx himself in August 1841 in his short essay Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform'. Here he stated for the first time the necessity for a socialist revolution, even though essentially social in content, to have a political form: 'All revolution ... is a political act,' and since 'without revolution socialism cannot be realized' it therefore 'requires this political act'. And it is in this writing - where Marx took the first steps towards a theory of the revolutionary political party - that he also characterizes political intelligence as the most essential requisite, the specific expression of bourgeois mentality: 'Political understanding is just political understanding because its thought does not transcend the limits of politics. The sharper and livelier it is ... the more completely it puts its faith in the omnipotence of the will; the blinder it is towards the natural and spiritual limitations of the will, the more incapable it becomes of discovering the real source of the evils of society.'64

The classical period of political understanding', in this sense, was the French Revolution. Hence politics is the mode of apprehension of social problems most native to the bourgeois-spiritualistic mind. It is no surprise, this being so, that political theory 'as such' should have been perfected by a thinker like Rousseau.

64. Below, pp. 413 and 420.

IV

The prominence accorded the Critique so far should not be allowed to lead to the conclusion that it occupies a pre-eminent or specially privileged place in Marx's work as a whole (or even among his early writings). On the contrary, the conclusion reached in the previous section should serve to indicate that Marx's most original work began to emerge only with the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

Yet it was necessary and desirable to emphasize the Critique's importance. Of all Marx's texts dealing with politics, law and the state it is easily the most complex and - more to the point - the least read and the most misunderstood. It is also one of the most difficult of Marx's writings. However, clarification of its intention and mode of argument leads to much better understanding of both The Jewish Question and the Introduction - texts more widely read and acknowledged as important, and somewhat more accessible in style. More significant still, it is the Critique which connects Marx's view of the Hegelian dialectic to his later analyses of the modern state and its basis in private property. It demonstrates perhaps more clearly than anything else how his critical thought moved along a single line of development stretching from reflection on philosophical logic to a dissection of the form and content of bourgeois society. His discussion of subject-predicate inversion in Hegel's logic, his analysis of estrangement and alienation, and (finally) his critique of the fetishism of commodities and capital can all be seen as the progressive unfolding, as the ever-deepening grasp of a single problematic.

There is an obvious risk of over-emphasizing the factors of continuity in Marx's work inherent in this approach - that is, of neglecting the elements of novelty or discontinuity present in each single stage of its development. This could lead to failure to understand the very process by which Marx, slowly and laboriously, worked his way through towards his final understanding of modern society. It is perhaps also necessary, therefore, to forestall any such temptation by underlining again that Marxism's most specific terrain of development was the socio-economic one. The limitations of the early texts are constituted by this fact - in other words, by the decisive importance of Marx's own later advances in his mature economic writings, his ever more rigorous accounts of the theory of value and surplus value, of the rate of profit and so on.
Looked at in this light, the *Critique* and the other shorter writings associated with it constitute a final, near-definitive step in the general theory of law and the state, while the *Manuscripts* represent by contrast the first step forward in what was to be a long (and ultimately more important) intellectual voyage rich in discoveries. The very grandeur of the latter, *Capital* and the *Theories of Surplus Value*, was bound in the long run to make the first step appear somewhat irrelevant. But (however understandable) this judgement too is mistaken. The later work should not be allowed to obscure the real importance of the 1844 *Manuscripts*, and especially of their vital central portion – the chapter on 'Estranged Labour'.

In a fashion analogous to many discussions of the *Critique*, Marxist critics have often objected that the conception of alienation or estrangement in the *Manuscripts* is too directly modelled on Feuerbach's theory of religious alienation. The latter maintains that man objectifies his own 'essence' and separates it from himself, making it into a self-sufficient subject called 'God'; after which the product dominates the producer, the creature becomes the Creator and so on. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (it is claimed) Marx remains a prisoner of this schema, and gives us only an anthropological theory, a theory dealing with 'Man' in the abstract, man outside of and independent of his real socio-historical relationships. But the series of texts presented in this volume is itself sufficient to provide an initial reply to these objections. The references to the working class in the very first of Marx's articles in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*; the historical and political themes tackled so boldly in *The Jewish Question*; above all, the *Critique's* brilliant analysis of the differences between ancient, medieval and modern society – how can it be imagined that anybody so engrossed in this type of socio-historical analysis in 1843 could, only one year later, have relapsed into a merely 'anthropological' position?

As far as the Feuerbachian analysis of religious alienation is concerned, incidentally, it should be noted that Marx continued to make some use of the model it provides in his later work (without noticeably regressing into anthropology). He does so, for instance, in the chapter on 'The Fetishism of Commodities' in *Capital*. After pointing out how a 'definite social relation between men... assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things', he goes on to say: 'To find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion,' since it is in these regions, precisely, that 'the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own. ... So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands'.

The charges brought against the *Manuscripts* by the upholders of 'dialectical materialism' (quite understandably vexed by a text treating problems about which 'dialectical materialism' has nothing to say) may be summed up in one hoary legend. According to it, Marx never employed the concept of alienation (Entäußerung) or estrangement (Entfremdung) again after the battle against the Left Hegelians was over: the idea simply vanishes from his mature work. E. Bottigelli, for example, recently gave a fresh lease of life to this view in his introduction to a French edition of the *Manuscripts*, and he is certainly not alone in his conviction. Not merely is criticism of this order incapable of grasping that for Marx the phenomenon of alienation or estrangement and that of fetishism are one and the same thing – and the analysis of fetishism or reification (Versachlichung, Verdinglichung) is, of course, dealt with at length in the three volumes of *Capital*. But even if one restricts oneself to the use of the actual terms 'alienation' and 'estrangement', the reader will find his only serious problem is to know which to choose among the hundreds of passages in the *Grundrisse* and the *Theories of Surplus Value* where they appear in key positions.

In the *Grundrisse* for example, discussing the sale and purchase of labour power, Marx points out how this exchange which seems at first glance to be one of equivalents is in reality a dialectical separation of labour from property. It amounts to 'appropriation of alien labour without exchange, without equivalent'. He goes on:

> Production based on exchange value, on whose surface this free and equal exchange of equivalents proceeds ... is at its base the exchange of objectified labour as exchange value for living labour as use value, or, to express this in another way, the relating of labour to its objective conditions – and hence to the objectivity created by itself – as alien property: alienation [Entäußerung] of labour.\(^65\)

In the closing pages of the First Part of *Theories of Surplus Value* we find the following similar argument:

Since living labour - through the exchange between capital and labourer - is incorporated in capital, and appears as an activity belonging to capital from the moment that the labour-process begins, all the productive powers of social labour appear as the productive powers of capital, just as the general social form of labour appears in money as the property of a thing. Thus the productive power of social labour and its special forms now appear as productive powers and forms of capital, of materialized [vergegenständlicht] labour, of the material conditions of labour - which, having assumed this independent form, are personified by the capitalist in relation to living labour. Here we have once more the perversion of the relationship, which we have already, in dealing with money, called fetishism.

A little farther on Marx adds:

Already in its simple form this relation is an inversion - personification of the thing and materialization [Versachlichung] of the person; for what distinguishes this form from all previous forms is that the capitalist does not rule over the labourer through any personal qualities he may have, but only in so far as he is 'capital'; his domination is only that of materialized [vergegenständlicht] labour over living labour, of the labourer's product over the labourer himself . . .

Then he concludes:

Capitalist production first develops on a large scale - tearing them away from the individual independent labourer - both the objective and subjective conditions of the labour-process, but it develops them as powers dominating the individual labourer and extraneous [fremd] to him.67

Statements like these demonstrate clearly the persistence of certain key terms and concepts formulated in the early writings: the 'inversion' or 'reversal' which turns the world upside down to give 'the personification of the thing and the materialization [Versachlichung] of persons'; the 'domination . . . of the labourer's product over the labourer himself' and the dominion of 'materialized [vergegenständlicht] labour over living labour'; and lastly, the dominion over men of all the forces and powers they themselves have created, which tower above them as entities alienated or estranged from them.

The same themes are at the heart of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. In estranged labour - which Marx already understands as wage-labour, the work which yields commodities and capital - the labourer objectifies and alienates his own 'essence'. 'The object that labour produces, its product, confronts it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer,' because the product of estranged or wage-labour is not a mere natural object modified and adapted to his own needs by man (a 'use-value'). It is rather the objectification of human subjectivity itself, of the worker's subjectivity which in labour separates itself from the worker and is incorporated in the material object or use-value (the 'body' or material 'envelope' of the commodity). In this form it then confronts the worker as objectified labour, the 'spectral objectivity' which Marx refers to in Capital. As he writes in the Grundrisse, '. . . objectified labour is, in this process, at the same time posited as the worker's non-objectivity, as the objectivity of a subjectivity antithetical to the worker, as property of a will alien to him . . .'68

In the opening pages of the Manuscripts we find Marx well on the way to understanding something which his critics and interpreters would still be struggling with a century later. That is, that the object produced by estranged wage-labour is not simply a material thing but the objectification of the worker's subjectivity, of his labour-power. This means, as Marx explains in Theories of Surplus Value, that 'When we speak of the commodity as a materialization of labour - in the sense of its exchange-value - this itself is only an imaginary, that is to say, a purely social mode of existence of the commodity which has nothing to do with its corporeal reality . . .'69 He reiterates the point in Capital:

The objectivity of commodities as values differs from Dame Quickly in the sense that 'a man knows not where to have it'. Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value. However, let us remember that commodities only possess an objective character as values in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour.70

But the Manuscripts also go well beyond this recognition that in estranged labour men alienate their own 'essence' or 'nature'. They have left behind in substance, if not yet in form, the characteristic Feuerbachian position referred to in the sixth of Marx's
Theses on Feuerbach: ‘The human essence ... can be comprehended only as “genus”, as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.’ Possibly the most original single aspect of the Manuscripts is Marx’s attempt to define what this human ‘essence’ or ‘human nature’ actually consists of, and to show that it has nothing in common with the essence of previous metaphysical philosophies.

In his *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (1969) Jean Hyppolite claims to detect the survival of ‘natural law’ among the distinctive themes of the Manuscripts – the persisting echo, as it were, of a position tied to theories of the Natural Rights of man. But this simply reveals his own incomplete understanding of Marx’s evolution. To avoid such an error, for instance, it should have been enough to read through *The Jewish Question*. In reality the Manuscripts define ‘human nature’ in a radically different fashion: not as a ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ of the sort found in natural-right philosophy but as a *series of relationships*.

If the worker alienates or separates his subjectivity from himself in the course of work, this happens because he is simultaneously separated and divided both from the objective world of nature (his means of production and subsistence) and from the other men to whom his work-activity belongs. This means that Marx does *not* conceive of his subjectivity as a fixed essence or an ‘internal, dumb generality’, but as a function of his relationship with nature and with other men – a function of inter-human or social relationships. This is the key to the most fascinating aspect of the Manuscripts, and (more especially) of the chapter on ‘Estranged Labour’. Their secret is that Marx envisages the process of estrangement as occurring in three directions or dimensions at the same time: (1) as the estrangement of the worker from the material, objective product of his work; (2) as the estrangement of his work-activity itself (he does not belong to himself at work, but to whoever has sold his day’s work-activity); (3) lastly, as estrangement from other men, that is from the owner of the means of production and of the use to which his labour-power is put. Marx writes in the Manuscripts:

> We have considered the act of estrangement of practical human activity, of labour, from two aspects: (1) the relationship of the worker to the *product of labour* as an alien object that has power over him.

This relationship is at the same time the relationship to the sensuous external world, to natural objects, as an alien world confronting him in hostile opposition. (2) The relationship of labour to the *act of production* within labour. This relationship is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something which is alien and does not belong to him, activity as passivity [*Leiden*], power as impotence, procreation as emasculation, the worker’s own physical and mental energy, his personal life – for what is life but activity? – as an activity directed against himself, which is independent of him and does not belong to him.

The third aspect of estrangement, Marx adds a little farther on, is that ‘an immediate consequence of man’s estrangement from the product of his labour, his life activity, his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man. When man confronts himself he also confronts *other* men. What is true of man’s relationship to his labour, to the product of his labour and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, and to the labour and the object of the labour of other men.’

At first glance such formulations might appear a mere puzzle, a sophisticated word-game. In fact, they record one of the most important insights later to be amplified in *Capital*: that is, that wage-labour does not produce only commodities, but also produces and reproduces itself as a commodity. It produces and reproduces not only objects but also the *social relationships* of capitalism itself. This is hinted at in the Manuscripts at the beginning of the chapter on ‘Estranged Labour’, and we find it again much developed and enriched in Chapter 23 of the first volume of *Capital*, ‘Simple Reproduction’. Here Marx comes to the conclusion that ‘The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.’

The human subjectivity or ‘essence’ estranged by wage-labour, then, is no longer that of traditional metaphysics (Kant’s ‘transcendental ego’, Hegel’s *Logos*) but a function which mediates man’s relationship both to nature and to his own kind. It is the ‘mediating activity, the human, social act’ of which Marx speaks in his notes on James Mill in 1844–5. It is the function which, after abstracting or separating itself from this simultaneous

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duality of relationships (man/nature, man/man), becomes transformed from a mere function into a self-sufficient subject, and assumes the character of an independent entity. It is transformed into God, or into money.

In 'value' or money the human essence is certainly estranged from man: man's subjectivity, his physical and intellectual energies, his work-capacity, are removed from him. But – this is the decisive insight of the Manuscripts – the ‘essence’ in question is clearly recognized to be no more than the functional relationships mediating man's working rapport with nature and with himself. His estrangement, consequently, is the estrangement or separation of social relationships from himself.

This argument again reproduces the general form we noted above, considering Marx's analysis of the modern representative state. The latter creates a separation between 'civil society' and the heavenly or abstract society of political equality. When real individuals are fragmented from one another and become estranged then their mediating function must in turn become independent of them: that is, their social relationships, the nexus of reciprocity which binds them together. Thus, there is an evident parallelism between the hypostasis of the state, of God, and of money.

'In this society of free competition,' writes Marx in the 1857 Introduction, 'the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate ... Only in the eighteenth century, in “civil society”, do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity."

This is one of the high points of Marxist theory. The specific trait, the essential characteristic of modern bourgeois social relations, is that in them the social link presents itself to us as something external, that is as something separated (estranged) from the very individuals whose relationship it is. We live in society, within the web of social relationships; yet it is perfectly possible for social relationships to have no meaning at all for us (think of the question of unemployment, for example). The social relationship in general has become something independent of individuals, who in order to partake of that relationship have to carry out certain actions: selling their labour-power, finding someone willing to employ them, and so on. This social relationship which has rendered itself independent of the members of society, and now counterposes itself to them as 'society', as something outside and above them, is distinguished and described for the first time in the Manuscripts as money. Money is the social bond transformed into ownership of things, the force of society petrified into an object.

This is the perspective in which the great analysis of money in the Grundrisse must be placed: an analysis condensed by Marx, at various points, in the following pregnant phrases: ‘The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket.’ ‘Money is therefore the God among commodities. Since it is an individuated, tangible object, money may be randomly searched for, found, stolen, discovered; and thus general wealth may be tangibly brought into the possession of a particular individual.’ ‘Money thereby directly and simultaneously becomes the real community [Gemeinwesen], since it is the general substance of survival for all, and at the same time the social product of all. But as we have seen, in money the community [Gemeinwesen] is at the same time a mere abstraction, a mere external, accidental thing for the individual, and at the same time merely a means for his satisfaction as an isolated individual.’ ‘The special difficulty in grasping money in its fully developed character as money – a difficulty which political economy attempts to evade by forgetting now one, now another aspect, and by appealing to one aspect when confronted with another – is that a social relation, a definite relation between individuals, here appears as a metal, a stone, as a purely physical, external thing.’

This analysis leads to a definition of capital as an estranged social relationship: estrangement means that it is incorporated in a stock of objects (raw materials, the means of production, etc.). It leads also to an understanding of commodities, and the sense in which the objectivity of their value is 'imaginary, that is to say purely social, having nothing at all to do with their corporeal reality' as use-values. In Capital, as we noticed, Marx insists that commodities acquire such reality only because they are 'expressions of one identical social substance, viz., human labour'.

What is implicit in these arguments of the Manuscripts is in fact the first premise of genuine 'historical materialism': that is, the discovery of the concept of the social relations of production. These
relations are constantly changing, because while producing objects men produce their own mutual relationships at the same time: while transforming nature, they also transform themselves. Hence Marx can affirm in the last of the Manuscripts that man's 'act of birth' is history, because man's 'being' is how he makes himself, how he 'becomes' historically. This statement alone, incidentally, indicates Marx's distance from Feuerbachian anthropology.

A pedantic Marxist critic might object to this that the words 'social relations of production' are not actually employed in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. But if the words are not there, the concept is, though admittedly in a still tentative and half-obscured form. In the section entitled 'Private Property and Communism' Marx describes how 'man's relation to nature is directly his relation to man, and his relation to man is directly his relation to nature', and this should be placed alongside his subsequent remarks on industry: 'Industry is the actual historical relationship of nature, and thus of natural science, to man... the history of industry and industry as it objectively exists is an open book of the human faculties and human psychology which can be sensuously apprehended.' That is, just as inter-human or social relationships are inconceivable apart from man's relationship to nature, so his relationship to nature (and hence industrial production) is inconceivable apart from men's social relationships among themselves.

The formulations of the Manuscripts are in this respect still involved and abstract. But they point forward clearly to the admirable definition of the social relations of production given, only a few years later, in Wage-Labour and Capital (1847–9):

In production, men not only act on nature, but also on one another. They produce only by cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production, take place.77

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77. Marx–Engels, Selected Works in one volume, p. 80.