CRITIQUE OF HEGEL’S ‘PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT’
Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics

EDITORS

MAURICE COWLING
G. R. ELTON
E. KEDOURIE
J. G. A. POCCOCK
J. R. POLE
WALTER ULLMAN
CRITIQUE OF HEGEL’S ‘PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT’

BY

KARL MARX

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
ANNETTE JOLIN AND
JOSEPH O’MALLEY

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Marquette University

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE
LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE
MELBOURNE SYDNEY
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521292115

© Cambridge University Press 1970

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1970
Reprinted with corrections 1972
First paperback edition 1977
Reprinted 1978, 1982
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 74-112471

ISBN 978-0-521-07836-8 hardback

Contents

Editor’s Preface page vii

Editor’s Introduction ix

Appendix to Introduction lxiii

CRITIQUE OF HEGEL’S ‘PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT’ (§§261–313) 1

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ‘CRITIQUE’…INTRODUCTION 129

Index 143
Editor’s Preface

The translation of Marx’s *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts* (§§ 261–313) is based on the German edition in Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels/Werke (Institut für Marxismus–Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialisti- schen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Band I, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1964), pp. 203–333; and photocopies of the original manuscript (No. A4, Marx–Engels Archives, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam). The editions of Rjazanov (Frankfurt a/M and Berlin, 1927), Landshut (Stuttgart, 1953), and Lieber and Furth (Stuttgart, 1962) were also consulted. In the translation, all departures from the text of the *Werke* edition follow the reading of Lieber and Furth on the basis of an examination of the manuscript photocopies, and all such departures are noted. The passages from Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie* are in the English version of T. M. Knox (Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1962) by permission of The Clarendon Press, Oxford. This is the standard English version of Hegel’s work, hence the decision to allow Knox’s rendition of Hegel to govern the present translation of Marx. The translation of Marx’s ‘Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung’ is based on the German edition in Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels/ Werke, Band I, pp. 378–91. The English translations of Bottomore (New York, 1964) and Easton and Guddat (Garden City, 1967) were consulted. This ‘Introduction’ by Marx is included in the present volume because of its special relationship to the earlier, and lengthier *Critique*.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of the following persons in the preparation of the translations, Introduction and notes: Drs Gerhard König and Manfred Klic of Dietz Verlag, Berlin; Mesrs H. P. Harstick and Götz Langkau of the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam; Dr Maximilien Rubel of the Centre d’Etudes Sociologiques, Paris; Dr Georg Eckert of the Friedrich–Ebert–Stiftung, Bonn; Mr C. Pels of Velsen, Holland; Dr Loyd Easton, Ohio Wesleyan University; Dr James Collins, St Louis University; and Drs Denis and Rosa Savage, Marquette University and Cardinal Stritch College respectively. I am especially indebted to Dr Shlomo Avineri of The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, for acquainting me with the importance of Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie* and the need for its translation, and for his continuing counsel; and to Annette Jolin, the co-translator of this text.
EDITOR'S PREFACE

My debt to other scholars in the field is evidenced in the footnotes to the Introduction and the texts and in the Bibliographical Note at the end of the Introduction. The typescript of the translations, Introduction and notes was prepared by Mrs Kay Camele and Mrs Barbara Neal. The work of translating Marx's *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* was supported through a research grant and a summer Faculty Fellowship granted by the Marquette University Committee on Research.

*Milwaukee*
*September 1969*

J. O.
Editor’s Introduction

The work translated here is Karl Marx’s critical commentary on Paragraphs 261–313 of Hegel’s major work in political theory, the Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse.1 The manuscript of Marx’s work, which he left unpublished during his lifetime, now resides in the International Institute of Social History, in Amsterdam; it carries neither title nor date. It is usually referred to as the Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts; in English, the Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ or, more conveniently, the Critique. The manuscript is in the form of a notebook (19 × 32 cm.) whose front cover and first four pages are lost. The missing pages probably contained Marx’s commentary on Paragraphs 257–60 of Hegel’s work. The loss of the cover, on which Marx probably recorded the date of composition, has given rise to differences on this matter among the commentators. Two early editors, Landshut and Mayer, date the Critique from 1841–2. However, best evidence indicates that it dates from the period March–August 1843, and that it was almost certainly composed in its entirety in the summer of that year. This would make the place of composition Kreuznach (s.d. Nahe), to which Marx, then twenty-five, had retired in the spring of that year to pursue research in political theory and history, and where he was married, on 19 June, to his childhood sweetheart, Jenny von Westphalen. The work was probably composed at the summer home of the bride’s mother, where the couple honeymooned.2

Marx had planned to do a critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right for over a year. He first mentioned the project to his editor–friend, Arnold Ruge, in a letter dated 5 March 1842; it was to be an essay for a collection

---

1 The standard English version is Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, transl. with notes by T. M. Knox (Oxford, 1942, with subsequent corrected editions). Hegel published this work in 1821, and used it as the text for his lectures in political philosophy at Berlin from 1821 until his death on 14 November 1831. Marx based his commentary on the edition of Eduard Gans, G. W. F. Hegels Werke, Vollständige Ausgabe, Band 8. 1. Aufl. (Berlin, 1833).

2 On the date of composition, see esp. Bert Andréas, ‘Marx et Engels et la gauche hégélienne’, Annali, Instituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (Milan, 1964/5), vol. 7 (1965), pp. 335, 356, n. 1; also Manfred Friedrich, Philosophie und Ökonomie beim jungen Marx (Berlin, 1960), p. 56, n. 22. These commentators accept the judgment of
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

of miscellaneous writings which Ruge planned to edit and publish, because of Prussian censorship, in Switzerland. The purpose of the essay, according to the same letter, was ‘to fight against the constitutional monarchy, as a self-contradictory and self-destroying hybrid’. Marx subsequently contributed two other pieces to Ruge’s collection, which appeared in two volumes under the title Anekdoten zur neuesten deutschen Philosophie und Publizistik (Zurich und Winterthur, February 1843). One of these was a lengthy criticism of the latest Prussian censorship directives, which Marx wrote in February 1842; the second, written about the same time, was a short piece signalling the importance of Ludwig Feuerbach’s criticism of speculative philosophy and theology. But Marx never submitted his essay on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right; in fact, it appears that the work as originally projected was never written. This may have been due to a lack of time available to Marx for such work; for after March 1842 he began to work seriously at journalism; and we know, for example, that these new responsibilities caused him to abandon another projected essay, this one on the history of religious art, for which he had done considerable research. On the other hand, his failure to write the Critique when originally planned may have been due to his lack of a methodology suitable for a systematic criticism of Hegel’s political philosophy; for as it turned out, a key element in the methodology employed by Marx in the Critique was provided by an essay by Feuerbach which first appeared, of all places, in Ruge’s Anekdoten. More on this later.

In any event, when Marx finally carried out his plan to criticize the Philosophy of Right he did not produce an essay, but instead filled some 150 manuscript pages copying out paragraph-by-paragraph Hegel’s doctrine on the internal constitution of the state, and subjecting it to lengthy and painstaking analysis. The result was a piece of writing at once brilliant and prolix, whose uneven style, shifting tone, and spontaneous doctrinal statements faithfully reflect the different moods, the flashes of inspiration, and in fact the personality of the author himself. Of the whole corpus of Marx’s writings, the Critique, largely because we have it just as it first flowed from his pen, especially exemplifies what Wilhelm Liebknecht meant when he observed that ‘if Buffon’s phrase holds good

David Rjazanov, who cites two references in Marx’s later writings (see p. xi below), and also the similarity between passages toward the end of the Critique and comments by Marx in his research notebooks which he dated ‘Kreuznach, July and August, 1843’. Cf. Rjazanov’s remarks in Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels/Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe (hereafter MEGA) (Berlin and Frankfurt a/M, 1927–32), vol. I, 1/1 (1927), pp. lxxi–lxxv, 402; and ibid. 1/2 (1929), pp. xxiv–xxx. (See also below, p. xxxix, n. 3 and the ‘Note on the manuscript’, pp. lxiv–v.)
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

of anyone, it holds good of Marx: "the style is the man"—Marx's style is Marx himself.¹

When he finished the Critique in the fall of 1843 Marx intended to revise his manuscript immediately for publication. He wrote an essay, entitled 'Zur Kritik der Hegel'schen Rechts-Philosophie. Einleitung' as an introduction to the proposed revision. He published this essay in the Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher (February 1844), co-edited by himself and Ruge in Paris, where he had gone with his wife into self-imposed exile in October 1843. In the same issue of the Jahrbücher, the only issue ever to appear, he also published an essay entitled 'Zur Judenfrage' in which he developed and applied some of the leading themes of the Hegel Critique. But shortly thereafter he abandoned his plan to revise the Critique itself, giving as his reason the complexity of the work; and though he referred to it twice in later writings in terms suggesting its importance in the development of his thought, he apparently made no subsequent effort to prepare it for publication. After his death in March 1883 the manuscript remained undiscovered among his papers until 1922, when David Rjazanov, who was then attempting to establish the contents of the full Marx–Engels Nachlass, found it in the Berlin archives of the German Social-Democratic Party. It was then published for the first time, edited by Rjazanov, in the first volume of the MEGA (1927).²

Rjazanov cites two references in Marx's later writings as part of his evidence for the 1843 date of composition. The first of these references is in Marx's Preface to his Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (1859). There Marx recounts his background and the events leading up to the writing of this book. He refers to a critical revision of Hegel's Philosophy of Right which he undertook shortly after resigning as editor-in-chief of the Rheinische Zeitung (he took the step officially on 18 March 1843) as his first attempt to resolve his doubts about the play of material interests in political society. His second reference is in the Authors Afterword to the second German edition of Das Kapital, vol. 1 (January 1873). There Marx discusses the difference between his and Hegel's use of the dialectic, and mentions a critique of the mystifying side of the Hegelian dialectic


² On the discovery of the manuscript, see David Rjazanov, 'Neueste Mitteilungen über den literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels' (German transl. by Carl Grünberg), Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung, vol. xi (1925), pp. 383–400, esp. 391–2. Details of the first and subsequent editions of the Critique are given below in a special note in the Appendix to the Introduction, p. lxiii.

xi
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

which he had produced nearly thirty years earlier. In addition to providing
evidence about the date of composition of the Critique, these references
suggest something of the complexity of the work which caused Marx to
give up the job of revising it for publication. Its complexity is a result of
the multiple aims which Marx brought to the work.

Marx’s original aim in producing a critique of The Philosophy of Right
was to attack the constitutional monarchy. This suggests that he intended
from the beginning to go beyond an evaluation of Hegel’s political philo-
sophy to an evaluation of existing political institutions as well; and, more-
over, to do both through a critical examination of The Philosophy of Right.
We shall see later how he could conceive of criticizing both Hegel’s
philosophy and existing institutions at once. For the moment we should
note that Marx’s later reference to the Critique, in his Preface of 1859,
indicates that in executing the work he had an additional aim beyond the
two originally proposed, namely, to clarify for himself the relationship
between the existing political institutions and the economic workings
of society. This additional aim was the result of his experience, as corres-
dpondent then editor of the Rheinische Zeitung through 1842 and early ’43,
of concrete social and political issues. This experience first raised in his
mind questions about the importance of economic factors in political
society, and led him to conclude that he lacked the specific kind of know-
ledge necessary for effective social criticism—knowledge of the anatomy
and historical genesis of modern political society. Both his work on the
Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ and the research he pursued
simultaneously at Kreuznach were intended to provide at least the begin-
nings of this knowledge. The notebooks he compiled at Kreuznach
constitute the record of this research. There are five of these notebooks,
totalling some 230 pages of excerpts, with his occasional comments,
from twenty-four books in political theory and history. The relationship
between these researches and the Critique itself becomes especially evident
in the second half of this work, as Marx begins more and more to intro-
duce historical data into his commentary on Hegel. His use of historical data
is a special feature of the critical methodology Marx employs in the Critique.

A final point which is relevant to the explanation of the complexity of
the Critique is Marx’s own view of its scope. From his later reference
to the work in the second German edition of Das Kapital, which we noted
above, and from a number of passages in the Critique itself, it is evident
that Marx considered it to be more than a criticism of Hegel’s political
philosophy. In fact, he claimed to have exposed and criticized, through
his examination of The Philosophy of Right, the essential features—and
errors—of Hegel’s philosophy in general. The Critique was not the last
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

effort of Marx in this direction; he renewed the effort in his 1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, composed in Paris, though in this work he concentrated on Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit. But it seems clear, again from his reference in Das Kapital, that he considered the Critique to be important, and perhaps definitive, as an evaluation of Hegelian philosophy itself.

To summarize the complex character of the Critique we can say that it was Marx’s first effort to expose and criticize Hegel’s philosophy in general and his political philosophy in particular; and through this effort both to criticize existing political institutions and, with the help of research in political theory and history, to clarify the relationship between the political and economic aspects of society.

The reader may judge for himself whether the Critique succeeds in all these aims. Marx himself evidently felt that it had succeeded so well that more than a single publication was required in order to present its results. Hence he abandoned the plan to revise the Critique and publish it as a single work:

In the Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher [i.e., in the Introduction to the proposed revision of the Critique] I announced a critique of jurisprudence and political science in the form of a critique of the Hegelian philosophy of law. Preparing this for publication, I found that the combination of criticism directed solely against speculation with criticism of various subjects would be quite unsuitable; it would impede the development of the argument and render comprehension difficult. Moreover, the wealth and diversity of the subject to be dealt with could have been accommodated in a single work only in a very aphoristic style, and such aphoristic presentation would have given the impression of arbitrary systematization. Therefore, I shall issue the critique of law, morals, politics, etc., in separate, independent brochures, and finally attempt to give in a separate work the unity of the whole, the relation of the separate parts, and eventually a critique of the speculative treatment of the material.1

Marx wrote these words in August 1844 in the Preface to his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, which constitute the first draft of the various separate brochures that were to grow out of the Critique. But these, too, remained unpublished, and in fact unfinished during Marx’s lifetime. He had hardly finished writing the words just quoted when he undertook, with Engels, the task of composing Die Heilige Familie, written while pursuing further his research in the literature of political economy. However, the program set down in the passage cited was not abandoned. The reference to a work which would attempt to give the unity of the whole appears to foreshadow that work which is most often, and correctly, characterized as the first statement of Marx’s mature theory of history and

EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

society: Part One of Die deutsche Ideologie. In fact, the Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ developed into the whole program of research and writing which occupied Marx for the remainder of his life. More immediately, however, it represents the first of several works produced by Marx during a crucial period in the development of his thought. The period in question began with his retirement to Kreuznach in the spring of 1843, and it ended with the completion of Die deutsche Ideologie which was written jointly with Engels and finished sometime late in 1846. Some remarks on the subject of Marx’s intellectual development will clarify the significance of this period in his life, as well as the importance of the Critique as marking a point of transition in the development of his thought.

II

Marx’s adult life was governed from beginning to end by a deeply-felt dedication to social criticism aimed at social revolution. We see his early sense of this vocation expressed in a graduation exercise done in his final year in the Gymnasium, 1835: ‘The main principle which must guide us in the selection of a vocation is the welfare of humanity... Man’s nature makes it possible for him to reach his fulfillment only by working for the perfection and welfare of his society.’ The subsequent course of Marx’s life, seen in retrospect, allows us to take this youthful declaration seriously.

As applied to Marx, the term ‘criticism’ has three-fold significance: it means self-clarification, the clarification of others, and political action. If one is to revolutionize human society in the interests of its perfection and welfare one must understand its nature, workings and failures, one must impart this understanding to others, and one must somehow effect the translation of this understanding into organized political action which will transform society in the interest of the common good. The unity of theory and praxis for Marx meant the inseparability of these three efforts in genuine social criticism. Social scientist, teacher, political

1 See also, in one of Marx’s notebooks of 1845, what appears to be a list of topics to be treated in a book projected but never written; the list includes practically every point of political significance touched on in the Critique; see Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels/Werke (hereafter Werke) (Berlin, 1953– ), vol. iii, p. 537.


3 MEGA i, 1/2, p. 167; in English, Easton and Guddat, p. 39.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

organizer—this is the three-fold vocation of the critic in the full Marxian sense.

Marx’s intellectual life was a function of this single, complex vocation; it does not display a sharp division into two parts, as was once commonly supposed. There appears to be no basis for the view that the young and the old Marx represent two distinct periods in which his doctrinal principles, his theoretical and practical concerns and his intellectual positions were radically opposed. His own major posthumously published writings—among them especially the Critique and his economic manuscripts of 1857–58—provide the textual evidence against such a view. On the basis of this evidence it has been shown that Marx’s intellectual and doctrinal development was, in Rubel’s words, ‘organic’, that it did not involve his rejection in later years of any essential, earlier-held positions, and that within this development the early and the late writings remain fundamentally consistent in presenting a unified social and political theory.1

We can appreciate both the development and the continuity in Marx’s intellectual life if we see it in terms of his dedication to social criticism. Marx came to appreciate fully the intellectual and practical demands of his vocation only by stages and as a result of particular experiences. As his appreciation of these demands grew, the focus of his research and writings shifted. In other words, his intellectual and doctrinal development was a function of the development in his awareness of the knowledge and action required for effective social criticism.

Marx’s first serious efforts at social criticism took the form of journalism during 1842 and early ‘43. These are recorded for the most part in his lengthy article on censorship in the Anekdoten, and in his writings on a variety of social and political questions in the Rheinische Zeitung. Here,

EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

his approach to criticism is characterized by his apparent conviction that social reform could be achieved by educating the public, and especially the régime, about the shortcomings of the existing socio-political order by appealing to a philosophical understanding of the nature and purpose of political society. The theoretical aspect of criticism was identified with social philosophy, and the practical aspect with public education through the medium of the popular press.

Two experiences caused him to lose confidence in the ability of such a program to generate social reform. First, he saw official reaction in the form of censorship effectively silence the critical press, which for him represented the voice of reason in society; this led him to conclude that efforts at public education alone could not bring about social reform; they must be combined with a program of practical, political organization. Second, he saw the power of economic interests within political society effectively frustrate the pursuit of the common good; and this led him to conclude that a philosophical understanding of society, however valid, does not of itself constitute an adequate theoretical basis for achieving the revolutionary aims of criticism; an understanding of the economic factors in political society is also required.

This recognition of his own theoretical shortcomings, especially in regard to the importance of economic interests in political society, marked the end of the first phase in Marx’s intellectual development. His subsequent intense efforts to remedy these shortcomings and to achieve the essentials of an adequate theoretical basis for effective social criticism constitute the second, and decisive phase (from spring 1843 to late 1846). This period is best characterized as one of intense self-clarification accompanied by his first efforts at political organization. From this period date his first attempts to achieve the knowledge, first in political theory and history, then in political economy, necessary to complement his philosophic conception of society and to provide the basis for an effective revolutionary program. In this period he also had his first encounter with the industrial proletariat, which led him to identify it as the material force in society which would be the vehicle for social revolution once it was informed by the spiritual force of his own social theory. Henceforth, education as an integral part of social criticism would be directed less at the public and the régime and more at the economically, socially and politically dispossessed; and its aim would be to bring these people to full consciousness of their interest and potential role in the revolutionizing of society. Workers’ organizations would be the means both for education and for the achievement and exercise of political power aimed at the radical transformation of the existing economic, social and political order.

xvi
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

By the end of 1846 Marx had become fully aware of the demands of his vocation. He had clarified in his own mind the essentials of the theory of society which was one of the demands, and had begun the work of political organization, combining the educative aspect of criticism and the pursuit of political power, which was another of the demands. The remainder of his active life was devoted to the continuing effort to pursue all these aspects of his vocation.

The theory of society which he formulated was set within the framework of a theory of history and was based on a conception of man as homo laborans and zoon politikon. Man is part of Nature, which is identified as the sum total of reality. Man consciously transforms his environment in response to the immanent dynamism of his needs. The transformation of his environment by man is called ‘production’; it is always pursued within a social context; and it is only within the framework of this social activity that the individual man is able to realize his own potential as a rational being. History is described as a sequence of forms of production analyzable in terms of the particular ways in which men have related to the environment, the ways in which they have marshalled and developed the productive forces available to them, and have related to one another in the application of these forces to the task of meeting their needs. His historical sketch traces the European experience up to the point where the dynamic development of the most recent form of social production, capitalism, creates a world-wide system of production and exchange which breaks down national and regional isolation and brings the whole world of men into working relationships with one another. At this stage, the significance of historical development ceases to be limited to the western world: history becomes world history, and it points to the establishment of a universal community of men each benefitting from the creativity of all the others within a historically transformed, humanized environment in which the development of human life is under man’s own rational control. This, in brief, is the doctrine of Part 1 of Die deutsche Ideologie. It summarizes the results of Marx’s efforts at self-clarification in the period 1843–6, and its genesis is only clearly traceable in the unpublished writings of the period, beginning with the Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’ and the contemporaneous Kreuznach notebooks in political theory and history (1843), through his Paris notebooks in political economy and the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844), the Theses on Feuerbach and the Brussels and Manchester notebooks in political economy (1845–6), to Die deutsche Ideologie. The theoretical positions and the ideals asserted in this latter work continued to govern all Marx’s subsequent labors. From 1847 to 1878, when the illnesses which eventually claimed his life first put an end
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

to his productive years of research, writing and political action, he continued to pursue his threelfold task: deepening through incessant research his understanding of human history and society; attempting to impart this understanding to others in a series of historical, political and economic writings which culminated in Das Kapital, his final and unfinished effort at a comprehensive exposition of the nature and dynamism of modern society; organizing the working class, the material force which was to be the mediating element in the creation of a truly human society. Thus, the final thirty years of Marx's productive life represent a continuation of the program established between 1843 and 1847, and his doctrinal development in these final thirty years builds upon and refines, without essentially changing, the basic social theory found in Die deutsche Ideologie. As the first major work undertaken in that early, crucial period of his theoretical self-clarification, the Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' occupies a special place in the development of Marx's mature doctrine. I shall indicate some of the essential features of the Critique, both as a work of criticism and as a doctrinal statement; my specific concern will be to clarify the critical methodology which the work embodies and the main points of doctrinal difference between Marx and Hegel. To prepare for this, we must examine the events in Marx's life and his doctrinal positions prior to the composition of the work.

III

Karl Marx spent his earliest years in the Rhenish town of Trier (Trèves) on the Moselle River. He was born on 5 May 1818, the third of nine children and the oldest son to survive past infancy, of Heinrich (born Hirschel) and Henrietta Pressburg Marx.1 Marx's father was a lawyer who, in 1816, had broken with the religious tradition of his family, passing from Judaism to Lutheranism in order to enjoy the practical, social benefits afforded by such 'emancipation'; in 1824 he had his children baptized as Lutherans also. Young Karl appears to have matured early under the influence of his father, with whom he enjoyed a warm relationship, and of a family friend whom he later called 'my fatherly friend', the Baron Ludwig von Westphalen. Both men judged young Karl to be

---

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

unusually gifted, and both imparted to him something of their own intellectual values and attitudes. From his father he inherited a regard for the ideals of the humanism of the Enlightenment, and from von Westphalen, a liberal political spirit imbued with the ideas of Saint-Simon—whose doctrines permeated the intellectual circles of the German Rhineland of the 1830s—together with a love of classical and romantic literature. Young Marx did not, however, imbibe anything of the patriotic attitude toward the Prussian monarchy—under whose hegemony the Rhineland had been placed in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna—which his father held in a lukewarm way, and which von Westphalen combined enthusiastically with his highly cultured liberalism.

Young Marx completed his formal secondary education in the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier in August 1835, and that fall began to study law at the University of Bonn, where he showed a taste both for scholarship and fun (one of the earliest likenesses we have of him appears in an engraving of the Bonn drinking club of students from Trier). In October 1836 he transferred to the University of Berlin, registering for law, philosophy and history, and he remained there until the spring of 1841, at which time he submitted a thesis ("The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature") to the faculty of philosophy of the University of Jena, which earned him a doctoral diploma in April of that year. His university transcripts show only one formal course in philosophy (logic, at Berlin in the summer semester of 1838); but we know from other sources that he undertook, between 1837 and 1841, a heavy program of reading in the works of Aristotle, Spinoza, Leibnitz and Hume, a history of the Kantian school, and the corpus of Hegel's writings.1

In Berlin Marx found an intellectual atmosphere which stimulated his nascent impulse for social criticism. He quickly moved into the circle of the Doktorenklub, a group of young university teaching assistants and radical intellectuals who engaged in spirited, critical discussion of religion and politics within the framework of Hegelian philosophy, which no longer enjoyed official approval but was still the dominant intellectual force and the focus of all theoretical controversy. This was his introduction to the thought of Hegel, whose philosophy, he wrote to his father, he

---

1 Marx's academic records at Bonn and Berlin are in MEGA I, 1/2, pp. 194–5, 247–8; the other sources for his philosophical studies from this period are his long letter to his father from Berlin, dated November 1837, and the excerpt notebooks he compiled in connection with his readings at Berlin. The letter is in MEGA I, 1/2, pp. 213–21; English transl. in Easton and Guddat, pp. 40–50; for his Berlin notebooks, see MEGA I, 1/2, pp. 104–5, 107–13.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

soon came to know from beginning to end. In this company the political liberalism he brought with him from the Rhineland acquired a more radical cast; for the common theoretical position of the members of the Doktorenklub was an interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy as a revolution-ary call to transcend the social and political status quo, and their practical political attitude, especially toward the Prussian régime, was an enthusiastic endorsement of this aim. Marx had no difficulty in adopting this political view; and, in the beginning at least, he shared his colleagues’ interpreta-
tion of Hegel, in whose philosophy he sought the theoretical tools for a rational transformation of society. But while persisting in the revolution-
ary aim, it appears that his early enthusiasm for Hegel gave way rather quickly to an ambivalent attitude of mixed respect and distrust; only rarely is Hegel directly cited in Marx’s journalistic writings of 1842 and early ’43, and then only with qualified approval; a high regard for Hegel’s abilities as an abstract thinker, which is evident in Marx’s writings both early and late, did not prevent Marx from maintaining, even prior to the Critique, a suspicious attitude toward Hegel’s views on social and political theory. In the Critique we see what looks like earlier ambivalence toward Hegel give way to overt and genuine hostility, the bitterness of which suggests the depth of Marx’s disappointment at finding Hegel to be not a champion of social revolution but an arch-conservative whose political philosophy is an elaborate justification, even a benediction, of the status quo.

The legacy of Marx’s Berlin years is not limited to the radicalization of his political views and his introduction to the thought of Hegel. He also gained at Berlin a healthy respect for discipline and technique in fashioning and applying the theoretical tools of social criticism. The lectures of Eduard Gans and Karl von Savigny, under whom he studied law, appear to have been most influential in this respect. The lectures of Gans, who had been a favorite disciple of Hegel and whose edition of The Philosophy of Right Marx later used in writing the Critique, served as a model of rational, critical analysis of legislative institutions and procedures; while it was apparently von Savigny who introduced Marx to the historical method of analyzing social and political institutions. And though Marx subsequently excoriated the ‘Historical School of Law’, which was identified with von Savigny, for its failure, or refusal, to judge the moral worth of historical institutions against the criterion of human nature, he nonetheless adopted as an integral part of his own scientific methodology the Savignian technique of clarifying the significance of existing institutions through an account of their historical genesis. Marx’s first systematic use of this historico-genetic technique was in the Critique,
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

where he goes so far as to assert that it is essential to true, philosophical criticism; subsequently he used it in the elaboration of his overall theory of history, where his primary aim remained the clarification of the realities of the historical present.

Marx hoped to pursue the dual career of teacher and journalist, lecturing in logic at the University of Bonn and collaborating with Bruno Bauer, a Berlin colleague, in the publication of a critical journal, tentatively titled the 'Journal' or 'Archive of Atheism'. But Bauer was expelled from the faculty of theology at Bonn because of his strong atheist views, and with his friend's dismissal Marx gave up his plans for lecturing at the university and turned exclusively to writing. His first efforts were those eventually published by Ruge in the Anekdoten. Then Marx plunged with characteristic enthusiasm and energy into his collaboration with the Rheinische Zeitung. His pre-Critique doctrine in social and political theory is found in these writings, which incorporate also his early views on the practical significance of philosophy.

He calls philosophy the activity of applying free reason, and divides it into two phases, theory and praxis. As theory philosophy is an ascetic activity carried on in solitude and systematic seclusion. To the popular mind it appears to be an overstrained and impractical occupation, a kind of magic whose incantations sound pompous and incomprehensible. It appears unrelated to ordinary life. But this is a misunderstanding. In fact, philosophers are the fruit of their times, and philosophies spring from the same spirit in man which gives rise to his practical works. Despite its appearance, philosophy is not outside the world; it simply has a different kind of presence in the world than do man's other rational activities. The world is its ground; it is the spiritual quintessence of its age. Moreover, the world is the object of its enquiry and concern; it is the wisdom of the world. This formula summarizes the essence of philosophy as theory, and establishes the basis of its reality as praxis; it also serves to distinguish it from religion, which he calls, with quiet hostility, the wisdom of the other world.

Philosophy as praxis is the activity of informed criticism. On the basis

1 See translation, below, p. 92.


3 Karl Marx: Chronik, p. 8.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

of the understanding achieved in the solitude of the study and first expressed in incomprehensible language, philosophers view the world with critical eyes, measuring existence against essence, the actual against the ideal, 'is' against 'ought'. This is philosophy measuring the world and declaring it to be deficient. Philosophy becomes worldly, that is, a practical, creative element in the world, an active force in culture and society. The philosopher speaks only after study, appeals to reason not faith, teaches rather than dogmatizes, demands and welcomes the test of being doubted, promises truth, and aims at the achievement of a world 'become philosophical'.

Needless to say, philosophy as the practical activity of criticism remains a thoroughly rational exercise: the measuring of existence against essence, of actuality against ideal, presupposes a grasp of the essential and ideal. But this grasp is achieved only through a study of what exists. 'True theory', Marx writes to Dagobert Oppenheimer in August 1842, 'must be developed and clarified in concrete circumstances and existing conditions'. The criteria against which the world is to be measured are derived by philosophical enquiry from the world itself. In short, philosophy as theory finds the 'ought' implied within the 'is', and as praxis seeks to make the two coincide.

Philosophy so described is to be sharply differentiated from other intellectual approaches to human affairs. Marx rejects the positivism of the 'Historical School of Law', and asserts against it that the mere historical existence of an institution does not justify it morally. The positivist attitude, which is said to be rooted in scepticism, desecrates everything sacred to lawful, moral, political man. It is an irrational position, for reason can find in human institutions the structures of human rationality, and thus can measure actual, historical institutions against the demands of rationality. Again, philosophy is not to be confused with exercises of imagination, which bring preconceived and fictitious ideals into the discussion of human life and institutions. Nor is true philosophy a speculative

1 'Der leitende Artikel in Nr. 179 der Kölnischen Zeitung' (hereafter 'Leitende Artikel') Rheinische Zeitung (hereafter RhZ) (July 1842); Werke 1, pp. 97–101; also Marx's discussion of philosophy in the notes to his doctoral dissertation (1841), MEGA 1, 1/1, pp. 64–5. On the dissertation itself as embodying a seminal statement of these themes, see the introductory remarks and references in Norman Livergood, Activity in Marx's Philosophy (The Hague, 1967), which also contains an English translation of the dissertation.

2 MEGA 1, 1/2, p. 280.

3 'Das philosophische Manifest der historischen Rechtsschule', RhZ (August 1842); Werke 1, pp. 79, 80, 85; Easton and Guddat, pp. 98, 99, 104–5. On Marx's attack on the 'Historical School of Law', see Jaeger, 'Savigny et Marx'.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

exercise, in the sense of an application of a ready-made schema of concepts
to the task of understanding and judging the historical world of human
affairs. Here it is Hegel, though he remains for the moment unnamed,
whom Marx has in mind; and he counsels his readers to follow the lead
of Ludwig Feuerbach, who emphasizes the primacy of immediate expe-
rience, in which philosophical reason can grasp things as they are and
find the criteria for rational criticism.¹

In all this Marx makes two fundamental claims: first, the historical
world of human institutions has its own immanent and substantive rational
and ethical content; and second, it is the task of philosophy, properly
understood, to grasp this content and criticize this world for the purpose of
improving it.

In becoming theoretical praxis, philosophy in Germany of the 1840s
uses the popular press as its medium of expression. It gives up its solitude
and ascetic existence and enters public life through the more conventional
means of the newspaper and journal of social criticism. The philosopher
becomes a journalist without ceasing to be a philosopher. Political society
is the prime object of his attention. He brings his understanding of the
foundations and purposes of society, law and the state to a public dis-
cussion of the deficiencies of the existing socio-political order.²

The institutions and codes of political society are the objective expres-
sion of human nature, a product of the actions of men which are rooted
in the inclinations of their rational and social nature. Thus, the state is
rooted in the natural ground of innate human capacities and inclinations;
accordingly, demands for social and political harmony are based on natural
premises: the justice of state constitutions is to be decided not on the basis
of Christianity, not on the basis of the state’s own nature and essence, not
from the nature of Christian society but from the nature of human society.
Neither religious considerations nor the abstractions of speculative
philosophy underlie the true philosopher’s demands for social justice.
Marx accepts Hegel’s idea that the state is the actualization of rational
freedom, then goes on immediately to assert that since this is so the state
must be derived from the rationale of freedom and developed from reason
in human relations. Whence comes the general criterion for judging
the existing political order: the state arises out of the exigencies of man’s
nature, and must express that nature and embody man’s rational freedom.
To the extent that it fails to do this, it is an unsatisfactory state. If the state

¹ ‘Die Zentralisationsfrage’ (unpublished, May 1842), MEGA 1, 1/1, pp. 230–1;
Easton and Guddat, p. 108; ‘Luther als Schiedsrichter zwischen Strauss und Feuer-
bach’ (January 1842), Anekdota II, p. 208; Easton and Guddat, p. 95.
² ‘Leitende Artikel’, Werke I, pp. 97–8, 100.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

is a product of man’s inherent rationality and sociability, then the philosopher demands that it should be the state of human nature, that it should be adequate to meet the demands of human nature.¹

Marx’s position on the subject of law follows as a corollary of this general doctrine on the nature of the state. Once again Hegel, among others, is cited with approval: the superiority of modern political philosophy lies in its conception of the state as an organism in which legal, ethical, and political freedom must be realized. It is an organism, Marx adds, in which the individual citizen, in obeying the laws of the state, simply obeys the natural laws of his own reason, human reason.² The laws of the state, like the state itself, derive from the nature of man. They are in essence (or idea), and thus ought be in fact (actuality), nothing less than the internal laws of man’s rational, social activity expressed in formal codification. The secular world is filled with natural, legal, ethical content to which the legislator is subject: ‘The legislator . . . must consider himself a naturalist. He does not make laws; he does not invent them; he only formulates them. He expresses the inner principles of spiritual relationships in conscious, positive laws.’ This judgment on the nature of legislation reappears almost verbatim in the Critique.³

Thus, just as organic political society, in originating in and meeting the demands of man’s nature, is an expression of that nature, so too are the laws of political society, for they are the conscious expression of the will of the people, created with and through it.⁴ This in turn provides the general criterion for judging the existing laws of the state. Human activity, not formal law, is paramount. If laws are to be the conscious reflections of man’s life, then to be valid and genuine they must reflect the needs and capacities of the people. They must not fetter human life, but yield to it; that is, they must change as the needs and capacities of the people change. Only in this way can law be actually identified with human freedom.⁵

Such are the fundamental positions of Marx’s early (pre-Critique) social and political philosophy. It is a doctrine which consistently emphasizes the primacy of the individual, rational, social members of the state, over

¹ ‘Leitende Artikel’, MEGA 1, 1/1, pp. 102, 103.
² Ibid., MEGA 1, 1/1, p. 104; Easton and Guddat, p. 130.
⁴ Ibid., Werke 1, p. 319; Easton and Guddat, p. 141
⁵ ‘Debatten über die Pressfreiheit’, RhZ (May 1842), Werke 1, p. 58.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

against the institutions and laws of the state. The natural capacities, needs and inclinations of men constitute both the origin and the purpose of the state: the state derives from them, being their product and their expression in the form of institutions; and the state's raison d'être, the realization of rational freedom, is precisely their fulfillment.

In the light of these considerations on the nature and role of philosophy and the political criteria which philosophy establishes, the deficiencies of the existing social–political order which Marx immediately faces—the Prussian State of the 1840s—are all too obvious to him. State censorship, exercised in ignorance and with caprice by bureaucrats, suppresses the organs of rational criticism, thereby silencing the very voices best qualified to guide the state to its proper end.1 Prussian provincial law (Landrecht) consistently violates the criterion for valid law by ignoring the natural, legal, and ethical content of human social life, treating this not according to its innate principles but rather as intrinsically lawless matter, then attempting to shape, modify, and arrange this spiritless and lawless matter for an external purpose.2 The legislators violate, in specific cases, the traditional customs of the people, customs which transcend national boundaries and are said to be rooted in a common and popular consciousness of right which conforms to the nature of things.3 Finally, contrary to the idea of a rational state, there are in existing society groups of people who effectively fall outside the state's organizational framework—a deficiency evidenced by the state's inability if not unwillingness to apply its administrative power to the alleviation of economic misery.4

His recognition of this latter deficiency must have caused Marx to question once again the relationship between economic interests in society and the workings of its political institutions. He had already concluded some weeks earlier that the interests of landed private property, rather than a concern for the public good, had governed legislative proposals, thus in effect transforming the state into a means for the successful pursuit

1 'Bemerkungen über die neueste preussische Zensurinstruktion. Von einem Rheinländer' (February 1842), Anekdota 1, pp. 56-88. His own struggles with the censors, which eventually brought on his resignation from the RhZ and the suppression of the paper, provided Marx with at least part of the experience which underlies his long and bitter attack on the bureaucracy in the Critique; see esp. pp. 44–8 below.

2 'Der Ehescheidungsgesetzentwurf', Werke 1, p. 316; Easton and Guddat, p. 138.

3 'Debatten über das Holzdiebstahlgesetz', RhZ (October–November 1842), Werke 1, pp. 112, 119.

4 'Rechtfertigung des —— Korrespondenten von der Mosel', RhZ (January 1843), Werke 1, pp. 172–99; the relevant passages are in English in Easton and Guddat, pp. 143–8. Cf. 'Debatten über das Holzdiebstahlgesetz'. Werke 1, p. 119.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

of private, economic interest.¹ Indeed, an examination of the legislature itself, in its constitution as an assembly of Estates, shows that it derives not from the need of the state but from the need of special interests against the state, and that its principle is not the representation of political reason but of the egoism of private interests, which is the absolute antithesis of political reason. And Marx concludes that the representation of political intelligence and the general interest in such an assembly is, therefore, a contradiction and an absurd claim.²

The increasingly radical tone of the articles carried in the RhZ—especially those of Moses Hess retailing the ideas of such men as Fourier and Weitling—drew the charge in late 1842 that the paper was flirting with communistic ideas. In answering the charge Marx admitted by implication his own lack of knowledge regarding both the fundamental question of the influence of economic factors in political life and the particular communistic ideas in question; and he declared his intention to submit these ideas to the thorough criticism they deserve.³

Thus, as his year of political journalism drew to a close in early 1843, two things had become increasingly clear to Marx: first, the existing socio-political order was far short of—indeed, in some respects it was the antithesis of—a rational state; and second, its reform could not be effected without a clearer understanding of the operation of economic forces within it.

Marx expressed the first of these conclusions in his letters to Ruge in the spring of 1843: the actual world, he writes, is a perverted world; existing political society is a despotism and tyranny in which the monarch, ruling by caprice in a state where man is despoiled and dehumanized, is the equivalent of the whole political system and is the only political person. But the state, he asserts, is too serious a thing to be made into a harlequinade. Then, reaffirming a principle already asserted in the RhZ—representation of the whole of the people by the people—he writes:

Freedom, the feeling of man's dignity will have to be awakened in these men. Only

¹ 'Debatten über das Holzdebstahlgesetz', Werke 1, pp. 126, 130, 143-4.
² 'Die Beilage zu Nr. 335 und 336 der Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung über die ständischen Ausschüsse in Preussen' (hereafter 'Die ständischen Ausschüsse'), RhZ (December 1842), MEGA 1, 1/1, p. 332. It is not, therefore, surprising that these two related issues, namely, the influence of landed private property and the character of the Estate-legislature, receive such extended and detailed treatment by Marx in the Critique: they were the very issues in which a connection between economic interests and the deficiencies of the existing political structure first became evident to him, and this in the final months of his tenure with the RhZ.
³ 'Der Kommunismus und die Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung', RhZ (October 1842), Werke 1, pp. 105-8.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

This feeling, which disappeared from the world with the Greeks and with Christianity vanished into the blue mist of heaven, can again transform society into a community of men to achieve their highest purposes, a democratic state.1

This condemnation of the Prussian monarchy voiced in the spring of 1843 did not represent a significant advance in Marx’s thinking. A year earlier, as we have seen, he had written to Ruge of the need to fight against the constitutional monarchy, which he described then as a self-contradictory and self-destroying hybrid. In this respect, then, his year on the RhZ had served mainly to confirm the earlier judgment by providing concrete evidence of the deficiencies of the state in the context of particular social problems.

Marx’s second conclusion, however, represented a significant advance, for it marked his realization of the need for new theoretical work, and it established the program of study and writing to be pursued at Kreuznach. In other words, criticism had at this point measured the gap between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ with regard to political society; now additional understanding was required if the two were to be made to coincide. When news of the impending suppression of the RhZ reached him, Marx recalled in 1859, he welcomed it as an opportunity to retire to the study. In the space of the next five months he read the twenty-four works in political theory and history, filled the 250 pages with excerpts from these, and produced his 150-page Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’.

IV

Marx employs three critical techniques in the course of the Critique. The first, which is borrowed from Ludwig Feuerbach, is generally referred to as the transformative method of criticizing Hegelian speculative philosophy; the second is straightforward textual analysis and explication; the third is the historico-genetic method of criticism, which, as we noted earlier, was probably inspired by von Savigny. Marx combines these three techniques in such a way that they become steps in a single overall critical procedure which has the effect of combining a criticism of Hegel’s philosophical doctrine with a criticism of the existing social and political order. Transformative criticism focuses on the form and character of Hegel’s philosophy as a mystical and pantheistic view of reality; its purpose is to divest of its mystical form the empirical content of Hegel’s doctrine, to expose Hegel’s account of the existing political order, an account which Marx judges to be essentially accurate when stripped of its

1 Werke 1, pp. 338–40; Easton and Guddat, pp. 206, 207–8; cf. ‘Die ständischen Ausschüsse’, MEGA 1, 1/1, p. 334.

xxvii
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

speculative trappings. Textual analysis and explication then expose the internal contradictions in Hegel’s account of existing political society, contradictions which, on the premise that Hegel’s account is accurate, can be said to reflect the internal contradictions of existing political society. Finally, historico-genetic criticism further clarifies these contradictions by tracing, with the help of historical research, the genesis of the modern state. With the exception of this last step, Marx’s critical operations are carried out wholly within the doctrinal framework of The Philosophy of Right. The key to Marx’s complex critical procedure is his judgment that within the peculiar philosophic form of The Philosophy of Right Hegel accurately depicts existing political society. It is this judgment which allows Marx to effect a criticism of political and social actualities via an immanent critique of Hegel’s Rechtsphilosophie.

As Marx himself put it:

The criticism of the German philosophy of right and of the state, which was given its most logical, profound and complete expression by Hegel, is at once the critical analysis of the modern state and of the reality connected with it, and the definitive negation of all the past forms of consciousness in German jurisprudence and politics, whose most distinguished and most general expression, raised to the level of a science, is precisely the speculative philosophy of right.¹

In short, Hegel’s Philosophy of Right is not only the highest expression of German philosophico-political consciousness, but a completely faithful account of the modern state.

Marx borrowed the technique of transformative criticism from Ludwig Feuerbach, whom he first encountered at Berlin, and whom he considered both then and later to be the most serious of Hegel’s philosophical successors. In a short essay in the Anekdota, which we cited earlier,² Marx called Feuerbach the purgatory through which speculative philosophy would have to pass if it was to attain the status of truth. Later, in his 1844 Manuscripts, Marx would write that positive humanistic and naturalistic criticism begins with Feuerbach, whose writings are the only writings since Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit and Logic containing a real theoretical revolution.³

Two of Feuerbach’s works influenced Marx in this respect: Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity) and, more importantly, the

² 'Luther als Schiedsrichter zwischen Strauss und Feuerbach'; see n. 1 to p. xxiii above.
³ MEGA i, 3, p. 34; Easton and Guddat, p. 285; and in MEGA i, 3, p. 151; Easton and Guddat, p. 316: ‘Feuerbach is the only one who has a serious critical relation to Hegel’s dialectic, who has made genuine discoveries in this field, and who above all is the true conqueror of the old philosophy.’
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

‘Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie’ (‘Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy’). The first was published in 1841; it contained Feuerbach’s critique of religion, the gist of which was his inversion of the traditional theological view which conceives of God as the primary subject and man as a being who is dependent on God, and in whom the divine qualities are expressed or objectified. Feuerbach’s doctrine declares man to be the true subject and God to be man’s projection, an objectification of man’s own essential perfections. Instead of God being conceived as the subject and man the predicate, man is now declared to be subject and God predicate. After establishing this subject–predicate (or subject–objectification) conversion, Feuerbach went on to trace the genesis of the concept of God in the human psyche—a procedure which is alluded to by Marx in the Critique as rational criticism, that is, criticism which shows the genesis of the object being criticized.¹

In his ‘Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy’, which first appeared in Ruge’s Anekdoten and thus came into Marx’s hands just before he started the Critique, Feuerbach made explicit his technique of the subject–predicate conversion utilized earlier in The Essence of Christianity, and presented it as a general method of criticizing speculative philosophy and its most perfect form, Hegelian philosophy. The truth about God and man had been shown by converting the religious subject and predicate; if now one wishes to find the truths hidden in the peculiar, theological framework of Hegel’s philosophy all one need do is systematically convert Hegel’s philosophic subjects and predicates:

The method of the reforming criticism of speculative philosophy in general is no different from that already used in the philosophy of religion. All we need do is always make the predicate into the subject... in order to have the undisguised, pure and clear truth.²

What theology—and in parallel fashion speculative philosophy—regards as infinite and transcendent is actually the essence of the finite hypostatized and conceived to be an independent subject:


² ‘Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie’, Anekdoten ii, pp. 62–86; I cite here the edition in Sämtliche Werke, vol. ii, pp. 244–68; the text above, p. 246. The passage parallels exactly a conclusion voiced in The Essence of Christianity: ‘We need only... invert the religious relations—regard that as an end which religion supposes to be a means—exalt that into the primary which in religion is subordinate, [and] at once we have destroyed the illusion, and the unclouded light of truth streams in upon us.’ Ibid., pp. 274–5.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The infinite of religion and philosophy is and was never anything other than some finite thing, some determinate thing, but mystified; that is, a finite and determinate thing postulated as being not finite, not determinate. Speculative philosophy is guilty of the same error as theology, namely, the error of making the determinations of what is actual or finite into determinations or predicates of the infinite, this through the negation of the determinacy in which they are, and which they are.\(^1\)

This speculative error is what characterizes German idealist philosophy, the governing concepts of which, culminating in Hegel’s concept of the Absolute, result precisely from this mystifying procedure. Against this, transformative criticism reasserts the primacy of the finite, specifically the primacy of man himself, who is the actual subject of those powers, qualities, and capacities which speculation attributes to mystical subjects such as the Monad and the Absolute:

All speculation over right, will, freedom, personality without man, outside of or completely above man, is speculation without unity, necessity, substance, ground or reality. Man is the existence of freedom, the existence of personality, the existence of right. Thus man alone is the ground and basis of the Fichtean “I”, the ground and basis of the Leibnizian Monad, the ground and basis of the Absolute.\(^2\)

Thus, transformative criticism of speculative philosophy is an extension of Feuerbach’s original criticism of religion. The extension is natural and valid because speculative philosophy is itself a refinement of religion; speculative philosophy is really theology: ‘The secret of theology is anthropology, but the secret of speculative philosophy is theology—speculative theology [which] transfers the divine being to this world as represented, determined, and realized in it.’\(^3\) Feuerbach’s ‘Provisional Theses’ establish this relationship between religion and Hegelian philosophy, which is called the perfected form of speculative philosophy, thus branding the latter, like the former, an instance of human self-alienation—that is, an example of man elevating the perfections which are properly predicted of himself to the status of independent subjects:

Feuerbach’s great achievement is [to prove] that philosophy is nothing more than religion brought to and developed in reflection, and thus is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of the alienation of man’s nature.\(^4\)

Neither Feuerbach nor, following him, Marx doubted that Hegel’s philosophy was essentially theological in character, and that what Hegel

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 207.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 244.
\(^4\) MEGA 1, 3, p. 152; Easton and Guddat, p. 316. Marx’s failure to qualify philosophy with the epithet ‘speculative’, in this passage from the 1844 Manuscripts, is no mere slip of the pen. In fact, through 1844 and 1845 he tended more and more to gloss over his distinction, maintained earlier, between valid, or true philosophy and speculative philosophy. In the Critique, however, he still maintains the distinction.

xxx
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

called the Absolute was what the ordinary man calls God. Both were familiar enough with passages in Hegel where he identifies the object of his philosophy with that of religion, namely, eternal truth in its very objectivity—God, and nothing but God, and the explication of God; and in which he characterizes his philosophy as divine service which renounces all subjective brain-waves and opinions while engaging with God.1 Neither man doubted the basically theological character of Hegel’s philosophical standpoint, summarized in his Science of Logic, which reduces all particular philosophic inquiries to elucidations of particular aspects of the self-manifestation and self-realization of God or the Absolute. This is the standpoint of speculative philosophic thought, which Hegel calls the only truly scientific and rational mode of procedure:

The Absolute Idea alone is Being, imperishable Life, self-knowing truth, and the whole of truth. The Absolute Idea is the only object and content of philosophy. As it contains every determinateness, and its essence is to return to itself through its self-determination or particularization, it has various phases. It is the business of philosophy to recognize it in them... The derivation and cognizance of these particular modes is the further business of the particular philosophic sciences.2

Hegel alludes to this passage in his Preface to The Philosophy of Right, alerting his reader to the fact that this work proceeds speculatively and thus is one of the particular philosophic sciences mentioned in the Logic. The Philosophy of Right applies the concept of the Absolute to an account of man’s social and political institutions, thereby elevating political theory to the level of speculative knowing and true philosophical science. In other words, in The Philosophy of Right man’s social and political institutions are understood as particular modes of the Idea, and as various phases of its self-determination.3

Against this, Feuerbach asserts the claim which is consistent with transformative criticism: ‘The beginning of philosophy is not God, not the Absolute, not being as the predicate of the Absolute or the Idea. The beginning of philosophy is the finite, the determinate, the actual.’4 Where Hegelian speculation declares that the state is divine will as present-Spirit which unfolds into the real form and organization of a world,5