

## Max Horkheimer's critique of Marxist Positivism in Henryk Grossmann

Max Horkheimer to Henryk Grossmann, New York [excerpt from a letter<sup>1</sup>]  
 '[Pacific Palisades, 20.1.1943] ...

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- 1 The letter exists in the form of a single carbon-copy in the Max Horkheimer archive. It carries the title: „Letter to H. Grossmann / January 20, 1943 / excerpt.“ That this is a partial transcript - apparently the theoretically relevant parts of the letter, minus the introductory and concluding remarks that are of a more personal nature - is indicated by an ellipsis at the start and at the end. As far as the substance of the letter is concerned, it deals with the Racket-theory that M.H. had been working on since the early forties; c.f. the letter to Löwenthal of 16.10.1942, and in particular the first draft of the paper „On the Sociology of Class Relations“, completed in September 1943. (HGS 12, p. 75 ff.). In his expectation of finding support for this in Grossmann's studies of Marx and Marxism M.H. was apparently disappointed. He attributed this ultimately to professional deformation, which he thought he saw in Grossmann's conception of Marx. It's an allegation which he sees confirmed, in this letter, in Grossmann's essay „The Evolutionist Revolt against Classical Economics“, which he seems to have had read in manuscript form. (It would be published only nine months later, in: *The Journal of Political Economy*, Chicago 1943, vol. LI, no. 5, October 1943, pp. 381-396, and December 1943, no. 6, p. 506-522; German: 'Die evolutionistische Revolte gegen die klassische Ökonomie', in: Grossmann, *Aufsätze zur Krisentheorie*, Frankfurt am Main 1971, S. 165 ff.) In the end what M.H. was about in his critique of Grossmann - and it is this that makes this letter so important - was the defense of the specifically philosophical orientation of Critical Theory (and its invocation of Hegel) against the discipline-specific tendency of its sociologisation. The context in which this letter needs to be seen becomes apparent not from the M.H.-Grossmann correspondence that has been preserved, but rather from the correspondence with Pollock, Löwenthal and Kirchheimer. In the former correspondence the two covering letters are missing. Grossmann's literary estate, in which they should have been present, is so far considered to be lost. As is clear from the other letters mentioned, M.H. first sent the letter not Grossmann, but in the form of a copy to Löwenthal as well as to Pollock, whom he both asked for an opinion - including whether they thought he should send the letter off at all. M.H.'s letter of 21.1.1943 to Löwenthal reads as follows: „Enclosed you will find a letter to Grossmann. It is the answer to his second letter in which he again complains about P[ollock] in the most impossible terms. As you will remember I answered his first letter with much more patience and politeness, but I think he now deserves a more outspoken reply. Since he enclosed his article on the concept of development which is a most rotten piece of work, I thought it may be good to give him my frank opinion about it. Otherwise he will again say that we are giving great care and help to our own studies, spending money for secretaries, mimeographed issues a.s.o. while he must achieve his masterpieces under the most difficult conditions. I had to enlighten him about my opinion in regard to what he

... my purpose here is a very specific one, namely to attempt a real and concrete elaboration of the theory of classes, something which, as I hardly need to tell you, we do not really have at the moment. What's really at issue here is the dialectic of legitimacy, with all which this implies for property relations. An explanation of why class has always been the epitome of rackets is not something different from proving that the universality of justice in this society is heading increasingly in the direction of unmitigated domination - the rationalisation of which has in any case been the very function of this ostensible 'justice' since time immemorial. It is this belief that extends the critique of the reality of free and fair exchange finally to the entire realm which bourgeois science calls Sociology, meaning to the entirety of the societal forms under which people nowadays have to live. To what extent it's actually going to be possible to do this I don't want to try to

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has done during the last years. / [...] Please [...] tell me if you think that there are some formulations particularly risky with regard to the left or the right. One of the pages of which I am a little doubtful is the mentioning of Nietzsche on page 9, line 7 from the bottom [here after footnote 30], since he is the anathema to all the different sides. On the other hand I think we should frankly say that one cannot write on philosophical problems knowing nothing of Nietzsche but that he is a romanticist.“ (MHA)VI 16.105) In the letter of the 22.1.1943 to Pollock, M. H. writes, in this vein: „It is clear that this letter is not written just for Grossmann but so for the purpose of defining certain basic ideas about dialectics which are usually forgotten among people like Gr[ossman].“ (MHA:)VI 33.334) A further mention of this topic is to be found in a 8.2.1943 letter to Kirchheimer: „In the meantime, Grossmann has written a long letter to me with the old and unfounded attacks on Pollock and some doubts regarding the racket theory. So he sent me his article on the Concept of Development. I thought I owe him a frank statement of how I feel, not only about the attacks but first of all about his actual theoretical stand point which, I think, is the root of the misunderstandings.“ (MHA:)VI 11.316) on the 28th as well as 29.1.1943 Pollock and Löwenthal had already replied that they had no objection to the letter being despatched to Grossmann. That he had indeed received it can be inferred from Kirchheimer's letter of 15.2.1943, in which not Grossmann's reaction itself is described, but rather Kirchheimer's assessment thereof: „I have read with great interest and satisfaction the copy of your letter to Grossmann. He did not show me his manuscript ['The Evolutionist Revolt against Classical Economics'], but – judging from his reactions to your letter - I am the afraid he has no organ anymore to realize the 'glissement du niveau' of his approach.“ (MHA:)VI 11.314) On Grossmann's reply to him M.H. finally wrote to to Löwenthal, on 19.2.1943: „Today I received a letter of 22 pages from Grossmann. His reaction to my letter, though quite crazy as usual, what not indecent. It shows a broken but still relatively honest intelligence. Of course, he does not accept my criticisms, but he, at least, tries to put up a theoretical discussion. I won't answer, at least not before you are here.“ (MHA:)VI 16.64) In the event all of the formulations incriminated by M.H. went into print (with a single exception, c.f. footnote

anticipate, but I am of the opinion that it is necessary for us to explore this seriously. An investigation of the type „the influence of rackets“ - aiming for example at the old institutions of European Democracy - is, compared to the above, of secondary importance, since the rackets should not be conceptualised as a power over and above the system but as the essential determinate form of class domination itself. It was in the sense of the above that I'd understood, from the outset, your original proposal for a specific investigation, and not at all in the sense of an empirical-sociological study of the type that would - for instance - examine how illegal interests supposedly „influence“ legal ones. That is how I had understood you originally, that you intended to investigate how the concept of original accumulation applied not merely to a supposedly early period, but - rather - to each and every phase of the bourgeois economy altogether. The Subject of this original accumulation would then be - thus conceived - the various groups within the classes, modelled on the rackets, tearing at each other over the extorted surplus value, in contrast to the individual dominant groups, as this has manifested itself in so many wars in history.

Of such an analysis of original accumulation I had promised myself a great deal, for it could conceivably have investigated if those same groups, for all their legality - just as is the case with the rackets - that are so dominant in the distribution of surplus value, are just as dominant in its original extortion, namely on production. If that were the case, it would provide the basis for what has been emphasised all along, namely the unity of production and distribution: as production determines distribution, so the latter at the same time influences the former. Isn't it the point that, behind the forms which - from a certain historical point onwards - restrain production in a specific society, we must focus on those groups that develop in the fight for the distribution of the booty? I don't deny for a moment that first of all these groups are formed through the material requirements of production in a given mode of production; sections I and II<sup>2</sup>, as well the subsections under those headings, form, as far as the factual side of this is concerned, the basis for these so-called sociological functions. On the other hand the technocrats, with all their limitations, have after all emphasised with some justification that in class society there's no area at all in which use value

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20) which probably needs to be ascribed to a rigidity on the part of Grossmann - which elsewhere also had been commented upon.

2 See letter of 6.11.1936, footnote 2.

[Gebrauchswertgestalt] is able to express itself rationally. If one searches for the reason for this arrest [Fesselung], expressing itself directly in the exchange values [Tauschwerten], in the ownership relationship, then one needs to concentrate on its dynamics, in which - so it seems to me - the notion of rackets places a crucial role. If there can be no question that the concept of class and everything concerned with it in a certain epoch is to be related to the technical structure of production, there's something dubious about this theoretical approach if the notion of class, thus conceived, leaves no room for tendencies inherent to its specific nature. The theory would otherwise be faced with the impossible task of having to deduce unambiguously all the differentiations and struggles within the class from the material aspect of production, which in my opinion would be an impossible and falsely conceived way of going about it. This naive assumption that such a linear, deductive form of the theory is logically unproblematic, usually accompanied by the equally naive idea of supplementing it by fixed external circumstances, i.e. as atheoretical facts, is something that we must put behind us, and in New York I'd gained the impression that you had understood my thoughts on this matter, concerning the theory of classes - and that it had been your intention to pursue this in your investigation of original accumulation. I am saddened that I was mistaken about this.

Your manuscript on the notion of development<sup>3</sup> contains a good deal of historical detail for which I am grateful. It's an approach which particularly in this country can be stimulating and fruitful. I am sure, and it is also my hope, that this study is going to be regarded as a valuable historical contribution. My objection, and it is a serious one, consists, when it comes down to it, to this, that in those areas where it's not your highly differentiated treatment of specific economic theories that is at issue, but rather those questions mostly discussed under the general heading of a materialist conception of history, that here your thinking becomes victim to a primitivism which makes of Marx a 'social scientist' quite indistinguishable from a progressive Positivist, indeed from the most narrowminded Empiricists altogether. I simply cannot understand the reverence expressed before Jones<sup>4</sup>, at the expense of Hegel, in any other way. And then this formula-

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3 Grossmann, „The evolutionist revolt against classical economics“, l.c. (c.f. footnote 1).

4 Richard Jones (1790-1855), English political economist, 1832 Professor in London, 1835-55 in Haileybury, 1836-51 tithe official.

tion of yours, "sociologizing"<sup>5</sup> economics. If the word itself doesn't make you shudder then surely the company in which this puts you must surely do so, company which you then go on to quote. I find this quite incomprehensible. You know better than I do that the critics of Political Economy looked upon the work of the founder of Sociology with some contempt, as an entirely impotent attempt at scientific synthesis which doesn't in the least measure up to Hegel; and that's taking into account that Comte and Spencer are of a very different caliber from Sombart<sup>6</sup> and Troeltsch. And yet it's exactly this sort of synthesis that you yourself seem intent on delivering - after gratuitously distinguishing Marx's personal achievements, which in your view seem to consist in bits from Saint Simon, Sismondi, Jones, a bit of classical political economy of course and then a dollup of Hegel, all of it cobbled together the way one lines up Philosophers in the traditional text books. I am of the opinion that this history of ideas point of view, which turns Marx into a link in the long chain of ever cleverer national economists, with or without the 'sociologising', does little justice to the level of theorising that he has achieved, even if, as in that letter to Weydemeyer<sup>7</sup>, he does on occasion list the differences between his new approach and the traditional way of doing things. Just what do you think he himself would have said to those well-meaning efforts that serve up his main achievement as consisting in all that "sociologizing" and "historizing"<sup>8</sup>, whereas it is as antisociological as it can possibly be. This emphasis on „who first had this idea?“ or „what does this study show that we didn't know before?“, the question of priorities in other words, which, inasmuch as it's „evolutionism“ that's at issue, you prejudge to the detriment of Hegel, would of course be just as embarrassing if applied to Marx. One only needs to take a theoretical train of thought apart for long enough to recognize that every element in it can be found somewhere else. If I'd been in your shoes I would at any rate not have confined myself to Saint Simon and Condorcet but would have invoked at least the ever-popular

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5 I.c., Grossmann, first p. 381 f.; German p. 168f.; Grossmann himself was there however partially quite critical of the „sociologising“ tendency to be seen in the Marx reception within Political Economy.

6 Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Economist, sociologist and philosopher, 1890 Professor at Breslau, 1906-31 in Berlin. Sombart was initially close to Marxism, but then - under the influence of the Russian Revolution - rejected it in the strongest terms.

7 Marx, letter to Joseph Weydemeyer of 5.3.1852, in: Marx/Engels, *Werke* vol. 28, Berlin 1963, p. 508.

8 I.c., Grossmann, p. 382; German p. 169.

Vico<sup>9</sup>, who after all not only perceived development in history but saw the role which the class relationship plays therein with remarkable clarity. Vico at least would not have lumped together the proletarians with the „technical and commercial directors of industry“<sup>10</sup> in the way St. Simon does. It's already there in Vico's basic premiss, with which he characterises “the development of all matters pertaining to humanity”: „first there were the forests, then the huts, then the cities, finally the academies“<sup>11</sup>, expressing a deeper awareness of the inter-connectedness of economic, societal and ideological moments than is to be found for instance in Condorcet - not to mention the profound insights into the historicity of society that he opens up, notwithstanding his avowal of the old cyclical theory and his popularity with Sociology students. At the very least I beg you to change or scrap altogether the sentence where you speak of the „fundamental point at which Marx is joined with Sismondi and Jones against Hegel, one which must not be overlooked in ascribing Hegelian influence to the ‘historicizing’ of economics“<sup>12</sup> - a sentence which is unfortunately truer to the spirit of your study than I would really like to have to admit. You're really making a concession here that is quite unworthy of you, to the whole official business of the history of ideas, the same enterprise which decades ago buried the very notion of there being anything „fundamental“ at all, burying it under a sort of blind and punctilious superficiality. It is quite unnecessary, and a wild goose chase after scientific discoveries, to go searching for new „elements“ in the bourgeois philosophy of history. If the theories of value concede to Jones and Sismondi - in the context of a rigorous and substantive investigation - that they, in contradistinction to the usual economists, emphasise the „social-formative influence of capital as the essential element“<sup>13</sup>, relating the difference between capitalist and other forms of production back to this, then one shouldn't turn this into a scheme of the history of the philosophy of history. Your forays in this direction could almost tempt me to a counterthesis: astonishing how much, at bottom, bourgeois social philosophers since Aristotle - who was a right proper citizen (if one doesn't con-

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9 Giovanni Battista Vico (1668-1744), Italian philosopher, 1698 Professor of rhetoric in Naples, 1734 Court historiographer.

10 I.c., Grossmann, p. 393; German p. 184.

11 Giambattista Vico, *The New Science - about the collaborative nature of the Peoples* (1744), transl. [into German] by Erich Auerbach (1924), Berlin undated, p. 100.

12 I.c., Grossmann, p. 514; German p. 202.

13 Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* vol. III, Stuttgart 1919, p. 484, quoted in Grossmann quotes, I.c., p. 513. German p. 200.

sider the citizen in a rigidly economic way) - kept repeating the same thing, and it is especially this doctrine of development and uninterrupted progress that belong to the specifically bourgeois constants, to the ideologies that we should be studying close up, instead of celebrating them as precursors to an ultimately achieved Truth. If you'd studied my own work of the last couple of years with these kinds of things in mind then perhaps that would have given you cause to reconsider this unbroken progress and history of ideas belief of yours. The way your text advocates dynamic thinking altogether seems to presuppose a notion of enlightenment that reminds of the way the formulas of romanticism are brought to bear on the ahistorical thinking of the 18th Century and its ostensible „rationalism.“ Every enlightenment author worth his salt, especially Helvetius, knew without needing to be told this that the Negative in History wasn't just a matter of simple error, but that it corresponded to objective material conditions. German academic Philosophy did not, in truth, attack the so-called rationalism of the Enlightenment because of its lack of historical depth, but because the Germans detected in the Enlightenment's attitude to History an element of resistance that they felt they'd only be able to overcome through the cult of the merely existent, the cult of historical facticity - until in the end, in the form of Positivism, Enlightenment and the established philosophies of history concurred in the veneration of the real. In Roscher<sup>14</sup> as well as in Savigny<sup>15</sup> you will find these two moments - the glorification of the historical and the hardening of knowledge in the purely factual -, already closely related. I'd be much surprised if in Jones, friend and successor of Malthus, it would be any different. If Marx once plays him off against Ricardo, then this is surely in part to be understood in the ironical sense that for the dialectician the reactionary in a certain way has a point against the advocate of progress, and if you are going to argue that Marx devoted 70 sides to Jones, then you should not leave it unsaid that that follows on from a book of at least 350 pages devoted to Ricardo. If you give a hoot about my judgement at all, then I ask you to omit the sentence in which you praise the special „courage“<sup>16</sup> of the English reverend and civil servant for no other reason that he wrote against the Jewish stock-market traders - only because his

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- 14 Wilhelm Georg Friedrich Roscher (1817-1894), political economist, 1843 Professor in Göttingen, 1848 in Leipzig.
- 15 Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779-1861), lawyer and Prussian statesman, founder of the „Historical School of Law“, 1800 Professor in Marburg, Germany, 1808 in Landshut, 1810-42 in Berlin.
- 16 l.c., Grossmann, p. 513; German p. 201.

own colleagues at the time fulminated against the scientific explanation of creation.

The decisive Hegelian moment in the critique of Political Economy is not that of dynamics or development. That is exactly what bourgeois historiography had wanted to make of it. Rather the Hegelian moment in Marx consists, when one gets down to it, in conceptualising this overwhelming power of the merely factual together with the possibility - by virtue of its own principle - of its own sublation. It seems to me that your polemic against what you hold to be the Hegelian Marx is based on an erroneous understanding of Hegel himself. At issue is not whether „the introduction of the evolution idea goes back to the influence of Hegel“<sup>17</sup>, - something I want to return to below. That's not the crux of the matter. It is rather, this, that one must think of it as the unfolding Idea, as contradiction. Hegel's objective Idealism, which after all conceptualizes the Idea as totality and not as the special sphere of consciousness, has as a consequence that in Hegel anything in the way of a contrast between theory and material history plays no role whatsoever. Your Hegel interpretation is itself already distorted by the pressure of Positivism, inasmuch as Spirit, in this reading of the Hegelian dialectic, is confined to the sphere of the cultural superstructure - you polemicise against Hegel as if he were Dilthey. The overemphasis on the Idea as totality in Hegel, which quite rightly was already subjected to criticism in Feuerbach, was on the other hand the motor for the dialectical understanding of reality. Material history doesn't relate to consciousness as a mass of facts which merely contains logical structure, trends, reason and unreason, contradiction, synthesis and so on, with reality being a sum total of facts into which every determination, the whole idea of order altogether is projected. Overcoming the absoluteness of this opposition - underlying all modern, but most especially English Philosophy - was the task that Hegel's enterprise had set itself, without which neither Marx's method nor a single one of his crucial categories is going to be comprehensible. It is this Hegelian moment that additionally brings with it that the critics of „Das Kapital“ take such offence not so much at some dogma-historical detail but rather at the style and the structure of his theory altogether. If M[arx] had recognized simply differences or finally „tensions“ in the distinction be-

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17 This German-language quote probably refers to an earlier letter by Grossmann which has not been preserved. This reading is supported by a further German-language quote - c.f. footnote 18.



tween use value and value, between fair exchange and the commodity work, between forces and forms of production, the plan of the factory and the plan of society and so on - rather than irreconcilable objective contradictions that enforce their sublation into a higher form (from which is derived the notion of a tendency), behaving altogether in a concept-like way -, then all this would not have been nearly so shocking. This whole approach - according to which antagonisms, negations, sublations are objective instead of simply metaphorical forms of speech projecting something figurative or spiritual onto the data of experience - is seen as deeply repugnant by the official theorists (for reasons that are quite fundamental) and they are quite sincere when they see in the materialist Marx and the idealist Hegel an animistic mystagogue supposedly projecting forms of thought onto the material the way primitive tribes project daemons onto Nature. As scientists these gentlemen may have the most admirable achievements to their name, but in philosophical matters they wear the well-known blinkers that the student already has to don if he wants a doctorate. They quite shamelessly accuse Metaphysics of anthropomorphism, but overlook the way the anthropos - the ostensible source of the logical order together with all of the conceptual differentiations - leads in all of this to the absolute of the hypostatised bourgeois subject. And that, just because it's hidden rather than honestly admitted, is supposed not to be a dogmatic principle! The hypostatisation consists precisely in this, that every query after context is in the end always related back to the scientific individual - as if it's this that's the ultimate starting point, that famous absolute beginning which Kant sets out to fight in his transcendental dialectic<sup>18</sup>. The superstition concerning this absolute beginning is still very much there even in what is supposedly this progressive idea of the axiomatic theory of the natural sciences. To the extent i.e. that this theory is not just a report on the intellectual procedure followed by some of the natural scientists, but is at the same time an attempt at the elimination, or rather the usurpation, of philosophical thinking altogether. It's a superstition contained above all in those couple of principles which traditional logic holds to be the highest, final, absolute, which themselves are exempt from being put into question. To be clear on this: this doesn't mean the scholars in question, as empirical scientists, can't make important contributions on the dependence of the individual from material, social, psychological conditions - but it does reveal itself in this,

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18 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, I, part 2.

that the meaning of their principles, in the end really all of their categories and most especially their so-called general convictions, is a slap in the face of their science.

As far as the idea of development is concerned, what follows from all this is that the unfolding of the Concept is not in the least, as you seem to think, the simple negation of objective events. The Concept in the sense of Hegel is indeed the „within“ of things, i.e. the way we come to understand them „in theory“. But the unalterable boundary between Mind and Nature, Existence and Concept, which even Spinoza - by turning them into an unmediated unity - was unable to overcome, is only an expression of the circumstance that the citizen, all effusiveness notwithstanding, holds Spirit no less than Nature in utter contempt, inasmuch as, in his heart of hearts, he sees in the latter no more than the senseless and indifferent material to be turned into profit, and in the former the means for its realization. It is in following through on this insight that what we call Concept and Being, far from being a flight of fancy, is rather reality itself, that Hegel gave to theory the seriousness that drew the most prominent of his contemporaries to become his pupils. The notion of development, no matter how illustrious the discoveries may have been that have been made in its name, remains, philosophically, no more than a mere metaphor, a harmless intellectual fiction, so long as the pre-Hegelian separation of Concept and Reality is maintained. It simply stays a concept in the subjective sense, a kind of factory plan of science by means of which facts that in themselves are disparate, are joined in some purposive way - *ad majorem negotii gloriam*. It's because of the way the doctrine of development becomes uncomfortable for the powers that be only in the guise of specific philosophic movements - more uncomfortable than many other scientific theories - that attacking its scientific aspect was mostly done by the more benighted of the clerics, while the cleverer ones knew very well that they had nothing to fear from the scientific findings for so long as these stayed tied to a philosophy that kept knowledge and reality dutifully apart. Among the cleverer ones must be counted Darwin himself, who as bourgeois thinker ignored all religious strife and felt himself vindicated by "excellent natural scientists and philosophers",

among them [Karl] Vogt and Büchner<sup>19</sup>, "and especially by Haeckel<sup>20</sup>" (see his introduction to the "Descent of Man"<sup>21</sup>). The fun stops however once, with Hegel, the Concept is transferred into the material itself and with that puts into question the right of Religion as well as other private opinions to pass off their private myths as objective. That's the point at which the objective historical process reveals itself in the interpenetration of necessity and freedom, in which the - on the face of it merely romantic - rupture of nature with itself, with regard to which these gents seem to console themselves readily enough, in the so very rational civilization, in the incurable contradiction of the social reality, in its most evolved form. In this the world of the Concept becomes that negative unity which maintains itself through perpetual destruction, turning into a totality that only in destruction becomes itself. However metaphysical this notion may sound in Hegel, it is this which, however much altered and refined, lives on in Marx - and indeed Fascism is outright Capitalism, existing in its negation. Though it's possible to assimilate and bring the categories of political Economy into line with those of the conventional sciences to the point where in the end it becomes a sort of absolute National Economy, that is a competition it can enter into only by giving up the ghost. It was the dialectic that overcame the narcissistic conception of a supernatural humanity together with a notion of knowledge that is agnostic, masochistic, and impotent. It was that, in its idealist and then especially in its materialist guise that brought to a close the type of Philosophy which treats Mind and Matter, concept and reality, essence and appearance, spirit and nature, thinking and events - in short all of the crucial categories - as invariants, placing them next to each other as antinomies, relating each to the other mechanically, externally. Though it is true enough that for German Marxists also it's been, right from the start, a lot more convenient to purify Marx of the Hegelian poison, inserting him into the line of respectable social scientists, than it was to spoil their appetite. But take my word for it: with the withdrawal of the poison the life of theory itself has had it.

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19 Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), physician and writer, most popular materialists of his time.

20 Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), physician and biologist, popular representative of metaphysical philosophical materialism, 1862 Professor in Jena.

21 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and selection in relation to Sex* transl. [into German] by J. Victor Carus, Stuttgart 1902, p. 3.

If the key to the process of objectivity is to be sought in the movement of the Concept, then in Hegel's work it is the Logic - much more than the Philosophy of Nature or of History - which in the first instance the economists would have to study. Hegel's determinations come increasingly to resemble the materialist dialectic, the more strictly these are confined to the realm of pure thought - and this because it is this purity itself that expresses the essence of the bourgeois world as system most perfectly, is the most revealing. It is no coincidence that the materialist thinker who took these questions more seriously than anyone else placed all those footnotes next to the Logic rather than next to the Philosophy of History.<sup>22</sup> It was he who wanted to make the study of Hegel's Logic obligatory and who, even if it lacked the finesse of the specialist, sought out the consequences of Positivism, in its Machian form, with the most determined single-mindedness.<sup>23</sup> It was still in this Lenin sense that Lukács was attacked for his inclination to apply the dialectic not to the whole of reality but confine it to the subjective side of things<sup>24</sup>, the way one could hear this argued in Heidelberg at the time. You however read Hegel's teachings, according to which development is that of the Concept, as if he disavowed the objective - and even worse the historically objective - side of things altogether! When in your attempt at justifying all this you simply take the vulgar meaning of the term „concept“ for granted, as if that's the obvious way to go, then that's a bit like reproaching Marx for denying the economic nature of the class relationship because after all exploitation means something moral or psychological or whatever - instead of inferring the meaning of the term from his own work. You write that you consider Marcuse's views on Hegel's teachings on history to be wrong, and that you could „find no evidence for such an opinion in Hegel“<sup>25</sup>. That would also explain why in a publication dealing with Hegel, amongst others, you quote none of Marcuse's books on him<sup>26</sup>, nor any other work that has emerged from our direction, but invoke instead the re-

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22 Lenin, „Gloss to Hegel 's 'Science of logic'“ (Title added by the editors, the Institute for Marxism-Leninism; first published by the literary estate, 1929), in: Lenin, *Werke* vol. 28, Berlin 1971, pp. 77 ff.

23 Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908; German transl. 1927).

24 See Georg Lukács, *History and class Consciousness*, Berlin 1923, S. 156ff.

25 See note 12.

26 Grossmann had indeed referred to Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, however only summarily and marginally, with the sentence: „Hegel, however, took the position that History at that time had reached its culmination, and that Idea and Reality had found their common ground.“ (l. c., S. 383, survivor 13; p. 169)

actionary parson Lasson<sup>27</sup>, under whose aegis the Russians were excluded from the Hegel congresses. He in turn you present to the American public „as a modern student of Hegel“<sup>28</sup>, though at German universities and beyond it's been common knowledge for decades that Herr Lasson's primary concern is to obscure in Hegel's thinking everything that is in the least bit progressive, reconciling him with the Church and all the rest in Germany that was reactionary. From him also you've adopted that paragraph 249 from the Philosophy of Nature, much-quoted by all reactionary Hegelians, which, in its peremptoriness, presupposing an understanding of everything that went before as well as an intimate knowledge of Hegel's language altogether, is so easily distortable in the sense indicated. In truth it means that those who want to reduce development positivistically to a succession of facts completely miss its radical nature, since development is emphatically not just one thing following on another, but rather touches that innermost essence of things through which they change into something else by staying what they were all along - the way for instance that economic periods don't just simply succeed one another - as the undialectical economists see it - but rather the way Capitalism stays identical, changes, is forced beyond itself and yet in Fascism still remains what it had once been, though really for the first time revealing its true self. That's the change „in itself“, the internal, conceptual change which Hegel time and again holds against that notion of development which confines itself to simply keeping apart different stages that follow one another chronologically, to then connect them to one another with the word „emerge“, by emphasising in stage A some aspect or other which is then supposed to be the cause of stage B.

You do make things just a bit too easy for yourself when on the one hand you characterise the „new dynamic approach“ - whose „spokesman“<sup>29</sup> Marx is supposed to be - with a Marx sentence which holds that since social phenomena contain no firm and eternal elements, their „Concept“, their essence, can only be grasped in their movement, while on the other hand you want to replace Hegel - whose teachings consist in an explication of just what is to be understood by this - by Jones, who in all likelihood would

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27 Georg Lasson (1862-1932), son of the philosopher Adolf Lasson, Lutheran pastor in Berlin, editor of Hegel's Complete Works (1905 ff.).

28 This formulation is missing from the print version.

29 Ibid., p. 517; German p. 206.

have condemned the polemic against definitions<sup>30</sup> that you dwell on as blasphemous. Surely one can't assume, on p. 26<sup>31</sup>, that the concept is something subjective, something merely in the mind, hence treating logic as something to be kept carefully separated from history, and then on p. 34<sup>32</sup> praise Marx for his method, according to which the essence of the Concept is to be found in the objective societal events themselves - where you, as an aside, this now as a result of your exclusively interpretative procedure, treat the opposition between merely transient attributes and essences as one that is to be nailed down in your view, just as rigidly, through definitions, as you do in the case of logic and the theory of history. When you say that Marx's „historicism“ is supposed to consist in carrying out a „Theory of social change“<sup>33</sup>, which I must say I regard as a sociological *Lapsus linguae* which, without you being aware of this, adapts him to Ogburn<sup>34</sup>, then you really should be aware that Hegel's logic does indeed represent ‘a theory of change’, involving both objective and subjective transformations, but the most profound one that the history of thought has come to know of until now. Hegel takes up the popular notion „that *Understanding, Reason, is in the objective world* that Mind and Nature have *universal laws* in accordance with which their life and their changes conform“<sup>35</sup>, and then seeks to depict the various aspects of these determinations abstractly, i.e. without recourse to the empirical material which in its turn differentiates according to the individual fields. Logic (not the corresponding Hegelian work, which is of course vastly richer, but rather the discipline that he refers to) relates to the fields of Philosophy of Law or of History the way a principle relates to its implementation, the way a theme relates to the concrete material that has been adduced for its realisation; the historical stages relate to the Idea the way facts relate to their core - very much analogous to the way the endlessly variegated empirical social process relates to those central moments, for the description of which, even in your own depiction of all this, Marx needed a special kind of theory. That at any rate is what things

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30 What is meant here is Marx's Hegelian rejection of definitions as inappropriate fixations of only partial or variable constellations; VG. Grossmann, *ibid.*

31 Grossmann. c., p. 515; German p. 203.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 517; German p. 206.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 518; German p. 207.

34 William F. Ogburn (1886-1959, sociologist, 1914 Professor in New York, 1927 in Chicago) who sought to provide an explanation of social change. (Theory of the ‘cultural lag’.).

35 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1934 Vol I, Introduction, p. 32.

look like for as long as one refrains from taking the specific dialectical relationships of the different fields into account. Hegel's Logic as well as the Phenomenology and the later works contain a plethora of theories of objective development in all areas of human and non-human nature, and even those which we ourselves would not want to avow seem to me in their originality and power entirely capable of taking on those evolutionists of yours. Not that I want to turn Hegel into a Marxist and already ascribe that famous turning-from-head-onto-feet<sup>36</sup> to Hegel. All I want to do is to save you from misapprehending - on the basis of Lasson and a few casual quotes - the difference to the extent that Hegel ends up in the materialist philosophy of history as one element next to Jones and Sismondi.

The conventionality of what you are saying in this text - this is the basis of my negative feelings about it - is entirely at odds, in my opinion, not only with your theoretical aims but also with what it is that we need to do if we are not simply going to revive theoretical cliches and slap them onto whatever historical discoveries that happen to present themselves. Being radical, I once read, if I remember rightly, in a writer wellknown to both of us, meant thinking things through from their roots<sup>37</sup>; I find however that when one looks at how those issues in your work that have a bearing on the concept of the historical dynamic are handled, then radical is really the last term that comes to mind, since all you do is simply repeat ideas common to those Progressives who see in Hegel a mystic<sup>38</sup> and in Nietzsche a romantic. And I'm convinced, at any rate, that for as long as this doesn't change, or in other words, for as long as Marxism doesn't separate itself explicitly, theoretically, from Positivism (and to do this practice and goals aren't sufficient, this separation affects the entire structure of the theory) that for as long as this goes on Marxism really will remain subservient to Positivism also in this sense, that it simply becomes a branch of an outdated form of academic life. A close reading of your text reveals that the enthusiastic demotion of the author of „Kapital“ to the rank of a ‘social scientist’ that you

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36 "The mystification which the dialectic suffers at the hands of Hegel didn't prevent him in the least from having been the first to have represented its general forms in a comprehensive and conscious way. With him however it is standing on its head. One has to turn it around to find the rational core in the mystical shell." (Marx, *Das Kapital* vol. 1, Afterword to the Second Edition, in: Marx / Engels, *Werke* vol. 23, Berlin 1968, p. 27)

37 Marx, „Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right“, in: (ibid), *Early Writings*, Stuttgart 1964, p. 216. (page ref. to German original.)

38 Marx himself does however use this term (in the sense of ‘mystificateur’): cf. Note 36.

are engaged in here has an apologetic side to it with regard to history that is only barely held in check by the content of the thesis. The concept of the objective tendency is perverted, the way you use it, into a method for putting the victors in the right and for misconstruing what is decisive here, namely that the Theory and the Practice is aimed not just against the most recent injustice, but against the injustice that is history altogether. On Sismondi, whose execrable theory of literature you gloss without bothering yourself for a single critical comment, you write: „Sweeping aside the classical evaluation of these earlier economics as ‘irrational’, he showed the historical justification for their existence“.[Engl. original - transl.]<sup>39</sup> But it is exactly in the confusion between theory and justification that Hegel’s central fault lies - and it is precisely in this respect that you are a Hegelian. Or do you happen to think for instance that the proof of objective necessity can’t be adduced just as plausibly for Fascism - sucking up like a maelstrom all of the different streams of late capitalism - as it can be for all previous phases, and perhaps even more so? Marx fought utopianism not because he believed in the objective tendency, but because utopia seemed to him palpably near as a result of this selfsame objective tendency.

[transl. Frederik van Gelder]

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39 Grossmann, op. cit., p. 396; German p. 188.