

What is the difference between Hegel and Marx?*

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Abstract: Here I have drawn some material from my recent “Hegel for Social Movements” to review the vexed question of the relation between Marx and Hegel. I base my observations on what Marx has written on various philosophical, methodological and political issues and not what he himself has said about his relation to Hegel, which are generally polemical and misleading. Nor shall I rely on what Engels has said in the course of popularising Marx’s ideas for 19th century socialists.

The main difference between Hegel & Marx is the times they lived in

The philosophical difference between Hegel and Marx is a topic which has been hotly disputed for over a century. The differences between the philosophical approaches of Hegel and Marx will be dealt with in detail later on, but the essential difference between Marx and Hegel is the times they lived in.

Given the economic, social and cultural peculiarities of Germany in Hegel’s day there was some basis for Hegel to believe that it would be through *philosophy* that Germany could modernise itself. Today, this stands clearly exposed as an ‘idealist’ position – to believe that an economic, social and cultural transformation could be achieved via a philosophical revolution, rather than the other way around. But this does not invalidate the choice Hegel made in his day. After Hegel’s death in 1831, his students did draw the revolutionary conclusions that were implicit in their teacher’s philosophy. Hegelianism spilt over the walls of the academy as his students popularised his teachings and translated them into the language of politics – or more correctly, translated politics into the language of Hegelian philosophy. In 1841, the Prussian government moved to “expunge the dragon’s seed of Hegelian pantheism” from the minds of Prussian youth. The newly-appointed Minister for Culture mobilized Friedrich Schelling (the last surviving representative of German Idealism, and now a conservative) to come to Berlin and do the job. His lecture in December 1841 was attended by Engels, Bakunin, Kierkegaard and notables from all over Europe but manifestly failed to quell the spread of radical ideas and revolutionary agitation which embraced Hegelian philosophy.

It is a remarkable fact that almost all the revolutionaries of the 19th and 20th century were either students of Hegel, Hegelians of the second or third philosophical generation or influenced by other figures of German Philosophy of the time – Kant, Fichte and Schelling, but above all Hegel – whether in the form of Marxism or other critical philosophical currents. So Hegel was not entirely mistaken in his belief in the political power of philosophy.

By the time that Marx resigned the editorship of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1843, France had been rocked by a series of working class revolts and Paris was seething with revolutionary ferment, the English working class had constructed the first working class political party in history (the National Charter Association) and were challenging bourgeois rule in Britain, and an advanced industrial working class was emerging in Germany. It was now obvious that change would come to Europe through the political struggle of the *industrial working class*. Capitalist development was disrupting all the old relations and it was going to be the industrial working class who would lead the transformation. Furthermore, the leaders of the labour movement were not just demanding inclusion in or reform of the state, or even aiming to replace government with one of their own, but to *smash* the state. This was something unimaginable in Hegel’s day.

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On reflection, it will be seen that all the political and philosophical differences between Marx and Hegel arise from the changes which took place in Europe in the interval between Hegel's last years and Marx's entry into radical political activity. This began with the first proletarian uprising in Paris in 1831, the year of Hegel's death, when Marx was 12 years old.

The differences between Marx and Hegel are of two kinds. Firstly, there is their political differences, and secondly their philosophical differences. Marx's political differences with Hegel are shown in his polemic against Hegel in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In assessing these comments it must be taken into account that Marx had not yet formulated his own distinctive political and philosophical view. Over the following 40 years, Marx's views became more distinctive.

Marx's theoretical differences with Hegel have to be divined from a study of his economic and social analysis and cannot be based on Marx's own declarations on his relation to Hegel, since these are polemical and in nature and cannot be relied upon. To bring out the philosophical differences between these two writers, I will outline the real differences between materialism and idealism, a problem far more multifaceted than usually imagined. Finally, I will look at Marx and Hegel in the context of a more extended philosophical and methodological genealogy which aims to make it possible to work out a position appropriate for our times which draws upon the strengths of both figures.

The Young Marx vs. Hegel on the State.

In the Spring of 1843, the young Karl Marx made critical notes on the section of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* on the State (although he references earlier sections in the course of his commentary), abandoning the work in disgust at §313, as Hegel sails off into speculations about the course of World History.

At this point in his life, Marx read Hegel as a Feuerbachian – that is, criticising Hegel for inverting the subject-predicate relationship, and much of his commentary is a rather tiresome ridicule of Hegel's idealistic forms of argument and expression. Marx regarded almost everything Hegel said as a rationalisation of the status quo. The criticisms he made which are worth taking particular note of are as follows.

Marx observes how in Hegel's scheme, the State reinforces already existing hierarchy and privilege in civil society and further that there is a 'civil society' within the civil service:

The *corporations*^{*} are the materialism of the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy is the *spiritualism* of the corporations. The corporation is the bureaucracy of civil society, and the bureaucracy is the corporation of the state. In actuality, the bureaucracy as civil society of the state is opposed to the state of civil society, the corporations. Where the bureaucracy is to become a new principle, where the universal interest of the state begins to become explicitly a singular and thereby a real interest, it struggles against the corporations as every consequence struggles against the existence of its premises. On the other hand once the real life of the state awakens and civil society frees itself from the corporations out of its inherent rational impulse, the bureaucracy seeks to restore them; for as soon as the state of civil society falls so too does the civil society of the state. (Marx, 1843, p. 45)

This passage is followed by an extended criticism of bureaucratism and hierarchy, upon which Hegel relies for the rationality of the State – the civil servant “is like a hammer *vis-à-vis* those below,

^{*} The “corporations” refer to the artisanal and commercial guilds of medieval society, which Hegel believed should be resurrected as part of the self-governance of civil society.

he is like an anvil in relation to those above" (Marx, p. 53). And the civil servant's "office is indeed his substantial situation and his bread and butter. Fine, except that Hegel sets direct education in thought and ethical conduct against the mechanism of bureaucratic knowledge and work! The man within the civil servant is supposed to secure the civil servant against himself" (p. 53). In other words, Marx thinks that Hegel's belief in the progressive role of the civil service is an idealistic delusion – all forms of bureaucracy and hierarchy lead to oppression.

Marx criticises the mediating role Hegel assigns to the Estates*:

The Estates preserve the state from the unorganised aggregate only through the disorganisation of this very aggregate.

At the same time, however, the mediation of the Estates is to prevent the isolation of the particular interests of persons, societies and corporations. This they achieve, first, by coming to an understanding with the interest of the state and, second, by being themselves the political isolation of these particular interests, this isolation as political act, in that through them these isolated interests achieve the rank of the universal.

Finally, the Estates are to mediate against the isolation of the power of the crown as an extreme (which otherwise might seem a mere arbitrary tyranny). This is correct in so far as the principle of the power of the crown (arbitrary will) is limited by means of the Estates, at least can operate only in fetters, and in so far as the Estates themselves become a partaker and accessory of the power of the crown. (p. 68)

Marx claims that this arrangement is aimed at *preventing* the people from forming an organised will, rather than at giving the people a means of *expressing* that will – participation in government transforms the political party from an instrument for the representation of the people into a means for control of the people by the state.

Marx rejects with contempt Hegel's 'deduction' of primogeniture and monarchy:

Hegel has accomplished the masterpiece: he has developed peerage by birthright, wealth by inheritance, etc. etc., this support of the throne and society, on top of the absolute Idea. (p. 74)

and further rejects Hegel's dismissal of a 'representative constitution', i.e., universal suffrage. In considering the complex mediations Hegel creates between the various civil powers, Marx comments in exasperation:

The sovereign, then, had to be the middle term in the legislature between the executive and the Estates; but, of course, the executive is the middle term between him and the Estates, and the Estates between him and civil society. How is he to mediate between what he himself needs as a mean lest his own existence become a one-sided extreme? Now the complete absurdity of these extremes, which interchangeably play now the part of the extreme and now the part of the mean, becomes apparent. They are like Janus with two-faced heads, which now show themselves from the front and now from the back, with a diverse character at either side. What was first intended to be the mean between two extremes now itself occurs as an extreme; and the other of the two extremes, which had just

* The "Estates" refer to the medieval institutions representing social classes in the political sphere. Hegel imagined the Estates to represent rural people and towns people via the landed aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie respectively. They were precursors of today's political parties. Note that the same German word, *Stände*, is used for both classes and estates. But *Klassen* are also classes, and it is clear from the context when *Stände* means Estates and not classes.

been mediated by it, now intervenes as an extreme (because of its *distinction* from the other extreme) between its extreme and its mean. This is a kind of mutual reconciliation society. It is as if a man stepped between two opponents, only to have one of them immediately step between the mediator and the other opponent. It is like the story of the man and wife who quarrelled and the doctor who wished to mediate between them, whereupon the wife soon had to step between the doctor and her husband, and then the husband between his wife and the doctor. (p. 87)

In the course of a long diatribe against Hegel's obsession with mediation, Marx says:

Actual extremes cannot be mediated with each other precisely because they are actual extremes. But neither are they in need of mediation, because they are opposed in essence. They have nothing in common with one another; they neither need nor complement one another. The one does not carry in its womb the yearning, the need, the anticipation of the other. (p. 88)

This of course cannot be squared with Marx's later views on the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but its political meaning is clear: the domination of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie does not need to be *mediated*, but *overthrown*, and the state is not in fact a mediator, but an instrument of oppression. This is probably the essential political difference between Marx and Hegel.

Hegel and Marx on universal suffrage

Hegel argues consistently for highly mediated forms of representation and against universal suffrage. Marx responds by pointing out that Hegel's valid criticism is avoiding the main question:

The question whether all as individuals should share in deliberating and deciding on political matters of general concern is a question that arises from the separation of the political state and civil society. (p. 118)

and

It is not a question of whether civil society should exercise legislative power through deputies or through all as individuals. Rather, it is a question of the extension and greatest possible universalisation of voting, of active as well as passive suffrage. This is the real point of dispute in the matter of political reform, in France as well as in England.

Marx does not proffer solutions to this problem, but makes an extended criticism of Hegel which brings out the contradictions entailed in Hegel's construction of representative politics. Elsewhere, Marx points out that in France, universal suffrage had been used against the urban working class by utilising the weight of the peasantry, whereas in Britain universal suffrage was the central demand of the emergent working class. Still, without meeting the problems raised by Marx, Hegel makes a powerful argument against universal suffrage.

As for popular suffrage, it may be further remarked that especially in large states it leads inevitably to electoral indifference, since the casting of a single vote is of no significance where there is a multitude of electors. Even if a voting qualification is highly valued and esteemed by those who are entitled to it, they still do not enter the polling booth. Thus the result of an institution of this kind is more likely to be the opposite of what was intended;

election actually falls into the power of a few, of a caucus, and so of the particular and contingent interest which is precisely what was to have been neutralised. (*PR* §311n.)

Marx did not have the answer to this problem in advance, but had to wait for the working class itself to show its way forward in the Paris Commune. And Marx was prepared to wait for the social process itself to point the way, rather than speculate.

According to Hegel, the deputies in the Legislature represent the various social and economic *branches* of society, and the electorate must not be seen as an agglomeration of atoms (*PR* §311). Deputies should represent the various real interest groups in society and give them equal weight. Universal suffrage on the contrary requires every individual to cast their vote privately, as an isolated atom. Hegel presages a preference in the workers' movement, noted by Marx, for delegates to the legislature to be selected from real workplace or local community organisations, such as Soviets.

Hegel believes that the public must be educated in national affairs, and he sees the assemblies of the Estates as the means of achieving this, while political discussion "at his fireside with his wife and his friends" can never go beyond "building castles in the sky." *Participation* in assemblies is essential for political education, and this can only be achieved in the bodies mediating between the real associations of civil society and the Legislature.

'Public opinion' is the name given to "individuals ... in their having and expressing their own private judgments, opinions, and recommendations on affairs of state" (*PR* §316). Public opinion is therefore "a repository of genuine needs and correct tendencies of common life" but "infected by all the accidents of opinion, by its ignorance and perversity, by its mistakes and falsity of judgment," and Hegel quotes Goethe:

"the masses are respectable hands at fighting, but miserable hands at judging."

In his preference for participatory democracy mediated by political parties and work-based organisations, Hegel is close to the positions of modern socialism. He is sharply at odds with socialism in imagining that the elite can "represent" the *hoi poloi* in their branch of the economy.

Marx & Hegel on the State.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is a flawed work, but nonetheless a project which was exemplary in its intent and method. Hegel's critical-logical reconstruction of the State was intended to function as an element of a reform program, directed against the reactionary absolute monarchy which ruled Prussia at the time, and one which, as a philosophical treatise, would have enduring significance. It is just such a critical-logical reconstruction which any social change activist should be interested in making today.

Much has changed since the book was written in 1821. In particular, the main axis of the class struggle is no longer that between the landed aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie (though the contradiction between rural and urban communities persists), but between a globalised working class and a bourgeoisie enjoying a formerly unimaginable concentration of wealth and international organisation.

Whereas Hegel could see the state as an arena mediating the struggle for dominance in civil society, most of us today, like Marx, take it that the dominant class in civil society (now the bourgeoisie) *wields* the state as an instrument for the suppression of both organised and spontaneous revolt against capitalist exploitation. The ground was already shifting when Hegel died in 1831, and it is now more than 135 years since the death of Marx, and the nature of the labour process and therefore of the working class has also changed enormously.

The fundamental idea of the book, as set out in the Preface, remains, to my mind, utterly convincing – we have to understand what in the existing state of political affairs is rational, i.e., historically necessary and therefore in that sense progressive, and understand what in the existing state is irrational and deserves to perish. Marx would heartily agree with this approach. Let us review some of Hegel's major political errors from a Marxist standpoint.

Hegel's misogyny

The highly misogynistic 'deduction' of the place of women in society is a pointer to the danger of taking any social phenomenon to be *natural* and of ignoring the *protests* of those who are suffering injustice. All social and historical phenomena are constructed by human activity and can be made otherwise than how they are. Hegel's misogyny is one of those instances where Hegel did not listen to his own advice. Everything is as it is for intelligible, social, cultural or political reasons. By the time Marx was writing his mature works, thanks to the struggle of the early feminists and anthropological research, it was well-established that gender differences were social constructs, and Marx understood what Hegel failed to learn from close female associates who were strong feminists and *must* have challenged him.

Hegel's failure to see the contradiction in exchange-value

Hegel was fully cognisant of the growing contradictions generated by the market, but whereas Marx was able to reveal the roots of these contradictions in the commodity form of value, Hegel stopped short of analysing the contradiction which his own analysis exposed.

Hegel had already derived the concept of 'value' in the section on Property, specifically under Use, so that value was taken naively as a measure of the usefulness of a commodity. Although he saw the value of a product as conditional upon the capacity to exchange it, he did not see that value is quantitatively determined in Exchange. Similarly in this section, Hegel says (*PR* §196) that it is labour which confers value on products of Nature and that "it is products of human effort which man consumes," so value is conditional upon the object being a product of labour. But he still sees the *measure* of value as determined solely by utility. Hegel recognised the system of Needs and Labour as a process of real abstraction and real measure, but he did not deploy what he developed in that part of his Logic to reveal the dynamics of bourgeois society. This Marx did.

The superficiality of Hegel's treatment of economic value was exposed by Marx. The contradictions of bourgeois society which generated ever increasing inequality of wealth were staring Hegel in the face, but all Hegel could do was describe and bemoan them. Marx showed how these pathologies were rooted in the concept of value.

It cost the Women's Liberation Movement the life-work of thousands of feminists in the mid-20th century to finally expose the social roots of women's oppression. The critique of political economy was Marx's life work and he wrote in the context of fully developed capitalism in Britain and a powerful movement of industrial workers across Europe. The critical resolution of problems like the oppression of women or the exploitation of wage labour are not tasks which can be done in an off-hand manner through the reflections of a single writer. Hegel's real accomplishment was his Logic, and it is this work which is truly enduring in a way his relatively superficial treatment of many of the problems which came up in *The Philosophy of Right* will never be.

Hegel is fully aware of the expanding and revolutionary effect of the market economy (essentially the bourgeois labour process) on the State and social life as a whole, but he accepted the creed of the Political Economists that in the market "self-seeking turns into a contribution to the

satisfaction of the needs of others” (*PR* §199). Participation in Civil Society develops the habit of work and fosters an infinite range of skills, and a growing understanding of ‘how the world works’. But the division of labour makes the labour of each individual less and less complex and makes people more and more dependent on one another.

the abstraction of one man’s production from another’s makes labour more and more mechanical, until finally man is able to step aside and install machines in his place. (*PR* §198)

Hegel explored a number of solutions to this growing social problem – philanthropy, a social minimum income guaranteed by the state, job creation schemes, and particularly emigration to the colonies, but he rejected out of hand the option of common ownership of the means of production (*PR* §46). Hegel failed to see that when the means of production are entirely social in character, the basic emancipatory role of private property cannot be extended – from ownership of one’s body, one’s home and personal effects and the tools of one’s trade – to social means of production used in common by thousands. Hegel proved that the air and water cannot be private property, but he failed to see that by the same logic, nor can the social means of production.

Universal suffrage and participatory democracy.

The demand for universal suffrage was one of those rights which had been sprouting in the soil of early modern society at least since the English Revolution of the 1640s, but which, like the demand for women’s emancipation and the demand for freedom from the exploitation of wage labour, Hegel set aside as “building castles in the sky.” But surely we now know that such demands are the harbingers of great social struggles to come. Hegel failed to see that utopian aspirations are not necessarily castles in the sky summoned up in fireside chats, but the product of real social and historical processes and may point to events yet to fully manifest themselves.

The ‘right to vote’ is understood nowadays as a right which extends to every *person*, like Abstract Right, but clearly it is part of the State, not Abstract Right or Civil Society. But unlike the kind of ‘rights’ for which Civil Society is responsible it is not an ‘individual right’ – dependent on a person’s circumstances and economic exigencies, but a ‘human right’. In the structure of the *Philosophy of Right*, this is a contradiction in terms. Notwithstanding all the criticisms which Hegel made of universal suffrage, criticisms which have been largely shared by Marxists, and if the opinion polls are to be believed, are nowadays shared by the majority of voters themselves, it is impossible to conceive of a truly democratic republic which does not include, as a marker of citizenship, a universal right to vote.

It matters not that universal suffrage is used, alongside private ownership of the means of communication and the means of production, to manipulate the mass of the population and perpetuate systems of exploitation. As Marx put it (1843) “it is a question of the extension and greatest possible universalisation of voting, of active as well as passive suffrage,” and in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848): “the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy.”

Hegel also presages Marx’s conception of the withering away of the state. Hegel showed us how the political role of the Crown *withers away* from the status of Chief Executive and Commander-in-chief, to being a jumped up clerical officer who signs documents and officiates at ceremonies, a living symbol with no executive function, as the state becomes more mature and stable and the cultural level of the masses increases. The same notion applies to all the institutions of State. Universal suffrage cannot be abolished (other than to usher in a despot), but must be *transcended*.

In what sense was Hegel an Idealist?

Almost any treatment of the Marx-Hegel relation hinges on a characterisation of materialism versus idealism. This can be deceptive, because the difference cannot be adequately defined along a single axis.

(a). Hegel described himself as an Idealist

Hegel was the final product of the philosophical movement known as “German Idealism,” which arose in Germany in response to Immanuel Kant’s Critical Philosophy. Kant had aimed to resolve the impasse between largely British Empiricism and largely French Rationalism. These philosophical currents were driven by problems which had arisen from the rapid development of natural science since Galileo, chiefly the sources and limits of human knowledge of Nature and the nature of reality. Kant had proposed that a thing existed “in itself” but human beings could have knowledge only of phenomena, i.e., appearances, while the nature of the thing-in-itself remained beyond experience and unknowable. Kant’s approach generated many troubling dualisms and contradictions, and the German Idealists attempted to resolve these contradictions by focusing on *forms of knowledge*, rather than by speculating on the nature of a reality outside of human practice, which was the preserve of the Materialists.

Hegel put it this way:

The proposition that the finite is ideal constitutes Idealism. The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in recognising that the finite has no veritable being. Every philosophy is essentially an idealism or at least has idealism for its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is actually carried out. ... A philosophy which ascribed veritable, ultimate, absolute being to finite existence as such, would not deserve the name of philosophy; the principles of ancient or modern philosophies, water, or matter, or atoms are *thoughts*, universals, ideal entities, not things as they immediately present themselves to us, ... in fact what is, is only *the one concrete whole* from which the moments are inseparable. (*Science of Logic*, §316, Hegel, 1812)

So the archetypal materialists were the ancient Greek Atomists – everything, including human life, was the result of interactions between atoms. Modern materialism, which arose *after* Hegel, has a broader concept of material reality which is inclusive of *social relations*, but earlier materialists tended to be blind to the social formation of knowledge and consciousness.

It was the Idealists, Hegel in particular, who discovered the *social character* of consciousness and knowledge, not the materialists. However, the idealists did not make forms of practice explicitly the subject matter of their systems; rather they took the “shadows” of real activity – logical categories, concepts, ideas, etc., as their subject matter, thus justifying their description as “Idealists.” A critical reading of Hegel will show however that *content* of these ideal forms is *forms of human activity*.

Not all forms of idealism are the same. In particular, Hegel distinguished between *subjective* idealists like Bishop Berkeley, and objective idealists, such as himself and Schelling. That is, for Hegel, thought forms were not chimera existing only in the imagination, but existed *objectively*, implicit in activity and material culture, independently of any single individual, and which individuals acquired in the course of their activity. Marx would surely agree.

(b). Hegel emphasised the active side rather than passive contemplation

The very first expression of Marxism – Thesis 1 of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* – is referring to Hegel in particular when it speaks of “idealism”:

The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the Object, actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in opposition to materialism, was developed by idealism – but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, differentiated from thought-objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. ... (Marx 1845)

Not only did the Idealists see perception as an *active* process, they also saw the interpretation of one's experience, how you conceived of and reacted to a situation, as itself an active process. The contrast with the materialist attitude to the social formation of human beings is set out in "Thesis 3":

The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. ... (*op. cit.*)

On the other hand, we see that Marx lambasted the philosophers (i.e., Hegel) for merely *interpreting* the world rather than seeking to change it, partly because "idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such," being concerned with concepts rather than activity – the shadows rather than the object itself. So Marx presents us with the contradiction that it is the *idealists* who based themselves on the struggle to change reality as the source of knowledge of reality, rather than passive contemplation of reality like the materialists. But like all professional philosophers, they merely "interpreted" the world, rather than acting to change it.

But but on balance, Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* is a *defence* of Hegel's idealism.

(c). Hegel took the social elite to be the agents of change

Having witnessed social change in Britain thanks to industrialisation, and in France thanks to the guillotine, Hegel looked forward to a less traumatic and chaotic revolution in Germany which would be led by the social elite – philosophy professors, enlightened monarchs and a meritocratic civil service, rather than the blind destruction wrought by mobs and factory owners. Although he supported the right of slaves and oppressed nations to throw off their oppressors, he wanted his native Germany to achieve modernity through the perfection of a state which would guarantee the freedoms of its citizens. He saw states as guarantors of freedom, not instruments of oppression (*true* states were not oppressive, only deformed or immature states or foreign occupiers) and was resolutely opposed to destructive, revolutionary methods of achieving social progress. He regarded the poor and working class as incapable of being agents of social progress other than through their gradual education – their misery was a *social problem* which could be solved only by the intervention of the enlightened elite.

When a work process is improved should we credit the supervisor who devises the improved method, or should credit the workers who carry out the improved technique? When a social problem is solved by the passing of a new law, do we credit the parliamentarians who passed the new law, or the social movement which demanded change? Do we get to a better world by (at least some) people forming an image of that better world and then going out and fighting for it, or does the better world arise out of contradictions inherent in the present state of affairs which drive people into actions irrespective of whether or not they can foresee the outcome? We call those people "idealists" who think that the social class whose business is plans and ideas are the agents of change, be they

agitators or Princes, rather than the masses who act out those ideas. We call those people “materialists” who see social change arising directly out of the conditions of life with ordinary people as its (generally) unconscious agents. Recall *Thesis 5* quoted above: if, as materialists, we see people as products of their social conditions then we reduce them to passive objects of change, leaving consciousness of change to the intelligentsia or the Party.

Hegel and the Idealists erred on the side of change-from-above, but exclusive focus on change-from-below is equally mistaken because it makes the people passive objects of structural forces beyond their control.

(d). Hegel believed that institutions tend to be true to their concept

Anyone will recognise that over the years automobiles have come to better accord with their concept than they used to, conveying passengers to their desired destination in comfort without breaking down. Likewise, washing machines have become more and more likely to wash your clothes and not wreck them since they were first invented in 1908. Hegel believed that this idea, which has been called “normative essentialism,” applies to social institutions as well as useful artefacts, and is crucial to his social philosophy.

Although states *originate* in violence, according to Hegel, the *concept* of the state is Freedom – freedom from crime, famine and outside attack, freedom for personal development and the enjoyment of culture. That is to say, a worthwhile concept, once it comes into being, will tend to realise itself in increasingly perfect forms and only falls into crisis when its concept no longer makes sense. In this sense, Hegel sees the logic of ideas and concepts as the driving force in history. Marx responded:

History does nothing, it “possesses *no* immense wealth,” it “wages *no* battles.” It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; “history” is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims. (Marx 1845a)

Marx here is expressing a materialist position, in which people are not to be seen as captive of ideals but real actors. But if Marx is not to be accused of voluntarism, we must take account of his aphorism:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Marx 1852)

That which is “transmitted from the past” – the institutions, symbols and beliefs, the norms built up by a people over centuries – unfold in a way ably described by Hegel with his dialectical idealist philosophy. But how people *make use of* those conditions is not always logical. People do not always do what they have to do, so to speak, so Marx’s insistence that the realisation of an idea is a matter of *struggle* is an important *corrective* to the idealist vision of history unfolding according to intelligible, rational principles. The fact remains however that Hegel’s idealism is a powerful principle of historical development and historically, it has always been the idealists who have emphasised human agency in social change.

(e). Hegel minimised the effect of mundane relations on institutions

As discussed above, in his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel is sometimes unbelievably naïve: he thinks that the civil service is a meritocracy which serves the public good, and never considers that civil servants look out for themselves like everyone else. It doesn't matter to him how judges are appointed or from what social class they are drawn, because it is their concept to apply the law to individual cases, not to further their own class interest or political agenda. That the constitutional monarch, as the traditional owner of the land, is an extremely wealthy person does not cause Hegel to suspect that their judgment might be prejudiced by their wealth.

Marx ridicules this idealism, commenting wryly: "The man within the civil servant is supposed to secure the civil servant against himself" (1843), noting that a 'civil society' necessarily operates *within* the civil service. Hegel seems to think that officials will act according to their job description, and Marx does not believe this. Everyone knows that the remuneration structure determines an employee's actions far more effectively than the organisation's mission statement.

In the USA people seem to accept that Supreme Court judges act according to their own political agenda, and that lower courts can be relied upon to discriminate against African Americans. However, in most developed countries, despite the fact that judges are invariably drawn from the most privileged section of society, the law is generally developing and applied in a rational fashion worthy of being written up in the law books, rather than being naked expressions of class prejudice. What is more, when decisions are made which *are* expressions of naked class prejudice, there is public outrage, appeals and political pressure, and even if it takes centuries, there is some merit in the aphorism: "The truth will out." In the long run, Hegel's idealism in this sense often turns out to have more merit than a cynical materialism would suggest.

For example, if you accept the climate science consensus, you must be an idealist, because an idealist thinks that Science, as an institution acting according to its concept, promotes true scientific knowledge. The cynical materialist, on the other hand, believes that scientists are motivated by the need to publish, get promoted, etc., and consequently are captives of corporate and bureaucratic interests, and the scientific consensus is not to be believed.

(f). Hegel overestimated speculative reason relative to social process itself

Hegel first published his *Encyclopædia of the Philosophical Sciences* in 1817. In this monumental work he aimed to prefigure (among other things), in outline, the entire development of natural science. But natural science did not progress by the writing of ever more perfect and comprehensive encyclopaedias. Rather, individuals and groups beavered away separately on narrowly defined problems, all the while lacking any sophisticated view of the whole, and gradually, over the decades, the separate strands more and more came into contact with one another, and over time, through a seemingly objective social process, viable overall, interdisciplinary scientific visions began to emerge.

Each strand of research has been influenced by the discoveries and theories and techniques and tools produced by the others. The scope and complexity and interconnectedness of human activity developed further and further, throwing up new insights, new techniques, new theories, new forms of experiment, new possibilities endlessly, way beyond the capacity of a single mind to plan or predict. Every insight, every discovery is the product of a human mind, but the process as a whole is a gigantic worldwide social process.

At each moment, the latest discovery to come out of the endless unfolding of human practice is intelligible in the light of what has gone before, what has already been discovered. But who can tell what the next discovery will be?

When Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* he left many questions unresolved. One of these was the question of whether the workers' movement could seize state power and how they would use that power. Marx did not attempt to work this out in advance. He had to wait until the

Paris Commune demonstrated what the workers movement would do. He then amended the Manifesto accordingly – adding to the 1872 Preface to the *Manifesto* the words: “One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.”

Likewise, in the writing of *Capital*, Marx took as his starting point the simplest social form in which value was manifested, the exchange of commodities. Living in England, at that time the most advanced capitalist country, it was possible to *observe* the entire unfolding of the value relation from practice of exchanging commodities. He could make the development of capital intelligible by means of his analysis of exchange, but he made only the most general and qualified predictions of where it was headed based on his clear view of where it was at the moment. But he could not predict the shape of the successive transformations of capital which would flow through the economy after his death, and Marx knew this.*

But compare Marx’s analysis with Hegel’s naïve analysis of value mentioned above.

As an Idealist, Hegel falsely believed that Logic would allow him to foresee what was as yet outside social experience. He was writing in 1817, before the microscope, Darwin’s discoveries, the Michelson-Morley experiment and the burgeoning of natural scientific investigation during the 19th century. It is obvious to us that the project of the *Encyclopaedia* was untenable, even granting that the *Encyclopaedia* in large measure is merely a systematisation of scientific knowledge as it was at his time, and not wholesale speculation. Only the social process itself as a whole can work out and reveal the real content of a concept. The real content of a concept is available to the theorist to the extent that they can observe and make intelligible what exists or is already at least in the process of development.

This is the difference between Idealism and Materialism in terms of method.

Turning Hegel on his head

Marx’s aphorism is valid:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again. (Marx 1873)

But without explanation, it is rather unhelpful for *understanding*, let alone *using* Marx’s dialectic. Consider this criticism which Marx aimed at Hegel:

The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can, a way different from the artistic, religious, practical and mental appropriation of this world. The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the head’s conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical. Hence, in the theoretical method, too, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition. (Marx 1858)

The “real subject” is social practice. A form of social practice cannot be observed and made intelligible by a theoretician until it *has come into being*. The progress of knowledge has the appearance of an accomplishment of thinking, but in fact it is the *real* progress of *social practice*,

* Marx did make a couple of qualified speculations in *Capital*, viz., that the concentration of capital in a few hands would ultimately lead to expropriation of capital, and that there was a tendency of the rate of profit as a proportion of investment to fall. Also, in his private correspondence, he was an inveterate optimist. But the essence of his scientific work is to avoid speculation.

subsequently '*reflected*' in the theories of successive philosophers. (Practical intervention into social practice rather than 'reflection' offers a wider scope for understanding a natural or social phenomenon, however.)

Now this is implicit in Hegel's advice in the Preface to *The Philosophy of Right* about the Owl of Minerva taking flight only at dusk, but Marx takes this advice *seriously*, whereas Hegel was all too inclined to believe that the *intellectual elite* of society (including himself) could use speculative logic to theorise in advance of the real development. Hegel's idealism is also reflected in the fact that Hegel always looked to the intellectual and social elite to *solve* social problems and regarded the masses as a more or less destructive force of Nature, whereas Marx on the other hand looked to the workers as the vehicle of social progress. This orientation to the 'earth' rather than the 'stars' is how I interpret "turning Hegel right side up again."

Concepts are forms of activity and Hegel's "Spirit" can be interpreted as *human activity*. The paragraph from Marx just quoted shows that this is the position which Marx took. There is much in Hegel's writing that makes it hard to believe that Hegel did not *also* see it this way, but whatever may have been in his head he always wrote as if it were the spiritual entities which were the primary component and human actions merely derivative realisations. Indeed, his whole style of writing can be described as 'idealistic'. However, ideas and activity are inseparable and any theory which bases itself on one and not the other is untenable.

The way I'd like to explain the relation between Marx and Hegel is to mediate the relation between them with Goethe's 'Romantic Science'.

Goethe, Hegel and Marx

During his Italian Journey (1787/1962) and in correspondence with his friend Johann Gottfried Herder, the great naturalist and poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, arrived at the concept of *Urphänomen* by observing the variation of plants at different altitudes and latitudes. Each plant, he believed, was a realization according to conditions, of an underlying form which he called the *Urpflanze*. This idea was inspired by Herder's *Schwerpunkt* – the 'strong point' of a people, their defining experience or industry, which (in Marx's words) "is a general illumination which bathes all other colours and modifies their particularity" (Marx 1858/1973, p. 107; c.f. Herder 2004/1774).

The *Urphänomen* was the simplest particular instance of a complex process or organism which exhibited the essential features of the whole. Thus in one simple, sensuously perceived instance, one could grasp the whole as a *Gestalt* and this *Urphänomen* would provide the starting point for a whole science. Both Hegel and Goethe died shortly before microscopes developed sufficient power to reveal the microstructure of plants and animals and the *cell* was discovered. Goethe could never have imagined what the microscope would reveal, but the *Urphänomen* anticipated the cell, which, alongside evolution by natural selection, laid the foundation of modern biology.

Hegel explicitly credited Goethe with this discovery as the inspiration for his own method which begins from the One, the simplest concrete something, the "germ cell," which provides a science with its starting point, given to it from outside the science itself. As is well known, the Logic begins from Being, but this turns out to be Nothing, and therefore Becoming, but Something (*Dasein*) has to become and when grasped in its immediacy this is the One, the unit. This concept is the real starting point of the unfolding process. For Hegel, this 'Ur-concept' cannot be the product of intellectual intuition as it was for Goethe's "delicate empiricism," but on the contrary was a product of critical thought. Hegel built his entire system out of this idea of the logical unfolding of a concrete science from a simple abstract 'Urconcept' (this is my term, not Hegel's). Hegel outlined this method in the section entitled "Cognition" in the *Science of Logic*.

For Marx, the starting point was not a concept, but an elementary form of social practice, an *Urpraxis* (again, that's my term, not Marx's). Let us trace Marx's philosophical journey leading up to his critical appropriation of Hegel's Logic exhibited in *Capital*.

Activity and Concepts.

In the very first words which belong to his mature views, Marx (1845/1976) criticises philosophical materialism for accepting the standpoint of natural science: that of an observer contemplating an independently existing object. Objects exist, distinct from thought; however, it is only thanks to 'practical-critical' activity that the object is perceived and reconstructed in thought. Marx explicitly substituted systems of *social practice*, social formations, for Hegel's *Gestalten des Bewußtseins* (formations of consciousness), real activities rather than their shadows. Concepts were to be understood in the first place as specific forms of activity, not simply as the product of theoreticians. Theoreticians can only study what is to be found in practical activity, implicitly or potentially, if not explicitly. So even though Hegel may have lost sight of this, and mistakenly taking social progress to be the work of theoreticians, his *Logic* retains its validity, provided only that concepts are interpreted as forms of practical activity, and only derivatively as subjective thought-forms or figures of categorical logic.

The Method of Political Economy

In the *Grundrisse* (1858/1973), Marx explained how the structure of *Capital* is related to the *Logic* in the passage known as "The Method of Political Economy." He outlines how the history of any science is made up of two phases as follows:

It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, ... However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed... Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations.

and then:

From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. ...

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. (p. 100)

This passage describes the structure of Hegel's *Logic*. The starting point of a science is the mass of measurements abstracted from the flow of economic reporting. This phase is represented in Hegel's Doctrine of Being, a phase of observation and measurement which precedes scientific reflection as such. The journey begins when these measurements are worked over, reflected on and

worked up into patterns and laws and a theoretical description of the data. This first phase of the development of a science (Marx, “the path historically followed by economics at the time of its origins,” p. 100) is complete when it arrives at the ‘simplest determination’, the singular entity which exhibits the essential relations of the whole process. This first phase is accomplished in the history of the science by means of *immanent critique* of the concepts abstracted from Being, and is represented by Hegel in the Doctrine of Essence.

The second phase is reconstructing the whole, now not as a chaotic conception, but as a systematic whole, a whole which exhibits in developed form the essential features with which we are familiar in the unit from which we began the reconstruction. This second phase – *systematic dialectic* (“obviously the scientifically correct method.” p. 101) is represented by Hegel in the Doctrine of the Concept. For Marx, this *Urphänomen* would be not a phenomenon or a concept, but an interaction observable in social practice, a familiar social act which we can viscerally understand, an *Urpraxis*. In the case of political economy, this would be the act of exchanging commodities. In each stage of the reconstruction, the concepts logically derived from the *Urpraxis* are validated by their objective existence in social practice. The resulting concrete reconstruction differs from the data with which the analysis began because it is a *systematic whole* rather than a mere succession of abstract qualities.

Marx realised this plan of work, his own part in the history of political economy, through many years of immanent critique of the rival theories of political economy, followed by a systematic reconstruction of bourgeois society in *Capital*.

The Commodity

Marx demonstrates that by beginning *Capital* with the analysis of the commodity he continues the legacy of Goethe and Hegel. In the first Preface to *Capital*, where Marx is talking about the problem of value in political economy, he says:

In the analysis of economic forms, moreover, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both. But in bourgeois society, the commodity form of the product of labour – or value-form of the commodity – is the economic cell-form. (1867/1996, p. 8)

Marx’s use of the metaphor of “cell” cannot fail to remind us of Goethe’s *Urphänomen*, which the science of biology realised in the cell. The first chapter is devoted to an exposition of the commodity relation. Marx derives the concepts of value in the first three chapters of *Capital*, unfolding from the exchange of commodities, the concepts of Quality, Quantity and Measure, paralleling the first book of Hegel’s *Logic*. By beginning with the commodity – the concrete simple something which is the unit of economic activity – and then unfolding from this concept a concrete conception of value in bourgeois society, Marx followed the structure which Hegel used in *all* of the books of the *Encyclopaedia*.

According to Hegel, this One from which the science is to be unfolded must be a *concrete* concept, by which Hegel meant that it must be the unity of two distinct determinations. Marx took the commodity relation to be the unity of two independent lines of action represented by two forms of value: the use-value of the commodity entailed in the consumption of the object (its social quality), and the exchange-value of the commodity entailed in the production of the object and realised in the market (its social quantity). The partial homology between the categories of Hegel’s Ontology and the early chapters of *Capital* reflects the fact that money has been doing the work of reducing all the products of human labour to a single measure, carrying out the work of logic, but as a *real process*, rather than as an intellectual exercise. Given the social nature of Hegel’s categorical

logic, it is to be expected that the categories of the logic should have a real existence in corresponding social processes. However, I do not accept the suggestion by Chris Arthur (2015), that this homology is a result of Hegel's study of the British political economists. It was the Soviet philosopher Ilyenkov who highlighted this process of *objective abstraction* in his works on *Capital* (1982/1960) and the ideal (1977), which is the basis for this homology. Hegel's own critique of political economy turned out to be rather fatuous.

Unit and Germ Cell

It might strike us as odd to begin from commodity exchange. Although, as Marx says in the opening words of *Capital*: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'," exchange of commodities is a rare occurrence in modern bourgeois society; generally, we *buy* and *sell* commodities.

The third section of Chapter 1, shows the historical genesis of exchange from its earliest appearance in exchanges between tribal peoples, leading up to the use of gold as a universal equivalent and later the issuing of paper money by states. In this way, he showed that money is *essentially* a commodity and that wage-labour is a commodity bought and sold on the labour market and used by capitalists purchasers.

This exhibits one of the aspects of the *Urpraxis* to which I drew attention above. The *Urpraxis* arises from problems at a lower level of development (trade in pre-modern societies). But with the formation of the self-reproducing *Gestalt* (a bourgeois economic formation) it generates, the *Urpraxis* itself goes through a series of transformations (ultimately the various forms of capital).

The Urpraxis is the "simplest social form"

In his *Notes on Adolph Wagner* (1989/1881, p. 544) Marx says:

I do not proceed from the 'concept of value' ... What I proceed from is the simplest social form in the which the labour product presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the '*commodity*'.

This is the same as when Hegel takes *private property* as the *simplest social form* of Freedom and makes it the starting point of *The Philosophy of Right*. Just as private property leads to the State, commodity exchange leads to capital, but in both cases the book does not begin with a concept of its subject matter, but of its underlying substance.

The commodity is a *form* of value, but 'value' is an intangible, neither 'a geometrical, a chemical, or any other natural property' (1867/1996, p. 47) – it is a suprasensible quality of a commodity. Value is in fact an artefact-mediated *social relation* which can therefore only be grasped *conceptually*. Nonetheless, the commodity is a form of value which, thanks to everyday experience, *can be grasped viscerally*. This means that the critique of the concept of commodity works upon relations which can be grasped viscerally by reader and writer alike. By beginning with the (concept of) commodity Marx mobilizes the readers' visceral understanding of commodities, and as he leads us to each successive relation. So long as that relation exists in social practice, then not only is the writer's intuition validated by the *existence* of that relation, but it also allows the reader to securely grasp and verify the logical exposition.

Marx's decision to begin not with 'value' but with the 'commodity' illustrates Marx's debt to Goethe's 'delicate empiricism', and is crucial for his praxis implementation of Hegel's *Logic*.

I am not aware of any evidence that Marx even knew about Goethe's *Urphänomen*, far less set about appropriating it. If any philosopher is the proximate source of Marx's philosophical turn to praxis, then it would be the follower of Gottlob Fichte, Moses Hess (1843/1964), with whom Marx was

working at the time he wrote *Theses on Feuerbach*. Also, much of what Marx had to say about Hegel is far from complimentary. The triadic relationship between these three holistic thinkers, Goethe, Hegel and Marx, is real notwithstanding that Marx never set out to make any kind of triad. In the 19th century, all Germans, Hegel and Marx included, were raised in the long shadow of Goethe, whose impact on German culture cannot be overstated. However, Goethe's natural scientific ideas were probably the least-known of his ideas, and were widely discredited by mid-century. But the impact of Goethe (who Marx listed alongside Dante and Shakespeare as his favourite poet) is undeniable.

Both Goethe and Hegel were one-sided in their method; the further development of science and culture, made it possible for Marx to transcend both Goethe's Empiricism and Hegel's Idealism.

Further, by making the *Urphänomen* of his science a *real* act of social practice, not an *imagined* social practice, but one whose norms had already been produced by the development of bourgeois society and could be the subject of observation and intervention, Marx turned Hegel's version of the *Urphänomen* inside out, recovering an important element of Goethe's *Urphänomen*.

'Everything' vs. a Gestalt

In Marx's view, bourgeois society was essentially a market place. But Marx did not believe he could explain *everything* about the modern world on the basis of the commodity relation. The state and family life were not (yet) market places.

Marx was drawn into political activity by his outrage at press censorship, inequality, aristocratic privilege and the slow progress of liberal reform in Germany, but he came to see that it was not the nobility or the state which was at the root of these social problems, but the *market*. By taking an exchange of commodities as the *unit of analysis* (Vygotsky 1987/1934), he had chosen a unit which already contained what he saw as essential to bourgeois society. Thus the complex whole which Marx reconstructed was to be taken as just thousands and thousands of commodity exchanges – bourgeois society. *Capital* provided a concrete analysis of how the production of commodities leads to the exploitation of wage labour on one side and the accumulation of surplus value on the other – but he did not pretend to provide an analysis of the state and world history.

Hegel, by contrast, took private property (rather than *exchange* of commodities) as the germ cell of Freedom, and claimed to unfold from private property the *entirety* of the state and world history. Marx's aims were rightly more modest.

Commodity and Capital

But *Capital* is a book about capital, not simple commodity production. In Part I of the book, the first three chapters, Marx analyses the circulation of commodities and money, but from this analysis he demonstrates the emergence of a *new* relation, that of capital, a new type of commodity. C–M–C (selling a commodity in order to buy another commodity) engenders M–C–M' (buying a commodity in order to sell it at a profit). Thus Marx derives a *new* 'molar'¹ unit of analysis, a second *Urpraxis* – the capitalist company or unit of capital, marking the emergence of the modern forms of capital. Beginning from Chapter 4, Marx unfolds from this second *Urpraxis* a dialectical exposition of the movement of capital, which takes up the remainder of the 3-volume work.

This theme in holistic science, where there is both a micro unit or *Urphänomen* (cell, quality, commodity, ...) and a molar unit (organism, concept, capital, ...) was first identified by the Soviet activity theorist, A. N. Leontyev (1981/2009). It is actually the molar unit which is the subject matter of the study, the key to understanding of which lies in the micro unit. In Hegel's *Logic*, the first volume (Objective Logic) begins with the One, and the Second Volume (Subjective Logic) begins

¹ 'Molar unit' comes from chemistry where it means that quantity of a substance which contains as many molecules as 12 gm of carbon-12, i.e., 6×10^{23} molecules.

with the Concept. What homology is there between the Subjective Logic and the succeeding chapters of *Capital*? Very little. The very general homology which can be found arises from homology between the subject matters (accumulation, competition). It can be argued that the formation of a uniform rate of profit across an economy, despite an organic composition of capital which varies from firm to firm, has a very general homology with the formation of the Idea from abstract concepts in Hegel's Concept Logic. But in any case, the homology arises from parallels in the subject matter itself, based on money as a real abstraction of human labour, not from Marx emulating Hegel. The structure of *Capital* is not a mirror of any work of Hegel's. The concepts of political economy unfold according to their own logic, and it would be a mistake to try and match *Capital* concept-for-concept with any of Hegel's books.

In summary, there are two phases in the formation of a science (the two volumes of Hegel's *Logic*, the two processes outlined in Marx's "Method of Political Economy"). Firstly, a protracted period leading up to the point when a theorist has the abstract starting point (*Urphänomen*) for the science properly so called, and then the concretisation of that abstract concept in the development of the science. Equally there are two phases in the *formation* of a social formation like capitalism: first the protracted period of history leading up to the point when its germ cell emerges, followed by the concretisation and universalization of that concept, entailing the transformation of all other relations in the social formation, and their subsumption under that one universal relation.

Hegel did not discover the *Urphänomen* – he appropriated it from the poet-naturalist John Wolfgang von Goethe and turned it inside out. It provided the abstract beginning of his philosophy, and each of the sciences he worked out began with a concrete simple something appropriated from the preceding science. This was the same idea which the communist Marx appropriated from the idealist philosopher, Hegel, and made the starting point for his critique of capital.

Summary

For Marx as for Hegel, a concept is a (normative) form of social practice, but whereas Hegel suffered from the illusion that a theorist could unfold from a conceptual ideal everything that was implicit within it, Marx consistently held to the view that the logical development had to follow the development of social practice at every stage, making intelligible what was revealed in social practice. Like Hegel, Marx took the simple something which formed the starting point for elaborate social formations to be a discrete *artefact-mediated action*, rather than an abstract universal like 'value' or 'Being'.

Note that Marx took the same approach in his study of the workers' movement in their struggle for state power, amending the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in the light of the actions of the workers' movement in the Paris Commune. He never built any socialist castles in the air. But writing in the middle third of the 19th century, Marx had material to work with, material which was not available to Hegel in the first third of the 19th century.

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