

Review of Tony Smith's,
Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism

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1. Setting aside Marx's own view

Tony Smith's (2014) contribution to *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*, which he edited with Fred Moseley, is entitled "Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism." Here Smith makes it very clear that he is aware that Marx took himself to be basing the structure of *Capital* on Hegel's *Logic*, and in particular taking capital to be a "Subject" in the sense of this concept in the *Logic*. But Smith tells us that we should "put aside" (p. 25) Marx's own view of what he was doing because the "the concept of capital does not fit what Hegel referred to as the Logic of the Concept" (p. 29). This claim, however, rests on Smith's own misunderstanding of the relevant concepts of the *Logic*.

None of the concepts of the *Logic* can be understood without, as Marx had done, first accepting the intention of the *Logic*, and understanding the overall structure of the *Logic* by means of which Hegel fulfills his central intent.

In the opening section of his contribution, Smith does much to draw attention to the mistake of interpreting Hegel as some kind of Deist with the Absolute Idea playing the role of God. However, remnants of this mistaken approach remain in his own "methodological" interpretation of Hegel's *Logic*.

The structure of the Logic

Hegel's *Logic* is a logic of enquiry. A logic is not a model. A logic is not a post facto representation of a completed, complex object, but a representation of its forms of development and self-change, its own *internal logic* as reflected in the mind.

all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, *what is there before us*. (Hegel, 1816, p.68)

Having made a beginning, a logic must "lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought" (Marx 1858). There is absolutely nothing idealist

about this “reproduction of the concrete by way of thought.” For himself, Marx did not *end* with this characterisation of his own project, saying that “[t]he 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” though “in the theoretical method, too, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition” (*op. cit.*). Marx was a revolutionary; his method was agitation and intervention in popular struggles, not merely “speculative.” But the “theoretical method” offered by Hegel, was “the presupposition.” As Marx wrote in “Thesis 11,” – the *point* is to change it!

How does Hegel propose that such a “theoretical method” should “reproduce the concrete”? He does not, as is frequently supposed, “derive” the world as it is from a presuppositionless concept like Being. Certainly not in the *Logic*, which, important as it is, has a much narrower scope. The *Logic* is merely a logic of enquiry, which Hegel recommends the philosopher apply to the myriad of sciences which together make up human knowledge. This he demonstrated in outline in the *Encyclopaedia*. But note that none of the sciences outlined in the *Encyclopaedia* have the same structure as the *Logic*. Logic is just one science, and a science which is quite different from any of the sciences of “nature or spirit” because it is abstracted from “externality,” *i.e.*, all empirical and practical content.

So, how then does Hegel suggest that a philosopher should proceed in forming a reproduction of the concrete in thought? Firstly, Hegel takes “the concrete in thought” to be made up of “units” *each* of which is *one* science (or one concept).

Then he suggests that we proceed one science at a time. Any one science he sees as one, initially abstract, concept which concretises itself and successively merges with each of the other concepts – “abstract determinations leading towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought” (Marx, 1858). The Concept Logic represents the trajectory of *just one* of these concepts. The initial, abstract concept which is definitive of that *one* science (or form of practice) is what Hegel calls the “Subject” in the *Logic*.

The first two books of the *Logic*, Being and Essence, are the logic of the *genesis* of that Subject (a science, or some form of practice), and the third book of the *Logic* is the *development* of the science itself once it is founded. The development of the Subject takes place both “internally” and “externally.” The internal development of the Subject is described as the three-fold interaction of Universal, Particular and Individual moments of the concept, in which an initially abstract conception takes on innumerable different nuances, applications, specialised principles, etc. This internal development of the Subject takes place simultaneously with the *external* development (and this is key), namely the formation of successively deeper relations with *all the other practices*, called the “Object.” The third and final part of the development, the Idea, is how the Subject, now merged with the Object (all the other concepts or forms of practice), changing and changed by each other, develop together. It is important to see that these various phases (including those in Being and Essence) do not unfold in *temporal* succession, one after the other, though they do develop thanks to what Fred Moseley has called “successive determination.” The seeming movement happens like waves endlessly washing over one another, or like individual people whose lives are both products of the world they live in

and changing the world. *Not* like a train travelling down a track, one station after another, to its final destination, as in Formal Logic.

So “Subject” does not at all mean some God-like agent building the world. It is just *one* science (or one social movement, or one new technique, or one business, or ...), but one alongside, before and after innumerable *other* subjects ... such as *capital*.

Once you understand this structure of Hegel’s *Logic* then it is possible to make well-founded judgments about what this or that concept in the Logic “is like,” “reminds you of”, or is “isomorphic or homologous with” etc. But it is best of all to just take the *Logic* at its word, as the logic of one form of practice.

Nothing in the above synopsis is an “interpretation” of Hegel’s *Logic*. Admittedly, I have “popularised” the Logic in my explanation, and I have avoided, so far as possible, Hegel’s obscure, Idealistic language and avoided any theistic connotations. But Hegel called it a “logic” and he meant it and it should be read as such. There is no basis for taking the Logic as a “model,” and then re-interpreting the substance of the model as something other than what it is.

Many Hegel scholars, including Walter Kaufman, Charles Taylor, Robert Pippin and even Robert Brandom agree that the real subject matter of Hegel *Logic* is human activity. Marxists are not alone in this belief. However, none have been able to go beyond this generalisation as I claim to have done. Humans may be irrational beings, but everything they do passes through their minds. Thought exists only as abstracted from human activity.

2. Mixing up Absolute Idea, Thought, Spirit and Subject

I will now briefly review how Smith misunderstands some key concepts of Hegel’s *Logic*.

The Subject

In [Marx’s] view the structure of capital is precisely isomorphic with the structure of Hegel’s Absolute. (p. 23)

This is not Marx’s claim in two respects. Firstly, the Hegelian concept at issue is the Subject, not the Absolute. “Absolute” is ambiguous: which Absolute? Hegel applies “Absolute” to any concept which in the context, is perfect, complete or self-sufficient. Most famously, “Absolute Knowledge” is the final category of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, meaning the condition of human life in which we are concretely aware that we are nothing other than the entirety of our historical journey to get here now. So when Smith says: “Marx’s claim, in brief, is that capital must be comprehended as an absolute ‘Subject’ in the Hegelian sense of the term” (p. 24) this is false. Marx aimed to analyse capital as it was, not some far future, all-embracing ‘Absolute capital’. On the contrary, Marx was concerned with capital as abstracted from the various practices summed up in Hegel’s concept of the Object.

Secondly, the claim is not *isomorphism*, capital having the same form or shape, so to speak, as the Concept Logic. Such structural similarity is the most superficial recognition of the relation between the two books. It is the *logic* of each which Marx was interested in.

To make sense of the *Logic* in respect to one particular concept, in this case *capital*, it is important to understand “concepts” as forms of human practice (activity), just as Marx suggested in “Theses on Feuerbach,”

1. The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that the Object [*der Gegenstand*], actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object [*Objekts*], 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. (Marx, 1845)

And in Hegel’s words:

“Philosophy has to do with ideas or realised thoughts, and hence not with what we have been accustomed to call mere conceptions [*abstrakte Verstandesbestimmungen*].” (Hegel, 1821 §1n)

So in this *very general* sense, “capital” has the same structure as *any* concept, insofar as that concept is grasped scientifically. The Concept Logic is, actually, a logic of concepts. *Any* science could be studied in this way, as a particular realisation of the Concept Logic. What is special about capital is, among other things, that capital is a form of human activity that acts on people *as if* it were an alien force of Nature, seemingly independent of the intentions, consciousness or even actions of any individual. All sciences, social movements or whatever have this character more or less, but this is particularly true in relation to capital. Smith expresses this idea when he says: “capital is a universal *distinct* from its moments, while being simultaneously *continuous* and *identical* with these moments” (p. 23). Individual companies, particular industries and regulations come and go, but through every bankruptcy and every take-over, every disaster and every discovery, capital continues unabated according to its own logic.

Imagine if, instead of writing a book about capital, Marx had written a book about Science. In Volume I, he would have written about “Science in general,” elaborating the distinctive general principles of Science, abstracted from the practices of all the sciences, and in Volume II, dealt with the various practices such as publishing, technology, education, and so forth which are necessary to the accumulation of scientific knowledge without being sciences as such, and then in Volume III he would have elaborated the relations between the particular sciences, physics, chemistry, biology, etc. to each other and Science in general. The subject matter is obviously the practice of science, but Science being what it is, this practice is amply reified in various principles, accomplishments, new concepts and discoveries. As I said, any such *fundamental* concept, be it capital, science, religion, evolution, war, or whatever, can be subject to the same kind of treatment.

The error of seeing in this approach some kind of rampant Idealism originates to some extent from Hegel’s idealistic presentation, but generally it arises as much from the *readers’* own idealism in presuming that “concept” refers to some “abstract determination of the understanding,” some mental entity. This idealism is then imputed to Hegel. But the real subject of Hegel’s *Logic* was always human practice, except that Hegel chose to present only the ideal side of

human activity (the “shadows” as Marx put it), even though he never doubted that:

Consciousness is spirit as a concrete knowing, a knowing too, in which externality is involved; but the development of this object, like the development of all natural and spiritual life, rests solely on the nature of the pure essentialities which constitute the content of logic. (Hegel 1816, Preface)

Capital is a book about capital; it is not a history book. It seeks to elaborate a *science* of capital, and this remains the case despite all of Marx’s remarks about the “craziness” of life under capitalism, the alienation and “upsidedownness” of the ideology of capital. Being true to Hegel’s conception of the sciences, the science of capital begins with the concept of capital in general, what Hegel calls the Universal moment of the Subject. The logic of the *genesis* of the Subject is treated in the first two books of the *Logic*, Being and Essence. The genesis of capital out of pre-capitalist or early capitalist formations and their theoretical expressions are not part of the science of capital, and are not included in *Capital*, but are treated by Marx elsewhere.

Thought and Geist

Smith chose not to take “thought” in the sense quoted above – as realised thoughts, i.e., practices – rather than “abstract determinations of the understanding.” So Smith argued against “the *Logic* as the unfolding of a reified and all-powerful Absolute Thought” and suggested that “‘absolute thought’ refers instead to *anyone’s* thinking in so far as it ‘cognises the immanent soul of [the]material ...’” (p. 25, citing Marx) and alluding to “Hegel’s inexcusably idiosyncratic way of discussing my thinking, the thinking of any ‘I’ and the thoughts that are products of this activity.” Smith had already noted that the younger Marx, as a part of his struggle against the Young Hegelians, was inclined to such condemnations of Hegel and never recanted these views. However, having made this point, he continues to cite Marx in order to impute frankly absurd beliefs to Hegel.

But what is distinctive about Hegel’s philosophy is that he was a *monist*. He did not set out from a dichotomy between matter and mind. This fact should alert any attentive reader of the *Logic* to the ascription to Hegel of ideas closer to the beliefs of Bishop Berkeley. Anyone who objects to or ignores this monism will have to be content with Kant, because dualism can take you no further. When Hegel writes about “thought” he is *not* talking about subjective thought-forms. Likewise, *Geist*, as in the *Zeitgeist* or “spirit of the times,” does *not* mean some supernatural entity ruling over human life, but rather the totality of human activity *itself*, the institutions, practices, technology and customs which condition what can and can’t be done. *Geist* is, of course, grasped through concepts (German *Begriffe*, from *begreifen*, to grasp). How else? Marx largely resolved the problem of taking up Hegel’s monism without the idealistic baggage in *Theses on Feuerbach* in which: “All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice” (Marx, 1845).

This is not to deny that there remain important methodological (not to say political) differences between Marx and Hegel on the question of the relation

between consciousness and behaviour. But as I argued in my chapter, “What is the Difference Between Hegel and Marx?” (Blunden 2021), six different dimensions can be identified along which the materialist/idealist difference can be rendered, and Marx counts as an Idealist along at least two of those six dimensions. It is by no means cut and dry.

3. The Mixing up of Universal, Subject and Being

On p. 38, Smith gives a one-paragraph summary of the structure of *Capital* with which I find little to disagree with, except that Individual (or Singular) moment, which he takes to be bank-capital. This Marx did *consider* at one point in the *Grundrisse*, but did not appear in *Capital*. And rightly so, I would argue.

Despite the obvious resemblance to the Concept Logic, Smith goes on to say:

At the beginning of a Hegelian systematic ordering the ‘universality’ we find is an empty determination, abstract universality.* At the conclusion of the theory we attain a comprehension of concrete universality, that is, a universal whose determinations are fully developed and explicit.* Marx’s notion of ‘capital in general’ is not homologous with either of these notions of universality. ‘Capital in general’ is not an empty abstraction. Nor is it transcended as Marx’s theory advances the way an immediate (simple) form of abstract universality is transcended in Hegel’s methodological framework ... On the other hand, ‘capital in general’ does not correspond to the Hegelian notion of concrete universality either. The latter *includes* all essential determinations of the relevant region, while the level of capital in general *abstracts* from all essential determinations of capital but not directly relevant to the production and circulation of total surplus value. (p. 38-39)

I disagree with many of the claims in this comparison, but chiefly that Smith is making the *wrong comparison*. The supposed structure of the whole of the *Science of Logic*, beginning with Being and concluding with the Absolute Idea, he compares with the Three Volumes of *Capital* beginning with the commodity. But the point he was trying to make was that Marx was mistaken in seeing the *Concept Logic* (beginning with the Subject) as the inspiration for *Capital*, not the whole of the *Logic*.

A footnote* to ‘universality’ at the end of the first sentence cited above says: “Hegel describes ‘Being’, the first category of the *Logic* in these terms.” (fn p. 38). That is, Smith is equating ‘Being’, the first category of the *Logic* (in fact, the first category of Philosophy altogether), with ‘universality’, the first category of the Concept Logic which appears 520 pages after Hegel introduces ‘Being’.

A footnote* to the second sentence, ending with “explicit,” tells us that what is being referred to here is the Absolute Idea. However, Marx never goes past Particularity, not even completing the elaboration of the Subject, capital. This incomplete exposition of capital, stopping short of elaborating the Individual moment of Subjectivity (*i.e.*, in my view, individual capitalist companies), and never going on to explore the interaction of capital with the Object (state, family, science, technique, the natural environment, religion, etc., etc.), leaving this task perhaps to future generations, and never developing a finished theory of

capitalist societies as a whole in the light of the interaction of capital with the multiplicity of other projects, the Idea in Hegel's terminology. And nor should he have. That was the kind of task Hegel undertook with his *Encyclopaedia*, and this kind of "system of everything" was thoroughly discredited by the time Marx wrote *Capital*.

Smith contrasts the "grand sweep of Marx's theory" with "a particular chapter in Hegel's work" (p. 38). But Marx was absolutely right to focus on the Concept Logic which is, in effect, a general theory for just one science (or practice, ...) when taken in abstraction from its cultural and economic surroundings and its historical development. That was the right chapter to choose from out of all Hegel's works which were literally encyclopaedic in scope. Marx did not set out to write a replacement for the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, but to bequeath to the world the paradigm of just one science, the science of capital. Much as he would have liked to have written a book on the state and other topics, he had only one life. And he took many thousands of words to do capital, whereas Hegel skipped over the topic in a few paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Right*.

Having set aside Marx's well-founded use of the Concept Logic as the basis for the structure of *Capital* by conflating the concept of two chapters of the Subject with the entire *Logic*, Smith went on to argue for a homology of *Capital* with the Essence Logic.

4. Claim that Capital is an Essence Logic

It can be useful to understand the logic of enquiry (which is how Hegel intended it to be read), in terms of how one new fact or observation "ripples" through an existing "formation of consciousness." The Logic of Being begins from such a hypothetical new observation, as yet uninterpreted.

At first this new observation just *is*. *What* it is is still indeterminate – a sharp drop in GDP, an unexpected vote for a fringe candidate, a sharp rise in sea temperature, ... This is the empty concept from which the enquiry begins, without prejudice, so to speak. First, there is an *analysis* of the new observation which concludes with the concept of One, i.e., that the new observation is One, of which there are presumed to be many, if we are to make sense of this one new observation. There follows a synthetic conceptual process which concludes with Measure, effectively the concept of a kind of 'almanac' of such observations, like, for example, the government's statistical report on the economy in the past year, which economists have to make sense of with their theories. This 'almanac' (the category of Real Measure), completes the first book of the *Logic*, Being.

Next comes the Logic of Essence in which that ontology has to develop in response to the new data.

The Logic of Essence traces the logic of how that existing body of knowledge responds to the new fact in order to make sense of it. That is why the first moment of the Essence Logic is called "Reflection." The Essence Logic is unable to complete this process aimed at characterising the new situation "as a whole," or "in a nutshell." It gets to the brink of that moment, but the leap to a new concept marks the beginning of the third book of the *Logic*, the Concept Logic. Let's look at how Smith finds a "model" for capital in the Essence Logic.

Smith's Reason for choosing Essence as the "Model" for Capital

Smith sets up his claim for the similarity of *Capital* and Hegel's Essence Logic by arguing:

Marx's theory begins where the Doctrine of Being ends. Hegel starts with the pure simplicity and utter emptiness of a category enabling only an affirmation of being. Marx begins with the simplicity of the 'commodity' in generalized commodity production, rent in two by the massive gulf separating (the nonetheless inseparably conjoined) dimensions of use-value and exchange-value.

Hegel then considers attempts to categorise a supposedly separate something in terms of what it is in itself, apart from its relationship to what is 'other', with the incoherence of all such attempts a result. Marx, in contrast, begins his critique of political economy with a social world which a) no separate commodity can be adequately comprehended in itself apart from its relations to other commodities, and b) no separate act of producing commodities can be adequately comprehended apart from its relations to other acts within a division of labour.* (p. 30-31)

The footnote* indicates that this is Smith's gloss of the first few Chapters of *Capital*, which, given that Smith claims that *Capital* reflects the Essence Logic, is to be compared to what appears to be Smith's gloss of the first moment of Reflection in Hegel's Essence Logic. Reflection, it should be noted arises from the last category of the Doctrine of Being, namely, Real Measure, which is obviously far from being an "empty concept."

Far from resulting in incoherence, Reflection leads to the Ground of the Contradiction generated by the "new data." Smith is at least correct when he says "Marx, in contrast," if little else.

Smith bases his claim for locating *Capital* at this point, corresponding to the beginning of Essence, on the apparent *similarity* of Essence and *Capital*:

Essence categories ... define cognitive frameworks that allow truths about more concrete and complex states of affairs to be articulated. The determinations of the Doctrine of Essence come in pairs neither of which can be considered apart from the other ... truths articulated within explanatory frameworks relating an essence and its appearance, a cause and its effects, a substance and its accidents, and so on. (p. 31)

It is true that Essence displays this "two-ness," whereas in Being, as each concept is taken up and critiqued in a series, it gives rise to a new concept which shows the previous concept to be *untrue*, classically illustrated by how Being is shown to be Nothing! The concepts of Being come in a serial form like this. By contrast, in Essence, each successive pair of concepts uncovers a deeper duality which merely pushes the former pair of concepts into the background. The Concept Logic is then characterized by "three-ness," in which each new triplet declares itself to include and *develop* the former.

The way Essence works is illustrated in the initial *analysis* which begins with Identity (reflecting what the new perceptions *is*, based on the existing ontology).

Identity is shown to include Difference (something absolutely identical to itself cannot be), but the resulting Diversity is *essential difference*, the unity of likeness and unlikeness. Hegel repeats this process over and over, sharpening the oppositions till arriving at *Contradiction* and then *Ground*. That is to say, an initial determination of what it is that is *truly* new in the new perception and the grounds of that contradiction. But this is only the beginning of the process of enquiry into the new fact. The two phases of Essence which follow Reflection are first Appearance (the dialectic of Form and Content) and then Actuality (the dialectic of Cause and Effect). Essence is a continual process of going behind the surface to find the ground of the contradiction beneath, but this process is never ending.

The Essence Logic is a journey. It never reaches the “essence” of the matter. It has the effect, as Smith says, of delving ever more deeply, but finds itself in an infinite regress.

For example, when a new phenomenon is investigated by seeking the causes of things we find that each cause is the effect of something else, which in turn is the effect of a deeper cause, and so on indefinitely. This can be overcome only by the determination of Reciprocity in which, say, crime and poverty are found to be causes of each other – crime and poverty are two sides of the same coin. But having arrived at this insight, no “solution” is found, the basis for that unity still remains to be uncovered. The dialectics of Chance and Necessary, Possibility and Real Possibility represent efforts to formulate such a conception. But this conception (e.g. Capitalism) is not part of Essence. The leap to the simple concept which unites Chance and Necessity, Cause and Effect, etc., is a new abstract concept which characterizes the whole of the reality which reveals the path to a theoretical explanation (and/or remedy) which can represent the new facts. This is the first concept of the Concept Logic, the Subject, which Smith wrongly identifies as an “empty concept.”

Now we can see why the Essence Logic is appealing. It is, as Smith notes, made up of pairs of opposite determinations (e.g. Appearance is explicit relation of Form and Content), the unity of which leads to a deeper contradiction. It sounds so very “Hegelian,” though actually, “essence and appearance” is not, as Smith believes, one of these pairs. Essence is, in fact, a logical representation of “immanent critique.” What I called above “some ontology, as per the existing conception of the world,” is the *existing theory*. Marx’s extended enquiry into the established theories of surplus value, which underlay his formulation of *Capital*, was a realisation of the Essence Logic. If the Essence Logic is a “model” of anything it is a model of that immanent critique of political economy. *Capital*, on the other hand, was the *reconstruction* of political economy based on that *immanent critique*, as illustrated by Marx (1858, p.100) in “Method of Political Economy” in the *Grundrisse*.

5. Misconception of Concept Logic

Smith has, so far as I know, a unique understanding of Hegel’s Concept Logic. Smith correctly notes that Hegel attempted to establish a strong normative justification for the system of right set out in the *Philosophy of Right* through the series of Syllogisms laid out in the section of the Concept Logic entitled the

Subject and in which Universal, Particular and Individual are combined in a series of syllogisms.

But in claiming that this “strong normative justification” applies to “the modern socio-political order,” Smith misses the point that the Germany in which Hegel lived at the time the *Philosophy of Right* was published was an absolute monarchy, and Hegel was presenting and justifying a vision of the modern world under a constitutional monarchy, in which the actual power of the monarch withered away to leadership of the army and a purely symbolic role in internal affairs. Meanwhile, universal suffrage of the kind which is the almost universal political support for capitalism today had been transcended by a collegial system of deliberative democracy based in each industry. Whether you approve of this system or not, it was based on a critique of the existing order (under conditions of censorship) while striving to avoid utopianism, by calling on norms which had some basis in the past or present. But it was not a justification of the status quo. It was an immanent critique of the existing system of custom and law which accepted that social and political life was “rational,” i.e., intelligible, and open to scientific analysis. One of the many criticisms one could make of the *Philosophy of Right* is that Hegel’s critique of value and his conception of capital and wage labour are woefully inadequate. Nonetheless, he did see the inhumanity of factory labour, the inherent tendency of capital towards inequality and inhumanity and the inadequacy of the only solutions he could see, viz., a welfare state, philanthropy or colonial expansion, all of which he rejected. He was writing in economically backward Germany at a time when an organised workers’ movement had yet to show its face, even in Britain where it existed underground. Of course, this was not the situation in 1867.

Smith goes on to ask that:

whether Hegel unintentionally contributed to the understanding of capitalism by developing a Logic of the Concept precisely homologous with the ‘logic of capital’. This would be the case if it were possible rationally to reconstruct a social order of generalised commodity exchange as a system of syllogisms mediating universality, particularity and singularity along the requisite lines once capital has been made visible. This cannot be done. (p. 28)

... In the relevant sense ... the concept of capital does not fit what Hegel referred to as the Logic of the Concept. (p. 29)

... Capitalism does not institute the sort of harmonious reconciliation of universality, particularity and singularity required to instantiate the Logic of the Concept in the socio-political realm. Capitalism therefore lacks rationality in Hegel’s strongly normative sense of the term. It could even be said that Hegel’s Logic of the Concept provides a categorical framework within which capital can be *subjected to critique*, although Hegel himself, lacking an adequate concept of capital concept of capital, failed to recognise this. (p. 35)

Smith is right, like every other writer on this topic, to recognise that the Logic provides a more useful starting point for a critique of capitalism than the *Philosophy of Right*, but a couple of points need to be made.

in the Concept Logic; a series of 10 syllogisms are subjected to critique in the section called “Syllogism,” and *all* of them bar the last are shown to be deficient. These fallacious syllogisms do, however, reflect real, actions in this imperfect world. The Logic of the Syllogism is by no means “harmonious,” but anyone involved in leading or criticising organisation (unions, businesses, scientific bodies, states,...) would be well-advised to study this section of the Logic and how Hegel utilised it in the *Philosophy of Right*.

Secondly, Hegel is not alone in disclosing the strong normative power of the relations described in the *Philosophy of Right*.

The point being, of course, he was pointing to the normative power of many relationships which did not at the time exist! Marx however, showed for example, how the universal exchange of commodities underpins a powerful norm expressed in the universal moral equality of human beings, as against feudalism, in this way laying a precondition for Socialism. Also the way the rate of surplus value which is highlighted in Volume 1, realising the equal value of all human labour, but in Volume 3, is displaced under capitalism by the rate of profit, realising the norm of equality of capital. This expressed in sharp relief, the class basis of capitalism. These norms are the sine qua non of capitalism. *Capital* is as much a work of Moral Philosophy as of Economics, just as the *Philosophy of Right* is as much a work of social science as a work of Moral Philosophy. Both writers recognise the unity of Ethics and economics. But in 1821, this unity had not yet manifested itself. Smith is wrong to claim (p. 39) that “a normative progression ... of Hegel’s affirmative systematic dialectic is thoroughly absent in Marx’s critical dialectic.” And he is wrong to say that “the contradictions of Essence Logic are *overcome* in the advance to the Logic of the Concept. In Marx’s critical dialectic, in contrast, these contradictions are repeated.

The Concept Logic does, it is true, “resolve” the infinite regression which The Essence Logic finds itself, but this does not result in any “harmoniousness.” Also, a closer study of the *Logic* would reveal that very many contradictions which are found in one book of the *Logic* are repeated in the following book, but on a higher level, so to speak.

6. Affirmative or Critical Dialectic

There can be no doubt that there are important differences between the dialectic of the Professor of Logic who advocated for a constitutional monarchy and that of the revolutionary who called for the overthrow of the state. But the claim of a contrast between “Hegel’s affirmative systematic dialectic” and Marx’s critical dialectic” are misconceived. To understand the value of Hegel’s *Logic* it is important to understand how it is *simultaneously critical and productive*. It’s aim is both to make intelligible what exist and to point to the contradictions which threaten to overthrow what exists.

It was Kant who introduced the word “critical” to philosophy, and the series of philosophers who followed Kant and culminated in Hegel based themselves on

critique. One of Hegel's most important contributions was to develop a dialectic which did not just merely tear down concepts, as did the ancient Sceptics, but is *productive*. Every new concept produced in the *Logic* appears thanks to criticism of the foregoing concept, which is taken to its limit and transcended. This is the meaning of "sublation." A concept is shown to be negative in relation to itself, but then when posited in unity with itself is affirmed. There are countless examples of this, of course, since every transition in the *Logic* is a sublation, but for example:

The negation of negation is not a neutralisation: the infinite is the affirmative. (1830, § 95)

Marx's dialectic was also both critical and affirmative – think of the hymn of praise to capitalism with which the *Communist Manifesto* begins! No, the difference is that while both agreed that social practice is intelligible, Hegel placed too much faith in logical criticism while Marx looked first to social practice.

7. Failure to understand dynamics of the Logic

The failure of Smith to understand the significance of the various concepts of the *Logic* derives mainly from a failure to understand the overall dynamics and structure of the *Logic* as a critical logic of enquiry, and as such, an invaluable weapon for *every* revolutionary or social critic. The obscurity of Hegel's exposition and terminology, makes all the concepts of the *Logic* open to misconstrual.

In a monist philosophy, whether that of Hegel or of Marx, concepts are forms of human activity. Consequently, a work of logic is open to a fruitful interpretation as descriptive of forms of social life. But the concepts of the *Logic* must be properly grasped as logical terms before we can understand how they can be realised as forms of social action.

I wonder, when Smith says:

But when sociality takes the historically specific form of *dissociated* sociality these social relations are mediated through relations among things (commodities, money). (p. 30)

is he aware that Hegel determined that human actions are *always* mediated by things. See Hegel (1816) The Syllogism of Action. It is not this which concerns Marx, but the fetishism which is engendered by capitalism and the alienation which results from the fact that the products of workers' labour is the property of an alien class. A commodity is not, of course, something which is characterised by its physical or chemical properties, but rather by their *social* properties, i.e., as mediating a form of human activity, a concept.

Hegel's *Logic* is unlike any previous logic. When reading it, one gets a distinct feeling of movement and time. This is illusory of course; the *Logic* deals in ideals, not external material forms as such. The aspects of the *Logic* which create this feeling of movement are firstly the transitions from one concept to a "new" concept. These transitions are driven by contradictions (as Zeno discovered, movement is "existing contradiction") and what Fred Moseley aptly called "successive determination," though in respect to *Capital*, rather than the *Logic*. These ideas are captured by the concept of "sublation," (*aufhebung*)

which, in various ways, is descriptive of every transition in the *Logic*. Any attempt to render the *Logic* into some kind of system or structure fails, because of this constant restlessness which characterises the *Logic*.

Smith is right, however, to note that “abstract labour” is a distinctive feature of capital, a feature which makes capital particularly suitable for a “model” based on logic. Values appear to individuals as objective properties of commodities, as others have noted, by means of “real abstraction.” Exchange of commodities renders the relation between qualitatively different actions on to the single dimension of value. Value expresses a totalisation of social relations in much the same way that when a person makes a judgment, and decide to act, they take everything into account, as they must in order to act. The *Logic* is based on such judgments. The logic of value is thus a special case of the logic of judgment. It is not a simple matter, but *this* shared starting point does provide a basis for a particularly strong connection between capitalism and the *Logic*.

Where Hegel touched on value, not of course in the *Logic*, but in the *Philosophy of Right*, he treated value very superficially and fails to see the contradictions inherent in value. But this tells us nothing about the relation of *Capital* and the *Logic*.

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