

MARXISM

An Historical and Critical Study

George Lichtheim

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Volume 13

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GEORGE LICHTHEIM

First published in 1961

This edition first published in 2015

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

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

ISBN: 978-1-138-85502-1 (Set)

ISBN: 978-1-315-71284-0 (Set) (ebk)

ISBN: 978-1-138-88887-6 (Volume 13) (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-71310-6 (Volume 13) (ebk)

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MARXISM

*AN HISTORICAL AND
CRITICAL STUDY*

by

GEORGE LICHTHEIM



Routledge and Kegan Paul

LONDON

FOR
I. A.

*First published 1961
by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
Broadway House, 68-74 Carter Lane
London, E.C.4*

Second edition (revised) 1964

© George Lichtheim 1961, 1964

Published as a Routledge paperback 1964

Printed in Great Britain

by Western Printing Services Ltd., Bristol

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PREFACE

A STUDY which sets out to present an integrated account of Marxian theory since its first formulation, and of the Marxist movement from its inception in 1848 to its petrification a century later, cannot hope to satisfy those who look for a neat dissection of topical problems. Nor is it intended to rival the work of scholars who have examined in detail one particular corner of the field. The task of assembling so many different elements of social and intellectual history under one general heading imposes limitations of which the author is only too conscious. Some of the resulting difficulties are considered in the Introduction. It may be pertinent, however, to state at the outset that it is not proposed here to do more than indicate the general sense of the movement and the period under review. This cannot be done without trespassing upon ground normally reserved for specialists, to whom every writer must be grateful, and who in their turn may acknowledge the usefulness of an attempt to bring together what is commonly treated separately. For his part the author only claims that extent of familiarity with the subject which is required to distinguish what is relevant from the boundless accretion of other data. The principle of selection, and the exigencies of space, may perhaps be thought to have resulted in a degree of compression unusual in a work intended for the general reader. If so, the defence must be that an analysis of so complex a subject is not achieved without rigid concentration upon essentials and ruthless disregard of mere detail. As for the standpoint here chosen, it will be enough to say that it represents no commitment to anything save the critical method inherent in the exercise of rational thinking.

While the actual writing of this book has not occupied me for very long, the subject is one which for many years has furnished the theme of constant discussion with friends and acquaintances sharing the same interest. In mentioning a few names, I am conscious of the

PREFACE

manifold intellectual debts incurred in the process. The late Franz Borkenau probably had the greatest influence upon the general approach adopted in this work, although he would have been unlikely to agree with all its conclusions. I take this opportunity of paying tribute to the memory of one of the most original and penetrating intellects of our time—an Argonaut of the spirit, daring and even reckless in the discovery of new territory. My other debts are more easily discharged. Several chapters have been read in manuscript by friends among whom I particularly want to mention Dr. Francis Carsten, of London University; Mr. Leo Labedz; and Mr. Morris Watnick, of the Russian Research Centre at Harvard. I am obliged to Mr. Richard Lowenthal for the loan of material and for some stimulating monologues; to Professor S. F. Bloom, of Brooklyn College, New York, and to Professor J. L. Talmon, of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, for the benefit derived from lengthy conversations with them; to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, for a research grant which greatly facilitated my work; to the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, and to the Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milan, for literature supplied to me; to Miss Marion Bieber for her kind assistance in procuring research material; to Linda Hamilton and Ruth Sharon for secretarial assistance; and last but not least to Mrs. Esther Howell, who patiently bore the burden of typing and retyping the manuscript.

NOTE ON SOURCES

NO FORMAL BIBLIOGRAPHY is appended to this work. To have done so would have meant stretching to intolerable length the list of works either referred to in the text or taken for granted in the presentation of the argument. What a really comprehensive survey would entail may be gathered from the fact that M. Maximilien Rubel's invaluable *Bibliographie des Oeuvres de Karl Marx* (Paris, 1956) runs to 258 pages and lists 885 titles for Marx alone, not counting a mere selection of 151 for Engels. A full-scale bibliography of Marxist literature—not to mention socialism in general—would certainly exceed the dimensions of the present work. For the socialist movement as a whole, the fullest select bibliography known to the author is that appended to the five volumes of Professor G. D. H. Cole's *History of Socialist Thought* (London, 1955–60). Though selective, it includes nearly all the general studies dealing with the subject, at any rate in English and French, less so in German. In the latter language, one of the best select reading lists is that contained in the notes to the two-volume biography of Engels by Gustav Mayer (The Hague, 1934); it is, however, inevitably centred on the history of German socialism. As regards the Russian Revolution and the history of Russian Marxism, the reader must be referred to the bibliographies given by the authors cited in the course of this study. Listing these and other sources here would entail an altogether useless duplication. On the other hand, no good purpose would be served by compiling a list based solely on works cited in the text. A selection of this kind would in fact be seriously misleading, in that it would leave out of account a number of general and specialised studies not specifically mentioned in the text, but which form the indispensable background of any serious work on the subject.

For practical purposes, then, the bibliography is contained in the Notes. The latter refer in general to writings in their original

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language, though in the case of Marx and Engels preference has been given where possible to English translations. Some of the latter being incomplete or inadequate, the German and the English text are occasionally listed side by side. Thus a reference to MEGA (*Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels: Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Marx-Engels Verlag, Frankfurt-Berlin, 1927-32: the incomplete but indispensable German-language edition containing the works down to 1848 and the entire Marx-Engels correspondence) is frequently followed by a parallel reference to the two-volume English-language selection cited as MESW (*Marx-Engels Selected Works*), or to the one-volume *Selected Correspondence* (MESCS). These are Soviet editions, and the same applies to such titles as the English edition of Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (*Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*), or the more recently published translation of Marx's so-called *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844. Where the editing appeared to be inadequate or tendentious, this has been remarked upon, but in general it has not been found necessary to contrast the original text with the translation.

References to *Capital*, vol. I, are in general to the London, 1938, edition of the original Moore-Aveling translation first published in 1887 under Engels's editorship. Volumes II and III are quoted in the Kerr (Chicago) edition, unless otherwise stated. All three volumes are now available in an official Soviet translation into English, of which occasional use has been made. In one or two places the text refers to the recent German edition, *Das Kapital*, (Berlin, 1949.) The posthumously published *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* are quoted in the only available German edition (Berlin, 1953). The *Theories of Surplus Value* are cited from the one-volume selection published in London in 1951, the original three-volume edition (*Theorien ueber den Mehrwert*, ed. Kautsky, 1905-10) not being available in full translation. Most of Marx's minor works have now been translated, not always adequately. References to Lenin's writings are either to the two-volume English *Selected Works* (London, 1947) or to individual works available in official English versions, e.g., *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. With Trotsky and some others there is the problem that the only collected editions of their works are the incomplete versions published in Russian in the 1920's. In general, reference has been made to German or English translations, but in the case of some of Trotsky's more important writings, the Russian original is cited. No corresponding difficulty arises for Stalin, whose writings are available in all known languages.

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The secondary works cited in the text are mostly in English, French, or German. Apart from the German sources already referred to, which relate chiefly to the nineteenth century, the student can obtain a very comprehensive reading list from the bibliographical essay appended to Carl E. Schorske's *German Social-Democracy 1905-1917* (Harvard, 1955). This is not merely the best historical account of the dissensions within the German socialist movement, but also a considerable aid to further reading. Central European socialism before and after 1914 is a world in itself, and its understanding requires at least some familiarity with its voluminous literature, including its more important periodicals. In view of the relative paucity of citations in the text, it may be worth remarking that only a fraction of the sources consulted for this topic are expressly referred to in the footnotes. The same applies *a fortiori* to general literature, and in particular to historical writings on the 1871-1914 period, which is the subject of a special chapter. Thus it would have been impracticable to back the few and brief references to British economics and Fabian socialism with extensive bibliographical references. This rule also holds good for the history of the Second and Third Internationals, where it is perforce assumed that the reader will be familiar with the basic facts. Any other procedure would have burst the bounds of what is after all primarily meant to be a critical history of Marxist theory. For the vast field of Soviet Marxism—considered as an ideological phenomenon—there now exists the very comprehensive bibliography of Russian sources given in G. A. Wetter's *Dialectical Materialism* (London, 1958). Like other students of the subject I owe a debt to the recent work of Professor Marcuse, and I have also gained some insights from an unpublished MS. by Dr. Eugene Kamenka. The post-war discussion on Marxism in Western Europe is referred to only incidentally. What a reading list would involve for France alone may be gauged from the bibliography of Jean-Yves Calvez' massive work, *La Pensée de Karl Marx* (Paris, 1956); here a number of important writings are listed which during the past few years have proved to be merely the precursors of a whole new department of French academic scholarship. In general, the reader does well to bear in mind that in what follows he is presented with no more than a bare outline of a subject whose proper study would exhaust the combined resources of a major research institute.

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INTRODUCTION

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

MARXISM IS A TERM which has come to stand for so many different things that it is relevant at the outset to clarify its intended use here. An attempt will be made in the following pages to trace the development of Marxian theory and to give an account of the manner in which the tradition thus established interacted with other currents to bring about those theoretical and practical results which have become so large a part of our present preoccupations. Viewed under this aspect Marxism can be regarded as one intellectual construction among others; alternatively, it can be assigned a definite place among the socialist movements of the nineteenth century which arose from the impact of the industrial revolution on European society. Either approach is legitimate, though one leads to a critical study of the system, the other to an historical account of the movement, both of which go under the name of Marxism.

Thus defined, the Marxian synthesis appears as the historical counterpoint to the liberal integration, and indeed there is a sense in which liberalism and socialism can be described as alternative reactions to the challenge posed by the industrial revolution. But unless Marxism and socialism are equated, it will not do to speak of a Marxian system as opposed to a liberal one. There have been socialist movements other than Marxism, while conversely there are elements common to liberal and Marxian thought that are missing from some distinctively socialist systems—that of Proudhon for example. Again, there is little purpose in contrasting Marx with some representative figure of nineteenth-century liberalism, J. S. Mill being the obvious example. For even if it were possible to take Mill more seriously as a theorist of society (his philosophical standing is another matter) he cannot be said to have furnished modern liberalism with a working

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model for everyday political use, whereas the 'union of theory and practice' is the distinguishing trait of Marxism; hence Marx cannot be discussed merely as a theorist, but must be understood in terms of those historic changes which he both predicted and helped to bring about.

It follows that a study of Marxism which attempts to be at once critical and historical—i.e., addressed to the theoretical structure as well as to the historical movement comprised under the same term—must display some such unity within its own methodical frame. The nineteenth century was indeed a great age of system-building; it was also an epoch rich in revolutionary social currents. But the two came together only in the person of Marx—they signally failed to do so in the case of Comte, Mill or Spencer, to mention three of the leading claimants to celebrity in the field of social philosophy. The unmistakable aura of absurdity which clings to figures like Comte or Spencer (to say nothing of such latter-day saviours of society as Henry George), and the diminishing relevance even of Mill, suggests a failure rendered all the more conspicuous by Marx's achievement. The fact is noteworthy quite apart from its historical consequences, but it is of course the latter that are intended when one speaks of Marxism as a whole. There is indeed no plausible way of divorcing one from the other, and it is just this which renders the subject at once so important and so difficult to analyse.

In principle this procedure is consistent with the Marxian approach, the ability to view itself historically being one of its peculiar intellectual charms. Yet if the term 'Marxism' is allowed to comprise all the theoretical and practical modifications introduced in the course of time, under circumstances unforeseen by the founding fathers, the historical approach becomes self-validating only at the cost of being emptied of meaning. We are thus back at the beginning—Marxism must be defined historically, but to define it so is to neglect its *theoretical* significance.

A possible way out of the difficulty lies in grasping the historical nettle rather more firmly. Marx himself was not averse to treating theoretical constructions functionally, in terms of what they accomplished in the particular age for which they were relevant. Why not follow his example? It is hardly necessary to stress that such an approach does not exempt one from the duty of attending to the scientific standing of those parts of the whole which clearly call for critical (as distinct from historical) treatment. The notion, e.g., that

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Marxism represents a link—possibly the most important link—between the French and the Russian Revolution has a definite theoretical content, in addition to suggesting a particular understanding of European history between 1789 and 1917. What took place during this period is more clearly understood in the light of Marxism than in the illumination shed by rival doctrines. Yet this consideration also serves to ‘place’ Marxism as the theory of one particular kind of revolutionary movement—that which arose from the impact of early industrialism upon the highly stratified society of nineteenth-century Europe.

There is, however, a methodical difficulty which must be faced at the outset. Although it is quite in accordance with Marx’s own manner to take an historical view of his work, such an approach presupposes a vantage-point made available by developments beyond the stage reflected in the Marxian system—in other words, it assumes that the Marxian categories are no longer quite applicable to current history. For obvious reasons this is an admission which orthodox Marxists find it hard to make, while others may wonder why this particular scruple should arise in the first place. Its emergence is due to the fact that Hegel and, following him, Marx took a view of history which is not the familiar positivist one. They saw history as a process whose meaning reveals itself by stages, the succession of the latter reflecting man’s growing awareness of his role in creating the historical world. To comprehend its past mankind must raise itself to a higher level; hence our ability to understand our predecessors suggests that we have reached a new altitude. This consideration originally presented itself to Hegel as a consequence of his discovery that philosophical systems had a tendency to age: they appeared to be historical, not merely in the sense of being conditioned by circumstances (no one had ever doubted this), but in the more alarming sense of tending to evaporate with the circumstances that attended their birth. Hegel tried to meet the difficulty by establishing an intrinsic relationship between the philosophy of history (his own) and the history of philosophy: *his* system, if not guaranteed to withstand the flux of time, was at any rate promoted to a special dignity by its ability to give an account of the process which had swallowed up all its predecessors. A philosophy which traced the unfolding of the *logos* through all its stages, from inanimate nature, via human history, to the realm of spirit, could assign their proper place to the various philosophical systems, including that in which the process

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had eventually culminated: Hegel's own. The categories of logic were also those of history, or the historical process exemplified the march of reason: no matter how it was put, the philosopher retained his hold on the totality of the system, which was identical with the world. In Hegel's philosophy—unquestionably the greatest speculative construction of all time—the history of logic and the logic of history have the same goal: the gradual unfolding of the Absolute Idea comes to a climax at the point where the human mind discovers the identity of mind-matter. The universe yields its secret to Reason because it is itself the creation of Reason.¹

It is today widely taken for granted that the gradual disappearance of these metaphysical certainties has introduced a relativist element into the philosophy of history—on this account frequently described as 'historicism' by an influential academic school.² If it is not always apparent whether the target aimed at by these writers is the Hegelian absolutism or the post-Hegelian adoption of a purely human standpoint, it is at any rate evident that they are not happy with an approach which seeks to comprehend both the history and the logic of intellectual phenomena. Since this criticism is directed against thinkers so widely different in their political outlook as Hegel, Marx and Croce, it clearly reflects a genuine philosophical difficulty. Those who take a different view of what is entailed by the philosophy of history are thus under an obligation to define their own standpoint. This, however, is best done by letting the results speak for themselves. At any rate it is the thesis of this study that Marxism is to be understood as an historical phenomenon, as against the now standard analysis of Marxian theory in terms of its compatibility with modern thought. Not that such investigations are without value—few scholarly endeavours are wholly useless, and a sustained indictment of 'historicism', however unconvincing to non-empiricists, may at any rate help to clarify the issue. But whatever the benefit to be obtained from such studies, their aim is different from that of the present enquiry, which sets out to derive the significance of a corpus of thought from its historic function; to trace the link connecting the French Revolution—via German philosophy and German history—with the East European cataclysm of our own age; and to do so in

¹ For an analysis of this aspect of Hegel's thought, cf. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, New York and London, 1941 (2nd edn., 1955), pp. 224–48.

² Cf. K. R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, 1957, *passim*.

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terms of an analysis relevant both to the movement of thought and the actions of men, no distinction being drawn between what people thought and what they did. For if it is true that we are dealing with a social transformation of which Marxism was both the theoretical reflection and the political agent, there is no point in confining the discussion to either the historical or the theoretical side. What is required rather is an effort to comprehend the manner in which both came together to bring about the situation now confronting us.

An attempt must nonetheless be made to relate Marxism to contemporary thought in general—in other words, to criticise it. For in dealing with a theoretical structure the genetic approach by itself is of course inadequate. It is not, however, irrelevant. The naive view that doctrines are either true or false, no other judgment being allowed, takes no account of the practical significance of theory: its relevance to the circumstances it sets out to explain. This is not just a matter of sound conclusions being accidentally derived from faulty premises; rather the problem consists in trying to identify those theoretical elements which at a particular point in time are genuinely productive of insight. This topic is commonly subsumed under the general heading of intellectual progress, as though it were simply a matter of each generation marching further along the same road and in the process correcting the errors of its predecessors. In reality the interaction of analysis and actual experience is a good deal more complicated. Thus, to take a well-known example, the labour market and the labour theory of value came into existence roughly at the same time, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; and although it is a commonplace of present-day discussion that the labour theory has been superseded as an instrument of economic analysis, it may still be granted that, for the purpose for which it was originally intended, it was, broadly speaking, adequate. Yet it would clearly be absurd to say that the theory was ‘true’ when Smith and Ricardo suggested it, less true when Marx elaborated it, and altogether untrue half a century later. In a sense the determination of value by embodied labour always rested on a tautology; yet as an intellectual tool designed to accomplish a particular task it was at one time important, in that it made possible a broadly accurate analysis of the manner in which the social product was distributed among various classes. That it did so with the help of equivocations which proved troublesome later on, is another matter. Intellectual progress

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consists largely in the substitution of one imperfect set of tools for another.

Methodically, the line of advance suggested by this example implies a departure from the customary distinction between factual and value judgments. The usual question with regard to the author of a systematic body of thought is: (1) What did he teach? (2) Is what he taught true? It is questionable whether this approach can ever be very helpful, and it is quite certainly useless in dealing with Marx, the more so as his theories emerged in response to developments which he was the first to identify. We cannot discover what he said without considering the problems he set out to solve, and we cannot analyse the problems without judging the validity of his attempted solutions. And since a problem for Marx was never simply a theoretical question, we cannot consider his solutions without taking a stand on the issues involved. That is why all attempts to discuss Marxism in a morally neutral atmosphere are from the start condemned to failure.

It remains to indicate briefly the general line of approach which has been followed. Our starting-point is not 'dialectical materialism', or some such abstraction, but the French Revolution and its impact on Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century; along with the industrial revolution and its repercussions in the theoretical sphere, i.e., among the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British and French writers who were then engaged in working out the analytical tools appropriate to the study of the new society. From this point the discussion moves forward in time, and eastward in space, its preliminary locus being Central Europe, and its temporary halting-point the abortive upheaval of 1848-9 which prefigured the greater cataclysm of 1917-19. There follows a period characterised by the gradual formation of the Marxist system and its political counterpart. Central European Social-Democracy, the system and the movement both relating back to the failure of the 1848 revolution. The full development of this orthodoxy, from about 1890 to 1914, is shown to depend upon an unstable balance of political factors in Central Europe whose disappearance, during and after the first world war, released explosive forces hitherto concealed beneath the surface of seemingly innocuous theoretical wrangles among 'revisionist' and 'radical' interpreters of the orthodox synthesis elaborated by the theorists of the pre-revolutionary era: Engels, Kautsky and Plekhanov. In consequence of this two-fold development—for the political splits and upheavals were both occasioned by,

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and reflected in, theoretical divergencies—the subsequent process is shown to involve a further eastward shift, away from the industrially and politically developed societies of Western and Central Europe, hitherto principally concerned in the growth of the socialist movement. The dissolution of Marxian socialism as formulated before 1914, and the emergence of Soviet Marxism (or ‘Marxism-Leninism’) is thus seen to parallel the decline of German (and Austrian) influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

As against this eastward shift it finally becomes necessary to consider those elements in the original Marxian synthesis which appear to have retained their relevance for modern society: notably the critique of liberal economics and the first approximation towards a unified theory of the state. Here an attempt is made to trace the line of development from the classics of political economy via Marx to present-day economics, and the parallel line from the political theorists of the eighteenth century to the sociology of our own day. If this seems a needless undertaking, one has only to consider what a history of liberalism would be like without mention of Locke, Turgot, Smith, and the authors of the American Constitution on the one hand, and the further development of their thought down to Russell, Dewey, Keynes, and the theorists of the welfare state, on the other. There is in fact no clear dividing line between the history of social theory and the history of society in general, though there may be different views about their interaction.¹

Clearly it is impossible to discuss so complex a subject without making a great many affirmations about matters of fact, some of which will necessarily be controversial. The author can only plead that this need has been imposed upon him by his method, which for the rest must justify itself by the results it yields. Since the standpoint here chosen is historical, in the sense common to Hegel, Marx and Croce—not to mention a list of contemporary philosophers, sociologists, and historians, which could easily be stretched to accommodate both conservatives and radicals—it will not be possible to please critics to whom ‘historicism’ is abhorrent. Neither is agreement to be expected from those who maintain a vested interest in traditional interpretations of the subject. In general it is here assumed that

¹ For the purpose of this argument, the distinction between Marxism and socialism in general can be ignored. Marxism is after all the predominant element in the socialist movement, at any rate during the period under discussion; and conversely there are non-classical variants of liberalism, e.g., the physiocrats; not to mention Rousseau and his Jacobin progeny.

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modern society has moved beyond the stage with whose analysis Marx was primarily concerned. In this sense the Marxian breakthrough may now be said to have been absorbed, not least through the instrumentality of the socialist movement itself. Such paradoxical accomplishments furnish the stuff of history. Indeed, they alone make it possible to interpret the past to the present, with which it is connected through the medium of those half-conscious convulsions which we call revolutions and which never fail to carry their own misinterpretations along with them. If this conclusion has the ring of scepticism, it also suggests (to the author at any rate) the truth of Hegel's dictum that genuine comprehension occurs after the event: Minerva's owl flies out at dusk. We are able to understand Marx because we have reached a point where neither his own modes of thought, nor those of his nineteenth-century opponents, are altogether adequate to the realities.

PART ONE

THE HERITAGE
1789-1840

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GERMAN IDEALISM

CLASSICAL GERMAN philosophy has been described as a secularised form of Protestantism ; it has also been called the theory of the French Revolution. There is no need to argue the respective merits of these interpretations. They are compatible, for the effect of the French Revolution upon the German Enlightenment was to accentuate certain traits which had their roots in the Reformation : principally the radical dissociation of the individual soul, and therewith the realm of freedom, from the wretchedness of earthly existence. German idealist philosophy, like German Protestant theology before it, transforms the aims of men into spiritual values ; it thus renounces as hopeless the task of anchoring them in material reality.

In its origins the German Enlightenment of the eighteenth century proceeded from motives held in common with sceptical and deist movements elsewhere in Europe, until in the person of Kant it brought forth a thinker who combined these intellectual strands with the heritage of the Reformation and the first stirrings of the Romantic movement—the latter by way of Rousseau whose growing influence among the educated elite of Germany prepared the way for a sympathetic reception of the French Revolution in its earlier, pre-terrorist, phase. In this manner the Enlightenment came to rest upon an intellectual assent to changes occurring beyond the frontiers and

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involving no more than a theoretical acceptance of events which had no counterpart in Germany. This attitude (which as time went on was modified by disapproval first of the Jacobin dictatorship and later of the Napoleonic empire) entailed no corresponding change in the contemplative outlook of the elite which had made itself responsible for the guardianship of intellectual values. As before, the life of the spirit was conceived as an autonomous realm unconnected with the sordid circumstances of material existence. Indifferent to the public sphere, because impotent to shape it in accordance with their ideals, the educated strata who around 1800 sustained the flowering of the German Renaissance in the classical Weimar culture, entrenched themselves in the unconquerable regions of philosophy, literature, and art. In so doing they evolved an awareness of personal freedom and a way of life that stood in stark contrast to the realities surrounding them. At the same time they made it more difficult for themselves to break out of their isolation and find the way back to ordinary human community, society, the state.¹

In this process may be traced the final consummation of tendencies latent in German society since the Reformation—tendencies which signalled the subsequent failure to bring the public realm into correspondence with the aims of the liberal intellectuals, when under the impulsion of social and economic change they finally descended into the political arena. In preparing the way for their discomfiture in the abortive 1848 revolution, the liberals simultaneously laid the groundwork for the theoretical justification of their repeated failures: henceforth every new defeat would serve as additional proof that mankind was neither worth saving nor capable of being saved. Only a few chosen spirits had access to the realm of freedom, truth, and beauty, and for them alone did these supreme values possess concrete existence. For the mass of the people there remained the consolations of religion, concerning whose illusory character Goethe and Hegel entertained as little doubt as did Feuerbach, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche. Thus the German Renaissance, originally the offspring of Northern Germany's traditional Protestant culture, issued in an idealist philosophy which from a secret doctrine of the elect evolved by stages into an openly proclaimed cult of the elite.²

¹ Marcuse, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Ernst Troeltsch, 'Der deutsche Idealismus', in *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen, 1925, pp. 532 ff.

² Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Zurich, 1947, *passim*; also by the same author, 'Mensch und Mitmensch', in *Die kirchliche*

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Hegel's philosophy represents a crucial stage in this process, for it marks both the climax of the idealist movement and the point where its inner tensions threaten to disrupt the philosophic integument. Hegel himself stood midway between the rationalist doctrine formulated by Kant and Fichte, and the reaction which arose from the failure of the French Revolution to translate the aims of the Enlightenment into reality. Opposed alike to the doctrinaire intransigence of the Jacobins, and to the conservative reaction dominant during the Restoration period after 1815, he consistently maintained an intermediate position which in the end led him back to a qualified acceptance of his native Lutheranism and its political sanction: the absolutist state. Yet the growing conservatism of the ageing Hegel was superimposed upon a rationalist system incompatible with religious orthodoxy and the ideology of the Prussian monarchy. The tension, never resolved in his life-time, exploded after his death. It then became apparent that the contradictions which ultimately tore the system apart had been held together by an act of will on Hegel's part. When in 1831 he left the scene, his followers drifted into incompatible positions which finally coincided with the emerging political line-up on the eve of the 1848 crisis. In conformity with the underlying gravitational pull of German history throughout the nineteenth century, the majority chose the conservative side.¹

The disintegration of Hegelianism thus went parallel with the gradual formation of a movement hostile to absolutism and religious orthodoxy. This coincidence of philosophical and political stirrings is an index to the backwardness of mid-nineteenth-century Germany. In Western Europe it was no longer possible to assemble a radical party under the banner of slogans directed primarily against the 'union of throne and altar', whereas Germany in the 1840's was still struggling with the heritage of absolutism, not to mention the Middle Ages. In Prussia as in Austria, the church—Lutheran in the one case, Catholic in the other—provided both the principal safeguard of authority and its ideological justification. In this respect as in others, the two leading German states were closer to Russia than to Western Europe. This contrast was already noticeable during the Napoleonic era and it became more marked after the disintegration of the *Dogmatik*, vol. III, 2; published separately, Zurich, 1954; cf. Karl Loewith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, Stuttgart, 1950, pp. 33 ff.

¹ For Hegel's conservatism, cf. Loewith, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–42; Marcuse, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 ff. For the incompatibility of Hegel's philosophy of religion with Protestant orthodoxy, cf. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie etc.*, pp. 343–78.

Bourbon monarchy in France during the 1830 revolution: an event that coincided with the close of the classical age in German literature and philosophy.¹

Hegel's philosophy must be viewed against this background of slowly mounting dissatisfaction with the continued existence of the Old Regime, after the latter had been eliminated in France and other parts of Western Europe. The tendency of his thought is to comprehend all possible antagonisms within the unity of a system which allows for conflict only as the motor of gradual progress towards a predetermined goal. The real and the rational are identical. Ultimately this is a theological conception, and the final tendency of Hegel's philosophy is to substitute itself for religion. On the political plane it reflects that reconciliation of (critical) thought with (unchanging) reality which is the common trait of all forms of German Idealism. Like the classical Weimar culture, of which it is the philosophical counterpart, the Hegelian system provides a transcendental resting-place for ideals not realised in actuality. It holds out to men the promise not of freedom, but of the idea of freedom; it envisages not the actual domination of reason in human affairs, but the recognition of the march of reason through history. It thus embodies both the ultimate aims of mankind—liberty and rationality—and their renunciation.

Hegel stands midway between the rationalism of the Enlightenment, which looked forward to a golden age of ordered freedom, and the radicalism of the post-1830 generation, determined to resume the advance where the French Revolution had been brought to a halt. His death in 1831 terminates the half-century of Germany's classical period which had opened with Kant's publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. The equivocal character of Hegel's pronouncements served for a while to conceal the fact that his system embodied, albeit in an obscure and mystifying fashion, some of the aims for which the French Revolution had been fought. Yet the radicals who broke away from him after his death were on solid ground when they denounced the conservative and contemplative bent of his philosophy. The 'reconciliation of idea and reality' is the central motive of Hegel's thought, as the transformation of reality is that of Marx.

¹ Goethe's death in 1832 marks the end of an epoch as much as Hegel's departure the year before. For a conservative interpretation of this turning-point, cf. Loewith, *op. cit.*, pp. 28 ff; for the conventional Marxist-Leninist view cf. G. Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, Zurich, 1948, pp. 27–45.

Hence the Hegelian dialectic in its orthodox form could not serve as an instrument of change, though a time was to come when it would be hailed as the 'algebra of revolution' by Herzen, invoked in support of radical revolt by Bakunin, and acclaimed as the esoteric doctrine of revolution by Engels.¹

Contrary to a widespread notion, the triad thesis-antithesis-synthesis is not essential to Hegel's system, whose motor is rather to be found in the dialectic of the whole and its parts. There is no foundation for the legend that he attempted to deduce the empirical sequence of actual events from the triadic march of logical categories, though this criticism can reasonably be urged against the pseudo-Hegelianism of Lassalle or Lorenz von Stein—neither of whom understood Hegel, or indeed knew how to handle logical concepts.²

The dialectical method is meant to conform to the actual structure of reality, conceived as a process in which the logical subject unfolds itself into its own predicates. Hegel's marvellously compressed discussion of this theme in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind* is still sufficiently lengthy and involved to defy summary exposition. For our purpose it is enough to say that he breaks away from formal logic, with its apparatus of fixed categories adapted to the empty

¹ Cf. F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in Marx-Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow, 1951, II, pp. 324 ff; cited hereafter as MESW. For Bakunin's views, cf. M. Bakunin: 'Reaktion in Deutschland', in *Deutsche Jahrbuecher*, vol. 17, 21st Oct. 1842, especially p. 1009: 'Let us put our trust therefore in the eternal spirit who shatters and destroys only because he is the unfathomable and eternally creative source of life. The desire to destroy is itself a creative desire.' (Quoted in D. Chizhevski, *Hegel bei den Slawen*, Reichenberg, 1934, p. 203.) For a more considered statement by a Polish pupil of Hegel, cf. August von Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena zu einer Historiosophie*, Berlin, 1838. There is evidence that Marx was influenced by him; cf. Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels*, Paris, 1955, vol. I, pp. 142 ff.

² For a brief account of the traditional confusion over Hegel's alleged dependence on the 'triad', cf. Gustav E. Mueller, 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis"', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, New York, June 1958, vol. XIX, nr. 3, pp. 411-14. The author exaggerates Marx's part in furthering the misconception and makes no mention of Schopenhauer's frenzied polemics which are still quoted as valid criticism of Hegel: cf. K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. II, pp. 30 ff. The terms 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' are employed by Fichte; they occur nowhere in Hegel's writings. This is not to say that the misunderstanding did not have some effect on later writers who believed themselves to be in the Hegelian tradition. It was Marx's criticism of such writers which unwittingly contributed to the further spread of the legend. Cf. his remarks on Stein, in a letter to Engels of January 8, 1868, in *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter cited as MEGA), Section III, vol. 4, p. 5.

certainties of mathematics, into a realm where the content and the method of philosophical enquiry are seen to coincide. The result of his enquiry is to demonstrate that reality is not as it appears to empirical perception, but as it is revealed by philosophical reflection. This certainty constitutes the inmost essence of German Idealism, and the source of its unbridgeable opposition to every form of empiricism. Insofar as Marxism embodies a similar conviction, with particular respect to history, it is still within the tradition of classical German philosophy.

Since for Hegel the truth of a philosophical proposition is demonstrated by what actually happens to the subject of the proposition—e.g., the truth that freedom is essential to men by the course of human history—there is for him no cleavage between the subject-matter of thought and the realm of actuality. Philosophical reflection discloses reason to be the ultimate essence of the world with which philosophy is concerned, and reason is likewise the instrument whereby in the course of time this truth is brought to the level of human awareness. This is the core of what has been called Hegel's pan-logism, or his rediscovery of Aristotle's ontology. It is also the starting-point of all the subsequent assaults on his system—by Feuerbach, by Marx and the other Young Hegelians, and lastly by Kierkegaard.¹

The Hegelian scheme is operative because for Hegel there is in the last analysis no distinction between mind and its object. Both have a common denominator, which Hegel calls Reason and which appears under the guise of Spirit in the historical world. Spirit is both subjective and objective, and its 'internal contradictions' are resolved in the dialectical process, whereby the potentialities of all things unfold in a pattern of self-transcendence to a higher unity. Dialectical progress, though mirrored in thought, is the objective history of the real world, which arrives at self-consciousness in philosophy. The traditional criticism of this form of idealism is that it subordinates existence to logic. This misses the point, for in Hegel's system philosophical cognition has itself an existential quality: it enables the individual to recover his essence, which is reason. Yet this identification of thought and reality was precisely the target against which Feuerbach and Marx—and from a different standpoint Kierkegaard—directed their shafts. These attacks proceeded independently of

¹ For the parallelism between the Marxian and the Kierkegaardian revolt against Hegel, cf. Loewith, *op. cit.*, pp. 125 ff; Marcuse, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 ff.

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each other. Marx knew nothing of Kierkegaard, and would not have considered his critique of Hegel important, save insofar as it emphasised the other-worldly nature of Christianity.

All the thinkers in question, including Marx, operated within the context of a secularised Protestant culture. The significance of this fact is not limited to the accidental circumstance that Hegel's philosophy became for a while the ideological sanction of the Prussian State. It extends to the core of the Hegelian system, and the subsequent revolt against it. Hegel had conceived the identity of the rational and the real in terms which ultimately went back to Christian theology. Behind the unfolding of Spirit in the universe lies the notion of creation. Spirit creates the world by externalising itself, and eventually returns to itself after arriving at self-consciousness. This process is mediated by toil and suffering, symbolised for Hegel by the image of the Cross. Reconciliation—the union of idea and reality—takes place only after the idea has undergone the lengthy travail of passing through successive incarnations in a medium—reality—which is alien to it, but gradually becomes one with the spirit that permeates it. The concrete identity of the real and the rational is the concept (notion) which embodies the essence of things—not as they appear in actuality, but as they are in reality. The concept is the logical form of the universal, i.e., that which determines the existence of particulars—as, e.g., Man is logically prior to particular men, who exist as such only by virtue of what is common to all. Thus the concept mediates between (spiritual) reality and (material) appearance, as Christ mediates between God and the world. Hence the *logos*-concept is Christ, and philosophy, which conceives the identity of reality and the absolute idea (God), becomes theology. But since the idea (*logos*) unfolds through all the successive stages of nature and history, philosophy must concern itself with reality and become science. Yet not empirical science, which never rises above the mere data of existence, but rather knowledge of the essential reality that manifests itself through the march of events in the world.

Since we are here concerned not with Hegel's philosophy—the briefest outline of which would fill an entire volume—but with its role in Germany on the eve of the 1848 revolution, it will be sufficient to indicate its relevance to the events which were shortly to dethrone it as the quasi-official ideology of the Prussian State, while incorporating some of its elements into a theory of total revolution.

It has been noted that, owing to the peculiar character of the

Hegelian dialectic of subject-object, Hegel's system mirrors its own theme. Another way of putting this is to say that while philosophy provides the general categories for the understanding of history, it also turns out to be the secret of history, inasmuch as the latter is revealed as embodied reason, now brought to self-consciousness. In principle it would have been sufficient for Hegel to state this as an axiom of thought; in fact he postulated it as an achievement that had already taken place: history had reached its appointed goal (in the *status quo*), and the reconciliation of idea and reality—Hegel's fundamental aim ever since the spiritual crisis which terminated his youthful revolutionary phase—was presumed to have taken place. This notion was not merely unacceptable to Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians of the next generation for political reasons: it represented a claim which was plainly unbelievable, namely that the identity of subject and object, thought and reality, had been attained in the true 'system of science', i.e., Hegel's own. This conclusion did not follow from the conception of history as the march of mankind to domination over nature and possession of the world through reason: but it followed necessarily from Hegel's belief that his system mirrored the totality of the world. Once this was granted, philosophy was reduced to contemplation of the idea's progress through history, now brought to a close in the comprehension of that necessity which had given birth, among others, to Hegel's own system of thought. Alternatively, if it was accepted that philosophy could not go beyond the comprehension of the actual state of affairs as necessary and therefore rational, those who wished to alter the existing condition of things were impelled to advance beyond the contemplative stage.¹

The conventional account of this chapter in the history of German philosophy is content to register the dissolution of the Hegelian school into conflicting groups, among whom the left-wingers—principally D. F. Strauss, Bruno Bauer, and Feuerbach—eventually

¹ For Hegel's spiritual crisis during his Frankfurt period (1797–1800), i.e., before the first tentative elaboration of his thought, in conjunction with Schelling in Jena (1801–2), cf. Lukács, *op. cit.*, pp. 131 ff. Although the interpretation supplied by L. is both banal and misleading, the relevant facts are stated. For Hegel's conceptual scheme cf. Marcuse, *op. cit.*, pp. 121 ff. Among recent literature on the subject, Georges M.-M. Cottier, *L'Athéisme du jeune Marx: ses origines hégéliennes*, Paris, 1959, presents a critical view of both Hegel and Marx from the Thomist standpoint. For an interpretation of Hegel which combines Marxist and existentialist viewpoints, cf. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris, 1947. Cf. also Jean Hyppolite, *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel*, Paris, 1955.

prepared the way for Marx. This hardly takes account of the complexities of a situation in which a radical critic of traditional theology like Strauss could figure as the leader of the left wing around 1836–8, only to become a highly conservative figure in the political field a decade later. What was originally at issue among Hegel's followers after his death (1831) was the philosophy of religion, and specifically the literal truth of Scripture. The 'right wing' and the 'centre' were defined by their respective attitudes towards the theological iconoclasm of Strauss, for whom Lutheran orthodoxy rather than the Prussian State was the enemy; while some typical 'Old Hegelians' maintained their allegiance to the system during the second half of the century, long after the 'Young Hegelians' had abandoned the philosophical arena. To be an orthodox member of the school it was sufficient to be neutral on the religious issue, following Hegel's own example. In a country where the government was then busy promoting a somewhat artificial union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches, with a view to giving the State a solid Evangelical foundation, such neutrality did indeed amount to passive support of the *status quo*; but not every member of the school in the 1830's was necessarily aware of this fact. Strauss was the exception, which was precisely why he initiated the practice of referring publicly to a 'right' and 'left' wing among Hegelians—following the terminology (then novel and alarming) of French politics.

Strictly speaking no 'Young Hegelian' group existed before the 1840's. By then the excitement over Strauss's critique of theology had yielded to the far greater stir produced by Feuerbach's assault on religion as such, while at the same time Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, and the Bauers (Bruno and Edgar), made their first tentative excursions into the critical field. Even then the debate was still partly conducted in metaphysical terms. It could not well be otherwise, since Hegel's doctrine of Right (the term under which he introduced the political realm) was grounded in his philosophy of history, which in turn sought to demonstrate the essential harmony of reason and the actual world. Its categories terminated in the existing condition of things, which in Prussia was characterised by the alliance of the State and the Lutheran Church against liberalism, i.e., against the contemporary form of the Enlightenment. But the Enlightenment was likewise the source of that strand in Hegel's thinking which affirmed the universality of reason and the consequent rationality of the universe. These contradictions would have exploded the system even

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if in 1840 the accident of a dynastic change in Prussia had not precipitated the long-delayed conflict between the government—fully supported by the State Church—and the nascent radical movement. It was as representatives of the latter that the ‘Young Hegelians’ found themselves harried by the ‘Christian-German’ orthodoxy which had recently found a programme in Romantic medievalism, and a leader in the new king, Frederick William IV. If the 1840’s are the most exciting period in nineteenth-century German intellectual history, the reason is that they witnessed the first principled confrontation of the *Ancien Régime* with the heirs of the French Revolution on German soil. For a century to come, the ideas that emerged from this crucible were to place their stamp on every movement originating from similar circumstances. And here it is worth stressing that the assault on absolutism and conservatism began at a time when the middle-class was still politically passive, and the industrial proletariat had hardly emerged. The radical intellectuals who incorporated the new outlook were not merely the heralds of a coming storm; their dissatisfaction with the existing order crystallised a mood which had been growing in Western Europe for some decades. Past and future mingled oddly in the ideology of a new social stratum which had not yet found its bearings, and whose confused gropings could be formulated alternatively in traditional liberal, or new-fangled socialist, terms. On the eve of the German pseudo-revolution, which was to satisfy national longings while leaving democratic aspirations unfulfilled, we encounter a new and potentially important group: the intelligentsia.

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IF THE EUROPEAN nineteenth century is defined as the era between the French and the Russian Revolution, the role played by German philosophy during this period appears in a paradoxical light. Germany resisted the impact of both upheavals, yet produced the essential link between them—Marxism. Moreover, this connection was established with the help of the Hegelian synthesis: a philosophy of contemplation and reconciliation, explicitly addressed to the task of mediating between the liberalism of the Enlightenment and the conservatism of the Restoration. The problem is not rendered easier by the corresponding circumstance that Hegelianism was having an unsettling effect upon East European intellectuals of aristocratic and conservative background long before Marx appeared on the scene.¹

The general character of German political evolution throughout this period is one of negative reaction to the upheavals produced, first in France and then in Russia, by the application to society of the doctrines of philosophic radicalism. The helpless passivity of the thin stratum of German sympathisers with the early phase of the French

¹ Cf. Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism*, London, 1958, p. 8. In addition to the Russian and Polish aristocrats among the Berlin Hegelians, mention must be made of those with whom Marx subsequently came into personal contact; cf. his correspondence with P. V. Annenkov in *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1954 (cited hereafter as MESC), pp. 39-51.

Revolution has already been noted. It corresponded not merely to the material weakness of the German middle class, but to its state of mind, which remained timidly conservative at least down to the middle of the nineteenth century. Thereafter the brief revolutionary effervescence of 1848-9 turned out to be a false dawn. German liberalism became progressively less combative as the century drew on, and after 1871 it was increasingly absorbed into the quasi-official ideology of National Liberalism. It thus continued the traditional role of the German middle class: that of a socially influential, but politically passive, adjunct to the autocracy.

Although on the eve of 1848 this peculiar constellation was not yet fully observable, it was already foreshadowed by the weakness of the radical intelligentsia and its isolation from the bulk of the educated middle-class public. In part the intellectuals compensated for this lack of influence by the intransigence of their theoretical formulations, as did their opposite numbers in France during and after the Bourbon restoration. But whereas the French ideologists of the 'Left' formed a coherent stratum which resisted official pressures and in the end imposed its outlook upon society, in Germany philosophic radicalism—the system of ideas and values held by the opponents of autocratic rule—disintegrated steadily throughout the second half of the century, leaving a vacuum which was not adequately filled by scientific materialism and positivism. As time went on, the entire complex of ideas associated with the French Revolution—ideas which in the 1840's had become the credo of the Young Hegelians and through them of the liberal opposition, though in a diluted form—disappeared from the consciousness of the educated classes. It became common form to assert the existence of an unbridgeable barrier between 'Western' rationalism (as though Kant had never existed) and the truly 'German' philosophy of Romanticism. This outcome casts a revealing light upon the intellectual situation on the eve of 1848, and in particular upon the significance of Feuerbach as the philosopher of Germany's aborted democratic revolution.

For reasons unconnected with his status in the history of philosophy, Feuerbach has come to be known chiefly as a precursor of Marx, or—more quaintly still—of 'dialectical materialism'. This is to ignore his significance as a critic of religion, and of the Hegelian system insofar as it embodied certain remnants of the theological world-view. From a formal viewpoint, Feuerbach's doctrine can be

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described as inverted Hegelianism. It can even be claimed that his inversion of Hegel's idealism (e.g., his treatment of spirit as the 'negation' of matter) anticipates some of the tenets of 'dialectical materialism'. But here we are concerned with his role in preparing the way for the emergence of a non-religious world view, i.e., for the completion of the Enlightenment on German soil. The understanding of this subject is not helped by emphasis upon the formal peculiarities of Feuerbach's philosophy. What matters is the effect of his teaching, which was to emancipate the radical intellectuals from the hold of institutional religion and its last remaining theological bulwark, Hegelian metaphysics.¹

Feuerbach begins and ends as a critic of religion, and of philosophical idealism—in his eyes a diluted form of theological idealism. The religious 'alienation' (the term, but not its application, goes back to Hegel) is viewed as the source of the philosophical alienation, of which Hegel's system is the last and greatest expression.² Apart from the critique of religious and speculative idealism, Feuerbach strictly speaking has no major aim in view. His attack on the Hegelian system, starting a little hesitantly and gradually rising to a climax in which the former disciple repudiates the master's teachings, turns wholly upon the destruction of speculative 'other-worldliness'. He himself was quite conscious of the fact that his substitution of anthropology for theology was the core of his thinking.³

This thinking has a passionate, almost lyrical, quality absent in

¹ Cf. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach, etc.*, MESW II, pp. 331 ff. The extent of Engels's commitment to the optimistic naturalism of the Enlightenment, which Feuerbach introduced into the post-Hegel discussion, is obscured by his strictures upon the inadequacy of Feuerbach's thought. Both men believed in the unification of philosophy and (natural) science, though at a level higher than that of the 'vulgar materialists' whom Feuerbach, like Engels, had repudiated. 'Dialectical materialism' (first so described by Plekhanov) was to be the concrete realisation of this positivist programme. Cf. Engels, *op. cit.*, pp. 337 ff.

² Cf. *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie*, in Ludwig Feuerbach, *Saemtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, 1904, vol. II, p. 249: 'The Hegelian philosophy has alienated man from himself, its entire system resting upon . . . abstractions.' 'The "absolute spirit" is the "departed spirit" of theology which leads a ghostly existence in Hegel's philosophy.' (Ibid.) 'Theology is belief in ghosts. Ordinary theology has its ghosts in sensual imagination, speculative theology in unsensual abstraction.' (Ibid.)

³ 'The secret of theology is anthropology.' (Ibid.) 'God was my first thought, reason my second, and man my third and last.' (*Philosophical Fragments*, in *Saemtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 388.) '. . . my writings all . . . have one and the same object . . . one and the same theme. That theme is religion and philosophy, and everything connected with it.' (*Vorlesungen ueber das Wesen der Religion*, p. 6; in *Saemtliche Werke*, vol. VIII.)

Hegel, but common enough in the Romantic movement. It was the peculiar achievement of Feuerbach to enlist the Romantic strain in the service of humanism. His affirmation of nature, man, the life of the senses, recalls Rousseau, with whom he also shares a certain sentimentality; while his radical rejection of Christianity foreshadows Nietzsche. At the same time he is totally free from Nietzsche's hysteria, which heralds the subsequent collapse of atheist humanism into nihilism. In the emancipation of the German mind from theology he represents the forward-looking stage, when rationalism still sounded an optimistic note. If religion is disclosed to be an illusion, it is also seen to constitute a human creation which flatters its originator, since the attributes of God are in fact those of Man. 'The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective—i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being.'¹

Feuerbach—like Hegel and almost every other representative of classical German philosophy a Protestant in his ethic, though not in his theological beliefs—attempts to rescue the religious kernel from the metaphysical husk. The outcome is a system of 'religious atheism' which has man for its unique centre of reference.

Who then is our Saviour and Redeemer? God or Love? Love; for God as God has not saved us, but Love, which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality. As God has renounced himself out of love, so we, out of love, should renounce God; for if we do not sacrifice God to love, we sacrifice love to God, and, in spite of the predicate of love, we have the God—the evil being—of religious fanaticism.²

The time has come to transform theology into anthropology. 'In the Incarnation religion only confesses what in reflection on itself, as theology, it will not admit; namely, that God is an altogether human being.' The statement 'God loves man' is an 'Orientalism' for 'love of man is the highest'. Feuerbach has no use for a God who plainly is nothing but the Oriental paterfamilias writ large, but his critique proceeds from this somewhat sentimental objection to the demonstration that 'God' is an imaginary substitute for the real world. Religion has sacrificed man to God. Now '... we need only ... invert the religious relation—regard that as an end which religion supposes to be a means—exalt that into the primary which

¹ L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in *Saemtliche Werke*, vol. VI, p. 17; translated as *The Essence of Christianity*, by Marian Evans (George Eliot), London, 1854, (2nd edn., 1881) p. 14.

² *Essence of Christianity*, p. 53.

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In religion is subordinate . . . at once we have destroyed the illusion, and the unclouded light of truth streams in upon us.¹

The loss of the religious illusion leads straight to the recognition that philosophy, to fulfil its task, must promote the emancipation of mankind from all obstacles which hamper the free development of human faculties. The positive content of philosophy is furnished by study of the real existence of man—not man in the abstract, but the empirical human beings whose liberty and happiness are at stake :

He who says no more of me than that I am an atheist, says and knows nothing of me. The question as to the existence or non-existence of God, the opposition between theism and atheism, belongs to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but not to the nineteenth. I deny God. But that means for me that I deny the negation of man. In place of the illusory, fantastic, heavenly position of man, which in actual life necessarily leads to the degradation of man, I substitute the tangible, actual, and consequently also the political and social position of mankind. The question concerning the existence or non-existence of God is for me nothing but the question concerning the existence or non-existence of man.²

In religion, man ‘alienates’ himself from himself, worships a self-generated image of perfection, and renders himself uselessly miserable. True philosophy breaks this enchantment and brings man back to himself. It does so by illuminating the sources of the religious illusion. ‘The historical progress of religion consists in this: that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognised as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God, is now perceived to be something human.’³

Feuerbach conceived his philosophy to be the realisation of all preceding systems—in this respect following in Hegel’s footsteps. But he repudiated Hegel’s procedure, including his identification of the real and the rational. Philosophy must take its start not from Hegel’s abstract ‘idea’, but from concrete nature and historical reality. It must trace the natural conditions of human freedom, and understand man as a being whose relationship to nature is mediated by the senses. It must realise that ‘thought is preceded by suffering’, and that cognition enters the picture only after man has been formed by nature. Above all, it must cease to judge men by the illusory idols they set up, notably the religious idol which estranges them from their own nature. Here Feuerbach spells out the implications of Goethe’s

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

² Preface to vol. I of *Saemtliche Werke*.

³ *Essence of Christianity*, p. 12.

pantheist world-view which by the 1840's had become the esoteric doctrine of the intellectual elite. For all its political conservatism and the calculated ambiguity of its public utterances, the 'spirit of Weimar' had always been profoundly subversive of religious orthodoxy.

There is an obvious retort to all this: *Why* does man experience the need to project the 'spiritual' part of his nature in this curious fashion? One need not be a theologian or an idealist philosopher to see that Feuerbach has to some extent begged the question. But the philosophical inadequacy of a doctrine has never yet prevented it from becoming socially important. The problem for the historian is why Feuerbach's influence on the subsequent development of German thought was so much less than that of a thinker like Nietzsche who shared his atheism, but not his humanism. To put it differently, why did those elements in German national life who continued to adhere to Feuerbach's outlook have to become socialists? This question leads back to politics, and specifically to the failure of German democracy in what for a moment promised to be its *annus mirabilis*: 1848.

Feuerbach's position, by and large, corresponds to that of the French materialists and rationalists on the eve of 1789, when the radical intellectuals entered the political arena. In the German setting these tendencies were necessarily reflected in a caricatured form. The place of the Girondins (not to mention the Jacobins, who had no German counterparts save Marx and his friends) was occupied by those democrats who formed the left wing of the National Assembly in 1848–9, and who subsequently maintained an increasingly hopeless resistance to the alliance between the Prussian state and the North German National-Liberals. This opposition in turn contained an even smaller and weaker republican element, largely concentrated in the South and actuated by particularist dislike of Prussia. Feuerbach is the philosopher of this republican-democratic opposition. Its failure is also his failure. With its growing elimination from public life, his own influence declined, until by the time of his death (1872) he was isolated and almost forgotten. Yet his legacy was incorporated within the body of Marxist, or quasi-Marxist, doctrine which at about that time began to permeate the nascent labour movement. This renaissance of his influence proceeded *pari passu* with the spread of a vulgarised scientific materialism among the middle-class public—now politically quiescent, but still anti-clerical and vaguely liberal. Since he had been among the first to demand the unification of

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philosophy and science, he could in retrospect be viewed as a forerunner of positivism as well as Marxism. In practice it depended largely upon shifting political affiliations which aspect received the greatest prominence. In the ideology of Social-Democracy, as formulated by Engels around 1880, both elements managed to coexist quite happily, albeit at the expense of the Hegelian heritage which Feuerbach had never quite repudiated. It was now taken for granted that Feuerbach's 'materialism', i.e., his naturalist humanism, offered the necessary corrective to Hegel's metaphysics. At the same time the development of (natural) science was welcomed as a solvent of speculative idealism and the most reliable reinforcement of the new positivist world-view.

All this was a far cry from the situation on the eve of 1848, when radical humanism was the fighting creed of a small but determined body of intellectuals who hoped to take the leadership in the impending revolution. The latter was envisaged in terms derived from French experience, and the radical intellectuals drifted towards Feuerbach's materialism, and away from their traditional idealist moorings, because the struggle against Church and State had begun to reproduce some of the features of the earlier revolt against the *ancien régime* in France. The extraordinary certainty of victory displayed by all the radicals, including Marx and Engels, in 1848-9 was due to their conviction that history was about to repeat itself.¹

In passing one may note the remarkable parallelism between the thought of Feuerbach and that of the Saint-Simonist school in France. Whether by coincidence or not, both stress the transformation of theology into anthropology: the kingdom of heaven is to be brought down to earth. When Feuerbach proclaims as his aim 'the realisation of the Hegelian and generally of the preceding philosophy',² he

¹ Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 332: 'The main body of the most determined Young Hegelians was, by the practical necessity of the fight against organised religion, driven back to Anglo-French materialism. This brought them into conflict with their school system.' Cf. also Lukács, *Der junge Hegel*, p. 342: 'Die Grundlinie der klassischen deutschen Philosophie ist ein Kampf gegen den philosophischen Materialismus.' (The basic line of classical German philosophy is a struggle against philosophical materialism.) For L. this is an awkward admission to have to make, since his general tendency is to represent classical German thought as the ideological reflex of the French Revolution—ignoring its derivation from Lutheran Protestantism which from the start gave it a conservative bent and subsequently led its more influential adherents to look to England rather than France as the political model.

² *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, para. 20.

not merely anticipates Marx, but echoes a theme which had already been sounded by the French ‘utopian socialists’.¹ The secularisation of religion, i.e., the transforming of religious into humanist motivations, was an aim common to radical movements on both sides of the Rhine, with the French generally setting the pace, while the more pedestrian Germans brought up the rear, but in the process deepened the French concepts into a systematic critique of theology and metaphysics. To gain a clear picture of Marx’s background one has to bear in mind that his birthplace, the Rhineland, lay at the crossroads of all these movements. It seems probable that he had already made the acquaintance of Saint-Simonism before he took up his studies. He was still a high-school pupil in Trier when a resident Saint-Simonian propagandist in 1835 attracted the unfavourable attention of the authorities with a pamphlet on ‘The Privileged Classes and the Working Classes’: perhaps the first time that this now familiar battle-cry had been sounded on German soil.²

¹ For a thorough analysis of this subject, cf. H. J. Hunt, *Le socialisme et le romantisme en France*, Oxford, 1955. For Saint-Simonian influence on German thinkers of the period, cf. E. M. Butler, *The Saint-Simonian Religion in Germany*, London, 1926, passim.

² The author in question, Ludwig Gall, seems to have been connected with an ‘advanced’ liberal circle of which Marx’s father, and the headmaster of his school, were members: cf. B. Nicolaevsky and O. Maenchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter*, London, 1936, pp. 9 ff. There is reason to believe that Marx’s future father-in-law, Ludwig von Westphalen, was likewise attracted to Saint-Simonism; cf. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, ed. T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, London, 1956, p. 9.

EARLY SOCIALISM

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, whose impact on the European consciousness has so far been discussed only in terms appropriate to the history of philosophy, is today generally acknowledged to have been the source of the modern socialist movement.¹ Though unchallenged, this reading of the facts lacks some of the overwhelming certainty which it necessarily possessed for contemporaries. At our present distance from the scene, the suggestion that socialism might equally well have come to birth under different circumstances has at least the plausibility of an academic hypothesis. To any European living between 1830 and 1870, such a notion would have appeared grotesque, just as it would have seemed palpably absurd to associate democratic radicalism with any country but France, and with any tradition save that of the Jacobins. (Switzerland was republican, but far from radical.) In 1848, and for some decades before and after this crucial watershed, the derivation of socialism from France was as plain as the Russian origin of modern communism is to us. To pursue socialist aims was to think along lines suggested by the evolution of France

¹ Cf. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London, 1952, part III, pp. 167 ff; Elie Halévy, *Histoire du socialisme européen*, Paris, 1948, passim; G. D. H. Cole, *Socialist Thought: vol. I, The Forerunners 1789-1950*, London, 1955, pp. 11 ff.