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# **Conceptual Thought as Critique: Remarks on Hegel and Marx**

**Andreas Arndt**

**Abstract:** The young Marx argued that Hegel defended an uncritical view of reality by taking empirical existence to be the truth of the idea. In his reproach, Marx puts the relationship between logic and 'Realphilosophie' in Hegel's philosophy into question. According to him, Hegel subjects' society and the state to a logical schematism instead of grasping them in their own logic. In this paper, I examine Marx's reproach and argue that Hegel does by no means suggest an affirmative view of reality. In particular, his view of the dialectical method can be understood as critical, in the sense that Marx had in mind. At the same time, however, ambiguities and ambivalences remain in Hegel's work. At decisive points in the *Philosophy of Right*, and partly in the Lectures on the *Philosophy of Right*, the critical function of the dialectical method appears to be weak. Hegel's method thus remains ambiguous with regard to the possibilities and also the necessities of a critique of reality, especially with regard to the institutionalization of social and political conflicts.

**Keywords:** Hegel, Logic, Method, Marx Philosophy of Right, Science of Logic.

In the epilogue to the second edition of the first volume of *Capital* Marx writes:

“In its mystified form, the dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.”<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the epilogue, Marx wants to make explicit what consists the opposition of his dialectical method to that of Hegel.<sup>2</sup> This delimitation is not unambiguous and raises questions. On the one hand side, the claim is that Hegelian dialectic *seemed* to have transfigured the existing state of things; this can be understood as a dissociation from the accommodation thesis – that Hegel has rendered himself to the Prussian State – as formulated by Rudolf Haym, a thesis also popular among

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1 Marx 1982, p.103.

2 „My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it.“ Marx 1982, p.102.

social democrats, and that even Marx in 1870 explicitly rejected.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand side, Marx does not leave any doubt that Hegel has mystified the dialectic.<sup>4</sup> Only in its rational shape, it is critical and revolutionary. At least, Hegel is thereby reproached to have not overseen the critical consequences of his dialectical method and to have abetted its appropriation for the purpose of transfiguring the existing things through mystification.

In relation to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, the young Marx defended the thesis that Hegel is necessarily led to the “inevitable outcome... that an *empirically existent* is *uncritically* accepted as the actual truth of the idea”<sup>5</sup>; his philosophy is characterized by a “necessary transforming of empirical fact into speculation and of speculation into empirical fact.”<sup>6</sup> Behind this reproach lies the assumption that for Hegel “logic is not used to prove the nature of the state, but the state is used to prove the logic.”<sup>7</sup> Central for the reproach of uncritical empiricism is therefore the relationship between logic and real philosophy in Hegel that Marx assumes. Following his conception, Hegel subjugates his representation of society and the state to a logical schematism instead of grasping them in their proper logic.

We will examine this thesis in what follows, whereby we will demonstrate that Hegel does not suggest an affirmative conception of the existing state of things, rather, his conception of method can be understood as critical, in the sense addressed by Marx. At the same time, obscurities and ambivalences remain. At decisive moments in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* and in parts even of his lectures on the philosophy of right, Hegel reduces the critical function of his method, and remains ambiguous regarding the possibilities and necessities, if any, of a critique of the existing state of things and of the institutionalization of social and political conflicts. This will, in the following, be the object of the first part the elaborations (I.). With regard to the method developed in the *Science of Logic*, we will then show that

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3 Cf. Haym 1857, p, 359. „The Prussian state... entered into the period of restauration... The Hegelian system became the scientific abode of the spirit of the Prussian restauration.” Also, Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of the leadings heads of the German social democracy assumed in 1870 in this sense, Hegel is “the discoverer and glorifier of the royal Prussian idea of the state.” He had this remark printed as remark to an essay by Frederick Engels, which angered Engels: “this ignoramus has the insolence to wish ti dispatch a man like Hegel with the word “Preuss””. Karl Marx seconded: „I had written to him that if, when he wrote about Hegel, he knew nothing better than to repeat the old... muck, then he would do better to keep his mouth shut.” (MECW, Vol. 43, pp. 508 and 512).

4 Cf. Arndt 2013.

5 MECW, Vol. 3, p. 39.

6 MECW 3, p. 9. „Ordinary empirical fact has not its own but an alien spirit for its law; whereas the form of existence of the actual idea is not an actuality evolved from itself, but ordinary empirical fact.”

7 Marx 2009, p.18

the absolute idea as absolute method is at the same time the normative reference point of the comprehension [*Begreifen*] of reality, and that this comprehension therefore necessarily includes a critical relation to reality. At the same time, the relation between logic and real philosophy remains methodologically under-determined (II.). But this also holds for Marx, who underestimates the critical significance of the absolute idea and tends to level the difference between *Logic* and real philosophy. In a comparison of the method that is claimed by Marx with the conceptions of Hegel, we will therefore finally show how far and on what ground they correspond to one another (III.).

## I.

According to Hegel's explanation, the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* are:

“An endeavor to *apprehend and present the state as something inherently rational*. As a work of philosophy, it must be as far removed as possible from any attempt to construct a *state as it ought to be*. The instruction which it may contain cannot consist in teaching the state what it ought to be; it can only show how the state, the ethical universe, should be understood.”<sup>8</sup>

At first glance, Hegel argues that conceptual thinking must distance itself from any critique of the existing reality of the state; what can be criticized is only an insufficient manner of conceptual thinking itself, and philosophy must indeed instruct [*belehren*] us on how to think conceptually. These two aspects, as Walter Jaeschke argues, should not be thought separately, since Hegel presupposes “a concept of reason which is twofold or also in itself differentiated into ‘self-conscious reason’ and ‘present reason.’”<sup>9</sup> In the “preface” to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* this doubling is compellingly expressed in the often misunderstood, and therefore infamous dictum: “*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.*”<sup>10</sup>

What we are dealing with here is the relationship between the *Science of the Logic*, and more precisely, of the absolute idea as the epitome of reason to reality. In contrast to the common misunderstandings that Hegel would characterize as rational, everything that exists in its being-as-it-is, one must emphatically recall that reality

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8 Hegel 2008, p. 14f.

9 Jaeschke 2014, p. 427

10 Hegel 2008, p. 14.

and actuality are not to be equated, as many interpreters have stressed.<sup>11</sup> This already follows from the *Science of Logic* where the category of reality falls into the logic of being-there and finally designates the finite and therewith still external relationship of something and other. Yet, the category of actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] falls into the logic of essence and designates a modality of the absolute in the transition to the concept. In distinction from the merely existing reality or existence, actuality is, as it says in § 142 of the *Encyclopedia* “that unity of essence and concrete existence [*Existenz*], of inner and outer, that has immediately come to be.”<sup>12</sup> Otherwise put, the actual is a reality if and insofar as it corresponds to the concept. Thereby it holds, and we will return to this more closely, that reality as a finite – and to this belongs also the sphere of objective spirit, the state – there cannot be a complete correspondence of the concept and the object. To this end, one reads in the logic of the concept in the section on the idea: “Finite things are finite because, and to the extent that, they do not possess the reality of their concept completely within them but are in need of other things for it – or, conversely, because they are presupposed as objects and consequently the concept is in them as an external determination.”<sup>13</sup> Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer has pointedly formulated that the concept of actuality – in the sense of the actuality of reason – encompasses in Hegel “the validity, not only of the positive validity of the moral-legal order” and should always be regarded “as the condition of development of (moral-legal) culture, that is the best possible at a time.”<sup>14</sup>

In his “preface” to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel does not explicitly draw this consequence and seems to suggest a rather affirmative attitude when he writes: “The unsophisticated heart takes the simpler line of adhering with trustful conviction to what is publicly accepted as true and then building on this firm foundation its conduct and sets position in life.”<sup>15</sup> This “truth about *right, ethical life, and the state*” is supposedly “as old as its recognition and formulation in the in public laws and in public morality and religion”<sup>16</sup> The common sense that confidently sticks to this is only the everyday manner of natural consciousness orienting itself in life. The “thinking spirit” wants to conceptually grasp the known truth – that is therefore not yet cognized<sup>17</sup> – “the content, which is

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11 Cf. paradigmatically Stekeler-Weithofer 1982, pp. 282–288; Aragüés 2018, p. 217 ff.

12 Hegel 2010a, p. 211.

13 Hegel 2010b, p. 672.

14 Stekeler Weithofer 1992, pp 288.

15 Hegel 2008, p. 5.

16 Ibid.

17 Cf. the „preface“ to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “What is familiar and well known as such is not

already rational in itself must win the *form* of rationality.”<sup>18</sup> Hereby we are not dealing with a mere affirmation of the existing state of things, since, as Hegel states, it is only through conceptual thought the rational content:

it may appear justified to free thinking. Such thinking does not stop at the given, whether the given be supported by the external positive authority of the state or agreement among people, or by the authority of inward feeling and the heart and by the witness of the spirit which immediately concurs with it. On the contrary, thought which is free starts out from itself and thereupon demands to know itself as united in its innermost being with the truth.”<sup>19</sup>

Birgit Sandkaulen<sup>20</sup> has clarified what difficulties are linked to Hegel's confidence in confidence. The tension between the critical attitude of thinking spirit and of the confidential conviction of natural consciousness catches the eye. If the validity of the existing state of things is only to be justified through the comprehension in free thought and does not follow from the authority of the existing state of things, then it follows that its rationality does not coincide with its mere existence. As little as each form of self-consciousness can be addressed as self-conscious reason, as little anything that is present can be addressed as rational. But this also means – as Hegel says about the concatenation of free thought – that any form of a non-comprehending [*nicht-begreifenden*] consciousness that relies on the common conviction or on the immediacy of feeling and heart, or on subjective conviction, deceives and can itself be deceived. As one must distinguish in reality, between rational actuality and mere existing state of things, one must also generally distinguish in consciousness between opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge (*epistémé*)<sup>21</sup> to justify the validity of the existing state of things – and also of the trusting conviction with regard to the existing state of things – at all. Put differently: trust itself requires the justification of the concept and mistrust in the non-reflected confidence. Hegel, who precisely for

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really known.” Here Hegel certainly even adds: “In the case of cognition, the most common form of self-deception and deception of others is when one presupposes something as well known and then makes one's peace with it.” Hegel 2018, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel 2008, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Sandkaulen 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fulda 2003, p.83: “On the one hand side, there now stands a consciousness that in its temporally specific biases lives. Hegel calls it natural consciousness [...], primordially caught in the opacity of the lived moment. On the other side stands the philosophy that must correct the inversions which are contained in natural consciousness. Thereby it presents itself to that natural consciousness as something inverted and wrong [...]. Thereby – like in Plato – there is the opposition of apparent knowledge, in which we usually live, and real knowledge of true philosophy.”

this reason, honors and despises public opinion,<sup>22</sup> has not made explicit its ambivalence in this passage. Neither here, nor at another place in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, is it justified why this trust can be trusted in all cases. Even more so, the inverted case of mistrust in the validity of the existing state of things – neither on the level of common sense nor as result of free thinking – is not considered nor possible conflicts resulting from it, leading up to the question of a right to resistance against a pathologically distorted political system<sup>23</sup> Rather Hegel refrains from the historicity completely for the benefit of a purely ideal moment:

In any case, however, it is absolutely essential that the constitution should not be regarded as *something made*, even though it has come into being in time. It must be treated rather as something simply existent in and for itself, as divine therefore, and constant, and so as exalted above the sphere of things that are made.<sup>24</sup>

Even if it holds that the objectivity of the objective spirit to which the state and the constitution belong, are not accessible to the arbitrariness of subjective action, and is the expression of a formative step of spirit which is objective vis-à-vis the individual, Hegel's testimony is not convincing. Here, as was pointed out by Birgit Sandkaulen,<sup>25</sup> the historicity of spirit is arrested, without the state being beyond historicity – since world history is ultimately inferred from the state. This historicity means in any case transformability and not persistence. Especially therefore the actuality of reason is here also always mixed with the merely existent and external to it, so that one must distinguish between the two. One could put this pointedly: the state as such is in its worldly existence, as objective spirit, can represent the concept only in a broken manner and mediated through externalities due to reasons that lie in reason itself. The representation of the eternal in it cannot abstract entirely from the real philosophical context, because it is part of the determination of the idea's being-there in actuality. By abstaining from it, Hegel's formulations create the impression that he wanted to displace the state from the realm of the finite into that of the absolute. If the constitution were absolute "simply in and for itself" [*schlechthin*] self-referential and thus "divine and constant," then it would be the absolute itself and would no longer belong to the objective and therefore finite

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22 "Public opinion therefore deserves to be as much respected as despised." Hegel 2008, p. 301.)

23 Cf. Siep 2012, p.45; 2015, pp. 46 –78.

24 Hegel 2008, p. 262.

25 Sandkaulen 2014, p. 434.



spirit. The state is only the “rational in and for itself,”<sup>26</sup> but only insofar as reason – the idea – has realized itself in it. The idea has always already become actuality in a determinate historical manner. In this sense, Hegel claims that “the constitution of any given people depends in general on the character and development of its self-consciousness. In its self-consciousness, its subjective freedom is rooted and so, therefore, is the actuality of its constitution.”<sup>27</sup> But this actuality is also supposed to be measured by how far it has realized a maximum of rationality in the frame of the objectively possible or has lagged behind. The constant or the eternal *in* the historical finitude of objective spirit is not absolute reason itself in its self-relationality, but as such it is the measure in relation (to finite) reality, wherein it only ever appears as fractured by externalities.

Hegel's formulations prove Marx right in that the handling of the method in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, which seems to transfigure the existing. However, there remains an ambivalence, which is exemplified here in view of the “trustworthy conviction” of the “unbiased mind” is to be made clear by way of example. In Hegel's view, the publicly known truth shows itself above all in religion; this, however, does not secure an affirmative, unconditional agreement of throne and altar, but in it, the individual experiences the consciousness of its freedom. It is not by chance that Hegel emphasizes in the *Encyclopedia* (1830) regarding the free spirit of the individual, that the consciousness of individual freedom has “come into the world through Christianity” and man “in religion knows its relationship to absolute spirit as such as its essence”, “has the divine spirit also as entering into the sphere of worldly existence, as the substance of the state, the family, etc.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Hegel emphasizes that people do not “have” the idea of freedom in this way, but they are it. “It is this wanting of freedom no longer a drive which demands its satisfaction, but the character – spirited consciousness that has become driveless being.”<sup>29</sup> If this is the basis of the trust of which Hegel speaks in the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, then it arises from an internalized consciousness of freedom, which can only agree with the existing because it finds itself in it. Obviously, Hegel assumes that trust only arises when it also can be justified. But even if it should be so the case of conflict remains hidden.

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26 Hegel 2008, p. 228.

27 Ibid., p. 263.

28 GW, Vol. 20, §482, Remark.

29 Ibid.

## II.

In the "Preface" to the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel emphasizes right at the beginning, the special significance of the method that he takes as a guiding principle, whereby he explicitly refers to the *Science of Logic*, even if he has "omitted to bring out and demonstrate the chain of logical argument in each and every detail...in dealing with a topic which is concrete and intrinsically of so varied a character."<sup>30</sup> Marx's assumption that the *Philosophy of Right* allows conclusions to be drawn about Hegel's conception of the method is therefore correct, especially since Hegel emphasizes in this context that his treatise should be judged primarily from this point of view. Yet, what is the nature of the relation of the real science of spirit to the method of logic cannot be inferred from Hegel's remark. Marx's view seems to be that Hegel uses figures of the logic as schematism and applies them directly to real philosophical facts. The concrete and manifold nature of these facts would then only be an obstacle to overload the text by constant references to the *Logic*. However, another interpretation is possible, which is suggested by the *Science of Logic* itself.

In connection with the passage already quoted above from the section on the idea, we read: "Since the idea is the unity of concept and reality, *being* has attained the significance of *truth*; it now *is*, therefore, only what the idea is."<sup>31</sup> This is doubly true: for the concept, which grasps itself here as a concept itself in pure thinking, and for the concept that refers to reality. Both are to be distinguished: only in the former case does the concept become purely self-referential and the idea consequently absolute. With respect to real objects the situation is different: "It is not that the subject matter [*der Gegenstand*], the objective and subjective world, *ought* to be in principle *congruent* with the idea; the two are themselves rather the congruent of concept and reality; a reality that does not correspond to the concept is mere *appearance*, something subjective, accidental, arbitrary, something which is not the truth."<sup>32</sup> This is to say that actuality in any case does not go directly together with the concept,<sup>33</sup> even if the concept or the idea must correspond to the reality, so that "anything actual might possibly *be in truth*."<sup>34</sup> The criteria for this actual or true being, Hegel formulates negatively: "But there is no saying what anything actual might possibly *be in truth*, if its concept is not in it and its objectivity does not measure up to

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30 Hegel 2008, p. 4.

31 Hegel 2010b, p. 672

32 Ibid., p. 671.

33 It goes together with the concept only insofar as the contingent, but not contingency in its multiplicity is logically necessary (cf. Henrich 1971).

34 Hegel 2010b, p. 672.

this concept; it would be a nothing.”<sup>35</sup> With this negative formulation he wants to clarify that what is dead has no correspondence of concept and reality and thus no real being.

On the other hand, it is also true for Hegel that the logical idea is necessarily in a difference to actuality. In the *Science of Logic* he emphasizes that this is by no means a limit of the idea, but a limitation inscribed in itself: “That the idea has not perfectly fashioned their reality, that it has not completely subjugated it to the concept, the possibility of that rests on the fact that the idea itself has a *restricted content*; that, as essentially as it is the unity of the concept and reality, just as essentially it is also their difference.”<sup>36</sup> This is generally true for reality, Hegel extends his analysis to the state, which even as the worst state, according to him, is still the state.<sup>37</sup> This raises the question, under which conditions do the non-correspondence of concept and reality lead to nothingness, and under which conditions is reality more than nothing?

In his lecture on logic in 1817, Hegel states: “When one says that this state constitution is bad, its badness is something transient – it is not. But there is not state which does not have something that does not correspond the idea, even if only in an incomplete and merely abstract manner.”<sup>38</sup> Even the worst state is in some respect - insofar as it is a state at all - in correspondence to the concept; but what is a state whose objectivity is not at all commensurate with the term? In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel remarks of the context just quoted: “Wholes like the state and the church cease to exist *in concreto* when the unity of concept and their reality is dissolved.”<sup>39</sup> This dissolution of the unity of concept and in which the objectivity of the state loses its adequacy to the concept is obviously a historical moment in the cognition of the state. In his *Lecture on the Philosophy of Right* in 1818/19, Hegel distinguished between reasonable and historical necessity as two ways of looking at things, and he emphasized that “true cognition” cannot “stop at the historical viewpoint of relations of right, since for it is valid only the right of the existing, that which is valid according to its form, even if it also would be in an infinite way, the highest wrong.”<sup>40</sup> Here, the rational view becomes the normative instance of objection, which criticizes the existing as being contrary to reason, if it “does not correspond to the idea.”<sup>41</sup>

.....  
35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 672.

37 Cf. Ibid., p. 673.

38 G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol, 23.1, p. 138. [add this to biblio and more detail maybe]

39 Hegel 2010b, p. 672.

40 .G. W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol, 26.1, p. 234.

41 Ibid.

From this criticism it follows that a historical overturning of the existing is necessary and justified: "If thus the spirit of a people entered a higher stage, the moments of the constitution which are related to earlier stages lose their footing; they must collapse, and no power is capable of holding them."<sup>42</sup> That this is not to be understood as attentism, Hegel clarifies a little later: "Everywhere, where spirit has attained a higher consciousness the struggle against such institutions is necessary."<sup>43</sup> If philosophy, as it is called in this context, transcends the historical view point, then it does not carry out a flight from the world into higher spheres, but proceeds "without regard for what is valid, for the ideas [*Vorstellungen*] of the time."<sup>44</sup> The point of view of reason implies a ruthless criticism of the existing, insofar as it corresponds to the general spirit in a people, i.e. its the level of education of the spirit reached under the respective circumstances as the reality of the concept. In this criticism lies an ought, because the Idea itself, as just as much theoretical as practical, demands validity in reality; in the lecture of 1821/2 it is said in this regard succinctly: "the rational ought to be effective [*soll gelten*]."<sup>45</sup>

The critical use of the method is based on the fact that in grasping the historical reality, the existing is measured against the concept or the idea. In the transcription of the lecture from 1819/20, Hegel emphasizes that "science does not set up an ideal," but that "a certain way is based on the way of the present Spirit" is taken as a basis.<sup>46</sup> Critique is therefore immanent critique. But in order for a critique to be possible at all, it is not enough to direct the gaze solely to the idea as the 'eternal-true,' which, according to Hegel, is 'not abstract,' but one must evaluate it according to the fundamental difference between concept and reality, and with regard to the historical state of formation of the spirit, whether it falls short of what is objectively possible or not. Instead, when Hegel repeatedly points out that philosophy the outer form of the existing reality" with the accidental and the individual, he consequently undermines the complexity of finite reality and thus of the existence of the idea in the spirit.<sup>47</sup>

.....  
42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., p, 235.

44 Ibid.,

45 GW, Vol. 26.2, p. 764. Cf. also the postscript of Griesheim to the lecture of 1824/5: "The philosophical consideration aims that a legal institution is rational, that the right, the true right of man, is respected in it. A historically founded right can be rejected by philosophy as irrational. For example, slavery in India can be justified historically by the fact that these slaves, even among the Negroes these slaves [...]. This justification notwithstanding, reason must maintain that the slavery of the Negroes is a completely unlawful institution, contrary to true human and divine Right and is to be rejected." (GW, Vol. 26.3, p. 1061).

46 GW, Vol. 26.1, p. 337.

47 Cf. the lecture / (GW 26.1: p. 339): "Rational contemplation raises above it what in detail is contradictory to hold for something so important." On the whole, it is to be noted that critical consequences

## III.

When Marx speaks of his method as distinct from that of Hegel, this does not happen on a common theoretical level with the *Science of Logic*, but in view of his project of a *Critique of Political Economy*. Seen from Hegel's point of view, we are thus dealing with methodological questions of a particular real science, whereby in view of the planned total scope of the project, of which *Capital* is only a part, it can be claimed, that it is largely congruent with Hegel's philosophy of the objective spirit.<sup>48</sup> From this level of a particular science, Marx refers to what he calls Hegel's "dialectical method," whereby on the one hand, he strongly emphasizes the contrast between the two – his "dialectical method" is "not only fundamentally different from Hegel's, but "its direct antithesis" – but on the other hand makes use of the *Logic* as a reservoir of "dialectical" figures of thought without reflecting on the conditions of the reflect the conditions of the possibility of such a use.

From Hegel's point of view, Marx's handling of the *Science of Logic* raises the question of how the absolute idea as absolute method relates to the real science of the objective spirit. That here, due to the permanent exteriority of the idea in the finite reality, a direct correspondence or congruence cannot take place, is already the result from the quoted claims that Hegel makes in the *Science of Logic* itself. How this difference is to be understood and how to work it out methodically, on the other hand, is largely left out. A revealing formulation is to be found in the "Logic" of the *Encyclopedia*:

"everything actual, insofar as it is something true, is also the idea... The individual being is some side or other of the idea, but for this still other actualities are needed...the concept is realized only in them together and in their relation. The individual taken by itself [*für sich*] does not correspond to its concept; this limitation of its existence constitutes its *finitude* and its demise."<sup>49</sup>

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in view of the existing order are above all made explicit in the *collegia* on the philosophy of right up to 1819/20.

48 "The order obviously has to be (1) the general, abstract determinants which obtain in more or less all forms of society, but in the above-explained sense. (2) The categories which make up the inner structure of bourgeois society and on which the fundamental classes rest. Capital, wage labour, landed property. Their interrelation. Town and country. The three great social classes. Exchange between them. Circulation. Credit system (private). (3) Concentration of bourgeois society in the form of the state. Viewed in relation to itself. The 'unproductive' classes. Taxes. State debt. Public credit. The population. The colonies. Emigration. (4) The international relation of production. International division of labour. International exchange. Export and import. Rate of exchange. (5) The world market and crises." Marx 1993, p. 7 [need to add this to the biblio]

49 Hegel 2010a, p.

However, he does not explain how to comprehend reason in reality under these conditions, i.e. how to reconstruct from the external relations the moments of truth and reality. Unfortunately, there are no further explanations of this point in neither in the supplement to the *Freundesverein* edition nor in the postscripts accessible today, in which the corresponding paragraph is almost without exception skipped over.<sup>50</sup>

The absolute method, as Hegel develops it in the *Science of Logic*, cannot simply be the method of apprehending reality, for in it the concept is itself in its pure self-reference and without any externality the object, so that in this absolute method it is at the same time subject, means and object of cognition. In the finite real sciences, on the other hand, the concept can only refer to itself externally, mediated by others, and is divided into moments of truth as mutually external realities. If the concept is realized only in them together and in their relationship, as Hegel emphasizes, and if the existent, which has the concept more or less in itself, is not deducible from the concept itself, then it requires an effort of its *own* of the concept to find it again in reality and to find the inner, conceptual and to represent the inner, conceptual connection of the fragmented realities.

The devotion to reality is inscribed in the absolute method itself - it is the „*impulse* [Trieb] to find and recognize *itself through itself in all things*”<sup>51</sup>, both theoretically and practically<sup>52</sup> - so that at the end of the passage through reality, as it we can read in the *Encyclopedia* „„the logical“ is again attained, but „with the significance that it is a universality that has proven itself in the concrete content as its actuality.”<sup>53</sup> This means that the absolute method in turn is the result of this passage (which Hegel, by the way, but never fully accomplished), but it is not ad limine identical with the method therefore it is not ad limine identical with the method which tries to grasp and represent the mediation of the conceptual moments in reality. The finding oneself and recognizing presupposes first of all a searching, to which, taken for itself according to Hegel, corresponds to a deficient form of method, the "enquiry [*suchende Erkennen*]": in it "the method likewise occupies the position of an *instrument*, as a means that stands on the side of the subject, connecting it with the object. The subject in this syllogism is one extreme, the object is the other, and in conclusion the subject unites through its method with the object without however *uniting with itself*

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50 In fact, it is to be noted that the question of the relationship of the dialectical method in the *Science of Logic* to the method in the real sciences has to the method in the real sciences has so far received little attention in the Hegel-research.

51 Hegel 2010, p. 737

52 Cf. Gerhard 2015.

53 G.W.F. Hegel, GW, Vol. 19, p. 415.

there. The extremes remain diverse, because subject, method, and object are not posited as *the one identical concept*.<sup>54</sup> Obviously, this concerns this concerns the finite spirit, thus also the objective one, because Hegel emphasizes explicitly, that the absolute idea, thus the absolute method, is to be referred to the absolute spirit: "Art and religion" are "its different modes of apprehending itself and giving itself appropriate existence"<sup>55</sup>, something that certainly only in philosophy is realized in the form of the concept. Below this threshold, the inner context of reality has to be reconstructed from its moments, in order to be able to identify the conceptual structures in reality. The peculiarity of the searching method in its theoretical and practical approach to reality is that here the existence of the idea in nature and in the finite mind is presupposed as an objective world and thus the real difference of subject, means and object in cognition and action. In this, this method differs from the absolute one. Hegel emphasizes that dialectics as an analytic-synthetic method<sup>56</sup> gets a "new foundation" in the absolute method, but otherwise "remains the same as in the preceding subject matter."<sup>57</sup>

It is at this point that Marx, insofar as he explicitly reflects on his method, as, for example, in the epilogue to the second edition of the first volume of *Capital*, the analytical moment to the mode of research - that is, to the 'searching' cognition in the narrower sense - and the synthetic moment to the mode of representation:

Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an a priori construction.<sup>58</sup>

The last remark refers to Marx's demarcation from Hegel, whom he reproaches with confusing the 'ideal' reflection with the movement of the substance itself – a quid pro quo that is the basis of Hegel's mystification

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54 Hegel 2010b, p. 738.

55 Ibid., 735.

56 "This no less synthetic than analytic moment of the *judgment* through which the initial universal determines itself from within as the other of itself is to be called the dialectical moment." Hegel 2010, p. 741.

57 Ibid., p. 748.

58 Marx 1990, p.102



of dialectics.<sup>59</sup> To the predominantly analytically oriented mode of research, Marx therefore also ascribes an empirically-materialist function of justification as in the so-called "Methodenkapitel" of the fragmentary "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, the first overall draft of *Capital*.

"The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the head's conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical. Hence in the theoretical method, too, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as presupposition."<sup>60</sup> In doing so, Marx, now again in agreement with Hegel, emphasizes that this subject (in the sense of the underlying, ὑποκείμενον) is an abstraction in itself:

The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation [Anschauung] and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.

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Marx, as is clearly evident here, identifies the Hegelian method with the absolute method, in which the concept refers only to itself, and at the same time he assumes that Hegel wants to apply this method directly to reality. In contrast, he not only offers a subject or ὑποκείμενον as an empirical-materialistic foundation, but at the same time he wants to limit the dialectic by opposing the self-reference of the concept to the view that the dialectic within the (finite) reality "does not abolish the real difference." In a longer passage on the system character of the capitalist mode of production, Marx makes it clear that the capital relation presupposes specific historical conditions to be reproduced, whereby this reproduction itself remains linked to external conditions.

What Marx sees as the consequence of the fact that his method is the exact opposite of the Hegelian one, turns out to be, on closer

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. concerning the reproach of mystification, extensively: Arndt 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Marx 1973, p. 101f.



examination as adequation with Hegel's determination of the concept in finite reality. The fact that the dialectic does not abolish the real difference here does not establish a contradiction. It is only abolished by showing that the finite has no true being, but is only a becoming, that is, in absolute spirit. For real philosophy, on the other hand, it is precisely the real difference that is decisive. Marx erroneously thinks he can bring into play against Hegel. And likewise, Hegel nowhere claims that real philosophical systems (such as the system of the capitalist mode of production) can reproduce themselves purely in a self-referential way; this is in fact only to the self-referral of the concept in pure thought. Marx succumbs throughout to the error that Hegel intended his *Science of Logic* in relation to real-philosophical facts directly to the validity.

Regardless of this, Marx proves to be a theorist who, in his references to Hegel's philosophy thinks further where it remains largely inexpressive in its implementation: in the question of a methodology of the real science of the objective spirit. This thinking-further remains insufficient insofar as Marx, in his adaptation of the dialectical method wants to sharpen its critical function in relation to Hegel, but at the same time cuts it off from its normative point of reference, namely from the absolute idea as the self-consciousness of freedom. In doing so, there is no doubt that Marx is following Hegel's program – to criticize through the comprehension of what is. He thus explains in a letter to Ferdinand Lassalle from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1858: “The work I am presently concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, if you like, a critical exposé of the system of the bourgeois economy. It is at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system.”<sup>61</sup>

That Marx thereby implicitly refers back to Hegel's conception of freedom could be shown but is not to be discussed further here.<sup>62</sup>

Translated by Frank Ruda

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61 Marx 1922

62 Cf. Arndt 2019.

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