
Rezensionen

Norman Levine: *Marx's Discourse with Hegel*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2012. 360 pages. ISBN 978-0230293342.

Review by Jacob Blumenfeld

“Marx appropriated Hegel’s method, but he rejected Hegel’s system.”¹ This is the core idea that Norman Levine repeatedly asserts throughout his most recent book, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel*. Although this is Levine’s main point, it is by far the least interesting and perhaps the least convincing idea to stem from his extensive research. His contribution to the long debate concerning the influence of Hegel on Marx is rather more of a philological nature than anything else. Levine has done the painstaking and rigorous archival work, with the help of the MEGA[®], of documenting exactly a) which texts of Hegel’s were available to Marx and when he read them, b) which texts of Hegel’s were available to Marx but were never read, and c) which texts of Hegel’s were never available to Marx (ch. 2). Given this “visible” and “invisible” bibliography of Hegel, Levine then reconstructs, year by year from 1837 to 1848, exactly how Marx’s knowledge of certain texts from Hegel directly influenced Marx’s philosophy, politics, and vocabulary, as can be seen in his dissertation, newspaper articles, manuscripts, and books (ch. 3). With this in view, Levine is able to judge how Marx mis-read Hegel (ch. 4), and how Marx’s method is indebted to Hegel (ch. 5).

Levine believes that the MEGA[®] has opened up new vistas in Marx research, allowing us for the first time to accurately categorize the stages in Marx’s development. This development, according to Levine, is from Hegelian Centrist, German Liberal philosopher to Internationalist Communist Social Scientist (with a Hegelian method). Not only the MEGA[®], but the new Hegel research in the 20th century that calls into question the so-called “metaphysical” readings of Hegel,² as well as the “systematic dialectic” approach to understanding Marx’s method which calls into question the linear and ahistorical readings of Marx’s dialectic,³ also contribute to reevaluating the status of Hegel’s influence on Marx (ch. 1).

¹ Sentences like this appear on pages 12, 72, 107, 108, 204, 219, 220, 239, 298, 302, and 305.

² The new generation of Hegel scholars that Levine cites are Terry Pinkard, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Karl Heinz Ilting, Frederick Neuhouser, Paul Franco, Dominico Losurdo, Manfred Riedel, Michael Theunissen, and Ernst Tugendhat.

³ For “systematic dialectics”, see the work of Christopher J. Arthur, Tony Smith, Geert Reuten, and Patrick Murray. The scholars that Levine cites on the continuity between Hegel and Marx more generally are Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Warren Breckman, David Leopold, and Stathis Kouvelakis.

The first major task of Levine is to reconstruct and summarize Hegel's systematic philosophy, including its ethical, political, historical, logical, natural and anthropological elements. The constant summarizing and oversimplifying of Hegel is meant to show that Hegel is not so naïve and "idealist" as Marx sometimes claims. Hegel has very materialist explanations for human consciousness, ethical values, social formations and political arrangements. The two points which Levine stresses the most are that of Hegel's theory of "subjective activity" and his account of the "ethical nature of the state".⁴ Briefly put, Levine claims that Hegel has a robust account of individual self-determination, laboring activity, class struggle, and political economy. But perhaps most importantly, Hegel understands that certain social conditions are necessary for creating a just political order. What's so important about this is that Marx (and Marxists) often blame Hegel for ignoring exactly these aspects in his philosophy, hence justifying a turn to materialism to correct the idealism of Hegel. If this is not the case, then a rethinking of the Hegel-Marx relation is in order, a task that Levine takes up in full.

These elements of Hegel's philosophy can be found in many of his writings, but the most explicit formulations are found in the third volume of his Encyclopedia, *The Philosophy of Mind*, as well as in the *Philosophy of Right*. Marx read both of these texts, and yet chose to ignore their more materialist claims. Why? According to Levine, Marx was actually very sympathetic to these Hegelian insights up until he came under the spell of Bruno Bauer's project of "critique".⁵ Until 1842, according to Levine, Marx, like Hegel, was a German Liberal, a constitutional monarchist who believed in social reforms such as freedom of the press and the right to divorce, but he did not advocate revolution.⁶ Levine argues persuasively that Hegel was clearly such a Liberal, and that his first interpreters, Gans, Rosenkranz, Michelet and Bayrhammer, were as well. With a new label, he calls them *Center Hegelians*, and says that they, along with the young Marx, were most in line with Hegel's original views. Right Hegelians should be read as a radical reaction to the Center Hegelians, and the short-lived Left Hegelians (from 1842–1844), are the reaction to that reaction. Marx moves from Center Hegelian Liberal Philosopher through Left Hegelian Democrat Journalist to Communist Social Scientist, with the major breaks occurring in 1843–4. After that,

⁴ Although these points are made throughout the book, they are given their own chapter eventually. See Chapter Four: "Marx's Mis-reading of Hegel".

⁵ See Chapter Three, Phase Four: "Marx's Development of Critique and His Delinking from Hegel".

⁶ Calling Marx a "monarchist" might seem like a shock, but Levine shows that Marx's very early political and philosophical writings from 1837 to 1842 never challenged the monarchy as such, but rather consistently called for liberal reforms *within* the monarchy. For this argument, see Chapter Three, Phase One: "Hegel and Marx in the Center".

from 1844–48, Marx's two projects are to immerse himself in political economy and to criticize the left Hegelians "ideology" for misunderstanding society, economy, politics, and, strangely enough, Hegel.

The second major task of Levine, the one that takes up the gigantic two-hundred page Chapter Three of his book, is to document how every text Marx wrote between 1837 and 1848 did or did not use particularly loaded Hegelian terms or concepts in his philosophical and political analyses. This is a worthy project of rigorous philology, but it borders on the trivial and highly speculative at moments. For instance, every citation of the word "essence" or the pair "form-content" in one of Marx's writings is taken as a specifically Hegelian methodological tool, and hence, it proves Marx's dependence on Hegel.⁷ It's true that these are important terms for Hegel, and that they do appear in Marx every so often, but it's not just the use of certain terms that makes a method. It's *how* they are used that is key.

For example, Levine's discussion of Marx's 1844 critique of the *Absolute Knowing* section in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is very odd.⁸ It's a very small discussion in Levine's book, given that it's Marx's most direct and systematic engagement with Hegel's "speculative thought" found anywhere. Frustratingly, Levine chooses not to directly engage with what Marx writes in this section, but instead he reviews and reiterates Hegel's general philosophy, especially focusing on the Master-Slave chapter in the *Phenomenology*. But Marx only has a few comments in his entire oeuvre using the words "master-slave", and its debatable whether they relate at all to Hegel's use of the terms. Marx is describing the dialectic of consciousness and self-consciousness in these 1844 excerpts, and, given the current readings of Hegel, he does this in particularly naïve ways. Instead of showing how Marx does or does not grasp Hegel's concept of "Absolute Knowing", Levine takes us on a detour by reviewing again concepts like labor, activity, substance, essence, and spirit. Unfortunately, these summaries, lists and detours can confuse as much as clarify the stakes at hand.

Levine has the tendency to overdo the divisions and sub-divisions in his book, sometimes even sub-dividing sub-divisions to produce a single sentence section! Like an impassioned entomologist, Levine cuts and cuts away tiny pieces of Marx, collecting evidence in the form of lists, nouns, verbs, and proper names that all trace back somehow to Hegel, in order to prove the existence of some evolutionary thread bet-

⁷ The examples of "essence" and the "form-content" pair are used so frequently by Levine that one should consult the index to find them all; they should not, however, all be judged alike. For instance, whereas Levine's explanation of such concepts in Marx's 1841 Doctoral Dissertation is well grounded, it is not as convincing in his analysis of the 1842–43 *Rheinische Zeitung* articles. See Phase Two and Phase Three of Chapter Three for these different accounts.

⁸ See Chapter 3, Phase Five: "*The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Inverted World of the Bourgeoisie".

ween Hegel and Marx, all the way from his beginning to end. Levine's accumulation of evidence is very good, but lists of separate Hegelian terms are no proof of a Hegelian method in Marx, especially when the 'method' in question means systematic, organic holism. Whereas the goal is to show how the whole is more than a sum of its parts, Levine offers us an endless stream of parts. Some of these parts are: philosophy, theory-practice, universal-particular, subject-object, essence, substance, form-content, subjective activity, spirit, civil society, history, and method. What's strange is that Levine leaves out the concept of freedom, perhaps the central idea in Hegel's philosophy, and essential to understanding spirit and his whole system. Spirit, as Levine describes it, is sometimes 'substance', sometimes 'subject', but nowhere is it really clear what it means. For Hegel, these are all dynamic concepts that build on each other to get us closer to a rational understanding of the chaotic, dynamic world of spirit, that is the world which human freedom created.

The reader of Levine's book leaves confused about Marx's final stance on Hegel. In the first half of the book, up until about page 180, it's clear that Marx ignored or didn't have access to key political texts of Hegel, one's that emphasized class, subjectivity, labor and struggle; it's clear that Hegel was no crude idealist, that he was a Liberal reformer who understood the problems of poverty and state domination; and it's clear that Marx was also a similarly minded Liberal. But at the same time, Marx *did* have access to books that showed Hegel's materialist and class-conscious sides as well. And yet Marx painted Hegel as a "mystical panlogistic" who defended the state and the bourgeoisie above all. How do we reconcile these two contradictory views that Marx had of Hegel? Levine's answer, unfortunately, is too simple. He argues that it is perfectly consistent to discard Hegel's "speculative" system, but to keep his "materialist" method. *But the materialist method directly precludes the possibility of any such speculative system.*

A materialist method, especially Hegel's, is not a form to be applied on top of a separate content, but rather a way of understanding the internal dynamics of certain kinds of systems, processes and structures. There is no "idea" governing such systems separate from their purposes, functions, histories and interrelations. This is the shocking secret behind Hegel's dialectic of spirit and Marx's dialectic of capital: there's no one behind it! Hence, to analyze such a system, a method is required that can present the self-generating dynamics of social systems. Hegel and Marx are then both seeing the same world with the same method, but their results are different because they emphasize different aspects of this world. Levine claims that Marx took the "mystical shell" off of the method and kept its "rational kernel". (p. 298) But, if all the previous claims concerning Hegel are right, then this old trope can no longer hold.

On a more technical note, Levine declares fairly often in his book that the MEGA[®] has "eliminated" two standard works of Marx, *The Economic-Philosophical Manu-*

scripts of 1844 and *The German Ideology*. These just don't exist, according to Levine. Rather, they are compilations of separate texts that David Ryzanov collected into a single manuscript for the MEGA[®]. Levine asserts that articles by Jürgen Rojahn concerning the 1844 Manuscripts, and articles by Terrell Carver, Inge Taubert and Hans Pelger concerning the *German Ideology*, definitively put this matter to rest.⁹ What's strange is that the *German Ideology* is not yet published in the MEGA[®]! And the 1844 Manuscripts are in the MEGA[®] in one piece, whatever the articles argue. So it might be a bit premature to declare them both "extinct". Even stranger, once Levine declares them both dead, he goes on to analyze large portions of them, just with new names. The Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts are now just the *Manuscripts* and the German Ideology is now split into two, *I. Feuerbach* and *The Leipzig Council*. In short, while Levine is right to call into question the unity of these texts, it does little to further the argument concerning Hegel's influence on Marx.

The value of this book is not the grand conclusions being made about 'system' and 'method', but the clarification of Marx's early political trajectory from centrist to communist. This trajectory, meticulously shown by tracking the words Marx used back to certain texts by Hegel he read, can now serve as a reference book for many Marx researchers to come. In that sense, Levine's contribution is crucial, for we now have evidence of Marx's use of Hegelian terms to construct his political philosophy, and we have the evidence showing which books of Hegel's Marx read, and which he didn't. We have the evidence showing why Marx sometimes got Hegel right, and why he sometimes got him wrong. But what we do with all this evidence is up to us.

Valeria Bruschi, Antonella Muzzupappa, Sabine Nuss, Anne Steckner, Ingo Stütze: PolyLuxMarx. Bildungsmaterial zur *Kapital*-Lektüre. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag 2012. ISBN 978-3-320-02286-0

Rezensiert von Eva Bockenheimer

Seit 2006 bietet die *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung* in Berlin *Kapital*-Lesekurse¹⁰ an, die sich großer Beliebtheit erfreuen und einen regen Zulauf haben. Die Initiatorinnen und Initiatoren dieser Lektürekurse haben langjährige Erfahrung als Teamer_innen und wissen, wie schwierig es ist, sich den Marx'schen Text anzueignen. Um das Verständnis zu erleichtern, entwickelten sie im Laufe der Jahre verschiedene, in den Kursen eingesetzte Folien. Schon bald gab es eine große Nachfrage nach den Folien, nicht

⁹ Levine makes this claim at numerous points in the book. See, for instance, pages 2, 15, 205.

¹⁰ Siehe dazu www.das-kapital-lesen.de.