

STATE AND REVOLUTION: HEGEL, MARX, AND LENIN

STATE AND REVOLUTION: HEGEL, MARX, AND LENIN

By

MARK EDWARD KNACKSTEDT, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Mark Edward Knackstedt, B.A. (McMaster University)
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three theories of the state's role in shaping civil consciousness, as they are presented in the writings of G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and V.I. Lenin. The immediate purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the essential features of these theories, and, in particular, to use this comparison as a means to better understanding the problematic relationship between Marx and Lenin.

For Hegel, the state is not to be understood in the usual liberal fashion, simply as a coercive instrument, but, rather, as the objective standard of rationality in the world and the repository of what Hegel calls "ethical life". The state, as it is described in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, represents the abolition of the conflict between private life and the community which is typical of bourgeois society. This is accomplished, to Hegel's mind, by the intervention of the state's mediating structures.

Against Hegel, Marx demonstrates in his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" that it is not the ostensibly universal state which is the basis of civil society's rationality, but egoistic civil society which is the basis of the inherently irrational state. The purpose of the state, thought Marx, is not to engender universality in civil society but simply to represent the sectional interests of classes within civil society, and the interests of private property. For Marx, the reconciliation of the individual with the community

occurs not under the tutelage of the state, but with the reabsorption of the state into civil society.

Lenin's *State and Revolution* affirms Marx's belief in the contingency of the state upon class interests; however, its theory of socialist revolution also demonstrates Lenin's belief in the capacity of the state to alter civil consciousness. Thus, while being nominally Marxist, Lenin's theory of the revolutionary state contains elements more typical of Hegel. To the extent that Lenin's theory attributes capacities to the state which Marx rejected in his critique of Hegel, Marx's explicit critique of Hegel provides grounds for questioning Lenin's claim to the torch of Marxism.

I believe that all separate paths, upon which one makes contact with others, here in this life, converge into a single way home, where all fog shall disperse.

-Alexander Bernewitz, 1863-1935

When a man has finally reached the point where he does not think he knows it better than others, that is when he has become indifferent to what they have done badly and he is interested only in what they have done right, then peace and affirmation have come to him.

-G.W.F. Hegel

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Is there any justification for the continued study of Karl Marx's writings in the post-Soviet world?

Even if one ignores for a moment the currently precarious footing of international communism, the continued study of Marx could be questioned simply on the basis of the body of secondary literature which already exists. At McMaster University's Mills Memorial Library alone there are about three hundred volumes, in various editions and translations, written by Marx. In addition, there are over seven hundred secondary sources on different aspects of Marx's work—not counting journal articles and book reviews. With all of this literature available, I was led to ask myself quite early in my research whether or not there was anything substantial left to be added to this research area.

Answering this question is, I think, linked to understanding why there has been so much written about Marx in the first place. It would be inappropriate on my part to attribute the great volume of secondary literature to a single factor. However, we must consider that the Marx 'research-industry' was propelled by an ideological urgency which

has historically permeated all questions about Marx and Marxism, especially during the Cold War. Because Marx's writings were the alleged foundational documents of the Soviet Union, and, for various reasons, have become conflated with Leninism, questions about Marx have traditionally been engulfed in the bigger question of Soviet Communism. Marx's writings have not been readily separable from the ideological conflict typical of East-West relations for much of this century; therefore, the secondary literature of Marx is larger than we might expect the literature on, say, Thomas Malthus. Unlike the literature surrounding other prominent social thinkers, that focusing on Marx has often been an arena in which the East-West conflict has played itself out.

The politicization of research into Marx has resulted in two general responses in the West. One response has been the vilification of Marx's writing. With this, the role of Marx's writings as the foundational documents of the Soviet Union is taken as settled and, consequently, Marx is viewed as an architect of totalitarianism. This reading is inadequate because it so clearly clashes with Marx's railings against ideology and the subjection of human beings.

Another response has been to adopt a reading of Marx corresponding to what Charles Taylor has called "the view from Dover Beach". Such a reading is a nostalgic one which longs to recapture a Marx unsullied by Bolshevism and portrays the Soviet Union as a betrayal of blameless ideas. This position is also inadequate because it seems intent on merely absolving Marx and says little about the role which Marx's ideas may have played in the development of Leninism.

In short, much of what has been written about Marx bears the mark of the ideological debates surrounding the Soviet Union, and, thus, tells us little about Marx in his own right. The purpose of this thesis is to offer for discussion a way of challenging the identity of Marx's thought and Leninism while avoiding the absolutist tendency.

Driving a wedge between Marx and Lenin in this fashion has, perhaps, become more feasible in the current ideological climate. More importantly though, distinguishing between Marx, the social theorist, and Lenin, the demiurge of the Soviet state, has become more necessary than ever. It might be argued that, once the ideological urgency has been siphoned off, the popular and academic discussion of Marx will mercifully fade away and some other poor soul will become the focus of café talk. However, in 1994, when it may be argued that Marx's ideas are irrelevant, Marx actually has much to tell us. At the time when the former Soviet Union and its successor states have abandoned Leninist ideas, the kinds of social problems that concerned Marx have resurfaced with a new virulence. Furthermore, though the Leninist political model has been rejected, my limited experience with Russia suggests that there is considerable ambivalence amongst contemporary Russians about the market-oriented, rights-based alternative. Therefore, there is a justification for the continued study of Marx, not as an ideologue or the father of communism, but as a theorist keenly tuned to social problems which have not changed much since his death. It is because the pieces of the old Soviet empire are facing anew the problems of community, freedom, and human welfare, for which Marx sought

solutions beyond the simple affirmation of individual rights and the free-market, that I answer my initial question with an emphatic “yes”.

The process of preparing this thesis has indebted me to many people, especially my thesis committee. Of immeasurable assistance was my supervisor, Dr. Marshall Goldstein. Dr. Goldstein’s suggestions and advice over numerous cups of coffee ensured that this project progressed smoothly from its conception, and prevented it from being more tangential than it might have been otherwise. I am also grateful to Dr. Peter Potichnyj, whose graduate seminar allowed me to work out the earliest outline of this thesis, and Dr. Howard Aster, without whom I would never have encountered some of the problems of contemporary Russian politics in such a vivid fashion or had reason to write this thesis in the first place. All committee members provided valuable recommendations on the manuscript and contributed to the argument which appears in the following pages, although its deficiencies are entirely attributable to me.

Thanks of a different kind are due to the staff and faculty members of the McMaster Department of Political Science, many of whom contributed indirectly to this project but provided reference letters, computer advice, address labels, sharp pencils, *etc.*

Finally, I wish to thank my parents who still always seem happy to see me, and the friends who provided emergency transfusions at the Phoenix. My greatest debt is to Kathryn Denning who, for many years now, has tirelessly listened to my ideas and read my writing—but is, thankfully, far more comprehensible than Hegel.

INTRODUCTION

One can consider neither the writings of Marx and Lenin, nor the seven decades of Soviet Communism which succeeded them, without questioning the relationship between socialist theory and what Michel Foucault called “Gulag” practice. In the context of the Cold War, however, this act of questioning was often little more than an attempt to absolve those theoretical texts of responsibility, or establish their guilt, for their alleged consequences: the totalitarian Soviet state and the Gulag. Foucault cautions against uncritically positing the Gulag as simply some kind of historical error, and asking only how it happened that the theoretical purity of Marx and Lenin could be so greatly distorted. To Foucault, questioning the relationship between socialist theory and Soviet practice in a serious fashion means

[r]efusing to question the Gulag on the basis of the texts of Marx or Lenin or to ask oneself how, through what error, deviation, misunderstanding or distortion of speculation or practice, their theory could have been betrayed to such a degree. On the contrary, it means questioning all these theoretical texts, however old, from the standpoint of the reality of the Gulag. Rather than searching in those texts for a condemnation in advance of the Gulag, it is a matter

of asking what in those texts could have made the Gulag possible.¹

To Foucault, the texts are not innocent. They do not occupy the privileged position of neutrality, or of disconnectedness from subsequent generations' use of them. Thus, Foucault argues that we must resist the temptation to confront the Gulag as a distortion of Marxism-Leninism. He advocates instead that readers of Marx and Lenin confront the texts themselves and seek to understand what it was about them which allowed them to become rallying points for Soviet ideology. In suggesting this approach, Foucault is not intent upon establishing a *causal* link between the theoretical texts of Marxism-Leninism and the Soviet reality. Rather, he suggests that this is a more fruitful way of relating actual Communist practice to Marxist-Leninist theory than simply positing the Gulag as a gross deviation from pristine texts—a sully of these works by the deeds of unworthy men. For Foucault, the study of the Marxist-Leninist canon must be more than an exercise in absolution or condemnation.

In the same way that Foucault insists the theoretical texts of Marxism-Leninism be questioned in light of the reality of the Gulag, Leszek Kolakowski argues that readers of Marx and Lenin must avoid dismissing Leninism as a distortion or betrayal of 'real Marxism'. Kolakowski does not deny that the question of the relationship between the writings of Marx and Lenin is a valid one. Nevertheless, for Kolakowski, to ask whether or not Leninism was a legitimate expression of Marx's thought is to pose the question

¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Colin Gordon *et al.*, trans.; New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 135.

incorrectly. Framed in this manner, the question cannot be answered without making all kinds of presumptuous claims about ‘what Marx really thought’.² Like the act, to which Foucault objects, of disassociating Marxism-Leninism from Stalinism simply for the purpose of rescuing the theories from the reality of the Gulag, to hold that Leninism was a betrayal of Marx’s thought is, for Kolakowski, to do little more than engage in an ideological exercise.

The British labour leader, Tony Benn, stated with some justification that

the distortion of the Marxist idea that developed in Russia was as great, and of the same character, as the distortion of the Christian teaching at the time of the Inquisition. But it is as wholly wrong to blame Marx for what was done in his name, as it is to blame Jesus for what was done in his.³

Unfortunately, Benn’s approach to Marx does not tell us anything about Marx’s or Lenin’s ideas in their own right, but serves only to absolve Marx of responsibility for Bolshevism. Not only is this approach uninformative, but it fails to take into consideration the role of Marx’s writings (as what Kolakowski would call “sacred texts”) in the subsequent development of Lenin’s ideas. Kolakowski is careful to point out that all social movements, regardless of their orientation, are to be explained “by a variety of circumstances” and that “the ideological sources to which they appeal, and to which they seek to remain faithful, are only one of the factors determining the form they assume and

²Remarkably, some writers have declared that they are privy to just such information. See G.D.H. Cole, *What Marx Really Meant* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1934) and H.B. Acton, *What Marx Really Said* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974 [1967]).

³Interview with Alan Freeman in *The Benn Heresy* (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1982), 172.

their patterns of thought and action”.⁴ He does not attempt to collapse the substance of social movements down to the content of their sacred texts because “no political or religious movement is the perfect expression of that movement’s ‘essence’ as laid down in its sacred writings”.⁵ However, Kolakowski, like Foucault, believes that it is as much a mistake to underestimate the role of the texts, as “these writings are not merely passive, but exercise an influence of their own on the course of the movement”.⁶

In this manner, Kolakowski’s approach to Marxist social movements, such as Bolshevism, is different from that of Benn. Benn’s assessment of the Soviet experience consists of comparing the ‘essence’ of Marx’s thought with its practical existence as Bolshevism or the Gulag; in contrast, Kolakowski feels it is far more informative to ask what it was about Marx’s ideas that allowed them to become rallying points for Bolshevism. Rejecting the notion that those who interpret the canonical writings of Marx correctly are therefore possessed of the truth, Kolakowski concludes that it is as pointless to ask whether or not Lenin was a true Marxist as it is to ask whether or not Thomas Aquinas was a true Aristotelian or Ignatius Loyola was a true Christian.⁷ While Kolakowski does not deny the legitimacy of exploring the relationship between Marx and

⁴Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: 1. The Founders* (P.S. Falla, trans.; Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1978]), 2.

⁵*Loc. cit.*

⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

⁷*Loc. cit.*

his interpreters, including Lenin, such an exploration can never tell us whether Lenin should be regarded as an apostle or a renegade. It is inadequate to say that Leninism is 'just a caricature' of Marx's thought because the essence of a caricature is that, despite its difference from the original, the original is still recognizable in it.⁸ This is not to say that the connection of Marx to Lenin ought to be established for the equally ideological purpose of demonstrating Marx's guilt. Marx cannot be held responsible for the questionable use of his work; nevertheless, the fact that his works were used as such cannot be dismissed out of hand. As Kolakowski puts it,

St. Paul was not personally responsible for the Inquisition and for the Roman Church at the end of the fifteenth century, but the enquirer, whether Christian or not, cannot be content to observe that Christianity was depraved or distorted by the conduct of unworthy popes and bishops; he must rather seek to discover what it was in the Pauline epistles that gave rise, in the fullness of time, to unworthy and criminal actions. Our attitude to the problem of Marx and Marxism should be the same.⁹

The manner in which Marx's thought was reflected in subsequent Leninist practice is particularly relevant to the study of Lenin's theory of the state, his views on its role in a socialist revolution, and his vision of an emancipated, socialist society. In the pamphlet *State and Revolution*, Lenin attempts to give a systematic account of Marx's conception of the state, and of the future socialist society, in order to set the theoretical standard for all future discussion of it. This was no small task for several reasons. First

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5f.

of all, Marx's most rigorous theoretical examination of the state, in 1843's "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", remained unpublished until after Lenin's death. Secondly, Marx's writing, even at its finest, does not provide the best material for a general theory of the state. Marx was predisposed to situating his reflections upon the state in the context of specific historical events like Louis Napoleon's *coup d' état* of 1851 and the Paris Commune of 1871. At no point did he provide either a comprehensive theory of the state or a clear discussion of the institutions of post-capitalist society.¹⁰ Thus, presenting a general theory of the modern state based on Marx's writing was, for Lenin, not simply a matter of putting a new shine on a more or less complete theory. Rather, it was an alchemic process of extracting from Marx's historical studies their implicit theoretical content and, with the aid of Friedrich Engels' commentaries, integrating this into a systematic theoretical account of the state.

In spite of the difficulties Lenin faced in presenting a Marxist theory of the state, he successfully grasped Marx's ideas in two important respects. Using Engels' writing to fill in the theoretical gaps, Lenin gave an accurate rendering of Marx's general conception of the state, *i.e.*, as a reflection of the egoistic interests of civil society. Incapable of expressing anything but class interest, the state's pretensions to universality were said to be false and only obscured the separation of the individual from power and

¹⁰ In letters to Ferdinand Lassalle and Friedrich Engels, Marx indicated his intention to work out his theory of the state in detail. The manuscripts of which this proposed work was a part were eventually published as *Grundrisse*. See "Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, 22 February 1858" and "Marx to Friedrich Engels, 2 April 1858" in *Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels: Collected Works* (Vol. 40; New York: International Publishers, 1983), 270, 298.

the power of property over the individual. Furthermore, in spite of Marx's tendency to gloss over such issues as the mechanics of the proletarian revolution and the character of the future, classless society, Lenin had at his disposal a clear vision of what socialist society would look like. In his account of the ill-fated Paris Commune of 1871 in *Civil War in France*, Marx described a social form in which (albeit briefly) the functions of the army and the police had been reintegrated into the general population of Paris and, thus, the coercive instruments of the state had been reabsorbed into the politicized individual. The state, ostensibly the expression of all citizens' interests but understood by Marx to be little more than the institutionalization of class conflicts within civil society, had been superseded and class conflict abolished. Despite the lack of a well thought-out general theory of socialist society in Marx's writing, Marx upheld the commune form, as it had existed in Paris, as an example of a society in which the prerequisites to socialism had been achieved. Thus, though Marx did not necessarily view the Paris Commune as a *model* for socialist society, the connection between Marx and Lenin can be clearly drawn. A.J. Polan puts it best when he says that "Marx endowed posterity with no other theory of the politics and government of socialist society than the commune-state; and Lenin incorporated into his politics the theory of the commune-state as elaborated by Marx, without additions and without omissions".¹¹ As an attempt to incorporate the concept of

¹¹ A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
 7. Though Polan's contention that Lenin integrated Marx's concept of the commune into his own theory in an unaltered form is credible, his use of the word "commune-state" is problematic. As will be discussed in Chapter III, Marx understood the Paris Commune to be a social form in which the state had been superseded. For this reason, Polan's reference to the "commune-state" is, perhaps, contradictory.

the commune into the Bolshevik program, Lenin's *State and Revolution* is quite true to Marx's thought and indicates "a process, not of revision or development, but of straightforward inheritance".¹²

Because Polan's conclusion, that Lenin's theory of the state represented a "straightforward inheritance" from Marx, recognizes that our task in reading Marx and Lenin is more complex than simply 'rescuing' Marx from Lenin's subsequent misinterpretations, it would meet with Foucault's and Kolakowski's approval. Yet, even if one is willing to acknowledge how Marx's theory of the state made the revolutionary program of Lenin's *State and Revolution* possible, the manner in which Lenin's theory of the state diverged from Marx should also be noted. Though it is evident that Marx's writing on the state had a profound effect on Lenin's *State and Revolution*, it is also regarding the theory of the state that Lenin departed from Marx to the greatest extent. While accepting Marx's characterization of the state as a plenum of class interest, and of the commune as a form embodying the characteristics of socialist society, Lenin incorporated an idea into his theory which was not an instance of "straightforward inheritance". This was the idea that the state, whilst a reflection of class conflict and bourgeois interests, was to have a leading role in the abolition of class conflict and the ushering in of a new socialist age.

In focusing upon this apparent deviation from Marx, it is instructive to recall what was said earlier. Foucault in particular warns against looking to Marx's texts for

¹²*Loc. cit.*

a “condemnation in advance” of subsequent deviations from them. After all, any answer to the question of how Marx would have acted in Lenin’s circumstances, or how he would have assessed Lenin, is necessarily hypothetical. There is, both Kolakowski and Foucault would argue, nothing to be gained by looking to Marx for an anticipation and refutation of Lenin. However, without playing semantic games, it can be argued that there is in Marx’s writing a ‘condemnation after the fact’ of Lenin’s theory of the state. To uncover this, we must turn our attention from Lenin to Hegel.

In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel posits a general theory of the state in which the state is viewed as the embodiment of reason in the world. As such, the state is not understood simply as an apparatus which makes and enforces laws, regulates industry, and maintains infrastructure. Rather, it is seen as the means by which civil consciousness can be influenced and the egoistic desires of individual men attenuated. The state is, in Hegel’s theory, the universal influence which fits human beings for life as members of an ethical community. But, according to Marx’s “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, this conception of the state inverts reality. While Hegel holds that the state exists independently of civil society, and that it is the repository of community and ethical life, Marx believes the state to be the institutional expression of the power relations inherent within civil society. For Marx, the state represents not the rule of reason over civil society but the coercive power of the propertied class over those who lack access to capital. As such, the state cannot be the independent means by which the fractious civil society is recast in the image of ethical community and universality. It can only serve

to mediate and perpetuate the power relations of which it is a mere expression. Therefore, Marx rejects Hegel's theory of the state on the grounds that it misunderstands the relationship between the state and civil society and that its conception of history, as the process of the state reconstituting civil society in the image of its own universality, is fundamentally incorrect.

In the first instance, Lenin accepts Marx's conception of the state. Arguing that the state is merely the product of material conditions in a society (at a given stage of historical development) which the state itself is powerless to affect, Lenin appears to deny the Hegelian contention that the state is the worldly embodiment of universality (the 'ethical idea') and to side with Marx. Because of the inadequacy of the state and its inherent inability to speak for anything other than private property, Lenin advocates the abolition of the state and the reorganization of society along the lines of the Paris Commune as Marx described it.

However, for Lenin, the achievement of the commune-society does not imply a complete abolition of the state, once and for all, or the reabsorption of coercive state functions back into civil society. Instead, it entails the consolidation of state power in the hands of a revolutionary vanguard acting on behalf of the proletariat. By equating the achievement of the commune-society with the consolidation of state power in the hands of the proletariat, Lenin conflates the commune-form with another of Marx's social forms: the "dictatorship of the proletariat". For Lenin, this does not pose a problem because, with the state in the hands of the hitherto oppressed class, its coercive instruments will

be employed to eliminate class conflict. In the process of extinguishing all conflict along class lines, the state destroys its *raison d'être* and, ultimately, withers away. However, in conflating the commune-form with the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin introduces into his theory of the state the notion that the state has a leading role in the reconstitution of civil society and that the state has the capacity to recast civil society in its own image. In effect, Lenin's proposed proletarian society affirms two contradictory social forms simultaneously: the commune, which is a society in which the state has been transcended, and the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is still very much a state form. While Lenin recognizes the need for the abolition of the state, and the civil conflict of which it is a reflection, he also advocates the state as the means to this end.

Though it would be inappropriate, perhaps flippant, to characterize Lenin's revolutionary program as 'Hegelian' on these grounds alone, his ideas about the role of the state in the shaping of civil society bear the mark of Hegel.¹³ While Lenin's *State and Revolution* maintains that the state is necessarily the *reflection* of class conflict, and that it exists to the extent that class conflict is irreconcilable, at the text's heart is an affirmation of the proletarian state's leading role in the *abolition* of class conflict. In emphasising the state's role in building a classless society, Lenin affirms the state's

¹³ It is not the purpose of this study to present textual evidence suggesting that Lenin's *State and Revolution* drew directly upon Hegel's writing. It is worth noting, however, that in Karl Balleström's discussion of the relative merits of Lenin's major philosophical works—*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks*—the author argues that "certainly, the general direction of [Lenin's] philosophical development tends towards a gradually higher esteem and to a greater incorporation of Hegel in his thinking". See Karl G. Balleström, *Die Sowjetische Erkenntnistheorie Und Ihr Verhältnis Zu Hegel* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishers, 1968), 78. Translation in this instance by J. Knackstedt.

capacity to act universally and to stand outside the material concerns of civil society. Thus, in its most important components, Lenin's theory of the state embodies ideas characteristic of Hegel.

As Foucault and Kolakowski have warned, it is profitless to discuss the relationship between Marx and Lenin by searching Marx's writing for what Foucault calls a "condemnation in advance" of Leninism. To look for such a condemnation, for the purpose of disassociating Marx's work from Leninism, is as much an ideological exercise as the orthodox Communist argument that Lenin was true to the word of Marx in every conceivable way. Both positions force Marx's texts to do the impossible: to speak to a reality Marx could not foresee. All we are left with, it has been suggested, is the ability to take the texts as historical documents and to determine how, with the passage of time, they came to be expressed in the revolutionary program of Lenin. However, it is my contention that Lenin's theory of the state may provide the reader with clear grounds on which to discuss the relationship of Marx and Lenin while avoiding speculation and ideological axe-grinding. Though Marx's texts provide no "condemnation in advance" of Leninism, they do—specifically in regard to the theory of the state—provide a condemnation after the fact of Hegelian theory. As already noted, Lenin's theory of the state embodies the Hegelian idea that the state had the capacity to act universally, and to reshape civil society in its universal image. Because Lenin's conception of the state mirrors Hegel's, a wedge can be driven between Lenin and Marx. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin affirmed and attributed to Marx a conception of the state which Marx

explicitly rejected in Hegel. Marx cannot be called upon to speak to the manner in which his work was used by Lenin; yet, because Marx's conception of the state was based upon a *rejection* of Hegel's theory, a specific portion of Lenin's theory can be assessed on the same grounds as Hegel's was.

In sum then, what is at issue in this study is the relationship between the state and civil society as it is presented by Hegel, Marx, and Lenin. My purpose will be to demonstrate how much these three thinkers were vexed by the same problem, *i.e.*, how best to achieve the synthesis of particular and universal interests. Most importantly though, I will suggest that Hegel and Marx, and especially Marx and Lenin, must be distinguished according to their views on the role of the state in achieving this synthesis. Lenin's theory of the state mirrored Hegel's in many important ways; thus, to the extent that Marx's writing was an explicit critique of Hegel, it can also provide an implicit critique of Lenin.

My discussion focuses upon three works, one by each of the writers: Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", and Lenin's *State and Revolution*. It is divided into chapters accordingly.

Chapter One provides a description of Hegel's metaphysical system which is, by necessity, cursory and introduces his theory of the state as a parenthesis within this system. It outlines the following parts of Hegel's argument: 1) that the state is not only an instrument but the earthly embodiment of universality, Absolute Mind, and ethical life; 2) that the state *qua* ethical community has a triadic structure in which the Family, Civil

Society, and the Political State are subsumed under the normative order known as Ethical Life, and Ethical Life is the third of three normative orders: Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life; 3) that the state is necessitated by the inability of the Family and Civil Society to engender ethical life in individuals; and, 4) that the state, as an entity transcending the narrow, egoistic interests of civil society, has the capacity to bring individuals to consciousness of themselves as universal and ethical beings.

Chapter Two situates Marx as a critic of Hegel's theory of the state and specifically discusses the nature of Marx's critique. This involves a discussion of the two moments of Marx's critique—transformation and demystification. This chapter also describes Hegel's proposed mediating structures (the Executive and the Legislature) in further detail, and offers an exposition of Marx's argument why these structures do not engender universality, and cannot be anything more than institutional expressions of the civil conflicts they were supposed to overcome. The failure of these mediating structures is attributed to their constitution and, ultimately, to their subservience to private property.

Chapter Three outlines Lenin's attempt to reconstruct a Marxist theory of the state, and his case for the state's abolition. This chapter attempts to come to terms with some problems of interpreting *State and Revolution*. Most importantly, it deals with the uneasy coexistence of ideas in Lenin's writing on the state which calls into question his interpretation of Marx's thought.

Finally, Chapter Four consists of a recapitulation and some concluding remarks.

Having said all this, I find it necessary to state exactly what this thesis is *not* meant to accomplish. My aim is not to demonstrate once and for all ‘what Marx really said’, to argue that Lenin bowdlerized Marx’s thought, or to pigeon-hole Lenin as a Hegelian rather than a Marxist. This would be a rather sterile exercise. My aim, recognizing the merits of Foucault and Kolakowski, is to explore Lenin’s theory of the state as an entirely plausible outcome of Marx’s thought while showing that, at the same time, it embodied characteristics that Marx had earlier rejected in Hegel’s theory.

I

HEGEL'S THEORY OF THE STATE

I. SOME OBSTACLES TO READING HEGEL

Mark Twain is reported to have said that “whenever the literary German dives into a sentence, that is the last you are going to see of him till he emerges on the other side of the Atlantic with a verb in his mouth”.¹ Turgid prose aside, a successful exposition of Hegel’s conception of the state and the body politic, as it is articulated in his *Philosophy of Right*, must overcome several substantial obstacles, both ideological and philosophical. In the Western political tradition, there is a tendency to view the state primarily as an apparatus of control which guarantees individual rights, such as the right to property, and prevents the reversion of the community to chaos and the war “of every man, against every man”.² This is the legacy of political theories like those of Thomas

¹See Peter Pecl’s Preface to Alfred Rosenberg’s *Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Vivian Bird, trans.: Torrance, California: Noontide Press, 1982), xxvii.

²Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (C.B. Macpherson, ed.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985 [1968]), 185.

Hobbes and John Locke which view the state as the result of a *contract*: a conscious, rational decision by individuals to transfer their natural rights to a sovereign power in exchange for the protection of their lives and their personal property. To the liberal sensibility, the Hegelian state appears to be the antithesis of its contractarian counterpart. It seemingly denies liberal rights and demands, among other things, that individuals make their interests “subordinate to it and dependant on it”.³ As such, Hegel’s theory of the state is liable to draw hostile reaction. Indeed, Hegel’s characterization of the state has been referred to as many things: as a general model for totalitarianism according to Bertrand Russell, as the codification of the “god-state” by L.T. Hobhouse, as the cause of the death of virtue in twentieth century revolutionaries by Albert Camus, as an apology for Prussianism according to Karl Popper, and as a theoretical justification for imperialism according to Noam Chomsky.⁴

However, to conceive of the state simply as an instrument is possibly to view the Hegelian state as something it is not. It can be argued that to view Hegel’s theory

³G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (T.M. Knox, ed.; London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967 [1952]), §261, §313. For references to the Preface of this text, page numbers from the Knox edition will be indicated. Otherwise, passages will be identified according to their paragraph number rather than by page. Each successive point in Hegel’s argument is divided into a main proposition, often a remark, and, occasionally, an addition. In this paper, no distinction has been made between these and references to paragraphs include any remarks or additions corresponding to them.

⁴See Bertrand Russell, *Unpopular Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 9-33; L.T. Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921 [1918]), 5; Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Random House, 1956), 134-148; Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968 [1962]), 312-335; and Noam Chomsky, *Year 501: The Conquest Continues* (Montréal, New York: Black Rose Books, 1993), 4f.

of the state in this manner, and subsequently to understand it as being hostile to individual freedom, is to fail to appreciate its fundamentally liberal spirit. Carl Friedrich writes that

Hegel's view of law and ethics, involving as it does also his view on politics and history, is basically at variance with prevailing views, the concept of the state being that of a community rather than an institution (*Anstalt*). The failure to grasp this divergence of the concept of the state, as Hegel uses it, has been the source of most of the misunderstandings. For if the prevailing modern concept of the state as primarily a government, an institutional manifold comprising those who exercise command functions *in* the community is substituted for Hegel's essentially Aristotelian conception of the state as the highest community, there arise immediately authoritarian, not to say totalitarian implications which are far removed from the essential liberalism of Hegel's conception.⁵

In light of the prevailing tendency to view the state as an 'other'—an institution which is necessary, yet inherently alien to human beings—it is not surprising that Hegel's meaning is obscured, and that some, like Russell, view the Hegelian state as one embodying the belief that

true liberty consists in obedience to an arbitrary authority, that free speech is an evil, that absolute monarchy is good, that the Prussian state was the best existing at the time when [Hegel] wrote, that war is good, and that an international organization for the peaceful settlements of disputes would be a misfortune.⁶

But one would be hard pressed to find a textual basis for this reading in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, for such a reading pays no regard to his idea that the state reaches

⁵Carl J. Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*. (New York: Modern Library, 1954 [1953]), xlv.

⁶Russell, *op. cit.*, 22.

its fullest actualization as an ethical community, not simply as an instrument of power. The process of rendering an accurate interpretation of Hegel's theory of the state is, therefore, bound up with distinguishing Hegel's classical conception of the state from the institutional conception common to the liberal tradition.

In addition to the ideological barrier, there is a far more formidable metaphysical barrier to achieving a clear grasp of Hegel's theory of the state. Interestingly, this is the kind of obstacle which an interpreter of Hobbes or Locke need not consider to the same extent as an interpreter of Hegel does. While contractarian theories of the state have problematic metaphysical bases in concepts such as free will and natural right, metaphysics is not their life-blood. For example, Thomas Hobbes' critique of the Aristotelian theory of perception, or his views on the uses of speech,⁷ are not the pillars on which his theory of the purpose and form of the state stands. Indeed, Hobbes would be able to articulate his theory of the state, which stands more or less on its own, even in the absence of his metaphysical insights. In marked contrast, Hegel's theory of the state as it is explained in *Philosophy of Right* can be understood *only* as a special case of Hegel's elaborate metaphysical system. Within this system, the state cannot be conceived merely as a coercive instrument legitimized by the rational self-interest of human beings. Rather, the state, as it is put forth in *Philosophy of Right*, must be viewed as a parenthesis within a much grander vision of the historical movement of the universe. As a result Hegel lacks, as Pelczynski suggests, the clarity and general

⁷See Hobbes, *op. cit.*, 86f, 100-110.

persuasiveness of Hobbes, but avoids the shallowness of a state premised on rational self-interest alone.⁸

These ideological and metaphysical barriers are, I suggest, the greatest hindrances to grasping Hegel's conception of the state. Contrary to the Hobbesian or Lockean conceptions of the state on which contemporary liberal society is premised, Hegel's state cannot be understood simply as the sum of the coercive institutions reigning over civil society. Thus, Hegel's claim that the laws and the interests of civil society must be subordinate to the state is not an affirmation of the state's entitlement to use its instruments in a totalitarian fashion. Nor can the state be understood in the absence of the metaphysical system which is its *raison d'être*. To appreciate Hegel's theory of the state more fully, one must view the state first as the earthly expression of a universal consciousness in the process of becoming ever more self-aware, and, second, as an ethical community in which human freedom reaches its *perfection*. The nature of Hegel's state will now be expanded upon by first turning to a discussion of his general metaphysical system of which the state is a necessary part.

⁸Z.A. Pelczynski, "The Hegelian Conception of the State", *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (Z.A. Pelczynski, ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 2.

II. THE CIRCLE OF NECESSITY

Hegel's political philosophy has something to tell us about our world even without his metaphysics. As Plamenatz states,

[e]ven if it is true that whoever rejects the Hegelian metaphysics misses the essence of his theory of the State and of man's progress in society, the fact remains that it is those parts of the theory which still make sense when the metaphysical system is rejected.⁹

Indeed, it is quite tempting to attempt to explain Hegel's theory of the state simply by looking at paragraphs 257 to 360 in *Philosophy of Right* and ignoring the rest of the text. However, if one considers Hegel's ideas about the state alone, with his ideas about ethical community and his understanding of the historical development of the universe truncated for methodological convenience, one is liable to stumble into the misunderstandings of his theory which have already been alluded to. It must be recognized that the Hegelian state responds to imperatives far different from those acting upon the contractarian state. These imperatives can be best illustrated by examining the context in which Hegel believes the state to arise, and the role that it plays in shaping public consciousness.

In an important respect, the Hegelian enterprise is no different than that of all the other great figures of Western thought, back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. Hegel's question was an epistemological one, which asked what it was that human beings could

⁹ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society, Volume II* (London: Longmans, Green and Company Ltd., 1963), 132.

truly know, and how such knowledge could be used a basis for making the universe comprehensible. He should be understood as a direct response to the writing of philosophers such as Kant, Schelling, and Fichte, whom Hegel accused of forsaking reason for mere intuition. It is perhaps ironic that a philosophical system that is often condemned on account of its other-worldliness so strongly championed reason over intuition and mysticism.¹⁰

The primary reality in Hegel's system is *Geist*. However it is conceived, *Geist* should not be viewed as analogous to the Christian God or as an entity standing outside of material reality, but as Absolute Mind: the living, conscious force behind the motion of the material universe which subsumes material existence *under* itself yet is also embodied *as* material existence and contiguous with it. All of the material universe which we as human beings encounter is not simply created by *Geist*, but represents *Geist*'s life functions—the very conditions necessary for *Geist*'s existence. Yet, the material universe is also the medium in which *Geist* expresses itself and which is posited by *Geist* in order to manifest itself. Thus, as Taylor explains, Hegel conceives the universe as both a life-form and an enciphered text in which *Geist* reveals what it is. The universe constitutes the necessary conditions for the existence of *Geist*, yet the universe is, simultaneously,

¹⁰See the Preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* (A.V. Miller, trans.; Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1952]), especially §6.

posited by *Geist* as such. The universe exists *by design*, yet it also exists *as a prerequisite for its designer*.¹¹

While Hegel argues that the phenomenological universe is the medium in which Absolute Mind expresses itself and, thus, that Absolute Mind is knowable through the philosophical penetration of material reality, he realizes that the mere fact that the universe appears to be an emanation of *Geist* is not, in itself, sufficient proof of *Geist*'s existence. That the material universe appears to be the orderly creation of some higher being only establishes the plausibility of Absolute Mind, not its necessity. Therefore, unlike, for example, Thomas Aquinas' teleological proof of God's existence which argues that the intricate workings of the material universe could only be designed by a divine artificer,¹² Hegel attempts to present a logical proof which he hopes will, on the strength of reason alone, make the existence of Absolute Mind self-evident.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 [1975]), 88. The implications of this for the Biblical doctrine of Creation are significant. If the material universe is both an expression of *Geist* and the prerequisite of *Geist*'s existence, then the doctrine of Creation is incoherent. Though *Geist* achieves self-expression in the universe and is thus logically prior to it, the material universe constitutes the conditions necessary for the existence of *Geist*. *Geist* cannot legitimately be considered the transcendent creator of something which is the precondition of *Geist*'s existence. We must assume, then, that Hegel understands both *Geist* and the universe to have always been.

¹² Aquinas formulated the teleological argument for the existence of God thus:

We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

See excerpt from *Summa Theologica* in *Classics of Western Philosophy* (Steven M. Cahn, ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 297.

In *Science of Logic*, Hegel demonstrates the necessity of Absolute Mind by means of dialectical development. He first identifies the most ontologically empty, impoverished category of reality of which one can conceive with certainty. This forms the ground-stone of knowledge about which there can be no doubt. Second, he identifies the internal contradictions of that initial category. Finally, he synthesizes a subsequent category which reconciles the inherent contradictions of the previous one, but which contains new contradictions of its own. The starting point for Hegel, which serves as an indisputable ground for his system, is *undifferentiated Being*. Because of the contradictory nature of undifferentiated Being which consists in the fact that undifferentiated Being is essentially *nothing*, Hegel is able to deduce the necessary existence of *determinate Being*.¹³ The contradictory moments of being and non-being are thus subsumed under a new category which is not simply posited but which is logically necessary, and which subsequently becomes the thesis in the next round of dialectical development. The goal of this ongoing dialectical process is to reveal an ultimate thesis which possesses no internal contradictions and is, as such, self-subsistent. According to Hegel, only one category of being, Absolute Mind, has the quality of non-contradiction which sign-posts it as the final stage of the ascending dialectic.

As Hegel explains in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, history is the process of *Geist*—or Absolute Mind—coming to ever more complete self-awareness and self-

¹³G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (A.V. Miller, trans.; Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991 [1969]), 82*f*.

consciousness. If *Geist* is to become truly self-aware, Hegel argues, then the universe must contain finite spirits—creatures which exist in time and have physical extension—because consciousness must exist *somewhere*. *Geist* must be embodied; therefore, there must be finite things manifesting themselves as “incomplete Spirit, a concrete shape in whose whole existence *one* determinateness predominates”.¹⁴ Self-consciousness is possible only over and against something else; otherwise, *Geist*’s self-consciousness would be little more than a dim sense of self-reference.¹⁵ The life of such a disembodied infinite spirit “would at best be one of dull self-feeling, there would be nothing in it which merited the name ‘consciousness’, much less ‘rational awareness’”.¹⁶ Thus, Absolute Mind must necessarily be mediated by some kind of finite being lest it sink into a self-referential state of unreflectiveness and, consequently, fail to be truly absolute.

In essence then, Hegel sees the structure of the material universe as being contingent on the fact that it is the embodiment of *Geist*, and posits that the form which the material universe takes can be deduced rationally from the requirements of Absolute

¹⁴Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §28.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, §§20, 21. As Hegel explains it, the unmediated Absolute Mind is “only the universal”. It is the universal which, because of its immediacy, is incapable of grasping itself as such. Just as, to Hegel, the phrase “all animals” does not constitute a zoology, Absolute Mind does not express what is contained within it. Only through the process of differentiating “all animals” into frogs, rabbits, sea-cucumbers, etc. and then reintegrating these individual parts into a system of knowing animals does the phrase “all animals” come to denote something other than an empty universal. Similarly, only through differentiation and “becoming-other” which is subsequently “taken back” does Absolute Mind come to reflect upon itself as absolute and, through the mediation of its finite phase, become conscious of itself as absolute.

¹⁶Taylor, *op. cit.*, 89f

Mind which must be both embodied and expressed in the universe. *Geist* can only be actual to the extent that it makes itself *Subject*, or “in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself.”¹⁷ Furthermore, since the finite universe exists solely to embody Absolute Mind, *Geist*’s self-awareness is perfected when we, as rational human beings, recognize *ourselves* as its vehicles. At the moment we recognize ourselves as such, our knowledge of the universe, our science, undergoes a transformation from knowledge of a universe which is *other* than us to a *self*-knowledge of the universal spirit of which we are, at present, the finite parts. In the process of coming to full self-awareness, *Geist* comes to its fullest possible self-expression. Furthermore, in so doing, it perfects its *vehicles*, finite and rational beings, which thus come to grasp the universal flowing through themselves and overcome the alienation between themselves and Absolute Mind which was, initially, a prerequisite to the process of Absolute Mind becoming self-aware. History, which is the process of Absolute Mind returning to itself, is simultaneously the process of finite beings coming closer and closer to unity with the universal purpose in which they are immersed and, thus, to freedom. As people come progressively closer to fulfilling their purpose as finite vehicles of Absolute Mind, they continually strip away the truths of epochs, which were viewed as radical truths in the first instance, but which are revealed as merely ideological,

¹⁷Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §18.

historically contingent constructs. To Hegel, in addition to being the return of Absolute Mind to itself, world history is the progress of the consciousness of individual freedom.¹⁸

Therefore, in Hegel's metaphysics, we are presented with a development that begins with undifferentiated Being and, on the strength of reason alone, ends in fully non-contradictory *Geist* which, by its own nature, posits the material universe. Hegel's world-system is premised entirely on rational necessity and not a problematic argument from design. Taylor provides a good synopsis of the movement of this system:

We show in our ascending dialectic that finite reality can only be as an emanation of *Geist*, hence that given finite reality, self-positing *Geist* must be. But then we can also demonstrate ... that a self-positing *Geist*, that is a cosmic spirit who lays down the conditions of his own existence, must posit the structure of the finite things we know. In these two movements, ascending and descending ..., our argument returns to its starting point. The existence of finite reality which originally we just took as a given is now shown to be necessary. Originally just a datum, it is now swept up in the circle of necessity.¹⁹

Yet, to call Hegel's metaphysical system a "circle of necessity" is not to say that it is tautologous. The argument as it is presented is not circular, but consists of a pair of non-circular arguments which establish each other's starting points.²⁰ The system

¹⁸G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (J. Sibree, trans.; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956 [1899]), 17-22. It should be further noted that when Hegel refers to "World-History", he is not referring strictly to the history of our Earth but to all of "both physical and psychical Nature".

¹⁹Taylor, *op.cit.*, 98.

²⁰*Loc. cit.*

returns to its starting point with more momentum than it had when it was put in motion; its starting point is revealed as having ontological necessity. In other words,

Our ascending movement thus starts with a postulate and proceeds by necessary inference. But what it infers to is ontological necessity, the proposition that everything which exists is posited by *Geist* according to a formula of rational necessity. The circle is thus not a single stream of inferences. Rather, it involves a reversal of starting point. We begin with the ascending movement which is a movement of discovery. Our starting point is finite existence which is first in the order of discovery. But what we reveal is a pervasive ontological necessity, and this shows that our original starting point is really secondary. Finite reality is itself posited by *Geist*, God, the Absolute. This is the real starting point in the order of being.²¹

Ultimately, Hegel's metaphysical system is one in which history is, first, the process of Absolute Mind coming to grasp its own essence through expression as finite being, and, second, the process of finite, rational beings coming to grasp themselves as free vehicles of Absolute Mind. The outcomes of this process are the perfection of *Geist*'s self-awareness, and the end of estrangement between finite and infinite being at the instant that finite spirits grasp the universal. In this, there is unity, not "an *original* or *immediate* unity", but "a unity which is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end and its goal, having as its end also its beginning".²²

Having considered what Hegel believed the motion of history to entail, one can now speak meaningfully of the Hegelian theory of the state. For, in Hegel's system, the

²¹*Ibid.*, 99.

²²Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §18.

state is not merely an apparatus to which free men consent in order to protect their interests. Rather, it is the *sine qua non* of freedom. The state is an integral part in the historical realization of both *Geist*'s self-consciousness and human freedom. According to Hegel, the historical purpose of *Geist* is to achieve perfect self-awareness and self-understanding. As we have noted, this cannot be achieved until finite, rational beings (like ourselves) become aware of themselves as contingent vehicles of *Geist*, that is, until finite beings grasp the universal. The role of the state, through education, legislation, and community life, is to facilitate this historical process in which individual, self-interested men come to grasp the universal through their particularity and, in so doing, become truly free.

III. HEGEL'S OBJECTIVES

The Philosophy of Right's famous epigram, "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational",²³ shows Hegel at his most quotable but can be quite misleading to contemporary ears.

As this phrase suggests, Hegel's aim in articulating his theory of the state was to attempt to "apprehend and portray the state as something inherently rational",²⁴ and not to look beyond the present state for truth. Far from finding enlightenment, he argues, whoever tries to look beyond the actual state and construct a state as it *ought* to be will be confronted only with relativism and vacuity. Hegel was adamant that any philosophy of the state must not be driven by arbitrary visions of what the state ought to be because this will necessarily degenerate into "an infinite variety of opinions" and, thus, make it impossible to discern what is "universally recognized and valid" or "substantively right".²⁵ Rather, all such a philosophy can hope to demonstrate is how the actual state is to be understood. To Hegel, philosophy finds its voice in the words and thoughts of its own epoch. Its scope and lexicon are limited by the spirit of the age. It cannot step outside of its own epoch any more than a man could leap over the Colossus of Rhodes.

²³Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 10.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 3f.

Should philosophers attempt such a leap beyond the actual, they find themselves in a realm where any theory, no matter how ludicrous, may be legitimately constructed. Such half-philosophy is said by Hegel to take us away from grasping the world as it really is. Since the true philosophy's only justifiable course is to reconcile itself to the actual as the expression of reason, philosophy must have no pretensions of apprehending the state as it has yet to be or as it might become. Just as the owl of Minerva "spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk",²⁶ so too does the philosopher only grasp a particular epoch in thought once the sun has set upon it.

Despite Hegel's identification of the actual state with reason, his theory of the state must not be read, as Russell, Hobhouse, and others have suggested, as advocating a radically conservative philosophy by which the existence of *any* state can be justified simply because it *is*. The reason for this hinges upon what Hegel considers to be actual. In casual speech it is not uncommon for the words 'actuality' and 'existence' to be used interchangeably. Usually, if something is said to be actual, then it is also said to be existent and *vice versa*. "In common life", Hegel states, "any brain-wave, error, evil, and everything in the nature of evil, as well as every degenerate and transitory existence whatever, gets indiscriminately called an actuality".²⁷ However, blurring the distinction between words in this manner muddles Hegel's argument. When Hegel says that the

²⁶*Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷G.W.F. Hegel, "Excerpts from the Introduction and Logic Section of Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline", *Metaphysics: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Ronald C. Hoy and L. Nathan Oaklander, eds.; Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991). §6.

actual is rational, he is not arguing that the existent state, as we encounter it in unmediated sensual experience, is rational. In *The Philosophy of Right*, what is *actual* is not simply that which *is* and which impresses itself upon our senses. To ascribe actuality to a contingent existence is to say that actuality “has no greater value than that of something possible, which may as well not be as be”.²⁸ Rather, the *actual* is that which is *not* contingent and fulfils its true essence in a manner which can be subsequently grasped by reason.

Understood in Hegel’s terms, the actual state is not necessarily the state as we see it, but resembles an ideal ‘form’ of the state—the eternal substance beneath the fleeting appearances. To refer to Hegel’s actual state as being the ‘form’ of the existing state is possibly misleading though, for this suggests that Hegel’s conception of actuality corresponds to something like Plato’s Theory of the Forms. This is not entirely true. In Plato’s writing, the Forms exist independently from worldly objects which are merely imperfect projections of the Forms they represent, and cannot be known through their worldly embodiments.²⁹ In contrast, according to Hegel, what is actual is inseparable from what is existent even though it might be represented in a distorted fashion. Thus, while the Forms are eternally inaccessible, the actual can be known through the philosophical penetration of the phenomenological world. Unlike the Platonic Forms, the actual can be

²⁸*Loc. cit.*

²⁹See “Meno” (W.K.C. Guthrie, trans.) and “Phaedo” (R. Hackforth, trans.) in *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (Reginald E. Allen, ed.; New York: Free Press. 1985 [1966]), 110-141, 155-196.

apprehended by reason. Bearing this in mind, Hegel's contention that the actual state was the embodiment of reason ceases to be an apology for the state as he encountered it and becomes instead an exhortation to thinking people. Hegel demands of us that we disregard the *apparent* state which "emerges with an infinite wealth of forms, shapes, and appearances" and shrouds the essential kernel of the *actual* state with "a motley covering".³⁰ To dwell on externalities is not, for Hegel, the proper course of philosophy. The purpose of philosophy must be to discern the light of eternal truth shining within these externalities.

If, as Hegel argues, reason is embodied in the actual state but not necessarily the existent state, then Hegel's claim that the actual is rational is not a conservative principle but a critical one. A state may have existence but, if it fails to promote ethical life, it lacks actuality. In failing to do that which it is in the state's essence to do, *i.e.*, facilitate ethical life, it leaves its essence unfulfilled. It is irrational. Far from being a whitewash which justifies authoritarian ideologies from Soviet Stalinism to the German National Socialism,³¹ the identification of reason with the actual state acts as a standard by which we can assess historical states. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the agenda is as much critical as it is expository. Though Hegel's aim is to describe the actual state,

³⁰Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 10.

³¹It is worth noting that, in his major work, Alfred Rosenberg (a leading ideologue of the National Socialist movement) refers to Hegel only in passing and refers to his philosophy as "the antithesis of all that is truly German" and "a doctrine of power alien to the blood". See *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (Vivian Bird, trans.; Torrance, California: Noontide Press, 1982), 175, 328.

The Philosophy of Right is also prescriptive in the sense that it sets up the *actual* state as the standard of rationality which the *existent* state, the “hieroglyph” of reason, should emulate.³²

³²Hegel’s distinction between *actuality* and *existence* is made more concrete in his discussion of the “Proceedings of the Estates Assembly in the Kingdom of Württemberg, 1815-1816.” In this essay, Hegel states clearly that positive law as it is expressed in the existent state is not necessarily rational. Hence, it is not necessarily actual. Positive law, according to Hegel, can only be rational to the extent that it conforms to the underlying principles of right. It is these underlying principles which are inherently actual, not the positive laws of the state. To see these principles as actual is to reconcile oneself to reason; to see positive law as actual is to cling to mere formalism. See T.M. Knox and Z.A. Pelczynski, eds., *Hegel’s Political Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 281.

IV. THE NORMATIVE ORDERS³³

The state, as Hegel conceives it, is the last of three ethical components—The Family, Civil Society, and the State—which together constitute the normative order known as Ethical Life. Ethical Life is, furthermore, the third of three normative orders: Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life. As the third ethical component within the third normative order, the State should be seen as the pinnacle of the double triad and as following logically from the other components.

The discussion of the normative orders in *The Philosophy of Right* is an integral part of its attempt to explain law, morality, and ethical life as expressions of the development of Absolute Mind. As discussed earlier, history is, from the perspective of Absolute Mind, the process of reintegrating its finite phase into itself, and, from the perspective of finite beings, the process of coming to grasp the universal. Hegel believes that true freedom is possible only when this process has run its course, and there is a perfect coincidence of individual will and the actual, universal will. Consequently, perfect freedom is not something which human beings are naturally fitted for and subsequently relinquish. It is actually something which can be found only when human beings attempt

³³In this section, the phrase “normative orders” is used, following Pelczynski, as shorthand for the three different spheres (Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life), towards which Hegel thinks the human will can be oriented, and within which particular sets of behavioural norms predominate. The phrase refers only to the spheres in which certain norms—egoistic, moral, or ethical—are upheld, and does not imply a division in Hegel’s thought, typical of contemporary analytic philosophy, between normative and empirical thinking. See *Philosophy of Right*, §33.

to elevate themselves above immediate, natural life and unite themselves with Absolute Mind. This process is outlined in *The Philosophy of Right*, and is said to culminate in the State—the institutional expression of rationality and freedom. Thus, in the hands of Hegel, the State takes on a cosmic significance. It is, as Plamenatz calls it, a “side-effect” of the historical development of universal spirit and its finite embodiment.

Abstract Right

Corresponding to the first normative order, Abstract Right, is a particular kind of freedom. In the realm of Abstract Right, the individual will is immediate and its actions are influenced by nothing but a simple rule of reciprocity.³⁴ Therefore, by the norms of Abstract Right, one is free to do whatever one wishes provided that, in doing so, the same right of others is not compromised. The exercise of Abstract Right has its greatest expression in the acquisition and maintenance of property. Property is not only necessary as a means of satisfying material needs but as a means by which men can be recognized in the world. As Hegel puts it, “[i]f emphasis is placed on my needs, then the possession of property appears as a means to their satisfaction, but the true position is that, from the standpoint of freedom, property is the first embodiment of freedom and so is in itself a substantive end”.³⁵ In order to make oneself known as an individual, one must infuse some external object with personal will. The agreement of the rest of the

³⁴*Ibid.*, §34, §38, §40.

³⁵*Ibid.*, §45.

world not to trespass against this property does not simply demonstrate a recognition of the property's ability to satisfy the needs of its owner, but also the general acceptance of the owner as a willing, free being. Property is the self which has been made objective. It is the embodiment of personality. Thus, the deprivation of property is an issue of loss of humanity, not just a loss of the means by which to satisfy needs. The imperative of Abstract Right, therefore, is to express oneself in the world, to be recognized as a person, and, reciprocally, to respect others as persons.³⁶

Yet, this is in itself an incomplete formulation of freedom. While a man acting in accordance with Abstract Right does not appear to suffer under external compulsion and is, apparently, free, he is actually not free to do anything except act according to his own self-serving whims and impulses. The principle of Abstract Right ensures that all actions adhering to it are necessarily egoistic; thus, the freedom afforded by formal rights is only a degenerate freedom to be self-serving. A person acting by the norms of Abstract Right is able to express himself as a rational and purposeful creature through egoistic activity and the acquisition of property; however, these actions do not constitute genuine freedom. Furthermore, there is nothing inherent in a society composed entirely of Shylockian, self-serving men which offers an enduring social bond.

³⁶Shlomo Avinciri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974 [1972]), 136f.

Morality

The norms of Morality are different from those of Abstract Right for they concern people not merely as self-interested, egoistic creatures but as beings capable of acting according to conscience. For Hegel, the point of departure for morality is a will which is moved by conscious self-reflection rather than by simple appetite. According to the norms of Abstract Right, human will is embodied in external things—property. The result of this is the capacity of people to make themselves known in the world through the objects they own. In contrast, in the realm of Morality, the individual will is no longer focused upon external objects but upon itself.³⁷ At the level of Abstract Right and property, the will is embodied in external things. At the level of Morality however, the will becomes embodied in itself. Thus, the individual becomes aware of himself as a moral agent.³⁸ Through the introspection of the will the individual surpasses his simple, legal knowledge of what he must *not* do as dictated by the principle of Abstract Right. As a moral being he is also aware of what he must do—even if this action does not coincide with his immediate self-interest. Hegel believes Morality to be an improvement over Abstract Right. The will is no longer embodied in an external object and is, as such, not subject to coercion. The will embodied in any kind of property can be coerced and manipulated by trespasses against that piece of property. In contrast, will existing *as* will takes the form of powerful inner conviction which cannot be coerced

³⁷Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §105.

³⁸*Ibid.*, §106.

and which allows the individual to stand the most savage external pressures. In the sphere of Morality then, to be free is to transcend appetite and to have the capacity to choose material deprivation or pain should this be required by moral principle.

Nevertheless, the norms of Morality, like the norms of Abstract Right, foster only an incomplete kind of freedom. Certainly the moral will has a self-awareness that the egoistic will does not. Yet Morality in itself is incapable of bonding society together and allowing it to fulfil universal ends. As long as moral agency has its well-spring solely in the self-reflection of the individual will, and is not mediated by universal ends, it cannot realize its identity with the universal.³⁹ The moral individual possesses the infinite capacity to determine himself and is, in this respect, free. This infinite capacity for self-determination intrinsic to the moral will allows an individual to withstand any coercion and to exercise his conscience against any law of the state which does not measure up to his standard of moral correctness. However, as in Abstract Right, this apparent freedom is in fact a limitation. While the individual is free to reject the wills of others, or the law of the land, this freedom is inherently a reactionary freedom. The will is not free to do anything originating within itself, but can only express itself in the negation of forces coming from outside itself. The negative freedom of Morality is illustrated particularly well in Dostoyevsky's 'Underground Man' who defines himself

³⁹*Ibid.*, §107-108.

entirely in terms of the negation of any and all prevailing social conventions.⁴⁰ While the Underground Man associates this capacity to negate with freedom, it traps him instead in a cycle of necessity in which he is compelled to negate in order to feel free. What is apparently freedom is merely another fetter. Like the egoism of Abstract Right, self-righteous Morality provides no basis for an enduring social bond. In taking as its highest principle the capacity of the individual to negate any other principle enshrined in the law or the social *ethos*, action according to morality alone destroys the capacity of the individual to grasp the universal. By Hegel's thinking, this is anathema to freedom.

Ethical Life

In contrast to the principles of Abstract Right and Morality, which have two inherently limited forms of freedom corresponding to them, true freedom is said to come into its own in the sphere of Ethical Life—hence Hegel's extended treatment of it.

The fact that Hegel treats the development of Ethical Life as having moved through the prior spheres of Abstract Right and Morality suggests that this logical movement is also a historical one. In other words, the manner in which the three moments are explained suggests to the reader that the principle of Abstract Right applies to primitive society, that the principle of Morality operates in a more advanced society, and that Ethical Life exists only in advanced societies. Actually, this movement is no

⁴⁰ See Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "Notes from Underground" in *Notes From Underground The Double* (Jessie Coulson, trans.; London, England: Penguin Books, 1972 [1864]).

more temporal than the earlier described movement from the contradictory category of undifferentiated Being to the self-subsistent category of Absolute Mind. Just as Hegel initiates his metaphysical system with the barest category possible and develops this to its culmination in *Geist*, he initiates his theory of society with the concept of Will, develops this through its different modes of expression (Abstract Right and Morality), and finishes at Ethical Life. As has been already noted, while the different categories of being are logically prior to *Geist*, these categories are posited by *Geist* as ontological necessities. Hence, this is not a historical process. Similarly, while Abstract Right and Morality are logically prior to Ethical Life, these two normative orders actually presuppose Ethical Life. Abstract Right and Morality are not simply incomplete forms of Ethical Life but elements of it which cannot be conceived of in isolation from some kind of social *ethos*.⁴¹ Thus, the three normative orders do not express a development through time but exist simultaneously. The reason that the movement from Abstract Right to Ethical Life appears to be historical is that Hegel deduces the categories of Abstract Right and Morality from Will before he is able to demonstrate that these categories are actually subsumed under Ethical Life.

To Hegel, Ethical Life is actual freedom made existent, or a universal pulled down to earth. As such, it is “the concept of freedom developed into the existing world”.⁴² Ethical Life involves a subjective disposition as moral life did. However,

⁴¹Plamcnatz, *op. cit.*, 228.

⁴²Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §142.

unlike the unmediated subjectivity of Morality, the subjectivity of Ethical Life is imbued with a conception of what is, in an absolute sense, right. Thus, it is the good come to life, the perfection of freedom, grasped in thinking, and made existent in the world of our day-to-day experience.

According to the principles of Abstract Right and Morality, there is always some tension between the will of the individual and the external world which is, subsequently, viewed as a fetter upon that individual will. There is a similar sense of ‘otherness’ in the Ethical order. The individual is aware that there is a distinction between his particular will as a citizen and the universal needs of society as a whole. However, the ethical individual now sees the *objectivity* of the ethical order as an expression of his own *subjectivity*. In other words, the individual and universal interests present in the community converge such that their content is identical.⁴³ The ethical order is ‘other than’ the individual, yet its needs and norms coincide exactly with the individual will. Ethical Life has as its prerequisite the particular man who wills the universal, such that he finds freedom, rather than a fetter, in the prevailing set of social norms.⁴⁴

As Hegel explains it, the ethical order is expressed in certain powers which regulate the lives of individuals. These powers are embodied in the state’s offices and institutions and are executed by individuals motivated by universal ends who,

⁴³*Ibid.*, §143.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, §144.

subsequently, will whatever is most necessary to the ethical order.⁴⁵ Together, the state offices and their officers constitute the legal and administrative apparatus of the state. The ethical substance of the state, and its laws, stand over and against those living in the state. These represent the absolute authority of the state which is inseparable from the mentality of Absolute Mind. Yet, these institutions and laws are not alien to the people, for the ethical person stands for these laws as he does for his own essence; thus, the individual has a sense of self-hood in the objective ethical order.⁴⁶ The relation of human beings to the ethical order is one of identity. Of course, the laws and institutions of the ethical order *are* binding on the will of the individual and, as a willing being, the individual stands apart from them. But the subsequent ‘bond of duty’ appears restrictive to an individual only to the extent that he subscribes to the norms of abstract right or morality. The ethical community is a fetter to the individual if, and only if, his actions are egoistic or degenerately moral.

In sum then, in the ethical order, freedom is neither unmediated impulsiveness, nor negation, but action according to consciously accepted universal norms and laws. In saying this, Hegel clearly distinguishes himself from thinkers like Hobbes and Locke⁴⁷

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, §145.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, §147.

⁴⁷Both Hobbes and Locke tend to define freedom in negative terms, *i.e.*, as freedom from external compulsion by other people or groups. They neglect another component of freedom which is, in the words of Larry Arnhart, “not just the absence of external restraints but self-mastery”. See Arnhart’s discussion of Rousseau’s conjunction of freedom and duty in *Political Questions: Political Philosophy from Plato to Rawls* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), 275.

and aligns himself more with Jean-Jacques Rousseau who argued that “to be governed by appetite alone is slavery, while obedience to a law one prescribes to oneself is freedom”.⁴⁸ In the ethical order, the individual is liberated from indeterminate or negative freedom which is in fact servitude. “In duty”, writes Hegel, “the individual acquires his substantive freedom.”⁴⁹ There is no conflict between the particular will and the universal will because they coincide and the private conscience no longer stands in opposition to the ethical substance of the state. The individual grasps the duties imposed by the state as being, in reality, of his own design and can give himself freely to them. It should be stressed then that, by acting according to duty, individuals do not forfeit their rights. Since the universal and the particular wills are now identical in the ethical community, there is no longer any distinction between right and duty. This allows Hegel to argue that, in an ethical order, “a man has rights in so far as he has duties, and duties in so far as he has rights”.⁵⁰ Neither excludes the other.

Despite its unity of rights and duties, Ethical Life is not a homogeneous thing. Just as there are three distinct normative orders, of which Ethical Life is one, so too are there three moments within Ethical Life. As Hegel has argued, both Abstract Right and Morality are logically prior to Ethical Life; nevertheless, these are cogent only in the

⁴⁸Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Maurice Cranston, ed.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1986 [1968]), 65.

⁴⁹Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §149.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, §155.

context of an ethical order. Thus, Ethical Life has the same kind of self-positing character that was earlier identified in Absolute Mind. Within the category of Ethical Life we witness the same kind of differentiation into three phases: the Family, Civil Society, and the State. The Family represents the most immediate and natural phase of ethical life. With the dissolution of the family, it passes into the second phase which is civil society. The third phase—which is the logical outcome of the other two—is the state *qua* ethical community. Just like Absolute Mind and Ethical Life, the state is put forth as the outcome of a logical movement through its preceding categories. Furthermore, like Absolute Mind and Ethical Life, the state posits its antecedents. In the self-positing structure of this Ethical triad is the basis of Hegel's argument that the family and civil society are subsumed under the state, and that the state plays the leading role in helping individual human beings see the universal. To Hobbes and Locke the state was an apparatus; to Hegel the state was no less than the light of Absolute Mind on earth.

V. THE STATE

In Hegel's thinking, the State is the culmination of the inability of the family and civil society to be adequate expressions of true ethical life. These prior moments *are* ethical moments and do play a role in the process by which Absolute Mind reveals itself in the world and becomes actual in communities of rational, finite minds. However, they are, in themselves, insufficient to help finite individuals grasp the universal will and, in so doing, facilitate *Geist's* coming to self-consciousness. The only sphere of Ethical Life adequate to this task is the State.

The family is described by Hegel as being the natural, or immediate, manifestation of *Geist's* historical movement as it is seen in the realm of human beings. The unity of the family is characterized by love and the "self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member".⁵¹ In the family there is a consciousness of individuality in unity, hence a realization of Ethical Life. The right that an individual possesses within a family is never actually exercised in that context, and it is not until the dissolution of the family that a family member can act according to the principle of right *vis à vis* other members. In the absence of considerations of right, the

⁵¹*Ibid.*, §158.

family cannot be viewed as a legal entity based on contract.⁵² Rather, it is bound together by altruism. At the point that the family dissolves, either because of a parent's death, or a child's leaving the home, those who were family members by inclination begin to become independent people. Where there was once a natural unity, and family members were moments of the whole, there is now only a link of money or other assistance.⁵³ Thus, the naturally ethical link between family members ends just as certainly as people must die or move out into the world.

It is the inevitable self-destruction of the family which, in Hegel's eyes, makes it inadequate to the task of facilitating a lasting ethical life. However, it should not be supposed that, with the dissolution of the family, people cease to participate in an ethical order. The reason for this is that the dissolution of the family brings about the release of individuals from their familial unity into self-subsistence. Though the remnants of the dissolved family now act according to self-interest, and not love or a sense of blood-relation, they become related to all other self-interested persons in the process of satisfying their needs. Thus, they are absorbed into a new kind of universal, ethical order. Individuals living outside of the immediacy of the family appear to be conditioned strictly

⁵²Indeed, Hegel would be nonplussed by the contemporary notion that marriage constitutes a contract between a man and a woman. Contract presupposes that one party to the contract holds rights against the other and that both parties relate to each other as individuals. Hegel does not think in this manner. To his mind, marriage is a conscious act by which two people consent to make themselves one person rather than assert their individuality. In Hegelian terms, marriage can be understood as a contract only to the extent that it is an agreement to transcend the individuality of the couple. If marriage is a contract at all, it is a contract to transcend contract.

⁵³*Ibid.*, §159.

by personal desires and, as such, might be called unethical. Yet, in acting according to personal desire, these individuals actually act according to a universal necessity. They act according to the widely held acquisitive values of their society and, thus, observe its ethical norm. This new sphere of ethical life is civil society.

Civil society is characterized by Hegel as the sphere of Ethical Life which is particular in appearance but which has universality as its underlying essence.⁵⁴ In other words, there is in this sphere an apparent divergence between the particular will and the universal but, in fact, the particular is conditioned by universal concerns—things like economic laws and the basic needs that all members of civil society share. Though a man in civil society acts according to his wants and desires he does not act simply according to his rights and moral convictions; rather, he acts in a manner that allows him to satisfy his wants. Since these wants can be satisfied only through interaction with other people, there is a universality expressed in the particular wants of one man. The interpenetrated “system of needs” compels individuals to participate in a higher plane of universality. Through the attempt to satisfy particular needs in a system of interdependent individuals, there forms in civil society a situation in which “the livelihood, happiness, and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness, and rights of all”.⁵⁵ This ensures that “individuals can attain their ends only in so far as they themselves determine their knowing, willing, and acting in a universal way and make themselves links in this

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, §181.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, §183.

chain of social connexions”.⁵⁶ Modern people cannot subsist on their own and, because of this, they touch the universal.

The problem with civil society as an ethical order, despite the fact that it unites individuals through universal economic laws and the universal human needs which are its basis, is that unrestrained, self-seeking men tend to rend the social fabric. In their ferocious pursuit of personal goods, egoistic and impulsive men push civil society to extravagance and degeneration.⁵⁷ Furthermore, though the individuals of civil society are drawn together by the necessities of economic life, they are incapable of managing large, capital-intensive industries. For example, a single entrepreneur who derives benefits from well-maintained infrastructure might not ever consider building a new rail-road line because of the tremendous expense involved. While particular individuals might be bound by need to large-scale projects like road repair and maintaining a standing army, the likelihood that individuals will initiate such projects on their own is very slight. The more technology- or capital-intensive a public good is, the less likely it is that self-seeking individuals will underwrite the risks of creating such a good. Consequently, the need arises for some kind of public authority which can exercise external control over the particularistic tendencies of civil society, protect positive rights, enforce contractual obligation, and supervise public services which would be too unwieldy or expensive for individuals to look after on their own. Therefore, in addition to the naturally occurring

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, §187.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, §185.

“system of needs” which unites the individual with the universal by the principle of interdependence, Hegel suggests two further organizations: the Police and the Corporation.⁵⁸ Through administration and education, these two organizations prevent civil society from flying to pieces under the pressure of particular interests.

Yet, like the family, civil society is ultimately inadequate to the concept of Ethical Life for reasons that Hegel makes clear. Undoubtedly, the three universal powers of civil society—the system of needs, the corporation, and the police—work to unite individuals with the universal needs of society. However, as already noted, the system of needs is prone to rampant self-centredness. Furthermore, the corporation serves only to bring together tradesmen of a specific art. Its end is “restricted and finite” in the sense that it only fosters universality within a clique of craftsmen and not across society. Finally, in being a regulatory body, the public authority of the police necessitates “a separation and a merely relative identity of controller and controlled”.⁵⁹ As a result, the

⁵⁸Hegel’s description of the Police and the Corporation takes place in §§231-249 and §§250-256 of *Philosophy of Right*. Though Hegel uses the term *Police*, this body should not be regarded simply as a department of government which works to uphold the legal code. Hegel had a broadly-based public authority in mind which would, among other things, ensure reasonable market prices for essential food items and coordinate public welfare programs. The *Corporation* on the other hand is comparable to a craftsmen’s guild which unites people of specific trades in a community and furnishes them with rights, privileges, and duties as part of their membership. Corporations help to channel individual egoism into a universal structure such that, in the words of Avineri, “even a member of the business class, who is totally immersed in particularistic pursuits, will have to relate in some reciprocal way to other members of his trade”. Both of these organizations work to temper the particularistic tendencies of civil society. They are thus mediating structures without which “antagonistic *bourgeois* cannot be co-operative *citoyens*” and “‘fraternity’ would disappear under ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’”. [See Avineri’s *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 165] Part of the confusion about the Police and the Corporation may arise because, in the contemporary mind, these kinds of public authorities are associated with the state. To Hegel though, public authority operates in the sphere of civil society, not the state.

⁵⁹Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §256.

police sets itself up as an ‘other’ which is an admission of the disjunction between private and public will and the impossibility of true ethical life. The individual does not see his own will reflected in civil society and cannot consciously accept it as something emanating from himself. He cannot find freedom in adhering to its norms. The limited ability of civil society to express ethical life causes the sphere of civil society, which previously displaced the family, to pass over into the sphere of the state. According to Hegel, “[t]he philosophic proof of the concept of the state is this development of ethical life from its immediate phase [the family] through civil society, the phase of division, to the state, which then reveals itself as the true ground of these phases”.⁶⁰ The state—like self-positing Absolute Mind—appears as the final result of the development in the ethical sphere *while showing itself to be the true basis of the phases that precede it*. By Hegel’s thinking then, the state is not the end of ethical development but its beginning. It is within the state that the family develops into civil society and also within the state that civil society achieves stability. The state is not simply *created* by the logical development of the ethical sphere but is also *present* in this development, the purpose of which is to yield a community conducive to freedom and truly ethical life.

To Hegel, the state is the embodiment of ethical existence which allows human beings to acquire universal consciousness and which facilitates the self-knowledge of *Geist* through such universally conscious beings. It is nothing less than the Divine “manifest and revealed to itself, knowing and thinking itself, accomplishing what it knows

⁶⁰*Loc. cit.*

and in so far as it knows it.”⁶¹ For an individual to be politically virtuous is for him to will, of his own volition, the ends of the Divine as it exists in the world—that is, the ends of the state. The unity of the particular and universal will is the condition in which “freedom comes into its supreme right”.⁶² On no account should the functions of the state be confused with those regulatory functions of the police. If one views the state simply as an apparatus which secures an individual’s rights and freedom from harm, then membership in a state becomes a matter of self-interest. As such, membership is an optional thing to be given up whenever a person feels that his or her association is no longer advantageous. But, to Hegel’s mind, the state is not merely a glorified *gendarme* having one head and many limbs. Rather, it is what allows human beings to take their place in the historical development of universal mind, and, hence, makes them capable of ethical living. Hegel minces no words in this respect. The state is neither an impartial umpire nor a leviathan: “The march of God in the world, that is what the state is”.⁶³

Hegel is equally clear about the nature of the freedom that members of a state possess. He is quick to diverge from the Hobbesian ‘freedom from external compulsion’, and to align himself with the Rousseauian ‘freedom to adhere to laws consciously made

⁶¹*Ibid.*, §257.

⁶²*Ibid.*, §258.

⁶³*Loc. cit.*

for oneself". In Hegel's actual state freedom is not untutored subjectivity, or hostility, towards a state which is viewed as a necessary evil. On the contrary,

concrete freedom consists in this, that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their own right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society) but, for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they know and will the universal; they even recognize it as their own substantive mind; they take it as their end and aim and are active in its pursuit. The result is that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion except along with particular interest and through the co-operation of particular knowing and willing; and individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone, but in the very act of willing these they will the universal in the light of the universal, and their activity is consciously aimed at none but the universal end. The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.⁶⁴

With this statement Hegel wears his debt to classical political thought on his sleeve.⁶⁵

Like the ancient Greeks, Hegel understands that people can form stable communities only when they share the same conception of the good life and can identify with the conventions of their country or *polis*. The common ground that a people shares finds its expression in the laws and customs which regulate their interactions and express their

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, §260.

⁶⁵See Polczynski, *op. cit.*, 5.

ethos. In Pelczynski's opinion, the Greeks, like Hegel, saw in the *polis* a coincidence of social *ethos* and state. The Greek *polis* was an ethical community infused with political aspects. These occurred naturally within the community; they were not imposed by some external state.

However, Hegel's conception of the state was also highly critical of the Greek tendency to silence the individual voice in the interest of the state. Though he borrowed the Greek notion of ethical community, he cannot be read as subscribing to the Aristotelian ideal that "while it is desirable to secure what is good in the case of an individual, to do so in the case of a people or a state is something finer and more sublime".⁶⁶ Nor can he be read as an enthusiast of Plato's Noble Lie by which the good of the state was to be held above the good of the individual.⁶⁷ Particularity is an essential moment of society as Hegel conceived it. Because subjective particularity was not incorporated into the organization of the *polis*, Hegel believed it was destined to emerge as something hostile, "as a corruption of the social order". In a society which suppresses the individual will,

either it overthrows society, as happened in the Greek states and in the Roman Republic; or else, should society preserve itself in being as a force or as a religious authority, for

⁶⁶Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (J.A.K. Thomson, trans.; London and Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987 [1955]), 64.

⁶⁷Plato, *Republic* (Allan Bloom, trans.; New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), §§414c-415d.

instance, it appears as inner corruption and complete degeneration, as was the case to some extent in Sparta.⁶⁸

The suppression of the individual will, no matter how noble the reason, was recognized by Hegel as a formula for disaster—especially in a modern state whose members were steeped in the individualistic tradition of Christianity and natural rights. Thus, Hegel does not favour the smothering of particularity; rather, he is inclined to see it as the animating force of Ethical Life. The strength of the state does not lie in the discouragement of the particular in the name of the universal, but in “the unity of its own universal end and aim with the particular interest of individuals”.⁶⁹

As careful as Hegel is to lay out his theory of the state in minute detail, his account fails to adequately make an important distinction. A large part of Hegel’s account concerns the “organism of the state”—the institutions of the state such as the Crown, the Executive, and the Legislature. These institutions correspond to what Hegel calls the “strictly political state”.⁷⁰ They do not, however, correspond to the state *proper*, *i.e.*, the state *qua* ethical community. The problem here is that Hegel uses the word ‘state’ when referring both to the political state, and the state proper. Pelczynski raises the point that, because Hegel did not distinguish rigorously between the strictly political state and the state proper, some readers might take Hegel’s state to be no more than the

⁶⁸Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §206.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, §261.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, §267.

political institutions of the state.⁷¹ Thus, it is not surprising that Hegel's theory of the state has been read as a precursor to totalitarianism.⁷² If a reader fails to grasp Hegel's conception of the state as an ethical community, then Hegel's claim that individual will must pass of its own accord into the interest of the state seems to be a demand that the individual surrender his or her will to a set of arbitrary institutions. Though this was categorically not what Hegel had in mind, and the "[f]ailure to realize this has been responsible for numerous misrepresentations of Hegel's position and his attitude to 'the state'",⁷³ Pelczynski justifiably holds Hegel partly responsible for the misconceptions surrounding his theory.

Hegel's lack of clarity about the state aside, the state should not be read as an amalgamation of institutions but as an organized community permeated by ethical life. It is in the context of ethical life that the state "which, sundering itself into the two ideal spheres of its concept, family and civil society, enters upon its finite phase, but it does so only in order to rise above its ideality and become explicit as infinite actual mind".⁷⁴ The state *qua* ethical community, which separates off from itself the other two spheres, defines the character of these spheres and is reflected in them. Therefore, the family and civil society are both contingent on the state for their form and content, and "mind is

⁷¹Pelczynski, *op. cit.*, 13.

⁷²Recall Friedrich's comment on page 18 of this chapter.

⁷³T.M. Knox's note to §267 in *Philosophy of Right*, 365.

⁷⁴Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §262.

present as their objective universality glimmering in them as the power of reason in necessity".⁷⁵ Though family and civil society, as inadequate expressions of ethical life, are logically prior to the state, Hegel sees the state as being the actual basis of family and civil society which the state separates off from itself for the sole purpose of transcending these moments. The state, in which ethical life and freedom come into their own, is the light of reason in the world which is subsequently reflected in family, civil society, and the institutions of the state. All of these spheres are necessarily rational to the extent that they develop in accordance with the state's essence which is to be the earthly repository of Absolute Mind and to facilitate the union of the family and civil society with the universal.

In sum, Hegel's philosophy comes full circle with the state. As we have seen, Hegel believed history to be the process of Absolute Mind splitting itself off into finite moments, transcending this finitude through self-reflection, and returning to unity. In the realm of Absolute Mind, this final unity would result in perfect self-knowledge and self-awareness. In the realm of men, the reunification with Absolute Mind would permit individual human beings to grasp the reason inherent in it, act in accordance with this reason, and, hence, be free. To Hegel's mind, the state facilitates the process by which human beings move beyond their particular interests by unifying these with the universal. In the family, the rationality of the human world is obscured by sentiment. In civil

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, §263.

society, this rationality is obscured by simple self-interest. Only the state promotes human self-consciousness such that human beings can know what is substantively rational and act according to this. Unlike the family or civil society, the state has world-historical significance and posits the family and civil society in the image of its own rationality.

In addition, with his concern for ethical life, Hegel's philosophy marked a return to the Hellenic ideal of community. But Hegel does not condone the sacrifice of the individual will to the universal and he had no illusions that the Greek state could or should be resurrected. The social differentiation which is, on one level, counter to the universal is nonetheless a necessary part of the modern state. By Hegel's day, economic interests had taken on a role that they did not have in classical society and thus had to be legitimized and integrated. Far from suppressing individual freedom, the Hegelian state aimed to uphold freedom and to enable each individual to realize his or her own freedom in conjunction with others. Far from being a coercive instrument hanging over the individual, the Hegelian state, premised as it is upon the individual's self-consciousness and his capacity to grasp the universal, requires *less* coercion than previously possible. "Coercion", says Avineri, "is the mark of undeveloped, undifferentiated structures. Where self-consciousness comes into its own, coercion becomes superfluous."⁷⁶

The strength of Hegel's conception of the state, then, was the degree to which it achieved a synthesis of the ethical life characteristic of the *polis* and modern liberal

⁷⁶Avineri, *op.cit.*, 193.

thinking while avoiding the extremes of both. Hegel's theory of the state was not an anticipation of totalitarianism, nor was it, as Hegel's identification of actuality and rationality might suggest, a conservative apology for the authoritarian Prussian state. As Hegel pointed out in his Preface, no existent state could achieve the philosophical idea of the state as he formulated it in *Philosophy of Right*. Thus, to say that Hegel was writing about Prussia is somewhat suspect. Avineri also disputes the conservative interpretation of Hegel. He cites provisions in *Philosophy of Right*, such as the election of representative assemblies, "which were absent in Prussia and which cannot by any stretch of the imagination, be seen as a reflection of Prussian reality". *The Philosophy of Right* thus "can be viewed as an oblique critique of Prussian conditions".⁷⁷ This, combined with Hegel's explicit claim that he was trying to discern the character of the state in general, casts doubt on the notion that Hegel used Prussia as a model for his political theory. Says Taylor of Hegel's 'Prussianism': "That such an appalling salad of the merely positive and the sub-rational should be attributed to Hegel, the philosopher of a rational cosmic order, is one of the great ironies of modern intellectual history".⁷⁸ Hegel did not intend his state to be a rehash of Greek ideas, a model for totalitarianism, or a self-congratulatory excuse for conservatism. Rather, he saw the state, and its institutions, as part of the ongoing historical process of actualizing freedom. As the

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁸Taylor, *op. cit.*, 457.

repository of reason in the world, the state expressed the universal against the individual's tendency towards unmediated egoism.

While the strength of Hegel's state was its alleged ability to reconcile the particular desires of individuals with the universal ends of Absolute Mind, this strength was, for Karl Marx, only apparent. Denying that the light of the state's reason shone in the sphere of civil society, Marx argued instead that the state was a reflection of the decidedly irrational civil sphere. Furthermore, in addition to inverting the relationship between the state and civil society established by Hegel, Marx offered a critique of the mediating structures of Hegel's state: the Executive and the Estates. Through his critique of the philosophical form and the practical content of Hegel's theory of the state, Marx was able to suggest that the character of civil society was not determined by Absolute Mind as it is expressed in the state but that the character of the state was determined by the general mindlessness of civil society. Contrary to what Hegel had claimed, Marx posited the state as simply the reflection of individual self-interest within civil society and the state's mediating structures as organs in the service of careerism and private property.

II

MARX'S RESPONSE TO THE *PHILOSOPHY OF* *RIGHT*

I was led by my studies to the conclusion that legal relations as well as the forms of the state could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general processes of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of life, which are summed up by Hegel after the fashion of the English and the French of the eighteenth century under the name 'civic society'.¹

I. MARX'S CRITICAL AGENDA

In order to set into the proper context our discussion of Marx's critique of the Hegelian state, it is useful to review Hegel's theory of the state and the purposes for

¹Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (N.I. Stone, trans.; Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, International Library Publishing Co., 1904 [1857]), 11.

which it arose. For Hegel, history is the chronicle of the struggle of Absolute Mind, or *Geist*, to overcome its estrangement from the temporal, extended universe—a universe which is in fact Mind in its finite phase. As explained in the previous chapter, this alienation of finite Mind from infinite Mind was an ontological necessity because Absolute Mind, in its undifferentiated form, would be incapable of anything more than a dull, self-referential, disembodied kind of consciousness. From the perspective of Absolute Mind then, the historical process is characterized by a progressive ‘coming to self-consciousness’ of itself as absolute. From the perspective of finite Mind, of which the consciousness of men is a constituent, the historical process takes the form of steadily approaching universal consciousness, and of moving through a set of social institutions which correspond to the human consciousness of a specific epoch. If history is a process by which *Geist* strives to grasp itself through the mediation of its finite phase and, ultimately, transcends its alienation from the universe of extension, then, for human beings, history is the process by which limited, contingent knowledge is unmasked and people strive for universality and freedom. By Hegel’s reasoning, the purpose of history is to bring *Geist* to a condition in which it is at home with itself as Absolute, and humanity to a state of absolute consciousness, having overcome all contingency. This is a condition to which Hegel refers in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as “Absolute Knowing”

in which all history is revealed as “the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end”.²

To Hegel, the state is the light of Absolute Reason as it manifests itself in the finite realm. The state is not to be understood simply in instrumental terms, as an apparatus which enforces contracts and the rule of law, but as the earthly embodiment of Absolute Mind which facilitates the ongoing universalization of human consciousness and the eventual reconciliation of Absolute Mind with its finite phase. As such, Hegel’s state has significance not only in itself, but as a parenthesis in Hegel’s metaphysics. In addition to coordinating such comparatively mundane tasks as public works, the state is the institution through which the historical struggle of Absolute Mind to reconcile itself with finite being is revealed to finite eyes. As the repository of Mind in the finite sphere, the state—according to Hegel—stands in contradistinction to civil society, the character of which is emergent from the state. Being prior to the material relationships of civil society, the state has the capacity to modify human consciousness and bring it closer to universality. The very existence of civil society presupposes the state which is able, through its many offices and bodies, to mediate between the particularistic concerns of civil life and universal ends.

The ultimate goal of Hegel’s state is to overcome the opposition between the mass of particular, egoistic desires intrinsic to civil society, and the universal ends of

²G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (A. V. Miller, trans.; Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1952]), §802.

ethical community. This is accomplished through the mediating structures of the state machinery, such as the Assembly of the Estates and the Executive. The end result, in Hegel's thinking, would be that the egoistic, self-absorbed individual has the capacity to grasp the universal interest of his community, and the reason to see that his own personal interests, in fact, coincide with the universal ones. The ability to see one's own interest in the *ethos* of one's community is the *sine qua non* of freedom in the Hegelian sense, and the means by which human beings can rise above crude self-interest. In short, the division which has stood throughout history, between the infinite and the finite, the universal and the particular, is transcended when the finite consciousness of humanity is elevated to infinite consciousness through the mediation of the state. The alienation of the particular man from the human community is overcome with the subsumption of the finite consciousness into the infinite consciousness, and with the particular being at home within the universal.

Since Hegel's theory of the state has its basis in a particular conception of reality (as outlined in such works as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*), Marx's critique of Hegel's theory of the state is equally a critique of Hegel's metaphysics. In the first instance, Marx is critical of the general notion that the empirical world is contingent upon Absolute Mind. Following closely the form of Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of religion, Marx argues that the essentially *religious* relation of human beings to Absolute Mind or its worldly concomitant—the state—is merely a symptom of humanity's alienation from its own essence, and of humanity's confrontation

of this disembodied essence as an external force. Like Feuerbach's critique of the relation between human beings and God, Marx's critique of the relation between the state and civil society suggests that Hegel posited this relation in an inverted fashion. Instead of the state being a truly autonomous body which moulds the character of civil society and attenuates the particular, egoistic desires which run rampant within it, Marx argues that the state is a dependent body, a *reflection* of these egoistic desires which has only the appearance of autonomy. In doing so, Marx, like Feuerbach, takes issue with what he believes to be the transposition of subject and object in Hegel's philosophy. However, Marx goes much farther than subjecting Hegel's political philosophy to a Feuerbachian critique. More than simply applying a borrowed methodology to Hegel's theory of the state, Marx further subjects the institutions of Hegel's state to critical analysis and calls into question the idea that the state can influence civil consciousness, that the state represents universality, and, ultimately, that there is a distinction between the state and civil society at all.

II. TRANSFORMATION AND DEMYSTIFICATION

In the 1872 Preface to *Capital*, Marx offers a summary statement of the critique of Hegel upon which he first embarked some thirty years earlier. Marx writes of Hegel's philosophy that,

the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.*, the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', [Hegel] even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.³

Marx's misgivings about the Hegelian preeminence of Mind did not, however, represent a rejection of Hegel. Marx is quick to identify himself with Hegel and his 'dialectical' method in spite of his opinion that Hegel's use of the method obscures the true nature of reality. According to Marx,

[t]he mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.⁴

³Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, trans.; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986 [1887]), 29.

⁴*Loc. cit.*

In other words, Hegel's philosophy is, to Marx's mind, quite informative. As Marx stated years earlier in the third part of his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts",

Hegel's *Phenomenology* is a concealed, unclear and mystifying criticism, but in so far as it grasps the *alienation* of man (even though man appears only as mind) *all* the elements of criticism are contained in it, and are often *presented* and *worked out* in a manner which goes far beyond Hegel's own point of view.⁵

The shortcomings of the Hegelian system thus do not involve the *content* of that system; rather, Marx is questioning the manner in which that content is being presented. Therefore, Marx's aim is not to reject the entire system on the grounds that it mystifies the true nature of reality, but to strip away the "mystical shell" of Hegel's system so that the "rational kernel" within it can be more clearly revealed.

Marx's earliest significant attempt at a demystification of Hegel's philosophy can be found in his marginal notes to Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which were written during the spring and summer of 1843. These notes, which consist of passages copied from Hegel's text followed by critical commentary, address paragraphs 261 to 313 of the text in which Hegel outlines his doctrine of the state. The critique of Hegel which Marx offers here is significant because it addresses in a broad fashion the problem of Hegel's metaphysics, and, in particular, the difficulties arising from his theory of the state. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, Marx does not fault Hegel on his description of the problem facing the state, *i.e.*, how to best overcome the disjunction between the particular

⁵ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" in *Early Writings* (T. Bottomore, trans.; New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 202.

interests of individuals and the universal interests of the ethical community. Instead, Marx argues that the institutional structures which are supposed to unify the particularistic aims of civil society and the universal aims of the state *qua* ethical community, the Estates and Executive, are self-contradictory and inherently ineffective. More importantly, Marx argues that, although Hegel posits civil society as an emergent phenomenon of the universal state, Hegel is at every point forced into a “crass materialism” which shows the state for what it really is—a tool of the particular interests which run rampant in civil society rather than an expression of universality and Absolute Mind.

The Critique of Hegel’s System in General

As Marx’s main concern is the practical critique of Hegel’s theory of the state as presented in *Philosophy of Right*, it is not surprising that Marx does not confront Hegel’s metaphysics directly. Instead of entering into an abstract discussion of Hegel’s system in general, Marx attempts to show that Hegel’s theory of the state forces one to the false conclusion that the finite, material spheres of family and civil society are derived from the infinite ‘Idea’ of the state. By demonstrating the logical difficulties of positing the state as autonomous and unconditioned, and civil society as contingent upon the state, Marx shows by specific example the failure of Hegel’s metaphysics in general. Just as it is incorrect to argue that ‘real’, empirical institutions, such as the family and civil society, are contingent upon the state, so too is it incorrect to argue that the finite, material universe is derived from infinite, absolute being.

The passage from *Philosophy of Right* which, for Marx, most clearly demonstrates the confusion and needless mystification of Hegel's theory of the state in particular, and his philosophical system in general, is found in paragraph 262. In it, Hegel writes:

The actual Idea is mind, which, sundering itself into the two ideal spheres of its concept, family and civil society, enters upon its finite phase, but it does so only in order to rise above its ideality and become explicit as infinite actual mind. It is therefore to these ideal spheres that the actual Idea assigns the material of this its finite actuality, viz. human beings as a mass, in such a way that the function assigned to any given individual is visibly mediated by circumstances, his caprice and his personal choice of his station in life.⁶

Marx finds this passage troublesome for several reasons. Though Hegel's claim that Mind is actual, and that it divides itself into the finite spheres of family and civil society, is quite consistent with his idealism, he is not clear about why this development occurs. Hegel says that the division of the "actual Idea" into the finite spheres of family and civil society occurs in order that it might transcend these finite phases and be reunited with itself as "infinite actual mind". However, this statement is, for Marx, the height of obfuscation. The problem Marx sees is that the Idea (the state) is represented as acting with purpose according to which "[i]t divides into finite spheres and it does this 'in order

⁶G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (T.M. Knox, trans.; London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967 [1952]), §262. For the sake of clarity and consistency with the previous chapter, all lengthy passages from *Philosophy of Right* cited by Marx will be quoted directly from Knox's translation of the text rather than from Marx's notes which occasionally alter, and add emphasis to, Hegel's writing. Shorter quotations from Hegel, presented as parts of quotations from Marx, will be indicated with single quotation-marks.

to return to itself, to exist for itself', in such a way that it is just as it really is".⁷ In other words, the cycle by which the actual Idea (the state) sunders itself into its finite components (the family and civil society) and then transcends these in order to, once again, become actual Mind is pointless because Mind is no more actual or complete after the cycle is completed than it was before the cycle began. Furthermore, in making the transcendence of its finite spheres a condition of its emergence as infinite and actual, Marx notes that Hegel makes the allegedly autonomous Mind contingent upon its finite spheres.

From this it becomes evident to Marx that Hegel is willing to uphold the primacy of the ideal and, thus, the integrity of his system, even at the expense of all good sense. The obscurity of the relationship between the state and civil society described by Hegel is the result of his refusal to view the living, material world as anything more than mere phenomena or appearance. While Hegel is prepared to admit that material circumstance, chance, and personal choice influence the function of the state, material reality—the world of our experience—is still forever relegated to second-class standing. The influence a man has upon the state because of chance or choice is understood to be the state working on itself. To Hegel, the apparent influence over the ideal sphere by

⁷ Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" in *Early Writings* (Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, trans.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1992 [1975]), 61.

material circumstances is little more than that: appearance. These circumstances, explains Marx,

this caprice and this personal choice of a station in life, this *real mediation*, are merely the *appearance of a mediation* which the real Idea performs on itself and which takes place behind the scenes. Reality is not deemed to be itself but another reality instead. The ordinary empirical world is not governed by its own mind but by a mind alien to it; by contrast the existence corresponding to the real Idea is not a reality generated out of itself, but is just the ordinary material world.⁸

In short, the Idea is taken, incorrectly, to be the subject, and all of the real material subjects, such as civil society, are taken to be the unreal predicates of this Idea.⁹

To recapitulate then, Hegel's conception of the relationship between state and civil society is as follows. Civil society and the family are finite spheres which are the products of infinite Mind. Both the family and civil society do not give rise to the state as part of their own natural, material development; rather, it is the life of the state—the earthly embodiment of Mind—which has distinguished these finite spheres from itself. As a result of the division of the finite spheres from the infinite sphere, we are left with a civil society which is indebted for its existence to a mind which is not its own, and

⁸*Ibid.*, 61f.

⁹Similarly, in *The Grundrisse*, (Martin Nicolaus, trans.; New York: Vintage Books, 1973), Marx says, 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, 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. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being [101].

which is determined by this mind. Thus, the goal of civil society is not to exist in its own right, but to exist according to the imperatives of the Idea which is trying to become explicit as infinite, actual Mind. Civil society's purpose is simply to be transcended by infinite Mind so that Mind can enjoy its own infinity.

Marx is, however, quick to point out the contradictions which this line of thinking demonstrates. Hegel has already told us that finite reality, of which civil society is a part, is to be understood as a secondary phenomenon. Nevertheless, civil society is also shown by Hegel to be essential to the process by which Mind becomes infinite and absolute. In other words, Marx states, "the political state cannot exist without the natural basis of the family and the artificial basis of civil society. These are its *sine qua non*; and yet the condition is posited as the conditioned, the determinator as the determined, the producer as the product."¹⁰ In this persistent inversion of subject and predicate which characterizes Hegel's treatment of the relationship between state and civil society, Marx sees a particular example of the failure of Hegel's system as a whole. For Marx, this failure consists in the fact that the material reality "which serves as a starting point is not seen as such but as a mystical result", that "[t]he real becomes a mere phenomenon", and that the Idea "has no goal beyond the logical one to 'become explicit as infinite real mind'".¹¹ As much as Hegel wishes to demonstrate in *Philosophy of Right* that material reality is at all points contingent upon Absolute Mind, material reality is ultimately shown

¹⁰ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 63.

¹¹ *Loc. cit.*

to be the basis of Absolute Mind. Thus, one is compelled to conclude with Marx that in paragraph 262 lies “the whole mystery of the *Philosophy of Right* and of Hegel’s philosophy in general”.¹²

An Aside About Feuerbach and the Transformative Critique

The originality of Marx’s critique of Hegel consists in the fact that Marx begins with Hegel’s political philosophy as a means to criticising his whole metaphysical system. Marx, as Avineri suggests, is not much of a metaphysician; his concern is with real social and political issues. Nonetheless, in his initial examination of the institutions of Hegel’s state, found in the first section of the “Critique”, Marx is able to put the general problem of Hegel’s metaphysical system in a nutshell: “Hegel everywhere makes the Idea into the subject, while the genuine, real subject ... is turned into a predicate”.¹³ For Marx then, the key to liberating the empirical truths, the real subjects, of Hegel’s philosophy from dependence upon the Idea requires, in part, the inversion of subject and predicate. The precedent for this kind of transformative critique of Hegel was found in the work of Marx’s contemporary, Ludwig Feuerbach.

Feuerbach was active as a philosopher in the period immediately following Hegel’s death in 1831. Though he began his public intellectual life as a Hegelian, Feuerbach is most noted for his ‘materialist’ critique of Hegel’s idealism. In two of his

¹²*Ibid.*, 64.

¹³*Ibid.*, 65.

major works, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* and *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach attacks the view that Hegel's 'Universal' is the primary reality. Instead of grasping the world through thought and abstraction, as was the practice of the Hegelian school, Feuerbach proposed a philosophy based on material phenomenon and sense perception. This is not to say that Feuerbach is engaged in mere "sensualism".¹⁴ Like Hegel, Feuerbach believed that the world must be apprehended by the mind; however, unlike Hegel, Feuerbach argued that the only opening to the mind is through the senses. Thought itself is not problematic; rather, it is thought which claims to encompass all reality—as in Hegel's system—which is problematic. Thus, to Feuerbach, Hegel's belief in an absolute mind which had to become objectified, and enter into a finite phase constituting the material universe, was insupportable because it was empirically unverifiable. Hegel's thought tells us that the objective world, containing all our experiences and sensations, is not real in the way we understand it intuitively, but is a predicate of Absolute Mind—a whim in the daydream of *Geist*. This, thinks Feuerbach, is pure mystification.

Feuerbach accounts for the primacy of Absolute Mind in Hegel's thought in the following fashion. According to Feuerbach, all conceptions of the Absolute are to be accounted for by the alienation of human beings from their own true essence. To Feuerbach, the material world is not some self-alienated form of Absolute Mind, nor is

¹⁴Manfred H. Vogel in "Introduction" to Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (Manfred H. Vogel, trans.; Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), xi.

the human consciousness a finite form of Mind in the process of de-alienation. Instead of being the absolute basis of reality which human beings can only dimly grasp with their limited intellect, Absolute Mind is, in fact, self-alienated humanity. Absolute Mind is the abstracted, absolutized essence of Man which, in its estrangement from its subject, takes on the appearance of an external, infinite being. In this alienated form, the human essence confronts men as something absolute and inhuman—as God.

The kind of religious alienation characteristic of Hegel's writing is to be explained by a process in which men, fully knowledgeable of their own finitude, project their own infinite qualities onto Heaven, objectify these, and make their own objectified qualities the focus of religious reverence. It is a disuniting of human beings from themselves. But, as Feuerbach argues, the fact that the human consciousness of God is identical to human self-consciousness does not mean that one is aware of this identity. In fact, religion is premised upon the ignorance of this identity. The power of this objectification lies precisely in the fact that its origin in human finiteness, and the human need to overcome this, is not acknowledged. Through projection and objectification, human beings create their own ideal image, but this image is not recognized as human in origin. Because men fail to see the basis of divinity within themselves, they have a divine fantasy instead—a God created in Man's image.

In this way "Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds it in himself. His own nature is in the first instance contemplated by him as that of

another being".¹⁵ At all times, God as He appears to us is the truth of humankind revealed in the divine realm:

Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God; so much worth as a man has, so much and no more has his God. Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man, —religion the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love-secrets.¹⁶

For example, God is conceived to be loving because human beings love and consider this to be God-like. God is understood to be wise and benevolent because human beings themselves know nothing better than wisdom and benevolence. Thus, in religion, human beings do not really contemplate the glory of God, but their own latent nature. "The reason", writes Feuerbach, "that conceives of God as an unlimited being conceives of God only its own limitlessness".¹⁷ Indeed, the divine essence is nothing more than human essence which has been liberated from the limits of nature and material life.¹⁸ Correctly understood then, the end of religion should not be to become God-like. Instead, because "this differencing of God and man, with which religion begins, is a differencing

¹⁵Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (George Eliot, trans.; Buffalo: Prometheus Books. 1989). 13.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 12f.

¹⁷Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, §6.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, §22.

of man with his own nature”,¹⁹ the end of religion should be to reject God entirely and to bring to full realization the human essence which men have mistakenly understood as belonging to God. Religion, speaking its truth in a non-obscurantist fashion, will be the positive affirmation of humanity.²⁰

The understanding of religion offered by Feuerbach’s transformational critique has quite interesting implications for Hegel’s philosophy.²¹ Transformational criticism of Hegel’s system suggests that, far from being the fundamental truth of the universe, Hegel’s Absolute Mind is “a phenomenon of human self-estrangement”.²² In Feuerbach’s critique, Hegel’s conception of history, as the process by which Absolute Mind transcends its finite phases and returns to itself, is transformed into an alternate conception of history in which human beings achieve full self-realization by reclaiming their “species essence”²³ from their self-made idols. History is not the chronicle of Absolute Mind’s

¹⁹Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 33.

²⁰Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: I. The Founders* (P.S. Falla, trans.: Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1971]), 114.

²¹Marx believed that among Feuerbach’s greatest achievements was to demonstrate that Hegel’s metaphysical system was “nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed by thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of human alienation”. See “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, 197.

²²Robert Tucker in Introduction to *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Tucker, ed.: New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978 [1972]), xxiii.

²³“Species essence” refers to the essence of human beings not simply as individuals but as a member of the human species. According to Feuerbach, human beings, unlike animals, have the capacity to grasp in thought their abstract human essence in addition to their particular individual essences: “Man is at once I and thou; he can put himself in the place of another, for this reason, that to him is species, his essential nature, and not merely his individuality is an object of thought” [*Essence of Christianity*, 2]. Man’s capacity to be conscious of himself
(continued...)

coming to self-consciousness through Man, its finite phase. On the contrary, it is the process by which humankind unmask and abolishes the many religious and ideological forms which appear to men initially as external necessities but which are revealed to be manifestations of human mental activity. History, as such, is not the daydream of Absolute Mind but the protracted struggle of real human beings to abolish illusory gods.

Marx's contribution to the Feuerbachian critique was to realize that human alienation can be identified in spheres other than religion. Within weeks of completing the "Critique", Marx formulated with great clarity the critical power of Feuerbach's transformative method in its capacity to "unmask human self-alienation in its secular forms, once its sacred form has been unmasked"²⁴ What Feuerbach had done was to transform the usual Hegelian subject, thought, into the predicate and the Hegelian predicate, human beings, into the subject. This liberated people, finite beings, from Hegel's system which held up the mental creations of men as independent things having power over them. Marx understood that the state, like Absolute Mind, was a concept in Hegel's philosophy indicative of alienation. This realization was the basis for Marx's critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state on the grounds that it reversed subject and predicate. As already noted, paragraph 262 of *Philosophy of Right* provides a vivid

²³(...continued)

as a species and as an individual, his capacity to have internal discourse with himself, is his unique quality which makes alienation possible.

²⁴Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" in *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley, trans.; Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977 [1970]), 132.

example of this reversal. Instead of positing the family and civil society as the true material basis of the state, Marx argues, Hegel mystifies this relationship by insisting that the state is the *basis* of these finite spheres and that it creates civil society simply to transcend its finiteness. Thus, it might be argued with some justification that Marx, in this particular case, was a practitioner of Feuerbach's transformative method, and that this is the backbone of his critique of Hegel's political philosophy.

Such a position has been taken by a number of commentators on Marx and his critique of Hegel's political philosophy. For example, Hal Draper, in attempting to explain the nature of Marx's "Critique", writes that "one characteristic is basic. Throughout, following the lead already given in philosophy by Feuerbach, Marx is intent on *inverting* Hegel, turning him upside down, in a sense which he later described in his preface to *Capital*".²⁵ Furthermore, according to Draper,

[i]n the 1843 'Critique', this process is seen in terms of the relationship of 'subject' to 'predicate'—of What Is (the existing reality) to the *idea* of What Is. *Which engenders which?* Shouldn't the real point of departure be the actual state, the one that really exists, rather than a philosophical concept (idea) of a state which does not exist anywhere but in the philosophizing head?²⁶

Likewise, Shlomo Avineri tells us that "Marx suggests that such a transformative criticism of Hegel's political philosophy could easily reveal that for Hegel the individual, the real

²⁵Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, I: State and Bureaucracy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 78. The passage from Marx's *Capital*, to which Draper refers, is quoted on page 66 of this chapter.

²⁶*Loc. cit.*

subject, appeared as a mere predicate of an abstraction hypostatized into an independent, all-embracing subject” and that “Marx sees in the transformative method the cipher which would enable him to decode the truth in Hegel’s thought”.²⁷ For both Draper and Avineri, Marx’s critique of Hegel can be collapsed to a process of transformation—a reversal of subject and predicate.

Certainly Marx would be the last to deny the influence of Feuerbach’s critique of religion on his own critique of Hegel’s political philosophy.²⁸ Nevertheless, the reduction of Marx’s critique to a simple inversion of subject and predicate should not be taken uncritically. As already noted, in the 1872 Preface to *Capital*, Marx believed that Hegel presented reality “standing on its head” and that Hegel’s metaphysical system “must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell”.²⁹ However, this is not to say that Marx’s critique of Hegel entailed *only* a transposition of subject and predicate. Indeed, in the opening remarks to *Capital*, Marx’s primary complaint about Hegel is not that he *inverts* reality but that he presents reality in a *mystified* fashion. This is a critical point because it suggests that Marx’s aim in the critique of Hegel was not simply to apply Feuerbach’s transformational formula to

²⁷Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971 [1968]), 13.

²⁸Not one to shy away from a clever turn of phrase, Marx wrote in 1841 that “there is no other path to truth and freedom except that through the fiery stream [Feuer-Bach]”. Attributed to Marx by Lucio Colletti in Marx, *Early Writings* (Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, trans.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1992 [1975]), 434.

²⁹Marx, *Capital*, 29.

Hegel's philosophy and, in so doing, magically salvage its truth. Contrary to Draper's view, Marx was not intent on simply inverting Hegel's philosophy. Rather, his aim was to demystify it.

If one reads Marx's critique of Hegel's political theory as the mere application of a method appropriated from Feuerbach, one runs the risk of glossing over some of its most important elements. Such a reading will lead to the conclusion that Marx's approach was formulaic and that Marx was only interested in engaging Hegel on a metaphysical level. However, if Marx is read as trying to *demystify* Hegel's account of the state, the complexity of Marx's enterprise becomes evident. Marx's concern is not merely a metaphysical one that asks whether it is the state which engenders civil society or civil society which engenders the abstract state. Throughout the "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" Marx's concern is with the actual institutions of Hegel's state, the implications of their failure for the state in general, and the mystification that the state suffers at the hands of Hegel. The "Critique" is not simply a philosophical exercise in subject-object transposition but an attempt to tear away the mystification arising from what Marx believed to be Hegel's identification of the Prussian state with the activity of Absolute Mind, and his subsequent reification of the *status quo*. To free Marx from the assumption that his critique of Hegel was exclusively transformative is to see that Marx's critique is not merely an abstract, formulaic exercise—a materialist version of Hegelian metaphysics—but a practical, concrete analysis of real institutions and real social problems. Ultimately, the significance of Feuerbach's transformative critique to Marx's

thought must be appreciated by readers of Marx; yet, this should not be done at the expense of reducing Marx's critique of Hegel's political theory to a simple formula. To do justice to Marx's encounter with Hegel's political philosophy one must also consider, in addition to the transformative critique, Marx's practical critique, in which he took issue with actual institutions and not merely philosophical categories like "subject" and "predicate". This can be found in Marx's analysis of the state's mediating structures—the Executive and the Estates—where the contradictions of these structures are enumerated.

The Failure of Mediation and the Illusion of the State

Marx is critical of the mediating structures of the state posited by Hegel, the purpose of which is to achieve a synthesis of individual interests and the universal interests of the ethical community. While Hegel maintains that these structures have the capacity to attenuate the particularistic desires of individuals in civil society, and provide a sphere in which the particular is transformed into the universal, Marx argues that the supposed unity of particularity and universality which is achieved within these structures is merely apparent and formal. The mediating structures of Hegel's state are in fact a veiled antagonism, and serve only to propagate particular interests in the ostensibly universal realm of the state rather than engendering universal thinking in civil society. The disjunction between the particular and the universal, though theoretically abolished, re-emerges when Hegel's political institutions are subjected to analysis. Marx elaborates on this in his examination of the Executive and the two Estates.

According to Marx, the tendency of individual self-interest to appear clad in the respectable clothing of universality permeated Hegel's theory. At all points, the alleged universality of the state is merely cloaked individualism. To Marx, the general problem of particularity masquerading as universality could be found in paragraph 289 of *Philosophy of Right*. In this passage, Hegel explains that the "corporation mind", the mind of the individual as it exists in civil society, undergoes a process of transformation by which it converts itself into the mind of the state. The reason for this, according to Hegel, is that the individual, acquisitive, self-interested mind finds in the state the means of securing its particular ends through positive law, rights, and the enforcement of contracts. For Hegel, the fact that individuals see their interests to be bound up in the universal interests of the state "is the secret of the patriotism of the citizens in the sense that they know the state as their substance, because it is the state that maintains their particular spheres of interest together with the title, authority, and welfare of these". Because individuals see their own well-being to be rooted directly in the universal, it is in the sphere of civil society "that the depth and strength which the state possesses in sentiment is seated".³⁰

Marx finds this statement to be quite indicative of the true nature of the state in general. Ultimately, it is nothing more than the egoistic desires of men which form the basis of the patriotic sentiment and devotion to the universal aims of the state. However, the ostensibly universal state is understood by Hegel to be autonomous and free

³⁰Hegel, *op. cit.*, §289.

from such particularistic influences. Hence the contradiction. While Hegel tries to preserve the autonomy of the state, he is forced simultaneously to admit that the integrity and legitimacy of the state is contingent upon its ability to preserve individual interests which Hegel must then uphold as the perfect expression of universality. Or, in Marx's words, "[a]s the universal is made autonomous, it is directly confounded with empirical existence and this limited existence is at once uncritically judged to be the expression of the Idea".³¹ Having identified the general problem of the state as veiled self-interest, Marx attempts to uncover the specific instances of this in the State's mediating bodies.

For Hegel, the function of the Executive is to administer such functions as the judiciary and the police.³² Such executive functions cannot be carried out reliably by casual servants who may fail to fulfil their duty to the state out of concern for their own interests. What is required to secure reliable civil service is that

men shall forgo the selfish and capricious satisfaction of their subjective ends; by this very sacrifice, they acquire the right to find their satisfaction in, but only in, the dutiful discharge of their public functions. In this fact, so far as public business is concerned, there lies the link between universal and particular interest which constitutes both the concept of the state and its inner stability.³³

In short then, what is required is a class of civil servants who are paid by the state to perform their duties and to keep the state apparatus functioning in good order. The civil

³¹Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 102.

³²Hegel's complete account of the Executive in *Philosophy of Right* is found from §287 to §297.

³³*Ibid.*, Remark to §294.

servant is to be “assured satisfaction of particular needs” and also freed from “external compulsion which may tempt a man to seek ways and means of satisfying them at the expense of his official duties”.³⁴ As it is conceived by Hegel, the bureaucratic class is a universal class. Freed from need, the bureaucratic class is said to be able to transcend the particularism of civil society and serve the state in a selfless fashion.

Marx, however, is not satisfied by this description of the bureaucratic class. The reason for this is the fact that the universality of the bureaucrat is a *formal*, rather than a *real*, characteristic. Instead of embodying the selflessness which is adequate to the concept of the universal state, the bureaucracy becomes a special enclave within the state apparatus “which has really made itself into civil society”,³⁵ *i.e.*, it uses its powers merely to satisfy the interests of those individuals who occupy its offices. The bureaucracy, argues Marx, “is the ‘*state formalism*’ of civil society”,³⁶ it is all of the particularistic desires of civil society concealed under the mantle of the universal. Furthermore, this ‘state as formalism’ is said by Marx to be the essence and, in fact, the *purpose* of the bureaucracy. The bureaucrat, who understands his ersatz universality to be the true and

³⁴*Loc. cit.*

³⁵Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, 107.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

real achievement of universality, sees the real purpose of the state—to engender genuine universality—as a purpose *opposed* to the state. In Marx’s words,

[t]he mind of the bureaucracy is the ‘formal mind of the state’. It therefore makes the ‘formal mind of the state’ or the *real* mindlessness of the state into a categorical imperative. The bureaucracy appears to itself as the ultimate purpose of the state. As the bureaucracy converts its ‘formal’ purposes into its content, it comes into conflict with ‘real’ purposes at every point. It is therefore compelled to pass off form as content and content as form. The purposes of the state are transformed into the purposes of offices and vice-versa.³⁷

As the offices of the ‘universal’ state are twisted to the private purposes of the bureaucracy, the state is held “in thrall, as [the bureaucrats’] *private property*”.³⁸

As far as the individual bureaucrat is concerned, “the purpose of the state becomes his private purpose, *a hunt for promotion, careerism*”.³⁹ For Marx, it is not the case that the identity which is posited, between the interest of the state and the particular interest, results in the bureaucrats taking on the universal interest of the state as their own. Rather, it is the private interests of bureaucrats, which stand in opposition to other private interests, that are injected directly into the state. Ultimately, in reifying the universal interest in the form of the bureaucratic class, Hegel introduces particular interest into the heart of the state and yet is forced to treat this particularity as the earthly expression of

³⁷*Ibid.*, 107.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 108.

³⁹*Loc. cit.*

Absolute Mind—a development undoubtedly ironic to Marx. The formal universality of the bureaucratic class is a poor surrogate for actual universality because it solves the antagonism between particularity and universality in thought only. What is needed, Marx believes, is not a formal subsumption of particular interests into the universal state, but a real absorption of the universal interest into the particular individual:

The bureaucracy can be superseded only if the universal interest becomes a particular interest *in reality* and not merely in thought, in *abstraction* as it does in Hegel. And this can take place only if the *particular* interest really becomes the *universal* interest. Hegel proceeds from an unreal antithesis and hence can resolve it only into an imagined identity which is in reality antagonistic. The bureaucracy is such an identity.⁴⁰

In addition to the bureaucrats' tendency to make state offices a springboard for lucrative careers, Marx points out another problem with their claims to universality. Not only are bureaucratic offices the expression of particular interests, but the appointment of bureaucrats to these offices is a particular act. In part, bureaucrats are appointed to their posts according to objective criteria, *i.e.*, tests which measure "knowledge and proof of ability" such that "the state will get what it requires".⁴¹ Yet, the actual appointment is subjective. Since the qualification for employment in the civil service is not genius,

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 109.

⁴¹Hegel, *op. cit.*, §291.

there are necessarily many candidates of good intelligence and ability whose relative merit cannot be determined objectively. Thus,

[t]he selection of one of the candidates, his nomination to office, and the grant to him of full authority to transact public business—all this, as the linking of two things, a man and his office, which in relation to each other must always be fortuitous, is the *subjective* aspect of election to office, and it must lie with the crown as the power in the state which is sovereign and has the last word.⁴²

While Hegel would like to argue that the monarch is the embodiment of the universal will in a single man, Marx realizes, correctly, that the particular will of the monarch is simply that: particular. Consequently, by making the appointment of civil servants dependent upon the decision of the sovereign, Hegel effectively rules out the possibility that these bureaucrats might ever function for universal ends. The allegedly universal bureaucratic class at best expresses the particular will of the monarch, and, at worst, the particular wills of all its constituents. The bureaucratic sphere is permeated throughout with self-interest.

Having deflated the universal pretensions of the bureaucratic class, Marx turns his attention to the Legislature⁴³ and its two constituent Estates: the first composed of representatives from the business class and the second composed of representatives from the landed class. Like the bureaucrats, the Estates, the bodies which represent civil society in legislative activity, are posited by Hegel as mediating strata between the self-

⁴²*Ibid.*, §292.

⁴³Hegel's discussion of the Legislature is found from §298 to §320.

interest of civil society and the universal ends of the state proper. However, Marx maintains that, like the bureaucrats, the Estates are only formally universal. To Marx, the Estates, in conjunction with the bureaucracy, ensure that

[t]he *matters of universal concern* are now complete without having become the real concern of the people. The real affairs of the people have sprung into being without the interference of the people. The Estates are the illusory existence of state affairs conceived as the affairs of the people. They are the illusion that *matters of universal concern* are really matters of universal, public concern or the *illusion* that the affairs of the people are matters of universal concern.⁴⁴

In Marx's critique, this general claim is developed by revealing the self-interest of the Estates which Hegel himself has imported into his account of them, and by a more typically 'Marxist' analysis of the relationship between private property and the supposedly universal landed gentry.

One of Hegel's statements of the capacity of the Estates to engender universal consciousness in civil society can be found in paragraph 301 of *Philosophy of Right*. Here, he refers to the function of the Estates as "bringing into existence the moment of subjective formal freedom", *i.e.* "the public consciousness as an empirical universal, of which the thoughts and opinions of the Many are particulars".⁴⁵ However, Marx calls attention to some statements made further on in the Remark to this paragraph. First, in arguing that the Estates are a guarantee of the general welfare and public freedom, Hegel

⁴⁴ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 125.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *op. cit.*, §301.

wants to make it clear that this capacity does not lie in their power of insight into the nature of the state's organization or knowledge of the 'ins-and-outs' of the state. This kind of insight, thinks Hegel, rests with the bureaucrats who are "more habituated to the business of government and have greater skill in it, so that even without the Estates they are *able* to do what is best, just as they also continually *have* to do while the Estates are in session". Second, in an attempt to deflect the accusation by the cynical "rabble" that the will of the Executive is bad, or less good, than the will of the ruled, Hegel tries to show that the Estates (unlike the bureaucracy) represent the real interests of the ruled. The presupposition held by citizens that all of the state's executives are only concerned with murkily defined state interests

might at once be answered on its own ground by the counter-charge that the Estates start from isolated individuals, from a private point of view, from particular interests, and so are inclined to devote their activities to these at the expense of the general interests, while *per contra* the other moments in the power of the state explicitly take up the standpoint of the state from the start and devote them to the universal end.⁴⁶

In Marx's opinion, Hegel's comments about the knowledge and the good will of the Estates accomplishes nothing but to suggest that the Estates are, in fact, superfluous, and, indeed, suspect. In comparing them with the bureaucracy, Hegel had attempted to demonstrate that the Estates had knowledge invaluable to the administration of the state arising from their direct involvement in material life and their desire to avoid

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Remark to §301.

the wrath of public criticism should they fail at their duties. However, as noted above, the bureaucracy would be able to administer the affairs of the state even in the absence of the Estates; in Hegel's words, "even without the Estates [the bureaucracy] is able to do what is best". Thus, to Marx, the Estates—which are redundant by Hegel's own admission—are a "pure luxury"; "Their existence is a mere *form* in the most literal sense of the word."⁴⁷ Furthermore, the good will of the Estates is called into question. In showing the true root of the Estates' interests to be the particular sphere, Hegel had attempted to show that the members of the Assembly of Estates were not trapped in some nether-world of lofty-sounding state interests and were indeed concerned with the material interests of "the Many". However, for Marx, this rootedness in the private standpoint is precisely what makes the Estates incapable of articulating the universal aims for which the Estates were created. The truth about the Estates, thinks Marx, "is that private interests are their universal concern, and not that universal concerns are their private interest".⁴⁸ Because they have their basis in civil society, the Estates are nothing more than the interests of civil society smuggled into the state sphere in a Trojan Horse of universality; they are "the *reflection of civil society upon the state*".⁴⁹

Because the Estates were rooted in the material interests of civil society, it is understandable that Marx had reservations about their capacity to act universally. This

⁴⁷ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 127.

⁴⁸ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

is especially true in the case of the Estates' representatives from the business class who, as businessmen, are not typically disposed to thinking beyond the pragmatism of commerce. However, Marx offers an additional criticism of the Estates pertaining specifically to the part played in the Assembly by the landed class. Unlike the representatives to the Estates from the business class who can only enter political life by being elected to their position, the representatives drawn from the landed class are entitled to sit in the Assembly of the Estates simply because they own property. According to Marx, this property qualification, and, in particular, the manner in which property is *acquired*, demonstrates the state's subordination to property in Hegel's political theory and its inability to pursue ends other than those which serve private property.

Hegel argues that, of the classes which constitute the Estates, the landed class is the one most naturally suited for political life because "its capital is independent alike of the state's capital, the uncertainty of business, the quest for profit, and any sort of fluctuation in possessions". For this reason, the landed class, unlike the business class, is essentially immune from all pressures and influences of material life, "whether from the executive or the mob".⁵⁰ In the absence of personal need, this class is said to be publicly spirited and would not be inclined to engage in politics for personal ends. Furthermore, since entailed property is passed intact to the first-born of each generation—by the principle of primogeniture—the qualification for politics is completely outside the control of any individual; thus, amongst the land owning families, individuals

⁵⁰Hegel, *op. cit.*, §306.

do not choose independently to engage in politics, rather, *political obligation chooses them*. In short, land owners are ideal candidates for state service because they suffer none of the exigencies of material life, and are chosen for this service by something other than their own subjective will.

As Marx points out though, this apparently perfect basis for political life—landed property—has a totally unexpected characteristic which ultimately calls into question the capacity of property owners to think universally. This is a result of the fact that entailed property cannot be alienated, *i.e.*, sold, at will. Hegel understands the principle of primogeniture to be a desirable thing which grants a modicum of stability to landowners and, as such, serves the best interests of the state. It is posited as something determined by the state to contribute to its own stability, “not as a end but as a *means* to justify and construct an end”. But, Marx argues, primogeniture is not the state’s doing. In reality,

primogeniture is a consequence of private property in the *strict* sense, private property petrified, private property (*quand même*) at the point of its greatest autonomy and sharpest definition. What Hegel asserts to be the end, the determining factor, the *prime cause* of primogeniture is in fact an effect of it, a consequence. Whereas according to Hegel primogeniture represents the *power of the political state over private property*, it is in fact the *power of abstract private property over the political state*. He makes the cause into the effect and effect into the cause, the determining factor into the determined and vice-versa.⁵¹

⁵¹Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, 167.

All that is left to the state is the illusion that, through positive law, it determines the movement of private property when in fact it is determined by that movement.⁵²

The problem with property given and received by primogeniture is that it is inalienable. It is fortified against the will of its owner. Thus, private property becomes the subject of the owner's will; the owner's will is present only as a predicate of the private property. Property does not exist as something in which the owner can invest his will, but as something by which personal will can only exist as an epiphenomenon. Personal will cannot actively possess inalienable property, but is possessed by that property. Nevertheless, it is not simply the fortification against the wilfulness of the property owner imposed by property that makes this property problematic. Since the right, and, indeed, the obligation, to engage in politics is contingent upon property ownership, and property ownership is dependent upon an

⁵²Interestingly, in addition to his claim about the capacity of property, 'private willfulness in its most abstract form', to dictate the content of the state, Marx makes an apparently parallel claim about currency. In Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's *Philosophie de la Misère*, it is argued that money is born of sovereign consecration in which the sovereign takes hold of pieces of precious metal and affixes his seal to them. To this, Marx responds:

one must be destitute of all historical knowledge not to know that it is the sovereigns who in all ages have been subject to economic conditions, but they have never dictated laws to them. Legislation, whether political or civil, never does more than proclaim, express in words, the will of economic relations.

Thus, of Proudhon's claim, Marx asks:

Was it the sovereign who took possession of gold and silver to make them the universal agents of exchange by annexing his seal to them? Or was it not, rather, these universal agents of exchange which took possession of the sovereign and forces him to affix his seal to them and thus give them a political consecration? [*The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), 83f.]

Like his argument about private property in the "Critique", Marx's comment about currency reveals the contingency of the state upon material, economic phenomena.

institution—primogeniture—which is independent of the will of the owner, private property owns both *the will of the owner* and *the office that this owner occupies in the state*. For Marx, the fact that primogeniture appears in such a positive light in Hegel's theory is indicative of Hegel's conservatism, and his desire to preserve the privileges of the landed class while making these appear to be in the interest of the state as a whole. What makes primogeniture positively glow is that "private property, *i.e.* private willfulness in its most abstract form, *utterly philistine*, unethical and barbaric willfulness, is made to appear as the highest synthesis of the political state".⁵³ In reality though, instead of being the state's greatest achievement, primogeniture determines the state. Through primogeniture, private property actually inherits the first born son and makes his will *the property of the property*. Since the political qualifications arising from property ownership are actually the political qualifications of the property, "political qualifications appear here as the *property of landed property*, as something directly arising from the *purely physical earth*".⁵⁴ In this way, Hegel's system "can be seen to degenerate into the crassest materialism"⁵⁵ by which "[t]he political constitution at its highest point is ... the *constitution of private property*" and "[t]he loftiest *political principles* are the *principles of private property*".⁵⁶

⁵³Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 169.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 166.

Marx appears to make two related yet distinct claims here. On the one hand, he argues that private property based on primogeniture inverts the relationship between private property and the state posited by Hegel. Contrary to Hegel's claim, the state is not prior to this kind of private property, this "private willfulness in its most abstract form". Rather, Marx argues, "[i]n the constitution guaranteed by *primogeniture*, *private property* is the guarantee of the political constitution. In primogeniture this guarantee appears to be provided by a *particular* form of private property." However, on the other hand, Marx makes a much stronger claim about the relationship between private property and the state. In addition to the initial claim that, contrary to Hegel's opinion, the constitution of the state is determined by the principle of primogeniture, Marx further posits a general relationship between the state and property *tout court*—regardless of how this property is acquired. "Primogeniture", he writes in the same passage, "is merely the particular form of the general relationship obtaining between *private property* and the *political state*". Thus, it is not simply the case, according to Marx, that the state is dominated by *entailed* private property, but by private property in general. The domination of the state by property is a feature of modern life.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Marx made his clearest statement to this effect when he reduced the executive of the modern state to a committee for the administration of private property [See *The Communist Manifesto* (A.J.P. Taylor, intro.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967 [1888]), 82.] But, because Marx sees the state as being owned by private property does not mean he sees the state as an instrument to preserve private property in the same way that, for example, John Locke does; to do so would be to view the state in an autonomous, Hegelian fashion. Marx's concern is not with the state as a protector of property but as an epiphenomenon of property.

At all parts of Hegel's description of the mediating structures of the state, the state is shown to be subordinate to those same particular influences that it was supposed to transcend and bring to universality. In the Executive, the universal potential of the bureaucratic class is debased by the fact that executive offices are used as a springboard for careerism and personal gain. Moreover, in the Estates, the explicit rootedness of the business class and the landed class in material life calls into question their capacity to be universal. In particular, the landed estate does not facilitate the universal sentiment in civil society but is complicit in the domination of the political constitution by private property. The Estates merely introduce the self-interests of entrepreneurs and land-owners into the workings of the state which, in turn, endows these interests with the appearance of universality. By this function "[t]he *Estates* are the lie, *legally sanctioned* in constitutional states, that the *state* is the *interest of the people* or that the *people* is the *interest of the state*".⁵⁸

More importantly though, the Estates contribute to a distorted impression of the structure of society as a whole. Because the Estates exist as the embodiment of the apparent mediation between the universal state and particularistic civil society, they make it appear as if there really is a clear distinction between state and civil society in the modern state. What Marx argues, though, is that there really is no state *qua* ethical community, and that the Estates are merely the formal representation of the universal state in a society which is nothing more than a multiplicity of particular interests. The Estates,

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 129.

says Marx, “are supposed to ‘mediate’ between the sovereign and the executive on the one hand, and the people on the other; but they do not do this”. Indeed, such a mediation is impossible because it is premised upon an actual division between the universal state on the one hand, and the self-interested civil society on the other. Such a division does not exist. The state as conceived by Hegel is a fiction. Instead of being an actual opposition of state and civil society, society (as a whole) is an undifferentiated totality. Understood as nothing more than a plenum of self-interest, modern society shows Hegel’s Estates for what they really are: as the “organized political antagonism of civil society” which “itself stands in need of *mediation*”.⁵⁹

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 160.

III. TRANSCENDING THE STATE

Certainly, Marx's assessment in "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" is not above question. At times it is needlessly polemical, and it often substitutes aphorism for closely reasoned argument. For example, his critique of paragraph 262 of *Philosophy of Right*, mentioned earlier, does cut to the heart of Hegel's mysticism. However, his reading of the historical development of Hegel's state, in which the state is simply identified with the 'Idea' and is said to divide itself into its finite phases simply to transcend these phases and thus become what it already was, is tersely worded and perhaps fails to grasp the complexity of Hegel's argument. Marx unfortunately has greater success at building a straw-man at this point than at being a serious interlocutor. Also disconcerting is the lack of clarity in Marx's statement of the most devastating part of his critique of Hegel—the argument that private property in fact *owns* the state. While Marx makes a convincing case for the control that *entailed* property exerts over politics, his claim that the relationship between entailed property and the state is merely a specific example of a *general* relationship between *all* private property and the state is poorly developed. While this claim accords with Marx's later claims about the relationship between property and the state it is not altogether clear how this was arrived at in the "Critique". Furthermore, despite his attempts to cut through Hegel's mysticism, Marx's argument about the relationship between the state and private property is, in itself, mysterious. While faulting Hegel for attributing autonomy to the abstract state, Marx is

perfectly happy to attribute will to inert private property. In spite of Marx's intentions, he often matches Hegel, obscurity for obscurity.

Deficiencies aside however, Marx's critique does demonstrate clearly the failure of Hegel's political philosophy to achieve a synthesis of egoistic self-interest and universal ends. Most importantly though, it suggests how such a synthesis might actually take place. In making such a suggestion, Marx was not merely responding to the failure of Hegel but to a question which would have had as much currency in the Athenian Agora as it did in nineteenth century Germany: How is the individual to be reconciled with his world?⁶⁰ For Hegel, this happens when Absolute Mind, having gone through its process of self-alienation, comes to understand the world of extension as itself, assimilates the material universe as its own truth, and makes actual that which was previously only potential. Marx shifts the focus away from an absolute mind which develops through empirical individuals and towards these individuals themselves. In a way, Marx's enterprise is identical to Hegel's in the sense that both see the crowning achievement of history to be the reconciliation of human beings with the universe. Yet Marx differs from Hegel in that he views this reconciliation as coming from the human recognition of religious alienation and not the self-knowledge of Absolute Mind. This transcendence of the alienation between men and their own works, which nonetheless confront men as external necessity, is what Marx eventually called *communism*. For Marx, communism was not merely a variation on the existing institutional state but "a total transformation

⁶⁰Kolakowski, *op.cit.*, 177.

of human existence, the recovery of man of his species-essence”.⁶¹ Contrary to the traditional liberal view,

social harmony is to be sought not by a legislative reform that will reconcile the egoism of each individual with the collective interest, but by removing the causes of antagonism. The individual will absorb society into himself: thanks to de-alienation, he will recognize humanity as his own internalized nature.⁶²

Or, as Marx himself said it,

[h]uman emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers (*forces propres*) as *social* powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power.⁶³

This is a remarkable statement because it captures both Marx’s dedication to the Hegelian enterprise and his departure from it. On the one hand, Marx saw communism as “the real future situation that Hegel had dimly adumbrated at the close of his *Phenomenology*, where spirit, having attained absolute knowledge, is beyond all alienation and fully ‘at home with itself in its otherness’”.⁶⁴ Communism was thus “Absolute Knowing” stripped

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 178f.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 179.

⁶³Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in *Early Writings* (Bottomore, trans; New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964 [1963]), 31.

⁶⁴Tucker, *op. cit.*, xxv.

of its mystical cloak. On the other hand though, Marx denied the capacity of Hegel's instrument of universality—the state—to facilitate this transcendence, or that this transcendence could be based on a division between private and political life. He attacked the dualism of state and civil society at the heart of Hegel's political theory. The prerequisites to true freedom were that the state be stripped of the appearance that it had a world-historical purpose aside from serving the desires of empirical individuals, and that human beings reabsorb into themselves the alienated functions of the state.⁶⁵ Freedom's point of departure is the integration of private and community life within each and every human being, and the resolution of humankind's species-essence into the lives of individuals such that the distinction between public and private is abolished.

In "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", Marx gives a short but provocative account of a political organization which overcomes alienation and the illusion of the state. The form that Marx suggests is *democracy*.

Democracy is the solution to the *riddle* of every constitution. In it we find the constitution founded on its true ground: *real human beings* and the *real people*; not merely *implicitly* and in essence, but in *existence* and in reality. The constitution is thus posited as the people's *own* creation. The constitution is in appearance what it is in reality: the free creation of man.⁶⁶

⁶⁵The idea that Marx's theory calls for human beings to reabsorb, rather than abolish, the state is given serious consideration in John F. Sitton's, *Marx's Theory of the Transcendence of the State: A Reconstruction* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1989). This study provides a good counterpoint for books such as Henry B. Mayo's *Introduction to Marxist Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) which takes the comparatively simplistic view that the future communist society "is to bring a condition of complete anarchy, without any government at all" [172].

⁶⁶Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", 87.

The use of the word ‘democracy’ requires some comment here. Though Marx advocates democracy, this does not suggest that he is simply a bourgeois democrat who believes in parliamentary government, popular elections, and the like. Such a conclusion would be nonsensical considering that Marx’s “Critique” is almost entirely a critique of the division of state and civil society, and of the relationship between the representative state and private property. Lucio Colletti is quite correct to write that, considering the content of the “Critique”, “it is scarcely possible to avoid perceiving that Marx goes well beyond the intellectual bounds of liberal constitutionalism”.⁶⁷ In fact, by ‘democracy’, Marx means something quite different from the contemporary understanding of the word. For Marx, democracy does not imply a representative government characterized by a division between the public and private realm; rather, it signifies “the organic community typified by the city-states of Antiquity (communities not yet split into ‘civil society’ versus ‘political society’)”.⁶⁸

In the “Critique” Marx writes that “[i]n democracy the *formal* principle is identical with the *substantive* principle”. Democratic organization is thus distinguished from the organization of Hegel’s state in which there was always a disjunction between substance, *i.e.*, the true interests of real human beings in civil society, and form—those interests as they were articulated at the political level in the state. Owing to the union

⁶⁷ Lucio Colletti in Introduction to *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, trans.: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1992 [1975]), 40f.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

of form and substance, democracy “is the first true unity of the particular and the universal”. In Hegel’s state, the political constitution “assumes the significance of the *universal*, determining and dominating all particulars”. By contrast, in democracy, “the state as particular is *only* particular, and as the universal it is really universal; *i.e.* it is not something determinate set off against other contents”. This realization leads Marx to perhaps the most original and fertile conclusion of the “Critique”: “the *political state disappears* in a true democracy”.⁶⁹ Even in an ostensibly democratic representative state like Hegel’s, “the *constitution* is dominant, but without really dominating, *i.e.* without materially penetrating the content of all the non-political spheres”.⁷⁰ It simply *cannot* because, even though representatives are chosen by the enfranchised public, the act of putting them into office cuts them off from the public that they were elected to serve. The form of the constitution is no longer identical with the substance of the constitution. Thus, the reconciliation of the universal and particular self-interest, which, in Hegel, is premised upon the division of the private sphere and the political state, actually requires an elimination of the state. Or more exactly, it requires a *reabsorption* of the political state into the individual.

What becomes evident in a reading of Hegel’s theory of the state as presented in *Philosophy of Right*, and Marx’s response to this theory in “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, is that Hegel and Marx had quite similar views of the foremost

⁶⁹Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, 88.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 88f.

aim of politics. Like Hegel, Marx thought that political activity should be oriented towards ending the alienation between the universal on the one hand and the particular on the other. However, the two writers had opposing views of what the nature of the alienation was. For Hegel, alienation consisted in Absolute Mind being separated from finite mind. In the realm of human affairs, this alienation took the form of a separation of finite civil society from the universal state. Consequently, for Hegel, the cycle of alienation ended with the subsumption of finite, egoistic, self-interested consciousness into the universal state—facilitated by the mediating structures of the Executive and the Estates. In contrast, Marx understood this alienation as the projection, and subsequent objectification, of the human species-essence upon “the heaven of their political world”⁷¹ which produced the illusion of an autonomous and universal state. Consequently, Marx understood alienation to end with the reabsorption of the abstract universal state—the species-essence of humankind—into each individual. To Marx, not only was Hegel’s account of alienation inverted, but Hegel’s exposition of the state’s mediating structures proved again and again that their bases were in the particularistic desires of civil society, not the universal ends of the state. The apparent synthesis of universality and egoistic individualism that Hegel achieves in the Executive and the Estates is in fact a veiled antagonism such that these mediating structures can never engender the universal in individuals; instead, individual particularity is made a universal principle. Ultimately, the state cannot be used as an instrument to overcome the separation of the particular and the

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 146.

universal interests inherent in political society because it is itself merely a reflection of particular interests.⁷² The reconciliation of the particular and the universal, the finite and the infinite, coincides with the disappearance of the state.

V.I. Lenin therefore presents us with a vexing problem in his pamphlet *State and Revolution*. Like Marx, Lenin views the state as an alienated mirror of the human consciousness, and as a mindless subordinate to class and property interests. His reservations about the state lead him to the similar conclusion that human beings can lead authentic lives only in a society in which the state has been transcended. But Marx sees such transcendence as coming from the recovery of the human 'species-essence' from its alienated existence in the state. As indicated in his later analysis of capitalist production, Marx came to understand this reabsorption as coinciding with the spontaneous collapse

⁷² A notable exception to the general conclusion that the state is a mirror of the particularistic civil society can be found later in Marx's "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" [*Surveys From Exile. Political Writings: Volume II* (David Fernbach, ed.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1992 [1973])]. Using the example of Bonaparte's Second Empire, Marx argues that, in some cases, when "all classes, equally impotent and mute fall on their knees before the rifle butt", the authoritarian state is able to achieve relative autonomy from civil society. In the Second Empire, the bourgeois failure to "simplify the state administration, reduce the army of official as much as possible, and finally let civil society and public opinion create their own organs independent of the power of the government" was responsible for the bourgeoisie's loss of political influence within Bonaparte's regime. Thus, the regime became the "last triumph of a State separate and independent from society" [*The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 167.] However, Marx was also quick to show that this autonomy does not contradict the notion that the state exists to serve a dominant class. Political power, after all, is not "suspended in mid-air". The French bourgeoisie's material interests were "most intimately imbricated precisely with the maintenance of the extensive and highly ramified state machine. It is that machine which provides its surplus population with jobs, and makes up through state salaries what it cannot pocket in the form of profits, interest, rents and fees" ["Eighteenth Brumaire", 186]. Consequently, even while sacrificing its political interests, the French bourgeoisie "cried out all the more loudly for a 'strong government'" [*Ibid.*, 213] and, thus, preserved its private interests. The way in which the apparently autonomous Second Empire of Louis Bonaparte served bourgeois interests was by guaranteeing the safety of bourgeois initiatives and the stability of society, making possible the rapid development of capitalism. The bourgeoisie, "freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself" [*Civil War in France*, 66].

of capitalism arising in part from over-production and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.⁷³ However, Marx never addressed the character of a communist society in great detail. The closest that Marx ever came to describing the institutions and form of a communist society was to identify the style of communist administration with that of the Paris Commune of 1871. Like the form of democracy which he outlined in the “Critique”, the Commune was vaguely characterized by Marx as

the reabsorption of the State power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression—the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force ... of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies.⁷⁴

Not surprisingly, problems arose when Lenin tried to draw practical conclusions from Marx’s theory and translate it into the language of a political program. Ultimately, Lenin came to the conclusion that for socialists to stress the gradual development, and spontaneous collapse, of capitalism was to wait for history to make a revolution which may or may not come.

The result was a conclusion which in the context of Marx’s thought is quite provocative. Unlike Marx, Lenin came to understand the state as having a major role in the process of its own abolition. While Marx would argue that the state is helpless to do

⁷³See especially *Capital, Volume III* (Frederick Engels, ed.; Moscow: Progress Press, 1986 [1959]), 211-266.

⁷⁴Karl Marx, *Civil War in France*, 168.

anything but mirror particularity and class interest, the state has, for Lenin, the capacity to be the light of reason in the world and, in the proper hands, can be set on a course to withering away. Lenin's solution to the problem of reconciling the interest of the individual with the collective interest of the ethical community was to adopt a state-centred approach to political rule designed to shape the consciousness of civil society. Before abolishing itself, the state needed to consolidate its power over civil society in order to make civil society capable of thinking universally. Thus, in Lenin's Marxism there is an intrusion of Hegelian thinking. Though the state is to be mistrusted because it is simply an instrument of self-interest in civil society, the state, in the proper hands, has the capacity to bring civil society to universality and, in so doing, render itself obsolete.

III

THE HEGELIAN PARADOX OF LENIN'S *STATE AND REVOLUTION*

Those who are in the least acquainted with the actual state of our movement cannot but see that the spread of Marxism was accompanied by a certain lowering of theoretical standards.¹

I. HEGEL AND MARX ON THE STATE: A RECAPITULATION

As noted in the previous chapter, Marx's critique of the Hegelian theory of the state perhaps obscures the extent to which Marx's enterprise was virtually identical to Hegel's. Like Hegel, Marx sought to reveal contemporary human existence as inauthentic because of the alienation which all human beings experience in day-to-day life.

¹V.I. Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" in *Selected Works: Volume II, The Struggle for the Bolshevik Party (1900-1904)* (J. Fineberg, ed.; London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1936), 47.

According to both Hegel and Marx, this alienation is most clearly seen in the estrangement of individual, egoistic, finite human interests from infinite, universal ends. Furthermore, both see history as an ongoing process in which the particular and universal spheres are brought to synthesis. Though Hegel and Marx understand the nature of this alienation in quite different ways, they agree in principle on the barrier which stands between human beings and authentic being and on the need for reconciliation. For Hegel, this is a reconciliation of Absolute Mind with its finite phase; for Marx, this is a reconciliation of real, concrete men with their abstract 'species-essence'.

Where Hegel and Marx disagree significantly is with respect to the means by which alienation can be eliminated. For Hegel, the relevant institution is the state. It is by the intervention of the state apparatus that universal thinking is engendered in the individual and that the particular man—as he exists in civil society—is brought into the ethical community. For Marx, on the other hand, the ostensibly universal state is shown to be contingent upon the particular interests of material life and, ultimately, exists for the protection of private property. The contemporary state's claims to universality are a sham because, upon examination, the state is shown to protect sectional class interests. Furthermore, no exercise of those individual political rights endowed by the state challenges the fundamental separation of the individual from state power and the power of property over the individual. Thus, the state is *incapable* of engendering universal thinking. The only way, according to Marx, to reconcile the particular with the universal is *not* for the state to subsume the particular under its universality, but for the individual

to absorb this universality into himself. In other words, the will of the individual ought not to become integrated into the state, but the functions of the state ought to be integrated into each individual. Reconciliation occurs when, like the monads of Leibniz's *Monadology*, each man, each instance of finite mind, "has relations which express all the others" and "is a perpetual living mirror of the universe".²

It is only when the distinctions between Hegel's and Marx's ideas about the role of the state are made clear that the contradictions in Lenin's own theory—as it is articulated in *State and Revolution*—are cast into strong relief. Lenin's few philosophical works, among them *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks*, provide little convincing evidence that Lenin drew on Hegelian sources for his theory of the state. Thus, Lenin's political thought cannot be pigeon-holed as Hegelian. Nevertheless, it can be posited that his nominally Marxist theory of the state shows some marked Hegelian tendencies. Understanding that Lenin's view of the state shared Marx's misgivings about the state's capacity to be anything but a reflection of civil society, the conflated name 'Marxism-Leninism' can be uttered with no contradiction. However, when considering the *role* that Lenin believes the state ought to take in the revolutionary transformation of society, the designation 'Marxist-Leninist' suddenly appears quite arbitrary. In *State and Revolution*, in spite of Lenin's allegiance to Marx, the self-declared materialist reveals himself to be an idealist, and the mindless, contingent state

²Gottfried Leibniz, "Monadology" in *Classics of Western Philosophy* (Steven M. Cahn, ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), §56.

is reconstituted as a social force standing above civil consciousness and having the capacity to alter it.

II. THE AMBIGUITY OF THE TEXT

The agendas of Hegel and Marx, as they are presented in *Philosophy of Right* and “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State” respectively, are relatively unambiguous.³ In contrast, interpreting Lenin’s *State and Revolution* requires that the reader reaches some preliminary conclusions about the text, the nature and purpose of which is very much in dispute. Much of the controversy about the text swings in loopy orbits around its alleged utopianism and the subsequent difficulty of reconciling it with Lenin’s ‘programmatic’ works. While Lenin’s *State and Revolution* exalts the capacity of the masses for spontaneous revolutionary activity and the abolition of class conflict, it seemingly contradicts the tone of his earlier writings which advocated the revolutionary abolition of class conflict under the tutelage of Lenin’s Social-Democratic (later

³This is not to belittle the objections often put against Hegel that his *Philosophy of Right* was a radically conservative, philosophical justification for the Prussian state. However, as I suggested in Chapter I, the idea that Hegel was a conservative and that he deified the Prussian state does not accord well with the claims of Hegel’s philosophy or with historical fact. Avineri offers a very credible objection to the reading of Hegel as a “Prussianist”:

To represent [the *Philosophy of Right*] as Hegel’s apothecosis of Prussia is nonsense, for philosophical and biographical reasons alike. No state, as Hegel would point out, could ever be adequate to the philosophical idea of the state as expounded in this work. Furthermore, Hegel prepared the *Philosophy of Right* while he was lecturing on the subject at Heidelberg, in Baden, before he moved to Berlin and ever became associated with Prussia. Lastly, the book contains provisions—like the election of representative assemblies—which were absent in Prussia and which cannot by an stretch of the imagination, be seen as a reflection of Prussian reality.

See Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974 [1972]), 116.

Bolshevik) Party and the subordination of working-class spontaneity to this revolutionary vanguard.

The Standard for Socialist Practice in *What Is to Be Done?*⁴

Lenin acknowledged the power of the labour movement as it had arisen spontaneously in Russia. In *What Is to Be Done?*, written in 1901-02, Lenin made specific reference to the strikes of 1896 which had begun in St. Petersburg with about 3500 spinners and weavers and then spread over much of Russia. As a result of their actions, the workers were able to gain economic and legal benefits from their employers and the government—including legislation in 1897 which limited the working day to eleven and a half hours across Russia. Far from celebrating the spontaneous actions of St. Petersburg's day labourers though, Lenin posited that simple, spontaneous self-organisation amongst the working class ultimately hinders the workers' movement. In Lenin's opinion, the St. Petersburg strikes actually created the mistaken impression that real improvements in working conditions could be gained by spontaneous, mass actions alone when, in reality, they did little more than exact concessions from the holders of capital. In spite of the economic and legal victories of the 1896 "industrial war" the

⁴One of the difficulties of working with primary sources which have appeared in multiple editions and translations is that works which were originally published as individual volumes also appear as parts of collections. Throughout this chapter I have mostly adhered to the usual convention of indicating the titles of books in italics, and the titles of articles, or parts of books, in quotation marks. I have, however, made exceptions to this when the work to which I am referring appears as part of collection, yet is best known as a separate volume. In these cases, the title of the work is italicized in the text and printed in quotation marks in the corresponding footnote.

inherently oppressive relationship between the capital holders and the workers remained unchallenged.

As it is described in *What Is to Be Done?*, the fault of the Russian working-class movement was that, while it contained the requisite spontaneity, it did not, as yet, exhibit a clearly defined class consciousness. While the working class was able to translate their misery into a struggle for economic gains within capitalism, they were unable to situate their plight in the grander process of social evolution and translate it into a *political* struggle against capitalism itself. Lenin describes the problem thus:

The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, *i.e.*, it may itself realise the necessity for combining in unions, for fighting against the employers and for striving to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, *etc.* The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals.⁵

The implications of this for the workers' movement, thought Lenin, were quite clear. To his mind, all socialists, both inside and outside his fractious Social-Democratic Party, who subscribed to a doctrine of 'spontaneous development' laboured under the delusion that "the pure and simple labour movement can work out an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers 'take their fate out of the hands of the leaders'". This, he insisted, was "a profound mistake".⁶ Revolutionary socialist consciousness would not arise

⁵ Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?", 53.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

spontaneously within the working class but needed to be engendered in this class from without. This was a task, not for factory committees, but for a consciously acting revolutionary vanguard—the Social-Democratic Party.

Quoting Karl Kautsky (for whom Lenin later had no shortage of vitriol in *State and Revolution*), Lenin attempts to establish the need for a socialist vanguard party. This need is based on the fact that, contrary to the opinions of some socialists, the class struggle of modern society does *not* create both the conditions for socialist production *and* the requisite socialist consciousness. Certainly, Lenin argues, socialist consciousness is a concomitant of the class struggle, but neither arises from the other. Socialist consciousness is a uniquely *bourgeois* response to modern industrial society which, because it requires a basis in scientific knowledge, can arise only amongst the intelligentsia. Like modern technology, modern economic science is a prerequisite to socialist production and *neither* of these can be produced by the proletariat. Thus, while the inequities and drudgery of modern industrial society may push the working class to engage in struggles over wages and working conditions, the source of true socialist consciousness is the bourgeois intelligentsia. (Only once socialism has been conceived amongst the intellectuals can it be, subsequently, communicated to intellectually developed proletarians who, in turn, introduce its principles into the class struggle.) The hitherto economic struggle of the workers for reform within capitalism is thus transformed into the political struggle for socialism.⁷

⁷*Ibid.*, 61f.

Assuming that the working class is incapable of producing a comprehensive ideology of its own, its only choice is to appropriate either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology. In Lenin's opinion, those who uphold the capacity of the working class to achieve socialist consciousness on its own actually belittle scientific socialism and, consequently, strengthen the hold of the prevailing bourgeois ideology on working people. The spontaneous labour movement, unable to translate its economic struggles into a coherent political program, "is pure and simple trade unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie".⁸ Lenin's contention that leaving the fate of socialism in the hands of the spontaneous labour movement is a *de facto* surrender to bourgeois principles was the basis for his passionate belief that "our task, the task of the Social-Democrats, is to *combat spontaneity*, to *divert* the labour movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy".⁹ Those socialists who believe that the spontaneous element of the labour movement must be allowed to play itself out, and that it is impossible to divert the movement from the path determined by the material conditions of life encountered by its constituents, make claims "*tantamount to the abandonment of socialism*". Indeed, if they pushed their position to its logical conclusion, "they would have nothing to do but 'fold their useless arms over their empty breasts'" and leave the possibility of revolutionary social

⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 62f.

democracy to bourgeois trade unionists.¹⁰ Lenin does grant that the working class gravitates spontaneously towards socialism in the sense that “socialist theory defines the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory”,¹¹ but he maintains that the socialist movement can seize the working class only to the extent that it does not bow to spontaneity. Since industrial society is hopelessly permeated by the bourgeois mentality, any spontaneous movement emerging from that society will be similarly permeated.

Alongside the main thesis of *What Is to Be Done?* is a parallel claim that revolutionary tactics and Marxism are wholly compatible. By Lenin’s account of Marx, the claim that having a “tactics plan” contradicts the fundamental spirit of Marxism “not only means theoretically vulgarising Marxism, but also practically *dragging the Party backward*”.¹² “[W]hat else is the function of Social-Democracy”, asks Lenin,

if not to be a ‘spirit’, not only hovering over the spontaneous movement, but also *raising* the movement *to the level of ‘its programme’*? Surely, it is not its function to drag at the *tail* of the movement: at best, this would be of no service to the movement; at the worst, it would be very, very harmful.¹³

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 63.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 64, n.1.

¹²*Ibid.*, 71.

¹³*Ibid.*, 73.

Rather than adopting an uncritical subservience to ‘spontaneity’, it is the duty of the Social-Democrats to use Marxist theory in order to guide the various oppositional strata and act as the vanguard of the working class. Unlike the ‘opportunists’, the Social-Democratic Party should not “soothe itself by arguments about the economic struggle bringing the workers up against their own lack of rights, and about concrete conditions fatalistically impelling the labour movement onto the path of revolution”.¹⁴ On the contrary, it should intervene in every sphere and in every question of social and political life—using Marxist thought as a basis for prudent action.

The substance of *What Is to Be Done?* can therefore be summarized as follows. The spontaneous class struggle and theory of scientific socialism are both the result of modern social forces. Still, coherent socialist theory does not necessarily grow out of conflicts in material life; it merely exists concurrently within the class of the bourgeois intelligentsia. Consequently, left to itself, the working class is incapable of moving beyond simple attempts to exact economic concessions from capital holders. It is unable to transcend the trade-union mentality, or see beyond immediate material concerns. Lenin is as critical of premature “excitative terror”¹⁵ as he is of the opportunistic genuflection to spontaneity. Nevertheless he insists that only with the injection of a political element into the proletarian class struggle—by bourgeois intellectuals who have thought through the nature of industrial society—can this limited, “pure and simple” economic struggle

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 151.

become a full-fledged political struggle which asks not only how labour can achieve better terms of sale but also how the conditions under which labour must be sold can be abolished once and for all. For Lenin, the locus of the political and intellectual element of the proletarian class struggle is the Social-Democratic Party—the revolutionary vanguard, the ‘head’ of the social movement of which the proletariat is the ‘heart’. The duty of the Social-Democrats is to create an organisation of proletarian revolutionaries under a central authority rather than to “kneel in prayer to spontaneity, gazing with awe upon the ‘posteriors’ of the Russian proletariat”.¹⁶

“An Aberrant Intellectual Enterprise”?

The problem of reconciling Lenin’s *State and Revolution* (published in January 1918) with his programmatic work *What Is to Be Done?* is located in the apparent change of attitude about the roles of the proletariat and the socialist party that the former book exhibits. While *What Is to Be Done?* stressed, amongst other things, the need for a set of clearly defined socialist tactics, a revolutionary party to act as the repository for coherent Marxist theory and practice, and the subordination of working-class spontaneity to the conscious, calculated actions of the vanguard party, *State and Revolution* seemingly de-emphasises the role of the Party and celebrates the workers’ capacity to smash the old “parasitic” state and reorganise *themselves* along socialist lines. In short, the reason why *State and Revolution* presents us with such a problem is that its shift from the Party to

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 123.

the proletariat, and from socialist tactics to spontaneous organisation, casts Lenin, hitherto an apparent practitioner of *realpolitik*, as both an idealist and a utopian.

The essentials of *State and Revolution*'s argument can be summarised in the following fashion. As described by Marx, all states are reflections of the egoistic property interests of civil society; as such, the state can be nothing other than an instrument by which the owners of capital oppress those classes who do not have access to property. The capitalist state, as a reflection of the capitalist mode of production, is only adequate to the needs of a capitalist society; consequently, if the proletariat are to create a society in which their needs are met, the old capitalist state apparatus must be destroyed and replaced with a proletarian apparatus. The main institution of the proletarian state is, for Lenin, the "dictatorship of the proletariat", to which Marx referred only incidentally, but which Lenin claimed had historical precedent with the Paris Commune.¹⁷ One of the distinguishing features of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that, though backed by a state apparatus, it will require this backing to a far smaller degree than the capitalist regime that came before it. This is true because the state will represent the interests of the majority for the first time in history and the tasks of the state

¹⁷To my knowledge Marx uses this phrase, to which Lenin gives a curious amount of weight, only twice: once in his letter of 5 March 1852 to Joseph Weydemeyer, in which Marx argued that "the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*" and that "this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*", and once again in *Critique of the Gotha Program* in which he argued that the revolutionary period of transition from capitalist to communist society was the "dictatorship of the proletariat". See *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (Volume 39; New York: International Publishers, 1983), 62 and *Critique of the Gotha Program* (New York: International Publishers, 1977 [1938]), 18. See also Engels' 1891 Introduction to Marx's *Civil War in France* in which Engels refers to the Paris Commune as a "dictatorship of the proletariat".

will have become so simplified by technology and the division of labour that any literate person can conduct them; thus, the state's *raison d' être*, administration and the repression of class, will have been eliminated. The only remaining purpose of the state will be to repress the residual bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements in society and to ensure that all of the economy's resources are allocated equitably. All members of society will be eligible, and obliged, to hold office in the new communal council style of government in which all officials would be bound by strict recall laws and paid a worker's wage. The most striking feature of the new state as Lenin describes it is that it creates the conditions for its own abolition. Since the state exists solely for the purpose of extinguishing the last of the old class antagonisms in society, and since the existence of the state is in general premised upon class conflict, as class conflicts are ameliorated so too shall the state wither away.

In the secondary literature on *State and Revolution*, there has been some consensus about its 'utopian' character. For Robert Conquest, *State and Revolution* is of special interest as "an expression of the most purely Utopian and theoretical side of the Marxist doctrine of society". Thus, the pamphlet's intentions seem diametrically opposed to the hard-nosed regard for political tactics characteristic of, say, *What Is to Be Done?*. Fifteen years earlier, when it seemed that a socialist revolution might not occur in Lenin's

lifetime, Lenin was absorbed in the practical concerns of orchestrating a revolution. Yet in 1917,

[w]hile Petrograd simmered in the background, Lenin—right on the eve of the anticipated and actual seizure of power—was giving the most idyllic semianarchist account of proletarian revolution and of how it is to result immediately in the most intensive democratization, culminating in the withering away of the state.¹⁸

In a similar vein, *State and Revolution* is, for Robert V. Daniels, “a work conforming neither to Lenin’s previous thought nor to his subsequent practice. It stands as a monument to its author’s intellectual deviation during the year of the revolution, 1917”.¹⁹ Daniels notes that the book hardly makes mention of the Party, as opposed to Lenin’s earlier text in which the role of the Party is emphasised and the success of the Party is associated with revolutionary success. Assuming the veracity of the claim that, for Lenin, the Party was characteristically the key element of the revolutionary process, Daniels is correct to say that “*State and Revolution*, the most developed product of Lenin’s thought in 1917, stands in sharp contrast to the main substance of ‘Leninism’ expressed previously and subsequently”.²⁰ Adam Ulam does not reject the pamphlet’s significance out of hand. Citing both the amount of time Lenin took preparing the manuscript and the care that

¹⁸Robert Conquest, *V.I. Lenin* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 84.

¹⁹Robert V. Daniels, “The State and Revolution: A Case Study in the Genesis and Transformation of Communist Ideology” in *The American Slavic and East European Review* (Vol. XII: 1953), 22.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 23.

Lenin took to ensure that it would be published even if he were killed,²¹ Ulam insists that Lenin treated the book's writing as a serious exercise. Even so, he concedes that "no work could be more *un*-representative of its author's political philosophy and his general frame of mind than this one by Lenin". Far from expressing Lenin's well-established views, "[t]hat unfortunate pamphlet is almost a straightforward profession of anarchism".²² Of the critics of *State and Revolution*, Louis Fischer makes perhaps the harshest condemnation. According to Fischer, *State and Revolution* subscribes shamelessly to the "utopian Nowhere method" of which Lenin was such a strident critic elsewhere and "[d]espite its plethora of Marx-Engels terminology and quotations, the Lenin book is an aberrant intellectual enterprise, a fanciful exercise for so rock-hard a man, as un-Leninist as the mask he wore and the false name he bore in hiding while writing it".²³

In spite of the consensus which exists amongst some critics regarding the utopian character of *State and Revolution*, there is disagreement about the relationship of this work to Lenin's earlier writing. While acknowledging the book's "naïve notions" and utopian character, Rodney Barfield insists that the content of the book does not represent

²¹ According to Ulam, when Lenin fled St. Petersburg on 11 July 1917 to avoid arrest, he left instructions for S. S. Kamenev that, should he be killed, the manuscript should be brought from Stockholm (where it was in safe keeping) and published. See Adam B. Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 352f.

²² *Ibid.*, 353.

²³ Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), 122.

an intellectual deviation of the kind claimed by Conquest, Daniels, Ulam, and Fischer. Rather, Barfield suggests that Lenin was a utopian idealist throughout his political career and that *State and Revolution* merely gave a systematic statement of Lenin's inner convictions about human nature and his ideals for a humane new world.²⁴ As already shown, *State and Revolution* is supposed to represent a big departure from 'real' Leninism because it emphasised the ability of the proletariat to organise themselves spontaneously, without egoistic self-interest, while de-emphasising the role of the vanguard party. Yet, some textual evidence suggests that this assessment of the proletariat was not an exception but was, rather, typical of Lenin's thought. To support this assertion, Barfield directs the reader to two articles—"What the 'Friends of the People' Are" and "To the Rural Poor"—written in 1894 and 1903 respectively. In these articles, Lenin indicates a faith in the spontaneous development of proletarian class consciousness, and a vision of a society characterised by voluntary toil and mutual self-sacrifice, which was repeated later in *State and Revolution*.

For example, in "What the 'Friends of the People' Are", Lenin says of the proletariat:

When the advanced representatives of this class will have mastered the ideas of scientific socialism, the idea of the historical role of the Russian worker, when these ideas become widespread and when durable organisations arise among the workers which will transform the present sporadic economic war of the workers into a conscious

²⁴See Rodney Barfield, "Lenin's Utopianism: *State and Revolution*" in *Slavic Review* (Vol. 30., No. 1., March 1971), 56.

class struggle—then the Russian *workers* will rise at the head of all the democratic elements, overthrow absolutism and lead the *Russian proletariat* (side by side with the proletariat of *all countries*) *along the straight road of open political struggle towards the victorious communist revolution*.²⁵

Unlike *What Is to Be Done?* this passage asserts the capacity of the proletariat to master the ideas of scientific socialism themselves, and to be the leading force in the communist revolution, without being subordinate to a vanguard organisation. Furthermore, in “To the Rural Poor”, Lenin writes

When the working class is victorious over the whole of the bourgeoisie, it will take the land away from the big proprietors and introduce *co-operative farming* on the big estates, so that the workers will farm the land together, in common, and freely elect trusted men to manage the farms. They will use machinery to save labour; they will work shifts for not more than eight (or even six) hours daily. Then the small peasant who prefers to carry on his own farm in the old way on individual lines will not produce for the market, to sell to anyone who comes along, but will produce for the workers’ associations; the small peasant will supply the workers’ associations with corn, meat, vegetables, and the workers in return will provide him with machinery, livestock, fertilizers, clothes and whatever else he may require, without his having to pay for it. Then there will be no struggle for money between the big and the small farmer, then there will be no wage labour for others; all workers will work for themselves, all labour-saving devices and all machinery will benefit the workers and help

²⁵V.I. Lenin, “What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are” in *Selected Works: Volume I, The Prerequisites of the First Russian Revolution (1894-1899)* (J. Fineberg, ed.: London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., n.d.), 454f.

to make their work easier, to improve their standard of living.²⁶

In Barfield's opinion, both of these passages are quite revealing because they show that, even at the time when Lenin was supposedly most absorbed by *realpolitik*, he was concerned with such things as ending the egoistic struggle for wealth, the abolition of wage slavery, and creating conditions under which coercive state power would become unnecessary. Far from representing a deviation from the spirit of his earlier work, *State and Revolution* was, in Barfield's eyes, merely an explicit reiteration of tendencies already well established in his thought. For Barfield, Lenin's "belief in the innate intelligence of the masses, his idealization of the common man, and his conviction of the inevitable dawning of a new historical era of universal harmony" were not idealist illusions that Lenin fell into in a moment of weakness or revolutionary fever; rather, they were "the basis of his entire revolutionary career and are the foundation upon which much of his writing rests".²⁷ Specifically acknowledging Barfield's conclusion, Rolf Theen argues that to understand *State and Revolution* the work as aberrant

fails to recognize, *inter alia*, that underneath Lenin's pragmatism as a revolutionary there was always a powerful utopian vision—a vision that sustained him even the darkest and most despairing days of his underground and exile existence. Though frequently submerged and perhaps eclipsed by his political pragmatism, the presence of a

²⁶V.I. Lenin, "To the Rural Poor" in *Selected Works: Volume II. The Struggle for the Bolshevik Party (1900-1904)* (J. Fineberg, ed.; London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1936). 293.

²⁷Barfield, *op. cit.*, 55.

utopian element in Lenin's political thought can be demonstrated in his writings as far back as 1894.²⁸

Thus, in Barfield's and Theen's assessment, *State and Revolution* ought not to be considered an aberration. On the contrary, it should be viewed as a work in which the utopian tendencies present throughout Lenin's career were most clearly dedicated to print.

Lenin's Appropriation of Marxism

To summarize: the 'utopian' reading of *State and Revolution* leads to two possible conclusions about the text. It can be viewed as either an aberration, or a systematic statement of ideas that Lenin held throughout his political career. Unfortunately, neither conclusion seems intellectually satisfying. By the first conclusion, advocated by Conquest, Daniels, Ulam, and Fischer, *State and Revolution* cannot be taken as a credible text. At best, it must be seen as little more than a trivial addition to Lenin's body of writing which neither makes a contribution to his political thought nor tells us anything about how Lenin really understood the world. At worst, it must be viewed as a thoroughly cynical piece in which Lenin provided revolutionary *desiderata* which he had not the slightest intention to implement. By the second conclusion, advocated by Barfield and Theen, *State and Revolution* retains its credibility because of the continuity between it and earlier 'utopian' writings. Nevertheless, it remains impossible to reconcile *State and Revolution* with the clearly un-utopian *What Is to Be Done?*. Barfield's attempt to

²⁸Rolf H. W. Theen. *Lenin: Genesis and Development of a Revolutionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979 [1973]), 117.

demonstrate that Lenin's early work contained a utopian element does not make *What Is to Be Done?* and *State and Revolution* any less antithetical. In short, neither of the 'utopian' readings of the text can reconcile *State and Revolution* with Lenin's earlier programmatic works while preserving its theoretical importance.

Alfred B. Evans offers a plausible alternative reading of *State and Revolution* which avoids the inadequacy of the conclusions arising from the utopian reading. Unlike the scholarly literature which uses the text *qua* utopian text as its point of departure, Evans contends that this starting point is poorly chosen. In other words, while the previously cited commentators disagree on the relationship of *State and Revolution* to the rest of Lenin's work, they all use as the starting point of their analysis the false assumption that the book *is* a utopian work. Evans suggests that, on the contrary, this book has tactical value and represents a continuation of Lenin's strategic attempts to better situate the Bolshevik Party. In this fashion, it can be argued that *State and Revolution* is cut from the same cloth as *What Is to Be Done?*—in spite of the apparent differences.

In adopting the 'tactical' reading of the text, one must ask what Lenin could hope to gain by writing it. In Evans' opinion, the answer is to be found in the pamphlet's opening pages. In the very first paragraph of Chapter One, Lenin writes the following:

What is now happening to Marx's doctrine has, in the course of history, often happened to the doctrines of other revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes struggling for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes relentlessly persecute

them, and treat their teachings with malicious hostility, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say, and to surround their *names* with a certain halo for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the revolutionary doctrine of its content, vulgarising it and blunting its revolutionary edge.²⁹

Having established the vulgarisation that Marx's thought suffered at the pens of bourgeois professors and labour union opportunists alike, Lenin declares that "[i]n such circumstances, in view of the incredibly widespread nature of the distortions of Marxism, our first task is to *restore* the true doctrine of Marx on the state".³⁰ This passage is of particular interest to Evans because it shows that Lenin's primary objective in *State and Revolution* was not simply to describe the characteristics of a future socialist society. The book has the additional, more immediate, aim of consolidating Lenin's status as the leading Marxist theorist in Russia and in the international socialist movement. Lenin's aim was not simply to posit a theory of the revolutionary state based on Marx's ideas, but to *reestablish what Marx really taught* on the subject of the state and to appropriate to himself the authority of Marx. At a time of divisive struggle within the international socialist movement, and of ideological differences in Russia, "*State and Revolution* represented Lenin's bid to claim the mantle of international leadership in the interpretation

²⁹V.I. Lenin, "The State and Revolution: The Marxist Doctrine of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution" in *Selected Works: Volume XII. After the Seizure of Power* (J. Fineberg, ed.: London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1937), 7.

³⁰*Loc. cit.*

of the teachings of Marx and Engels”.³¹ In short, it can be reasonably argued that *State and Revolution* was not written simply as a dream of some distant socialist future. Rather, it was a text of significant tactical value written to further the aims of the Bolsheviks in the circumstances immediately surrounding the October Revolution.

Since no commentator is privy to what was on Lenin’s mind at the Zurich Library as he gathered the material for *State and Revolution*, it is impossible to make any claims about the pamphlet’s purpose with certainty. The controversy about it, summarised above, is not likely to be resolved from the existing evidence. However, one can suggest some plausible conclusions about it. Utopian elements notwithstanding, the ‘tactical’ reading of *State and Revolution* is quite convincing. Such a reading allows one to reconcile the text with programmatic works like *What Is to Be Done?*. Furthermore, the tactical reading does not force the reader to treat as trivial the work which Lenin evidently believed was of great importance. Most importantly, the tactical reading of the pamphlet encourages readers to refocus their attention on the agenda which Lenin himself sets out very clearly on the first page. Unlike the utopian interpretation, which is likely to view *State and Revolution* exclusively as a vision of a shiny socialist future or as an “attempt to establish a yardstick for socialist *practice*”,³² the tactical interpretation stresses Lenin’s self-declared aim to “*restore* the true doctrine of Marx on the state” and, in so

³¹ Alfred B. Evans, “Rereading Lenin’s *State and Revolution*” in *Slavic Review* (Vol. 46, No. 1, Spring 1987), 5.

³² Neil Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought: Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981), 84.

doing, fortify his position as the leading exponent of Marxist theory. Granted, the 'tactical' reading of the pamphlet cannot be sustained to the exclusion of the 'utopian' reading, or *vice versa*, based on textual evidence alone. However, Lenin's explicit agenda makes the former reading at least as plausible as the latter. Understood as an attempt to reclaim the torch of Marxism, *State and Revolution* is consistent with the tactical concerns of *What Is to Be Done?* and represents Lenin's attempt to get the upper hand in the doctrinal struggles within the socialist movement.

This conclusion has implications for the analysis of Lenin's theory of the state. To the extent that Lenin considered himself to be the true heir of Marx, his theory of the state must be assessed according to how well it reflects Marx's ideas about the state. As will now be shown, Lenin's theory of state and revolution accords with Marx's theory of the state in its belief that the state is merely an instrument of class domination. However, because Lenin upholds the state's capacity to end class conflict, his theory represents a significant departure from that of Marx.

III. LENIN'S REVOLUTIONARY STATE: AN UNEASY COEXISTENCE

As Lenin's attempt to establish himself as the leading interpreter of Marx, and as an attempt to present a coherent 'Marxist' theory of the state, *State and Revolution* is a troublesome work. Many of Marx's most significant writings on the state were not published until after Lenin's death; thus, the raw materials for Lenin's attempt to reconstitute the Marxist theory of the state were surprisingly scant.³³ Lenin had limited access to Marx's theoretical conclusions arising from his early encounters with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Perhaps owing to this textual deficiency, Lenin was driven to use Engels' interpretations of Marx's theory of the state (including *Anti-Dühring* and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) to fill in the blanks. It can be reasonably argued that, due to Lenin's inability to study Marx's most comprehensive critique of the state and his reliance on Engels' reading of Marx, Lenin subsequently misunderstood Marx's ideas about the transcendence of the state and underestimated the degree to which the state was a mirror of civil consciousness. Furthermore, as Neil Harding has suggested, Lenin's uncritical acceptance of Engels' idea that the 'dictatorship

³³For example, the "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" was not published until 1927, the two volumes of *Grundrisse* were published in 1939 and 1941 respectively, and the *German Ideology* was not completely published until 1932. See Bibliography to *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Bottomore *et al.* eds.: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

of the proletariat' constituted completed communism forced Lenin to reconcile theoretically two social forms which were, in fact, irreconcilable.³⁴

The State: "Parasitic Excrescence" or Proletarian Instrument?

Lenin's understanding of the relationship between the state and civil society follows the same contours as that of the early Marx. Quoting from Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Lenin denies the Hegelian notion that the state can stand above civil society or that it has the capacity to dissolve the schism between class interest and the ethical community:

'The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from the outside; just as little is it 'the reality of the moral idea', 'the image and reality of reason', as Hegel asserts. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms, which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting interests, might not consume themselves and society in sterile struggle, a power apparently standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict and keeping it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.'³⁵

³⁴Harding, *op. cit.*, 91f.

³⁵Engels as quoted in Lenin, "State and Revolution", 8. See also Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1940), 193f. In this passage, as quoted by Lenin and as it appears in Engels' text, Engels attributes to Hegel the idea that the state is 'the reality of the moral idea'. This is perhaps a misapprehension on Engels' part as Hegel did not believe the state to be the repository of *morality* but, rather, of *ethical life*.

Lenin's conception of the state thus coincides with Marx's conception. He believes that the state exists when, and to the extent that, class conflict *cannot* be resolved; in other words, the existence of the state proves that class conflict is irresolvable. This is the basis for Lenin's dismissal of the idea of "bourgeois ideologists" that the state can be used as an instrument for the conciliation of classes. "According to Marx", argues Lenin, "the state could neither arise nor continue to exist if it were possible to conciliate classes." It is thus incoherent to think of the state in the Hegelian sense, as an instrument of universalization, because it is foremost "an instrument of class *rule*, an organ for the *oppression* of one class by another; it creates 'order', which legalises and perpetuates the oppression by moderating the collisions between the classes".³⁶ Properly conceived, the state's 'order' is not a reconciliation but a means of rendering the oppressed classes impotent. As advocates of the state's role as a conciliator, the Menshevik faction of the Russian socialist movement betrayed itself as a mere collection of "petty-bourgeois democrats with near-Socialist phraseology".³⁷

Like Marx, Lenin characterises the state as being composed of "special bodies of armed men" which constitute the public power and which are not identical to the armed population itself, *i.e.*, the "self-acting armed organisation of the population". In spite of the claims made about them—that they act in the general interest of the population—the standing army and the police are little more than the instruments of state

³⁶Lenin, "State and Revolution", 9.

³⁷*Loc. cit.*

power.³⁸ According to Lenin, these bodies, which are said to exist for the purpose of social order, would be unnecessary if society were not cleft into antagonistic classes. Thus, a society might have a great deal of social complexity or technical competence, but even then the state cannot be considered a *natural* characteristic of it. The state does not arise from the administrative needs of a complex society, but from class conflict alone. Given that the state is not an instrument for the conciliation of classes, but, rather, a symptom of their irreconcilability, Lenin, like Marx, rejects the idea that universal suffrage within the modern state is capable of expressing a universal will. In fact, to act within democratic institutions is to do worse than resign oneself to imperfect representation; to act in this manner is to consent to the social cleavage from which the state arose. For this reason, the attempt to mend the cleavages of class society is, to Lenin, irrevocably linked with the imperative to reconsider the state apparatus as a whole. The demand for the elimination of the state's deficiencies is a demand for its dissolution. Believing that the secret to the transcendence of the state was to be found in Marx's account of the Paris Commune, Lenin posits the commune-society as the basis for a new social order which has liberated itself from class conflict, and its institutional analogue—the state. As stated by Engels, a society modelled upon the Paris Commune “that organises production anew on the basis of the free and equal association of the

³⁸*Ibid.*, 10.

producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong: in the museum of antiquities side by side with the spinning wheel and the bronze axe”³⁹

Because Lenin understood the state to be a reflection of class conflicts present in civil society, and believed it to be incapable of reforming class cleavages, his account of the state accords well with that of Marx. Recall that in the “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State”, Marx denied the universality of the state, preferring to describe it as a plenum of numerous egoistic interests which is nothing more than the antagonism of civil society institutionalized at the political level. In this manner, Lenin’s self-declared mission to “restore Marxism by purging it of its distortions”⁴⁰ is not liable to question. However, as *State and Revolution* progresses, Lenin’s attitude towards the state undergoes a curious shift which is made even more remarkable by his apparent failure to recognize this. While upholding the claim that the state is necessarily a reflection of the antagonisms existing within civil society, further reading of *State and Revolution* reveals that Lenin also saw the state as an instrument of proletarian emancipation. The contradiction between these two conceptions of the state—as an apparatus *contingent* upon class antagonism *and* as a power standing outside civil society capable of *resolving* class antagonism—necessitates the critical reassessment of *State and Revolution*.

³⁹Engels as quoted in Lenin, “State and Revolution”, 16. See also Engels. *op. cit.*, 198.

⁴⁰Lenin, “State and Revolution”, 61.

Unlike Marx, for whom the state's abolition was premised upon the spontaneous, authentic, democratic⁴¹ self-government of individuals, Lenin believed that the state must be the instrument of its own abolition. Referring to a lengthy passage from Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, Lenin insists that Marx's theory of the state does not indicate a "hazy conception of slow, even gradual change, of absence of leaps and storms, of absence of revolution". According to Lenin, the Marxist theory of the state does not repudiate revolution in exchange for some vague faith that the state will 'wither away' on its own. In fact, the Marxist theory is said to prescribe "the 'abolition' of the bourgeois state by the proletarian revolution".⁴² The spontaneous withering away of the state would occur only once the bourgeois state had been forcefully smashed with a decisive proletarian revolution and state power had been consolidated in the hands of the proletariat. The mending of social divisions is, for Lenin, possible only with proletariat's violent seizure of the state instruments with which the oppressing class—the bourgeoisie—can be crushed and class antagonism eliminated. With the loss of the state's only purpose, the maintenance of oppressive class relations, the vestigial state will atrophy and vanish.

Lenin's account of this 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is interesting because, while it describes a social form in which antagonism has been abolished and, as such, "is

⁴¹ Recall from the previous chapter that, though Marx's use of the word 'democracy' apparently indicates his support for bourgeois representative government, his conception of democracy was classical rather than liberal-bourgeois.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 16f.

so constituted that it begins to wither away immediately”,⁴³ it nevertheless describes a *state* under the control of the proletariat. While the bourgeoisie “need political rule in order to maintain exploitation”, the dictatorship of the proletariat uses the state apparatus strictly “in order completely to abolish all exploitation” and to free the majority from bourgeois manipulation.⁴⁴ Seemingly, the idea of a state in which class antagonism has been abolished runs counter to Lenin’s earlier assertion (cited in Engels and attributed to Marx) that the existence of the state is necessarily a *reflection* of class conflict. Nevertheless, Lenin apparently saw no contradiction in claiming that the collapse of the state as an instrument of class domination can only be achieved by the domination of the proletariat, by their consolidation of state power, and by their becoming a ruling class capable of crushing bourgeois resistance. Most importantly, he believed that his elevation of the state to the head of the socialist revolution reflected accurately the word of Marx: “The state, *i.e.*, the proletariat organised as the ruling class, is inseparably bound up with all [Marx] taught on the revolutionary role of the proletariat in history. The culmination of the role is the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political rule of the proletariat”.⁴⁵ In short, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolutionary exercise of state power by the

⁴³*Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 26.

working class, is the true basis of socialist practice and “is the touchstone on which the *real* understanding and acceptance of Marxism should be tested”.⁴⁶

Therefore, in spite of Lenin’s initial agreement with Marx that the state is a sullied and useless instrument for ameliorating the antagonisms in civil society of which the state is, in fact, a reflection, Lenin gives the state a leading role in revolutionary practice. This is tempered somewhat by Lenin’s claim that the proletarian consolidation of power constitutes a transformation “from the state (*i.e.*, a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something *which is no longer really a state*”.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the capture of the state’s coercive force by the proletariat to use for their own ends is essential to Lenin’s conception of the socialist revolution and this state-heavy approach is attributed to Marx. Furthermore, Lenin’s unwillingness to wait for the spontaneous amelioration of class conflict, and a subsequent withering of the state, reveals his belief in the ability of the state to alter fundamentally civil consciousness—in spite of his initial claims to the contrary. Though appealing to the principles of spontaneous self-organization in civil society, and the contingency of the state, Lenin is, at all points, strangely silent about civil society. He takes a bureaucratic approach to revolution and affirms the leading role of the state. This is revealed most clearly when he says that the Bolsheviks “do not indulge in ‘dreams’ of dispensing *at once* with all administration, with all subordination”. To think otherwise is to exhibit “a lack of understanding of the tasks

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 41. My italics.

of the proletarian dictatorship” and a conception of socialism “totally alien to Marxism” which will “serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until human nature has changed”. To this Lenin declares that the Bolsheviks aim to secure socialism “with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and ‘managers’”.⁴⁸

The Problem of the State’s Leading Role

Lenin’s account of the state in *State and Revolution*, and of the role of the state in a socialist revolution, brings up a number of difficulties with the text which must be addressed in further detail. Because, as already noted, Lenin did not have Marx’s most comprehensive statements on the nature of the state at his disposal, the theory of the state offered in *State and Revolution* is necessarily influenced by Engels. In fact, much of Lenin’s attempt to lay out systematically “Marx’s” ideas on the matter is derived from Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and *Anti-Dühring*. While this use of Engels is perhaps justifiable in Lenin’s case, the extent to which Lenin relies on Engels to reconstruct Marx’s theory of the state, and of socialist revolution, ultimately leads him astray.

In searching for a practical model for socialist society, Lenin chose the municipal council style of the Paris Commune which Marx had discussed at length in his

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 47.

Civil War in France.⁴⁹ Though Marx viewed the Commune simply as the response of the Paris proletariat to a particular political crisis, and, arguably, not as a model for all future socialist societies, Lenin's choice was quite reasonable because, as Polan notes, the commune was the only administrative form "to which Marx did declare allegiance".⁵⁰ Engels makes this clear in his letter to August Bebel of 18-28 March 1875 in which he writes, on Marx's behalf, that

All the palaver about the state ought to be dropped especially after the Commune, which had ceased to be a state in the true sense of the term. ... [T]he state is merely a transitional institution of which use is made in the struggle, in the revolution, to keep down one's enemies by force ... and, as soon as there can be any question of freedom, the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore suggest that *Gemeinwesen* be universally substituted for *state*, it is a good old German word that can very well do service for the French 'Commune'.⁵¹

⁴⁹The Paris Commune of 1871 originated in the wake of France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. After the victory of the French National Guard over the government forces on 18 March 1871, the National Guard found itself in control of the capital and, subsequently, passed on the leadership to what it considered to be the legitimate local government: the Commune. Elections were held on 26 March, and the Commune lasted for about two months until soldiers loyal to the Versailles government moved in on 21 May and defeated the Communards on 28 May. As a form of municipal council, the Commune was not intrinsically 'revolutionary'; it was, in fact, a reversion to an ancient form of organization. As Draper points out, "In France *commune* did not, and does not, necessarily have the meaning of a revolutionary form of government or society. On the contrary, its base meaning is simply 'free town', a more-or-less autonomously self-governing municipality not controlled out of hand by a top-down super-centralized national government such as has been the French tradition since the absolute monarchies". See Foreword to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune* (Hal Draper, ed.; New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 9.

⁵⁰A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 6.

⁵¹Friedrich Engels, "Engels to August Bebel, 18-28 March 1875" in *Marx-Engels: Collected Works* (Vol. 45; New York: International Publishers, 1991 [1975]), 63.

Furthermore, the commune had the advantage of allowing Lenin to incorporate a similar and already existing Russian institution—the soviet—into a Marxist theory of the state.⁵² Thus, Lenin does not appear to do great violence to Marx’s theory by sharing Engels’ enthusiasm about the commune, and by embracing it as the political form appropriate to socialist society. Nevertheless, Lenin’s continued uncritical acceptance of Engels’ reading of Marx leads him to conclusions that Marx himself never made. Of particular importance was Engels’ statement in the 1891 Introduction to Marx’s *Civil War in France* that the Paris Commune and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat were one and the same.⁵³ By taking this claim seriously, Lenin was forced to reconcile theoretically two conflicting models of social organization which were, in fact, irreconcilable.⁵⁴ This, in turn, had serious effects upon the coherence of *State and Revolution*.

According to Marx, the Paris Commune of 1871 had ceased to be a state. In *The Civil War in France* Marx defined the state as a coercive mechanism characterised by separate bodies of armed men—soldiers and police—which enforce the superiority of

⁵²Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldier Councils, 1905-1921*. (Ruth Hein, trans.; New York: Pantheon Books, 1974 [1972]), 11.

⁵³See Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 17f. Engels’ exact words were, “Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”.

⁵⁴Neil Harding believes that Engels’ rhetorical outburst “posed to all subsequent Marxists the insuperable problem of reconciling, indeed identifying, the commune with the dictatorship of the proletariat” and that the theoretical tension within Lenin’s attempt at a Marxist theory of the state “arose from his inclination to take Engels seriously and therefore from his endeavour to square the circle which Engels had sketched”. See Harding, *op. cit.*, 91.

one class over another. As Harding points out, since the communal council in Paris disbanded the army and reintegrated their functions into the armed people, the state had in fact vanished.⁵⁵ Even Marx spoke of the commune as something which was “no longer a check on the, now superseded, State power”.⁵⁶ In short then, the Commune was a social form which had overcome the “parasitic excrescence” of the state.⁵⁷ The state, as an institutional reflection of class conflict, was transcended by the Commune.

On the other hand Marx understood the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ strictly as a transitional form. In his letter to Joseph Weydemeyer of 5 March 1852, Marx wrote that “the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*” but that “this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*”.⁵⁸ In addition to being transitional, the dictatorship of the proletariat was, for Marx, indubitably a state form. In *The Critique of the Gotha Program* he writes that “[b]etween capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one to the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁶Marx, *Civil War in France*, 71.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁸Karl Marx, “Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852” in *Karl Marx-Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (Volume 39; New York: International Publishers, 1983), 62.

dictatorship of the proletariat".⁵⁹ In contrast to the Commune which represented the *de facto* abolition of the state, the dictatorship of the proletariat was a state form in which the working class used the state's instruments to orchestrate the transition to statelessness.

Herein lies the difference between the commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the profound oddness of Engels' attempt to identify the two. While the dictatorship of the proletariat was a transitional state form replacing the moribund bourgeois state, there was nothing at all transitional about the Paris Commune as it was described by Marx.⁶⁰ Through the reintegration of the state's coercive force into the people of Paris, the Paris Commune superseded the state. It was not a preparation for something more perfected, the 'withering away' of the state; it was the actual reabsorption of state functions into the general population. In this way, the Commune corresponded to Marx's conception of 'democracy' as explained in his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State". It is evident, then, that Lenin, in accepting Engels' identification of the commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat, commits himself to reconciling two

⁵⁹Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* (New York: International Publishers, 1977 [1938]), 18.

⁶⁰Harding, *op. cit.*, 90. Interestingly, Hannah Arendt, who reads Marx as an advocate of centralism and the Party monopoly on power, and who also conflates the commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat like Engels and Lenin, reaches a different conclusion to Harding. Arguing that Marx eventually became aware that the Commune "contradicted all notions of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'", Arendt says that Marx "concluded that the communal councils were, after all, only temporary organs of the revolution". See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 261.

fundamentally irreconcilable social forms. This had lasting implications for his theory of the state. As Harding puts it,

[Lenin's] attempted resolution followed the lines implicit in Engels' identification, that is he characterised the dictatorship of the proletariat, for the moment at least, in terms of the commune. There was, however, always lurking in the immediate background, an alternative model which stressed centralisation against initiative from below, emphasised the need for a transitional period as against an immediate reappropriation by society of the powers arrogated by the state, and separate bodies of armed men under the guidance of the Party as against the self-activity of the people in arms.⁶¹

In spite of his attempt to use the commune as the basis for a Marxist theory of revolution, the uneasy coexistence of social forms which characterises *State and Revolution* legitimized in Lenin's thought a belief in the leading role of the state. As already noted, the idea that the state has a leading role in orchestrating social change is questioned by Marx's account of the Paris Commune and refuted outright by Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State". Lenin's attempt to shoehorn the idea of the leading role of the state into a Marxist theory of revolution is responsible for the frequent contradictions of *State and Revolution*.

As already noted, there is no doubt that Lenin understood the relationship between the state and civil society in the same manner that Marx did. Furthermore, he accepted the spontaneous, stateless commune as the best model for socialist society. However, because of the false identity that Engels bequeathed—of commune society and

⁶¹Harding, *op. cit.*, 91f.

the dictatorship of the proletariat—there is dreadful theoretical tension within *State and Revolution*. Because of his commitment to Engels' reading of Marx, Lenin is forced to sustain two incompatible views about the state. The state is presented both as a mere reflection of the egoistic interests of civil society *and* as an agent capable of determining social consciousness.

The text provides substantial evidence to this effect. Throughout *State and Revolution* Lenin tries to resolve the antinomy between the commune and the dictatorship of the proletariat by arguing that the dictatorship is necessary to smash the power of the bourgeois state and to replace it with a proletarian state which, by its very nature, will “wither away”. Illustrative of this attempt is Lenin’s claim that Marxists “recognise that after the proletariat has conquered political power it must utterly destroy the old state machine and substitute for it a new one consisting of the organisation of the armed workers, after the type of the Commune”.⁶² With this, he attempts to reconcile the state-directed approach of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the spontaneity of the commune. Unfortunately, this kind of argument often simply calls attention to how incompatible these two forms really are. For example, after a lengthy quotation from Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, Lenin attributes to Engels the belief that the bourgeois state must be abolished “by the proletarian revolution” and that “the remnants of the *proletarian* state *after* the socialist revolution” will wither away”.⁶³ This statement suggests that the

⁶²Lenin, “State and Revolution”, 105.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 16f.

proletariat will use their revolution to consolidate state power, and, further, that the coercive instruments of the state will be wielded to end all class differences within civil society. Since the existence of the state is premised upon class division, the seizure of state power by the proletariat puts an end to the state as a state. In finally coming to represent all of society and wielding its instruments in the interest of society as a whole, the state is said to commit its last act. The government of people by a privileged few is transformed into a simple administration of the process of production by all. This argument by Lenin is, however, puzzling. On the one hand, Lenin makes it clear that the proletariat must forcibly smash the bourgeois state and place their own apparatus in its place. On the other hand, the proletarian state is said to fade away of its own accord. This is problematic by Lenin's own reasoning. Like Marx, Lenin believes that the state is an expression of class cleavages, that it exists only to mediate these cleavages, and that an amelioration of class cleavage, accordingly, makes the state irrelevant. The fact that, to Lenin's mind, the proletariat must retain the state as a coercive instrument implies one of two things: 1) that the proletarian revolution does not necessarily dissolve class difference or represent the whole of society, *i.e.*, the proletariat simply preside over a new kind of class antagonism; or, 2) that the state is *not* an expression of class antagonism, *i.e.*, the state can continue to exist in spite of the fact that class conflict has been effectively abolished. In the first case, the proletarian revolution represents nothing more than a *coup d'état*, a substitution of one oppressive state apparatus for another. In this case there is no reason to suppose that the state must ever disappear even if it is

recognized that this would be desirable. If states, by Lenin's own admission, exist only to mediate class conflict, then why is the proletarian state any more likely to wither away than a bourgeois one?⁶⁴ In the second case, it is claimed that the character of the state is not contingent upon civil consciousness and that it does not necessarily follow that where there are no classes there can be no state. This, of course, contradicts everything Marx said about the dependent character of the state in his critique of Hegel.

Further along Lenin repeats himself saying that "[r]evolution alone can 'put an end' to the bourgeois state" and that the proletarian state "can only 'wither away'".⁶⁵ The implication here is that once power has been consolidated in the hands of the workers, state power is used to eliminate class conflict. However, in the context of Marx's views on the relationship between the state and civil society, the idea of the proletarian state having a leading role in the creation of socialist society is incoherent. What Lenin is advocating is a revolution 'from above', an autonomous initiative on the part of the state. This seemingly contradicts Marx's notion that the state is a mere

⁶⁴Rosa Luxemburg was particularly critical of the Leninist notion that the coercive instruments of the state could be wielded by the Party in the name of the proletariat. In "Leninism or Marxism" [See *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Bertram D. Wolfe, intro.; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).] Luxemburg criticizes the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as an instance of the mere substitution of one oppressive state form for another, unlikely to 'wither away' of its own accord. "What is there in common", she asks, "between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and organization of a class struggling for its emancipation?" [90] The working class is unable to acquire a new sense of discipline from a state form premised upon Party rule, and must destroy its old habits of obedience and servility. For Luxemburg, "[i]t is a mistake to believe that it is possible to substitute 'provisionally' the absolute power of the Central Committee (acting somehow by 'tacit delegation') for the yet unrealizable rule of the majority of conscious workers" [91]. It is the principle of proletarian rule on the part of the Party which makes it all the more likely that the proletarian movement will be handed over to bureaucrats and turned into "*an automaton manipulated by a Central Committee*" [102].

⁶⁵Lenin, "State and Revolution", 18f.

reflection of civil society. For Lenin to say that a socialist revolution can be orchestrated by the state apparatus is to deny the contingency which Marx insists characterizes the state. To argue that the state, as an expression of civil conflict, can act against its own base in order to end class conflict is nothing less than an affirmation of the state's irrational will to suicide. For Marx, the end of class conflict cannot be achieved through top-down measures. The revolution is not, to Marx's mind, an initiative of the state but a negation of the state through a reabsorption of its functions into civil society.

Lenin is, nevertheless, insistent. While he argues that "according to Marx, the proletariat needs only a state which is withering away, *i.e.*, a state so constituted that it begins to wither away immediately, and cannot but wither away", he maintains that "the toilers need a 'state', *i.e.*, 'the proletariat organised as the ruling class'"⁶⁶ and that "[t]he exploited classes need political rule in order completely to abolish all exploitation".⁶⁷ Yet, if the proletarian state, like all others, is based upon class conflict (in this case, between the deposed bourgeoisie and the ruling proletariat) it is not at all clear what the basis of its withering away is. Lenin suggests that by using the force of the state to liquidate the bourgeoisie and, thus, abolish class conflict, the proletariat have the capacity to abolish the state. But this line of reasoning runs counter to Marx's thinking on two counts. Not only does it deny that the state is an institution which emerges from civil

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 25.

consciousness, but it affirms the idea that the state can be universal and monological—not merely a plenum of particular interests.⁶⁸

In sum then, Lenin has a subtle grasp of Marx's conception of the state in the sense that he understands it to be an institutional expression of conflict within civil society and a moderator of that conflict. Lenin's keen awareness of the state's contingency upon class conflict is reflected in his observation that "Marxism always taught that the state will be abolished with the abolition of classes".⁶⁹ It is this apparent enthusiasm for Marx's ideas which makes his approach to political practice all the more bewildering. Having argued that the form of the state is a reflection of society's development at a given stage in history, Lenin is still intent on reversing the relationship between the state and civil society, and on using the coercive force of the state, in the name of proletarian interests, in order to determine the development of civil society.

⁶⁸ Another, perhaps secondary, problem with Lenin's discussion of the state is his use of words. In several passages, of which the first quotation in this paragraph is an example, Lenin uses 'state' (in single quotation marks) to denote a state "which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word". 'State' becomes Lenin's way of referring to the dictatorship of the proletariat while suggesting that it, like the commune, is not really a state at all. Lenin's use of 'state' implies to the reader that language is too imprecise for his purposes and that, in conjunction with the commune, *state* is not what he really means. However, this peculiar usage also serves to obscure Lenin's meaning in conjunction with the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this case, when he says 'state' he means *state* in the conventional sense of the word, although the use of single quotation marks suggests that he means something else. The word *state* has become so emptied of semantic content in *State and Revolution* that it can be used to describe a social form—like the commune—in which the state is withering away just as easily as it can be used to describe the dictatorship of the proletariat in which the state is strong and in the hands of the proletariat. Yet the word means two quite different things on the two occasions: in the first case it describes a society which has become monological and transparent, and in the second case it describes a society in which there is still class division and coercive force. Lenin's use of the word in these two different ways is not indicative of the failure of language to convey Lenin's thoughts, but of the tension underlying those thoughts.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Unlike Marx, who held that “[t]he mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life” and that “[i]t is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness”,⁷⁰ Lenin’s theory of revolution assigns leading roles in history to human consciousness and political institutions. Lenin’s idealism is especially ironic in light of his respect for Marx as a realist. In Lenin’s opinion,

[t]here is no trace of an attempt on Marx’s part to conjure up a utopia, to make idle guesses about what cannot be known. Marx treats the question of communism in the same way as a naturalist would treat the question of development of, say, a new biological species, if he knew that such and such was its origin, and such and such the direction in which it was changing.⁷¹

Yet, in attempting to systematize the Marxist theory of the state and of revolution, Lenin abandoned detached contemplation and took the active path of planning a socialist revolution. While it would be fruitless to deny that on occasion Marx appears to recognize the necessity of violent, willful revolution in his writing, Marx’s account of history, the motion of capital, and social evolution was that of a fundamentally contemplative man—a scientist and a philosopher. His concern was not to set up

⁷⁰Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (N.I. Stone, trans.; Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, International Library Publishing Co., 1904), 11f.

⁷¹Lenin, “State and Revolution”, 77.

sectarian principles “by which to shape and mould that proletarian movement”,⁷² but to discern with clarity the revolutionary social conditions to which capitalism had given birth. Furthermore, Marx expressed hope that the proletariat could achieve their objectives by peaceful means.⁷³ While there is nothing inherently wrong with a doctrine of state-orchestrated revolution for the purpose of changing society, Lenin is incorrect to suppose that this doctrine can eliminate class conflict or that it can be accommodated within a Marxist theory of the state. Because Lenin prefers action to contemplation,⁷⁴ he forsakes the analytic integrity of Marx’s theory and his Marxism shows itself to be of “a peculiarly voluntarist sort”.⁷⁵ Lenin cannot be faulted for believing that Marx arrived at an accurate understanding of the state and its relationship to civil society. Yet, no knowledge of Marx’s theory of the state provides any more of a tool for the proletarian creation of communism than an understanding of Darwin’s writing could empower a particularly quixotic chimpanzee to overthrow the laws of natural selection, and become human.

⁷²Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1988 [1948]), 22.

⁷³See “The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution” in *Marx-Engels Reader* (Robert C. Tucker, ed.: New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978 [1972]), 522-524.

⁷⁴On the interruption of his work on *State and Revolution* by the October Revolution, Lenin wrote “It is more pleasant and useful to go through the ‘experience of the revolution’ than to write about it”. See Postscript to “State and Revolution”, 112.

⁷⁵Harding, *op. cit.*, 3.

IV. "A PIECE OF 'HEGELIAN WEAKNESS'"?

As a statement of Lenin's inclinations, *State and Revolution* is very revealing. It might be argued that this book is an anomaly amongst the others. Closer examination suggests though that the book is an affirmation of Lenin's longstanding commitment to revolutionary tactics. Furthermore, in spite of his exaltation of proletarian spontaneity rather than the machinations of the Party, Lenin's basic commitment to the state as the leading force in a proletarian revolution reconciles *State and Revolution* with other works such as *What is to Be Done?* However, his insistence in *State and Revolution* that the state must assume a leading role in the abolition of class conflict and the reconciliation of egoistic man with his ethical community raises the question of how well it can be accommodated within the Marxist theory of the state. Unlike Hegel, who believed that the state was the universal light of reason in the world, Marx understood the state to be at all times a reflection of civil society. As part of the superstructure of material life, the state was a mindless executor of the needs of capital and had no capacity to change material conditions. To Marx, the state was as incapable of altering its material basis as the human mind is of reconstituting the physical brain of which it is an epiphenomenon. As an expression of antagonism within civil society, the state would exist for as long as egoistic self-interest reigned in the civil sphere and individuals remained incapable of reabsorbing the coercive functions of the state into themselves. Lenin, for all practical purposes, dispensed with Marx's conception of the state as a symptom of conflict in civil

society and reconstituted the state as self-supporting and capable of the revolutionary transformation of civil consciousness. The result was to be nothing less than the abolition of civil conflict, and the creation of a transparent and monological society in which the state would become irrelevant.

If the consistency of Lenin's *State and Revolution* with his other works, in spite of its 'utopian' appearance, makes it remarkable, then the role it assigns to the state in the life of civil consciousness is outright provocative. Lenin's apparent hostility to the state was tempered by his enthusiasm for a state-heavy doctrine of proletarian rule. Prior to withering away, the state was to assume a universal form and facilitate the universalization of civil society. In this way, a state-centred approach to rule would inaugurate statelessness—a Hegelian paradox. By arguing that the state can stand apart from the puerile demands of civil society, and that it can express the universal interests of human beings, Lenin not only rejects Marx, but affirms the conception of the state which Marx rejected in Hegel. This is not to say that *State and Revolution* should be branded summarily as a 'Hegelian' text. However, to read *State and Revolution* from the Hegelian standpoint brings its subterranean values of state universality, and the universalizing capacity of the state, to the surface. Most importantly, it provides a good basis for assessing Lenin's claim to the torch of Marxism. If one pushes to the point of philosophical clarity the theory of the state which is implicit in Lenin's political program, Lenin's claim to "restore the true doctrine of Marx on the state" is tenuous at best.

Though Lenin insisted that it was Marx's thought which animated the Bolshevik movement, it was, arguably, the spectre of Hegel which hovered over it.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

At the centre of this discussion have been three different conceptions of the state's role in the development of civil consciousness.

For Hegel, the theory of the state, as it is presented in *Philosophy of Right*, is a parenthesis within Hegel's account of reality in general. As explained in Chapter One, the primary reality is, for Hegel, Absolute Mind. Absolute Mind does not stand aside from material reality. Rather, material reality is alienated Absolute Mind; it is Absolute Mind having entered into its finite phase and existing in a state of separation from itself. As Hegel explains in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, history is the process by which Absolute Mind overcomes this separation, and finite mind is reintegrated into infinite mind. This historical movement is necessary because, without it, Absolute Mind would be, in Hegel's words, "only the universal".¹ Mind in its initial, undifferentiated form would be incapable of reflecting upon itself and being conscious of itself *as* Absolute

¹*Phenomenology of Spirit* (A.V. Miller, trans.; Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1952]), §20.

Mind. In this form, Mind has only perfect identity with itself and is analogous to “the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black”.² In order to break with this self-referential identity, Absolute Mind must separate off from itself a finite sphere. Absolute Mind thus objectifies itself in the form of finite human mind, and in the form of all material reality that human beings encounter. It is through finite mind’s mediation that Absolute Mind is able to reflect upon itself and become truly self-conscious of itself as absolute. History is thus, for Hegel, a process in which Absolute Mind divides itself into an infinite and a finite sphere, and then strives to overcome this separation between subject and object, universal and particular.

In Hegel’s political philosophy, the state is the highest form of Mind as it exists in the world of human experience. Its purpose is to facilitate the historical process of reuniting finite mind with the universal by helping its citizens to understand their own freedom as a particular instance of the universal will. In the actual Hegelian state, freedom and obligation are no longer separate. This is not to say that the private sphere is swallowed up in a ‘totalitarian’ fashion. Rather, the institutional structures of the state—the Executive and the Estates—mediate between the private and collective spheres and bring about a coincidence of the two. Though these institutional structures are composed of people, the collective will as it is embodied in the state is understood by Hegel not to arise from popular opinion but from historical reason. In short, history as it is revealed in the lives of human beings is the process by which the empirical world

² *Ibid.*, §16.

comes to reason in accordance with the imperatives of Absolute Mind, and the state is the motivating force behind this process.

For Hegel, the alienation of the individual will from the collective will, and its subsequent resolution, is essential; in contrast, Marx sees alienation as inessential and invariably a negative thing. While to Hegel the purpose of the state is to help people reconcile their self-interest with the interest of the ethical community, Marx sees the state as an instance in which people become slaves to their own creation. Marx's critique of the state, as it was described in Chapter Two, was derived in part from Feuerbach's critique of religion, which revealed God to be the objectification of such qualities as benevolence and wisdom which are subsequently projected upon Heaven and confronted by human beings as independent realities. God was, to Feuerbach, the illusory objectification of all of the things that human beings most desired. Similarly, Marx saw the state as the illusion of objective universality. In his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State", through an evaluation of the mediating structures posited by Hegel—the Executive and the Estates—Marx demonstrated that Hegel's 'universal' state would fail to engender ethical thought in its citizens. Instead, the state was shown to be subordinate to the self-interest of the bureaucrats and representatives of which it was composed, and to private property. From this, Marx concluded that the state had no power to engender ethical life in civil society, and that the state was nothing but a section of civil society which exercised the state's coercive instruments in its own interest and justified its actions with a thin veneer of universality. To Marx, the reconciliation of the individual and

collective wills which Hegel sought could not be achieved by attempting to bring the self-interested individual up to the level of the 'universal' state; rather, this illusory universal must be reabsorbed into each individual. This reabsorption would not entail the extinction of individuality for the sake of the universal good, but the full emancipation of the individual by substituting authentic community life for the ersatz community of Hegel's state.

When laying out his theory of the revolutionary socialist state in *State and Revolution*, Lenin invoked the name of Marx and insisted that his theory was true to Marx's doctrine on the state. However, as was shown in Chapter Three, though Lenin agreed with Marx's conclusion that the state is necessarily a reflection of the myriad egoistic self-interests of civil society, his vision of socialist revolution was premised upon the leading role of the state. Marx did believe that state power would have to be consolidated under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', and that this state form would administer the transition from bourgeois society to communist society—in which the state would be superseded. Thus, Marx clearly did not equate the dictatorship of the proletariat (a kind of state) with the achievement of a commune-society (the negation of the state). Most importantly, because he recognized that any state is inherently a symptom of class conflict, he had no faith in the capacity of a state, proletarian or not, to engender universality in its citizens. The state, as Marx argued, cannot determine that by which it is determined. Because of Lenin's emphasis on the leading role of the state in socialist society, there is a theoretical tension that runs throughout *State and Revolution*. While

Lenin agrees with Marx that the state is a reflection of class conflict, and an admission of the irreconcilability of this conflict, he also upholds the capacity of the state to ameliorate class conflict, to be universal, and to recast civil society in the image of its universality. In *State and Revolution*, class domination is made the condition of class emancipation, and the state is made an instrument rather than something to be transcended.

At first, it might seem contradictory that I insist upon driving a wedge between Marx and Lenin having also granted, at the outset of my discussion, the strength of Kolakowski's position that such an act has, of necessity, ideological underpinnings. Our attitude towards the relationship of Marxism to Bolshevism, according to Kolakowski, ought to be similar to our attitude towards, for example, the relationship between Christianity and the Spanish Inquisition. The enquirer into the history of Christian thought cannot be content to argue that the excesses of the Inquisition resulted from the depravity of Torquemada or the distortion of the true Christian doctrine. Rather, he must seek what it was about Christianity that, in the fullness of time, gave rise to such cruelty and extreme actions. Similarly, the student of Marxist thought cannot be content with the conclusion that the genesis of the totalitarian Soviet state can be located entirely in Lenin's misinterpretation of Marx's writing or in the primitive material conditions of post-Tsarist Russia. Lest his inquiry turn into an ideological exercise which aims either to *legitimize* Soviet communism by demonstrating that Lenin was the rightful heir of the Marxist torch, or to *absolve* Marx of responsibility for Soviet communism by

demonstrating Lenin's deviation from orthodox Marxist theory, the enquirer must also ask how Marx's thought made Bolshevism, and the Soviet state, possible.

When one considers the works of Marx which were available to Lenin, Lenin's revolutionary doctrine can be seen as an entirely logical outcome of Marx's thought. In writings such as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx pointed to a future in which the division between the particular desires of individual people, and the needs of the community, would be overcome. However, the classless future adumbrated by Marx was not accompanied by any well-articulated principles of revolutionary practice. Thus, Lenin faced serious problems when trying to draw practical conclusions from Marx's thought and translate it into a political program. To the extent that Marx recognized the high probability of revolutionary violence in the abolition of the bourgeois order, and that state power, consolidated under the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat, would be necessary to do away with the remnants of bourgeois power after the spontaneous collapse of capitalist production, Lenin's subsequent practice can be considered 'Marxist'.

Also, in accepting the commune, as it is portrayed in Marx's *Civil War in France*, as the appropriate model for post-capitalist society, Lenin upholds the only social form for which Marx showed any enthusiasm. As A.J. Polan has argued, Lenin's integration of the commune into his political program represented a "straightforward inheritance" from Marx.³ To Polan's mind, Lenin incorporated the only form of

³A.J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 7.

communist social organization described by Marx—the commune—without alterations, omissions, or additions. Assuming the veracity of this claim, it is possible to see how, from the perspective of Michel Foucault, Marx’s texts made Lenin’s politics possible, and how, from the perspective of Kolakowski, Marxism provided a way of thinking which, in time, gave rise to Bolshevism. Because the texts of Marx can be connected to the practice of Lenin in this fashion, Kolakowski is correct to compare Marx to Prometheus who awakes from his dream of power “as ignominiously as Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*”.⁴

However, Kolakowski’s insistence on casting Marx as Gregor Samsa, the man who awoke to find he had been transformed into a giant cockroach, perhaps obscures the fact that a more apt comparison might be Josef K. from Kafka’s *Trial*—the man who was served with charges against which he could not respond and condemned for an offense about which he had no knowledge. While Kolakowski’s approach saves his analysis from the ideological absolutism which was characteristic of discussions of Marx and Lenin during the Cold War, it also makes the question of whether or not Bolshevism was a valid interpretation of Marx’s thought a meaningless one. Kolakowski avoids the profitless discussion of Bolshevism as a distortion of ‘what Marx really said’ only by making it impossible to deny that it was, in fact, Marxism which culminated in Bolshevism. In a response to Kolakowski, Ralph Miliband writes that Kolakowski improperly takes as

⁴Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: I. The Founders* (P.S. Falla trans.: Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1978]), 420.

settled that it really was Marx's thought which culminated in Soviet reality. Because of this, Kolakowski

badly underrates the degree to which so much that came after Marx directly contradicted his ideas at crucial points, and cannot therefore reasonably be taken to be in any way congruent with Marx's Marxism, or to be a 'possible interpretation' of it.⁵

Kolakowski's approach to the discussion of Marx and Lenin provides grounds for a rational discourse which is more than an ideological exercise to absolve Marx of responsibility for Lenin's deeds. However, as Miliband points out, Kolakowski's approach uncritically conflates Marxism and Leninism in a fashion which is "quite arbitrary and question-begging".⁶ Kolakowski's implicit claim that Marx's thought is the beginning of a slippery-slope ending in Bolshevism has the virtue of excluding, from the outset, all attempts to absolve Marx of culpability for Lenin's deeds. Yet, the cost of this exclusion is the exclusion of *all* critical comparison. Kolakowski, ultimately, eliminates the ideological content of the discussion of the relationship of Marx and Lenin by abrogating the discussion altogether.

Rather than accepting the conflation of Marxism-Leninism as legitimate, Miliband believes it to be "much more reasonable and accurate to stress how much that is of crucial importance separates Marx from Lenin".⁷ Kolakowski might argue that to

⁵ Ralph Miliband, "Kolakowski's Anti-Marx" in *Political Studies* (Vol. XXIX, No. 1; March 1981), 120.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

do so only serves ideological purposes and, thus, is not very informative. However, as this study has suggested, it is possible to compare and contrast the ideas of Marx and Lenin while avoiding the ideological mire. One can never say with any certainty what Marx would have thought about Lenin, or how he would have assessed Lenin's socialist program. Marx cannot be made to respond to a reality he knew nothing about. Yet, the fact that Marx offered no "condemnation in advance" of Lenin does not prescribe an uncritical conflation of 'Marxism-Leninism' after the fact.

In sum, Lenin should not be castigated for calling himself a Marxist even while holding ideas about the role and capacity of the state which were not up to the standards that Marx set for Hegel. The purpose of this study was to come to a better understanding of Lenin in his own right, not to dismiss him or offer an apology for him. As I have suggested though, there is a way to drive a wedge between the ideas of Marx and Lenin which avoids both extremes. While it would be an overstatement to characterize Lenin's theory of the revolutionary state as 'Hegelian', reading Lenin from a Hegelian perspective casts some aspects of Lenin's theory into clearer relief. Furthermore, though Marx's writing provides no "condemnation in advance" of Lenin's practice, Marx's "condemnation after the fact" of Hegel is as instructive. As I have demonstrated, Marx's theory of the state arose from an explicit rejection of the Hegelian theory. Marx's theory of the state does not contain an anticipation and condemnation of Bolshevism, nor should one be sought. Nevertheless, because Lenin's account of the state affirmed certain capacities of the state which Marx rejected in Hegel's theory, Marx's explicit critique of

Hegel also offers an implicit critique of Lenin. Lenin's theory of the revolutionary state, intentionally or not, bore the mark of Hegel; thus, Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State" speaks to the reality of Bolshevism in a way that Marx's historical or political studies cannot.

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