

Hegel, Marx, Engels, and the Origins of Marxism

A review of Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx by Tom Rockmore

By David North
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The following is second of a two-part series. The first part can be read [here](#).

The purpose of Rockmore's assault on Engels becomes transparent as soon as he turns his attention to Marx. By claiming that it was the philosophically-ignorant Engels who created what is known as "Marxism" by falsifying and distorting the conceptions of his lifelong comrade and friend, Rockmore feels free to unveil a "new" Marx—that is, one without the materialistic "narrative" (to use post-modernist jargon) that supposedly was conjured up by Engels after the former's death. And so, contrary to the claims of Engels and several generations of "Marxists," the real Marx had no substantial differences with the philosophical outlook of Hegel. Rockmore claims that "it is crucial to go beyond politically motivated claims for distinctions in kind between Marx and Hegel, or again between Marx and philosophy, or even between philosophy and science; for it is only in this way that one can see that in the final analysis Marx is not only a philosopher, or a German philosopher, but a German Hegelian, hence a German idealist philosopher" (161).

Prior to Rockmore, we are expected to believe, the "Marxists" had denied and obscured the real Marx's allegiance to idealism. The materialist and anti-Hegelian positions they ascribed to Marx were largely a product of their own theoretical incompetence in philosophical matters. "Engels knew neither philosophy nor Hegel well," writes Rockmore. "Since Engels, few Marxists, including Lenin, have been well versed in Hegel. . . . Marxist denigration of Hegel retarded awareness of his significance for Marx's position" (162).

Aside from Rockmore's attempt to reinterpret Marx as an idealist, the claim that "few Marxists, including Lenin" have made a careful study of Hegel can be dismissed as simply stupid. Again, Rockmore relies on the intellectual acquiescence of an academic community steeped in cynicism and indifference. He takes for granted that no one, at least in the academic milieu within which he operates, will take him to task for writing things that have absolutely no basis in fact. Has Rockmore ever bothered to review the writings of G. V. Plekhanov, the "Father of Russian Marxism"? Even those who disagree with Plekhanov's philosophical conceptions could not claim, in good faith, that his familiarity with Hegel was anything less than exhaustive and profound. Is Rockmore unfamiliar with Lenin's *Conspectus on Hegel's Science of Logic*? Composed in 1914-15, the later publication of Lenin's "Philosophical Notebooks"—which includes his extensive annotation of Hegel's *Logic*—had a major impact on the appreciation of the weighty theoretical basis of Lenin's political work. Rockmore seems to not be aware that it was precisely Lenin's *Conspectus* that contributed to a significant revival of

theoretical interest in Hegel among Marxist scholars—including, by the way, Lukács, for whom Rockmore professes admiration. What about the writings of Trotsky, which exhibit a mastery of dialectic method? [End Note 1] Or the works of early Soviet theoreticians such as Deborin and Axelrod? We might add as well the work of later Soviet philosophers such as Mikhail Lifshits and E. V. Ilyenkov, who made important contributions to the understanding of the Hegel-Marx relationship despite the repressive conditions, enforced by a privileged bureaucracy hostile to serious theoretical work, that existed in the U.S.S.R. (both during and after Stalin's rule).

Previously we showed that the greatest obstacle to Rockmore's efforts to portray Engels as a positivist who simply dismissed the relevance of philosophy were the words of Engels himself. Similarly, the refutation of Rockmore's claim that Marx was a German idealist is to be found in his own writings. The manner in which Rockmore tiptoes around the works of Marx, citing rather sparingly and highly selectively, indicates that he himself realizes that his thesis rests on rather shaky ground. Rockmore gets off to a bad start by stating that Marx "is in part responsible" for the widespread belief that he broke from Hegel. This is because in an oft-quoted passage in the *Afterword* to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx "obscurely" suggests that his own position results from the inversion of Hegel's. Since Engels, generations of Marxists have approached Marx's position as the inversion of Hegel's.

Actually, there is nothing that is in the least obscure in the passage to which Rockmore refers. This is what Marx wrote in January 1873:

"My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.* the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he 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" (*Capital*, Volume 1, Moscow, 1970, p. 29).

This English translation is a faithful rendition of what Marx wrote in the original German. There is nothing in Marx's words that is obscure, oblique or confused. Marx is saying, as clearly as he possibly can, that his own method is fundamentally different than Hegel's—"its direct opposite." And why? Because Hegel's dialectic is that of an idealist for whom the real world is a merely a manifestation of thought; whereas for Marx, thought forms are a reflection in the human mind of a real existing material world. Take extra note of the fact that the phrase "*reflected by the human mind*" is used by Marx. But Rockmore tells us (on page 6) that "For our purposes, it suffices to point out that the reflection theory of

knowledge, which was later adopted by a long line of Marxists, has no basis in Marx's writing." As we have already noted, anything goes!

Rockmore has no end of difficulties with the writings of Marx. Referring to Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Rockmore states that "The text, which Marx did not prepare for publication, is repetitive and somewhat painful to read" (47). No doubt it is—for Rockmore. The cause of his discomfort is that the content of Marx's *Critique* cannot be in any way reconciled with Rockmore's attempt to portray Marx as a Hegelian idealist. With the writing of this *Critique*, Marx initiated the intense theoretical work (to which Engels contributed significantly) that shattered the idealist framework of Hegel's philosophical system, demystified his dialectical method, and established the foundations for the development of a genuinely materialist ontology rooted in the historical study of man as a *social being*. The decisive achievement of Marx's *Critique*, for which the earlier work of Ludwig Feuerbach (who goes virtually unmentioned by Rockmore) provided a critical philosophical impulse, was his demonstration of the essential inadequacy of Hegel's speculative idealism as an instrument of historical and social analysis. With Hegel, the logical categories, which he elaborated as objective moments in the dialectical reconstitution of the Absolute Idea, represented the underlying and inner foundation of material reality itself. He derived the forms of Being from the dialectical process of abstract logical thought. Marx established that Hegel's procedure reversed the real relationship between consciousness and reality, and by so doing prevented the genuine cognition of the "civil society" (as Hegel referred to the existing social order) within which man lived. Rather than discovering the material source of real social processes, Hegel deals with them in terms of abstract logical relations. As Marx explains:

"The transition of the family and civil society into the political state is, therefore, this: the mind of these spheres, which is *implicitly* the mind of the state, now also behaves to itself as such and is *actual* for itself as their inner core. The transition is thus derived, not from the *particular* nature of the family, etc., and from the particular nature of the state, but from the *general* relationship of *necessity* to *freedom*. It is exactly the same transition as is effected in logic from the sphere of essence to the sphere of the concept. The same transition is made in the philosophy of nature from inorganic nature to life. It is always the same categories which provide the soul, now for this, now for that sphere. It is only a matter of spotting for the separate concrete attributes the corresponding abstract attributes" (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, New York, 1976, p. 10).

By way of example, Marx examines a characteristically convoluted and obscure passage from Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*, which reads:

"Necessity in ideality [writes Hegel] is the *development* of the idea within itself. As *subjective* substantiality it is *political conviction*, as *objective* substantiality, in distinction therefrom, it is the *organism* of the state, the strictly *political* state and *its constitution*" (Cited in Volume 3, p. 10).

Marx then exposes the analytical poverty, even sophistry, which is concealed in the abstruse Hegelian jargon:

"The *subject* here is 'necessity in ideality'—the 'idea within itself.' The *predicate*: *political conviction* and the *political constitution*. In plain language *political conviction* is the subjective and the *political constitution* the *objective substance* of the state. The logical development from family and civil society to the state is thus sheer *pretence*. For it is not explained how family sentiment, civil sentiment, the institution of the family and social institutions as such are related to political conviction and to the political constitution, and how they are connected" (Volume 3, p. 10-11).

In Hegel, writes Marx, "The sole interest is in rediscovering 'the idea' pure and simple, the 'logical idea,' in every element, whether of the state

or of nature, and the actual subjects, in this case the 'political constitution,' come to be nothing but their mere *names*, so that all that we have is the appearance of real understanding. *They are and remain uncomprehended, because they are not grasped in their specific character*" (Volume 3, p. 12. Emphasis mine).

The essential weakness of Hegel's method is that "He does not develop his thinking from the object, but expounds the object in accordance with a thinking that is cut and dried—already formed and fixed in the abstract sphere of logic. It is not a question of evolving the specific idea of the political constitution, but of establishing a relationship of the political constitution to the abstract idea, of placing it as a phase in the life-history of the idea, a manifest piece of mystification."

Thus, Marx sums up the fundamental error of the Hegelian approach: "Philosophical work does not consist in embodying thinking in political definitions, but in evaporating the existing definitions into abstract thoughts. Not the logic of the matter, but the matter of logic is the philosophical element. The logic does not serve to prove the state, but the state to prove the logic" (Volume 3, p. 18).

Rockmore skips over Marx's profound critique of Hegel's methodology. It is simply too "painful." He makes a brief and vague reference to Marx's criticism of Hegel's derivation of the state from logic, without acknowledging its far-reaching significance in the theoretical development of Marx himself. In fact, Rockmore tries to dismiss it as a misunderstanding, stating that "we must ask ourselves whether Marx's critique of Hegel does justice to Hegel, or rather rests on an incorrect reading of Hegel" (48). This question exposes the intellectual dishonesty that underlies Rockmore's project. Marx is, on the one hand proclaimed to be a Hegelian idealist, and the subsequent creation of an anti-idealist "Marxism" is the product of distortions introduced by the materialist usurper, Friedrich Engels. Yet, on the other hand, whenever Rockmore is compelled to make reference to works by Marx that criticize Hegel along materialist lines, the professor suggests that Marx simply did not know what he was talking about.

Rockmore proceeds with the same evasiveness when dealing with the series of works that followed the *Critique* in which Marx (with the increasingly significant collaboration of Engels) carried through his materialist demystification and reworking of the Hegelian dialectic. Rockmore has virtually nothing to say about Marx's lengthy and detailed analysis of the Hegelian method in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx entitled this section, *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*. I will resist the temptation to quote extensively from this invaluable text, which deepens the analysis of the Hegelian method previously developed in the *Critique*. However, it is necessary to emphasize that Marx gave as his reason for writing this *Critique* the vital need to distinguish his own work from that of Hegel and his epigones. He took such well-known Left Hegelians such as Bruno Bauer to task for having failed to adopt a critical attitude to their teacher. Marx, on the other hand, professed the greatest admiration for Feuerbach, whom he praised as "the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, [Moscow: 1977], p. 135). Why would Marx have paid this tribute to Feuerbach if he had continued to view himself as a Hegelian?

The next great work produced by Marx with Engels, *The Holy Family*, is also dismissed by Rockmore, who writes, "The book contains much arid polemic against Bauer and other left-wing Hegelians. When he is at his best [i.e., when Marx agrees with Rockmore], Marx is an insightful writer, attentive and quick to respond to various nuances in the authors he considers, and capable of brilliant insights. This book, on the contrary, is almost wholly polemical, mainly a collection of simplistic views [i.e., which contradict Rockmore], lacking the nuances of previous and later

Marxian writings, quicker to denounce than to comprehend, full of sharp oppositions” (75).

For Rockmore “nuance” really means obfuscation, a characteristic that is not to be found in Marx’s theoretical work. The latter’s criticism of Hegel’s position is so clearly defined that it is difficult to distort and misrepresent. It is virtually impossible to describe the conceptions advanced by Marx as compatible with the idealist speculation of Hegel. *The Holy Family* represents an immense advance toward the elaboration of the materialist conception of history and the identification of the proletariat as the objective revolutionary force in bourgeois society. The material practice of this class, not the self-movement of logical concepts, shall provide the basis for the revolutionary transformation of society. The real foundation of social revolution is lodged not in the thought of any individual worker, but in the objective social being of the proletariat as a class. The historical implications of Marx’s critique of German speculative idealism emerges with the discovery, by Marx and Engels, that “It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 4, New York, 1974, p. 37). It comes as no surprise that this crucial passage, in which the emergence of the proletariat as a new revolutionary class found in the writings of Marx and Engels as a conscious theoretical expression, is not cited by Rockmore. Presumably, he found it too “arid,” lacking in “nuance,” too “polemical,” and too “simplistic” to merit comment.

Another crucial section of *The Holy Family* which Rockmore chooses to ignore is the lengthy section on the evolution of modern materialism. Having already announced that “Materialism is a doctrine that is clear in Engels, but certainly less clear in Marx” (5), Rockmore cannot welcome *The Holy Family*’s brilliantly concise review, written by Marx himself, of the development of modern materialism since the seventeenth century and its profound contribution to the development of socialist thought:

“Just as *Cartesian* materialism passes into the *natural sciences proper*, the other trend of French materialism leads directly to *socialism* and *communism*.

“There is no need for any great penetration to see from the teaching of materialism on the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education, the influence of environment on man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc., how necessarily materialism is connected with communism and socialism. If man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man” (Volume 4, p. 130).

As a consequence of his dismissive attitude toward Marx’s critique of Hegel’s idealism, Rockmore is unable to understand either the foundations of Marx’s theory of capitalist society, let alone its most essential contributions to the development of scientific political economy. He writes:

“The central idea in his own [Marx’s] economic theory is not his theory of value, nor his account of commodities, nor again his concept of alienation, nor even his view of the fetishism of commodities. It is rather the decisive insight, based on Adam Smith and developed in part by Hegel, that modern society is a transitory stage arising from the efforts of individuals to meet their needs within the economic framework of the capitalist world” (xvi).

Here we have a banal platitude that one might encounter in a high school class on Home Economics (that modern society consists of

individuals trying to make a living) palmed off as the “decisive insight” gleaned by Marx from his painstaking analyses of the writings of Hegel and Adam Smith (to whom Marx devoted several hundred pages in his *Theories of Surplus Value*)! There is a connection, however, between this vulgar observation and Rockmore’s misrepresentation of Marx’s theoretical development. He dismisses all the most important elements of Marx’s general theory of capitalist society as a whole whose discovery and elaboration would not have been possible without the critique of speculative idealism and the materialist reworking of the Hegelian dialectic. Indeed, Marx’s “economic turn” which began in 1844 flowed necessarily from the critical stance that he had taken toward Hegel’s derivation of the world from the movement of logical concepts. The materialist explanation of the real foundations of human society and its necessary reflection in definite forms of social consciousness required that philosophy turn its attention from heaven to earth, away from God in all forms (including the philosophical God of Hegel’s Absolute Idea) to man, away from the abstract contemplation of pure thought to the study of labor as the real foundation for the creation, reproduction and cultural development of human society.

Idealism versus materialism

Notwithstanding the exhaustive and explicit character of Marx’s critique, Rockmore attempts to salvage his portrayal of Marx as an idealist philosopher who did not really break with Hegel by fooling around with terminology. He writes, “If we understand ‘idealism’ as referring to the idea that the subject in some sense produces its world and itself, then Marx is clearly an idealist” (70). In other words, anyone who accepts that human beings, endowed with consciousness, act upon the world and, in so doing, change the world and themselves, is an idealist. This definition evades the central issues involved in the collision between idealism and materialism, and would allow an amalgamation of the most diverse and incompatible philosophical outlooks. Rockmore’s definition asserts that idealism must include all philosophical tendencies that accept that consciousness is an active and creative force in history.

But this leaves unanswered two critical and interrelated philosophical issues. The first concerns the relationship of thought and matter, in which the following questions are posed: Does matter exist independently of consciousness, or does consciousness arise independently of matter? Does matter precede thought, or is it the other way around? Is the existence of a material world an absolute precondition for consciousness, or can consciousness (or spirit) exist either without or independently of a material world? Did the creation of the universe precede consciousness, or was consciousness present before the universe came into existence? The second issue, rooted in the first, raises questions relating to the nature and reliability of the cognitive process—that is, to what extent can the mind know that which exists outside of it? Is it possible for thinking to give an accurate presentation of reality?

It is the answers that different philosophers give to these questions that determine whether they belong to the camps of idealism or materialism. Those who assert, in one form or another, the primacy of thought over matter, of consciousness over being, are idealists. Those, in opposition to this position, who assert the primacy of matter over consciousness, and who insist that consciousness emerged only as the product of the evolution of matter, are materialists.

Rockmore’s definition of idealism is merely a subterfuge aimed at confusing the critical philosophical issues. Moreover, he is hardly the first to find a universal basis for idealism in the undeniable fact that human beings act with consciousness. As Engels pointed out, “we simply cannot evade the fact that everything which motivates men must pass through their brains—even eating and drinking, which begins as a consequence of the sensation of hunger or thirst transmitted through the brain, and end as a result of the sensation of satisfaction likewise transmitted through the brain. The influences of the external world upon man express themselves

in his brain, are reflected therein as feelings, thoughts, impulses volitions—in short, as ‘ideal tendencies,’ and in this form become ‘ideal powers.’ If, then, a man is to be deemed an idealist because he follows ‘ideal tendencies’ and admits that ‘ideal powers’ have an influence over him, then every person who is at all normally developed is a born idealist and how, in that case, can there be any materialists at all?” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 26, Moscow, 1990, p. 373)

It is not the recognition of the presence of “ideal powers” or their influence over human beings that is at issue in the dispute between materialism and idealism, but rather how the origins and nature of those “ideal powers” are understood and explained. Is or is not the source of the “ideal” to be found, in the final analysis, outside the mind, in an objectively existing material world?

Rockmore repeatedly attempts to misrepresent the answer which Marx gives to this question, which is consistently and unequivocally materialist. For example, in dealing with the method employed in the writing of *Capital*, Rockmore cites from the *Afterword* to the second German edition in which Marx states that “if the life of the subject matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere *a priori* construction.” Rockmore then comments:

“Marx’s wording here easily creates misunderstanding. He is obviously not espousing the reflection theory of knowledge pioneered for Marxism by Engels. He is also not saying that knowledge in fact requires that mind literally reflect an independent world” (131). Once again, Rockmore attempts to deny the materialism of Marx and to counterpose his views to those of Engels by means of a subterfuge. The use of the word “literally” is a red herring introduced only to create confusion. The crucial issue is whether the mind reflects an independent world. The ideal forms in which the material world is reflected are complex and contradictory. The ideal reproduction of the real in the human mind proceeds through a historically and socially-conditioned process of abstraction. In this specific sense, the mind is not functioning merely as a “mirror,” in which reality is, on the basis of immediate reflection, reproduced in all its complexity. [End Note 2] But still, in the final analysis, the images, thoughts and concepts that emerge in the human mind are reflections of an objective reality that exists outside the mind of the cognizing subject.

The very words by Marx quoted by Rockmore appear in the *Afterword* to *Capital* almost immediately after a lengthy passage in which Marx’s philosophical outlook and analytical method were described by a contemporary reviewer writing for a Russian journal. Marx cited approvingly from the review, which states in part, “Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but rather, on the contrary, determining that will, consciousness and intelligence. ... If in the history of civilization the conscious element plays a part so subordinate, then it is self-evident that a critical inquiry whose subject-matter is civilization, can, less than anything else, have for its basis any form of, or any result of, consciousness. That is to say, that not the idea, but the material phenomenon alone can serve as its starting point” (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 27).

Rockmore chooses not to cite this passage.

Instead, Rockmore proceeds to conclude his potted analysis of the *Afterword* by claiming that Marx “reaffirms the obvious in declaring himself a Hegelian...” In fact, Marx describes himself not as a Hegelian but, more precisely and correctly, as “the pupil of that mighty thinker”—having already explained in detail that which separated the materialist student from the idealist teacher. He concludes the exposition of the relationship of his method to that of Hegel by stating, “The 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 *Capital*’s shell” (

It should be clear by now that Rockmore’s claim that “Marx is clearly an idealist” (70); and that “Marx, as distinguished from Marxism, is committed to idealism” (179) is a gross and obvious falsification of the philosophical position held by Marx from 1843 until his death in 1883. However, it is appropriate to settle this particular argument by letting Marx, once again, speak for himself. In a letter written to his friend Ludwig Kugelmann on March 6, 1868, Marx sharply criticizes a review of *Capital* that was written by a young professor, Eugen Dühring (later to become the subject of Engels’ immortal polemic). Complaining that Dühring “practices deception,” Marx writes, “He knows full well that my method of exposition is *not* Hegelian, since I am a materialist, and Hegel an idealist. Hegel’s dialectics is the basic form of all dialectics, but only *after* being stripped of its mystical form, and it is precisely this which distinguishes *my* method” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 42, New York, 1987, p. 544, emphasis in the original).

It is hard to believe that Professor Rockmore failed to come across this well-known letter in the course of preparing the writing of his book. Rather, he simply chose to ignore it. Thus, the charge leveled by Marx against Dühring can be placed just as fittingly on Rockmore’s doorstep.

Marx the reformist?

What, then, is the purpose of Rockmore’s tortured efforts to separate Marx from Engels and Marxism, while at the same time reclaiming him as a Hegelian idealist? The answer finally comes near the conclusion of the book, when Rockmore purports to discover a “stunning passage” in Volume 3 of *Capital* in which Marx repudiated his earlier views on the necessity of social revolution. “According to Marx,” writes Rockmore, “freedom, which only begins where forced labor ceases, consists in establishing control over the economic process in conditions favorable to human beings. Although real needs must still, and will always need to be, met through the economic process, that is, within the realm of necessity, beyond it lies what Marx now calls the realm of freedom. In suggesting that its prerequisite lies in shortening the working day, he implies that as the goal of history real freedom lies in free time” (173).

Rockmore then cites at length from Marx:

“In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite” (Rockmore 173; passage appears in *Capital*, Volume 3, London, 1974, p. 820).

I have reproduced the passage as cited by Rockmore in its entirety, so that the reader may decide for him- or herself whether the conclusion drawn by Rockmore is in the least justified by what Marx actually wrote.

“Many things could be said about this remarkable passage. Perhaps the most obvious is that, after many years of fighting for communism, Marx here just as obviously abandons it as a precondition for real human freedom. Freedom no longer lies in a break with a previous stage of society, that is in revolution, but in a basic improvement in conditions of

life, or in reform. In a word, Marx here substitutes reform for revolution” (173).

It is no doubt true that many things could be said about this passage, but nothing that Rockmore says is correct. To find in this passage a rejection of revolution in favor of reform requires that one attribute to virtually every sentence its opposite meaning. “Freedom,” proclaims Marx, can be realized by “socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature...” This, of course, can be achieved only through the overthrow of capitalism, a mode of production where economic anarchy prevails in the form of the all-powerful market. On this basis, freedom—understood as the development of man’s creative capacities beyond the sphere of work dictated by the necessity to maintain and reproduce life—will expand. Freedom arises out of and remains rooted in necessity, that is, man’s need to obtain from nature that which he needs to survive and reproduce. As for the shortening of the working day, that is the basic measurement of the gradual encroachment of freedom upon necessity—but not itself the realization of freedom, and certainly not within the framework of capitalism. Nothing in this passage supports the next statement by Rockmore:

“Marxism has traditionally been hostile to mere reform. Yet in this passage Marx seems to hold out hope that modern industrial society and real human freedom are compatible if and only if human beings can reestablish control over the economic process, which is the real master in capitalist society.” But rational control over economic life is not possible under capitalism, nor can the drive for profit be subordinated to the realization of purely human needs.

What Rockmore advocates—a Marx without historical materialism, without Engels, without Marxism—proves in the end to be a Marx without socialist revolution, a “Marx” that is not simply stood on his head, but also handcuffed and gagged.

Epilogue

It is necessary to attach to this review a brief epilogue. The publication of *Marx After Marxism* has been followed by the release of a volume edited by Professor Rockmore, entitled *The Philosophical Challenge of September 11* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005). In the introduction to this volume, co-authored by Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (Professor of Philosophy at Temple University), we read the following:

“One wonders whether we are prepared to address 9/11 in accord with the familiar terms and categories of our tradition, or whether they are even adequate to the task. We are no longer certain of our analytic instruments. ... Political philosophy as we have known it now seems outdated, seems unable to help us in our hour of need.

“One suspects that the impasse extends to other demands. All of our ready conceptual assurances are confounded by 9/11. The assumption that we have captured the world in our theories has been stalemated by the world itself. The world has changed in ways no one could have foreseen. We cannot diagnose the events of 9/11 by any simple application of the usual tools. They defy our sense of legible order, and we cannot say that our categories will adjust again” (3).

As a confession of theoretical paralysis and intellectual bankruptcy in the face of reality, one can hardly imagine a more embarrassing self-exposure. Professor Rockmore would have us believe that the airplanes seized by the hijackers shattered not only the World Trade Center, but also the cognitive and analytical structures developed in the course of 2,500 years of philosophical thought.

Rockmore does not tell us what it is that imparted to the events of 9/11 their singularly incomprehensible character. After all that happened in the twentieth century—the horrors of two world wars, the Holocaust, the Stalinist purges, the dropping of two atomic bombs, and countless other acts of barbarism that in their totality claimed the lives of hundreds of

millions of human beings—what is it that sets September 11, 2001 apart from all antecedent tragedies? What new and heretofore unimagined qualities and characteristics did the events of that day reveal?

It now seems fairly obvious that Rockmore’s assault on Marxism left him singularly unprepared for the very first political challenge of the twenty-first century. Having proclaimed the death of “Marxism” and the philosophical illegitimacy of the Marxist refutation of Hegelian idealism, Rockmore quite clearly has failed to discover an alternative theoretical structure that would enable him to analyze and understand contemporary reality.

Concluded

End Notes:

[1] In his polemical response to Professor James Burnham, a pragmatist and bitter opponent of Hegel (whom he had denounced as the “century-dead, arch-muddler of human thought”), Trotsky paid tribute to the great German philosopher: “Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of science. But because it was only an *anticipation*, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies” (*In Defense of Marxism* [London: 1971], p. 66). At the conclusion of the faction fight that erupted inside the Trotskyist movement in 1939-40, Burnham repudiated socialist politics and began his rapid political evolution to the extreme right. (Back to text)

[2] Lenin, in his *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, wrote: “Logic is the science of cognition. It is the theory of knowledge. Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws, etc., and these concepts, laws, etc. (thought, science = ‘the logical Idea’) *embrace* conditionally, approximately, the universal law-governed character of eternally moving and developing nature. Here there are *actually* objectively, **three** members: 1) nature; 2) human cognition = the human **brain** (as the highest product of this same nature), and 3) the form of reflection of nature in human cognition, and this form consists precisely of concepts, laws, categories, etc. Man cannot comprehend = reflect = mirror nature *as a whole*, in its completeness, its ‘immediate totality,’ he can only *eternally* come closer to this, creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of the world, etc., etc.” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 [Moscow, 1972], p. 182, emphasis in the original).

And in another passage, Lenin noted: “Cognition is the eternal, endless approximation of thought to the object. The *reflection* of nature in man’s thought must be understood not ‘lifelessly,’ not ‘abstractly,’ *not devoid of movement, not without contradictions*, but in the eternal *process* of movement, the arising of contradictions and their solution” (Ibid, p. 195, emphasis in the original). (Back to text)

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