

## The Criticism of Modern Society and Labor: One Aspect of the Difference between Marx and Hegel

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- I. Marx's criticism and appreciation of Hegel
- II. The formulation of Hegel's concept of labor
- III. Conclusion

Hegel and Marx concentrated on the disintegration of modern society, especially the disunion of the state and the civil society in the modern era (Shibata 2014). According to Marx, the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era corresponds to the development of animals into human beings, and the abstract, universal human being appears in the modern era for the first time in the history (Marx 1975a, p.81). However, this type of the human being is, as Marx says, “the completion of the idealism of the state ... [and] at the same time the completion of the materialism of civil society” (Marx 1975b, p.166). This dualistic being suffers from the division of the idea and material, or the mind and body, thus serving as the essential foundation for the complementarity relations between idealistic nationalism and materialistic applause for the market, which can be seen throughout the modern era. The romantic criticisms of modern society<sup>1)</sup> are valued by Marx as one-dimensional because they miss this dualism.

In the earlier stages of development, the single individual seems to be developed more fully, because he has not yet worked out his relationships in their fullness, or erected them as independent social powers and relations opposite to himself. It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history comes to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore, the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end. (Marx1993,

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1) Beiser speaks of the criticism of the civil society by the early German romantics (Beiser 1992, pp. 232-239). They criticized the division of labor, which demands dull and enervating tasks from people; materialism, i.e., the pursuit of money and the satisfaction of material needs; and the egoism of civil society, which is made into its first principle. He regards the early German romantics as the foreshadowers of Hegel and Marx, but such an evaluation is one-sided.

The unity of modernism and romanticism originates, needless to say, from the dualism of state and civil-society that is specific to modern society and the dualism of private and public man in modern society. Therefore, the overcoming of modernism cannot be the return to the romanticism, but its overcoming.

Homelessness and uprootedness in the modern world have been subjects of discussion since the birth of the modern era. Hegel was, in particular, the first philosopher who made it his lifelong task to investigate the overcoming of this dissolution of the human being in the modern world. Under the influence of the French Revolution, Hegel and his fellow students at the University of Tübingen, Hölderlin and Schelling, devoted their lives to the cultural horizons opened up by the Revolution. We also must grasp the distress of these young cultured Germans, insofar as our “social revolution” does not exceed the frame of the state or policy; that is, we have not overcome the dualism of the state and civil-society, which is the achievement of the French Revolution.

For young Hegel, the subject of this article, the task was to overcome both modernism and romanticism. For him, the freedom brought by the French Revolution was above all freedom from religion, and it demanded the thorough criticism of the existing religious regime. Hegel compared the life of the ancient Greek polis to the religious regime of his time, which involves the alienation and externalization of folkways, and he tried to overcome it.<sup>3)</sup>

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2) Hegel also criticizes romanticism as follows, and his criticism is very close to that of Marx: The idea [*Vorstellungen*] of the innocence of the ethical simplicity of uncultured [*ungebildeter*] people implies that education [*Bildung*] will be regarded as something purely external and associated with corruption. On the other hand, if one believes that needs, their satisfaction, the pleasures and comforts of individual [*partikularen*] life, etc. are absolute ends, education will be regarded as merely a means to these ends. Both of these views show a lack of familiarity with the nature of spirit and with the end of reason (Hegel 1991, p. 224).

3) Hegel analyzed the reason why the ancient world went to ruin and the modern world appeared and positioned modern people as bearers of the shift from the ethical world to self-alienated world and Christianity as the private religion which responds to the private life of modern people: “Reason could never give it up; somewhere the absolute, the independent, and the practical have to be found. It is not possible to find them in the will of the people anymore. Although it appears in the divinity that Christianity gave to reason, it appears out of our power, our will, but not out of our earnest desire and prayer.” [Die Vernunft konnte es nie aufgeben, doch irgendwo das Absolute, das Selbständige, Praktische zu finden, in dem Willen der Menschen war es nicht mehr anzutreffen; es zeigte sich ihr noch in der Gottheit, die christliche Religion ihr darbot, außerhalb der Sphäre unserer Macht, unseres Wollens, doch nicht unseres Flehens und Bittens] (Hegel 1971, S.208).

“The rape of freedom forced him, let his eternal, his absolute loose in the deity—the misery that spread had forced him to seek happiness in heaven and to hope. The objectification of God has proceeded

Hegel saw emancipated powers developing their maximum abilities in the modern era and painfully understood that he had to throw away his youthful dreams and tackle the reality of the present if he was to analyze it penetratingly. Therefore, for Hegel, the modern era had shifted its center of gravity from political freedom to economic freedom. He began meticulously studying the economists James Steuart, Adam Smith, and David Ricardo. Through this research, he arrived at the structure of the civil-society, which he expressed as “the mediation of need and the satisfaction of the individual [*des Einzelnen*] through his work and through the work and satisfaction of the needs of all the others--the system of needs” (Hegel 1991, p.226), “a system of all-round interdependence,” and “the external state, the state of necessity and of the understanding” (Hegel 1991, p.221) that appears as an entity with self-motion.

Hegel organized his social philosophy as the system of “family–civil society–state” based on this “system of needs” or “system of all-round interdependence” and aimed to overcome the modern society in the state. However, the organization of his social philosophy expresses, at the same time, deep contradiction and penetrating insight. To put it another way, in his social philosophy, the development from family through civil society to state is at once the development and sublation of the contradiction at each stage, but this sublation is absolutely ideal and ideological, leaving the dualism of the state and civil society, or the contradiction in the real world.

In my former article, I pursued the sublation of the dualist structure of the state-civil society that was explored by Marx and made clear that the direction of his studies stands opposite to that of Hegel. Marx highlighted the adversarial relationship in the dualism of the state-civil society and life itself and laid down a path to the sublation of this practical contradiction (Shibata 2014). Nevertheless, in that article, I did not clarify the origin of the contradictory directions in Marx and Hegel’s studies, although both tried to burst through the unity of modernism and romanticism. What is the difference between “life itself” (Marx) and “natural morality” (Hegel)? Did not young Hegel come down from “religion” and “politics” to “economy” and finally find “labor,” as did Marx? Because both Marx and Hegel took labor as the principal element of their philosophies, we have to grasp the difference of their concepts of labor to understand their contrariety in depth. In this article I would like to compare the concepts of labor in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx) and the *System of Ethical Life (1802/3)* (Hegel) to achieve this purpose.

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together with the corruption and slavery of the people, and the objectification of God is really just a phenomenon of this spirit of the time.” [Raub der Freiheit hatte ihn gezwungen, sein Ewiges, sein Absolutes in die Gottheit zu flüchten, - das Elend, das jener verbreitete, hatte ihn gezwungen, Glückseligkeit im Himmel zu suchen und zu erwarten. Die Objektivität der Gottheit ist mit der Verdorbenheit und Sklaverei der Menschen in gleichem Schritte gegangen, und jene ist eigentlich nur eine Offenbarung, nur eine Erscheinung dieses Geistes der Zeiten] (Hegel 1971, S.211–212).

## I . Marx's criticism and appreciation of Hegel

Before we concretely investigate Hegel's concept of labor, I would like to survey Marx's evaluation of Hegel in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The evaluation appears mostly in the Third Manuscript's "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole." Marx's attitude towards Hegel's dialectic here is based mostly on Feuerbach's naturalism. However, at the same time, Marx attained the concept of "activity," which could never have emerged from Feuerbach's criticism of religion, through the criticism of the private property ("state of national economics"), which is the externalized and alienated form of this human activity. Nonetheless, this concept of activity forms, in fact, the core of Hegel's dialectic; therefore, Marx's criticism of Hegel should not be seen as materialist criticism of an idealist. Marx assumes here against Hegel not an absolutely antagonistic relation; rather, he alternates between criticism and appreciation: Marx thinks that he should take over the dialectic, but it must be criticized comprehensively at the same time. Marx seems to contrast the idealistic dialectic with the materialistic; however, the dialectic involves both the human being who inhabits and is active in the world and who makes it objective, and the way of thinking that grasps both this activity and the human being; therefore, both the idealistic dialectic and the materialistic dialectic interact and are not absolutely set against each other.<sup>4)</sup>

Marx evaluates Hegel's dialectic in the third manuscript, which along with *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is "the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy" (Marx 1975, p. 329), rather than his earlier works, such as the *System of Ethical Life (1802/3)*, which I would like to explore in this article. If there is a shift in the argument between *the*

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4) In this respect, Fredric Jameson makes an interesting comparison of the Mar and Hegel's dialectic: "Thus dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness and may be described as the attempt to think about a given object on one level, and at the same time to observe our own thought processes as we do so: or to use a more scientific figure, to reckon the position of the observer into the experiment itself. In this light, the difference between the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectics can be defined in terms of the type of self-consciousness involved. For Hegel this is a relatively logical one, and involves a sense of the interrelationship of such purely intellectual categories as subject and object, quality and quantity, limitation and infinity, and so forth; here the thinker comes to understand the way in which his own determinate thought processes, and indeed the very forms of the problems from which he sets forth, limit the results of his thinking. For the Marxist dialectic, on the other hand, the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by this class position—in short of the ideological and situational nature of all thought and of the initial invention of the problems themselves. Thus, it is clear that these two forms of the dialectic in no way contradict each other, even though their precise relationship remains to be worked out" (Jameson 1974, p.340).

*Phenomenology of Spirit* and his earlier works, the Hegel criticized by Marx differs from the Hegel of this article. Considering this problem, I would like to examine, first, Marx's appreciation of Hegel.

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labor and comprehends objective man—true, because real man—as the outcome of man's own labor (Marx 1975, pp. 332–333).

Here, Marx appreciates Hegel because he grasped “the essence of labor.” This labor is “the self-creation of man,” which appears as “a process” from objectification through the loss of the object and alienation to the transcendence of this alienation. Marx's appreciation of Hegel, read independently, makes it difficult to distinguish Marx from Hegel. Could Hegel be Marx's predecessor, since he grasped “the essence of labor”? Marx argues that “the essence of labor” is the foundation by which to sublimate private property—the focused expression of the contradiction in modern civil society (“alienated labor” of the First Manuscript). Thus, only the identities of Hegel and Marx seems to be highlighted.

However, Marx criticizes Hegel, who grasped “the essence of labor,” in another place.

“He grasps labor as the essence of man—as man's essence which stands the test: he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labor. Labor is man's coming-to-be for himself within alienation, or as alienation, or as an alienated man.” (Marx 1975, p. 333)

Hegel is criticized because he sees only “the positive side” and not “the negative side” of labor. We must confirm here Marx's true intention in his appreciation and criticism of Hegel. What is the negative side of labor? Does Hegel really miss this side of labor, as Marx says? This, one of the important problems discussed in this article, is not easily solved. When we consider Marx not only in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* but also in *The Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*, he himself sees labor positively as a self-confirming act, since the later Marx grasped labor as the labor process, the “eternal necessity” of human history.

Marx writes, “Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy” (Marx 1975, p. 333). The concept of labor in this modern political economy includes its negative side, exploited labor. According to Marx, political economy, especially that of Adam Smith, rightly acknowledges “labor as its principle” and no longer looks upon “private property as a mere condition external to man” (Marx 1975, p. 290). It grasped labor as “the subjective essence