

Herbert Marcuse: No Dialectics, No Critique

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The purpose of this text is to reconstruct and to discuss how and why Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), a Marxist thinker and a member of the Frankfurt School, placed such a focus on Hegel’s dialectical philosophy and why this emphasis was decisive for his Marxist thinking. Even if an understanding of Marcuse’s reception of Hegel is not reducible to this Marxist “usage”, this dimension—that is, Hegel’s importance for Marxism—seems to be crucial. The historical connection between Hegel and Marx is well known: Marx’s thinking was very much inspired by Hegel’s dialectical philosophy of the human, history and society. But this connection will not be at issue for the following examination. Rather, the relevant questions for the present study are: why did Marcuse make such an effort to highlight Hegel’s thinking as especially important for his critical and Marxist theory, not only as an implicit background figure for Marx and Marxism in general? And how was this integration of Hegel into Marxist theory achieved? Even if some attempts have been made to explain why Marcuse put so much of his theoretical energy into Hegel, the question cannot be viewed as entirely solved. For instance, Douglas Kellner writes, in his broad-ranging and important study on *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, that Marcuse “never really explained why he involved himself in such intensive work on Hegel”.¹ Thus, the question remains, why and how Hegel is important for Marcuse’s development of his Marxist theory.

During his lifetime, Marcuse wrote two books on Hegel’s philosophy: *Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (1932) and *Reason*

¹ Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 69.

and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory (1941), and he also made Hegel an important figure in several other essays and books. Those writings that examine Hegel in the most explicit way belong to the early stages of Marcuse's theoretical career. Marcuse did not write any particular works on Marx, but the fundamental impulse from Marx, like the one coming from Hegel, would be present throughout his entire life's work. Marx's influence on Marcuse begins even before his turn to Hegel; Marx's philosophy can be viewed as the first opening that provided Marcuse the space to think through some "fundamental questions". Marcuse's questions, departing primarily from his early experiences of Marx's thinking, which, like his interest in Hegel, precedes his encounter with Heidegger,² although several of the most important issues were articulated in connection with his work on Heidegger's philosophy.³ There are some big differences between the two Hegel-books. As Andrew Feenberg writes, whereas the first can be viewed as a book on Hegel written for Heideggerians, the second can, on the other hand, be understood as "the work of a Marxist albeit a Marxist intent on recruiting Hegel to the cause".⁴

In order to summarize the horizon of Marcuse's thinking from his earlier texts, in which the influences of Marx, Hegel and Heidegger are woven together, one can say that they carry the ambition of formulating a concrete philosophy of the human and its historical essence, and that this philosophy, which in the spirit of Marxism contains a critique of existing capitalist society, is supposed to lead to radical action and a fundamental change to society through the unity of theory and praxis. This focus can be understood as the core of Marcuse's thinking and it will remain at the core of his entire thinking life, even if the ontological dimension will be weakened by the time he parts ways with Heidegger in 1932 and begins his cooperation with the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt and their members, such as Horkheimer and Adorno. Like many of the members of the institute, Marcuse fled to the USA during the Nazi regime in Germany and participated in the work of the institute there. Unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, however, Marcuse did not return to Germany after the War, but

² Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp. 5, 9, 14, 17 and 18.

³ See Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse* and Alfred Schmidt, "Existential-Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse".

⁴ Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 48, see also p. 49.

played an equally important role for the student movements of the 1960s in the USA as Horkheimer and Adorno did in Germany.

It is important to distinguish between Marx and Marxism in the thinking of Marcuse. Even if Marcuse tried to deal with problems in Marx's philosophy in relation to societal and historical transformations (at the same time as he held onto Marx during his entire philosophical life),⁵ it is foremost in relation to the crisis of Marxism during his own time that he saw the need for new perspectives. It is against this backdrop that a reclaiming of Hegel's philosophy became urgent. Marcuse was a part of what is commonly referred to as Western Marxism—the historical development of Marxism in Western societies that no longer was directly connected to the aftermath of the Russian revolution or to Soviet party politics.⁶ Through his Hegel-studies Marcuse was an important figure within the Hegel renaissance during the 1930s and 1940s. Within this renaissance, Korsch and Lukács were other important “Hegelian Marxists”, and they also had an impact on Marcuse.⁷ The philosophy of Hegel was according to Marcuse well suited to be an instrument for the renewal of Marxism, while at the same time he insisted that Marx's philosophy was in many respects more fruitful than Hegel's. Marcuse localized fundamental problems within the version of Marxism developed in Russia during the period surrounding the Russian revolution, but also within the later decades of Soviet Marxism. According to Marcuse, the crisis of these versions of Marxism amounted to the fact that Russian communism did not answer to Marx's socialist utopia of a classless society, and instead of the “withering away” of the state, a new strong and bureaucratic state established itself. For Marcuse, theory must aim at transcending traditional forms of Marxism and offer new perspectives.⁸ Marxism had become a power instrument, when in actual fact it once again needed to be a theory of liberation. Marcuse's attempt at connecting the thinking and writing of Hegel and Marx was a way of redressing this balance.

The question of dialectics will be crucial for this examination. The dialectical method, as the negative motor of critical thinking, was the main dimension of Hegel's thinking that Marcuse claimed for himself. Even if Marcuse was also critical toward Hegel in different ways, he continuously

⁵ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp. 5, 6 and 9.

⁶ See Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) and Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976).

⁷ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p. 4.

⁸ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp. 6-7.

presented dialectics as an extraordinarily important part of the Hegelian legacy. The question of dialectics was also important for Marcuse's thinking in the way that it made him develop a Hegelian Marxism rather than a Heideggerian or phenomenological Marxism—before 1932 and before Heidegger's commitment to the cause of National Socialism, Marcuse had done both. But the decision in favor of dialectics (and of Hegel) did not only come out of the personal conflict with Heidegger, it emerged out of a certain philosophical questioning itself. When Marcuse made an effort to try to answer his fundamentally Marxist questions on the essence and liberation of the human, he tended to underline the importance of dialectics more and more, even if one can say that the concept of dialectics and the role of phenomenology seemed to get along pretty well in his earliest texts. Especially in the first book on Hegel, which explicitly announces its debt to Heidegger's philosophy, one can identify an attempt to think Hegel's theory of history within a framework of Heideggerian categories. But it still seems reasonable to claim that it was dialectics that led Marcuse away from Heidegger. Marcuse claimed early that phenomenology had to be corrected by the dialectical method,⁹ though it is not surprising that the concept of dialectics only plays a minor role in the Heidegger-inspired Hegel-book. In order to preliminary announce the general importance of dialectics in Marcuse's theory, an investigation into Hegel's influence on Marcuse's political Marxist theory is crucial because Hegelian philosophy lays the foundation for that dialectical-negative thinking, without which, according to Marcuse, a critical theory is not possible. Programmatically, we can say that for Marcuse, a critical theory needs dialectics!

My intention is to present a *reconstruction* of how Marcuse's Marxist thinking uses Hegel's dialectical philosophy and to develop a *discussion* about its significance. In this examination I have mainly focused on those texts in which Marcuse explicitly deals with Hegel, and since his own explicit focus on Hegel mainly belongs to his early work—his two Hegel books were released relatively early (1932 and 1941)—this period will be the most important one. Some research already exists on Marcuse's "Hegelian Marxism", even if this in almost every case is reduced to a side question.¹⁰

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", in Richard Wolin & John Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 2, and Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p. 69.

¹⁰ See for example John Francis Kavanaugh, *Whole and Part in Hegel, Marx and Marcuse* (Saint Louis: Washington University, Dissertation 1973); Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*; Seyla Benhabib, "Translator's Introduction", in Marcuse, *Hegel's*

At the same time, there is a larger discussion about Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism.¹¹

Marcuse's early texts: Marxism between Hegel and Heidegger

In this section I will investigate Marcuse's early texts, that is, those texts written from the end of the 1920s to the beginning of his exile from Germany at the time of Hitler's *Machtergreifung*. Firstly, I will (a) sketch out Marcuse's Marxist questions and impulses (and then clarify how his Marxism is assisted by Hegel). But since Marcuse's thinking during this time moves between the inspirations of Marx, Hegel and Heidegger, he can be said to be experimenting with different paths within this constellation. Therefore I will secondly (b) take into account Heidegger's influence on Marcuse, and the relation between a "Heideggerian Marxism" and a "Heideggerian Hegelianism" will be discussed—these labels seem to fit well with some of Marcuse's thoughts at this time, even if the main question for this section is whether Marcuse's Marxism is, in the last instance, mainly influenced by Hegel or Heidegger. Crucial for this crossroads in Marcuse's philosophical development is, thirdly, (c) the question of dialectics. It is through this question that Marcuse finally chooses the Hegelian and dialectical path and insists on how dialectics and its negative movement is what thinking needs in order to be critical toward existing societal conditions and to instigate radical change.

Ontology and the Theory of Historicity (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987); Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*; Russell Rockwell, "Marcuse's Hegelian Marxism, Marx's *Grundrisse*, Hegel's Dialectic", *Radical Philosophy Review*, 16:1 2013; and Kellner & Clayton Pierce, "Introduction: Marcuse's Adventures in Marxism", in Kellner & Pierce (eds.), *Herbert Marcuse: Marxism, Revolution and Utopia* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹¹ See Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*; Alfred Schmidt, "Existential-Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse", in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); as well as, for example: Jóhann Páll Árnason, *Von Marcuse zu Marx: Prolegomena zu einer dialektischen Anthropologie* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971); Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*; Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981); Benhabib, "Translator's Introduction"; Hauke Brunkhorst & Gertrud Koch, *Herbert Marcuse zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 1990); Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Wolin, "Introduction: What is Heideggerian Marxism", in Wolin & John Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism*.

a) Marcuse's Marxist questions

Marcuse's early texts, from 1928 and onwards, are deeply inspired by Marx's philosophy, and my ambition at this point is to sketch out his fundamental Marxist questions. The influence of Marx on Marcuse was strong even in his later writings, which will also be referred to below. In the text "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism" (1928), Marcuse seeks to formulate what kind of fundamental themes are contained in Marx's philosophy. The connection to Heidegger is, as the title suggests, much present in the text, but, for my present purposes, I will ignore this here (even if I will have reason to return to it in the next section). In the abovementioned text, Marcuse underlines the general questions surrounding the "historical" and "action" as central Marxist categories for him. He writes that Marxism not only aims at knowledge in itself (and thereby remaining abstract), but that the knowledge in which Marxism results is always connected to a concrete historical situation and must lead to radical action and ultimately to the liberation of humanity. Marxism stands for the theory of the revolution of the proletariat and consists in the revolutionary critique of capitalist society. Marxism is only a science as far as it contains the insight that revolutionary action is a necessity. Marxism seeks therefore the unity of theory and praxis. The truth of Marxism is not merely a truth of knowing, it is a truth of historical and revolutionary development.¹² Human existence is essentially historical and practical, and these moments are connected: human praxis derives from the historical situation, and its demands and needs. Radical action is an answer to a given situation, but it is also a way of forming and transforming it.¹³ For Marcuse, knowledge production is therefore an activity that can never have a neutral value in itself, but rather it always comes out of a historical situation and out of the interests and needs that people have within that situation. Simultaneously Marxist theory points back to the situation that provokes a need for transformation at the same time as it speaks of a liberated society transcending the existing state of affairs, and which calls for revolutionary practice. Theory and praxis are therefore not only identical in the sense that theory seeks to become practical in the revolutionary way, but that thinking initially cannot be separated from human societal life and its practices. This does not guarantee a successful liberation, but theory and praxis must not

¹² Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", p. 1.

¹³ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", pp. 5ff.

be understood as two separate entities that one should try to connect for the sake of liberating humankind. Something that can be said to be missing in Marcuse's thinking is a positive presentation of the non-identity of theory and praxis, since it seems that—in order to be able to transcend existing society and the false images of societal praxis it harbors—theory must make itself non-identical with society for the sake of a new praxis. The identity of theory and praxis needs a moment of non-identity, although this concept is not used by Marcuse.

Another main theme for Marcuse is the nature of radical action. Even if Marcuse, following Marx and Engels, means that every action in some sense changes the circumstances of human life, every action does not change human existence. It is only radical action that reaches to the core of human essence and that has the ability to change human existence as such. Radical action would in the situation of a capitalist society be the revolution of the proletariat. Through radical action, that which has become unbearable for human existence will be overcome and replaced with what is necessary for humanity, but where this sense of necessity remains immanent to radical action itself. This dimension of necessity, then, comes not from outside; the action is executed because of its inner necessity, a necessity that is essentially historical. Its necessity derives from the human needs within a historical situation, and what is needed is the creation of a genuine, meaningful and true existence, in contrast to the unbearable existence that follows from capitalism.¹⁴ According to Marcuse, the possibility of this action becomes a necessity and a reality when the needs of the situation coincide with the knowledge of the situation and its immanent necessity. The true historical existence of the human will only develop if it also develops knowledge of its situation. Only then is the human in touch with its history and can deal with the challenge which it is now ready to face. The necessity of radical action, therefore, can only become real on the basis of knowledge of the nature of the historical situation. And according to Marcuse, it is the knowledge of the proletarian class, its self-consciousness, which incorporates the historical unity that is able to bear this task of necessity. One can here point out Marcuse's generally uncritical approach towards Marx. For example, Marcuse is not problematizing the possibility for the class to develop a non-false consciousness and its ability to become a revolutionary

¹⁴ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", pp. 4ff.

subject in the way that, for instance, Adorno would.¹⁵ It appears as if Marcuse assumes an unproblematic continuity from Marx to his own theoretical effort.

Another central aspect of Marcuse's early thinking, which has a close relation to the development of his Marxism, is the question and need of a concrete philosophy. This is formulated in the essay "On Concrete Philosophy" (1929). Although fundamentally Marxist, here we can also trace arguments that are close to Heidegger. In order to stay within the bounds of Marxism, however, one may say that Marcuse generally formulates concrete philosophy as a philosophy that has concrete human existence as its subject. Not that philosophy should only be a practical or concrete science; it is a way of philosophizing in itself: Marcuse underlines that philosophy is a form of human existence—theory and praxis are identical also in this respect. Capitalism is that situation in which human existence finds itself in a crisis, and the task of philosophy is to make its truths visible as counter images to it in a concrete manner.¹⁶

The discovery of Marx's Paris manuscripts had a crucial impact on Marcuse's thinking and on his formulation of Marxism. This he discusses in the text "New Sources on the Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics" (1932). Marcuse highlights especially Marx's theory on the being and essence of the human. Marx's critique of political economy was not only an economic critique, it contained a critique of capitalism as a threat to human essence as such. In capitalist society the human turns into something inhuman, she is alienated and suffers a loss of reality (Marcuse calls this *Entwirklichung*). The human is hindered in its possibility to reach self-consciousness through labor, through which, as a *Gattungswesen*, the human being could liberate herself. But a liberating kind of labor differs essentially from the kind of alienating labor predominant in capitalist society, which is a destructive form of labor, tearing asunder the human, nature and society. In this situation of alienation, human essence and human existence are separated from each other, according to which the lived life does not correspond to its real essence. This is the big challenge that society confronts, namely to end this catastrophe through revolutionary

¹⁵ Joan Alway, *Critical Theory and Political Possibilities: Conceptions of Emancipatory Politics in the Works of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 64ff.

¹⁶ Marcuse, "On Concrete Philosophy", in Wolin & Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism*, pp. 34ff.

action. Moreover, through Marx's reference to Hegel's concept of labor and its merits—that is, his understanding of the human being as realizing itself through its own labor and activity—Marx, according to Marcuse, turns Hegel into a crucial starting point for his own praxis philosophy.¹⁷ Marcuse's aim is precisely to hold onto this praxis philosophy. In their "Introduction: Marcuse's Adventures in Marxism" to the volume *Herbert Marcuse: Marxism, Revolution and Utopia*, Kellner and Clayton Pierce point out that Marcuse's encounter with the Paris manuscripts had the consequence that he came even closer to Marx (distancing himself further from Heidegger), for the potential inherent in Marx's thinking for realizing a concrete philosophy now became abundantly clear to him.¹⁸

Beside this specific impulse that was set on its way by a reading of the Paris manuscripts, I cannot see any essential change in Marcuse's understanding of Marx during his entire work. I would thus state that one ought to speak of a continuity on this matter. The role of the Paris manuscripts can for Marcuse be seen more as a confirmation of what Marcuse had hoped to find in Marx's thinking. Marcuse will hold onto these fundamental Marxian questions and onto the task of developing a concrete, materialist and historical theory of society and the essence and needs of the human as a critique of capitalist and alienated society. A main focus for Marcuse is always an endeavor to free up those possibilities that speak to the urgent need for radical and revolutionary change. In Marcuse's discussion of Marx in *Reason and Revolution* (1941) these questions are crucial: societal alienation and capitalism; the historical need to overcome these; the question of how the human essence can find its proper place and the idea of a materialist critical theory of the human.¹⁹ In his later book, *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) these themes are still present. The liberation from capitalism is at stake and a politics of liberation should have its starting point in a critical theory which does not remain within its scientific framework, but leads to action—this is what the society demands. What is otherwise rejected as merely "utopian" is what society needs in order to develop. The point of departure is here a materialist theory that grows out of a contem-

¹⁷ Marcuse, "New Sources on the Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics", in Wolin & Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism*, pp. 95ff., see also, in relation to the concept of labor, p. 94.

¹⁸ Kellner & Pierce, "Introduction: Marcuse's Adventures in Marxism", p. 24.

¹⁹ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), pp. 273-322.

porary understanding of the nature and needs of the human and deals with the need for a fundamental societal change through radical praxis.²⁰

b) Heideggerian Marxism and Heideggerian Hegelianism

As already mentioned, the young Marcuse finds himself in a constellation of inspiration consisting of Marx, Hegel and Heidegger. The earliest texts (apart from Marcuse's dissertation on the German art novel from 1922)—I referred to a couple of them in the prior section—can be said to incorporate different attempts at orientating himself within this constellation. Taken together, these texts can rightly be considered as containing a “Heideggerian Marxism”, even if the Hegelian dimension, also present, is lost in this description. Marcuse's first book on Hegel, *Hegel's Ontologie*—a text with which he initially sought to gain a professorship through Heidegger—could be understood as a Heidegger-inspired Hegelianism, that is, a “Heideggerian Hegelianism”. In this book, the Marxist starting point is not apparent, it is rather hidden, even if the fundamental questions surrounding concrete human life and history are themselves present. It is therefore possible to speak of a continuity between this book and the other early essays.

Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism represents an attempt to formulate a combination of these two philosophies, in which the strengths of both come to reinforce each other, but mutually are used to correct one another's weaknesses. In Heidegger and Marx, Marcuse sees the potential of a concrete philosophy of human essence as a historic phenomenon and for which the historical task of radical action is decisive. How Marcuse formulates his own form of Marxism has already been discussed. The influence that Heidegger exerts upon him becomes apparent, for example, in “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism”. The description of the Marxist “situation”, the understanding of the human as *Dasein*, as well as the question surrounding historicity, and finally an interpretation of the truth of Marxism as a *Geschehen*, are already important Heidegger-inspired lines of thought. But also the fact that the title of the essay announces Marcuse's ambition to contribute (*Beitrag*) to the phenomenology of historical materialism makes this connection clear.²¹ Also the explication of the connection of theory and praxis and Marcuse's formulation that philosophizing is a fundamental way for human *Dasein* to exist has a link to

²⁰ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

²¹ Marcuse, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism”, pp. 1ff.

Heidegger.²² In large parts, Marcuse's interest in Heidegger lies precisely in the search for a concrete philosophy, which opens itself toward the possibilities of the historical situation and may lead to radical action and social change.²³ Much of this he finds in Heidegger. But ultimately he also thinks that Heidegger's philosophy is stuck in the presentation of the historicity of its object and therefore never reaches the question of praxis.²⁴ This is the reason why, according to Marcuse, phenomenology must be criticized and corrected by the dialectical method.²⁵ But phenomenology can also stand as a counterpoint to Marxism. A theme that speaks for Heidegger is according to Marcuse the positive focus on individual *Dasein*, which in Marx is at risk of disappearing behind the laws of history. However, even here, it is important to see how individuals are not isolated from but in dialectical relation to the whole of society.²⁶ That which often is formulated by Marcuse as a Heideggerian Marxism is in this text formulated by himself as a "dialectical Phenomenology", and since the text's theme is first and foremost an attempted *rapprochement* between the philosophies of Marx and Heidegger, this concept can be interpreted as a "Marxist-dialectical Heideggerianism". The crucial question surrounding this choice of method (dialectics and/or phenomenology) departs in Marcuse from the thought that the method must be adequate to its object. Both dialectics and phenomenology have according to Marcuse the ambition of growing out of reality and the historical situation itself. The ability of the methods to arrive at the historical dimension of human existence is decisive, and important is therefore how they successfully can be made concrete and ultimately lead to liberating praxis. Even if phenomenology reaches great depths in its analysis, Marcuse thinks that it is only through the dialectical method that action can be prepared and made possible.²⁷ Below (c), Marcuse's understanding of dialectics will be discussed further.

In Marcuse's first Hegel-book, a "Heideggerian Hegelianism" is developed. This book is therefore of no direct relevance for our inquiry into Marcuse's Hegelian Marxism. But since the book is about Hegel I will refer to it briefly. It remains uncertain whether Marcuse sought to ingratiate

²² Marcuse, "On Concrete Philosophy", p. 34.

²³ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", pp. 10ff.

²⁴ Schmidt, "Existential-Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse", p. 40.

²⁵ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", p. 2.

²⁶ Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, p. 148.

²⁷ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", pp. 17ff.

himself with Heidegger by first embracing a Heideggerian vocabulary more than in the other early texts, and by second placing Marx into the background,²⁸ for the purposes of making his habilitation in Freiburg for Heidegger easier, a habilitation which in any case would not happen for political reasons. One would have expected that it was Marcuse's ambition to develop a dialectical phenomenology in this book, like in the other early texts. However, this is not the case. The book contains rather a Heideggerian Hegel-analysis that does not highlight dialectics (and that does not accentuate any Marxist perspective). It is difficult to explain the sudden disappearance of dialectics here, in a book on Hegel (the philosopher of dialectics) during a time in which Marcuse wrote other texts emphasizing the importance of dialectics, if not in connection to Marcuse's relation to Heidegger. And this he does afterwards too. All the same, it is relevant to briefly discuss how Marcuse uses Hegel in this book, even if Hegel does not fill the function of strengthening Marxism here.

As the title indicates, the theme of the book is Hegel's ontology and his theory of historicity. The main focus is the concepts of life, history and motion, and one can say that Marcuse, departing from Hegel but operating with Heidegger's concepts, is trying to formulate a theory of the historicity of being.²⁹ What Marcuse is interested in is whether Hegel's logics and concept of life, as well as his concept of history, really reach all the way down to, and become relevant for, concrete human existence.³⁰ At this point a connection to many of Marcuse's other writings becomes clearer. But in this book, the question is whether Hegel's ontology really is able to turn life, as a historical category, into the fundamental concept of ontology.³¹ For Marcuse, it is therefore crucial whether the historical is understood adequately and whether philosophy in Hegel formulates a concept adequate to history. Here, Marcuse's analysis of Hegel leads him to a critique of Hegel's concept of history. As is the case in the other early texts on the concept of dialectics (to be discussed later), Marcuse criticizes Hegel's theory for becoming unhistorical (despite Hegel's own intentions). It is in the transition of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* into absolute knowledge that Marcuse sees the arresting of the historical. As a result, Hegel's philosophy never really took the form of a genuine historicity: the spirit takes its journey

²⁸ See Benhabib, "Translator's Introduction", p. xii.

²⁹ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, pp. 1ff.

³⁰ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, p. 195.

³¹ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, pp. 195 ff. and 229.

through history only because he knows history cannot hurt him. History can only take the path of spirit.³²

c) The question of dialectics and leaving Heidegger

In the already mentioned shorter early texts, Marcuse tried to combine the philosophies of Heidegger and Marx. But, he would soon turn his critique toward phenomenology, claiming that the lack of dialectics was itself a limitation. During those same early years Marcuse wrote two other essays, which he called “On the Problem of the Dialectic (Part 1)” (1930) and “On the Problem of the Dialectic (Part 2)” (1931). These essays can be viewed as his first attempts to develop the concept of dialectics as being discovered as a certain deficiency in Heidegger. The dialectic would thus be made into a fundamental concept in his own theory. But Heidegger’s influence is present even here. The concept of dialectics will be discussed later with respect to Marcuse’s later writings—it plays a significant role in his entire work, not least in his book on Freud and his critique of Soviet Marxism—but here I will discuss the beginnings of his elaborations on this concept.

In the first of these essays,³³ Marcuse makes an initial point that both reality and the relation of philosophy to reality are dialectical. Thus, dialectical thinking cannot be understood as a mere external method, which tries to grasp a one-sided and homogenous reality. This also means that reality is inherently contradictory and that thinking can only relate to it in dialectical terms. Marcuse finds these dialectical insights into the relation between philosophy and reality in both Plato and Hegel. But in Hegel, in contrast to Plato, dialectics are thought historically, which for Marcuse is crucial. Dialectics becomes the principle of becoming. Reality is becoming by being dialectical. In Hegel, the point of dialectics is to rip being out of its stagnated and isolated existence and transform dialectics into the life nerve of its development. It is important to understand the singular in its negativity, by which its own singularity is negated and becomes a part of a higher form of being. In Hegel, reality is simultaneously dialectical and historical (and for Marcuse, only that being that is historical is also dialectical). But for Hegel, being as historico-dialectical is also subject. Therefore Hegel understands thinking, as the self-reflection of being, as dialectical

³² Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, pp. 305ff.

³³ Marcuse, “On the Problem of the Dialectic (Part 1)”, in Wolin & Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism*, pp. 53-67, see also Marcuse, “The History of Dialectics”, in Marcuse, *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 142ff.

and as the method for conceptualizing reality. After his discussion of this, Marcuse speaks briefly of Marx and his understanding of dialectics, which presupposes Hegel's understanding, but also stands for a critique of Hegelian dialectics. While reliant on Hegel's dialectics, Marx develops a more concrete form of dialectical thinking, which in contrast to Hegel can lead to a genuine and historically situated realization of the human. One can conclude here that in this text Marcuse mostly refers to the concept of dialectics of other thinkers; he has not as yet worked out his own philosophical position.

In the second essay on dialectics, formulations surrounding the movement of dialectics become clearer and more detailed. Marcuse describes dialectics with a quote from Hegel as the *Sichselbstgleichheit im Anderssein*. According to this understanding the human becomes identical with itself by becoming different from itself. Marcuse also writes that dialectics in Hegel is a process of a continuous *Aufheben* of otherness. Sublation means here that both the human and society progress by relating to their contradictions and negate themselves through those contradictions in order to sublimate them. They dedicate themselves to their otherness in order to sublimate it and reach fulfillment through this process. According to Marcuse, Hegel shows how this process is formative in every concrete form of being. This means for Marcuse that dialectics essentially also is a movement through which the current state of existence is transcended.³⁴ And the possibility of this transcending will be decisive as to why Marcuse turns the concept of dialectics into the core principle of critical thinking. Dialectics makes the transcending of the societal situation possible, which is a possibility that already is rooted in the inner dialectical "nature" of reality. Through a dialectical interpretation of reality, theory makes the inner contradictions of reality come forth, and thereby it becomes possible to create counter images to the contemporary state of society. In "Contributions" Marcuse writes that dialectics puts every established and stagnated form into motion.³⁵ Despite this positive description of Hegel's concept of dialectics, Marcuse criticizes Hegel with help from Marx. Hegel, after all, undermined a real transition of society despite his philosophy being dialectical. The reason for this, according to Marcuse, is that the historical dimension ultimately disappears in Hegel's system. Because Hegel seeks to lift his dialectics, founded in the historical determined life process, to become an absolute totality, the his-

³⁴ Marcuse, "On the Problem of the Dialectic (Part 2)", in Wolin & Abromeit (eds.), *Heideggerian Marxism*, pp. 68-85.

³⁵ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", p. 17.

torical dimension is arrested. In contrast, Marx's dialectics makes a real movement of transcendence possible, which is prepared through the analysis of the situation that is historically given.³⁶

Even if Marcuse tries early on to formulate a dialectical phenomenology, the concept of dialectic can be seen as a symbol for why Marcuse and Heidegger part ways. Even if a dialectical phenomenology tries to acknowledge the benefits of Heidegger's analysis of existence and its concrete historical situation, it was the ability of the dialectical method to concretize theory and give it its fruitful practical perspective that made it attractive for Marcuse's thinking. Marcuse rather tried to build on both Hegel and Marx in order to develop his own political theory on the possibilities for radical change. The concepts of dialectics and negativity play big parts in this. Marcuse's Marxism therefore chooses the path of Hegel and dialectics, rather than via Heidegger. Regarding the central focus for our study—that is, how and why Hegel was important for the development of Marcuse's Marxism—one can say that Marcuse highlights the importance of Hegel's thinking and of dialectics from out of an essentially Marxist perspective.

Hegel and Marcuse's Critical Theory

I have now arrived at that phase of Marcuse's writing which coincides with the establishment of his cooperation with the Institute of Social Research and its members Horkheimer, Adorno, Löwenthal and others. At this point the Heideggerian influence undergoes further weakening, and instead Marcuse's thinking is increasingly informed by the development of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse will also become a leading figure within this school of Critical Theory and be very important for the student movements of the 1960s, first of all in the USA and in Germany.

This section departs (a) with a discussion on how Marcuse, in dialogue with Hegel, examines the beginnings of social theory as well as the relation between philosophy and critical theory. Marcuse's book *Reason and Revolution*, in which the dialectical and subversive potential of Hegel's Logic is presented, is essential for this (b). The third part (c) consists of one of the most important discussions for this text: Marcuse's concept of dialectics in relation to Hegel, Marx, and Marxism. Finally (d), one of Marcuse's late and most famous works about the one-dimensional man will be addressed, in which he identifies a crisis for negative and critical thinking, a discussion

³⁶ Marcuse, "On the Problem of the Dialectic (Part 2)", pp. 77ff.

relevant here since this must also be understood as constituting the crisis of dialectics.

a) Hegel and the Critical Theory of Society

The main focus in this part will be Marcuse's second Hegel-book, *Reason and Revolution*. In this book, Marcuse identifies the limitations of Hegel with help from Marx, but still it is clear that Marcuse cannot undertake this critical task without the dialectical impulse from Hegel. It is difficult to find precise formulations in which Marcuse directly highlights Marxism's need for Hegel—in this book one rather finds formulations limiting Hegel's potential—but I interpret Marcuse's position as saying that Hegel's dialectical theory is needed explicitly in order to place at the center the dialectical and an idea of negativity, both of which are present in Marx's thinking, though in a slightly different way. Although Marx went further than Hegel and thereby prepared the ground for Critical Theory, it is crucial to hold onto Hegel, from out of which the life nerve of critique comes. As will be seen below in the discussion on dialectics in Hegel and Marx, Marcuse often and unsurprisingly thinks that there is a path leading from Hegel to Marx, but the Marxist Marcuse nevertheless writes two books on Hegel in order to hold onto dialectics. It is clear that it is not enough to stay within Marx's thinking. Rather, Marcuse constructs an aggregate of the Hegel-Marx-constellation, which for him becomes necessary for the possibility of critical theory and for the movement toward the liberation of the human.³⁷ To summarize, one can say that Marcuse's highlighting of Hegel has the ambition to: (1) show how Hegel has a critical and revolutionary function for Marx's thinking and the following Marxist tradition; (2) show that Hegel not was a conservative thinker, but essentially a critical thinker, and (3) with help from Hegel, save dialectical and negative thought for the sake of a critical theory of society, which is yet to be developed.

An important dimension of *Reason and Revolution* is that it defends Hegel against, at that time, the common accusation of Hegel as a totalitarian philosopher and who could be connected to fascism.³⁸ I will not focus on

³⁷ In his article on Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, Kevin Anderson quotes Raya Dunayevskaya's understanding of Marcuse's theory—that is similar to my understanding—as having “re-established the revolutionary dialectic of Hegel-Marx”. Kevin Anderson, “On Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory: A Critical Appreciation of Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, Fifty Years Later”, *Sociological Theory* 11:3 1993, p. 258.

³⁸ See for example Marcuse's later written afterword in *Schriften* 4 (Springe: zu Klampen, 2004), pp. 369ff., see also the translator's afterword, p. 375.

this theme here, although it is remarkable how affirmative Marcuse is in his interpretation of Hegel, especially when compared to the thinking of his colleague Adorno. The abovementioned book is to a large extent of an introductory character. The whole first half treats the main dimensions of Hegel's work: the phenomenology of spirit, logic, political philosophy and the philosophy of history. But for Marcuse it remains an ambition to use Hegel as a foundation for the construction of a critical social theory. According to Marcuse, Hegel founded social theory precisely because his theory and dialectics were derived from an analysis of reality. His thinking was partly a reflection on the historical development of reality, but it was also partly the case that reason needed to be realized in the social and political institutions of social reality in order to truthfully become real reason. Hegel's dialectics are not closed off to the reality of the social, but in Hegel reason starts to respond to and realize itself in different forms of society. Marcuse depicts Hegel's system as the culmination and end of the modern era, an era that had interpreted the world from out of reason and self-consciousness and that had thus subordinated nature and history under the criteria of thinking. At the same time, Hegel acknowledged that societal and political life were man-made constructs and that these structures themselves served as the foundations upon which reason realized itself. But here Hegel, according to Marcuse, brings philosophy to its negation and thus to its end. This confrontation with society results, despite Hegel's intention, in the closed immanence of reason. Hegel's theory instead turns into a link that bridges the old form (Kant) and a new form of critical theory (Marx). Hegel also serves as a link connecting philosophy and social theory. The principal difference between Hegel and Marx consists in the fact that Hegel's concepts—although they can be viewed as being informed by economics and politics—belong to philosophy and remain locked within its framework. In contrast, Marx tried to develop a theory that represented a negation of philosophy. Additionally, Hegel's concepts strengthen and confirm the existing order, while Marx's categories all the time are seeking to become the negation of that political order. The problem with Hegel is that he allows reason to fully realize itself within the static status quo of the state. But for Marcuse, the method of dialectics survives Hegel's state and even transcends it. Even if Hegel meant that politics finds its fulfillment and end in the state, his critico-dialectical method endures and becomes the in-

strument for (i) Marx's materialist thinking and (ii) Marcuse's version of a critical theory.³⁹ Against this background, Marcuse has the ambition of examining how philosophy can and must be transcended in order to make room for a new adequate critical social theory. This he tries to do with Hegel's dialectics as a foundation.

Marcuse discussed this path from philosophy to a critical dialectical theory as early as in the 1930s. One essay, "Philosophy and Critical Theory" (from 1937),⁴⁰ stands out here. In this essay, Marcuse tries to describe in what a critical theory must consist and how it is to differ, but also depart from philosophy (mainly Hegel's). Here, philosophy comes across as belonging to the old world, and Marcuse writes that philosophy, as an enterprise trapped within the extant division of labor, has lived of the fact that it has not realized itself (in Marx's sense). But while Hegel meant that the freedom of man was realized in the state, Marcuse claims that Hegel only identified freedom with necessity, and that both the human and society were trapped in an apparent necessity and therefore man was not free. Reality is reconciled with reason, but reality is not fundamentally altered. Economic structures are sublated in Hegel, and are therefore fundamentally conserved, and this is not enough for Marcuse. Philosophy must rather find its end through real societal change. Critical theory differs from philosophy in so far as it participates in political struggle, which aims at liberating humanity from capitalist alienation.

Karl-Heinz Sahmel, for instance, criticizes Marcuse's negative thinking; he sees within it the risk that Marcuse's theory of society as a negative whole makes a critical position impossible.⁴¹ My interpretation of Marcuse is rather that he understands the whole as both problematic and negative, but that its inner antagonisms make room for critical reflection and critical distance it demands.⁴² Society is not entirely homogenous.

³⁹ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 251-257.

⁴⁰ Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory", in Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Karl-Heinz Sahmel, *Vernunft und Sinnlichkeit: Eine kritische Einführung in das philosophische und politische Denken Herbert Marcuses* (Königstein: Forum Academicum, 1979), pp. 223ff.

⁴² This touches on a question that makes possible a certain comparison between Marcuse and Adorno. Even if Sahmel is referring to Adorno in order to ground his questioning of Marcuse, Adorno himself was often criticized in the same way, for example by Habermas. In my book *Philosophie im Konjunktiv: Nichtidentität als Ort der Möglichkeit des Utopischen in der negativen Dialektik Theodor W. Adornos*, I try to show how Adorno's concept of the non-identical is the concept that opens up the possibility for the critical position. Marcuse, though, seems to lack a concept like this.

b) *The subversive content of Hegel's Logic*

Marcuse's treatment of Hegel's *Logic* in his second monograph on Hegel consists, despite its thematic content, in perhaps Marcuse's strongest arguments in favor of a subversive potential for Hegelian dialectics, which is far from self-evident since his *Logic* is devoid of political content.⁴³

An important entrance into this issue is that Hegel's *Logic*, in contrast to many of its predecessors, can be said to be a "materialistic logic", and hereby he is also paving the way for Marx's materialism. It is not merely an idealistic logic, but stands for a critique of a traditionally accepted demarcation between categories and forms of thought on the one hand, and their addressed content on the other hand. Rather, the categories express the dynamics of reality. Hegel does not accept the existence of a ready-made world outside of thinking, with which thinking then deals. This would mean that thinking would have to accept the world as it is, and resign from the ambition of reconciling reality with truth, that is, to make reality into what it should be. According to Marcuse, Hegel rejects all attempts to sanctify certain forms of being or society. Reality in its immediate shape must rather be negated and destroyed. With its negative character, dialectics belongs in essence to the domain of logic. The task of thinking is to negate reality in order to sublimate its current forms and to let their inherent potential for reason be realized. Crucial is that reality needs to be negated and therefore become what it is not. Only by not being permitted to remain what it initially was, can reality become what it has potential for. According to Hegel, it is the whole and the common that must be developed; the negation, on the other hand, is fulfilled through the singular or individual, a negation that is sublated by the common in order to secure its progress. Here, dialectics is positive despite its negative method.

It is also essential to highlight how the concept of essence stands for the negative and the antithetic dimension in the Hegelian concept-triad of being-essence-concept. When something turns into its own contradiction it is expressing its own essence, and this means at the same time that the inner contradictions of being appear in its essence (and then will be sublated). Essence is the form of being through which being is set in motion and transcends itself. Through this motion being also turns into something else. The process of being's transformation, which shall lead to itself, has

⁴³ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 121-168 and Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 32.

begun. This process and the relation between the concepts of essence and being correspond to Hegel's theory of reality as negative: reality develops by mobilizing its inner contradictions. In this mobilization one can find the critical potential of Hegel's thinking. Marcuse also shows, against the backdrop of Hegel's concept of dialectics, how Marx's concept of capitalism is another example of a concept that brings out the critical significance and concept of essence. Within the play of societal contradictions, the (false) essence of society comes forth, it shows its right face. This possibility to make visible inherent contradictions is the subversive potential of Hegel's *Logic*. But Marcuse also inherits the ambition to let reason permeate reality from Hegel.

In the end, Marx's dialectics is more fruitful for Marcuse. Why does Marcuse prefer Marx, and what role is Hegel playing in this discussion?

c) *Marcuse's understanding of dialectics between Hegel,
Marx, and Marxism*

In this section I will examine how Marcuse formulates the concept of dialectics of Hegel and Marx. I shall also address Marcuse's later discussions of this concept. First, however, I start with Marcuse's exposition of dialectics in *Reason and Revolution*, where he admittedly joins Marx and identifies the limitations of Hegel's understanding of dialectics. Nonetheless, despite this critical undertaking, Hegel remains in a powerful position. Hegel and Marcuse share the understanding that the dialectic operates as the immanent negation of reality, itself the principle of movement and creativity. The societal praxis of the human includes negativity, as the possibility of transition. One may say that Marcuse's concept of negativity includes both a constructive and a destructive aspect: on the one hand, for example, the negativity of private property as the obstacle for a genuinely humane community, but on the other hand the negation of this obstacle would be positive in the sense that it is the overcoming of what is destructively negative. He writes that the negativity of capitalist society lies in the alienation of labor, but that the negation of this negativity would lead to the end of alienated labor.⁴⁴ Christian Fuchs argues how Marcuse uses the concept of negativity in a double sense, namely as a description of the problematic society and as the method for tearing it down. A negation of the negation

⁴⁴ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 282.

would thus mean revolution.⁴⁵ According to Marcuse both Hegel and Marx understand dialectical reality as the whole of reality—truth lies in the whole—which they at the same time understand as a negative totality. But Hegel and Marx view this totality differently. Whereas for Hegel the whole is the ontological whole and a closed system of reason, which has become identical with the progress of history, for Marx dialectics is entirely disconnected from this ontological understanding. In Marx negativity instead turns into a historical premise that must not be hypostatized into a metaphysical fact. Totality in Marx is the class society, to which its historically developed form and its inherent negativity belong. Here, Marx turns the dialectical method into a historically determined method, which loses the general and universal meaning it has in Hegel. No longer, then, can the idea of a negative totality be used in relation to all things. Dialectics now grasp things as elements of a certain historical totality from which they cannot be separated. This kind of dialectics then include both the existing negativity of capitalist society and its negation. Although dialectics is the driving force of history in Hegel, dialectics as such, according to Marcuse, become timeless in a problematic way, both with respect to its generality and universal applicability.⁴⁶ What for Hegel is history, is only pre-history for Marx.⁴⁷ But in *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse mentions Hegel's understanding of history in a positive manner. Hegel's optimism consists of an understanding of reality in a destructive way, namely that what exists finds itself in a dissolving movement initiated by reason and as such will not persist. Reason will transform reality until reason corresponds with reason. Dialectics stands for the view that all reality is impregnated with negativity and contradictions, and therefore is the counterpart of all positivism.⁴⁸ According to Marcuse, Marx concretized Hegel's dialectics and his theory of alienation, as well as the idea of transcending alienation within capitalist society and its specific situation.⁴⁹

In *Reason and Revolution* and in his book on Soviet Marxism (1958) Marcuse discusses the crisis of Marxism as a lack of dialectics. This is

⁴⁵ Christian Fuchs, *Herbert Marcuse interkulturell gelesen* (Nordhausen: Bautz, 2005), pp. 22ff. and 31; see also Richard Bernstein, "Negativity: Themes and Variations", in Robert P. Pippin, Feenberg & Charles P. Webel (eds.), *Marcuse: Critical Theory & the Promise of Utopia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), p. 14.

⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 312ff.

⁴⁷ Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 8.

⁴⁸ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 26-27 and 36-37.

⁴⁹ Kellner & Pierce, "Introduction: Marcuse's Adventures in Marxism", pp. 26-27.

crucial for my focus in the present text, because it means that Marcuse uses both dialectics and Hegel to conceptualize the crisis of Marxism. In *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse means that the reduction of dialectics and of Hegel's significance within Marxism, which took place both before and after Lenin, mostly coincided with the attenuation of the revolutionary dimension of Marxism. Lenin himself questioned the naturalistic version of Marxism and defended the need for dialectical thought. According to Marcuse, Lenin meant that it was dangerous only to connect the possibility of revolution with the necessity of economic laws and only to follow economic goals. The goal of politics must be to rule economics, and dialectics is a counterpart to the necessity of history and the overthrow of the prevailing order.⁵⁰ The dialectic also plays a significant role in Marcuse's criticism of Soviet Marxism. The main aim is to examine and immanently criticize some of the significant tendencies within Soviet Marxism. Marcuse writes that there might be no question better suited to show the direction of the development of Soviet Marxism than how it deals with dialectics.⁵¹ What has happened with Marxism in the USSR is worse than a revision: what was once a critical way of thinking has developed into an extensive worldview and a method with fixed frames and rules. Instead of being the tool for revolutionary consciousness and praxis (as was the case for Marx), Marxism is now placed within the established power system. But dialectics is rebellious against this kind of doctrinal framing, and, according to Marcuse, this significantly is shown in the difficulties that Soviet Marxism encountered in developing a textbook on dialectics. Dialectics cannot be fixed into a homogenous system, but contains rather a resistance against the systematic. In Soviet Marxism, dialectics tended to stagnate into a general system in which the historical process merely was understood as a pattern of nature. The Soviet regime made dialectics harmless to itself, it was put to rest in order to protect an established form of Marxism.⁵² An important task for Marcuse is thus to reconnect Marxism with dialectics.

During the late period of his thinking, Marcuse wrote several texts with dialectics as their main focus. For example, in 1960, Marcuse formulated his position regarding dialectics and negativity in a pithy way in a new preface to *Reason and Revolution*: "A Note on Dialectic". What is again at stake is

⁵⁰ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 398-401.

⁵¹ See also Marcuse, "Dialectic and Logic Since the War", in Kellner & Pierce (eds.), *Herbert Marcuse. Marxism, Revolution and Utopia* (New York: Routledge 2014).

⁵² Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*, pp. 114ff.

the possibility for negative and critical thinking as well as the possibility and need for reawakening it in order to negate the existing state of society. According to Marcuse, the world is inherently contradictory and therefore is continuously contradicting itself. With help from negative thinking it is possible to abstract from reality, a critique that is performed from within these contradictions. The crucial aspect is not only to revive Hegel, but it is in Hegel that dialectical thinking is first developed into a reality-negating method, a thinking essentially alienated from the established universe of discourse and action. The fact that it is alienated in this sense marks out a potentiality: not to be totally included in that which is supposed to be criticized, but to keep a distance to reality and screen it. According to Marcuse, dialectics depart from an experience of the world as unfree; the human being is also alienated in this sense: one does not live one's life as oneself. The interpretation of the world should according to Marcuse not only be made on the basis of what it is, but essentially on the basis of what it is not, that is, in relation to what is excluded and prohibited from developing.⁵³

If it now can be determined that Marcuse's theory is in a fundamental way Marxist, it is also without a doubt that Marxism has continuously a need to return to and use Hegel's dialectical thinking. Marcuse strengthens his Marxism through Hegel.

d) One-dimensional man and the crisis of negative thinking

Marcuse's late book *One-dimensional Man* (1964) is neither explicitly a book on Hegel nor directly about the question of dialectics. Rather it is an analysis of capitalist society, which is more pessimistic than many of his earlier works. Nonetheless, even here, he still seeks out those possibilities for revolutionary praxis. The relevance of this book for our study here is that, indirectly, Marcuse makes dialectics into a key question surrounding the possibility of resistance within advanced industrial societies. Because both the human and society are characterized by one-dimensionality, dialectics and the two-dimensional possibility of negative and critical thinking is lacking.

The advanced industrial society contains two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand society, it has the ability and the tools to prevent qualitative changes. Industrial society, as an irrational society despite the semblance of reason, blocks social transformation and paralyzes critique. On the other

⁵³ Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic", in Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. vii-xvi.

hand, there are forces within society that could break through these embankments.⁵⁴ But the potentialities of critique are undermined in that they are limited to certain platforms, with oppositions integrated and rendered harmless. Society has built a semblance of reason so strong that all contradictions appear as irrational and every resistance seems thereby impossible.⁵⁵ Marcuse still places his hope in a negative thinking that is supposed to make visible how irrational existing society is, and to show up the ways in which the negation of negativity is possible. But one-dimensional society does everything to triumph over its contradictions. A two-dimensional thinking, on the other hand, is dialectical, and it would not try to win over the real contradictions, but rather depart from them in a productive way. Such a way of thinking presupposes an experience of the world's antagonism, which is (at least) two-dimensional. If philosophy is guided by this experience it can, according to Marcuse, distinguish between semblance and reality, untruth and truth or unfreedom and freedom, and thus initiate a movement that can resist the totalitarian form of society.⁵⁶ But it is the two-dimensional way of thinking or the two-dimensional character of dialectical logics that makes it possible for thinking to grasp the antagonistic reality,⁵⁷ and to develop counter images to reality.⁵⁸

To some degree Marcuse in this book also discusses Hegel's philosophy in order to strengthen his own materialist theory. With help from Hegel, Marcuse tries to emphasize the importance for dialectical thinking to let itself be guided by the nature of its object. According to Marcuse, Hegel criticized the critical philosophy of his time for being afraid of its object, and he demanded instead that philosophy fully grasp how its logic is concretized in its objects. Dialectical logics cannot be merely abstract and formal since it is determined by concrete reality. Marcuse thinks that if the historical content of reality enters into a relation with the dialectical concept it can reach concretization. Logical truth thus also becomes historical truth.⁵⁹ Thinking absorbs the antagonistic content and real tensions of a historical situation in order to process its dialectic and to oppose its apparent one-dimensional structure.

⁵⁴ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society* (London: Sphere, 1968), pp. 9-15.

⁵⁵ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 19ff.

⁵⁶ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 105ff.

⁵⁷ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 111-112

⁵⁸ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 112ff.

⁵⁹ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 116ff.

In the end, the positive and one-dimensional thinking risks overcoming the negativity of two-dimensional thinking, since the positive affirms whatever is actual and does not construct any counter images of it.⁶⁰ This suffocation of the oppositional forces leads to the possibility for reality to be ruled under its own positive form and can develop its repressive violence in an undisturbed way.⁶¹ But it is important to highlight the fact that Marcuse in this book also explicitly discusses Hegel's philosophy in order to establish his own idea of a critical thinking that seeks to resist one-dimensionality. Even if his theory is essentially informed by Marx, Marcuse's Marxism makes itself dependent on Hegel's dialectics, as a form of dialectics that has the ability to realize and concretize the rational.

At the same time it seems possible to question Marcuse's general affirmation of and maybe naïve position in relation to Hegel. Marcuse does not reflect on society's ability to integrate contradictions and critique, in order to undermine them as being strictly a Hegelian problem. In contrast, Adorno tries to explain society's ability to make its own negation into a part of its functioning as a principle that indeed comes from Hegel. In Adorno, the question of negative thinking is therefore shot through with ambivalence. Adorno sees in it both the way that the system maintains its grips as well as providing the possibility for real subversive critique. Also other commentators have put Marcuse's affirmation of Hegel into question. How much of Hegel's theory is Marcuse really embracing? Kellner notes, for example, that Marcuse's second book on Hegel is barely at all critical of Hegel; Marx was more critical than Marcuse.⁶² In addition, Alasdair MacIntyre problematizes the fact that Marcuse assumes several doubtful dimensions from Hegel, for example the thought that Hegel is realizing history (and then letting Marx take over).⁶³ Martin Jay writes that Marcuse tends to formulate an identity philosophy, whereas it is precisely this dimension of identity in Hegel which Adorno will criticize later, as the principle oppressing the non-identical.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, all this points to the general importance of Hegel for Marcuse's Marxism.

⁶⁰ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, pp. 120ff.

⁶¹ Marcuse, *Schriften* 4, p. 370.

⁶² Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp. 144ff.

⁶³ MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, pp. 31ff.

⁶⁴ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 60ff.

It is not until his text “Zum Begriff der Negation in der Dialektik” (1966) that Marcuse discusses Hegel’s dialectics in a critical way similar to Adorno. He here puts forward its conformist tendencies, which are actualized when the negation is only a semblance in Hegel. The negation is no real negation, rather it serves to stabilize Hegel’s system. In the end this always means that it is the existing state of affairs that is reproducing itself, such that the negativity does not become a source for change. In Marcuse’s view, Marx risks also falling into this trap as long as theory does not distance itself from the idea that the future has its source within, and therefore gets stuck inside, the actual state of affairs.⁶⁵ The only hope for negativity is to find ways to disturb the prevailing order from outside. It is therefore in relation to this critique of Hegel that resistance can take both anarchic and chaotic forms.⁶⁶ But in another text from the same period, about the history of dialectics, Marcuse is, with help from a Marxian argument, arguing in favor of an understanding of the revolutionary dimension of dialectics as its idealistic core, and not just a specific aspect. Even if the uncritical moment in Hegel’s dialectic consists in the organization of the contradictions in the harmony of the whole, the critical and radical moment for Marcuse is alive in the singular moments of Hegel’s system, which according to Marx means that dialectics are fundamentally revolutionary.⁶⁷ Marcuse seems unable to choose between these paths, but dwells in this twilight of Hegel-critique and Hegel-affirmation. Nevertheless, in Marcuse, Hegel reconquers his critical edge.

⁶⁵ Marcuse, “The Concept of Negation in the Dialectic”, in Marcuse, *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia*, pp. 128ff.

⁶⁶ Marcuse, “The Concept of Negation in the Dialectic”, p. 131.

⁶⁷ Marcuse, “The History of Dialectics”, in Marcuse, *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia*, pp. 247 ff., for a similar Hegel-critique, see Marcuse, “A Note on Dialectic”, pp. xiiff.