

The Revisionist Within: Unity and Unilateralism in Hegelian Marxism and Beyond

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Marxism's integrity

What today is at stake in revisiting the scene of the relation between Marx and Hegel, or, more broadly, in recalling to our own present Marxist interpretations of Hegel as well as Hegelian understandings of Marx? At the very least we might have to entertain the possibility that answers to this question are today not immediately forthcoming. The question surrounding where Marx stands with respect to Hegel is obviously a question that can be posed. But, if the question abides, there is the nagging doubt that it does so for principally logical rather than existential reasons. The relation between Marx and Hegel marks out a point of systemic undecidability inherent in Marxism itself: since the polysemy of both Marx's and Engels' own writings bear no stamp of clarity on the issue, then what follows is that, interpretatively, a decision *must* be taken—and taken interminably. But a decision for what? To what end? Why decide to decide?

These counter-questions are to be considered as one measure of our present malaise. For what we are arguably still in the process of coming to terms with is how the necessity of taking a decision on this issue has lost its sense of avowed urgency. Not only this: the collective experience of our own present is a fragmentation of the very *stakes* that had permanently been in play when the relation of Marx and Hegel was a question of utmost significance for previous generations of Marxists. What of these stakes specifically? They represent what Lenin famously canonized as the “three sources and three components of Marxism”: Marxism is born from the confluence of French socialism, English political economy and German ideal-

ism.¹ These sources do not serve merely as historical antecedents, as the triangulation of lived traditions accounting for the contextual conditions out of which Marxism historically emerged; they index in a metonymic fashion the three distinct modes of practice in and by which Marxism is engaged: politics, science and philosophy. They are, as Lenin speaks of them, the component parts of Marxist thought, the co-existence and synchronicity of which secure for Marxism its operativity as both *perennis et universalis*.² If it is comprised of these three distinct and differentially calibrated practices, the stakes do not simply correlate with the practices as such, staking out the contiguous loci of Marxism's concern; the image of a Marxist engaged *in*, or even *by*, "politics", "science" and "philosophy" is liable to mislead, since Marxism immanently transformed the practice of these practices.³ What therefore comes to be at stake is among other things the meaning of the practices that are recast in a new image. This shows itself in the variable ways in which Marxists interpreted Hegel, not just with respect to the meaning of the "philosophical", but with equal insistence in terms of the meaning also of the "scientific" and the "political".

Three stakes, then, can be provisionally enumerated, which, in one way or another, are thrown into relief by tracing out the elasticity of the distance separating Hegel from Marx:

1) The *practico-political*. Marxism not only carries within itself a concrete political demand for the real transformation of the social relations

¹ V. I. Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism", *Collected Works of Lenin*, vol. 19 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973).

² It is in this short propaedeutic that Lenin famously writes that "Marxism is all powerful because it is truth." He goes on to attribute this omnipotence, and the truth that is the cause of its force, to Marxism's comprehensiveness and, more significantly, its *integrity*: "It is comprehensive and *harmonious*, and provides men with an *integral* world outlook irreconcilable with any form of superstition, reaction, or defense of bourgeois oppression. It is the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism." Lenin, "The Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism", p. 22.

³ A point made with especial force by Louis Althusser. Please see: *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 1990) and "On the Materialist Dialectic", trans. Ben Brewster, in *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996). At the same time, we must not neglect the fact that Marxism has been described—often by its critics—as the negation of these practices i.e. as an "anti-science" (see, for example, Karl Popper), as an "anti-politics" (see Hannah Arendt) and an "anti-philosophy" (Karl Jaspers). Since, however, Marxism would augur a new understanding of what is possible and thinkable *as* a science, politics, and a philosophy—demanding no less than a transvaluation of the criteria by which each is indexable—then it is no surprise that Marxism became a principal site of contestation over the very meaning of each of these practices or modes of thinking.

and forms of economic production of capitalism, it opens up both a new political terrain and a new mode of political existence. Class antagonism reframes the very meaning of political practice. And at stake is the precise character of “class struggle” and the terms by which this struggle is waged. But, on this fundamental point, the history of Marxism contains within it a series of ambivalences about its own politico-strategic consequences. Mutually exclusive possibilities sit side-by-side: “spontaneity of the masses or party organization?”, “reform or revolution?”, “insurgency or hegemony?”, etc. These questions, which function more as ultimatums, bring to a head the crucial question surrounding the principal subject of transformative political action, and Marxism’s position with respect to this emancipatory subject. On the one hand, Marxism indexes a subject that is anterior to it (i.e. the laboring classes of industrial capitalism). On the other, Marxism is itself the site for the active production of an emancipatory subject—the “Proletariat”, which can be said to be the result of, and be sustained through, Marxism and its attendant political apparatuses. Is the political agent for emancipatory transformation referable as a *datum*, as something given, a real existent with an objective basis in the lived relations of social production? Or is this collective subject itself an ideality that must be brought into existence by means of a *political* operation? Marxism’s understanding of class identity roughly divides between, on the one hand, an empirical realism and, on the other, a genetical-constructivism. The very encounter between Marx and Hegel touches on these very questions. We can see how, for example, Georg Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* or, even, Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony used Hegel to undermine the means and methods of thinking class in determinate and objective terms, and likewise how certain counter-responses, provided by the likes of Colletti and Althusser, identified within these Hegelian solutions the traces of voluntarism, historicism and subjectivism.⁴

2) The *scientificity* of Marxism, that is, the extent of the *theoretical* revolution effected by Marx—what Louis Althusser pronounced (borrowing a term from Gaston Bachelard) as the “epistemological break” locatable

⁴ Please see: Louis Althusser, “Marxism is not a Historicism”, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970) pp. 119-144 and Lucio Colletti, “From Bergson to Lukács”, in *Marxism and Hegel*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: NLB, 1973), pp. 157-199, as well as Colletti, “From Hegel to Marcuse”, in *From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society*, trans. Judith White & John Merrington (London: NLB, 1972) pp. 111-143.

within the work of Marx,⁵ the result of which was an irreversible rupture with its philosophical and politico-economic pre-history. Marx induced a science, “historical materialism”, which opened up a new continent for knowledge. Just as the names of Pythagoras and Thales are assigned to the founding of Mathematics and Galileo to Physics, Marx (referred to by Galvano della Volpe as the inventor of a “Moral Galileanism”⁶) discovered the science of history, thereby effecting a double displacement. First a displacement of history from philosophical speculation to its scientific analysis, and second a displacement of the “eternal ideas” of classical political economy onto the terrain of history.⁷ At issue was not simply *if* Marxism designated a science, and not solely *how* it broke ineradicably with the ideological precursors of both classical political economy (Smith, Ricardo) and the philosophy of the left Hegelians (Proudhon, Feuerbach, Bauer); the very meaning of science was at stake. As Simone Weil writes: “you cannot claim for ‘scientific socialism’ if you have not a clear idea of what science is, if consequently you have posited in clear terms the problem of knowledge, of the relationship between thought and its object.”⁸

3) The *philosophical* import of Marxism. Despite *prima facie* the question of Marxism’s scientificity seemingly resting on the annulment of philosophy, alongside the clear textual discontinuities that one can locate in the writings of Marx and Engels (e.g. *Theses on Feuerbach*, 1845, *The German Ideology*, 1846, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847), all of which would stage a break with their erstwhile “philosophical consciences”, a philosophical practice is nonetheless incubated, even if it is not positively circumscribed by Marx and Engels in the same way that applies to the fields of “science” and “politics”. The “dialectic” would be one such philosophical operator present in Marxian thought, and for which, in the official organon of Soviet Marxism, “*dialectical* materialism” (understood as the philosophical complement to the scientific discourse of ‘historical materialism’), indexes. Notwithstanding the official classification of Soviet Marxism, western Marxists (in varying degrees of opposition to Soviet “orthodoxy”) continually retur-

⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 32-38.

⁶ Galvano della Volpe, “For a Materialist Methodology of Economics and of the Moral Disciplines in General”, in *Rousseau and Marx and Other Writings*, trans. John Fraser (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), p. 201.

⁷ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 23.

⁸ Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. Arthur Wills & John Petrie (London: Ark, 1988), p. 29.

ned to the Marxian texts, locating therein a certain philosophical mutation, and seeking to draw out the implications for the expounding of a specifically Marxist philosophical practice. Such philosophical experiments may or may not imply the dialectic (whether methodologically or ontologically construed), but in any case, a confrontation with Hegel is unavoidable.

Politics, science and philosophy: the three constitutive practices of Marxism, each constituting a *necessary* but, in isolation, an *insufficient* condition in accounting for Marxism. It is at once a matter of recognizing, as Louis Althusser always insisted, the “differential specificity” of these moments,⁹ as well as placing due emphasis on the specific difference of “Marxism” itself, as the proper name of a “discourse” that, so to say, is forged in and through the unification of the three irreducible instances of “politics”, “philosophy” and “science”.¹⁰ It is on the basis of the co-existence of its constituent parts, on account of its wholeness and *integrity*, that Marxism summons its potency—or as Lenin makes clear, its *omni*-potence. On this very same basis, a *fourth* issue or stake reveals itself. It is a stake that does not relate to a further as-yet unnamed practice, but instead concerns the interrelation between these practices; in this regard, it can be said to overarch the others. It addresses the problem of the *revisionist*. The revisionist puts into question the equality between these constitutive features of the Marxist discourse, through the unilateralization of one practice or mode of thought at the expense of the others. Against the threat offered by the revisionist, what is at stake is to preserve or re-secure the very integrity of Marxism. Marxism, as a totalizing discourse, depends on the perfect coordination of its constituent parts. But, and this is from where our present sense of reticence springs: in the long drawn out night of Marxism’s retreat, it is precisely its omnivalent pretensions that appear to have receded furthest from sight.

Postmodern disintegration

If today we remain under the condition of the postmodern it is on account of the general state of incredulity shown toward meta-narrativity and *mutadis mutandi* to the systematizing proclivities of Marxism, as they have been presented above. Marxism, as necessarily a meta-discourse—as a “Discourse” that provides refuge for the “discourses” of the political mili-

⁹ Cf. Althusser, “On the Materialist Dialectic”.

¹⁰ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 11-43.

tant, the philosopher and the scientist—has been a principal victim of such incredulousness. This indifference derives from the vitiating and paradoxical effects to which a “Discourse” succumbs when, in seeking a perfect balance between its constitutive elements, it must account for this wholeness by presenting it discursively, doing so, though, without reinscribing this unity within any one of the particular discourses with which it is in a relation of equiprimordiality. This leads to two suboptimal outcomes. Either Marxism must secure its unity by means of a fourth discourse, which supervenes onto the site of the unification of its three founding elements, but which, in not being immanent to the whole it finds, remains itself unthought. Or the very unity of its system must be accounted for by appeal to one of its constituent parts—either the philosophical, scientific or the political—as the privileged means by which the unity of ends is established. In doing so, though, the principle of equivalence is indubitably compromised for the unilateralization of one of its interiorized elements (whence the result of “revisionism”). Either way, the necessity of the composite integrity of Marxism, its unity and wholeness, is categorically compromised in times when a general fragmentation of the stakes and the heterogeneous ends that regulate them is collectively felt.

The logic of this disintegration of the “tasks” and “ends” of genres of discourse was, as we know, the subject of Jean-François Lyotard’s report on what he diagnosed as the crisis of legitimation indicative of the “post-modern condition”, according to which a series of conflicts arise

between a language game made of denotations answerable only to the criterion of truth [science] and a language game governing ethical, social and political practice that necessarily involves decisions and obligations, in other words, utterances expected to be just rather than true and which in the final analysis lie outside the realm of scientific knowledge [politics] (...) and speculation [philosophy] that functions as a meta-subject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of the empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures.¹¹

This heightened awareness of the “logic of disintegration” invades the Marxist problematic from within; by virtue of this recognition it is possible

¹¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 33-35.

to read the history of Marxism as a series of reflexive attempts to bring into accord the relatively autonomous discursive practices that are operative within it, changing emphasis and accent on the order of determination between its three levels, as an oarsman steadies his boat by veering in the opposing direction to compensate for any oversteering.¹²

This lengthy introduction has been taken to lay the groundwork for what is to follow for the remainder of this inquiry. It is from the outset to sound a cautionary note, in that the terrain upon which we today embark in investigating the relation between Marx and Hegel—and, in its mediated form, an investigation into how the history of Marxists received the question of Hegel and his relation to Marx—is evidently such that the once perspicacious stakes have been largely obscured and fragmented. Which is not to say, that, when taken singularly, there are no real questions to be heeded from within the provinces of politics, philosophy and theory. Rather, from the position of our own conjuncture, it is a matter of raising two redoubtable problems. Firstly, whether Marxism (in its Hegelianized form or otherwise) has any longer the capacity to bring into *general* relief and to present as a *unified* whole the stakes and tasks of philosophy, politics and science? And secondly, perhaps more fundamentally still, whether, under the condition of the irreversible fragmentation and heterogeneity of these practices, the very attempt of any such synthetic act invariably brushes up against its own impossibility?

For Hegel: Philosophy unilateralized

In the history of Marxism, to broach the relation between Marx and Hegel is not solely to engage in a scholastic exercise; the value and effects of posing the question of their relationship has never been limited to the bounds of Marxist “philosophy”, in any restricted disciplinary sense of the term. This

¹² In this connection, Lyotard offers some remarks in truncated form, noting how: “It would be easy to show that Marxism has wavered between the two models of narrative legitimation I have just described. The Party takes the place of the University, the proletariat that of the people or of humanity, dialectical materialism, idealism, etc. Stalinism may be the result, with its specific relationship with the sciences: in Stalinism, the sciences only figure as citations from the metanarrative of the march towards socialism, which is the equivalent of the life of the spirit. But on the other hand Marxism can, in conformity to the second version, develop into a form of critical knowledge by declaring that socialism is nothing other than the constitution of the autonomous subject and that the only justification for the sciences is that they give the empirical subject (the proletariat) the means to emancipate itself from alienation and repression: this was, briefly, the position of the Frankfurt School.” Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 36-37.

much has already been established. But the fact that the consequences of this interpretative encounter between Marx and the strictly philosophical thinking of Hegel reverberated outwards into other contiguous areas of concern, held within it the risk that the philosophical, as a specific mode of thought, would be carried too far beyond itself, encroaching illicitly on both the question of Marxist science and Marxist politics. The risk was that the *differentiae specificae* of these other constitutive parts of Marxism would be resultantly compromised.

Two notable thinkers, Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti, operating within two quite distinct intellectual contexts and political situations, were very much alert to this problem. Even though the problematic is articulated in quite different ways, the works of Althusser and Colletti are unparalleled in showing a sensitivity towards: (i) the co-origination of a triptych of practices of thought by which Marxism is, we could say, “initially baptized”¹³ as well as (ii) the difficulties of remaining consequent in this originating gesture, when the lived history of Marxism has, at every turn, been haunted by the risk of revisionism, which reveals itself through an encroachment of one of its constituent practices upon and over its other parts. This insight is in evidence when in a lecture on Hegel, dedicated to Jean Hyppolite, Althusser describes that:

The Marx-Hegel relationship is a currently decisive theoretical and political question. [As] a theoretical question: it governs the future of the number-one strategic *science* of modern times: the science of history, as well as the future of the *philosophy* linked to that science: dialectical materialism. A political question also derives from these premises. It is inscribed in the class struggle at some level, in the past as in the present. (translation modified)¹⁴

A reckoning with the extent of the relationship between Marx and Hegel has wide implications. But as Althusser goes on to explain, in investigating the Marx-Hegel relation, the indexing of these implications will itself be affected by the manner in which the “philosophical” and the “non-philosophical” are brought into contact with one another: either the relation between these two thinkers constitutes an object for a general questioning,

¹³ A term borrowed from the work of Saul Kripke. Cf. *Naming and Necessity* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1981), pp. 96-97, 135-140.

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, “Marx’s Relation to Hegel”, in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and History*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1982), p. 164.

traversing the entire field of Marxist practice (political, scientific and philosophical), or it implies a philosophical questioning that is simply generalized to cover non-philosophical practices. In the case of the former, philosophy becomes itself a datum for the practices of non-philosophy; whatever is at stake in, through and between Marx and Hegel is filtered through the distinct prisms of politics and science: non-philosophical questions are raised at philosophy for extra-philosophical ends. In the case of the latter, philosophy *informs* (in both senses of transmitting and shaping) the precise ways and wherefores of science and politics; whatever is at stake in other sites of Marxist practice gains its fullest expression in and through its philosophical articulation: philosophical questions are directed towards non-philosophical practices for the purposes of the solicitation of philosophical ends. What the latter possibility results in is the *unilateralization* or *superordination* of philosophy. For Althusser (as well as for Colletti), it remains a question of ascertaining the precise interrelation between the “philosophical” and the “non-philosophical”, without falling victim to a treatment of Hegel and Marx that has as its principal purpose the universal accreditation of Marxism through its philosophical circumscription.

The temptation of a certain unilateralism of the philosophical in and through the treatment of Hegel and Marx is obviously great, since the question at stake already gains its immediate field of intelligibility internal to philosophy, as part of its own history. And yet this would be a simplifying assumption. What is considerably more crucial is that the possible unilateralization of the philosophical arises out of conditions that are not exclusively philosophical but are themselves *extra-philosophical*.

We can point to an important phase in the history of Marxism in which the value of Marxist philosophy reveals itself in all its lucidity. From around the 1920s up to the 1960s, a specific but dispersed filiation of Marxist thinkers—what we can designate loosely and not altogether unproblematically as “Hegelian Marxists” (Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse, foremost among them)¹⁵—responded to the direction of both Marxist science and Marxist politics, and to the double

¹⁵ Like all such designators, “Hegelian Marxism” suffers from imprecision in capturing this somewhat disparate filiation of Marxists. Not only is there the obvious problem surrounding the extent to which the individual thinkers would themselves assent to such a label, there is more incisively the issue whether their works are in any way *sufficiently* Hegelian for the term to be warranted. Cf. Gillian Rose, *Hegel contra Sociology* (London: Athlone Press, 1981). Gillian Rose sees in much of Western Marxism the traces of Fichte and not Hegel.

crises it identified therein. This philosophical recuperation arose out of, and in opposition to, the “degenerative” Marxism of the Second International, with the purpose of replotting through Hegel the philosophical coordinates of Marxism, in order to reorient both its sense and direction. Reactivating the relation between Hegel and Marx served thus an extra-philosophical function: a direct refutation to both the nomological scientism of the Second International and its attendant political reformist and opportunist tendencies (tendencies incubated in, for example, the work of Kautsky, Plekhanov and Bernstein). To reassess the relation between Hegel and Marx served as a bulwark against the destructive one-sided implications of a putative scientific and concomitantly reformist Marxism that had increasingly become estranged from its own originary sources. This necessary counterpositioning, and the far-reaching implications of a renewed appreciation of Hegel’s contribution to Marxism, was to have two principal effects: 1) the *rectification* of a seeming forgetting of the philosophical origins out of which the Marxian texts emerged and which they incubated within themselves and 2) the positing of philosophy as the *general* and *effective* means in the reassertion of Marxism’s revolutionary force and its theoretical novelty.

This double gesture is, for one, captured in Karl Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*, published in 1923. Korsch reclaims Marxism for philosophy and philosophy for Marxism.¹⁶ This means first the proper elucidation of Marxism’s specific and essential intervention in the history of philosophy. But secondly, and more essentially, Korsch’s act of reclamation touches on the role and function of philosophy in the wider field of Marxist practice. As Korsch himself describes, and in a way that will be seen as exemplary of Hegelian Marxism more widely understood: the force of philosophy serves as the *real* precipitate in the revolutionary upsurge of the masses on the march; the active, vitalizing and revolutionary elements of Marxism coalesce when precisely philosophy is itself ascendant within Marxist thought.¹⁷ Philosophy is the ideological seal on revolutionary political practice (a part of a wider “historicist” interpretation of Marxism, uniting Korsch, Gramsci and Sartre).¹⁸ Just as the philosophy of the German Idealists shored up the

¹⁶ The same argument is advanced by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quentin Hoare (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), pp. 332-336.

¹⁷ Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, tr. Fred Halliday (London: New Left Books, 1971) p. 47.

¹⁸ Here we would need to consider Sartre’s claims in his *Search for Method* (New York: Vintage Press, 1968): “every philosophy is practical, even the one which at first appears

worldview within which the revolutionary political tendencies of the bourgeoisie fomented, Marxist philosophy is the necessary complement to the historical emergence of the proletariat upon the political stage;¹⁹ the physiology of emancipation is comprised of the head of the philosopher and the heart of the proletarian, as the young Marx was to write.²⁰ And yet in times when Marxism is on the defensive—in the aftermath of severe political defeat and disappointments, of aborted revolutions and suppressed revolts—philosophy is abandoned and the objectifying power of science takes prominence.²¹

Philosophy does not only represent the flow of the subjective side of history, i.e. when history is on the move and ideas take on a material force—in contradistinction to the ebbing tide and political stagnation that marks out the rise of “passive” science; philosophy is that mode of thinking, which presents the necessity of both moments in the fullness of their dialectical movement. It is the discourse that, once “the umbilical cord of its *natural* combination has been broken”²² by the vitiating effects of a vulgar scientism and political reformism, returns Marxism to its founding unity. In this way, philosophy comes to occupy a double position. Against the passivity of science, it is on the active side of history. But it is not only one side of a two-sided historical process. It is the only discourse capable of comprehending this two-sidedness, that is, of presenting the dialectical movement of history itself. The privileged position of philosophy, and of Marxist philosophy specifically, is on account of its *modus*, what specifies its method, namely the dialectic—more precisely, the *materialist* dialectic.²³

to be the most contemplative. Its method is a social and political weapon” (p. 5). The entire description of philosophy that Sartre provides in this short text resonates greatly with Korsch. On the question of ‘historicism’, consider Antonio Gramsci in the following passage from the *Prison Notebooks*, p. 442: “The philosophy of praxis is absolute ‘historicism’, the absolute secularization and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history. It is along this line that one must trace the thread of the new conception of the world.”

¹⁹ Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 41.

²⁰ Karl Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction”, *Marx and Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 3. trans. Richard Dixon *et al* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), p. 186.

²¹ This dialectic of philosophical hope and scientific circumspection is also noted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in chapter 3 of *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 64.

²² Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, p. 53.

²³ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971). Lukács famously announces that Marxism discovered the “dialectics of history itself”, its distinct philosophical contribution consists in comprehending that

Korsch's insight here is a point more widely shared by other variants of Hegelian Marxism.

The principal means to restore a sense of philosophical impetus to Marxism was to shore up the ineliminable traces of Hegel within the writings of Marx. What these Hegelian interpretations of Marxism rediscovered in Hegel was, in general terms, the source of Marx's own revolutionary *method*: "to be clear about the function of theory", writes Lukács, "is also to understand its own basis, i.e. its dialectical method."²⁴ Indeed, as Lukács claims in "What is Orthodox Marxism?" (more explicitly than Korsch), the methods of the empirical sciences stand in direct conflict with the revolutionary process that Marxist philosophy, in its very method, emboldens; the vulgar Marxists of the Second International, divesting themselves of the critical weapons to further proletarian struggle, and inveigled by the methods of the positive empirical sciences, served but to reproduce the conditions of existence of capitalist production:

the dialectical method was overthrown and with it the methodological supremacy of the totality over the individual aspects; the parts were prevented from finding their definition within the whole and, instead, the whole was dismissed as unscientific or else it degenerated into the mere "idea" or "sum" of its parts. With the totality out of the way, the fetishistic relations of the isolated parts appeared as a timeless law valid for every human society.²⁵

Like "every fetishistic science" the vulgar Marxists strayed into the illusory realm of an empirically verifiable "objectivity", having at their disposal a set of categories that merely sustained the fiction of capitalist reality, keeping it in a state of unquestioned pre-eminence.²⁶ The "fetishistic" form of science reveals itself in its objectifying and rationalizing propensity,²⁷ resulting in

"dialectics is not imported from history from outside, nor is it interpreted in light of history (as often occurs in Hegel), but is *derived* from history made conscious as its logical manifestation at this particular point in its development" (p. 177).

²⁴ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 3.

²⁵ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 14.

²⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 10.

²⁷ The same mode of argumentation is adopted by Max Horkheimer, in his programmatic statements about "critical theory" and the future direction of the Frankfurt School, in "Traditional and Critical Theory". He writes: "The assiduous collecting of facts in all the disciplines dealing with social life, the gathering of great masses of details in connection with problems, the empirical inquiries, through careful questionnaires and other means, which are a major part of scholarly activity (...) all this adds up to a pattern which is, outwardly, much like the rest of life in a society dominated by industrial

science being blind-sighted twice over: once, on the side of the real, by the allure of a “phantom objectivity” revealing itself in its factual immediacy and second, on the side of cognition, in the form of a reified mind composed of a set of assumed and naturalized categories, “regarded as the true representatives of social existence.”²⁸ As Lukács claims, more generally:

the fetishistic illusions enveloping *all* phenomena in capitalist society succeed in concealing reality, but more is concealed than the historical, i.e. transitory, ephemeral nature of phenomena. This concealment is made possible by the fact that in capitalist society man’s environment, and *especially* the categories of economics, appear to him immediately and necessarily in forms of objectivity which conceal the fact that they are the categories of the relations of men with each other. Instead they appear as things and the relations of things with each other.²⁹

A line of reasoning seemingly of a piece with Marx’s own insights into the fetish character of the commodity form, namely that “the definite social relation between men assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”³⁰ With one significant twist, however: the “fetishistic” form is no longer specifically tied to the commodity and to the capitalist system within which commodities are produced and consumed, exchanged and circulate. Attention now turns toward the empirical sciences that, according to Lukács, lay the very conditions under which a society of general reification is possible and endures; “by *scientifically* deepening the laws at work”³¹ and by seeking to give a transcendental gloss to the categories that organize our experience as subjects of capitalism, science ensnares consciousness within a state of reified immediacy, thereby imprisoning thinking and acting in a perpetual reproducibility of what is, in its brute facticity, and thus effectively debarring the *actual* possibility of its transcendence. The technical and empirical sciences form the “web of rational calculation”, from out of which is further spun the entrapment of modern man under the specific historical conditions of capital.³²

production techniques.” *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell et al (New York: Continuum Press, 1995), p. 191.

²⁸ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 93.

²⁹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 14.

³⁰ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 163.

³¹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 113.

³² The consequence here, as Lucio Colletti adeptly points out, and as we shall examine in greater detail later, is that the critique of science becomes total, in Lukács specifically, but

Lukács extends the famous Marxian analysis of commodity fetishism, in order to cover the sciences as the progenitor of reification. Certainly, the move is not entirely unwarranted. We can recall how in Marx's account of the commodity form, the sensuousness of the object as commodity, i.e. what confronts the gaze, conceals within itself what is imperceptible to the senses, namely the *supersensuousness* of its wider social and historical existence.³³ It is through laying out this description that Marx presents the structure of ideological misrecognition constitutive of commodity societies, a description that can equally be made to apply to a certain scientific procedure. Famously, Marx writes:

in the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity form, and the value-relation of the products within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this.³⁴

The ideological structure of the fetishized commodity mirrors the critique of the sensuous (empirical) materialism of Feuerbach that appears in the first of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: Feuerbach's own sensualizing of matter ends up merely reproducing the classical image of contemplative detachment, surrendering thereby the vitality of active practical life to Hegelian philosophical idealism.³⁵ In both cases (in the analysis of the fetish character

in Hegelian variants of Marxism more generally: "reification is engendered by science. And since there is an absolute homogeneity and solidarity of nature between science and capitalism—to the point that science appears as an institution of the bourgeois world, destined to be swept away with it (...) Capitalist reification, in short, is *the reification* engendered by science itself." *Marxism and Hegel* (London: NLB, 1973), p. 182. What precisely gets jettisoned, according to Colletti, is the exactitude of a critical analysis of capital (the very hallmark of Marxian thought), which requires a scientific practice in order to effectively understand and explain the complex structuration and operativity of capitalism. Anything that falls short of this simply repeats the "romantic critique of the intellect and science, and contributes little to a socio-historical critique of capitalism", p. 175.

³³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 164.

³⁴ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 165.

³⁵ Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Richard Dixon *et al.* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975). The first of Marx's theses on Feuerbach famously states: "The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was set forth abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

of the commodity form and in the first thesis on Feuerbach), the fallacy of empiricism is circumscribed. The concrete is not the material particularity of a physical thing that meets the gaze; exactly at this point of *immediacy*, when what appears to the eye in its physical form does not penetrate any further than its manifest appearance, and thus leaves unrecognized the variety of determinations that account for its *social* existence, the concrete is itself abstract. A thinking of the social whole is debarred in advance by a science that handles only determinate and particular things. In contrast, philosophical, that is, dialectical thinking makes possible the active articulation of “the concrete totality of the historical world, the concrete *and* total historical process.”³⁶ The concrete *qua* concrete, Lukács quotes Marx, is “a *synthesis* of many particular determinants”,³⁷ a “*unity* of diverse elements.”³⁸ As a *unity* of the diverse, the concrete is the preserve of the whole, of totality. As a *synthesis*, this totality is not given as a datum, but the active result of thought: “the intellectual reproduction of reality”³⁹ brings a real diversity into accord with reason as the totalizer or totalizing instance. From within the province of Marx, Lukács secures a Hegelian insight otherwise disowned by the obdurate scientific materialism of the epigones of the Second International: the substance of the real is not matter; *a contrario*, “to posit oneself, to produce and reproduce oneself—that *is* reality.”⁴⁰

That Lukács (alongside the other Hegelian Marxists) repudiates the scientific Marxism of the Second International is not in question. What does remain in doubt is the presumption that an excessive scientism be rectifiable by and through a strictly philosophical counter-movement that risks burying entirely the problematic of science and the specificity of its practice; a philosophical destruction of science and scientific method that nonetheless makes possible a clearing for Marxism’s philosophical grounding. Lukács, as we have already noted, claims that “to be clear about the function of theory is also to understand its own basis i.e. its dialectical method.” This is a principal concern for the filiation of “Hegelian Marxist”, more generally. What subtends Marxist theory is the dialectical method, and this methodological elucidation has strictly Hegelian provenance.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity” (p. 6).

³⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 145.

³⁷ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 9.

³⁸ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 9.

³⁹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 15.

Hegelian philosophy: the last and ultimate expression of philosophy, for which, as Martin Heidegger put it, no “future, still higher standpoint over against it” is possible.⁴¹

It is in the very recuperation of the philosophical stakes of Marxism—through a reevaluation of the extent of Hegel’s contribution to Marxism—that the problem of the *unilateralization* of the philosophical reveals itself. In returning to Marxism after a renewed exploration of Hegel, Hegelian Marxism preserves and deploys certain categorial distinctions that run counter to the purpose of effectively coordinating the three-fold relation between the orders of the political, scientific and the philosophical, from which Marxism gains its potency. Principal among them is the distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*; a conceptual coupling already philosophically overdetermined, providing no neutral schema within which to carve out the differences between Marxist science, politics and philosophy, and by which to think the relative autonomy of each of its constituent practices. The stringently anti-Hegelian interpretations of Marx developed by Lucio Colletti and Louis Althusser were especially alive to this problem in their immediate Marxist forebears. While cognizant of the specificity of the practice of Marxist philosophy (“the paradoxically precarious existence of Marxist Philosophy”,⁴² as Althusser would speak of it), they understood that this need for the preservation of a distinct Marxist practice of philosophy should not encroach upon the stakes and function of class struggle and the scientific inquiries into the functioning and structuration of capitalism.⁴³ For the rest of this chapter, however, attention will focus especially

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, “Negativity: A Confrontation with Hegel approached from Negativity”, in *Hegel*, trans. Joseph Arel & Niels Feuerhahn (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 3.

⁴² Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 28.

⁴³ Louis Althusser poses the questions clearly in his important introduction to *For Marx*: “What is Marxist philosophy? Has it any theoretical right to existence? And if it does exist in principle, how can its specificity be defined?” (p. 31). Certainly, beyond the bounds of this particular investigation, it is nonetheless of significance to remind the reader that Althusser was especially uncertain with respect to what this specificity of Marxist philosophy consists in. His philosophical trajectory would see him providing quite different answers to the originary questions set forth in *For Marx*. Whence his later position, advanced for example in his lecture “Lenin and Philosophy”, that “philosophy has no history, philosophy is that strange theoretical site where nothing really happens, nothing but this repetition of nothing. To say that nothing happens in philosophy is to say that philosophy *leads nowhere because it is going nowhere*: the paths it opens really are, as Dietzgen said, long before Heidegger, ‘*Holzwege*’, paths that lead nowhere.” *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 33.

on Lucio Colletti's critical appraisal of the philosophical unilateralism of Hegelian Marxism.

In Hegel and against Marx: The absolution of reason,
the sequestering of science

For Lukács and other Hegelian Marxists, a clarification of Marxist theory depends on attending to its philosophical basis—that is, on settling accounts with Hegel. Both the task and the object of this elucidation is the dialectical method: the gift of philosophy. Lucio Colletti's *Marxism and Hegel*, published in 1969, is a forensic and immanent scrutiny of this philosophical basis, in order to better elucidate both the philosophical and non-philosophical sacrifices that are the by-product of any such Hegelian clarification. Colletti demonstrates that attending to the dialectical method as the philosophical base of Marxism ends up producing the obverse effect. It produces a set of confusions and figurative evasions that render less clear the unity of Marxism as a science, philosophy and a politics. In Colletti's own words, the variety of restorative interpretations of Hegel provided by Marxists gave rise to a fundamental and necessary "error that now lies at the basis of almost a century of theoretical Marxism."⁴⁴ In what does this fundamental error consist? For Colletti, it is locatable in the restitution of both the Hegelian critique of *Verstand* and in its concomitant retrieval of *Vernunft*: the counterpositioning of sensuous intellect against the super-sensuousness of speculative thinking as reason, that is, the empirical factum of reality against the rational truth of thought as what is real. As Hegel himself writes in the *Science of Logic*: "the understanding *determines*, and holds the determination fixed; reason is negative and *dialectical*, because it resolves the determinations of the understanding into nothing; it is positive because it generates the universal and comprehends the particular therein."⁴⁵ We already see the distant echoes of this difference reverberate in the writings of both Korsch and Lukács; what transpires in the Marxist recuperative interpretations of Hegel is not only the confirmation of the inner diremption and prioritization of the faculty of "reason" over and above the "intellect" (or the "understanding"), but the further counterpositioning of "Philosophy" and the "sciences", setting two constituent parts of Marxism into direct conflict with one another. Preserved within Hegelian Marxism is

⁴⁴ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. Arnold V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1993), p. 28.

the very content with which Hegel had ascribed to the opposition between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, namely that the power of reason rests on philosophy fully unbridling itself from the determinate materialist sciences, realizing its own essence as an unmitigated idealism.⁴⁶

For his part, Colletti begins by reconstructing the very principles of Hegel's philosophy out of which Marxist philosophy, tied to the dialectic, is said to emerge. Returning to Hegel's second remark at the end of the chapter on "determinate being" in the *Science of Logic*, Colletti underlines the definitional problem that any Marxist Philosophy, which takes sustenance from Hegel in expounding the necessary philosophical stakes inscribed in Marxist practice, is forced to encounter, namely Hegel's claim that, *in esse*, philosophy is consubstantial with idealism.⁴⁷

The trouble, according to Hegel, is that the historical existence of philosophy has invariably been inconsistent with its own essence. Despite the principle of idealism, particular philosophies have retained an extra-logical substrate—heterogeneous to all conceptual mediation—that stands as the facticity of being and the halting-point for thought. Kantian philosophy would be foremost among them, which in the name of philosophy nonetheless subtracts something qualitatively vital from it, namely its speculative interest. Hegelian philosophy would be the purification of philosophical thought, cleansed of all such extraneousities and limitations. Hegel's critique of Kant will for Colletti be of principal significance;⁴⁸ the acceptance of Hegel's critical account of Kant by those putative Hegelian Marxists would explain, according to Colletti, the superordination of philosophy as the principal instance in Marxist thought, as well as, by the very same token, accounting for a tendential regression behind the theoretical breakthrough of a Marxian materialist science.

For Hegel, Kant's refutation of the ontological argument for the existence of God dramatizes the glaring inconsistency of a philosophy not properly consequent with what it means to philosophize; Kant's claim that existence is not a *real* predicate, is a materialist postulate of scientific and thus *non*-philosophical derivation. The postulation is a function of the understanding. Once existence is predicated to a concept, the concept does

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 27: "Philosophy, if it would be a science, cannot, as I have remarked elsewhere, borrow its method from a subordinate science like mathematics."

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 154.

⁴⁸ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, see esp. chapters 6, 7 and 8.

not become *etwas mehr*.⁴⁹ Kant exemplifies accordingly: while the concept of one hundred thalers is no more than one hundred thalers, only the depositing of one hundred *actual* thalers positively affects the creditor's bank balance. The most basic materialist postulate (shared by the empirical sciences) arises from this: being and thought, real existence and the "idea", are non-identical. A first-order implication for Hegel is that if this Kantian refutation of the ontological argument for the existence of God holds, it does so in a way that goes against the interests of reason and of philosophical thought. Kant is guilty of misapplying the conditions by which objects of experience are apprehended—that is, the rules governing the understanding (the faculty par excellence of science and of common sense)—in order to censure philosophical speculation about a Being that, precisely as supersensible, cannot be made to yield to the rules of the understanding.⁵⁰ Hegel accordingly turns the tables on Kant. If Kant's critical gesture consists in reeling in the excesses of speculative metaphysics by divining the line separating legitimate from illegitimate knowledge claims (such that the critical task results in the sequestering of reason by means of the finitude of the understanding) then Hegel takes issue with Kant's illicit over-extension of the understanding, which serves as the universal arbitrator of the legitimate ends of knowledge, and seeks instead to liberate reason from the shackles of the finite, thus unbridling thought from the faculty of the understanding. While for Kant the ontological argument proceeds erroneously through the misapplication of the categories that regulate the understanding, for Hegel, the Kantian critique of the ontological argument operates defectively by misapplying the rules of the intellect to legislate over a thinking that necessarily exceeds the scope of its dominion. Hegel thus writes: "the *genuine* criticism of the categories and of reason is just this: to make *intellect* aware of this difference and to prevent it from applying to God the determinations and relationships of the finite."⁵¹

A second and related implication of this minimal postulation of materialism is, according to Hegel, to have consecrated the finite and *mutadis mutandi* to have vanquished the infinite. The infinite is banished to the farthest reaches of what is conceivable, to what is other than being or simply

⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett Press, 1996) A598/B626-A600/B628. For Hegel's refutation of Kant's position, please see Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp. 86-88

⁵⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, see pp. 90 and 45, where a similar point is made.

non-being. “Finitude is the most stubborn category of the understanding”;⁵² riveted to the sensible, the understanding is bound to what is determinate, particular, conditioned, in short to what is given. Whatever is finite is a determinate positivity, but as conditioned and determined, it is a positivity that cannot be mistaken for self-sufficiency. The finite is a limited being, and as limited it is infected by what is on the hither side of its limit, namely that it is not. The point of externality vis-à-vis a determinate being is an “otherness” that nonetheless is an interiorized and reflected moment of the in-itself of *that* particular being: “something has a limitation”, states Hegel, “insofar as it has negation in its determination, and the determination is the accomplished sublation of the limitation.”⁵³ What the understanding cannot properly grasp is this accomplishment through sublation, through rational mediation, even if it *partially* apprehends that finitude is at once what is in its immediacy a positivity *and* is invaded by a negativity, which impels it to move beyond its determinate limit, condemning it to “having-ceased-to-be”: the understanding is at one with common sense in surmising that the empirical law governing all things is that “the hour of its birth is the hour of its death”;⁵⁴ what comes into existence will fade from being, the presence of something is haunted by its inevitable absenting into nothingness. Where the understanding errs is by converting nothingness into an “imperishable absolute”, so that the very ceasing-to-be is absolutized: “the determination or destiny of finite things takes them no further than their *end*.”⁵⁵ A melancholic elegy is composed from the wistful serenade of the understanding, converting non-being as “the determination of things and at the same time making it imperishable and absolute.” As Colletti will summarize Hegel’s argument against the *finitism* of the understanding, “finitude, never ceasing in its ceasing, is thus eternal.”⁵⁶ This is the spurious infinity Hegel repudiates, on account of the two related errors it commits: first by “infinetizing the finite” (the movement of which has been described above) and second by finetizing “the infinite” (the result of the understanding’s dualistic and “one-sided” apprehension of the finite and the infinite).⁵⁷ The spurious

⁵² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 129.

⁵³ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 133.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 129.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 130.

⁵⁶ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 91: “The commonest injustice done to a speculative content is to make it one-sided, that is, to give prominence only to one of the propositions into which it can be resolved.”

infinity of the understanding resolves infinity into the open series of a succession of finite things, which rise and fall, emerge and fade, *ad infinitum*. The infinite is solely the outcome of the movement of perpetuity of the ceasing-to-be of things at the same time as it remains itself external and indifferent towards them.

Were the infinite external to the finite, then the former would be just the presentation of one side of a conceptual couplet, rendering infinity just a finite particular. To be equal to the infinite requires that it not be one of a pair, a part of a whole, but the whole itself, the very movement within which the determinateness of being is carried forth, like the suspended sedimentary particles within the sea, dissolving and crystallizing, separating and rejoining: “the finite is *in* and *of* the infinite”⁵⁸ and thus does not stand opposed as the determinate finite being does to the aloofness of an Idea beyond, held at an unreachable distance. As the “determination of the finite in the infinite”, it is none other than the expression of the movement of ideality.⁵⁹ The finite thereby relinquishes its self-sufficiency as a real and concrete datum, the finite thus becomes itself ideal: “the ideal *is* concrete, veritable being, and on the other hand the moments of this concrete being are no less ideal—are sublated in it; but in fact what is, is only the concrete whole from which the moments are inseparable.”⁶⁰ As the very medium by which the finite as determinate being is seized, the infinite makes its crossing over into the actual, it is immanent to *this* world: spirit is “made flesh”, the Idea “transubstantiated”.

As Colletti notes (following the early Marx), this immanentization of the infinite plays a double game: it means *first* the realization and fulfilment of the essence of philosophy as the consummation of speculative idealism but *second* it represents the consolidation of the Christian Logos through the repatrification of God;⁶¹ the absolute is pulled down from its position of indifference towards the world, shoring up the place of God not as the “there” of a “nowhere”, but as a “here”, already within the ambit of the real. With respect to the first point, reason is finally superordinate over the understanding, it presides over the sublation of the finite into the movement of the whole. This Hegelian operation is affirmed by Lukács, Korsch

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 151.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 143.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 155.

⁶¹ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, pp. 10-20; Karl Marx, “The Poverty of Philosophy”, *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Richard Dixon *et al.* (Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1976), pp. 162-165.

and Marcuse, as the revolutionary thrust of Marxist *philosophy* in contrast to the conservationist analytic of the sciences. In both Hegelian thought and in Marxist theory, the realization of philosophy comes about through a methodological rectification: the principle of “(non-)contradiction”—sacrosanct for the understanding—is dispensed with and is substituted for the dialectical method, which bespeaks “the identity of identity and non-identity.” It puts philosophy on the right methodological track, delivered from the syncretism that had otherwise dogged it. As Colletti sums up Hegel’s—and *mutadis mutandi* Hegelian Marxism’s—abjuring of the intellect: “the intellect reifies everything that it touches. It transforms that which is not a thing into the *finite*. It is not the principle of philosophy or idealism, but of *Unphilosophie*.”⁶² While for philosophy proper, “there are no things, there is only reason; there is no exclusive determinacy, ‘a right this here’, that excludes its opposite, but a rational inclusion, ‘a this together with that’—i.e. the unity of “sameness” and “otherness”, of “being” and “non-being”, of finite and the infinite, *in* the infinite.”⁶³

Colletti’s rendering of the Hegelian reaffirmation of philosophical (dialectical) reason over the limits of the understanding is neither neutral nor innocent;⁶⁴ it filters the Hegelian logic through those attempts by Marxists at a restorative interpretation of Hegel. In Lukács, we had earlier noted in what way the faculty of the intellect is not only *transmuted* into the very progenitor of the reificatory logic, but moreover that reification becomes correlated with the sciences as such. The empirical or regional sciences which, in Hegel’s *Logic*, are bound to the “immediate”, are in Lukács beholden to a pernicious “phantom objectivity”, that, in the words of Herbert Marcuse, “confine[s] men within the existing order of things and events.”⁶⁵ Lurking behind this homage to Hegel is Weber’s sociological thesis concerning the “iron cage” of scientific rationality; modern societies are marked by a series of systemic rationalizations “whose unity derives from its orientation towards that aspect of the phenomena that can be grasped by the *understanding*, that is created by the understanding and hence also subject to the control, the predictions and the calculations of the understanding.”⁶⁶ The understanding condemns thought to a circularity that solely assents to

⁶² Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 12.

⁶³ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Of course, on strictly Hegelian premises, dialectical reason constitutes a pleonasm.

⁶⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Humanities Press, 1991), p. 20.

⁶⁶ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 113.

what is, to the present state of affairs. The appropriation of dialectics is a methodological necessity, since it is the only *rational* method that affords a breaking-out of the empiricist allure of the immediacy of the object and its substitution with a genetic and dynamic seizing of the movement of history as a whole. A possibility that finds, in Lukács, its compressed elucidation in the following passage from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*:

What is actual is necessary in itself. Necessity consists in this that the whole is sundered into the different concepts and that this divided whole yields a fixed and permanent determinacy. However, this is not a *fossilized* determinacy but *one which permanently recreates itself in its dissolution*.⁶⁷

A “fossilized” determinacy: this is the determinate being—static, particular, reified—of the understanding, in contradistinction to the *process* of determination of the parts through the whole, which constantly resolves itself out of its own compositional dissolution, that the dialectical reasoning of Hegelian philosophy accomplishes. Marxism and Hegel would be brought into tandem on this point of philosophical method.

But, as Colletti reminds us, the Hegelian assuaging of the intellect in the name of reason plays a game that at the same time is other than methodological: Hegel's *Logic* is the transliteration of logic into the “Christian Logos”. The immanentization of the infinite does not solely mean the final overcoming of the limitations of the understanding by reason; it serves as the consecration of the absolute, of God. Hegel's *Logic* is thus a philosophical method in the service of an onto-theo-logic.⁶⁸ Reason restored through the dialectic represents the abjuring of the understanding and, against the non-attribution of existence to the concept (an entailment of Kant's prioritization of the intellect over reason), restores the ontological proof concerning God's existence. The “logic” or “method” of the dialectic does not stand apart from the ontological proofs to which the method lends itself. Colletti writes, with respect to Hegel: “the world was negated *in order to* give way to the immanentization of God; the finite was ‘idealized’ *so that* the Christian *Logos* could incarnate itself and so pass over from the beyond to the here and now.”⁶⁹ The method is a *function* of the ends on which Hegel puts the dialectic to work; it is teleologically inscribed. And for Colletti, this

⁶⁷ Hegel cited in Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 106.

⁶⁹ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 80.

is the most debilitating outcome, it is a method, whose results could not be any different, even were they extricated from the philosophical system under which dialectical reason operates.⁷⁰

The mystifying shell and the rational kernel

The question animating the Marxist reception of Hegelian philosophy has always been whether the “revolutionary” dialectical *method* can be salvaged from the “reactionary” character of the *system* within which the former is imprisoned. This question, invariably raised, has with equal persistence convoked as a response the curiously convoluted and mixed metaphorical figures that Marx employs in the Postface to the Second Edition of the first volume of *Das Kapital*: “With him [Hegel], it [the dialectic] is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.”⁷¹ An operation that contains within it not one, but two tasks: an inversion and an extraction. The *inversion*, which necessitates putting the dialectic on its feet and an *extraction* requiring that the rational content of the dialectical method be pulled out from the retrogressive forms imprisoning it: the real substantializations or hypostases of the absolute in the form of God and the Prussian State.

We are now in a position to make a more general summary of the stakes over which Hegelian Marxism presided. First, the “rational kernel” to be saved is the philosophical affirmation of “reason” over the “intellect”. The dialectical method certifies what is proper to philosophical thinking, that is, the grasping of the “whole” and thereby the traversal of the conditioned limitations self-imposed by the “intellect”—the faculty of both common-sense and the sciences. In his analysis of the *Science of Logic*, Colletti cogently demonstrates that the dialectic reveals its rational essence by first overcoming the intellect on its way to fulfilling philosophy as *idealism*.⁷² Even when delivered out of the “mystical riggings” of the absolute—i.e. the onto-logical demonstration of the existence of God, the ascension to absolute knowledge or the consecration of the bourgeois State—the dialectical method is fundamentally compromised by way of its inherent idealism. The

⁷⁰ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 48.

⁷¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁷² Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, pp. 47-51. Althusser also reproached Hegelian Marxism for seeking to say something substantive about Marxist theory from the convoluted metaphor adopted by Marx, and reprised many times subsequently. See “Contradiction and Overdetermination”, in *For Marx*, pp. 89-94.

“dialectic” is delivered up in the name of “idealism” by way of idealism. Taken on its own, therefore, the extraction of the rational kernel of Hegelian philosophy is incapable of providing Marxism with its differential features, both as an ostensive materialism and as a critical *science* of political economy. Nonetheless, it is with the discrete operation of an “extraction”—with the opposition between the intellect of the “sciences” and the reason of “philosophy” preserved—that some notable restorative Marxist interpretations of Hegel have plied their intellectual labor. Indeed, Lukács diligently transcribes this metaphorical gesture found in Marx’s Postface to *Capital*, so as to separate out “the progressive part of the method” from the “corpse of the written system [that] remained for the scavenging philologists and system-makers to feast upon”,⁷³ claiming that in extracting the rational method Marxism is unimpeachable. Marcuse, with equal certainty, proposes that “what Marx criticizes as the dialectic is the foundation and actual ‘content’ of Hegel’s philosophy—not its (supposed) ‘method’.”⁷⁴ For “while Marx criticizes, he simultaneously *extracts* the positive aspects, the great discoveries made by Hegel.”⁷⁵

Since the *extraction* appears insufficient on its own, it would seem that the task of an inversion is both indispensable and primary. As a precondition for laying claim to the “rational kernel” of Hegel’s philosophy, the dialectic must first be put on its feet, in order that philosophy is convertible from an essential idealism to a materialism. This is how precisely Marx puts the case in the Postface to the first volume of *Das Kapital*: “It must be turned right side up again, *in order to* discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell”. The problem is that the sign-posting of this causal direction does nothing to waylay the awkwardness of the metaphorical construction; an awkwardness that reveals a fundamental incompatibilism between the “extraction” of a dialectics and the achievement of materialism through “inversion”. Here we encounter what Colletti describes as a “heterogenesis” of tasks: the “extraction” and the “inversion” operate neither on the same level nor do they refer to the same object.⁷⁶ As referent, the dialectic is in each operation at cross-purposes. Through inversion, the dialectic stands the right side up: “material conditions determine consciousness”, it is “not consciousness that determines ideas.” But what is achieved in the course of

⁷³ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 41.

⁷⁵ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 79.

the inversion (the founding of the “materialist dialectic”) is unsupported by the outcome of the extraction (the traversal of the intellect by reason and the realization of philosophy’s essence as an idealism). Colletti will present the dilemma in the following way: *either* a dialectical materialism is possible but it cannot sanction the extraction of the “rational” kernel of the Hegelian method, since it is precisely Hegel’s claim that dialectics inclines toward idealism, which is in question. *Or* the commitment to the materialism of the dialectic is inessential and therefore the entire thrust of Hegel’s methodological breakthrough can be retained but its commitment to materialism vanquished. In the case of the former, “dialectical materialism is simply an idealism unaware of its own nature,”⁷⁷ and in the latter, by being aware of its own nature, a Marxist dialectics is forced to drop the very identificatory traits (i.e. its “materialism”, its claim to “scientificity”) that would serve to specify the distinguishing characteristics of “Marxism” over its Hegelian antecedent. Colletti thus sees the law of the “broken middle” taking its revenge. This reveals itself historically, in the way that the Marxist recuperation of Hegel bifurcated between two tendencies. On the one hand, the “official” codification of “dialectical materialism”, which leant on principally Engels, Plekhanov’s and Lenin’s restitution of a “dialectic of matter” and, on the other, what became known as “Western Marxism”.⁷⁸

Separated in what is otherwise the inseparable unity of Marxism is its philosophical and scientific determinations. “Science” and “philosophy”, metonymically indexed by way of the “intellect” (or “understanding”) and “reason”, come to be in dispute. The integrity of Marxism, comprised of the three co-originary practices of politics, philosophy and science, is torn asunder. Exemplary in this is the argument that Marcuse develops in *Reason and Revolution*, and which Colletti represents in the following way:

The “understanding” i.e. common sense and science, which adhere to things and real factual data, represent positivism and the safe and sound world of the bourgeoisie; they stand for conformism and preservation, and that “false” and “self-assured” consciousness which sticks closely to objects, knowing full well that if “this security disappears”, it will be driven into “unrest” and will undergo fear and anguish. Contrariwise, Reason, which denies that things exist outside of thought and states that things are truly “real” when they are no longer things but thoughts—this Reason represents the destruction of the established order. The “intellect” is positive thought, thought that recognizes existing reality. Reason,

⁷⁷ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 60.

⁷⁸ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, pp. 61-62.

on the other hand, which negates the world (...) for the sake of the Idea, is negative thought. The understanding (intellect) is Reaction—Reason is Revolution.⁷⁹

The relative autonomy of the variable instances of Marxist practice (“philosophical practice”, “scientific practice”, “political practice”), is placed in doubt. Colletti indexes the crisis accordingly: philosophical reason divides *and* conquers. It divides the understanding—the province of science and common sense—from reason, in order to sequester science as a *sub-ordinate* instance; but it also, in the same process, covets political practice, by converting it into a mirror image of itself. “Reason *is* revolution”: as the use of the copula indicates, an identity is metonymically advanced between a certain mode of philosophy (dialectical philosophy) and a particular type of politics (transformative, that is, emancipatory politics). The individuated “faculties” are thus assigned a political destination, resolving revolutionary politics into Reason and the understanding into, at best, reformism, but at worse a quietist acceptance of the way things are. Only the Marxist dialectic, by means of a philosophical elucidation, can surmount not only the pitfalls of science but also the political compromises of the understanding. As Lukács will write, once the terrain of dialectical materialism is relinquished, politics is forced to wage its struggles “on the ‘natural’ ground of existence, of the empirical in its stark-naked brutality”.⁸⁰ But in doing so, it is caught within the yawning divide between the received objectivity of the situation (the “milieu of the facts”) and the subjective force of an action necessary for the transformative overcoming of that situation. “Being” and “action”, the “is” and “ought” stand opposed to each other. The faculty of the will (for the young Lukács) is lobotomized in the absence of any dialectical mediation.⁸¹ Politics, for its revolutionary capacity to be realized, must place itself in the service of dialectical (philosophical) reason.

Inversions and extractions, then. For Colletti, out of this fog of metaphors, the situation becomes clear. The method and system of Hegel cannot be separated in the way that countless Marxists, reiterating Marx of the Postface, had otherwise supposed. Neither an inversion nor an extraction, nor (more accurately) an extraction on the basis of a prior inversion of the Hegelian priority of the being of the Idea over matter was in any way

⁷⁹ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 77.

⁸⁰ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 23.

⁸¹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 23.

congenial to thinking the specificity of Marxism—not philosophically, politically nor as a science.⁸² The *differentiae specifica*e of Marxism had been irrevocably compromised. The superordination of a philosophical elucidation of the methodological bases of Marxism that, according to Hegelian Marxists, would serve to place Marxist theory and practice on a firmer footing, led however only to accentuate an instability between the differentiating tasks of Marx. How, though, could the indexing of this problem of philosophical superordination and the concomitant attenuation of the role of science be reckoned with without, on the one hand, re-drawing the lines of emphases from the opposing direction, such that once more the problematic of science would gain a paradigmatic status in the thought and practice of Marxism, resulting thereby in the unilateralization of science over and against its other sites? This problem is arguably insoluble, and we will not find the answer in Colletti.

For Colletti, materialism and not the dialectic constitutes the defining feature of Marxism. This goes beyond specifying on which of the two terms emphasis is to be placed. “Dialectical materialism”—which in the canon of Marxist orthodoxy represented the *philosophical* branch of “Marxism”—is exposed by Colletti as a *contradictio in terminis*. Marxism must decide: either the dialectic or materialism, either continuity with its immediate pre-history or a profound break with Hegelianism. *In nuce*, either philosophy or science. Colletti writes:

“the intellect”, the principle of non-contradiction, is common sense, the point of view of materialism and of science. Everything that philosophy or idealism asserts—that the finite “is not” and the infinite “is”—the “intellect” presents in the reverse order. Materialism and science are, therefore, the *Unphilosophie*, that is the antithesis or negation of philosophy.⁸³

This attestation leaves little doubt about the mutual exclusion involved, and where, with respect to this opposition, Colletti positions himself. Marxism is first and foremost a materialist *science*, not a *dialectical* philosophy. It falls on the side of what was the object of Hegel’s repudiation, the “understanding”, which proceeds by way of determinate being, by way of the immediacy of what is perceived as appearance, as both finite, particular and

⁸² Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*. A similar (but by no means identical) point is made by Althusser in “On the Materialist Dialectic”.

⁸³ Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 113.

conditioned. This leads Colletti to admit the following mutually exclusive alternative: “If *scepsis towards matter* (...) is a moment that is indispensable to philosophy *qua* idealism, the critico-materialist point of view cannot help but imply a *scepsis towards reason*.”⁸⁴ The critico-materialist standpoint, the position of a putative Marxist Science, vouchsafes for the principle of non-identity between thinking and being; the very principle, which at the beginning of the *Science of the Logic*, Hegel identifies in Kant, in order to break with Kant, and which Hegelian Marxism also puts into question as the insuperable starting point for an elucidation of its own philosophy. For Colletti, Marxism must not deviate from the most elementary materialist principle: existence is unassimilable to the concept (it is “extra-logical”, a “something more” (*ertwas mehr*)). Dialectical philosophy, which resolutely breaks with this basic materialist premise, cannot be anything other than idealism. As correlative terms, the real and rational convert existence into a logical category; the real movement of things is thereby said to mirror the movement of the concept, the two orders of *causa essendi* and *causa cognoscendi* are thus elided. The speculative pretensions of reason compromise a forensic analysis of the real and determinate conditions of capitalist expropriation and exploitation and the hazardous irruption of class struggle. Colletti (and Galvano della Volpe before him) shows the extent to which Marx was quickly alert to these Hegelian defects (even if many subsequent Marxists chose to ignore the warning signs). In Marx’s early critical readings of Hegel and in his polemic against the Hegelianism of Proudhon in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx diagnoses the litany of errors that follow from the methodological reasoning of the dialectic. “Just as by dint of abstraction everything is transformed into a logical category”, it follows for Marx that

one has to make an abstraction of every characteristic *distinctive* of different movements to attain movement in its abstract condition—a *purely formal* movement, the purely logical formula of movement. If one finds in logical categories the substance of all things, one imagines one has found in the logical formula of movement the absolute method, which not only explains all things, but also implies the movement of things.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 92.

⁸⁵ Marx, “Poverty of Philosophy”, p. 162.

The speculative pretensions of reason is exposed as scientifically fraudulent, a fraudulence that shows itself: (i) in the amphibologous reasoning it adopts, i.e. in confusing ‘the logical formula’ of change with real movement; (ii) in the subsequent manner that it resolves the contingencies of historical conditions into the logical deduction of their categorial unfolding; (iii) in the paucity of any determinate or actual knowledge that the “absolute method” of the dialectic is said to furnish. An interpretation of the history of social formations through the logical procession of the categories empties out history of its empirical density, evacuating thought of the very content required to incisively interrogate the actual historical conditions of societies, leaving thinking thereby to be ravaged by its own analytical impotence—what della Volpe diagnosed as its “cognitive sterility.”⁸⁶

The fault of those (Marxists or otherwise) who recognize in the philosophy of Hegel the revolutionary thrust of the dialectical method resolve the difficult labor of a direct confrontation with actual history, that is, with the concrete and specific conditions of overdetermined conjunctures, into a formal schema accounting for the movement of the whole as such, namely History and its *logical* unfolding.⁸⁷ It was as if the generic formulae for thinking change and movement that Hegel bequeathed—i.e. “the negation of negation”, “the unity of opposites”, the dialectical transformation from “quantity into quality”, etc.—were sufficient to guarantee knowledge of the complex social, economic and political processes of capitalist societies; as though, equipped with such a formal demonstration, the critical categories of the Marxian critique of political economy could be extricated from the historical site of their theoretical production (principally from the volumes of *Capital*) and employed *a prioristically*—transformed into *generic* ideas, the analytical and explanatory power of which was supposed to apply, without exception, to all societies, past, present and future. Marx’s own method—of which section three of the *Einleitung* (1857) to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* served as the most lucid expression—was, according to Colletti, at variance with this deductive approach. Marx produced *determinate* knowledge (for della Volpe and Colletti, following Kant, the only kind!) on the basis of a *specific* structuration of society, i.e. capitalist society, the actual existence of which constituted a *real object* for the understanding and not an ideality fabricated out of reason, forged

⁸⁶ Galvano della Volpe, “For a Materialist Methodology of Economics and of the Moral Disciplines in General”, in *Rousseau and Marx*, p. 178.

⁸⁷ Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 8.

through the “mere relation of idea to idea”, the result of “an internal monologue within thought itself.”⁸⁸ The task of the understanding is, from out of the phenomenality or the factuality of *this* society, to synthesize multitudinous *real* social causes and to reach an order of conceptuality that is neither *determined* exclusively by the bounds of particular empirical cases, from which knowledge has been induced, nor, through the genericity of an abstraction, is it rendered indeterminate. Avoiding the possibilities of both induction and deduction, a Marxist materialist science presents its knowledge through “determinate abstractions”: a mode of concept whose explanatory and disclosive power is not restricted to the particular conditions from which it was induced but constitutes a historically conditioned model, law or rule that, despite its conditioned appearing, functions as an *explanans* for other contemporaneous concrete cases.⁸⁹

For this purpose Marx needed no *philosophy* of history, which would contrive to fashion history in its own rational image but a science of the real object, of a determinate societal and historical conjuncture. We can see precisely in what way the priority between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*, between the ascendant heights of philosophical speculation and the activities of scientific calculation and common sense, is once again reversed by Colletti, and how the cascade of oppositions, said to take their bearings from this difference—“History” and “nature”, “Being” and “determinate being”, “the unconditional” and “the conditioned”, “infinity” and “the finite”, “the idea” and “matter”, “negativity” and “positivity”, etc.—find an arrangement that is something other than the dialectical surmounting that Hegelian Marxism seeks to present. As a reversal, though, Colletti does not jump out of the Hegelian shadow. Instead caught within the prismatic filter of the opposition between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, seeking to wrest the scientificity of Marxism away from any crypto-metaphysics, preserving the “understanding” against the speculative pretensions of reason, he ends up converting the entire problematic into a simple alternative: either a Marxist materialist science or a Marxist dialectical philosophy.⁹⁰ The stakes are decisively clear,

⁸⁸ Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 3.

⁸⁹ A determinate abstraction proceeds from the concrete to the abstract to the concrete again (notationally expressed by della Volpe as C-A-C¹). This is opposed to the circle augmented by generic abstractions, that takes the notational form of A-C-A. Please see: Galvano della Volpe, “For a Materialist Methodology of Economics and of the Moral Disciplines in General”, pp. 194-197.

⁹⁰ The severity of this alternative becomes all the more pronounced in Colletti’s later work, up to and including his irreversible break with Marxism. For an especially clear

but the terrain decidedly barren. And this is the problem, of course: in spite of himself, despite Colletti's own position as a philosopher, as a delicate reader of Kant and Marx, the entire philosophical vocation of Marxism gets tied to Hegelianism and vanquished as a result. All that remains is the promise of a Marxist Science, which itself, tied to the "understanding", comes close to simply taking its place next to the other empirical sciences.⁹¹ But not only this. A political silence engulfs the alternative that Colletti lays bare. On precisely the terrain of Marxism, which compossibilizes "science", "philosophy" and "politics", the stand-off between Marxist science and Marxist philosophy turns Marxist politics into an unsuspecting residual instance.

It is symptomatic that in an essay entitled "Marxism: Science or Revolution?", Colletti is led back into a classically Leninist position: "building the party requires something 'from without.'" ⁹² This "without" meaning, of course, "science". Science becomes the conditioning moment for politics: "the working class cannot constitute itself as a class without taking possession of the scientific analysis of *Capital*."⁹³ This is no time to replay the entire history of Marxism from the point of view of what, from this investigation, would appear as the suppressed "third term", which, if only it had the proper space for articulation, would resolve the impasses and incurable

recapitulation of the unbridgeable divide between the means and ends of a Marxist science and a Marxist Philosophy, Cf. Colletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic", trans. John Matthews, *New Left Review* 1:93, September-October, 1975, pp. 3-29.

⁹¹ Arguably, Althusser was more successful in his attempt to think the novelty of the Marxist practice of science, choosing as he did to rethink the very question of the scientificity of the sciences, which did not needlessly box the very practice of a Marxist science into an empiricist corner (the ultimate price paid by Colletti). Nor was the idea of a Marxist Philosophy forfeited (even if Althusser equivocated greatly on the question of what a Marxist Philosophy can do?). For Althusser's critical appraisal of Colletti and della Volpe (who ultimately stand charged of 'empiricism' and less explicably 'historicism'), cf. "Marxism is not a Historicism", *Reading Capital* (London: NLB, 1970). The empiricism of science becomes the unilateralized instance of Marxist practice. It becomes the model by which all other practices are validated. As Althusser clearly describes: 'Colletti (...) maintains that history, and even reality itself, have an *'experimental structure'*, and therefore that in essence they are structured like an experiment. If real history on the one hand is declared to be 'industry and experiment' in this way—and if all scientific practice is defined as experimental practice, it follows that historical practice and theoretical practice have one and the same structure.' p. 135. Having said this, the value of Colletti over Althusser shows itself in the systematic interpretation that Colletti gave of Hegel, something that (for all manner of reasons) is not present in Althusser (notwithstanding Althusser's early "pre-Marxist" forays into Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*).

⁹² Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 236.

⁹³ Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, p. 236.

blind-spots that have arisen from the received struggle between the Hegelian Marxists, who sought to revivify Marxist philosophy, and those who, in turn, had as their principal aim the scientific accreditation of Marxism. Were it now, as a matter of course, the immediate task of this chapter to raise the political instance of Marxism (that would find ample expression in the work of Lenin, Luxemburg, Sorel, Gramsci, moments in Althusser), we would however find that it is not itself immune to a recalibration of Marxism's interiorized relations that borders on an overcompensation of its own subordinate status. What results is the overextension of the bounds of political practice that encroaches on the relative autonomy and specificity of Marxism as a science and a philosophy. Gramsci's remark that "since *all* action is political, can one not say that the real philosophy of each man is contained in its entirety in his political action?", would be the respectable face of this politicism while the Lysenko affair would constitute its most destructive manifestation.⁹⁴

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To Marxism, societies today apply the pious moral dictum, *de mortuis nisi bonum*. This is itself an indicative sign of its historical fragility, even if the sustained economic crises of the last decade have brought with them a renewed interest in elements of a Marxian analysis of capitalism—i.e. the cyclical crises of capitalism, of systemic unemployment and precarious labor, etc. The problem has been that the utility of the writings of Marx have become restricted to being just a further theoretical prism through which to sift through the veritable crises of capital. Concessionary analytical acceptance results in canonical domestication. Marx takes his place next to Smith, Ricardo, Bentham and Keynes, within some decontextualized ether. These are barely the crumbs of comfort to keep the infirmed hopeful, they are instead the offerings that serve more as a "halo of consolation". They thus serve notice, for one thing, on the disintegration of the unity of its ends as well as recognition of the acute difficulties surrounding the heterogeneity of the means (politics, philosophy, science) by which such ends were to be secured. It is, as Colletti feared already in the mid-1970s, namely that Marxism soldiers on emboldened by its principles alone but in denial of the facts:

⁹⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 326.

the only way Marxism can be revived is if no more books like *Marxism and Hegel* are published, and instead books Hilferding's *Finance Capital* and Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital*—or even Lenin's *Imperialism*, which was a popular brochure—are once again written.⁹⁵

Ultimately, to repose the question of the relation of Marx and Hegel today runs the inevitable risk of being “the foible of a few university professors.” But, this would be unnecessarily churlish. If the posing of this question serves a purpose in our own present then what it permits is a laying out of that immense history (at one and the same time philosophically, politically, scientifically charged) in front of us, even while at the same time today we deem it best to place the future of its recommencement behind us. In this sense, it might well be that by seeking to regain a time that has passed, by posing once more the extent of the connection or disconnection between Marx and Hegel, all we can possibly gain is a stronger sense of the times we have lost. This is said as much in respect to Marxism as much as it is to discredit our own times.

⁹⁵ Colletti, “A Political and Philosophical Interview”, *New Left Review* 86, 1974, p. 28.