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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Who Put Hegel Back into Marxism?

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Abstract

There is a consensus in the literature that the Marxism of the Second International (1889–1916) lacked philosophical sophistication and that understanding of Marxism's Hegelian origins was lost soon after Karl Marx's death, only to be recovered with the emergence of Western Marxism in the 1920s. This article challenges this consensus, urging revision of the basic outlines of the intellectual history of Marxism. It begins by sketching two ways contemporary scholars understand the Hegel-Marx connection. It then shows that these views were anticipated before World War I in the work of Max Adler. Against the view that Hegel was "put back into Marxism" in the 1920s or 1970s, then, this article maintains that there have always been sophisticated as well as simplifying accounts of the Hegel-Marx connection.

Keywords: Marxism; Hegel; intellectual history; Max Adler; Karl Marx

This article challenges the received wisdom that interpretations of Marx's debt to Hegel went badly wrong shortly after his death, and that more or less a century was needed to reverse the damage. I demonstrate with a case study that Marxology before 1918 was far more sophisticated than a reader of the secondary literature would be led to believe. The Austrian Marxist Max Adler anticipated, in texts published 1904–18, two of the accounts of the Hegel-Marx connection still advocated by contemporary scholars. There was thus no more and no less reason to "re-Hegelianize" Marxism in the 1920s than there was in the 1970s or 2020s. My claim is not that Adler made a decisive break in Marxism's history. I conclude, rather, that there have always been more sophisticated as against more simplifying accounts of the Hegel-Marx connection depending on the talents, interests, and intentions of the author in question. Marxism was always a space of argument with a plural character but, in contrast to the excellent work now available on the historical Marx, the historiography of Marxism is still too

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caricatured to be a reliable guide. The question raised by this conclusion is less who re-Hegelianized Marxism than why the Hegel-Marx connection has been repeatedly reforgotten and rediscovered.

With few exceptions, the "Orthodox Marxism" of the Second International (1889–1916) is described in the literature as dogmatic, determinist, economistic, and crudely materialist. This consensus unites scholars with otherwise divergent readings of Marx and Marxism, from Martin Jay characterizing early Marxism as "a full-fledged metaphysics of matter … [which] reduce[d] consciousness to an epiphenomenal status"[1] to Michael Heinrich dismissing its "rather crude economism" and "pronounced determinism."[2] Helmut Fleischer styles the transition from Marx to Marxism as "the victory of ideology over ideology-critique."[3] Gareth Stedman Jones, too, points to "the intellectual gulf between [Marx's] generation and that which came to dominate the *Marxist* socialist movement,"[4] concluding that "the Marx constructed in the twentieth century bore only an incidental resemblance to the Marx who lived in the nineteenth."[5]

Although the precise nature of Marx's Hegelian inheritance is still debated, there is again a consensus that Marxists of the Second International did not understand it. According to Ian Fraser and Tony Burns, it was only in the 1920s and 1930s, in the work of Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and the Frankfurt School, that this question began adequately to be broached.[6] It was left to these Western Marxists, argues Max Pensky, to recover Marx's "Hegelian origins"[7] and to undertake what Rudolf Walther calls a "rehabilitation of the dialectic."[8] For Norman Levine, the 1920s marked the beginning of Marxism's "re-Hegelianization," the foundation on which, with the steady (re)publication of Marx's early writings, it became possible accurately to narrate Marx's intellectual biography.[9] Even Christoph Henning's iconoclastic narrative maintains that

[1] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), 66.

[2] Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 24–25, emphasis omitted.

[3] See the title of Helmut Fleischer, "Marxismus: Sieg der Ideologie über die Ideologiekritik," in *Der Marxismus in seinem Zeitalter*, ed. Helmut Fleischer (Leipzig: Reclam, 1994), 201–32.

[4] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (London: Penguin Books, 2017), 594, original emphasis.

[5] Ibid., 595.

[6] Ian Fraser and Tony Burns, "Introduction: An Historical Survey of the Hegel-Marx Connection," in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*, ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), esp. 8–15.

[7] Max Pensky, "Western Marxism," in *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, ed. Peter E. Gordon and Warren Breckman, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 271.

[8] Rudolf Walther, "Marxismus," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-socialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner et al., vol. 3 (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1972), 968. For further examples see Geoff Boucher, *Understanding Marxism* (Durham: Acumen, 2012), 79–80; Jan Kandiyali, "Western Europe," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*, ed. Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis, and Imre Szeman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 480; Jaime Edwards and Brian Leiter, *Marx* (London: Routledge, 2025), 229.

[9] Norman Levine, *Divergent Paths: Hegel in Marxism and Engelsism* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2007), quote at pp. xii–xiii.

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Marx was "re-philosophized" beginning in the 1920s, though Henning laments rather than celebrates this process.[10]

Rejecting this consensus, I show that Marx's Hegelianism was well understood before the end of World War I. My argument challenges the received wisdom about the shape of Marxism's history in its broadest outlines, at the level of abstraction of interest to generalists. To challenge the view that Hegel was put back into Marxism starting from the 1920s, some account of Marx's relation to Hegel is required. I use the first section of this article, "The state of the art," to offer a stylized sketch of the contemporary literature. I find two families of interpretation of the Hegel-Marx connection, which I dub "dialectic-as-method" and "freedom-in-history." After outlining the Marxological context c.1900 in the second section, I argue in the third and fourth sections, "Dialectic-as-method" and "Freedom-in-history" respectively, that Adler anticipated both interpretations of the Hegel-Marx connection before the end of World War I. By the standards of the contemporary literature, then, Hegelian Marxism must predate the 1920s. In the fifth section, "Reassessing Western Marxism," I reassess the evidence that the inception of Western Marxism is the moment of Marxism's re-Hegelianization.

The state of the art

The question of Marx's relation to Hegel is highly controversial. Since it touches on the questions of Marx's basic philosophical commitments and methodology, it is also foundational, anchoring a range of other exegetical controversies. At the most general level, the debate turns on whether or not Marx definitively broke with Hegel.[11] Since the allegation that Marxism in the Second International was ignorant of Marxism's Hegelian roots presupposes the importance of these roots, this section presents a stylized sketch of that portion of the literature that maintains that Marx's Young Hegelianism was formative and therefore crucial for understanding all his later work. The argument here therefore overlooks those interpretations of Marx which marginalize Hegel's influence.[12]

If Marxism ever needed to be re-Hegelianized, this is because some aspect of the Hegelian inheritance was indispensable for Marx's achievement. There is persistent disagreement in the contemporary literature about what this was. Roughly speaking, there are two main families of argument. The first maintains that Marx appropriated from Hegel a modified dialectical method and an implied conception of a social totality. The second view is that Marx's main inheritance from Hegel was an account of the relationship between labor and freedom, along with the (connected) view that history is progress in the consciousness of freedom. I set out these views in this section in order to establish a standard

[10] Christoph Henning, *Philosophy After Marx: 100 Years of Misreadings and the Normative Turn in Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2015), quote at 12, emphasis omitted.

[11] See, e.g., Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, trans. P. S. Falla, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 262–7; Fraser and Burns, "Introduction," 1.

[12] See, e.g., William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of* Capital (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), esp. 9–12.

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by which Marxists before 1918 can be judged. If the arguments here were anticipated then, then Hegelian Marxism cannot have been born in the 1920s, and the consensus view needs revision.

According to the first camp, the continuity between Marx and Hegel is methodological. On one version of this view, Marx's earliest critique of Hegel involved refining the latter's dialectical method, and Marx's subsequent work consistently applied this new method. Lucio Colletti argues that this is evident from the 1843 manuscript known in English as "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, and "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" (as I will refer to it).[13] Marx's argument was not that Hegel had compromised with the conservative state of his day, such that what was required was a consistent application of the method. This was a misreading that Colletti traces back to Engels.[14] Instead, Marx argued that it was necessary to separate the "rational kernel" of Hegel's method from its "mystical shell."[15] The mystical shell was Hegel's theological point of departure, which committed him to interpreting "empirical reality … as a 'vessel' of the Absolute."[16] Thus on Hegel's account, "the institutions of capitalist-protestant society … appear as immanent concretizations of the divine Spirit, not historical institutions but sacraments."[17] The point was not that Hegel had applied his method inconsistently to obtain conservative results. On the contrary, Leopold shows that Marx consistently maintained that Hegel's analysis of the modern state was sound.[18] But if, as Joseph O'Malley puts it, one rejects the premise that reality is co-extensive with God, one is free to subject it to criticism.[19] When this is done, the alienation that Hegel had successfully "diagnosed" could begin to be addressed.[20] Indeed according to Colletti one can already in 1843 detect the germ of Marx's argument in *Capital:* "to explain the fetishism of thought with reference to the fetishism or mysticism built into social reality."[21]

If Marx did not make the distinction between a revolutionary dialectical method and a conservative, compromising Hegelian system, the argument continues, one can also see that it is misleading to suggest that Marx replaced an idealist dialectic with a materialist one. Such a dialectic would still posit the unity of thought and being, risking the same kind of mystification as Hegel and

[13] Lucio Colletti, "Introduction," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, by Karl Marx (London: Penguin, 1992). See also David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andrew Cole, "Hegelianism," in *Bloomsbury Companion to Marx*, ed. Diamanti et al., esp. 193.

[14] For a more sympathetic interpretation of Engels see, e.g., John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature* (New York: Monthly Review, 2020), 358–416; Kaan Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[15] Colletti, "Introduction," 13. See also Kołakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 1, 402–4.

[16] Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, trans. John Merrington and Judith White (London: New Left Books, 1976), 127.

[17] Ibid., 128.

[18] Leopold, *Young Marx*, 69–74, 82–92.

[19] Joseph O'Malley, "Marx, Marxism and Method," in *Varieties of Marxism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1977), 13–14.

[20] Leopold, *Young Marx*, 80.

[21] Colletti, "Introduction," 38.

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inviting the misunderstanding that thought is epiphenomenal. In contrast, O'Malley draws on the "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse* to highlight that Marx's method had at least two steps: "'realistic' investigation and 'dialectical' exposition."[22] Dialectics, on this view, is not a claim about the nature of being, but about the appropriate way that (scientific) thought works on its data.[23] Marx's method, then, rested as much on "empirical realism" as it did on dialectics.[24] Insofar as ideas emerge from a material "base" on this view, this happens in the process of applying more or less scientific methods to making sense of this empirical given. It is not the view that ideas are *post facto* rationalizations of material interests. As the social totality changes, so too do the ideas fabricated to make sense of it, but primarily because the social totality really changes.

Christopher J. Arthur, a leading exponent of the school of "New Dialectics," argues that Marx's project in *Capital* was an extension of his critique of Hegel, whose construction of a "system of [self-moving] categories" was merely the mirror of "the self-moving abstraction" of capital.[25] Thus "the critique of economic categories is that of the social form that Hegel's concepts absolutise and idealise," and Marx's aim was to indicate the possibility of practically overcoming both with historicizing de-mystification.[26] Whereas O'Malley takes Marx at his word that the Hegelian method is simply the correct means of reconstructing a social totality in thought, Arthur argues for a conceptual correspondence between Hegel's system and bourgeois society. Nonetheless the school concurs that Marx's inheritance from Hegel was first and foremost a method, central to which was conceptual reconstruction of a social totality.

Despite important differences, the perspectives summarized above share the view that Marx's critique of Hegel produced a new, refined dialectical method. The core of this method is the working-up of concepts into a coherent picture of the social totality. The Hegel-Marx connection is thus "a movement ... from the logic of thought to the thought of the logic of capital."[27] Marx's mature work was an application of this method to capitalist society. A particularly important result was Marx's revelation that capitalism had transformed relations between persons into relations between commodities. This "commodity fetishism" is a direct successor to Marx's analysis of alienation in his early work, and a product of his dialectical method. I call this family of interpretations of the Hegel-Marx connection "dialectic-as-method."

A second family of arguments emphasizes Marx's achievement as a philosopher interested in the relationship between history and freedom. Joseph McCarney argues that the dialectic is not merely an apposite tool for the conceptual reconstruction of a social totality. Rather, Marx took forward Hegel's theory of

[22] O'Malley, "Marx, Marxism and Method," 9.
[23] Ibid., 9–11.
[24] Ibid., 10.
[25] Christopher J. Arthur, "From the Critique of Hegel to the Critique of Capital," in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*, ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), 107, 123.
[26] Ibid., 125.
[27] Cole, "Hegelianism," 189.

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history as progress in the consciousness of freedom. The sense in which Marx de-mystified Hegel was by moving the locus of contradiction from an impersonal, quasi-divine spirit to human beings in class society.[28] The conceptual contradictions in Marx's dialectic are not those that confront social scientists as they refine their analytical arsenal, but "the gap between what the subject posits and what it experiences."[29] Since "the discovery of such contradictions is inherently transformative for subjects susceptible to reason," history ought to make progress and ideology-critique should accelerate such progress.[30]

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of the concept of labor here, both for Marx's conception of freedom and as a bridge to his critique of political economy. Stedman Jones argues that the achievement of German philosophy since Kant had been the elevation of freedom from the satisfaction of natural impulses to true self-determination.[31] It was labor, understood as creative and conscious activity, that distinguished human beings from animals. In this activity, it is possible to rise above impulsive, hedonistic action and thus labor is the essence of freedom. Marx's critique of political economy therefore raised a profound objection to a social order based on private property: "The idea that freedom meant self-activity, and that the capacity to produce was man's 'most essential' characteristic, led [Marx] to conclude in 1844 that 'estranged labour' formed the basis of all other forms of estrangement and, therefore, that 'the whole of human servitude' was 'involved in the relation of the worker to production'."[32] Peter Ghosh notes that Stedman Jones sees "no fundamental continuity in Marx's ideas," so that it is hard to characterize Stedman Jones's Marx as Hegelian or otherwise.[33] But for Ghosh, this becomes the key to understanding the shape of Marx's intellectual biography: the concept of labor facilitated "Marx's seamless *translation of the critique of philosophy into the critique of political economy*."[34] If political economy is the science of the division of labor, and if the division of labor is at the root of human alienation, then the critique of political economy is the key to ending alienation.

On this view, Marx's conception of labor-as-freedom was the crux of his Hegelian inheritance and the foundation for his critique of political economy, or: "The nexus of labour and freedom is the fundamental connection between Marx and German idealism."[35] Historical progress amounts to increasing consciousness of and control over the activity in which the human being realizes its nature. Freedom means self-realization, in the sense of human development of

[28] Joseph McCarney, "Hegel, Marx and Dialectic," in *Hegel and Modern Philosophy*, ed. David Lamb (London: Croon Helm, 1987), 166–68.

[29] Ibid., 172.

[30] Ibid., 172–75, quote at 172.

[31] Stedman Jones, *Marx*, 195–204.

[32] Ibid., 198.

[33] Peter Ghosh, "Constructing Marx in the History of Ideas," *Global Intellectual History* 2, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 161 (fn. 122).

[34] Ibid., 133, original emphasis.

[35] Douglas Moggach, "Perfectionism, Alienation and Freedom," in *Reassessing Marx's Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Jan Kandiyali (London: Routledge, 2020), 36.

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the human essence. I call this second family of interpretations "freedom-in-history."

There are three caveats to this stylized sketch. First, the division between the families need not be sharp, with scholars such as Michael George bridging the two.[36] Nonetheless some scholars focus on one aspect of the Hegelian inheritance to the exclusion of the other. Norman Levine argues that this inheritance is confined to the role played by the conceptual apparatus of Hegel's *Logic* in the critique of political economy, and that Marxism is not a philosophy of history.[37] At the other extreme, in their seminal 1932 essay introducing Marx's *Frühschriften*, S. Landshut and J. P. Mayer rejected the claim that Marx's dialectic was a "method": "[the dialectic] is rather the very manner in which the actual implementation of history happens, which is dialectical for no other reason than that it is the implementation of the movement of the 'Idea': the implementation of the 'realization of philosophy'."[38]

Second, Levine[39] and Michael Quante[40] argue that what I have presented as two forms of Hegelian Marxism correspond to two distinct moments in Marx's reception of Hegel. They locate the "freedom-in-history" interpretation in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," also known as the "Paris Manuscripts" (as I refer to them hereafter), and argue that the textual focus for this encounter was Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* They argue that Marx's revised dialectical method was developed around the time the *Grundrisse* was drafted, and that Hegel's *Science of Logic* was decisive for this second phase of Marx's Hegelianism. It is therefore possible to argue both that there is a distinction between the "Young Marx" and the "Mature Marx," and that Marx was a lifelong Hegelian.

Finally, the debate about the importance of Hegel for Marx is further complicated by the possibility that Marx misrepresented the influence in some way. Stedman Jones argues that Marx's "materialist" stance in *The Communist Manifesto* was "ingenious but disingenuous,"[41] and that Marx stripped out some of the Hegelian terminology in *Capital* on Engels's recommendation, fearing that the jargon might hamper the book's reception.[42] Marx, then, may have overstated his break with Hegel in favor of a social-scientific presentation of the critique of political economy. It is also possible that Marx had not himself fully understood or mastered his debt to Hegel, as in Alex Callinicos's arresting

[36] Michael George, "Marx's Hegelianism: An Exposition," in *Hegel and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Lamb, 120–27, quote at 127.

[37] Norman Levine, *Marx's Discourse with Hegel* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 33.

[38] S. Landshut and J. P. Mayer, "Einleitung" in *Karl Marx. Der historische Materialismus. Die Frühschriften*, ed. S. Landshut and J. P. Mayer, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1932), p. xxxviii.

[39] Levine, *Marx's Discourse*, *passim* but esp. 5–6.

[40] Michael Quante, "Dialektik," in *Marx-Handbuch. Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Michael Quante and David P. Schweikard (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2016), esp. 272–73.

[41] Gareth Stedman Jones, "Introduction," in *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (London: Penguin, 2002), 144.

[42] Stedman Jones, *Marx*, 424–28.

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claim that "Marx's resort to Hegelian categories is best seen as a philosophical cannibalisation."[43]

In sum, there are at least two ways to "put Hegel into Marxism." One is family of arguments about dialectics as a method. The other is a family of arguments about the unique conception of freedom in German philosophy. The rest of this article shows that, by 1918, Adler had made arguments belonging to both families. To the extent that this is proven, the conventional wisdom that Marxism was re-Hegelianized in the 1920s is found wanting.

The first rediscovery of the "Young Marx"

The literature on Marxism's history is virtually unanimous in its judgment that Marxists in the Second International period lacked a sophisticated account of Marx's Hegelian inheritance. Consider McCarney's assessment that the history of Hegel's legacy in Marxism is "one of misunderstandings and misappropriations, lost opportunities, unnoticed slippages, wrong turnings and blind alleys."[44] For the period before 1914, the first and last word on the Hegel-Marx reception is taken to be Engels's didactic texts, especially the *Anti-Dühring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of German Philosophy*. These texts are widely believed to have set Marxists on the wrong track by suggesting that Marx believed that matter itself was dialectical and insisting sharply on the primacy of class interest over conscious human agency. In much of the literature, the narrative simply skips over the next 30 years and resumes either with Lenin's reading of Hegel's *Logic* during World War I or with the seminal essays of Lukács and Korsch published in 1923.

This narrative overlooks important sources such as the thesis submitted to the Sorbonne by Jean Jaurès in 1891, to my knowledge the first academic study of the Hegel-Marx connection.[45] Its central claim is that, despite appearances, "German socialism" (i.e., Marxism) was not a materialist doctrine but fundamentally a theory of freedom with clear roots in German theology and philosophy.

The omission of Jaurès from the history might be justified with the claim that in this period a paucity of sources doomed accounts of the Hegel-Marx connection to failure. And, indeed, Jaurès arguably misunderstood an essential part of the argument of *Capital* and its connection to Young Hegelian philosophy. He contrasted a medieval world in which craftsmen were self-employed but

[43] Alex Callinicos, *Deciphering Capital* (London: Bookmark Publications, 2014), 129. Both arguments again have a long history that I cannot do justice to here. For an early statement of the argument that Marx misunderstood and polemically misrepresented Hegelianism, see Johann Plenge, *Marx und Hegel* (Tübingen: Verlag der H. Laupp'schen Buchhandlung, 1911). For a brilliant overview of Plenge's intellectual *milieu* see Asaf Kedar, "National Socialism Before Nazism: From Friedrich Naumann to the 'Ideas of 1914'," *History of Political Thought* 34, no. 2 (2013), 324–49.

[44] Joseph McCarney, "Hegel's Legacy," in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*, ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), 56.

[45] The thesis was submitted in Latin as *De primis socialismi Germanici lineamentis* and translated into French shortly thereafter as *Les Origines du Socialisme allemande* [*The Origins of German Socialism*]. References are to the republished French edition: Jean Jaurès, "Les Origines du socialisme allemand," in *Œuvres de Jean Jaurès*, trans. Adrien Veber, vol. 3 (Paris: Édition Rieder, 1935), 49–111.

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incapable of mass production with a capitalist world in which workers were more productive but insecure because separated from the means of production.[46] Although the prognosis of a world in which "man will be master both of himself and of things" aligns with Marx's vision of communism,[47] Marx's diagnosis was different: a medieval world largely structured around ties of personal dependence had been replaced by a society of *apparent* freedom, in which social relations had taken the mystified form of relations between things.[48]

That said, if Jaurès misunderstood Marx's argument about the commodity fetish, his argument could hardly be said to lack philosophical sophistication, and he drew a number of important conclusions about Hegel's impact on Marx's "materialist dialectic." In the *Philosophy of Right*, Jaurès argued, Hegel had not claimed to have traced the historical order of the forms of freedom under discussion, but their logical order, assessing the rationality of each with the dialectical method. It was from this perspective, too, that socialism was to be judged the successor to capitalism: its necessity was logical not historical.[49] Jaurès also underscored that the historicization of economic categories was central to *Capital's* argument.[50]

Jaurès and his contemporaries are overlooked because, it is said, it was not until the early 1930s that many of the manuscripts now regarded as vital for the understanding Marx were published for the first time, notably the "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" and the "Paris Manuscripts."[51] And, the argument continues, it was not until the second (1953) edition of the *Grundrisse* that this text had any appreciable reception.[52]

This picture is seriously misleading. Although often unmentioned in publication histories of the *Grundrisse*, one of its most important sections, the "Introduction," was first published in *Neue Zeit* in 1902.[53] The extract was therefore as widely disseminated as any of Marx's writings could be in the Second International period. Also in 1902, Franz Mehring collected and reissued hitherto inaccessible works from the 1840s, including Marx's doctoral thesis, essays such as "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," "On the Jewish Question," and "Critical Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform'," as well as *The Holy Family*.[54] This first

[46] Ibid., 105.

[47] Ibid.

[48] On this see, e.g., Leopold, *Young Marx*, 230.

[49] Jaurès, "Origines," 110–11.

[50] Ibid., 104.

[51] These were published in two competing editions in 1932, one issued by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow and the other edited by the German social democrats Landshut and Mayer. On this see Michael Maidan, "The *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the Paris Manuscripts," *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 6 (1990): 767–81; Marcello Musto, "The 'Young Marx' Myth in the Interpretations of the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," *Critique* 43, no. 2 (2015): 233–60.

[52] Martin Nicolaus, "Foreword," in *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, by Karl Marx (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 7.

[53] Karl Marx, "Einleitung zu einer Kritik der politischen Ökonomie," *Neue Zeit* 21/1, nos. 23–25 (1902–3): 710–18, 741–45, 772–81.

[54] Franz Mehring, *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, 4 vols (Stuttgart: Verlag von J. H. W. Dietz, 1902).

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reception of the "Young Marx" has been almost entirely overlooked in the historiography of Marxism.[55]

These sources were immediately deployed to combat the revisionist challenge.[56] One of the recurring debates in Marxism was the role of consciousness and human will in the historical progress toward socialism that (some) Marxists viewed as inevitable. Eduard Bernstein had rejected the idea that Marxism represented a unity of theory and practice. Drawing on neo-Kantian philosophy, he argued instead that there is an appropriate division between scientific research, which is value-free and non-partisan, and political struggle underpinned by ethical commitment. The only sense in which socialism was a proletarian science was in a happy coincidence between "the progress whose direction we see before us" and the interests of the working class.[57] According to Bernstein, the Hegelian dialectic in particular was an unscientific leftover from Marx's youth that had prejudiced his research by committing him to the construction of "contradictions" and the prediction of a revolutionary break.[58] The revisionists had set the challenge of explaining Marx's Hegelianism without violating his own scientific and non-moralizing precepts.

Dialectic-as-method

Max Adler (1873–1937) was one of the leading Marxist intellectuals in Austria and co-editor (with Rudolf Hilfering) of the pioneering *Marx-Studien* series.[59] Adler has generally been studied as a neo-Kantian who aimed at synthesizing Kant and Marx.[60] Adler was indeed influenced by neo-Kantianism but not, at least in the pre-war period, in order to supply Marxism with an ethical basis, as Tim Rojek claims.[61] In his first book, *Causality and Teleology*, he made clear that his argument "has absolutely nothing to do with the neo-Kantian movement's attempt … to reduce the political demands of socialism to the teaching of Kant's practical philosophy."[62] Rather, Adler proposed using the tools of Kantian epistemology

[55] Hobsbawm mentions the publication of these sources but does not take their impact seriously. See Eric Hobsbawm, "The Fortunes of Marx's and Engels' Writings," in *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840–2011* (London: Little, Brown, 2011), 182.

[56] Franz Mehring, "Vorwort des Herausgebers," in *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, ed. Franz Mehring, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Verlag von J. H. W. Dietz, 1902), p. xi.

[57] Eduard Bernstein, "How is Scientific Socialism Possible?," in *Eduard Bernstein on Socialism Past and Present: Essays and Lectures on Ideology*, ed. and trans. Marius S Ostrowski (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 362.

[58] Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, ed. and trans. Henry Tudor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. 29–46.

[59] For a biographical essay in English see Mark E. Blum, *The Austro-Marxists 1890–1918: A Psychobiographical Study* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 109–22; for basic biographical information see Kołakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 2, 254–55. The *Marx-Studien* published major works of Marxist theory including Hilferding's *Finance Capital* and Otto Bauer's *The Nationalities Question and Social Democracy*.

[60] Alfred Pfabigan, *Max Adler: Eine politisch Biographie* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag), esp. 273–323.

[61] Tim Rojek, "Austromarxismus," in *Marx-Handbuch. Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Quante and Schweikard, 311–13.

[62] Max Adler, *Kausalität und Teleologie im Streite um die Wissenschaft: Separatabdruck aus den "Marx-Studien,"* vol. 1 (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung Ignaz Brand, 1904), 92, fn. 1.

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(*Erkenntniskritik*), especially a neo-Kantian transcendental account of consciousness as inherently superindividual, to provide a foundation for what he took to be the Marxist view that society could be studied scientifically. Adler suggested a connection between the fact that individual consciousness pointed toward its "sociation" [*Vergesellschaftung*] and the development of society toward such increasing social integration.[63]

Given his reputation as a neo-Kantian, Adler might seem a surprising candidate for an Hegelianizer of Marxism. One must keep in mind that Adler saw his work as doing two distinct things: sometimes merely interpreting Marx's Marxism, and sometimes updating Marxism in light of subsequent scholarly developments (though Alfred Pfabigan is right that Adler was sometimes unclear about which he was doing).[64] Adler never claimed Marx was a Kantian, but rather that one could respond to Marx's bourgeois critics by supplementing his system with Kantian answers to question Marx did not pose. Putting aside the question of the orthodoxy of Adler's Marxism, one can see that in his strictly Marxological work Adler offered versions of dialectic-as-method and freedom-in-history.

One can already glimpse the dialectic-as-method conception in *Causality and Teleology*, where Adler argued that *Capital* was about putting the complex phenomena of capitalism in "a mental, conceptual order," and that this was why Marx had devoted so much energy to the analysis of the "value-form."[65] But it was in 1908 that Adler reconstructed Marx's Hegelianism systematically, publishing a series of studies on "the dialectic."[66] These texts have been relatively neglected in the scholarship on Adler, but the extended discussion of Hegel and the limited references to Kant show a different side to his thought.

Writing firmly in the role of interpreter rather than supplementer of Marx, his argument worked on two fronts. The first was to defend the place of the Hegelian inheritance in Marxism against those revisionist critics who saw in the dialectic and Marx's Hegelese only so much "hocus pocus."[67] Adler wanted to make sense of Engels's claim that the dialectic was "our best working tool and our sharpest weapon."[68] Second, Adler challenged what he argued was a profound misunderstanding of the nature of Marx's "materialism" in Georgi Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism.*

[63] For the importance of "Vergesellschaftung" in Adler's thought see Mark E. Blum and William T Smaldone, "Max Adler," in *Austro-Marxism: The Ideology of Unity*, ed. Mark E. Blum and William T. Smaldone, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 19–38.

[64] Pfabigan, *Adler*, 278.

[65] Adler, *Kausalität* 102, 124.

[66] Max Adler, "Marx und die Dialektik," *Der Kampf. Sozialdemokratische Monatsschrift.* 1, no. 6 (March 1, 1908): 257–65; Max Adler, *Marx als Denker. Zum 25. Todesjahre von Karl Marx* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1908); Max Adler, *Marxistische Probleme: Beiträge zur Theorie der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung und Dialektik* (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz, 1913). *Marx als Denker* was revised and reissued after World War I but I refer to the first edition throughout.

[67] Adler, "Dialektik," 256.

[68] Ibid. Adler does not provide a reference but the quote is from Engels's pamphlet on Ludwig Feuerbach. English translation taken from: F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1946), 44.

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On both fronts Adler argued that Marx's strictly methodological claims were being misunderstood as metaphysical or ontological ones. Against Plekhanov's claim that Marxism rested on the view that the universe was essentially material, and that therefore everything had a material cause, Adler insisted that Marx's work was simply not relevant to these kinds of "ontological questions of worldview."[69]

Central to Adler's interpretation of Hegel and of what Marx took from Hegel was the claim that there was an ambiguity in Hegel's conception of dialectics. This was, on the one hand, a claim about the nature of thought, which Adler refers to as dialectics proper. The heart of dialectics proper was "immanent development" or the hard-to-translate term *Eigengesetzlichkeit*: the lawfulness inherent to the thing itself.[70] Studying thought on its own terms, Adler argued, gives you dialectics. On the other hand, under the rubric of "dialectics" Hegel made a claim about the nature of reality, which Adler called "antagonism." Based on a theological objection to Kant's distinction between thing-in-itself and perception, Hegel posited the identity of thought and being, which meant that in his system dialectics and antagonism were interwoven. The dialectical nature of thought was identified with the antagonistic development of world history. Adler's Hegel believed these to be two sides of the same coin.

Because it was based on immanent development, Hegel's method avoided counterposing the actual and the ought, and instead claimed to have revealed their identity.[71] Furthermore, it appeared to Hegel's followers that he had established a tight connection between thought and world; thinking was no longer "isolated" but understood as the culmination of world history: "the point at which it attained to self-consciousness, to understanding of its lawfulness."[72] This unity of lawfulness and consciousness was the essence and starting point of freedom. Marx's achievement was to complete this project: "to give a re-creation in thought of this process of development up to the point that this re-creation is transformed into conscious action by human beings guided by understanding."[73]

Marx succeeded where Hegel failed because he was able, at his best, to prise apart dialectic and antagonism. He was able to show that the dialectic of thought was not creative of the world, but thereby to clarify dialectic as a method and use it in a more constructive and appropriate way. The "mystical" aspect of Hegel's thought was precisely that it failed to distinguish between its "metaphysical" and its "methodological" dimensions.[74] Right from the start of his critical encounter with Hegel, Adler claimed, Marx was interested in making sense of human social life: not the nature of *Geist* (i.e., mind, spirit, or intellect), but of *geistige Natur*.[75] Adler told the familiar story of the Hegelian system foundering on the retreat of reform in the years after Hegel's death, and the idea that this

[69] Adler, *Probleme*, 64. Cf. Paul Paolucci, *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[70] Adler, *Denker*, 12. Cf. Roberto Fineschi, "On Hegel's Methodological Legacy in Marx," in *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*, ed. Fred Mosely and Tony Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 140–63.

[71] Adler, *Denker*, 21–22.

[72] Ibid., 23.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Adler, "Dialektik," 258.

[75] Adler, *Denker*, 27.

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made the claim for a unity of actuality and ought ever less plausible. But Marx only needed to continue down the path he was already taking to come to the realization that Hegel had failed to approach social life in terms of its own inherent lawfulness. Instead, Hegel had imposed a developmental schema on it from outside with his recourse to an "Absolute Spirit estranged from humanity."[76] Consistent application of dialectical reasoning led Marx to treat dialectics as a method for the study of social life and not as a metaphysical or ontological claim: "the notion of an unconscious process of *Weltgeist* finally coming to recognize itself was transformed into the notion of a social lawfulness that *always runs through the consciousness* of human beings, *but* remains *unconscious to them*, which must ultimately become conscious through its own workings."[77] That which remained unconscious to human beings in society, but which underpinned the inherent lawfulness of the latter, was "*social labor.*"[78]

Here Adler offered his interpretation of dialectics as a method. When one peeled away the metaphysical mystification, one could see that Hegel had accurately characterized the nature of thought. It is concepts that contain their own contradiction: "The straight line is not simultaneously crooked, but the thought of the straight line is only possible by distinguishing it from the crooked line."[79] Thinking is a process that can only be captured as a coherent whole through its contradictions and as becoming. Understanding this process deeply requires us to understand "the universal mediation and relational juxtaposition of all the content of thought as a fact of thinking."[80] It is in the always imperfect deconstruction and reconstruction of our concepts that we can hope to approximate the whole process of thinking. "The principle of the dialectic," he went on, "is therefore *totality.*"[81] When applied to social science, the dialectical method implies a combination of rigorous empirical work and sophisticated philosophical refinement of the concepts used to make sense of the data. Like O'Malley, Adler saw this as an ontologically neutral "empirical realism" combined with the iterative dialectical refinement of concepts.[82]

Adler was aware that Marx had been charged with conflating dialectics and antagonism. After all, it was Marx who claimed that class struggle was the motor of history, that capitalism was producing its own "negation of the negation." Adler conceded that probably Engels and possibly Marx could be charged with sometimes conflating dialectics as a scientific method (proceeding via conceptual contradictions), on the one hand, with antagonism as the claim that the stuff of the universe was inherently contradictory and in process of becoming, on the other.[83]

Adler had two responses to this potential problem. First he argued that the contradictions between base and superstructure, between proletariat and

[76] Ibid., 31.
[77] Ibid., 32. Original emphasis.
[78] Ibid. Original emphasis.
[79] Adler, "Dialektik," 259.
[80] Ibid., 260.
[81] Adler, *Probleme*, 32, original emphasis.
[82] O'Malley, "Marx, Marxism and Method," 10–12.
[83] Adler, *Probleme*, 85.

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bourgeoisie, were results of Marx's scientific investigations, not metaphysical or ontological presuppositions. When Marx began his social-scientific investigations, he simply left such ontological questions behind, and was always too preoccupied with his critique of political economy to return to them.[84] But Adler's contention that Marx had turned away from metaphysical questions and narrowed his focus to empirical, social-scientific research would not answer Bernstein's charge that Marx's Hegelian inheritance had prejudiced his research by priming him to construct contradictions regardless.[85] So, second, Adler explained that dialectics as a method of working up raw material into concrete concepts opened up the possibility of discovering antagonisms in social life. These were there to be discovered because the substance of social science is "intellectual-historical" [*geistig-geschichtlich*] by its very nature.[86] Dialectics were therefore appropriate to the social sciences in a way that was not (necessarily) true for the natural sciences.[87] This is because, if it is the concepts of thought that are characterized by contradictions, the antagonism in human social life, being "*geistig-geschichtlich*," can be accounted for. Antagonisms express the fact that human society is essentially intellectual and historical.

The subject matter and starting point of the social sciences is "the human being as individual who is simultaneously socialized [*vergesellschafteter*]."[88] Only the dialectical approach could hope to make sense of this reflexive subject matter, shaped by its context but capable of shaping that context. Unlike the material of the natural sciences, human beings are capable of understanding their life as exhibiting a certain lawfulness, and thereby changing it. Marx's discovery, Adler argued, was to prise this insight away from pantheistic mysticism about a universe coming to know itself and restrict it to the social-scientific domain in which it belongs: "the way that human beings maintain and change their social life [is] a *natural process* ... which presses for the discovery of its conditions and can attain this because it fundamentally differs from other natural processes in that it is realized ... through the consciousness of ... thinking and willing human beings."[89] Economic facts, Adler argued, should not be understood as material data in contrast to "intellectual" or "psychical" (*geistig* or *psychisch*) phenomena, because the economic was social and the social was *geistig-geschichtlich.* Crucially, this perspective was quite independent of any claims about the basic substance of the universe or of whether this universe was deterministic. Empiricism implied neither a commitment to nor a rejection of philosophical materialism. Armed with the dialectic, one could simply get on and make a revolution in social science.

This revolution was Marx's critique of political economy. The latter was, indeed, "directly a logical and conscious consequence of the newly-won theoretical standpoint."[90] The entire human world is produced, so not only products

[84] Ibid., 79.
[85] E.g., at Eduard Bernstein, "Dialektik und Entwicklung," *Die neue Zeit* 17, no. 37 (99 1898): 332.
[86] Adler, *Denker*, 30.
[87] Here Adler anticipates Lukács's famous rejection of Engels's dialectics of nature.
[88] Adler, *Probleme*, 6.
[89] Adler, *Denker*, 33. Original emphasis.
[90] Ibid., 58.

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but also the conditions of production are an historical product, Adler argued with reference to Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy.*[91] This whole process has a material foundation, without which no human life would be possible. Marx thus realized that only by confronting political economy could he hope to achieve his goal of uncovering social *Eigengesetzlichkeit.*[92] This was what he pursued for the rest of his career, up to and including *Capital.*[93]

It was crucial to see that this project was a "*critique* of political economy," and to understand the implications of this claim.[94] Fundamentally, this amounted to showing that the categories of political economy were not transhistorical and its laws not laws of nature. Marx did this by demystifying the appearance of autonomy of economic phenomena, by showing that behind the appearance of relations between objects stood social relations:

> The mighty foundation of thought on which the whole critique of political economy rests is that ever-inexhaustible first section of *Capital*, in which the material appearance of economic categories is dissolved and the mysterious efficacy of purely objective factors is revealed to be a social process, i.e. a process reflected between and through human beings. ... Hand in hand with this, economic categories return, from their objective autonomy vis-à-vis human beings, to their true form as social relationships, and in this way the apparently unchanging natural concepts of economics are transformed into social forces that can only be understood historically.[95]

This "destruction of the objective appearance of economic relations" constituted, Adler contended later, Marx's epoch-making achievement in the social sciences.[96]

Adler had offered a surprisingly cutting-edge interpretation of Marx, a quarter of a century before the publication of the *Frühschriften.*[97] He stressed the coherence of Marx's intellectual development as the logical progression of an originally philosophical project which left Marx with an outlook and method that he never abandoned. Marx's project was the sublation of Hegel's, achieved by recovering the human-practical basis of social *Eigengesetzlichkeit.* Not by aping the natural sciences, but proceeding on the basis of *Eigengesetzlichkeit*, a procedure derived from Hegel, did Marx make socialism "scientific." Unpacking this *Eigengesetzlichkeit* compelled Marx to turn to historical and social-scientific empirical investigations. These investigations formed the foundation of his critique of political economy, a logical continuation of his critique of Hegel. Thus, for Adler, the heart of Marx's critique of political economy is the analysis of

[91] Ibid., 55–56.
[92] Ibid., 59.
[93] Ibid., 63.
[94] Ibid., 70. Original emphasis.
[95] Ibid., 64.
[96] Adler, *Probleme*, 16.
[97] Cf. Pfabigan, *Adler*, esp. 307–8. Pfabigan here characterizes Adler's exegesis as "avantgarde" but ultimately unfaithful to Marx's conception of dialectics.

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the commodity fetish, and, one might add, those who do not understand this should read the *Grundrisse.*[98]

Freedom-in-history

As a Marxist, Adler offered a remarkably consistent and systematic reading of Marx's work as a logical continuation of Hegel's thought. His account attempted to elaborate on and justify Marx's autobiographical sketch in the "Preface" to his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, and to integrate these with his scattered remarks about the dialectic as a social-scientific method. The aim of reconstructing a coherent system which made sense of these sources shaped the resulting portrait of Marx's thought. In this sense it was a Marxist answer to the Hegel-Marx connection, stressing those elements that Marx, in his later life, had stressed too.

Adler's work also shows that one did not need the "Paris Manuscripts" to understand the outlines of Marx's philosophical anthropology and its role in his philosophy of history. Indeed, Adler even saw the connection here to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit.* The idea of "human emancipation" can also be found in the works of Adler already discussed,[99] but it was treated directly in his essay "The Socialist Idea of Liberation," published in 1918.[100]

Here, Adler argued that the essence of Marx's project was uncovering "history's mechanics."[101] This was no crude stadial history proceeding through the anonymous and impersonal unfolding of the productive forces. It was, rather, "a phenomenology of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]."[102] The meaning of history was the socialization of humanity and the humanization of society, a process that amounted to the realization of human nature. The meaning of communism —i.e. human emancipation—was a society in which this process was not only highly advanced, but also subject to human control: "no longer merely to experience progress, ... but rather consciously and systematically to create it."[103]

With this in mind, one could see that Marx's critique in *Capital* was aimed not only at historicization and consciousness-raising, the focus of dialectic-as-method, but at characterizing capitalism as fundamentally at odds with human nature. Capitalism amounted to "the estrangement [*Entfremdung*] and reification [*Verdinglichung*] of all human-social relations" and it was this that reduced the human being in such a society to a state of slavery, a mere "plaything of economic forces."[104] The point of Marx's distinction between political and human emancipation, Adler argued, had been that isolated individuals in

[98] At least, so much as was available in 1908.

[99] E.g., Adler, *Denker*, 66.

[100] Republished in Max Adler, "Die sozialistische Idee der Befreiung bei Karl Marx," in *Marx-Studien: Blätter zur Theorie und Politik des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus*, ed. Max Adler and Rudolf Hilferding, vol. 4 (Glashütten im Taunus: Verlag Detlev Auvermann KG, 1971), pp. vii–xxiv.

[101] Ibid., p. viii.

[102] Ibid., p. ix.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., p. xi.

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competitive civil society could never realize their "species-being" and, drawing a comparison between Marx and Aristotle that is now coming back into fashion,[105] that communism would entail the reconciliation of state and civil society in the service of "the good life" [*des schönen Lebens*].[106] In sum, Marx taught that "capitalism is dehumanization, the complete estrangement of the human being from society and thereby the total separation from his or her true essence."[107] Only a social revolution abolishing private property, and ending alienation and reification, could ensure rational human development and "conclude the prehistory of human society."[108]

One might argue that, because he had not read the "Paris Manuscripts," Adler could not see the full extent to which Marx drew inspiration from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, especially the role played by labor in human alienation, and the importance of labor as a concept bridging the philosophical foundations and the critique of political economy. In addition, Adler does not stress (here) the (arguable) structural parallel between Hegel's story of spirit's necessary self-alienation in its progress toward "Absolute Knowing" and the necessity of human alienation in historical progress. All of this is to say that Marxologists are now able to reconstruct Marx's intellectual biography to a higher resolution than a hundred years ago. The point of this article is not that no progress has been made. But the evidence is clearly a far cry from the view that early Marxists had so butchered the Hegel-Marx connection that it can be omitted from the history. On the contrary, in 1918 Adler presented an outline of the "freedom-in-history" interpretation that remains defensible. But because Adler is too often pigeonholed as an Austro-Marxist and a neo-Kantian, the extent of his understanding of both aspects of Marx's Hegelianism has been overlooked.

Reassessing Western Marxism

The critical thesis of this article is that Adler's work challenges the consensus account in the synoptic literature about when and how Hegel was put back into Marxism. Many readers will demand an account of those figures usually credited with re-Hegelianizing Marxism (such as Lukács, Korsch, and Herbert Marcuse) and of the impact the publication of the "Paris Manuscripts" or the *Grundrisse* had on the reception of the Hegel-Marx connection. If I am right that Adler anticipated many of the arguments of (later) Hegelian Marxism, some of the claims to novelty made on behalf of Western Marxism require reassessment and, given the centrality of the birth of Western Marxism as a break in the historiography, an alternative picture of Marxism's overall shape is implied.

[105] See, e.g., Norman Levine, *Marx's Resurrection of Aristotle* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). See also the references to human flourishing in Leopold, *Young Marx*, *passim* esp. chap. 4; Paul Raekstad, "Human Development and Alienation in the Thought of Karl Marx," *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 3 (2018), 300–23.

[106] Adler, "Idee der Befreiung," p. xvii.

[107] Ibid., p. xxiii.

[108] Ibid., p. ix.

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I do not claim that nothing changed in the history nor that no progress has been made, but that generalizations about Marxism's vulgarity before the 1920s cannot be sustained. I have placed Adler's Marxological efforts in two key contexts. First, the 1902 republication of many of Marx's essays from the 1840s, which still provide much of the primary material for those interested in these formative years, as well as of the "Introduction" to the *Grundrisse*, which is the mature Marx's most sustained methodological essay. Second, the revisionist challenge that Marx's Hegelianism was unscientific baggage that should be jettisoned.

The revisionist controversy was followed by recurrent disagreement within Marxism about Marxism's philosophical status. It is in the context of this long-running, unresolved problem that we should read periodic restatements of what Korsch called "the problem of Marxism and philosophy."[109] In light of my analysis of Adler, one can see that the resurfacing of this debate in the early 1920s drew on no new sources and made no Marxological breakthroughs. Lukács and Korsch—like Adler, Lenin, Mehring, and others—had read Hegel, and could hear the echoes in Marx. They had their own reasons for stressing the importance of these connections.[110] To the extent that there was a break here it was political and not theoretical, a circumstance having to do both with the sectarian divide in Marxism following World War I and the fact that Lukács and Korsch were relatively late converts to Marxism with no personal relationships to preserve and no scruples about vigorously criticizing the preceding generation.[111] Lukács and Korsch, like others before and since, disagreed over the precise nature of the Hegel-Marx connection.

Lukács offered a new conception of the special role of the proletariat in human history, arguably going beyond even Marx himself in drawing a line of continuity between the project of German philosophy and the class struggle. Where Adler had seen communist society as a reconciliation of the human being with itself through conscious and systematic control over human sociation, Lukács argued that the proletariat was the first class in history capable of real action, therefore freedom, because it is both subject and object of knowledge. The proletarian was literally the commodity become self-conscious and, since the commodity was the organizing principle of capitalist society, this meant societal self-knowledge, an historical totality coming to know itself.[112] Reading Lukács in light of Adler allows us to see that his argument was much more specific and

[109] Karl Korsch, "Marxism and Philosophy [1923]," in *Marxism and Philosophy*, by Karl Korsch, ed. and trans. Fred Halliday (New York and London: Verso, 2012), 70.

[110] Edward Baring, "Who are You Calling Vulgar? Lukács, Kautksy, and the Beginnings of 'Western Marxism'," *Rethinking Marxism* (August 31, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2023.2241345; Edward Baring, "Marxism of, by and for the People: Karl Korsch and the Problem of Worker Education," *Modern Intellectual History* 21, no. 1 (2024): 133–56. See also Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 66–68.

[111] Michael Buckmiller, "Einleitung: Die Anwendung der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung auf die Geschichte des Marxismus," in *Marxismus und Philosophie: Schfriften zur Theorie der Arbeiterbewegung 1920–1923*, vol. 3, *Karl Korsch: Gesamtausgabe* (Amsterdam Stichting beheer IISG, 1993), 64.

[112] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), esp. 159–72.

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controversial as Marx-exegesis than the simple "re-Hegelianization" attributed to him in the synoptic literature. From the preceding it will also be clear that, contrary to what is sometimes claimed, Lukács did not rediscover the critique of "reification," which was understood by Marxists of the Second International. Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* is a landmark in the "freedom-in-history" account of Marx's Hegelianism, but not a sharp break.

Korsch's view is often simply equated with Lukács's, but in fact Korsch rejected the idea that Marx had "intend[ed] to turn his new principle into a general philosophical theory of history that would be imposed on the outside upon the actual pattern of events."[113] Korsch was generally more concerned with preserving Marxism's scientific status and sits squarely in the "dialectic-as-method" family. The core of Marx's procedure in *Capital*, he argued, was a progressive "conceptual clarification" by which the totality was deduced from the "simple concept": "These concepts are supposed to anticipate entirely, to contain within themselves, like a germ as yet undeveloped, the concrete reality of the whole process of being and becoming, genesis, development and decline of the present-day mode of production and social order."[114] But, like Adler, he was a little uneasy about the status of the "contradictions," worrying that they could compromise "the revolutionary-progressive, anti-metaphysical and strictly empirical-scientific main tendency of Marx's research."[115] He proposed that, outside the context of the dialectical exposition of concepts, Marx's talk of "contradictions" and "oppositions" be understood as no more than "parables" [*Gleichnisse*].[116]

The publication of the "Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" and the "Paris Manuscripts" did little to change this basic picture of discord. One could, like Herbert Marcuse, see in them the key to understanding the unity of Marx's lifelong project of the critique of political economy. If the precise role of the concept of labor as a bridge between Hegel and political economy could be seen clearly for the first time, this was a Marxological breakthrough of interest to specialists (though the claim remains controversial). For Marcuse this meant that Marxism had an indispensable ontological foundation: "a quite particular philosophical interpretation of the human being and its historical realization."[117] Because human labor is unique as "knowing and conscious activity," and because the human being is uniquely able to look beyond appearances and at the essence of things, it is only through human labor as

[113] Karl Korsch, "Introduction to Capital," in *Three Essays on Marxism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 59.

[114] Ibid., 51, 53.

[115] Karl Korsch, "Die dialektische Methode im 'Kapital'," in *Krise des Marxismus: Schriften 1928–1935*, ed. Michael Buckmiller, vol. 5, *Karl Korsch: Gesamtausgabe* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1996), 549.

[116] Ibid., 549–50.

[117] Herbert Marcuse, "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus (1932)," in *Der deutsche Künstlerroman. Frühe Aufsätze*, vol. 1, *Herbert Marcuse: Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 511. English translation available at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/historical-materialism/. This was Marcuse's review of the volume that first published the "Paris Manuscripts."

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free activity that the objects of nature are themselves realized.[118] This interpretation allowed Marcuse to argue that humanism and naturalism were one and the same from Marx's perspective (though also to agree with Adler that Marx was not for all that a materialist).[119]

Marcuse developed his arguments in his important book *Reason and Revolution*, first published in 1941, and thereby secured a wide Anglophone reception for the "freedom-in-history" perspective. The theory of commodity fetishism allowed one to see "economic conditions ... as the complete negation of humanity."[120] Communism would mean real freedom rather than rule by blind economic forces, "a society wherein the material process of production no longer determines the entire pattern of human life,"[121] and the end of "pre-history."[122] Marcuse did not claim that his argument amounted to a break in Marxism's history, nor to a rediscovery, but presented it rather as one side of a debate within Marxism about the dialectic.[123] As argued in the section "Freedom-in-history," the critique of capitalism as irrational and inhuman, and therefore as a society of unfreedom, was advanced by Adler in 1918. *Reason and Revolution* is likewise a landmark rather than a turning-point in the history. It represented important progress, but not something qualitatively new.

At the same time, one could conclude with Auguste Cornu (in what is to my knowledge the first book-length study of the "Young Marx") that it was precisely these philosophical acrobatics that mark these manuscripts out as pre-scientific: "Despite its objective appearance, this materialism thus remains idealist by the goal it implicitly assigns to history."[124] For Cornu, the obvious reliance of the "Paris Manuscripts" on an abstract philosophical anthropology was only evidence that Marx was not yet a scientist. The importance of these manuscripts was not that they pointed toward a human essence that would be historically realized, but that they paved the way for an historical conception of human nature as a product of history, the investigation of which required socio-economic rather than philosophical critique. History did not have a goal, Cornu argued, but what Marx took over from Hegel was a dialectical conception of the "logical" historical evolution of "an order conforming to reason."[125] It was important to Cornu that this be a "law of economic and social evolution" rather than a mere "ideal" (otherwise, presumably, Marx was just another utopian), but he ended the book with an altogether ambiguous assessment of just this issue.[126] The new sources had provided nothing more than another occasion to restate the old problems of base, superstructure, and human agency in historical materialism.

[118] Ibid., 520–23.
[119] Ibid., 524.
[120] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 281.
[121] Ibid., 293.
[122] Ibid., 317.
[123] Ibid., 398–401.
[124] Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx: L'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1934), 341.
[125] Ibid., 402.
[126] Ibid., 405–6.

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Conclusion

Max Adler as a case study shows that there have always been more or less sophisticated conceptions of Marx's project as well as more or less crude summaries of his achievements. People have always been doing things with Marx and no amount of scholarly consensus on the historical Marx (even if such consensus existed) is going to stop them. Marx the Hegelian is difficult to understand and simply does not do what some people want Marx to do, so there are always likely to be other Marxisms. An adequate history of Marxism will have to approach it as a space of argument, avoiding the temptation of privileging one strand as Marxism's essence and all the others as mere deviations. Doing so would mean avoiding writing about Marxism as if it was ever a homogeneous discourse that could be either de-Hegelianized or re-Hegelianized, economistically determinist or socially dialectical.

The same contextual and scholarly care that has been given to the historical Karl Marx has not yet been applied to the history of Marxism. There is a strong temptation to dismiss previous generations of Marx-commentators as missing something that we are only now in a position to see. At the research frontier of questions of interest to specialists, this is sometimes true. But our predecessors were no less thoughtful than we are, as well as no less (and no more!) concerned to get things right.[127]

In sum, there was no more reason to "re-Hegelianize" Marxism in the 1920s than there was in the 1970s or 2020s. The historical Marx remains no less obscure or misunderstood today than one hundred years ago; the Marx of "the materialist conception of history" no less in demand. For this reason, perhaps, the former is fated to permanent "rediscovery."

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[127] Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

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