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**THE YOUNG HEGEL, by George Lukacs. London: MIT Press, 1977**

Lukacs began writing his study of Hegel's early intellectual development soon after having read the text of Marx' *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* prior to their publication in Moscow. Having earlier renounced the 'idealistic' prejudices of his *History and Class Consciousness* and undergone a public self-criticism which drew him ever closer to Stalin, he threw himself enthusiastically into an analysis of the relationship between dialectics and economics. By the time he had completed his work on Hegel in the Autumn of 1938, Europe seethed with fascist intrigue. Years later, in the *Preface* he wrote to the new edition of *The Young Hegel* printed in 1954, Lukacs suggested that one of the reasons for his study was the critique and overcoming of the tradition of irrationalism in German thought that, seen from Hegel's side, had developed out of the writing of Schelling. The *Preface* could as easily have been written in those dark years before the outbreak of war when the concrete manifestation of international fascism seemed to trumpet this entire irrationalist tradition. The philosophy of Hegel, Lukacs suggests, proved to be a great stumbling block for the irrationalist tradition of 19th century German philosophy. It is no accident perhaps, that Lukacs' study of the young Hegel forms a prelude to his work on Schelling, *The Destruction of Reason*. Taken together, these two works reflect the march of irrationality in the land where both philosophers were born. At the same time, Lukacs makes it clear that his interest in the cultural and historical context within which Hegel's thought developed, particularly the conflict with Schelling, is bound up with the cultural politics of post war Germany. The elucidation of Hegel's philosophy and a 'correct' view of the intellectual currents and conflicts of his age, he believes, can serve the people of Germany as a compass, especially the intelligentsia who, Lukacs says, "have not make up their minds whether to move forwards or backwards". In 1938, with the fate of Germany in the balance, Lukacs aimed to show what he believed to be the triumph of reason over unreason in the history of German thought. In 1954, with the future of the German nation again in the balance, Lukacs wished to present this triumph of reason as a compass to the heirs of the greatest historical period of German mind.

It is not a revitalising of the tradition of rationality alone that Lukacs wished to provide for the German people. The roots of Marx's thought, he points out, lie in this tradition and Marxist perspectives can therefore both serve to provide a correct historical understanding of German cultural history while at the same time contribute an answer to the question: whither Germany? Lukacs regards the development of historical materialism as an outcome of Hegel's philosophy and seeks the origin of this development in the dialectical method of Hegel's thought. In his study, he traces the emergence and early evolution of Hegel's dialectic from its first confused and 'mystical' appearance in Frankfurt through its clarification in the social economics of the Jena period to the maturity of *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

Lukacs begins his highly readable account with an evaluation of the religious studies that Hegel wrote in Berne, the chief of which was *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* which he completed in the Spring of 1796. Hegel's interest in religion and his viewpoint of Christianity as an alien authority over men's minds, he suggests, owed much to his concern with the reasons for the collapse of the Greek city states and the loss to its citizens of their freedom. Hegel perceived the origin of their fate to lie in the transformation of the free citizen into the private individual, the Athenian bourgeois. His early conception of Christianity, says Lukacs, is that it was the religion of the private individual and consequently associated with a bourgeois despotism and loss of freedom. On this matter Lukacs has no doubts: set against a background of the French Revolution and the impact of its democratic ideals, Hegel's association of religious positivity with the destruction of ancient democracy in these early theological studies reflects a substantive indictment of Christianity. Hegel's perspective of ancient democracy, however, was not without its own weaknesses. The ancient state, with its ideals and calling upon the duty and loyalty of the citizens was itself, the concretised

expression of a positivity as potentially insidious as that of Christianity. While both were directed towards the privacy of conscience, the positivity of the city states called for a worldly involvement which bound the 'free' citizen to the consensus of the Polis while that of Christianity chained the individual in the realm of the spirit. It was as a result of these early difficulties that the notion of positivity evolved in Hegel's thought so that by the time of the Frankfurt period, it had been replaced by the all embracing 'worldly objectivity' that would eventually lead Hegel towards the philosophical position of objective idealism. But if the antithesis between positivity and moral subjectivity had been the central issue of Hegel's Berne period, along with his dreams of regenerating ancient freedoms, there could be no real life bridge for him between that golden age of plastic beauty and the harsh reality of German economic backwardness .

The time that Hegel spent in Frankfurt, says Lukacs, is best known for his semi-theological work, *The Spirit of Christianity* and his interesting *Fragment of a System* which contains the first clear formulation of his later dialectical method. But it was also during this time that Hegel's attention was first drawn to economic thought, particularly the work of Stuart. The impact of Stuart's political economy, however, is guesswork, as Lukacs admits, for all that remains of any economic studies that Hegel may have made during this time are the dubious reflections of Rosenkrantz on a Commentary that Hegel may have made on Stuart's work.

As a literary Marxist, Lukacs naturally wanted to introduce economics into Hegel's intellectual development as early as possible. Maintaining that the *Fragment of a System* contains a "decisive moment" in the evolution of Hegel's thought, he argues that from Frankfurt onwards, Hegel regarded economics and economic life as a necessary part of human existence. This viewpoint is certainly contentious. What we do know of the *Fragment* deals essentially with the relationship of man to positive religion in a continuation and deepening of the problem of positivity that had occupied his mind in Berne. In seeking to negate the positivity of Christianity by creating a religious unity of man and God in his work, *The Spirit of Christianity*, Hegel had consciously made religion the high point of his thought during the early part of his stay in Frankfurt. In the *Fragment*, however, Lukacs discerns a nascent dialectic of contradiction, which he says, is "the greatest achievement of Hegel's period in Frankfurt". To my mind, his overall perspective of this period is something of a contradiction itself. What he wants to do, it seems, is to develop an analysis of the Jena period, with all the advances it contained in Hegel's intellectual progress, out of the clear warm air of the last writings of Frankfurt. These, he argues, are a forward movement towards the dialectics of contradiction as opposed to the 'backwardness' of Hegel's earlier theses of the period, love, reconciliation and the fusion of man with God contained in *The Spirit of Christianity*. Unfortunately, Lukacs lacks the extant materials to be able to demonstrate clearly a progressive development from a theological mysticism that he sees in *The Spirit of Christianity* to the nascent dialectics of the highly fragmentary *Fragment*. While therefore not denying the inherent interest of his analysis of one of the most puzzling periods of Hegel's early intellectual life, it must be said that much of his argument is enlightened speculation.

In general terms, Lukacs' study of the Frankfurt period may be summarised thus: redirecting the focus of his attention from the positivity of the Christian religion that he examined during his stay in Berne, Hegel now becomes interested in the fate of the individual, i.e. how can the *individual* overcome this religious positivity? His answer is that man can achieve this through love and his union with God. This half of the story, however, provides no clue to the challenging remark that Lukacs made when he suggested that the unconscious *leitmotiv* that characterised Hegel's thought from the time of Frankfurt onwards is expressed in the famous aphorism of a later period about the rational being real and the real, rational. How is it, readers will ask themselves, that Lukacs is able to summarise this period in terms of an intellectual reflection of a later progress. The answer, I think, lies in his determination to

reveal how the progressive side to Hegel's religious writings in the form of nascent dialectics leads to the social economics and more mature dialectics of the Jena period. Such a reconciliation of the seemingly dual and antithetical faces of this period beneath the mask of a progressive rationality demands the skill of a contortionist. Lukacs' apparent successes suggest that he had either found his way to the truth or was merely engaged in manipulating ideas and facts, apeing that master of distortion he admired and served during his life, Joseph Stalin.

Having inherited a small estate on the death of his father in 1800, Hegel gave up his post as a private tutor in Frankfurt to work full time on his studies of religion. He went to Jena early in 1801 at the age of thirty, unknown yet self-assured, spent much of his time there engaged in an intellectual dialogue with his old friend, Schelling, already famous as a philosopher, and left after a period of extraordinary productivity, a thinker who had already advanced beyond his contemporaries in the development of German classical philosophy. The Jena period was probably the most intellectually fertile of Hegel's life and Lukacs devoted well over half his book to it, showing how the Hegelian phenomenology of consciousness developed out of debates and conflicts within German philosophy at that time - initially between Fichte and Kant, then between Schelling and Fichte and finally between Hegel and Schelling.

On arriving in Jena, Hegel joined Schelling in a vigorous campaign against subjective idealism on behalf of the new philosophy of objective idealism first expressed by Schelling in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* published in 1800. The origin of Schelling's break with Fichte, Lukacs argues, lies in their different points of departure from the philosophy of Kant. Fichte, for whom the existence of the world and its content were reduced to the products of an active Ego, took his point of departure from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Schelling, whom Marx had described as a 'nature enthusiast' to Feuerbach, accepted the objectivity of nature as 'given' and "began by re-interpreting the *Critique of Judgement* in the spirit of objective idealism". (Lukacs) In an interesting section dealing with this break, Lukacs implies that Hegel understood the *real* significance of the divergence between Schelling's theory of knowledge and that of Fichte and may well have been instrumental in clarifying it for his friend. Hegel went to Jena armed with an objective dialectics gained from his last years in Frankfurt, says Lukacs. This advance, he maintains, enabled him to keep Schelling on the rails of objective idealism and explains both his immediate substantial polemic against subjective idealism and the closeness of viewpoint between the two men up to the time that Schelling left Jena in 1803. This point of view can only be acceptable if one goes along with Lukacs' understanding of the Frankfurt period. But let the unwary traveller beware, the ticket purchased in Frankfurt bears the Lukacs stamp and there is no break in the journey between that point and *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

Hegel's criticism of the ethics of Kant and Fichte in his essay *Faith and Knowledge* and his support for Schelling's views in such works as *The System of Ethics* (1801-2) marked the high point of his own systematic idealism. One of the most interesting and to my mind one of the most important aspects of Lukacs' study is his analysis and philosophical overview of Hegel's departure from Schelling's philosophy. He dates the development of this breach from 1803 when Hegel wrote his essay on the *Scientific Modes of Treatment of Natural Law* and assesses his intellectual progress by contrasting this work with the earlier *System of Ethics*. This first essay is dominated by the question of morality and contains Hegel's experimental deduction of economic categories from a universal 'unity of the people'. These are presented statically and unhistorically, their contradictions and independent moments being annihilated in a series of contrived unities. In the essay on Natural Law however, Hegel's dialectic preserves the partial moments of its development, in contradistinction to the method of Schelling whose dialectical annulment ended in an intellectual intuition. The great consequence of this preservation of development and its incorporation into an historical absolute was that it

presented Hegel with an unlimited scope for empirical research within an objective dialectics that advanced to ever higher and more complex determinations, particularly in the relationship between economy and society. Schelling's intuition, on the other hand, implied an outright rejection of empiricism that ultimately led him into the arms of a reactionary theology.

Lukacs argues that the 'philosophical' side to Hegel's break with Schelling was complemented by the influence of the French Revolution, particularly the figure of Napoleon as an active instrument of social and economic change. At the same time, he maintains that this 'historical' side to Hegel's intellectual development in Jena was an outcome of the Frankfurt period where he had come to regard the positive spheres of modern society as products of human activity. It is this latter point, according to Lukacs, which explains the increasingly active role that Hegel gave to labour in the dialectic of social development he expressed in his philosophy of history from the Lectures of 1803-4 through to those of 1805-6.

Lukacs broadens this theme in a thoughtful section of his book where he examines the roles of labour and teleology in Hegel's Jena social economics. The position of labour in Hegel's philosophy of history, according to Lukacs, is that it expressed the purposeful actions of human beings... the active force of the real historical process that lead to the creation of modern civil society. This view of history in Hegel's philosophy, says Lukacs, "culminates in the concrete realm of human praxis" at the heart of which lay a new teleology, the dialectic of labour. In short, purposeful human labour forges an objective historical reality through human practice. It was this centrality of man's economic activity, human praxis in general, to Hegel's Jena philosophy that for Lukacs, produced the dialectical unity of theory and practice in his thought that separated him forever from the traditions of German idealism. Despite the persuasiveness of his argument, the critically minded reader will soon find his brain jarred by the same kind of glaring philosophical peculiarities that appear here as in other corners of his study. The most interesting of these, I think, is the emergence at intervals of a distinctly literary-academic Marxism for which Lenin, whom Lukacs is fond of quoting, would have found nothing but harsh words. Throughout this study, little is said about Hegel's life and the relationship between his daily material existence and the development of his thought. The dialectic of development apparently occurred only within Hegel's consciousness where a complex interplay of ideas advanced from pure subjectivity to an objectivity of human labour. The problem is that Lukacs' understanding of the nature of Hegel's consciousness reflects Hegel's own theory of knowledge, but where the master ultimately subsumed nature, history and society within consciousness, Lukacs subsumes the Young Hegel's intellectual development within his own fixed idea of philosophy. At times, his position degenerates still further when he abandons this *idée fixe* and drifts over to a nebulous social science as he does, for example, when he examines the limitations of Hegel's economic thought. "The main line of Hegel's economic thought" he says, "is an attempt to infer from man's relation to modern civil society all the categories of economics and sociology." Hegel, says Lukacs, then goes on to show how these categories in turn "generate the objective laws governing the interplay between man, nature and society". Interesting stuff, only the reader is left asking what it all means and may conclude, as I do, that it is a miscarried attempt to appear profound; *real* meaning indeed seems lacking.

Lukacs gives over the final section of his study to a serious-minded discussion of Hegel's Phenomenology prefaced by a clear and absorbing analysis of the reasons for his growing estrangement from Schelling. The seeds of Hegel's annihilating criticism in the Phenomenology, Lukacs maintains, were sown in the period up to 1805 when Schelling's own development took him away from their common ground of a progressive dialectics. Central to this divergence was the crucial issue of the method by which knowledge of the absolute could be acquired. In Lukacs' eyes, intellectual intuition as the cognitive mode of Schelling's

philosophy reflected an 'aristocratic' and irrationalist theory of knowledge that enabled only a few geniuses to obtain truth, understanding and insight. This followed from his 'aristocratic' theory of society. While the immediacy of intellectual intuition led Schelling to turn his back on history, his destructive dialectics severely limited his conception of the absolute and thus the richness and vital character of life. With Hegel on the other hand, dialectics developed in tandem with the growth of his historical consciousness and general political attitudes. It is not a case of social and political differences being created from the diverging philosophical pathways for Lukacs, but the reverse — the roots of the breach lay in fundamentally opposite social and political values to begin with. Despite this changing of gears once again to a pseudo materialism, Lukacs convincingly proves his point, the method of Hegel's Phenomenology clearly develops out of his attack on Schelling's philosophy.

In the critique that he made of Hegel's dialectical method and philosophy in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the young Marx said that the Phenomenology was "the true point of origin and secret of the Hegelian dialectic". Nowhere in this crucial study, however, does Marx indicate that Hegel's masterpiece contained an overall dialectical movement that, in Lukacs' words "goes on behind the back of the various configurations of consciousness"; a movement, furthermore, containing a duality whereby the subjectivity of the configurations appear within a silent background of the objective categories of reality. This discovery of a mute objectivity in Hegel by Lukacs soon after having read Marx' own philosophical critique of 1844 with its clear and uncomplicated contrasting of the Hegelian Absolute as an entity of mind with "real corporeal man... with his feet firmly planted on the solid ground" seems strange. In fact, it seems as though Lukacs is continually engaged in rendering worldly the young Hegel's phenomenology of spirit, forever drawing it down to the objectivity of substance, to materialism. One is left wondering how he could have minimised a key point Marx made in his critique that the reappropriation of estrangement in the motion of Hegelian spirit occurred only within consciousness.

Some observers have remarked in connection with Lukacs' work in general that he Hegelianises Marx - this may be true and is a process that can be observed at work at odd intervals in this study. More important perhaps is that Hegel's thought is strangely brought towards materialism. But this does not detract for one moment from the true greatness of the Phenomenology and the world historical importance of its contribution to the march of human knowledge. It was merely Lukacs' fate to write about the philosophy of others even though there are those today who hail him as an original thinker. In a Note on Hegelian philosophy that he appended to his Doctoral Dissertation, the young Marx noted that from the evolution of a school of philosophy and its fragmentation,

"there also emerge a number of subordinate, querulous formations without individuality. Some of them place themselves behind a philosophical giant of the past - but the ass is soon detected under the lion's skin; the whimpering voice of a manikin of today or yesterday blubbers in comical contrast to the majestic voice resounding through the ages... whose unwelcome organ it has appointed itself."

A historical judgement; nonetheless, this is a stimulating book that will certainly provoke much thought in the serious-minded student of philosophy by virtue of its lucid and qualified analysis, well brought out by Rodney Livingstone's excellent translation. Less impressive is the methodological idealism of its author who in his quest for truth has constructed a somewhat dubious reality.

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