

Hegel, Marx, Engels, and the Origins of Marxism

A review of *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx* by Tom Rockmore

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2 May 2006

Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx, by Tom Rockmore. 224 pages, Blackwell Publishers, 2002. US\$29.95

Tom Rockmore, who teaches Philosophy at Duquesne University in Pennsylvania, begins his book *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx*, with the following statement:

“It is, or at least should be, obvious that as a political approach Marxism has failed as a historical alternative to liberal capitalism. After the rapid demise of the Soviet bloc in 1989, and the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the opposition between totalitarian Marxism and liberal capitalism, a major influence in much of the twentieth century, dissolved. As a result, the modern industrialized world entered into an involuntary Pascalian wager firmly based on liberal economic and liberal democratic principles. At the time of writing modern economic liberalism literally has no real rival in the industrialized world” (xi).

Rockmore’s pronouncement of the death of “political Marxism” is typical of the outlook that prevails in academia: that is, the end of the U.S.S.R. signified the end of Marxism. But what is the basis of this assertion? Nothing more than the unstated premise that the politics of the old Soviet bureaucracy represented Marxism. This premise says far more about the social and political outlook of the professorial fraternity than it does about Marxism. On what basis have academics established equivalence between the reactionary nationalistic politics of the Kremlin and the world scientific outlook of Marxism? Generally, they simply ignore this question entirely. From their lofty heights they look upon the real political struggles waged over many decades by revolutionary Marxists against the Kremlin oligarchy as mere “sectarian squabbles” for which tenure-track professors have no time. It was enough for them to recognize that the power of the Kremlin bureaucracy was, at least until 1991, real. In other words, the bureaucracy controlled a powerful state, and also had the ability to dispense considerable patronage—some of which was used to finance international symposia which stylishly left academics were always glad to attend.

Understood as the theoretical foundation of revolutionary socialist program and practice, Marxism played no role in the policies of the Soviet regime since the late 1920s—that is, since the formal expulsion of Leon Trotsky and his supporters in the Left Opposition from the Soviet Communist Party. The Kremlin’s repudiation of the Marxist origins of the Soviet regime was sealed in blood during the 1930s with the campaign of political genocide that it directed against all remnants of the Marxist and revolutionary intelligentsia and working class within the U.S.S.R. The Moscow Trials and the associated purges which resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of revolutionary socialists was the spearhead of the program of international counter-revolution directed by Stalin and his

associates from the Kremlin.

As early as 1933, following the Stalinist betrayal of the German working class that made possible Hitler’s seizure of power, Trotsky called for the overthrow of the regime of the Kremlin bureaucracy through a political revolution. The issue for Trotsky was not vengeance, but the preservation of the U.S.S.R. He warned repeatedly that unless overthrown by the working class, the policies of the Stalinist regime would lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Trotsky’s insistence that Stalinism was a regime of crisis, that the nationalist program of the Kremlin bureaucracy was both economically and politically bankrupt, that the autarkic economic policies of the bureaucracy could not in the long run shield the U.S.S.R. from the pressures of a world economy dominated by capitalism, and that the fate of the Soviet Union depended upon the victory of socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist states of Western Europe and North America were essential components of the Marxist program of the Fourth International.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented a tragic confirmation of not only the perspective of the Fourth International, but also of Marxism as a science of political perspective. It would have been appropriate for scholars who claim to be specialists in the social sciences—who, for the most part, never even imagined that the Soviet Union could disappear overnight—to acknowledge that the Marxist analysis upheld by the Trotskyist movement had proven to be extraordinarily farsighted.

However, such manifestations of intellectual humility were not to be found. Instead, the demise of the U.S.S.R. led to a veritable eruption of publications proclaiming the death of Marxism. These works fall into two broad categories. In the first category, there are the products of the unabashed ideological defenders of capitalism from the political right (such as Fukuyama and Pipes), for whom the end of the U.S.S.R. simply proves the impossibility of any alternative to the existing bourgeois order. In the second category are to be found a wide range of works from leftist academics, who still hold open the vague possibility of social change at some point in the distant future—but who insist that it will not be Marxism that provides the theoretical substance for any future social transformation.

Pseudo-Hegelianism versus Marxism

What, then, is the alternative to Marxism? There exists a substantial body of new academic literature that argues for a revival of various forms of pre-Marxian philosophy and politics. It claims that the emergence of young Dr. Marx in the early 1840s aborted the development of alternative left-progressive philosophies and social movements. As the work of Marx

developed on the basis of a withering critique of Hegel, it is argued that the damage done by Marx's attack must be repaired. Having been stood on his feet by Marx, these writers argue, it is now necessary to turn the old idealist philosopher back on his head. Hegel's work provides sufficient ground, they write, for the development, within a contemporary context, of progressive social theory and practice. Some of the works that argue along these lines are explicitly hostile to Marx; others suggest that Marx either added little to Hegel or exaggerated his own originality; and still others make the case for a fusion of Hegelianism and Marxism, generally to the detriment of the latter.

Professor Errol Harris writes in his *Spirit of Hegel* (New Jersey, 1993) that "it is not Hegel who stands on his head, but Marx and Engels, who cut off the head, and then imagine that the decapitated torso of the dialectic is still capable of life and movement" (11). He adds: "Nobody would suggest that Marx's own doctrines were derisory, but his criticisms of Hegel were often extraordinarily obtuse and blinkered, based as they were on a gross misunderstanding of Hegel's 'Idealism.'"

In *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom* (New Haven and London, 1999), Professor Paul Franco argues that it is in Hegel, not Marx, that answers to the problems of the contemporary world will be found: "For the past thirty years or so, there has been a tremendous revival of interest in Hegel's social and political philosophy. At first largely motivated by the quest for the origins of Marx's project, this revival of interest has begun to focus on Hegel as a thinker in his own right, and one with perhaps something more profound to offer than Marx" [ix]. As for the latter, Franco refers to Marx as the "epigone" of Hegel (77).

The Canadian academic, David MacGregor, has written several books devoted to establishing Hegelianism as the principal theoretical foundation upon which democratic and socially-progressive projects must base themselves. In *The Communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx* (Toronto and Buffalo, 1990), MacGregor asserts that "Marx's misinterpretation of the Hegelian Ideal set him against Hegel's theory of the state and may have prevented him from coming fully to grips with the contemporary reality of liberal democracy only now being seriously confronted by his latter-day followers (who have much to learn from Hegel). This book points to an understanding of the liberal democratic state that tempers Marx's critique with the insights of Hegel's political theory" (3-4). MacGregor states frankly that it is his aim to "rescue Hegel's thought from the interpretation imposed upon it by Marx. I will argue against Marx's claim that that the Hegelian dialectic 'must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell'" (11).

In his later *Hegel, Marx and the English State* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1992), MacGregor expands his criticism of Marx, accusing him of having "mishandled a crucial component of the Hegelian legacy. He replaced Hegel's concept of private property, which includes the right of the worker to the product of labor, with the notion of surplus value and the negation of private property under communism. This meant that Marx's ideal society lacked not only a state, but also most of the institutions in civil society required to ensure personal freedom and prevent arbitrary rule by a dominant elite" (7).

In yet another work, *Hegel and Marx After the Fall of Communism* (Cardiff, 1998), the social-political essence of MacGregor's critique of the well-established Marxian conception of the Hegel-Marx relationship emerges even more clearly: "The concept of private property forms the controversial nub of the relationship between Hegel and Marx ... Hegel sought to preserve the institution of private property while Marx urged its overthrow ... I maintain that Hegel would have agreed with Marx's critique of capitalist property. Yet, unlike Hegel, Marx failed to probe the positive side of property rights; instead, he recommended the abolition of property in favor of common ownership of the means of production" (116-18). For MacGregor, Hegel's political theory provides the intellectual impulse for a viable alternative to the revolutionary socialist

aspirations of Marx—that is, the revival of the liberal social welfare state, in which an eclectic social-market system is directed by a high-minded and public-spirited bureaucracy.

Professor Warren Breckman's *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1999) argues along similar lines. He maintains that the fall of the Soviet Union and associated regimes in Eastern Europe have resulted in the discrediting among academic social theorists of Marx's uncompromising opposition to capitalism and bourgeois "civil society." Breckman writes, "[T]he one major area of agreement is that Karl Marx's total rejection of the concept of civil society is inadequate to expanding democratic life within complex societies. Here, it is the consensus that is new, not the insight itself. For the shortcomings of Marx's critique of civil society are now openly acknowledged even by those who remain sympathetic to some conception of socialism, retain elements of a Marxist critique of capitalism, or, minimally, as in the case of Jacques Derrida, 'take inspiration from a certain spirit of Marxism'" (2). Breckman further notes that "if the present debate takes for granted the need to go beyond Marxism, one of its chief characteristic moves has been to look behind Marx for inspiration and theoretical guidance. . . . This post-Marxist interest in pre-Marxist social theory has significantly enhanced the prospects and relevance of Hegel, the master thinker whom the young Marx triumphantly claimed to have overcome" (3).

Were its motivation not so politically and intellectually suspect, a revival of interest in Hegel would certainly be a welcome development. But attempts to develop social and political theory on the basis of Hegel or any other major figure in the pre-1840 world of German classical idealism, without reference to (or by means of a misrepresentation of) the subsequent intellectual development carried out by Marx and Engels—whose work arose historically out of the massive socio-economic transformation of Europe as well as critical scientific advances that followed Hegel's death in 1831—represent a major step backward, theoretically and intellectually, and can only serve reactionary political ends.

Historical falsification and misrepresentation

Like the above-cited works, Rockmore's book also proposes to discover a new agenda for radical social change by annulling the theoretical impact of Marxism. But the approach he takes is somewhat different from the others works. While the other books propose to free Hegel from the grip of Marx, Rockmore contends that it is Marx who must be liberated from his ideological imprisonment within Marxism! The real Marx, proclaims Rockmore, was a devout Hegelian idealist. That Marx had been almost universally understood to be a materialist, Rockmore argues, is the product of a grotesque falsification and fraud perpetrated by none other than Friedrich Engels, a philosophical simpleton who, lacking the university training necessary for serious theoretical work, removed all the Hegelian subtleties present in the real Marx's thinking and created the ideological monstrosity known as Marxism!

"Marxism, which derives from Engels," writes Rockmore, "turns on its account of the relation of Marx to Hegel, which in turn determines a view of Marx as leaving Hegel behind. I believe the Marxist view of Marx is both substantially inaccurate, and that it impedes a better view of Marx's position, including his philosophical contribution. I will be arguing that to 'recover' Marx, we need to free him as much as possible from Marxism, hence from Engels, the first Marxist" (1).

Rockmore is not the first to argue that there existed differences between Engels and Marx. At different times it was advanced by writers as diverse as Georg Lukács, Lucio Colletti, Jean Hyppolite, George Lichtheim, various representatives of the Frankfurt School, Leszek Kolakowski, and, more recently, Terrell Carver. The mere fact that Engels outlived Marx by 12 years has been sufficient to give rise to claims that the survivor

exploited his position as executor of Marx's literary estate to substitute his own views for those of his late associate. The alleged differences between the views of Marx and Engels have assumed by now something of a mythic status. None of the claims advanced by the writers listed above can withstand careful analysis, and Lukács later revised his own position on this question. But however one might object to their arguments, it would still be necessary to acknowledge that they approached the works of Marx, Engels, and Hegel with a necessary degree of intellectual seriousness. Nothing of the sort can be said of Rockmore.

The general tone of sloppiness and cynicism that pervades this entire work finds characteristic expression in the manner in which Rockmore purports to "answer" those who might assume on the basis of their life-long collaboration that Marx and Engels shared a common philosophical-theoretical outlook.

"A main reason to believe that Marx and Engels are the joint authors of a single shared doctrine," writes Rockmore "lies in the close association of the former with the latter. That is a little like saying that people who hang out together must think alike" (8).

"Hang out together"? That may be a fair description of what Professor Rockmore does with his pals in the Philosophy Department of Duquesne University. It is hardly an appropriate way to describe the relationship between Marx and Engels. The intimate intellectual and political collaboration of Marx and Engels spanned 39 years, from 1844 until Marx's death in 1883. During that time, they maintained direct contact with each other either through written correspondence or personal meetings on virtually a daily basis. The contemporary edition of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works* includes 10 volumes (each containing between 500 and 600 pages) of correspondence. These letters, which allow the reader to follow the intellectual development and interaction of these two extraordinary men over four decades, testifies to a degree of philosophical solidarity, moral kinship, and personal friendship for which one can hardly find an equal in history. Where differences arose—whether over theoretical, political or personal matters—there exists a documentary record of the disputes.

Aside from their joint authorship of the critical formative philosophical works of Marxism—in particular, *The German Ideology* which represented the first detailed elaboration of the materialist conception of history—Marx provided a detailed written account of Engels' role in the elaboration of their common theoretical world outlook. Rockmore's attempt to portray Engels as the wicked anti-Hegelian who covered over Marx's enduring allegiance to German idealism, is shattered by what Marx himself had to say on this very subject in his 1859 Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*:

"Friedrich Engels, with whom I maintained a constant exchange of ideas by correspondence since the publication of his brilliant essay on the critique of economic categories (printed in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*) arrived by another road (compare his *Condition of the Working Class in England*) at the same result as I, and when in the spring of 1845 he too came to live in Brussels, we decided to set forth together our conception as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience. The intention was carried out in the form of a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy. The manuscript, two large octavo volumes [*The German Ideology*] had long ago reached the publishers in Westphalia when we were informed that owing to changed circumstances it could not be printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose—self-clarification. Of the scattered works in which at that time we presented one or another aspect of our views to the public, I shall mention only the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, jointly written by Engels and myself, and a *Speech on the Question of Free Trade*, which I myself

published. The salient points of our conception were first outlined in an academic, although polemical, form in my *Poverty of Philosophy...*" (*Collected Works*, Volume 29, New York, 1987, p. 264).

Marx's reference in just one paragraph to "the same result as I," "our conception," "our former philosophical conscience," "our main purpose—self clarification," "our views," and, finally, "the salient points of our conception" clearly establishes the very high level of theoretical agreement between himself and Engels.

Though Rockmore does refer to Marx's Preface to the *Critique*, he does not cite this crucial passage. This is not the only occasion as we shall establish when Rockmore ignores, in a manner so blatant that it smacks of intellectual dishonesty, statements by Marx which contradict his own thesis.

In his zeal to discredit Engels, Rockmore asserts that Marx's lifelong collaborator simply lacked the level of education necessary for a proper understanding of Marx. Engels was a mere "philosophical autodidact" who "was not concerned with philosophical subtleties..." (9). Rockmore reminds his readers that "Marx studied philosophy, in which he held a doctorate at the university. Yet Engels did not earn a college degree. He studied philosophy only sporadically, and simply lacked the requisite training, not to mention the philosophical talent, to do high-quality philosophical work of his own. He also lacked the sophisticated appreciation of philosophical doctrines and sheer philosophical inventiveness of Marx. As a philosopher, he was at best a talented amateur with an interest in the topic" (10).

What an unpleasant combination of professorial snobbishness and pompous self-satisfaction! While Professor Rockmore obviously places great weight on academic credentials, it would be very hard to establish on the basis of the history of philosophical thought that there exists any correlation between the ability to undertake serious philosophical work and the possession of a university doctorate, let alone a tenured position in a university philosophy department. If Rockmore's standards were to be applied as a basis for determining who may be judged a serious philosopher, quite a few rather well-known names would have to be removed from Western intellectual history—including those of Spinoza and Descartes. As we are informed by Desmond M. Clarke in his excellent new biography of the founder of Cartesian rationalism, "Descartes' formal education had been narrowly scholastic, and it had certainly not provided a basis for the fundamental reform of human knowledge that he eventually undertook" (*Descartes: A Biography*, Cambridge, 2006, p. 37). And while Rockmore's use of the term "autodidact" (self-taught) is intended pejoratively, one might note that many of the greatest thinkers and writers in history may be included in that category.

But in any case, Rockmore's presentation of Engels' intellectual preparation, not to mention the breadth and depth of his knowledge, particularly of philosophy, is downright false. By the time Engels completed his studies at the Elberfeld *gymnasium*, he had attained a level of education that, if I may hazard a guess, Professor Rockmore rarely encounters among his own doctoral candidates. According to his school report of September 1837 (when he was not quite 17), Engels had achieved such a degree of proficiency in Latin that he "finds no difficulty understanding the respective writers either of prose or poetry, namely, Livius and Cicero, Virgil and Horace, so that he can easily follow the thread of the longer pieces, grasp the train of thought with clarity and translate the text before him with skill into the mother tongue." As for Greek, the school report stated that Engels "has acquired a satisfactory knowledge of morphology and the rules of syntax, in particular good proficiency and skill in translating the easier Greek prose writers, as also *Homer* and *Euripides*, and could grasp and render the train of thought of a *Platonic* dialogue with skill." The writer of this report also expressed admiration for Engels' work in mathematics, physics, and "*Philosophical*

propaedeutic” (*Collected Works*, Volume 2, New York, 1975, p. 584-85).

For a work that hinges on the claim that Engels lacked either the training or skill required to undertake serious work in the sphere of philosophy, it is shocking that Rockmore makes no reference whatever to the episode in Engels’ early career that established him, even before his initial encounter with Marx, as an outstanding figure in German intellectual circles—that is, Engels’ refutation of Friedrich Schelling. An aged philosopher by the time he was called to Berlin in 1841 to counter the influence of Hegelianism among radical-democratic students, Schelling’s arrival in the Prussian capital caused an uproar. His lectures were viewed as a major philosophical event and drew an immense audience that included, among others, the young Kierkegaard, Bakunin and Engels. Schelling, who in his youth had roomed with Hegel and had at one time counted him among his closest friends, repudiated his objective idealist system and turned sharply toward philosophical subjectivism and irrationalism. Moreover, the early renown of Schelling had been eclipsed once Hegel emerged as the dominant figure in German philosophy. But in the aftermath of Hegel’s death in 1831, the Prussian state authorities became increasingly troubled by the revolutionary conclusions that students were drawing from the late philosopher’s works. Schelling was given the task of stopping the spread of the radical Hegelian contagion.

In the struggle to defend the reputation and legacy of Hegelianism, it was none other than Engels who emerged as the major figure. Three works written by Engels in 1841—*Schelling and Revelation*, *Schelling on Hegel*, and *Schelling, Philosopher in Christ*—were hailed by the Left-Hegelian youth as the decisive refutation of Schelling from a Hegelian standpoint. That Rockmore chooses to ignore these texts—which would immediately expose the absurdity of his claim that “Engels knew neither philosophy nor Hegel well” (162)—is nothing less than intellectual dishonesty. Rockmore simply ignores or glosses over events and texts that undermine his own flimsy thesis.

Rockmore asserts repeatedly that Engels was a “positivist,” convinced that philosophy had been entirely superseded by science and had lost all intellectual relevance. Engels, according to Rockmore, “consistently treats Hegel as if the latter’s philosophy were pre-scientific nonsense” (15). Upon reading such outrageously false statements, one has the impression that Rockmore believes that in the prevailing climate of anti-Marxist political and intellectual reaction he is freed from all traditional standards of scholarship. Whether a particular statement is true or false, or whether it can be supported on the basis of written texts and the historical record, is of no importance whatever. What he strives for is not intellectual clarification and theoretical precision, but the fulfillment of a pre-conceived ideological agenda.

It would not be difficult to fill up dozens of pages with quotations in which Engels paid tribute to the genius of Hegel, whom he memorably described as “the most encyclopedic mind of his time” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 25, New York, 1987, p. 25). Engels’ appreciation of Hegel found its most evocative expression in his brilliant pamphlet on *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. There, Engels referred to Hegel as “Olympian Zeus” who presented “a wealth of thought which is astounding even today. The phenomenology of mind (which one may call a parallel to the embryology and paleontology of the mind, a development of individual consciousness through its different stages, set in the form of an abbreviated reproduction of the of the stages through which the consciousness of man has passed in the course of history), logic, philosophy of nature, philosophy of the mind, and the latter in turn elaborated in its separate, historical subdivisions: philosophy of history, of law, of religion, history of philosophy, aesthetics, etc.—in all these different historical fields Hegel worked to discover and demonstrate the pervading thread of development. And as he was not only a creative genius but also a man of encyclopedic erudition, he played an

epoch-making role in every sphere. It is self-evident that owing to the needs of the ‘system’ he very often had to resort to those forced constructions about which his pygmean opponents make such a terrible fuss even today. But these constructions are only the frame and scaffolding of his work. If one does not loiter here needlessly, but presses on further into the huge edifice, one finds innumerable treasures which still today retain their full value” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 26, Moscow, 1990, p. 361-62).

How is it possible, given the existence of this and countless other passages authored by Engels, that Rockmore can claim that Engels dismissed Hegel’s work as “pre-scientific nonsense”? Rockmore must assume that neither his editors, nor the academic community in which he navigates his career, will be troubled by his gross falsifications. In works dealing with Marxism, there seems to be no expectation of scholarly rigor. The prevailing motto is, rather, “Anything goes!”

Rockmore’s assertion that Engels was a positivist who maintained that the development of science rendered philosophy superfluous is no less false. Indeed, Engels wrote precisely the opposite. He repeatedly warned that the work of even the most brilliant natural scientists is limited to the extent that they lack serious acquaintance with the history of human conceptual thinking as it finds expression in the development of philosophy. The “art” of conceptual thinking essential for the correct interpretation of the results of empirical research, Engels insisted, can be acquired only through the painstaking study of the history of philosophy. In a crucial passage, Engels wrote:

“Empirical natural science has accumulated such a tremendous mass of positive material for knowledge that the necessity of classifying it in each separate field of investigation systematically and in accordance with its inner inter-connection has become absolutely imperative. It is becoming equally imperative to bring the individual spheres of knowledge into correct connection with one another. In doing so, however, natural science enters the field of theory and here the methods of empiricism will not work, here only theoretical thinking can be of assistance. But theoretical thinking is an innate quality only as regards natural capacity. This natural capacity must be developed, improved, and for its improvement there is as yet no other means than the study of previous philosophy” (*Collected Works*, Volume 25, p. 338).

I cannot resist citing another passage, in which Engels presents a conception of the relevance of philosophy that is the absolute opposite of the position attributed to him by Rockmore:

“Natural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot, however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly from the common consciousness of so-called educated persons, which is dominated by the relics of long obsolete philosophies, or from the little bit of philosophy compulsorily listened to at the University (which is not only fragmentary, but also a medley of views of people belonging to the most varied and usually the worst schools), or from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy, but unfortunately in most cases to the worst philosophy, and those who abuse philosophy most are slaves to precisely the worst vulgarized relics of the worst philosophies” (Volume 25, p. 490-91).

By now the reader must be asking him- or herself a question: how is it possible, given the extensive record of Engels’ writings, that Rockmore can commit to paper statements that are so glaringly false? The answer is, “Welcome to the world of professional academic anti-Marxism, where anything goes!”

The purpose of Rockmore’s assault on Engels becomes transparent as soon as he turns his attention to Marx. By claiming that it was the philosophically-ignorant Engels who created what is known as “Marxism” by falsifying and distorting the conceptions of his lifelong

comrade and friend, Rockmore feels free to unveil a “new” Marx—that is, one without the materialistic “narrative” (to use post-modernist jargon) that supposedly was conjured up by Engels after the former’s death. And so, contrary to the claims of Engels and several generations of “Marxists,” the real Marx had no substantial differences with the philosophical outlook of Hegel. Rockmore claims that “it is crucial to go beyond politically motivated claims for distinctions in kind between Marx and Hegel, or again between Marx and philosophy, or even between philosophy and science; for it is only in this way that one can see that in the final analysis Marx is not only a philosopher, or a German philosopher, but a German Hegelian, hence a German idealist philosopher” (161).

Prior to Rockmore, we are expected to believe, the “Marxists” had denied and obscured the real Marx’s allegiance to idealism. The materialist and anti-Hegelian positions they ascribed to Marx were largely a product of their own theoretical incompetence in philosophical matters. “Engels knew neither philosophy nor Hegel well,” writes Rockmore. “Since Engels, few Marxists, including Lenin, have been well versed in Hegel. . . . Marxist denigration of Hegel retarded awareness of his significance for Marx’s position” (162).

Aside from Rockmore’s attempt to reinterpret Marx as an idealist, the claim that “few Marxists, including Lenin” have made a careful study of Hegel can be dismissed as simply stupid. Again, Rockmore relies on the intellectual acquiescence of an academic community steeped in cynicism and indifference. He takes for granted that no one, at least in the academic milieu within which he operates, will take him to task for writing things that have absolutely no basis in fact. Has Rockmore ever bothered to review the writings of G. V. Plekhanov, the “Father of Russian Marxism”? Even those who disagree with Plekhanov’s philosophical conceptions could not claim, in good faith, that his familiarity with Hegel was anything less than exhaustive and profound. Is Rockmore unfamiliar with Lenin’s *Conspectus on Hegel’s Science of Logic*? Composed in 1914-15, the later publication of Lenin’s “Philosophical Notebooks”—which includes his extensive annotation of Hegel’s *Logic*—had a major impact on the appreciation of the weighty theoretical basis of Lenin’s political work. Rockmore seems to not be aware that it was precisely Lenin’s *Conspectus* that contributed to a significant revival of theoretical interest in Hegel among Marxist scholars—including, by the way, Lukács, for whom Rockmore professes admiration. What about the writings of Trotsky, which exhibit a mastery of dialectic method? [End Note 1] Or the works of early Soviet theoreticians such as Debordin and Axelrod? We might add as well the work of later Soviet philosophers such as Mikhail Lifshits and E. V. Ilyenkov, who made important contributions to the understanding of the Hegel-Marx relationship despite the repressive conditions, enforced by a privileged bureaucracy hostile to serious theoretical work, that existed in the U.S.S.R. (both during and after Stalin’s rule).

Previously we showed that the greatest obstacle to Rockmore’s efforts to portray Engels as a positivist who simply dismissed the relevance of philosophy were the words of Engels himself. Similarly, the refutation of Rockmore’s claim that Marx was a German idealist is to be found in his own writings. The manner in which Rockmore tiptoes around the works of Marx, citing rather sparingly and highly selectively, indicates that he himself realizes that his thesis rests on rather shaky ground. Rockmore gets off to a bad start by stating that Marx “is in part responsible” for the widespread belief that he broke from Hegel. This is because in an oft-quoted passage in the *Afterword* to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx “obscurely” suggests that his own position results from the inversion of Hegel’s. Since Engels, generations of Marxists have approached Marx’s position as the inversion of Hegel’s.

Actually, there is nothing that is in the least obscure in the passage to which Rockmore refers. This is what Marx wrote in January 1873:

“My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.* the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought” (*Capital*, Volume 1, Moscow, 1970, p. 29).

This English translation is a faithful rendition of what Marx wrote in the original German. There is nothing in Marx’s words that is obscure, oblique or confused. Marx is saying, as clearly as he possibly can, that his own method is fundamentally different than Hegel’s—“its direct opposite.” And why? Because Hegel’s dialectic is that of an idealist for whom the real world is a merely a manifestation of thought; whereas for Marx, thought forms are a reflection in the human mind of a real existing material world. Take extra note of the fact that the phrase “*reflected* by the human mind” is used by Marx. But Rockmore tells us (on page 6) that “For our purposes, it suffices to point out that the reflection theory of knowledge, which was later adopted by a long line of Marxists, has no basis in Marx’s writing.” As we have already noted, anything goes!

Rockmore has no end of difficulties with the writings of Marx. Referring to Marx’s *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Rockmore states that “The text, which Marx did not prepare for publication, is repetitive and somewhat painful to read” (47). No doubt it is—for Rockmore. The cause of his discomfort is that the content of Marx’s *Critique* cannot be in any way reconciled with Rockmore’s attempt to portray Marx as a Hegelian idealist. With the writing of this *Critique*, Marx initiated the intense theoretical work (to which Engels contributed significantly) that shattered the idealist framework of Hegel’s philosophical system, demystified his dialectical method, and established the foundations for the development of a genuinely materialist ontology rooted in the historical study of man as a *social being*. The decisive achievement of Marx’s *Critique*, for which the earlier work of Ludwig Feuerbach (who goes virtually unmentioned by Rockmore) provided a critical philosophical impulse, was his demonstration of the essential inadequacy of Hegel’s speculative idealism as an instrument of historical and social analysis. With Hegel, the logical categories, which he elaborated as objective moments in the dialectical reconstitution of the Absolute Idea, represented the underlying and inner foundation of material reality itself. He derived the forms of Being from the dialectical process of abstract logical thought. Marx established that Hegel’s procedure reversed the real relationship between consciousness and reality, and by so doing prevented the genuine cognition of the “civil society” (as Hegel referred to the existing social order) within which man lived. Rather than discovering the material source of real social processes, Hegel deals with them in terms of abstract logical relations. As Marx explains:

“The transition of the family and civil society into the political state is, therefore, this: the mind of these spheres, which is *implicitly* the mind of the state, now also behaves to itself as such and is *actual* for itself as their inner core. The transition is thus derived, not from the *particular* nature of the family, etc., and from the particular nature of the state, but from the *general* relationship of *necessity to freedom*. It is exactly the same transition as is effected in logic from the sphere of essence to the sphere of the concept. The same transition is made in the philosophy of nature from inorganic nature to life. It is always the same categories which provide the soul, now for this, now for that sphere. It is only a matter of spotting for the separate concrete attributes the corresponding abstract attributes” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, New York, 1976, p. 10).

By way of example, Marx examines a characteristically convoluted and obscure passage from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Law*, which reads:

“Necessity in ideality [writes Hegel] is the *development* of the idea within itself. As *subjective* substantiality it is *political conviction*, as *objective* substantiality, in distinction therefrom, it is the *organism* of the state, the strictly *political* state and *its constitution*” (Cited in Volume 3, p. 10).

Marx then exposes the analytical poverty, even sophistry, which is concealed in the abstruse Hegelian jargon:

“The *subject* here is ‘necessity in ideality’—the ‘idea within itself.’ The *predicate*: *political conviction* and the *political constitution*. In plain language *political conviction* is the *subjective* and the *political constitution* the *objective substance* of the state. The logical development from family and civil society to the state is thus sheer *pretence*. For it is not explained how family sentiment, civil sentiment, the institution of the family and social institutions as such are related to political conviction and to the political constitution, and how they are connected” (Volume 3, p. 10-11).

In Hegel, writes Marx, “The sole interest is in rediscovering ‘the idea’ pure and simple, the ‘logical idea,’ in every element, whether of the state or of nature, and the actual subjects, in this case the ‘political constitution,’ come to be nothing but their mere *names*, so that all that we have is the appearance of real understanding. *They are and remain uncomprehended, because they are not grasped in their specific character*” (Volume 3, p. 12. Emphasis mine).

The essential weakness of Hegel’s method is that “He does not develop his thinking from the object, but expounds the object in accordance with a thinking that is cut and dried—already formed and fixed in the abstract sphere of logic. It is not a question of evolving the specific idea of the political constitution, but of establishing a relationship of the political constitution to the abstract idea, of placing it as a phase in the life-history of the idea, a manifest piece of mystification.”

Thus, Marx sums up the fundamental error of the Hegelian approach: “Philosophical work does not consist in embodying thinking in political definitions, but in evaporating the existing definitions into abstract thoughts. Not the logic of the matter, but the matter of logic is the philosophical element. The logic does not serve to prove the state, but the state to prove the logic” (Volume 3, p. 18).

Rockmore skips over Marx’s profound critique of Hegel’s methodology. It is simply too “painful.” He makes a brief and vague reference to Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s derivation of the state from logic, without acknowledging its far-reaching significance in the theoretical development of Marx himself. In fact, Rockmore tries to dismiss it as a misunderstanding, stating that “we must ask ourselves whether Marx’s critique of Hegel does justice to Hegel, or rather rests on an incorrect reading of Hegel” (48). This question exposes the intellectual dishonesty that underlies Rockmore’s project. Marx is, on the one hand proclaimed to be a Hegelian idealist, and the subsequent creation of an anti-idealist “Marxism” is the product of distortions introduced by the materialist usurper, Friedrich Engels. Yet, on the other hand, whenever Rockmore is compelled to make reference to works by Marx that criticize Hegel along materialist lines, the professor suggests that Marx simply did not know what he was talking about.

Rockmore proceeds with the same evasiveness when dealing with the series of works that followed the *Critique* in which Marx (with the increasingly significant collaboration of Engels) carried through his materialist demystification and reworking of the Hegelian dialectic. Rockmore has virtually nothing to say about Marx’s lengthy and detailed analysis of the Hegelian method in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx entitled this section, *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*. I will resist the temptation to quote extensively from this invaluable text, which deepens the analysis of the Hegelian method previously developed in the *Critique*. However, it is necessary to emphasize that Marx gave as his reason for writing this

Critique the vital need to distinguish his own work from that of Hegel and his epigones. He took such well-known Left Hegelians such as Bruno Bauer to task for having failed to adopt a critical attitude to their teacher. Marx, on the other hand, professed the greatest admiration for Feuerbach, whom he praised as “the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy” (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, [Moscow: 1977], p. 135). Why would Marx have paid this tribute to Feuerbach if he had continued to view himself as a Hegelian?

The next great work produced by Marx with Engels, *The Holy Family*, is also dismissed by Rockmore, who writes, “The book contains much arid polemic against Bauer and other left-wing Hegelians. When he is at his best [i.e., when Marx agrees with Rockmore], Marx is an insightful writer, attentive and quick to respond to various nuances in the authors he considers, and capable of brilliant insights. This book, on the contrary, is almost wholly polemical, mainly a collection of simplistic views [i.e., which contradict Rockmore], lacking the nuances of previous and later Marxian writings, quicker to denounce than to comprehend, full of sharp oppositions” (75).

For Rockmore “nuance” really means obfuscation, a characteristic that is not to be found in Marx’s theoretical work. The latter’s criticism of Hegel’s position is so clearly defined that it is difficult to distort and misrepresent. It is virtually impossible to describe the conceptions advanced by Marx as compatible with the idealist speculation of Hegel. *The Holy Family* represents an immense advance toward the elaboration of the materialist conception of history and the identification of the proletariat as the objective revolutionary force in bourgeois society. The material practice of this class, not the self-movement of logical concepts, shall provide the basis for the revolutionary transformation of society. The real foundation of social revolution is lodged not in the thought of any individual worker, but in the objective social being of the proletariat as a class. The historical implications of Marx’s critique of German speculative idealism emerges with the discovery, by Marx and Engels, that “It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 4, New York, 1974, p. 37). It comes as no surprise that this crucial passage, in which the emergence of the proletariat as a new revolutionary class found in the writings of Marx and Engels as a conscious theoretical expression, is not cited by Rockmore. Presumably, he found it too “arid,” lacking in “nuance,” too “polemical,” and too “simplistic” to merit comment.

Another crucial section of *The Holy Family* which Rockmore chooses to ignore is the lengthy section on the evolution of modern materialism. Having already announced that “Materialism is a doctrine that is clear in Engels, but certainly less clear in Marx” (5), Rockmore cannot welcome *The Holy Family*’s brilliantly concise review, written by Marx himself, of the development of modern materialism since the seventeenth century and its profound contribution to the development of socialist thought:

“Just as *Cartesian* materialism passes into the *natural sciences proper*, the other trend of French materialism leads directly to *socialism* and *communism*.

“There is no need for any great penetration to see from the teaching of materialism on the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education, the influence of environment on man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc., how necessarily materialism is connected with communism and socialism. If man draws all his knowledge, sensation,

etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man” (Volume 4, p. 130).

As a consequence of his dismissive attitude toward Marx’s critique of Hegel’s idealism, Rockmore is unable to understand either the foundations of Marx’s theory of capitalist society, let alone its most essential contributions to the development of scientific political economy. He writes:

“The central idea in his own [Marx’s] economic theory is not his theory of value, nor his account of commodities, nor again his concept of alienation, nor even his view of the fetishism of commodities. It is rather the decisive insight, based on Adam Smith and developed in part by Hegel, that modern society is a transitory stage arising from the efforts of individuals to meet their needs within the economic framework of the capitalist world” (xvi).

Here we have a banal platitude that one might encounter in a high school class on Home Economics (that modern society consists of individuals trying to make a living) palmed off as the “decisive insight” gleaned by Marx from his painstaking analyses of the writings of Hegel and Adam Smith (to whom Marx devoted several hundred pages in his *Theories of Surplus Value*)! There is a connection, however, between this vulgar observation and Rockmore’s misrepresentation of Marx’s theoretical development. He dismisses all the most important elements of Marx’s general theory of capitalist society as a whole whose discovery and elaboration would not have been possible without the critique of speculative idealism and the materialist reworking of the Hegelian dialectic. Indeed, Marx’s “economic turn” which began in 1844 flowed necessarily from the critical stance that he had taken toward Hegel’s derivation of the world from the movement of logical concepts. The materialist explanation of the real foundations of human society and its necessary reflection in definite forms of social consciousness required that philosophy turn its attention from heaven to earth, away from God in all forms (including the philosophical God of Hegel’s Absolute Idea) to man, away from the abstract contemplation of pure thought to the study of labor as the real foundation for the creation, reproduction and cultural development of human society.

Idealism versus materialism

Notwithstanding the exhaustive and explicit character of Marx’s critique, Rockmore attempts to salvage his portrayal of Marx as an idealist philosopher who did not really break with Hegel by fooling around with terminology. He writes, “If we understand ‘idealism’ as referring to the idea that the subject in some sense produces its world and itself, then Marx is clearly an idealist” (70). In other words, anyone who accepts that human beings, endowed with consciousness, act upon the world and, in so doing, change the world and themselves, is an idealist. This definition evades the central issues involved in the collision between idealism and materialism, and would allow an amalgamation of the most diverse and incompatible philosophical outlooks. Rockmore’s definition asserts that idealism must include all philosophical tendencies that accept that consciousness is an active and creative force in history.

But this leaves unanswered two critical and interrelated philosophical issues. The first concerns the relationship of thought and matter, in which the following questions are posed: Does matter exist independently of consciousness, or does consciousness arise independently of matter? Does matter precede thought, or is it the other way around? Is the existence of a material world an absolute precondition for consciousness, or can consciousness (or spirit) exist either without or independently of a material world? Did the creation of the universe precede consciousness, or was consciousness present before the universe came into existence? The second issue, rooted in the first, raises questions relating to the nature and

reliability of the cognitive process—that is, to what extent can the mind know that which exists outside of it? Is it possible for thinking to give an accurate presentation of reality?

It is the answers that different philosophers give to these questions that determine whether they belong to the camps of idealism or materialism. Those who assert, in one form or another, the primacy of thought over matter, of consciousness over being, are idealists. Those, in opposition to this position, who assert the primacy of matter over consciousness, and who insist that consciousness emerged only as the product of the evolution of matter, are materialists.

Rockmore’s definition of idealism is merely a subterfuge aimed at confusing the critical philosophical issues. Moreover, he is hardly the first to find a universal basis for idealism in the undeniable fact that human beings act with consciousness. As Engels pointed out, “we simply cannot evade the fact that everything which motivates men must pass through their brains—even eating and drinking, which begins as a consequence of the sensation of hunger or thirst transmitted through the brain, and end as a result of the sensation of satisfaction likewise transmitted through the brain. The influences of the external world upon man express themselves in his brain, are reflected therein as feelings, thoughts, impulses volitions—in short, as ‘ideal tendencies,’ and in this form become ‘ideal powers.’ If, then, a man is to be deemed an idealist because he follows ‘ideal tendencies’ and admits that ‘ideal powers’ have an influence over him, then every person who is at all normally developed is a born idealist and how, in that case, can there be any materialists at all?” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 26, Moscow, 1990, p. 373)

It is not the recognition of the presence of “ideal powers” or their influence over human beings that is at issue in the dispute between materialism and idealism, but rather how the origins and nature of those “ideal powers” are understood and explained. Is or is not the source of the “ideal” to be found, in the final analysis, outside the mind, in an objectively existing material world?

Rockmore repeatedly attempts to misrepresent the answer which Marx gives to this question, which is consistently and unequivocally materialist. For example, in dealing with the method employed in the writing of *Capital*, Rockmore cites from the *Afterword* to the second German edition in which Marx states that “if the life of the subject matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere *a priori* construction.” Rockmore then comments:

“Marx’s wording here easily creates misunderstanding. He is obviously not espousing the reflection theory of knowledge pioneered for Marxism by Engels. He is also not saying that knowledge in fact requires that mind literally reflect an independent world” (131). Once again, Rockmore attempts to deny the materialism of Marx and to counterpose his views to those of Engels by means of a subterfuge. The use of the word “literally” is a red herring introduced only to create confusion. The crucial issue is whether the mind reflects an independent world. The ideal forms in which the material world is reflected are complex and contradictory. The ideal reproduction of the real in the human mind proceeds through a historically and socially-conditioned process of abstraction. In this specific sense, the mind is not functioning merely as a “mirror,” in which reality is, on the basis of immediate reflection, reproduced in all its complexity. [End Note 2] But still, in the final analysis, the images, thoughts and concepts that emerge in the human mind are reflections of an objective reality that exists outside the mind of the cognizing subject.

The very words by Marx quoted by Rockmore appear in the *Afterword* to *Capital* almost immediately after a lengthy passage in which Marx’s philosophical outlook and analytical method were described by a contemporary reviewer writing for a Russian journal. Marx cited approvingly from the review, which states in part, “Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intelligence, but rather, on

the contrary, determining that will, consciousness and intelligence. ... If in the history of civilization the conscious element plays a part so subordinate, then it is self-evident that a critical inquiry whose subject-matter is civilization, can, less than anything else, have for its basis any form of, or any result of, consciousness. That is to say, that not the idea, but the material phenomenon alone can serve as its starting point" (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 27).

Rockmore chooses not to cite this passage.

Instead, Rockmore proceeds to conclude his potted analysis of the *Afterword* by claiming that Marx "reaffirms the obvious in declaring himself a Hegelian..." In fact, Marx describes himself not as a Hegelian but, more precisely and correctly, as "the pupil of that mighty thinker"—having already explained in detail that which separated the materialist student from the idealist teacher. He concludes the exposition of the relationship of his method to that of Hegel by stating, "The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (*Capital*, p. 29).

It should be clear by now that Rockmore's claim that "Marx is clearly an idealist" (70); and that "Marx, as distinguished from Marxism, is committed to idealism" (179) is a gross and obvious falsification of the philosophical position held by Marx from 1843 until his death in 1883. However, it is appropriate to settle this particular argument by letting Marx, once again, speak for himself. In a letter written to his friend Ludwig Kugelmann on March 6, 1868, Marx sharply criticizes a review of *Capital* that was written by a young professor, Eugen Dühring (later to become the subject of Engels' immortal polemic). Complaining that Dühring "practices deception," Marx writes, "He knows full well that my method of exposition is *not* Hegelian, since I am a materialist, and Hegel an idealist. Hegel's dialectics is the basic form of all dialectics, but only *after* being stripped of its mystical form, and it is precisely this which distinguishes *my* method" (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 42, New York, 1987, p. 544, emphasis in the original).

It is hard to believe that Professor Rockmore failed to come across this well-known letter in the course of preparing the writing of his book. Rather, he simply chose to ignore it. Thus, the charge leveled by Marx against Dühring can be placed just as fittingly on Rockmore's doorstep.

Marx the reformist?

What, then, is the purpose of Rockmore's tortured efforts to separate Marx from Engels and Marxism, while at the same time reclaiming him as a Hegelian idealist? The answer finally comes near the conclusion of the book, when Rockmore purports to discover a "stunning passage" in Volume 3 of *Capital* in which Marx repudiated his earlier views on the necessity of social revolution. "According to Marx," writes Rockmore, "freedom, which only begins where forced labor ceases, consists in establishing control over the economic process in conditions favorable to human beings. Although real needs must still, and will always need to be, met through the economic process, that is, within the realm of necessity, beyond it lies what Marx now calls the realm of freedom. In suggesting that its prerequisite lies in shortening the working day, he implies that as the goal of history real freedom lies in free time" (173).

Rockmore then cites at length from Marx:

"In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result

of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite" (Rockmore 173; passage appears in *Capital*, Volume 3, London, 1974, p. 820).

I have reproduced the passage as cited by Rockmore in its entirety, so that the reader may decide for him- or herself whether the conclusion drawn by Rockmore is in the least justified by what Marx actually wrote.

"Many things could be said about this remarkable passage. Perhaps the most obvious is that, after many years of fighting for communism, Marx here just as obviously abandons it as a precondition for real human freedom. Freedom no longer lies in a break with a previous stage of society, that is in revolution, but in a basic improvement in conditions of life, or in reform. In a word, Marx here substitutes reform for revolution" (173).

It is no doubt true that many things could be said about this passage, but nothing that Rockmore says is correct. To find in this passage a rejection of revolution in favor of reform requires that one attribute to virtually every sentence its opposite meaning. "Freedom," proclaims Marx, can be realized by "socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature..." This, of course, can be achieved only through the overthrow of capitalism, a mode of production where economic anarchy prevails in the form of the all-powerful market. On this basis, freedom—understood as the development of man's creative capacities beyond the sphere of work dictated by the necessity to maintain and reproduce life—will expand. Freedom arises out of and remains rooted in necessity, that is, man's need to obtain from nature that which he needs to survive and reproduce. As for the shortening of the working day, that is the basic measurement of the gradual encroachment of freedom upon necessity—but not itself the realization of freedom, and certainly not within the framework of capitalism. Nothing in this passage supports the next statement by Rockmore:

"Marxism has traditionally been hostile to mere reform. Yet in this passage Marx seems to hold out hope that modern industrial society and real human freedom are compatible if and only if human beings can reestablish control over the economic process, which is the real master in capitalist society." But rational control over economic life is not possible under capitalism, nor can the drive for profit be subordinated to the realization of purely human needs.

What Rockmore advocates—a Marx without historical materialism, without Engels, without Marxism—proves in the end to be a Marx without socialist revolution, a "Marx" that is not simply stood on his head, but also handcuffed and gagged.

Epilogue

It is necessary to attach to this review a brief epilogue. The publication of *Marx After Marxism* has been followed by the release of a volume edited by Professor Rockmore, entitled *The Philosophical Challenge of September 11* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005). In the introduction to this volume, co-authored by Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (Professor of Philosophy at Temple University), we read the following:

"One wonders whether we are prepared to address 9/11 in accord with the familiar terms and categories of our tradition, or whether they are even

adequate to the task. We are no longer certain of our analytic instruments. ... Political philosophy as we have known it now seems outdated, seems unable to help us in our hour of need.

“One suspects that the impasse extends to other demands. All of our ready conceptual assurances are confounded by 9/11. The assumption that we have captured the world in our theories has been stalemated by the world itself. The world has changed in ways no one could have foreseen. We cannot diagnose the events of 9/11 by any simple application of the usual tools. They defy our sense of legible order, and we cannot say that our categories will adjust again” (3).

As a confession of theoretical paralysis and intellectual bankruptcy in the face of reality, one can hardly imagine a more embarrassing self-exposure. Professor Rockmore would have us believe that the airplanes seized by the hijackers shattered not only the World Trade Center, but also the cognitive and analytical structures developed in the course of 2,500 years of philosophical thought.

Rockmore does not tell us what it is that imparted to the events of 9/11 their singularly incomprehensible character. After all that happened in the twentieth century—the horrors of two world wars, the Holocaust, the Stalinist purges, the dropping of two atomic bombs, and countless other acts of barbarism that in their totality claimed the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings—what is it that sets September 11, 2001 apart from all antecedent tragedies? What new and heretofore unimagined qualities and characteristics did the events of that day reveal?

It now seems fairly obvious that Rockmore’s assault on Marxism left him singularly unprepared for the very first political challenge of the twenty-first century. Having proclaimed the death of “Marxism” and the philosophical illegitimacy of the Marxist refutation of Hegelian idealism, Rockmore quite clearly has failed to discover an alternative theoretical structure that would enable him to analyze and understand contemporary reality.

End Notes:

[1] In his polemical response to Professor James Burnham, a pragmatist and bitter opponent of Hegel (whom he had denounced as the “century-dead, arch-muddler of human thought”), Trotsky paid tribute to the great German philosopher: “Hegel wrote before Darwin and before Marx. Thanks to the powerful impulse given to thought by the French Revolution, Hegel anticipated the general movement of science. But because it was only an *anticipation*, although by a genius, it received from Hegel an idealistic character. Hegel operated with ideological shadows as the ultimate reality. Marx demonstrated that the movement of these ideological shadows reflected nothing but the movement of material bodies” (*In Defense of Marxism* [London: 1971], p. 66). At the conclusion of the faction fight that erupted inside the Trotskyist movement in 1939-40, Burnham repudiated socialist politics and began his rapid political evolution to the extreme right. (Back to text)

[2] Lenin, in his *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, wrote: “Logic is the science of cognition. It is the theory of knowledge. Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But this is not a simple, not an immediate, not a complete reflection, but the process of a series of abstractions, the formation and development of concepts, laws, etc., and these concepts, laws, etc. (thought, science = ‘the logical Idea’) *embrace* conditionally, approximately, the universal law-governed character of eternally moving and developing nature. Here there are *actually* objectively, **three** members: 1) nature; 2) human cognition = the human **brain** (as the highest product of this same nature), and 3) the form of reflection of nature in human cognition, and this form consists precisely of concepts, laws, categories, etc. Man cannot comprehend = reflect = mirror nature *as a whole*, in its completeness, its ‘immediate totality,’ he can only *eternally* come closer to this, creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of the world, etc., etc.” (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 38 [Moscow, 1972], p. 182, emphasis in the original).

And in another passage, Lenin noted: “Cognition is the eternal, endless approximation of thought to the object. The *reflection* of nature in man’s thought must be understood not ‘lifelessly,’ not ‘abstractly,’ *not devoid of movement, not without contradictions*, but in the eternal *process* of movement, the arising of contradictions and their solution” (Ibid, p. 195, emphasis in the original). (Back to text)

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