

Marx on Ontology of Critique and the Praxis of Philosophy

Jayson C. Jimenez

Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila

Abstract: Recent failures of Marxism to cast a critique against its ideological and historical formations (Stalinism comes to mind) welcome either a rethinking of Marx as a serious political thinker or abandoning his philosophical project for being too supple. Rethinking Marx, or at least the use of his philosophy, generated forms of Marxism thanks to the historical appropriation of “Marx” and “Marx’s works” to various socio-political conditions. Historically and presently, these appropriations remain unsuccessful in realizing the utopian communist project, let alone being faithful to Marxist scholarship in doing so, as reflected by modern socialist states (i.e., China and North Korea, to name a few). Despite this failure, abandoning Marx is a costlier alternative, for his theory was (and remains) the only viable critique of capitalism. Thus, I plan to reevaluate ‘Marx’—in what way can we *still* use his philosophy to inspire critiques of capitalism and Marxism’s ideological appropriations? In this paper, I look into Marx’s earlier works. Of particular focus is the notion of ‘critique’ as an ontological foundation that underpins Marx’s ideation of philosophy as a praxis.

Keywords: Hegelianism, Marxism, ontology of critique, praxis

INTRODUCTION

The big claim that I am going to make in this paper is this: Marxism has failed Marx. Marxist regimes of the recent decades solidified into Hegelian-styled dogmatic states responsible for the ‘diabolical horrors’ of the last century.¹ These horrors allegedly isolate Marxism not only as a dystopian project but a failed political alternative without a concrete philosophical direction. In an attempt to restore this direction, this paper pays attention to Marx’s earlier conception of philosophy that critically antedates his scientific extrapolations in his later works. In the following discussion, I present two things: first, what Marxism lacks is a clear ontological feature; and second, in the absence of such a feature, Marxism should return to Marx’s conception of ‘philosophy’. This paper concludes that this *return* underscores Marx’s serious contribution by positing philosophy as a praxis.

CONJURING MARX’S SPECTRE

Timely after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the 1990s, Jacques Derrida initiated the rethinking of Marx not merely as a political figure but as a recurring spectre that haunts contemporary Marxisms. In the book *Specters of Marx*, Derrida claims that communism aspires to become a ‘*de facto* Marxism.’² He claimed that communism’s *de facto* aspiration, not to mention its confused agenda, only carried its supposed ontology elsewhere. In the absence of ontological direction, Derrida portends that Marx no longer belongs “to the communists, to the Marxists, to the

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversation with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 43. Levinas wrote “that there are many things for which [he] can still not pardon Marx.” Levinas further argued that Stalinism re-encoded Marxism for the appropriation of a totalising ideology that promotes a “diabolical horror” as illustrated by its subsequent nihilistic effects.

² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

parties.”³ As a “novel form of war,” he adds, it is always a theoretical, philosophical, and political responsibility to read, reread, and discuss Marx to exorcise one of his spirits in time to the disappearance of dogma machine and ‘Marxist’ ideological apparatuses.⁴ Thus, what Derrida precisely had in mind (and a successful play of the ‘spectre’ rhetoric) is the *conjurement* of Marxism of its messianic eschatology.⁵ As seen in most socialist regimes in the late twentieth century, this telic feature only pushes the possibility of communism into its nadir state.

Meanwhile, Derrida described these events as *Déjà vu* or an old repetition of Marxism’s failure to connect ontologically with politics.⁶ These repetitions allegedly delay, if not hinder, what Marx and Engels conceived in the *Manifesto* as the ‘real movement’ toward communism.⁷ As it turns out, the ‘real movement’ was compromised in the expense of a messianic eschatology disposed to political misuse, for instance, the use of ‘realpolitik’ as an ideological justification of Stalinism’s nihilistic excesses. In Derrida’s rather obscure term, we should exorcise Marx’s spectre to reveal the ontology (or ‘hauntology’ to use his word) of his philosophical cause, let alone brave the metaphysical crumbs of Marxism’s uncanny messianism.

In one of his works, the philosopher Antonio Negri asked, ‘[Is] it possible to be a communist without Marx?’⁸ To be a communist without

³ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 62, 72 (italics mine). Derrida defined conjuration into two main semantic values. The first underscored two interrelated meanings: a conspiracy (*Verschwörung*) by swearing together an oath (*Schwur*) against a superior power; and a magical incantation to convoke a charm or spirit. Meanwhile, the second means a ‘conjurement’ or a magical exorcism that tends to expel the evil spirit. In sum, Derrida argues that conjuration occurs when one allies to conspire (conjure) against a hegemonic sphere of power. See *Ibid.*, 40-41, 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* [1848], trans. by Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2015).

⁸ Antonio Negri, “Is it Possible to be a Communist without Marx?,” in *Critical Horizons*, 12:1 (2011), 5-14.

Marx is theoretically possible, but it is also practically absurd, especially when contemporary examples of communist states highlight the Left finally merging with capitalism *ipso facto* a benefactor (i.e., the post-Mao Chinese socialism). Negri, of course, by asking such querulous questions might have anticipated the coming of communism not as a ‘real movement’ as championed by the *Manifesto* but the invention of ‘communisms’ in the ideological sense. Indeed, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, communism as ideology features “evolutions of human societies” that would end “when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its deepest and most fundamental longings.”⁹ Henceforth, communism as a veritable direction concedes as a messianic antidote in various forms to human societies in need of ideological relish. Teleology alternatively replaced Marxism’s supposed ontological dimension that went well with communism taken as a utopian political project with a messianic twist—thanks to Hegel’s gambit on hard-shelled idealism—hardwired in every way we think of Marx today.

RETURN TO HEGEL

Marx’s spectre is caught between Marxism’s lack of ontology and Hegelian idealism as a *de facto* ontological alternative. However, to think of Marx in the Hegelian sense, despite the latter’s speculative system, is an inequitable treatment of Marx as an original thinker with a distinct notion of philosophy’s task. One cannot dismiss Marx’s role in the post-Hegelian generation, especially his significant digressions on what should be philosophy’s task that contemporary Marxist scholarship and appropriations have advertently or inadvertently ignored. In this light, I propose that to recognize Marx’s philosophical contribution, one must: (1) conjure (or *expel*) Hegel’s spectre from Marx and theoretically, (2) conjure (or *conspire*) Marx’s concept of philosophy against Marxism.¹⁰

⁹ Francis Fukuyama, quoted in Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 66.

¹⁰ See Derrida’s exposition of the term *conjure* in *Ibid.*, 40-47.

In his seminal work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek writes about a kind of ‘return to Hegel.’¹¹ A ‘return to Hegel’, however, is no less a speculative urgency to reconcile political and economic crises in all human societies. In other words, such return warrants an idealistic approach to these crises through synthesizing current alternatives (i.e., capitalism, technology, and globalization) or, in Alain Badiou’s terms, attaining a “homogenous combinatory space”¹² on top of an idealistic shell.¹³ However, it is on this homogeneity and idealistic shells that synthetic alternatives permit a ‘privileged’ subjectivity. This has been the case more importantly, in the economic front, such as the ‘capitalist’ subject acting as a privileged cog pivotal to the post-industrial boom. The privileged subject is also seen in Nietzsche’s case against modernity following God’s untimely death. Moreover, this is also conceivable in Kant’s ontological privileging of the *Noumenon* as a field of unknown possibilities because of our epistemic limits and of Hegel, whose *Spirit* is seen as a privileged ‘finality’ of philosophical process. The privileged subject, let alone its concept, which was first diagnosed among the Sophists and reified later by Cartesianism, celebrates a metaphysical character attaining a kind of superficial status that no other concepts had enjoyed. Extending the analysis, Deleuze and Guattari examined this to be the problem in philosophy where “concepts are dated, signed, and baptized.”¹⁴

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), xxx.

¹² Badiou rescued Hegel from the unsutureable lag of his dialectical kernel through his structuration of dialectics free of its idealistic shell, in other words, by proposing a material organic species called society. See Joseph Spencer, “Left Atomism: Marx, Badiou, and Althusser on the Greek Atomists,” in *Theory & Event*, 17:3 (2014).

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. by Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009).

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (London: Verso, 1993), 8. Noting on the cogito as an example, Deleuze and Guattari asked about the precursors of the cogito and if other philosophers previously signed similar or identical components of the cogito.

Such privileging solidified in German idealism's "rational alone is real" axiom that shreds the transcendent strand of modern philosophy, thanks again to Hegel. He brought into the fore how rationality defines the realness, which not only unmasks Kant's transcendental compromise but also inaugurates the dawn of a new philosophical age. In her book *The Future of Hegel*, philosopher Catherine Malabou writes,

Philosophy, Hegel argues, will have had no other effect but that of precipitating the coming-to-be analytic of the synthesis (*le devenir analytique de la synthese*). The principle of the prior unity of the opposites has certainly always played a part in philosophy Synthesis remains an idea 'which succeeding eras have to accomplish.'¹⁵

Attaining this synthetic moment in every historical era, Malabou held that Hegel called for a 'unity of concept' for the inauguration of an absolute essence embodied in self-conscious individuality. However, Malabou, to save Hegel from pure idealism, considers the philosopher as a speculative thinker of 'plastic individuality'. Of course, utilizing Hegel's terminology in the 1831 preface on *Science of Logic* at best, Malabou claims that "a plastic discourse demands ... a plastic receptivity and understanding" where a "reader is already formed."¹⁶ In other words, the philosopher as a speculative thinker acts both as a 'plastic' receiver and an 'interpretive' reader. Although we can surmise from here that Malabou simply rescues Hegel from the non-negotiable weight of the Absolute itself. In plasticity, the philosopher as two-fold reader and receiver liberates the 'particular Self' from conceptual closure. In this vein, Malabou underscored that "*philosophy*, when it appears in its moment, is presented as a conclusion As Hegel declares, 'seizes, at the close, its

¹⁵ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. by Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005), 176.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

own concept', and looks back (*Zurücksehen*) on its knowledge."¹⁷ Recall that Hegel places *Zurücksehen* (or, in my loose association, 'reflection'¹⁸ as the negative component of speculative knowledge that relates to the conscious construction of the Absolute.¹⁹ Not only that Hegel prefigures philosophy as purely intuitive, where Kant unfortunately has stalled, but also reflective to secure privileged access to the Absolute. In this sense, the Absolute plays as a necessary trap of the hard-shelled speculative thought. Is it possible to conceive philosophy without falling prey to the Absolute? In other words, is it possible to be Hegelian without Hegel?

In his essay "Remembering the Impossible," German philosopher Frank Ruda suggests that it is possible to be Hegelian if one refuses the traumatic kernel of Hegel called the 'absolute knowledge.'²⁰ The only defensible Hegelian position, Ruda adds, is through a liberal reading of his theory of mutual recognition (intersubjectivity) that ends up sacrificing most of Hegel's fundamental claims.²¹ In this supposition, he somehow trumped Hegel's zero-sum game on the importance of the Absolute in his rational system. He bargained after all that the speculative Absolute is a losing end (because "we are all finite and have no access to anything absolute"), which, if we cut loose, there can still be a working Hegelian philosophy.²² On the one hand, we can also take into account Žižek's reception of Hegel as more "Kantian than Kant himself."²³ For Žižek, while Kant still postulates the transcendence of the Thing-in-itself

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸ P.H.A. I Jonkers, "The Importance of the Pantheism-Controversy for the Development of Hegel's Thinking," in *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 4 (2002), 272-278. Jonkers clarifies that intuition is the positive side of knowing that represents immediacy and reflection, the negative side, represents mediacy. Their union constitutes what Hegel called non-instrumental use of reason or 'speculative knowledge'.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

²⁰ Frank Ruda, "Remembering the Impossible: For a Meta-Critical Anamnesis of Communism," in *Idea of Communism 2: The New York Conference*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 232.

beyond the ‘field of representation’ (*noumena*), Hegel has already subtracted the transcendence; thus, there is *nothing* beyond representation but only the Thing-in-itself (*Spirit*) experienced in its radical negativity (remember, absolute knowledge, for Žižek, signifies a ‘symptomatic’ loss in the Lacanian purview).

In this sense, Žižek pointed out that dialectics is a “systematic notation of failure” to arrive at absolute knowledge.²⁴ The subject accepts ‘contradiction’ in light of this failure as an internal condition of his identity, which hardwires into the subject’s final consent of the Absolute as a nary concept.²⁵ What we can draw from Ruda’s and Žižek’s claims is rather the negotiable value of the Absolute that makes Hegel ‘Hegelian’. It is about how Hegel conceives philosophy (say, its methodical nature) as a “reflective articulation of the Absolute.”²⁶ In its nature to reflect where the Absolute does not matter, philosophy can be an affirmation of intersubjective relations (Ruda) or subjectivity’s inherent contradiction (Žižek). Surprisingly, these come close to what Marx speculated as philosophy’s distinct nature and task.

THE ONTOLOGY OF CRITIQUE

As a popular academic in the late 1820s, Hegel was seriously backed by political luminaries in Berlin, such as Karl Sigmund Altenstein, in advancing his philosophical cause. The Ministry of Culture, led by Altenstein, proposed the inception of the *Berliner-Kritische Association* and its publication arm, the *Jahrbücher für Wissenschaftliche Kritik*,²⁷ which somehow institutionalized Hegel as an informal philosopher of the State. It is after Hegel died in 1831 that speculative philosophy achieved its meteoric height. The publication of complete volumes of Hegel’s works

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xxix.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jonkers, “The Importance of the Pantheism,” 276.

²⁷ David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger., 1969), 1.

acclaimed the thinker as the mere completion of philosophy and, like Alexander (the Great), “[there is] no successor who could mount the throne.”²⁸

In 1814, Hegel was invited by Heinrich Paulus to become J. G. Fichte’s successor as Chair of the philosophy department at Berlin.²⁹ Seen as the arrival of speculative philosophy in the new academic capital, Hegel’s appointment was welcomed with serious resistance among German theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and W. M. L. de Wette.³⁰ Berlin theologians accused Hegel of promoting Christianity as the perfect synthesis of revealed religion in his dialectical logic. As for Hegel, his method reconciles philosophy and religion, which was originally put into suspicion by Kant in favor of a transcendental field in his first *Critique*. As it turns out, Hegel suffered a significant recoil when some Hegelians informally placed religion as a *prelude* to philosophy, signifying an ultimate unity that denies the possibility of any supernatural revelation.³¹ Not to mention that due to the waning political situation in Germany, Hegelians were forced to drop the mediative philosophy in favor of a radicalizing political contradiction in which “one party must triumph utterly.”³² These events caused speculative philosophy to face its most critical modification. The term ‘absolute negation’, for example, recurs eminently in various Hegelian discourses as a relentless force of contradiction apposite to the synthetic process, or rather in Mikhail Bakunin’s dramatic intensification of the term: “the joy of destruction is also a creative joy.”³³ Arguably equating destructive with creative magnitude of joy, Bakunin’s stance is a definitive break from the old Hegelian school, radicalizing ‘negation’ as supra-logical drive of the

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 80.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ McLellan, *The Young Hegelians*, 8.

³² Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

synthetic process that politically congeals in its contradictory powers. From there, the concept of negation enjoyed a cult following among young Hegelians, including Marx, Feuerbach, and Stirner.³⁴ With profound influence, this led the new breed of young Hegelians to embrace *Rechtsphilosophie* negatively of ‘Hegel’ that is to say, rethinking dialectics (*sans* synthetic apogee) as philosophy of criticism (*Kritik*).

Years later, Marx found himself in this break by espousing criticism as the kernel of dialectics. In his letter to Arnold Ruge, Marx outlined the idea of *Kritik* as the main theme of their newly minted journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher*. In its inaugural issue, Marx published his correspondence with Ruge under the title “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing” implying his signature ontology of criticism. Here, he launched a full-blown critique against the ‘mediative’ *Rechtsphilosophie* of the right-wing Hegelian reformists.³⁵ Marx chiefly argued that they do not attempt to “dogmatically prefigure the future, but want to find the new world only through the criticism of the old.”³⁶ Needless to say, Marx reconfigures philosophy as a ‘ruthless criticism of everything existing’ whereas its function as criticism is “[not to be] afraid of its own conclusions, nor of conflict with the powers that be.”³⁷ He even submits communism to criticism, admitting that it is no less a dogmatic abstraction manifesting in humanistic principles, yet only a “special one-sided realization of the socialist principle.”³⁸ Veering from this idea, he dismissed socialism’s complicit ontology of human essence and instead

³⁴ Robert Nola, “The Young Hegelians, Feuerbach, and Marx,” in *The Age of German Idealism*, ed. by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 306-307. Following the negative overtone, Feuerbach at some point called the Absolute as ‘vague and meaningless predicate’ and Hegelian philosophy as ‘rational mysticism.’

³⁵ Karl Marx, “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* Marx also criticized despotic forms of communism in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. See also Nola, “The Young Hegelians,” 299.

addressed that we must be concerned with the theoretical existence of man by *nature* essentially forming his consciousness, like science, religion, and the like. Anticipating the value of human freedom, he underscored that “[t]he reform of consciousness consists only in enabling the world to clarify its consciousness, in waking it from its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions.”³⁹

Marx’s ontology of criticism brings human consciousness into the manifold of real struggle, say, “putting the religious and political question into self-conscious human forms.” In what might be considered a remarkable post-Hegelian contribution, Marx disentangled the earlier post-Kantian entanglement between nature and individuality by installing in human agency a revolutionary character in the philosophical form that in a way uniquely distinguishes Marx not only as a political thinker but also as a critical ontologist of human consciousness. Towards the end of the letter to Ruge, Marx labeled this attempt as critical philosophy.⁴⁰ Critical philosophy is also the speculative gist of Marx’s 1841 doctoral thesis. In the following section, I examine the use of criticism as an ontological complement to Marx’s notion of philosophy as a praxis.

THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida writes that “there is then some spirits ... and one must reckon with them.”⁴¹ In this reckoning, we can only understand Marx today in pure theoretical rejoinders against practices of Marxism that already inhabit a large part of recent history. A case in point for Derrida is that reckoning Marx’s spirit is to welcome his spectre, not as a

³⁹ Marx, “For a Ruthless Criticism,” 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* For Marx, a human must discover himself between these real struggles and immanently subject everything as objects of critique. In this avenue, the dialectics, therefore, has found its true reality. Marx maintained Hegel’s method and yet made a fragile leap from the latter by entrusting to human agency the radical ontology of criticism rather than to revealed divine truths of speculative knowledge.

⁴¹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xx.

revenant but an *arrivant* to our hospitable memory.⁴² In this memory, therefore, how to reckon Marx before Marxism? Alternatively, how to return Marxism to Marx?

In reading Marx today, one should settle scores with his original philosophical conscience. This conscience is traced in the sheer repository of his earlier projects, which are utterly philosophical compared to his mature works. To return to his philosophical conscience is to simply submit Marx to the ruthless criticism of a Marx that *conjures* his own spectre, to borrow from Derrida. In this conjuration, we settle scores with his Hegelian roots, but in the manner of a self-positing dynamism, a *creative joy* in Bakunin's words employed to recover the lost intent of Marx's philosophy that conceptually rusted in various appropriations of Marxisms.

True enough, we cannot deny Hegel's presence in the tenets of critical philosophy. Recall that in his 1837 letter to his father, Marx initially studied idealism through Kant and Fichte, but he arrived at the point of "seeking the idea in actuality itself," which brought him to consider Hegel's speculative philosophy as "concrete and sure-grounded."⁴³ In the same letter, Marx informed his father of his first Hegelian work, a 24-page dialogue titled "Cleanthes, or the Starting Point and Necessary Progress of Philosophy" that largely ruminates on the merging of science and art through a "philosophical dialectical account of divinity."⁴⁴ Marx concluded the dialogue with a Hegelian undertone,

⁴² *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴³ Karl Marx, "Letter from Marx to his Father" [1837], in *The First Writings of Karl Marx*, ed. by Paul Schafer (New York: IG Publishing, 2006), 78-79.

⁴⁴ H. E. Mah, "Karl Marx in Love: The Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Hegelian Theory of the Young Marx," in *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 79. Unfortunately, this work did not survive. 'Cleanthes' would have charted the Hegelian predisposition of Marx's ontologico-historical function of philosophy. H. E. Mah believed that 'Cleanthes' illustrates how divinity, from a simple, abstract self unity (idea-in-itself) attained a higher system of Reason despite various contradictions by history, nature, and religion. For this discussion, see *Ibid.*, 14-15.

explaining how divinity from a simple *idea-in-itself* attained a higher rational system amid contradictions in history, nature, and religion.⁴⁵

However, Hegel only remained as a spectral influence on Marx. In his 1841 doctoral thesis “Difference between Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature,” Marx exonerated his minor Hegelianism at the expense of what might be regarded as an early exegesis of critical philosophy. In this work, Marx not only investigates the existence of the *clinamen* or the capacity of atoms to swerve against other atoms to form actual material existence but also outlines the two-fold function of philosophy in the critical sense.⁴⁶ Recall that after Kant, the term *Kritik* slowly dissipates in the philosophic scene. It was only in Hegel’s *Science of Logic* that critical philosophy regained its spotlight, but only in partiality to carry his criticism against Kant, whose critique of rationality otherwise exposed pure reason’s ulterior allegiance to moral terms, thus, as Hegel notes, unable to “originate any special forms, whether cognitive principles or moral laws.”⁴⁷ So, in its cessation from Kant’s time onward and a little revival in Hegel, which is nothing else but a plain expositing-criticism, the use of critical philosophy has been revitalized by Marx not only as a position to articulate the connection of sensibility to extra-philosophical categories of thought but also as a complete program of submitting regulative metaphysical concepts to ontological criticism.

Surprisingly, Marx exposed such ‘criticism’ in the marginal notes of his doctoral thesis. There, he asserts an immanent determination and universal historic character of philosophy, positing that,

The *praxis* of philosophy is itself theoretical. It is the critique that measures the individual existence by the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, “Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature” [1841], in *The First Writings of Karl Marx*, ed. by Paul Schafer (New York: IG Publishing, 2006), 149.

⁴⁷ Georg Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, trans. by William Wallace (Clarendon Press, 1975).

essence, the particular reality by the Ideal. But this immediate realization of philosophy in its deepest essence is afflicted with contradictions, and this, its essence, takes form in the appearance and imprints its seal upon it.⁴⁸

The praxis of philosophy is criticism that unfolds existence from the essence, and reality from its Ideal counterpart. Of course, discerning the Ideal suggests a regulative principle of pure reason (that Kant perceptively deferred). However, Marx submits the Ideal to critique to unveil the philosophic consciousness, which, in his doctoral work, was presented in direct opposition to religion (here, he regards Prometheus as an intrepid figure of such consciousness). Central in this praxis, critical philosophy emerges as a bold project of acquiescing known philosophic theses to immanent tension in which the theoretical mind, as Marx argues, once liberated in itself turns into “practical energy as will.”⁴⁹ Contrary to philosophy’s popular abstractness, the practical energy commits to “the urge to realize itself” against abstract totality in favor of ontological reality. He further invokes the ‘becoming philosophical of the world’ through these theoretical tensions and, on the one hand, ‘becoming worldly of philosophy’ in light of its inner deficiency to realize itself. In other words, the *praxis* of philosophy lies in its tension as a universal character to fossilize its reflective scarcity already imbibed by Kant’s imposing limit on consciousness and Hegel’s alleged completion of philosophy through the Absolute. Here, Marx cannot afford another mistake. That is why the *philosophical consciousness* (the outcome of his doctoral investigation) carries a double-edged demand: one against the world and another to philosophy. What Marx tries to impose here is how to impede the possibility of philosophy to universalize and manifest as a formal system, a la Hegel. In this formula, Marx not only indicates

⁴⁸ Marx, “Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy,” 149.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

critique as an essential philosophical praxis but also maintains a ‘non-conceptual’ positive philosophy:

On one side, the *liberal* party ... maintains ... the concept and principle of philosophy; on the other side, its *non-concept*, the moment of reality. This second side is *positive philosophy*. The act of the first side is critique, hence precisely that turning-towards-the-outside of philosophy; the act of the second is the attempt to philosophize, hence the turning-towards-itself of philosophy.⁵⁰

What borders in critical philosophy, assuming this co-existent function, is both a conceptual critique of the world and its double, the ‘non-conceptual’ definition of reality as a positive critique of itself. For Marx, critique, as it differs from philosophy, is directed against formalizing tendencies of philosophy as a concept. On the contrary, positive philosophy does not conceal in the facticity of the concept fabrication and/or formulation, but a consistent inclination to concrete ontology within itself in the same manner criticism attacks philosophical truths. In the ‘liberal’ sense, philosophy acts as a critique of the world. In the ‘positive’ sense, it philosophizes against itself. From a liberal to a positive angle, Marx clarifies that critical philosophy tersely occurs not only in the refusal of the world to become philosophical (in reference to Hegel’s liberal ontology), let alone philosophy becoming worldly through its self-initiated epistemic collapse (of course, Kant’s suspension of noumenal access). But also, it presents philosophy as a critique of the formalizing conception of the world, which in turn generates philosophy’s positive critique of itself. Thus giving light to Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, philosophy functions not only to interpret the world but might as well change it.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 150-155.

In general, Marx's praxis of philosophy lies in the return to Marx and his post-Hegelian critical thought. The 'immanence' of philosophy—its 'non-concept'—is its self-critique. In his marginal notebooks on Epicurus, Marx notes the following observation: "As in the history of philosophy, [sic] there are nodal points which raise philosophy to concretion, apprehend abstract principles in a totality, and thus break off the rectilinear process."⁵¹ Philosophy, in its historical trajectory, had taken refuge from various dominating aspects of conceptual formulation. Thus, for Marx, breaking off from rectilinear process is philosophy's liberal position since to break from itself is its positive function free from the 'anxiety of its own conclusions.'⁵²

CONCLUSION

When we are at a loss for the work of a philosopher, we fail to take into account his earlier works that nonetheless convey his critical transition. The praxis of philosophy finally held dear to the return of Marxism to the younger Marx and rethink 'Marx' by way of his earlier conception of philosophy as a critique of the world and its non-conceptual turning to itself. In his preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx ironed out this attitude in their criticism of their contemporaries: "We [Engels and Marx] resolved to work out in common the opposition of our view to the ideological view of German philosophy, in fact, *to settle accounts with our erstwhile⁵³ philosophical conscience*. The resolution was carried out in the form of a criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy."⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, ed. by Gregory Elliott, trans. by Ben Brewster, James Kavanagh, Graham Lock, and Warren Montag (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 270. Althusser adopted the translation of 'erstwhile' as 'former' in his essay "Marxism Today."

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" [1859], in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 5.

This brief passage allows us to reflect on three themes: first, Marx and Engels' effort to oppose the ideological view of German philosophy; second, they aimed at settling with their former philosophical conscience; and third, the entire project poses as a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy. Technically, Marx and Engels addressed the first issue in their subsequent work, *The German Ideology*, in which they argue that the entire German philosophic criticism has become dependent on the definite Hegelian system, thus unsuccessful in advancing inclusive polemics against it. Such an attitude, however, surfaces way earlier in Marx's treatment of philosophy as 'non-conceptual' and 'critical' in his doctoral thesis. This theoretically reinforced critical philosophy as an ontological weapon against formalizing tendencies of Marxism's appropriations. There, through the power of critique as a philosophical praxis, Marx ultimately made peace with his spectre haunting what had become of his thought.

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