REVIEWS

Philosophy

Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution.* Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory. Oxford University Press. New York 1941. (431 pp.; $3.75)

This book is an extremely valuable interpretation of Hegel's philosophy in its social and political significance and consequences and constitutes a monumental introduction to the method of socio-historical criticism, to the method of "critical theory" as developed by Max Horkheimer and the Institute of Social Research. It consists of two clearly distinguished parts, the first dealing with the foundation of Hegel's philosophy, the second with the rise of social theory in the post-Hegelian and anti-Hegelian philosophy from Schelling and Kierkegaard to Fascism and National Socialism; the main chapters of the second part deal with Marx and French and German positivism. The unity of the two sections lies in the unity of the movement which leads from Hegel's first writings in theology, philosophy and politics to the most recent forms of social theory, a movement which is basically influenced by Hegel either in its dependence on him or in its reaction against him.

Marcuse belongs to that group of important younger philosophers whose starting point is the post-Hegelian period of German intellectual history. While German classical philosophy was rediscovered by the generation to which this reviewer belongs, the younger group, whose philosophical education occurred in the period of world war and revolution, is in a process of rediscovering the post-classical development. For, in this period the ideological foundation of the great catastrophes of our contemporary history was laid. There is hardly a more important step in this rediscovery than Marcuse's book.

The main thesis with respect to Hegel is clearly expressed in the following statement: "Hegel's philosophy is indeed what the subsequent reaction termed it, a negative philosophy. It is originally motivated by the conviction that the given facts that appear to common sense as the positive index of truth are in reality the negation of truth, so that truth can only be established by their destruction. The driving force of the dialectical method lies in this critical conviction" (26). This interpretation of the dialectical method generally, and of Hegel's use of it in particular, links Hegel to the line of revolutionary rationalism, the first segment of which is represented by bourgeois Enlightenment, the second by proletarian socialism. Hegel becomes understandable as the bridge from Kant and the bourgeois revolution to Marx and the proletarian revolution, with critical dialectics serving as the main cable of that bridge. Even the fact that Hegel's philosophical development "concludes with the declaration that history has achieved the

reality of reason" (27) does not remove the critical and negative power of reason. But it is now directed against philosophy as such: "Philosophy reaches its end when it has formulated its view of a world in which reason is realized. . . . The truth now would require actual historical practice to fulfill it. . . . Critical thinking does not cease but assumes a new form. The efforts of reason devolve upon social theory and social practice" (28). This surprising proposition is carried through a precise examination of Hegel's writings from the earliest fragments to the pamphlet on the English reform bill. Equal emphasis is laid on the logical structure of Hegel's thought and on his social and political philosophy, while his interpretation of religion and art is somewhat neglected. It is very fortunate that Marcuse takes his main insights into the character of Hegel's thought from the early writings. For the life of Hegel's work pulsates in those earlier writings and not in the later completed system. Whoever is acquainted with Hegel's fragments and the earliest formulation of his system, including the several political pamphlets written before the *Phenomenology of Mind*, never can be impressed by the distorted picture of Hegel as the dogmatic philosopher of the Restoration, the adorer of the absolute state and the logical sophist, as he has been depicted by those who only know him superficially and not as he really was.

The negative, critical function of reason in Hegel's thought is demonstrated again and again. For, Hegel's "reason signifies the absolute annihilation of the common-sense world" (48). Everything is something other than it immediately is, and uniting itself with "its other" tends to fulfill the law of life and progress which is at the same time the law of thinking and being—the law first expressed in Aristotle's interpretation of being as a movement from potentiality to actuality (42). Applying this law to the social and political situation of his period, Hegel shows the contradictions within the German state, which was not a state, and within the process of labor in bourgeois society which is abstract and quantitative and deprives the individual of the products of his labor, making him dependent on an alien force against which he is powerless. Anticipating Marx's criticism of bourgeois society, Hegel says: "The value of labor decreases in the same proportion as the productivity of labor increases. . . . The faculties of the individual are infinitely restricted and the consciousness of the factory worker is degraded to the lowest degree of dullness" (79). The social system arising from abstract labor and quantitative exchange is "a vast system of communality and mutual interdependence, a moving life of the dead. This system moves hither and yon in a blind elementary way, and like a wild animal calls for strong permanent control and curbing" (79). From this the philosophy of the state is derived. A strong state is necessary in order to prevent the chaos implicit in the method of capitalistic production. The state has as its function the preservation of the freedom of the individual from the destructive forces of economic society. It is not the state as such that is adored, nor is totalitarian power given to it as in Fascism, but the state which incorporates reason, and only so far as it does so. Here lies the absolute contrast between Hegel and National Socialism.

"On the day of Hitler's ascent to power Hegel, so to speak, died" (419). This quotation from a National Socialist writer concludes the book, rightly denouncing the misjudgment of some Americans who make Hegel's theory of the state responsible for modern totalitarianism. "Hegel's philosophy was an integral part of the culture which authoritarianism had to overcome"

(411). This is not disproved by the fact that Hegel's own monarchic solution was not a solution at all, but a relapse into the irrational which the rational state was supposed to have overcome. It only shows that the contradictions of bourgeois reality lead to state absolutism if they are not overcome in themselves by revolution, the road from Hegel to Marx.

The second part deals (too briefly) with those people who represent the transition from philosophy to sociology. The extremely important thesis of this section is that the positive philosophy of the 19th century was an apologetic for the given socio-political reality, that the restoration in Europe obtained comfort from positivistic philosophers, and that positivistic arguments are used by the present day philosophers of reaction and Fascism. There are striking quotations from Comte, Stahl, and the Fascist pseudo-Hegelians in Italy which show that the lack of critical attitudes to any given reality, natural as well as historical, necessarily leads to the acceptance of the given social and political state of affairs and to the devaluation of the rational individual.

As one who agrees in all important points with Marcuse's book, I should like to make the following criticisms and suggestions. Firstly, the section on Hegel should be substantially enlarged by a full treatment of Hegel's philosophy of religion and an adequate treatment of his aesthetics. Even a critical social theory cannot avoid an "ultimate" in which its criticism is rooted because reason itself is rooted therein. Otherwise criticism itself becomes positivistic and contingent. And no successful revolution can be made without a group of people who—however critical they may be of any special religious symbol—believe that the "freedom of personality" is the meaning of existence and are ready to live and to die for this belief. The pervasive disappointment over the last revolutions demonstrates this irrefutably. Feuerbach is right in showing that there is wishful thinking in religion and Marx is right in showing that the bourgeois religion belongs to the whole of bourgeois ideology. But it is a wrong generalization, derived from a metaphysical materialism, to dismiss religion itself as ideology. The transformation of philosophy into critical theory does not imply such a consequence at all.

Secondly, I should suggest that the second part become a second volume. In its present form it is too short to substantiate fully the thesis that positivism is the philosophy of reaction. Above all, the difference between 18th and 19th century positivism is only indicated, not developed. This is a serious point because it would affect the main thesis. Is positivism as such or only a special type of positivism reactionary? Other points, such as the altogether too fragmentary discussion of Kierkegaard and of the struggle within the Hegelian school, may be mentioned in connection with the demand for the enlargement of this part. In the same connection I want to make the suggestion that the result of the interpretation of Hegel in the first part be related more strictly and extensively to the discussion of the second part.

These suggestions will show that the reviewer anticipates a second edition of Marcuse's book, or more exactly, a continuation of the important and far-reaching interpretations with which it has started.

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