

Capital Volume 1: Themes from the *Phenomenology*

Roy Medvedev, in his mammoth critique of Stalinism, *Let History Judge*, reported the reminiscences of Yevgeny Frolov, an old Party member, concerning the attempts of Jan Sten to teach Stalin dialectics.¹ Sten failed despite being a prominent Deborinist, a member of the Institute of Red Professors, and part of the leadership of the Marx-Engels Institute.² Frolov, in the course of his anecdote, also reported the following as an aside: “In those years dialectics was studied by a system that Pokrovsky had worked out at the Institute of Red Professors, a parallel study of Marx’s *Capital* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*.”³ While such a claim, on the surface, seems unremarkable, it is, in fact, a very remarkable claim to make. First, Pokrovsky was never recognised as an expert in Hegel, or as an outstanding philosopher, or as a member of the Deborinists, i.e. the group who emphasized the importance of Hegel to Marxism. Secondly, nowhere else has the claim ever been made that *Capital* was studied along with the *Phenomenology*. Thus, in all likelihood, Frolov misremembered what had actually occurred.

That does not mean, however, there is no rational kernel to his faulty memory. For, knowing the influence of the Deborinists during their dominance in Soviet philosophy, there undoubtedly was a system of studying Marx and Hegel in parallel. A more likely book though would have been the *Science of Logic*. Indeed, Engels had already written in 1891 that, if “you compare development from commodity to capital in Marx with development from Being to Essence in Hegel you will get quite a good parallel.”⁴ Similarly, Lenin, in his notes on Hegel (which were dedicated to searching for the influence of the latter on Marx) wrote that “The beginning – the most simple, ordinary, mass, immediate ‘Being’: the single commodity (‘Sein’ in political economy).”⁵ Whoever might have created such a possible study course and what exactly it could have entailed are, unfortunately, lost to time. Sill, a parallel study of Marx’s *Capital*, volume 1 and Hegel’s *Science of Logic* would be salutary for grasping dialectical logic.⁶

Yet the question remains: Did the *Phenomenology* have any influence on *Capital*? We know that Hegel’s larger *Logic* had an immediate impact on Marx’s critique of political economy. As he wrote to Engels in 1858:

¹ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism, Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. and tran. George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 438.

² Yehoshua Yakhot, *The Suppression of Philosophy in the USSR (The 1920s & 1930s)* (Michigan: Mehring Books, 2012), 250.

³ Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, 43.

⁴ Frederick Engels, “Engels to C. Schmidt, November 1, 1891,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 439.

⁵ V.I. Lenin, “Plan of Hegel’s Dialectics (Logic),” in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 38: Philosophical Notebooks* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), 320.

⁶ The foundations for such work I have given in two previous essays. See, Jason Devine, “Dialectical logic in Plato’s ‘Parmenides’, Hegel’s ‘Logic’ and Marx’s ‘Critique of Political Economy’,” accessed 15 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/dialectical-logic-platos-parmenides-hegels-logic-and-marxs-critique-political-economy>; Jason Devine, “Marx’s critique of political economy: The logic of the commodity,” accessed 15 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/marxs-critique-political-economy-logic-commodity>.

By mere accident – Freiligrath found me some volumes of Hegel originally belonging to Bakunin, and he sent me them as a present – I leafed through Hegel’s *Logic* again and found much to assist me in the *method* of analysis. If I ever have time for that kind of work again, I would find great pleasure in writing two or three pages on the *rationale* which Hegel discovered – but also mystified – to make it accessible for the common man.⁷

This was during the time that Marx was working on the *Grundrisse*, i.e. the first draft of *Capital*. More importantly, in that letter he expressly noted the impact of the *Logic* concerning the method of political economy. Further, when looking at *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the economic manuscripts of 1861–3, i.e. the second draft of *Capital*, the *Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865*, i.e. Marx’s draft of *Capital* vol. III, and finally *Capital* vols. I–III, it can easily be seen that Marx *only ever* referred to three works of Hegel: *Science of Logic*, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, and *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I, Logic*. The answer to the above question would appear, then, to be no.

Yet, knowing the influence that the *Phenomenology* played in Marx’s intellectual development it would be incorrect to accept that answer. First, the book “was the most important one for the theoretical basis of the” Young Hegelian movement.⁸ All the major elements, categories, and the basic logic utilised by its leading members, Strauss, Ruge, Bauer, etc. all came from the *Phenomenology*. Second, when Marx was conceiving his doctoral dissertation, his “choice of topic was taken from Hegel’s *History of Philosophy* and *Phenomenology*, while the framework for understanding Epicurean and Democritean physics was based on his *Philosophy of Nature*.”⁹ Finally, Marx had famously written in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that, in analyzing the Hegelian system of philosophy, one had to start with the *Phenomenology*, because it was “the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy.”¹⁰ These manuscripts were “Marx’s first attempt to systematically apply the dialectical method to political economy and, as such, were his first tentative steps towards writing *Capital*.”¹¹ Therefore, the *Phenomenology* lies not only at the basis of Hegel’s system and the Young Hegelian movement, but was also the foundation for both Marx’s first major writing and his initial foray into a dialectical critique of political economy.

Before going forward, it is important to emphasise that Marx’s words on the position of the *Phenomenology* were not an exaggeration. Rather he was following Hegel’s own statements. The latter noted in his famous preface that at the *Phenomenology*’s conclusion Spirit had self-developed “the element of knowing. In this element, the moments of spirit unfold themselves into the *form of simplicity* which knows its object to be itself. They no longer fall apart... Their

⁷ Karl Marx, “Marx to Engels, January 14, 1858,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Letters on ‘Capital’*, tran. Andrew Drummond (London: New Park Publications, 1983), 50.

⁸ Jason Devine, “How Hegelian was Marx? A contribution to the history of Marx and Young Hegelianism,” accessed 15 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/how-hegelian-was-marx-contribution-history-marx-and-young-hegelianism>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), 128.

¹¹ Jason Devine, “1843–1844: Marx’s Feuerbachian phase,” accessed 16 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/1843-1844-marxs-feuerbachian-phase>.

movement, which organizes itself in this element into a whole, is *logic*, or *speculative philosophy*.”¹² That is, the phenomenological development of consciousness prepared the way for pure logic, for the system of categories; the former thus was the intellectual premise of the latter. Hegel later repeated this in the preface to the first edition of the *Science of Logic*. There he pointed out that, when initially publishing his book, his goal was that “the first part of the *System of Science* which contains the *Phenomenology* should be followed by a second part containing logic and the two concrete sciences,” but since he expanded the scope of his logic, it moved him “to have this part published separately; it thus forms the first sequel to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in an expanded arrangement of the system.”¹³ It is also no accident that in his lecture notes for his second-year philosophy course, “Phenomenology” preceded “Logic.”¹⁴

In the nature of dialectical logic, though, these two works are inextricably bound together, or rather genetically connected. Thus, anyone who has read both works would immediately agree with the Old Hegelian Karl Rosenkranz, who observed that “the same categories occur in the *Phenomenology* and in the *Logic*; so that the *Logic* was properly already contained in the *Phenomenology*.”¹⁵ Certainly this is true as Hegel himself noted, “the exposition of that which alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself...In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I have presented an example of this method with respect to a concrete object, namely *consciousness*.”¹⁶ The *Phenomenology*, then, was the premise of *Logic*, but the latter was also the premise of the former. Therefore, both works contain each other and Hegel’s system is self-premising. Each work can, hence, be used as an entry point to the other, helping to explain each other and *vice versa*. Now, since the *Phenomenology* follows the same methodological rhythm of the *Logic*, a parallel study of the former and Marx’s *Capital* is logically possible. As a result of the limitations of space, however, I will not carry that out, but rather merely develop some elements of that future necessary work.

Phenomenology and Capital: A Scientific Beginning

Marx’s starting point in *Capital* is the same as Hegel’s in the *Phenomenology*. That is to say, both begin with what is most obvious, with immediate empirical reality. For Hegel, dealing with epistemology, this was sense-certainty and for Marx, dealing with political economy, this was the commodity. Both aimed to take the reader to the standpoint of science, i.e. to a deeper, integrated, and holistic comprehension of the phenomena being investigated.¹⁷ This is, of course, necessary as, although science starts with what is at hand, that is not all there is. More specifically, the regulative principle of any phenomenon is not and cannot be seen on the

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, tran. and ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 23.

¹³ G.W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, tran. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 29.

¹⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, tran. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Ltd., 1986), 55, 74.

¹⁵ Karl Rosenkranz, *Hegel as the National Philosopher of Germany*, tran. Geo. S. Hall (St. Louis: Gray, Baker & Co., 1874), 32.

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, tran. and ed. George Di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33.

¹⁷ “It is this coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*, that is described in this *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Knowledge in its first phase, or *immediate Spirit*, is the non-spiritual, i.e. *sense-consciousness*.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, tran. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 15.

surface. As Marx argued, “it is a task of science to reduce the merely phenomenal movement to the actual inner movement. Accordingly...in the minds of the agents of capitalist production and circulation, *notions* must necessarily form about the laws of production that diverge completely from these laws and are merely the *expression in consciousness* of the apparent movement.”¹⁸ Or, as he wrote even more explicitly: “all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence.”¹⁹ To achieve the standpoint of science, then, one must dig below the surface.

The need for science to go further is also crucial, because to stop at the obvious would be to take things uncritically, take them for granted, and so fall into error. Thus, Hegel argued quite rightly that “What is familiar and well known as such is not really known for the very reason that it is *familiar and well known*. In the case of cognition, the most common form of self-deception and deception of others is when one presupposes something as well known and then makes one’s peace with it.”²⁰ A scientific approach requires a critical attitude, and science must be, above all, a *project of critique*. This is precisely why, as already noted, since the notions of capitalists are uncritical, viz. they take the capitalist mode of production for granted, their consciousness simply expresses how the latter *appears* to function, and thus they are unable to correctly grasp how it *essentially* operates. Therefore, although science starts with the familiar, its very logic moves it towards the unfamiliar.

Hegel’s *Phenomenology* starts with sense-certainty, or, more generally, natural consciousness and then moves through its various subsequent forms up to scientific consciousness.²¹ However, it is not Hegel who subjectively carried out this development, rather, the “necessary progression and interconnection of the forms of the unreal consciousness will by itself bring to pass the *completion* of the series.”²² This is a result of its own logic, the dialectic of its development. More specifically, this occurs because “the exposition of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* procedure.”²³ The move from one form of consciousness to another means that each succeeding form negates the previous, showing it to be untrue. Hence it appears to be simply negative, but that is only the *appearance*. In fact, it is a “scepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*.”²⁴ It is an *abstract*, one-sided view to see only the negation, the opposition, and ignore the *concrete* view that the negation is *specific*, that it has *resulted* from something previous. The nothingness is, then, not nothing, but simply a specific negation.

In the words of Hegel: “it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Marx’s Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865*, tran. Ben Fowkes and ed. Fred Moseley (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 419.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 766.

²⁰ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 20.

²¹ “The Science of this pathway is the Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through.” Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

²³ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

which has a *content*.”²⁵ When this is done then “the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.”²⁶ The genesis of scientific consciousness, absolute knowledge, takes place through a succession of forms, each one proving itself to be untrue and giving forth a truer form, which, in turn, proves itself to be untrue and so onwards. Each negation is therefore a positing and *vice versa*. Each abstract step is a move towards the concrete whole.²⁷ This is precisely the dialectic method, the logic of self-development, which includes the positive in the negative, the unity of opposites, the negation in the negation, etc.²⁸

In sense-certainty, the first form of the experience of consciousness, we merely perceive an object which confronts us. Therefore, the “knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is*.”²⁹ The knower, the subject, simply takes the object as it is. Hegel pointed out that because “of its concrete content, sense-certainty immediately appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth for which no bounds can be found, either when we *reach out* into space and time in which it is dispersed, or when we take a bit of this wealth, and by division *enter into* it.”³⁰ The world appears as an immense collection of objects, with a single object as its elementary form, and, since we take it all in, “sense-certainty appears to be the *truest* knowledge; for it has not as yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its perfect entirety. But, in the event, this very *certainty* proves itself to be the most abstract and poorest *truth*.”³¹ This great wealth of information is actually a poverty of knowledge because, being *immediate*, “All that it says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing.”³²

The basic relation here, in the initial step of consciousness, is that between subject and object, and the first knowledge is simply that both exist, that both *are*.³³ In Hegel’s words:

²⁵ Ibid., 51.

²⁶ Ibid., 51.

²⁷ “The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development.” Ibid., 11.

²⁸ “The one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress*...is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is *the negation of the determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives...Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation, it has a *content*. It is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 33.

²⁹ Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58.

³⁰ Ibid., 58.

³¹ Ibid., 58.

³² Ibid., 58.

³³ The Old Hegelian Erdmann once argued that “When Fichte [“Introduction to Science of Knowledge;” translated in *Jour. Spec. Philos.*, vol. i.] describes the beginning of philosophy as not a fact but a fact-act, he thereby, as Hegel always recognises, discovers the real philosophical method. See, Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Outlines of Logic and Metaphysics*, tran. B.C. Burt (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1896). 17. Here he correctly pointed to one of the sources of Hegel’s dialectical method, viz. the first introduction to Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. There Fichte wrote:

“certainty as a *connection* is an *immediate* pure connection: consciousness is ‘I’, nothing more, a pure ‘This’; the singular consciousness knows a pure ‘This’, or the single item.”³⁴ Yet, since knowledge is the relation between subject and object, both are actually *mediated*, viz. the subject has the knowledge only through the object, and the object is an object of knowledge only via the subject. Without the object, knowledge would not exist, so that it appears that the subject is unessential and the object essential.³⁵ Things are no longer as they appeared and so it is “sense-certainty itself that must be asked: ‘What is the *This*?’ If we take the ‘This’ in the twofold shape of its being, as ‘Now’ and as ‘Here’, the dialectic it has in it will receive a form as intelligible as the ‘This’ itself is.”³⁶ ‘This’ now shows itself as a concrete unity of two opposed aspects.

Hegel, starting with the aspect of time, posed the question “‘What is Now?’”, let us answer, e.g. ‘Now is Night’”³⁷ Later though, *Now is Day* and so the *Now* that is *Night* is no more, and shows itself to be *not*. However, in the movement of *Day* and *Night*, as both alternate from *is* to *is not* and back, the *Now* persists, and this “self-preserving *Now* is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving *Now* *through* the fact that something else, viz. *Day* and *Night*, is *not*.”³⁸ The *Now* is *posited* exactly through the *negation* of both its sides. It will then be understood that a “simple thing of this kind which is through negation, which is neither *This* nor *That*, a *not-This*, and is with equal indifference *This* as well as *That* – such a thing we call a *universal*. So it is in fact the universal that is the true

“Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience. Consequently, philosophy's object must necessarily lie *outside of all experience*...A finite rational being possesses nothing whatsoever beyond experience...These same conditions necessarily apply to the philosopher, and thus it appears incomprehensible how he could ever succeed in elevating himself above experience. The philosopher, however, is able to engage in abstraction. That is to say, by means of a free act of thinking he is able to separate things that are connected with each other within experience. The *thing*, i.e., a determinate something that exists independently of our freedom and to which our cognition is supposed to be directed, and the *intellect*, i.e., the subject that is supposed to be engaged in this activity of cognizing, are inseparably connected with each other within experience. The philosopher is able to abstract from either one of these, and when he does so he has abstracted from experience and has thereby succeeded in elevating himself above experience. If he abstracts from the thing, then he is left with an intellect in itself as the explanatory ground of experience...If he abstracts from the intellect, then he is left with a thing in itself...as the explanatory ground of experience. The first way of proceeding is called *idealism*; the second is called *dogmatism*.” See, J.G. Fichte, “[First] Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in J.G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, ed. and tran. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 9, 10-11. Hegel repeated this essential point in his lecture notes on phenomenology: “Since things and their determinations *are* in the Knowing it is possible, on the one hand, to think of them as in-and-for-themselves outside of Consciousness, as given to the latter in the shape of alien and already existing material for it. On the other hand, since Consciousness is equally essential to the Knowing of these it is also possible to think that Consciousness itself posits this, its world, and produces or modifies, either wholly or in part, the determinations of the same through its behaviour and its activity. The former point of view is called **Realism** the latter **Idealism**.” However, whereas Fichte spoke of going *beyond* experience to explain the latter, Hegel expressly remained *within* experience, viz. it explains, justifies itself in its own dialectical, *self-development*. See, Hegel, *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, 55.

³⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁵ Ibid., 59.

³⁶ Ibid., 59-60.

³⁷ Ibid., 60.

³⁸ Ibid., 60.

[content] of sense-certainty.”³⁹ When we say something *is*, we are literally stating its bare existence and employing a universal.

Hegel then pointed out that that we obtain the same result with the other side of This, viz. ‘Here.’ He wrote that “‘Here’ is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: ‘No tree is here, but a house instead’. ‘Here’ itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant...Again, therefore, the ‘This’ shows itself to be a *mediated simplicity*, or a *universality*.”⁴⁰ Sense-certainty, because it is the first, is immediate knowledge: it is the simple perception of what is. However, despite wanting to grasp the specific Now (Day) and the specific Here (tree) it can only truly grasp the universal. Therefore, sense-certainty has turned into its opposite: it is not immediate, but *mediate*, and, moreover, the object is seen to be unessential and the subject to be essential. It was the dialectic of sense-certainty itself which brought about this reversal.

Hegel’s analysis began with knowledge and moved towards its two aspects, knowing, or the ‘I,’ and the object. Since both aspects exist, since both *are*, they therefore showed themselves to be a single ‘This.’ This new category, in turn showed itself to have two aspects, ‘Now’ and ‘Here.’ Taking Now on its own, it divided itself into Day and Night, or Now and Not-Now. These two then gave rise to yet a new category, the universal. The aspect or category of ‘Here’ also showed the same development. Thus we can clearly see the method of dialectical logic: a category is posited, through its development it negates itself, and so shows itself to be a unity of opposites. This unity in turn is negated and gives rise to a new opposition. Since each successive category is the resolution of the previous contradiction, it contains and thus is enriched by the previous categories. This process is, therefore, a self-development.

As Hegel started with the appearance of knowledge, so Marx started with the appearance of wealth. Quoting his earlier book, *A Critique of Political Economy*, he began the first chapter of *Capital* with the following words: “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an. ‘immense collection of commodities’; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity.”⁴¹ From here Marx’s dialectical critique moved onward and

revealed two aspects, use- and exchange-value. The course of analysis then led to a new category, labour, which itself also had two aspects. The analysis of these, in turn, led to the form of exchange-value viz. the *value-form* and its two aspects, relative and equivalent form, and then passed through the simple form, the expanded form, the general form, and finally, the money form of value. Marx’s analysis of the commodity was, therefore, the positing, development, and negation, of the unity of opposites contained in each successive category.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

⁴¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, tran. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 125.

⁴² Devine, “Marx’s critique of political economy,” accessed 19 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/marxs-critique-political-economy-logic-commodity>.

Marx followed the development of commodity exchange, i.e. the successive forms of commercial relationships, the realm of the market, which is precisely what everyone sees on the surface of social life. However, through this he was led to analyse the relations of production which lay underneath and gave rise to the sphere of exchange. That is, in a system of production where people are separate, private producers, the products they make have to be exchanged, viz. they are commodities, things with value. This does not exist in a communal system of production. In other words, then, Marx moved beyond how capitalism *appears* towards the *essential* nature of how and why it actually functions.⁴³

The further significance to Marx's beginning and analysis is that this Hegelian influence enabled him to make his final break with classical political economy and set forth his own critical project. Marx's first published work on political economy was *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which came out in 1847. As he later wrote, "it contains the seeds of the theory developed after twenty years' work in *Capital*. Reading the *Poverty of Philosophy* and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*...might thus serve as an introduction to the study of *Capital*."⁴⁴ When Marx wrote that book he was actually a critical Ricardian, viz. at that time he based his work off of David Ricardo, while pointing out his errors. In the same way, Ricardo had started his foundational book, *On The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* as a critical Smithian, accepting and yet criticising Adam Smith, and in the course of it going beyond the latter.⁴⁵ The first chapter of Ricardo's work is titled "On Value," and discusses, among other things, "value in use," "value in exchange," and the determination of value by labour.⁴⁶ It is highly significant that Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, the first draft of *Capital* and the place where he discovered and substantiated the existence of surplus-value, i.e. the essence of capitalist exploitation of the working class, similarly titled his planned first chapter "Value."⁴⁷ However, the first chapters of both *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*, were titled "The Commodity."⁴⁸ Why the change?

The reason is that between late 1858 and 1859 Marx made his final break with Ricardo. In fact, when looking at the fragment of that chapter on value it can easily be seen that Marx's analysis quite differed from Ricardo's. Thus Marx wrote that the "first category in which bourgeois wealth presents itself is that of the commodity. The commodity itself appears as unity of two aspects."⁴⁹ That is, as opposed to Ricardo, Marx argued that the first category was not actually "value" but rather "the commodity." This was because, unlike Smith and Ricardo, Marx showed that the commodity was a unity of opposites, a fact that was rooted in definite relations of production and, more specifically, in the dual character of labour within the latter. He was the

⁴³ "A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." Marx, *Capital*, 163.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, "Note on the *Poverty of Philosophy*," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 24: Marx and Engels 1874-83* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 326.

⁴⁵ David Ricardo, *On The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: Dent, 1978), 7, 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, tran. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 881.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers, 1989), 27; Marx, *Capital*, 125.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 881.

first to explicitly and systematically root value in the relations of production and to establish the role of the duality of labour, and this, in turn, enabled him to prove surplus-value.⁵⁰ This scientific revolution that Marx effected via his critique of political economy thus necessitated a change of title from “Value” to “The Commodity,” viz. the *form* had to match the new *content* that his analysis produced.

Phenomenology and Capital: The Struggle of Consciousness and Classes

It is important to keep in mind that despite Hegel’s scientific concern with the development of human consciousness, he was an idealist and so that epistemological genesis was actually coterminous with the becoming of God. For Hegel, a single consciousness, humanity itself, and God were concepts used synonymously. He described the *Phenomenology* as “the exposition of the coming to be of knowledge,” which lays out “the various SHAPES OF SPIRIT as stations on the way through which spirit becomes pure knowledge, that is, absolute spirit.”⁵¹ Hence, an individual, in reading the *Phenomenology*, retraces the steps humanity had taken to absolute knowledge. This latter includes the self-understanding of being one with God. *He* moves through humanity and humanity moves through *Him*. However, unless all steps have been taken, such knowledge cannot be realised: “until Spirit has completed itself in *itself*, until it has completed itself as world-Spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as *self-conscious* Spirit. Therefore, the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what *Spirit is*, but only Science is its true knowledge of itself.”⁵² That is, religion, on the basis of faith, claims what only science, on the basis of reason, can comprehend; this is because “God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone and is only in that knowledge, and is only that knowledge itself, for He is Spirit.”⁵³ As opposed to this, Marx’s materialism led him to focus on empirically verifiable facts, on actual material relations. Thus, in this section, we will again see the same dialectical logic and the results will differ between Hegel and Marx thanks to their opposing standpoints.

One of the most famous parts of the *Phenomenology* is Hegel’s discussion of the struggle of self-consciousness, Lordship and Bondage. First, though, it should be noted that the three basic phases in the movement of knowledge are consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. The first is the sphere of immediacy, of externality, where connection is only implicit. The second is the realm of mediacy, viz. all connections are explicit and reciprocal.⁵⁴ In the initial

⁵⁰ “I was the first to point out and examine critically this twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities.” Marx, *Capital*, 132; “The best thing about my book is 1. (on this rests the *entire* comprehension of the facts) the *two-fold character of labour*, whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value, which is emphasised right in the first chapter; 2. the treatment of *surplus value independent of its special forms of profit, interest, land rent etc.*” Karl Marx, “Marx to Engels, August 24, 1867,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Letters on ‘Capital’*, tran. Andrew Drummond (London: New Park Publications, 1983), 111.

⁵¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Hegel’s Advertisement and Hegel’s Note to Himself,” in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, tran. and ed. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 468.

⁵² Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 488.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 461.

⁵⁴ The dialectical relationship of the three phases follow “Hegel’s form of triplicity, and some of the different terms used to describe it are: immediate, mediate, self-mediation; in itself, for other, in and for itself; indeterminate, determinate, self-determined, positive, negative, the absolutely positive.” Devine, “Marx’s critique of political economy,” accessed 19 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/marxs-critique-political-economy-logic-commodity>.

phase the relation was an external one between the knower, i.e. the 'I,' the subject, and the object. Now, for self-consciousness, the object of knowing is consciousness itself and so the distinction between the 'I' and object lies within the subject itself. Self-consciousness is, therefore, implicitly a unity of opposites, subject and object. Hegel, in presenting the struggle argued that "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."⁵⁵ That is, a self-consciousness must be recognised by another as not a mere object, but also as subject. For two self-consciousness coming across each other would immediately be in the first relationship, viz. they would see the other as object and themselves as the knower. Neither would get the acknowledgement it required, and so both would be self-consciousness *in themselves*, only implicitly, not explicitly, not *in and for themselves*. To be more specific, a self-consciousness must exist "*for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it."⁵⁶ Self-consciousness' internal unity must become simultaneous with an external unity. Both must see each other as *equally subject-objects*.

Self-consciousness arose from consciousness and so it bears the traces of the latter form. Thus it is "simple being-for self, self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else...and in this immediacy...it is an *individual*. What is 'other' for it is an unessential, negatively characterized object."⁵⁷ However, this "'other' is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual. Appearing thus immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects."⁵⁸ Both are, therefore, not yet self-consciousnesses for each other: neither has recognition, nor have proven themselves as such. Now, of course, each of them "is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and therefore its own self-certainty still has no truth...this is possible only when each is for the other what the other is for it, only when each in its own self through its own action, and again through the action of the other."⁵⁹ That is, the mutual acknowledgement of both can only take place through their reciprocal action.

In order to prove itself to be a self-consciousness, to be a subject, each must show "itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence*, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life."⁶⁰ The immediacy of life is the world of discrete, individual objects, but the essence of subjectivity is the ability to *act*, to *change*, and thereby raise itself above concrete limitations. That is, while the object is *individual*, the subject is inherently *universal*. Therefore, each self-consciousness must prove its pure subjectivity, its non-objectiveness, not merely potentially, but in actuality, viz. it must risk its life. This proving is a dual action: "action on the part of the other, and action on its own part. In so far as it is the action of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other. But in doing so, the second kind of action, action on its own part, is also involved; for the former involves the staking of its own life."⁶¹ As a result of this situation, "the relation of the two self-

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle.”⁶² To prove that one is a subject, that one has agency, is to prove that one is not a simple, inert object. To do this is to engage in practical activity, viz. negate an object, to destroy or alter it, to subordinate it to one’s will.

Hegel argued that this dilemma formed a syllogism, where self-consciousness in general is the middle term and the two individual self-consciousnesses are the major and minor premises. As both cannot win this struggle it reveals “the inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*.”⁶³ More exactly, there is now posited “a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is a merely *immediate* consciousness, or consciousness in the form of *thinghood*.”⁶⁴ One side proves itself a subject and the other has sunk down to an object. The first is “the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself,” and the second “is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman.”⁶⁵ Although this is the termination of the struggle, it is not the end of the process.

The lord being in charge, the bondsman must serve the lord’s will and hence work for him. His desire for objects (food, clothing, etc.) is now met via the bondsman. Since the lord is “(a) *qua* the Notion of self-consciousness an immediate relation of *being-for-self*, but (b) is now at the same time mediation, or a being-for-self which is for itself only through another, he is related (a) immediately to both, and (b) mediately to each through the other.”⁶⁶ The lord stands independent and thus immediately opposed to both the object of desire and the bondsman. However, the lord also stands in a mediated relationship to both, because he relates to the object via the bondsman and relates to the bondsman via the object. The *independence* of the lord is, therefore, actually a *dependence*. Nor, for that matter, does the lord have true recognition as pure self-consciousness, as a subject, because the recognition is not reciprocal, but forced as the recognising side is an object.

Yet the bondsman *is still* a self-consciousness, if only implicitly. In this condition, he “also relates himself negatively to the thing, and takes away its independence; but at the same time the thing is independent *vis-a-vis* the bondsman,” as it is owned by the lord.⁶⁷ Thus the bondsman’s “negating of it, therefore, cannot go the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation; in other words, he only *works* on it.”⁶⁸ As a result of this another change occurs, because “just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is...and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness.”⁶⁹ The bondsman has within the

⁶² Ibid., 113-114.

⁶³ Ibid., 112-113.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 117.

truth of pure negativity and being-for-self, for it has experienced this its own essential nature. For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it...has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*.⁷⁰

Self-consciousness is absolute negativity because it not merely negates the object, but it also negates its very self, viz., in its essence, it is self-negating. This is because in negating the object, in changing it via activity, it negates, it changes itself.⁷¹ Indeed, as Hegel pointed out, the bondsman's "consciousness is not this dissolution of everything stable merely in principle; in his service he *actually* brings this about. Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it."⁷² Therefore, it is the *activity*, more exactly, the labour of the bondsman which proves itself to be the universal movement, that which melts away everything stable.

The more specific reason for this development and why the bondsman gains an insight that the lord cannot is because of the two different approaches to the object, i.e. desire and work. The first "has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence."⁷³ The lord only desires and so only enjoys a temporary fulfilment. However, the second "is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing."⁷⁴ Desire, then, merely consumes, annihilates the object, but work alters it, forms it into something new. Thus, as a result, this "formative *activity* is at the same time the individuality or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence...therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being...its *own* independence."⁷⁵ Through work, labour activity, the bondsman, the subject, makes himself *objective* and simultaneously makes the object *subjective*, viz. the bondsman gives the object a new shape conforming to human designs.⁷⁶ As

⁷⁰ Ibid., 117. "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew." William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Signet Classic, 1998), 1.2.129-130; "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away...All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 17.

⁷¹ Marx repeated this idea decades later: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*." See, Karl Marx, "[Theses On Feuerbach]," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 616.

⁷² Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117.

⁷³ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁶ "The subject, in objectifying itself, subjectivises the object and *vice versa*, in subjectivising the object, the subject objectifies itself. This is *one and the same process*, and so in practical activity the identity of subject and object is

Hegel wrote elsewhere, “through labour the self makes its own determinations into the forms of things and in its work views itself as an objective self.”⁷⁷ Therefore, it is by means of work that “the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is.”⁷⁸

It is important to recognise that in Hegel’s discussion the struggle was *not* between lord and bondsman, but rather between two self-consciousnesses that *resulted* in the existence of the latter. Further, while the bondsman attains to a higher consciousness and freedom because of its own activity, its work, the impulse was *first* provided by a fear of death, viz. it gave the original discipline needed for work. This is not to say that Hegel agreed with slavery, for as he argued elsewhere: “Slavery is in and for itself *injustice*, for the essence of humanity is *Freedom*.”⁷⁹ Yet in the same place he argued that slavery had historically played an educative role, that it was a “phase of advance” over our original isolated barbarism, preparing humanity for “a higher morality and the culture connected with it.”⁸⁰ For him, then, just as slavery had to arise, it also had to fall. Similarly, even though it was the bondsman’s labour that supported both him and the lord, and which ultimately made him the more powerful, the subjugation of the bondsman via fear was also necessary.

Hegel accepted the existence of the hierarchy of power, even if he felt it had to be reformed. Indeed, he recognised the existence of classes in capitalist society and even the problems and injustice of poverty.⁸¹ He further noted that the different answers society provided to the latter, such as charity and providing more work were unsuccessful. Hegel argued that, as a result, society was pushed to different forms of colonisation.⁸² But, ultimately, he felt that no real solution had yet been found and he accepted the bare fact of some form of state welfare.⁸³ This,

achieved.” Jason Devine, “On Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Confused Philosophy,” accessed 21 July 2026, <https://links.org.au/lenins-materialism-and-empirio-criticism-critical-comments-confused-philosophy>.

⁷⁷ Hegel, *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, 62.

⁷⁸ Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 118.

⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tran. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 99.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸¹ When the activity of civil society is unrestricted, it is occupied internally with *expanding its population and industry... the accumulation of wealth increases... But... the specialization and limitation* of particular work also increase, as do likewise the *dependence and want* of the class which is tied to such work; this in turn leads to an inability to feel and enjoy the wider freedoms, and particularly the spiritual advantages, of civil society. When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living... that feeling of right, integrity, and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one’s own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a *rabble*, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands... Poverty in itself does not reduce people to a rabble; a rabble is created only by the disposition associated with poverty, by inward rebellion against the rich, against society, the government, etc.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood and tran. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 266.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 267, 268.

⁸³ “The important question of how poverty can be remedied is one which agitates and torments modern societies especially.” *Ibid.*, 267; “This inequality between wealth and poverty, this need and necessity, lead to... inner indignation and hatred... State power enters and must see to it that each sphere is supported. It goes into means and remedies, seeking new markets abroad, etc.... The appearance of force must be avoided... but rather employ the suffering classes in other ways... Commerce is certainly left to its own devices – but with the sacrifice of this generation and the proliferation of poverty, poor-taxes and institutions.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit*:

should be no surprise because, for Hegel, class oppositions existed within the realm of civil society with its conflicting interests. In his conception, it was the job of the state to manage and arbitrate those differences.⁸⁴

As will be seen below, while Marx accepted Hegel's view of the importance of labour, he did not do so uncritically.⁸⁵ That is, he did not fully accept the latter's account and so he also rejected the role of fear, the uncritical acceptance of hierarchy and classes, and the role of the state as a means of resolving the contradictions of class struggle. In other words, while Hegel's account of the lord and bondsman clearly influenced Marx, it certainly *was not* the source where Marx got the idea of class struggle. Rather he undoubtedly got it from his professor, the Old Hegelian Eduard Gans. Marx had started studying law at Berlin University in October 1836. During his first term, he attended the classes of Gans.⁸⁶ The latter lectured on Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and, earlier that year, had published a book, *Rückblicke auf Personen und Zustände*. There he argued that

The Saint-Simonians have, I believe, taken a completely erroneous view of the evil of competition, or of the war and struggle, within civil society, an evil that must be transformed into order and hierarchy... Yet... the Saint-Simonians have... rightly observed that slavery has not, in fact, come to an end, that while it may be disappearing in form, it persists in substance in its most perfect manifestation.

Just as the master and the slave, later the patrician and the plebeian, and then the feudal lord and the vassal once stood in opposition to one another, so too do the idler and the worker stand opposed today. Visit the factories of England, and you will find hundreds of men and women, emaciated and wretched, sacrificing their health and their enjoyment of life to the service of a single individual... Is it not slavery to exploit a human being like an animal, even if, otherwise, he would be free to starve?

The recognition that the state must provide for the poorest and most numerous class, that, should they wish to work, they must never lack suitable employment, and that a primary objective must be to thin out that crust of civil society commonly known as the 'rabble', reflects a profound insight into our times; and the history that follows will, on its pages,

A translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with commentary, ed. and tran. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 140.

⁸⁴ "In relation to the spheres of civil law and private welfare, the spheres of the family and civil society, the state is on the one hand an *external* necessity and the higher power to whose nature their laws and interests are subordinate and on which they depend. But on the other hand, it is their *immanent* end, and its strength consists in the unity of its universal and ultimate end with the particular interest of individuals, in the fact that they have *duties* towards the state to the same extent as they also have rights." Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy*, 283.

⁸⁵ "Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power... But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it." Marx, *Capital*, 283-284.

⁸⁶ David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life & Thought* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1973), 19, 25.

have occasion more than once to recount the struggle of the proletariat against the middle classes of society.⁸⁷

Here we can see not only the Hegelian commitment to solving the problems of poverty by means of the state, especially state welfare, but, more importantly, an explicit recognition that classes are not merely opposed, but that they fight and have been doing so down the ages. Especially important is that Gans equated working for a wage with slavery and that he noted the existence both of exploitation in English factories and the proletarian struggle. It is eminently reasonable to assume that Marx had read his professor's then-recently published book, for 12 years later Marx clearly paraphrased it in the *Manifesto*! There he famously opened the first chapter: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another."⁸⁸

Marx, in his unpublished *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, argued that the "outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process," and, more exactly, that he "grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man's own *labour*."⁸⁹ Yet Marx also pointed out that "Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy. He grasps *labour* as the *essence* of man – as man's essence which stands the test: he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labour. Labour is *man's coming-to be for himself* within *alienation*, or as *alienated man*."⁹⁰ That is to say, under capitalism labour is alienated and both the classical political economists and Hegel uncritically accepted that; they could not see beyond it, they could not conceive of unalienated labour. Marx, however, was more consistent in applying Hegel's logic, viz. if labour is both the basis of the system of power and the means by which the worker self-develops, then *only the workers can free themselves* and hence cannot rely on that same system. With this the possibility of unalienated labour opened up, and which implied an end to classes, the state, and therefore communism. Marx achieved this perspective via his successive critiques of Hegelianism and of political economy.

The contrast between Hegel and Marx here is best seen by looking at chapter 10 of *Capital*, volume 1, "The Working Day." Marx showed that the longer workers labour, the more they are exploited; thus workers seek to shorten the working day, while capitalists want to lengthen it. As a result, "in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class."⁹¹ Page after page, Marx detailed how English capitalists broke the laws regarding the working day, how they stole the workers' time for breaks and lunch, overworked and exploited workers, used child

⁸⁷ Eduard Gans, *Rückblicke auf Personen und Zustände* (Berlin, Verlag von Veit und Comp, 1836), 98, 99-100.

⁸⁸ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 12.

⁸⁹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 132.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹¹ Marx, *Capital*, 344.

labour, and placed their workers in horrendous and dangerous conditions.⁹² In this victimisation of the workers, they were clearly the object and the capitalists the subject: the latter made the decisions, they had the power. Workers put up with this because of a fear of starving; something which Marx never thought was a positive aspect.

Of course, workers at times fought back against the capitalist-defined working day. Thus he noted that in “1858-60 the journeymen bakers of Ireland organized, at their own expense, huge meetings to agitate against night work and Sunday work. The public...supported them with typically Irish warmth. As a result of this movement, a rule of exclusive day-labour was successfully established in Wexford, Kilkenny, Clonmel, Waterford, etc.”⁹³ However, he also pointed out that the workers lost elsewhere in Ireland thanks to the united opposition of their employers.⁹⁴ Marx reported that in 1866, in Scotland, agricultural labourers protested against the length of the working day. Although he did not mention if they had won, he wrote that the “formation since the end of 1865 of a trade union among the agricultural labourers, first of all in Scotland, is a historic event.”⁹⁵ What Marx was suggesting through these examples was that while public meetings and protests are important, the formation of a union was even more so.

As it is a battle between the two classes, Marx clearly held unionisation to be crucial, as a step-forward in workers’ consciousness, self-organisation, and thus capacity to fight back. This is especially necessary as workers simply cannot rely on moral persuasion. Indeed, as Marx rightly asserted: “Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so.”⁹⁶ This is because the whole system compels the capitalist to ruthlessly exploit his workers. In Marx’s words, “it is evident that this does not depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist. Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him.”⁹⁷ Even if a capitalist were to take pity and exploit his workers less by giving them a shorter day or raising their wages, he would only be lowering his profits and opening himself to being outmaneuvered on the market by his competitors.

As the lot of the working class has never and can never be improved by the morality of the capitalists class, and as any improvement can only be won by workers themselves, therefore the “establishment of a normal working day is the result of centuries of struggle between the capitalist and the worker.”⁹⁸ At first capitalists sought to make the working day longer than it traditionally was. However, “the pretensions of capital in its embryonic state, in its state of becoming, when it cannot yet use the sheer force of economic relations to secure its right to absorb a sufficient quantity of surplus labour, but must be aided by the power of the state.”⁹⁹ Thus capital required the force, the violence, of the state to break the will of the newly-

⁹² Ibid., 349-361.

⁹³ Ibid., 362.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 362.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 363.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 381.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 381.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 382.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 382.

developing proletariat. That is, it needed to discipline workers to accept the lengthening of the working day. One of the forms this took was “the well-trying method of locking up workers who become dependent on public support (in one word, paupers) in ‘an ideal workhouse’. Such an ideal workhouse must be made a ‘House of Terror’, and not an asylum for the poor.”¹⁰⁰ Again, it cannot be stressed enough, Marx clearly disagreed on subjugation and fear playing any positive role whatsoever. Terror is not empowering and does not teach self-liberation.

Marx especially looked at the history of labour legislation, the Factory Acts, writing that as “soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent, it began to offer resistance, first of all in England.”¹⁰¹ He also noted though that for “three decades...the concessions wrung from industry by the working class remained purely nominal.”¹⁰² Not only did the workers have to fight for legislation, they had to fight for its implementation. The “normal working day for modern industry dates only from the Factory Act of 1833” where a working day was set at 15 hours.¹⁰³ By 1838 though “factory workers...had made the Ten Hours’ Bill their economic, as they had made the Charter their political, election cry,” and by 1846-1847, “the Chartist movement and the ten hours’ agitation reached their highest point.”¹⁰⁴ The workers then successfully got legislation passed in 1847 that would limit the working day to 10 hours in 1848.¹⁰⁵

The capitalist manufacturers immediately set about to undermine and maneuver around the legislation, but, far more important for the ultimate outcome of the new Factory Act and its implementation was the fate of Chartism:

the fiasco of the Chartist party, whose leaders had been imprisoned and whose organization dismembered, had shattered the self-confidence of the English working class. Soon after this the June insurrection in Paris and its bloody suppression united, in England as on the Continent, all fractions of the ruling classes...under the common slogan of the salvation of property, religion, the family and society. Everywhere the working class was outlawed, anathematized, placed under the ‘*loi des suspects*’.¹⁰⁶

This in turn led the manufacturers to break out in “open revolt, not only against the Ten Hours’ Act, but against all the legislation since 1833.”¹⁰⁷ Through an increasing variety of tricks and dodges the “revolt of capital was after two years finally crowned with victory by a decision handed down by one of the four highest courts in England,” which announced that the Ten Hours Bill was legally a dead letter.¹⁰⁸ What is crucial to recognise here is that the real reason for this loss was the defeat of Chartism and resultant loss of working-class self-confidence and organisation. It was only after this, with the subsequent political reaction and counter-attack by

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 388.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 390.

¹⁰² Ibid., 390.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 390.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 393, 395.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 395.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 397.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 398.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 404.

the manufacturers, that workers were unable to mount an active defence. Still, the workers did not remain on the losing side for long: “the workers had offered a resistance which was passive, though inflexible and unceasing. They now protested in Lancashire and Yorkshire in threatening meetings.”¹⁰⁹ Eventually a compromise was reached and a new Factory Act was passed in 1850. Continual moves on both sides lead to further legislation and the limiting of the hours of child labour and for women, across further branches of industry.¹¹⁰

Marx rightly concluded, then, that the “establishment of a normal working day is therefore the product of a protracted and more or less concealed civil war between the capitalist class and the working class,” and since it was “fought out first of all in the homeland of that industry – England,” therefore, the “English factory workers were the champions, not only of the English working class, but of the modern working class in general.”¹¹¹ The English factory workers had thus set a shining example and standard, not only for the rest of the working class in England, but globally. What was even more vital though, was how they had achieved their win. In Marx’s striking words, to fight capitalist exploitation,

the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital. In the place of the pompous catalogue of the ‘inalienable rights of man’ there steps the modest Magna Carta of the legally limited working day, which at last makes clear ‘when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins’.¹¹²

It will be noticed that Marx here considered the political movement and success of the workers as even greater than the rights of man! For Marx the more important labour of the working class is not how they actually engage in the process of production, but rather it is their *political labour*: their self-organisation and fight for their class interests. The reason for this is because, as he wrote to a friend years later, “every movement in which the working class comes out as a *class* against the ruling classes and tries to coerce them by pressure from without is a political movement.”¹¹³ As an illustration, he wrote that

the attempt in a particular factory or even in a particular trade to force a shorter working day out of individual capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. On the other hand the movement to force through an eight-hour, etc., *law* is a *political* movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movements of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say, a movement of the *class*, with the object of enforcing its interests in a general form, in a form possessing general, socially coercive force.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 405.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 405-411.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 412-413.

¹¹² Ibid., 416.

¹¹³ Karl Marx, “Marx to F. Bolte, November 23, 1871,” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 270-271.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 271.

Further, he noted that if “these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are in turn equally a means of developing this organisation.”¹¹⁵ In other words, the very work of self-organising helps develop the workers’ consciousness and capacity for further organisation. Thus it is only by means of the *labour of politics* that the *politics of labour* can succeed, because the “political movement of the working class has as its ultimate object, of course, the conquest of political power for this class.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion

While it has been rightfully noted that Hegel’s *Science of Logic* was a key influence on Marx’s *Capital*, it would be incorrect to see the former as the only work that impacted the latter. The fact is that Marx had intensively read all of Hegel’s major works. The point, then, is not asking whether this or that Hegelian text had an effect on Marx, but grasping that it was Hegelianism *in toto* that was formative. Marx ultimately rejected the Hegelian system, but critically accepted the Hegelian method. This was done precisely through critically reading and reflecting on all of Hegel’s works and, importantly, discussing them with others. I have sought to prove this with one of Hegel’s greatest books, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in contrast to Marx’s *magnum opus*, *Capital*, volume 1.

In analysing the similarities and differences between the first chapters in both books, it has been shown that Marx accepted Hegel’s understanding of the beginning of science and the dialectical method of its development. However, while Marx not only worked in a different intellectual field, he crucially rejected Hegel’s idealism. The root of human development lay not in changing forms of consciousness and certainly not in god, but in the material activity, the labour, of humanity. In further looking at the parallels, or lack thereof, between Hegel’s section on lordship and bondage and Marx’s chapter on the working day, it was established that Marx accepted Hegel’s *logic of labour*, its revolutionary implications, but far more consistently than that “mighty thinker” ever did. For if the worker via its labour, is the basis of the system of power and that same labour is inherently radical, changing both object and subject, then workers *do not need* the fear of masters or the state. They are the producers and hence the proper inheritors of the world and its wealth. Their *self-liberation*, both a possibility and necessity, is the only thing that can achieve that.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 271.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 270.