

*The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, by Raya Dunayevskaya. Edited and introduced by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002. \$25.00. Pp. xiii, 386.

This is a collection of essays, talks and letters by the American political activist and self-taught Hegel scholar Raya Dunayevskaya. The collection demonstrates her distinctive contributions to dialectical thought in the Marxist tradition and especially her treatment of dialectics as an objective component of the total social process of real revolution.

In a well-crafted introduction, Anderson and Hudis point out that renewed interest in Marx has been kept apart from scholarship in Hegelian dialectics. The political price for this separation is quite high:

Our time is burdened by the absence of a vision of a future which transcends the horizon of existing society. . . . The failure to project an alternative to both existing capitalism and statist communism is a more important facet of today's social crises than is generally recognized. . . . Will the social dislocations brought about by globalized capital stimulate a search for new alternatives rooted in what Dunayevskaya termed the dialectic of second negativity, or will the anti-globalization movement bog down in accommodations to the power of capital?

This review approaches Dunayevskaya's contributions to "theoretic preparation for revolution" (167) at three overlapping levels. At each level we see her passionate interest in *new societal beginnings*.

The first level is the premise that there is an *integral connection of philosophy and revolution*. This premise challenges the current deep separation between philosophical discussion and political activism. For Dunayevskaya, engaging in philosophy and working for the emancipation of working people are two sides of the same urgent endeavor.

Her initial problematic was the growth *within the revolution* of the counter-revolution — the emergence of the Stalinist ideology of socialism in one country from within the Bolshevik Revolution. In the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, she saw other revolutionary movements stall, abort or turn into their opposites. Practice *alone* had not achieved thorough-going revolution in the 20th century. She concluded that "a new beginning, a new point of departure, a new unity of philosophy and revolution must be worked out" (172).

The second level of theoretical preparation for revolution was Dunayevskaya's turn to the Hegelian philosophy of dialectics and especially its "*negativity as the driving force toward ever-new beginnings*." She characterized negativity as "the urge to transcend, the ceaseless motion" that ultimately achieves, in Hegel's language, "absolute liberation." The philosophical term "absolute" means complete, total, self-determining. Dunayevskaya shared Marx's conviction that the struggle to uproot the capitalist system had to dig deeply, and that our goal is to build a society on new human relations. The term "absolute" thus conveys how comprehensive are the twin tasks of abolition of the capital system and of societal reconstruction.

The third level was Dunayevskaya's audacious exploration of Hegel's Absolute. This was traditionally seen by Marxists as a sphere of idealistic mysticism, a closed ontological system. Nonetheless, Dunayevskaya found that in order to make headway with issues of revolutionary organization it was necessary to immerse herself in the "Doctrine of the Notion," the final *Logic* in which Hegel discusses the Absolute Idea. Hegel considered this the subdivision of the realm of subjectivity or freedom. Dunayevskaya felt compelled to stretch herself as far as Hegel's Absolute because she saw it as *a means for "reconstructing society on totally new, truly human beginnings"* (153). How?

Dunayevskaya saw Hegel's concept of the negation of the negation, the method of the Absolute Idea, as of key importance for revolutionary struggle. Negation needs to go beyond the refutation of the given, the tearing down of the old. This is because the first negation remains imprinted with the old. *Only when negativity goes on to become self-directed, self-related, or "absolute," does it create the positive.* For Hegel, the positive arises when and only when negativity is directed not just at the old but at one's initial efforts at negating it. His second negation is thus the "negative relation to self." Hegel's Absolute

implies a "ceaseless movement" which works on both external and internal barriers to freedom. For Dunayevskaya, the dialectical movement, instead of reaching a pinnacle or the so-called end of history, becomes continuing.

In this collection of philosophical writings, Dunayevskaya does not come to grips with the importance and difficulty of attaining a first negation. How can we conduct a first negation, which necessitates the exercise of power, without stifling dissent, self-reflection and creativity?

Dunayevskaya's style is compressed and difficult. Connecting links are occasionally left out. She weaves references from Hegel's major works into discussions of Marx's writings and working-class history. These interconnections are critical to her project but she does not always assist the reader to follow her transitions. Thankfully the editors do a superlative job of giving background information and relevant references so as to guide the reader on this arduous journey.

Although it takes considerable energy to extract the meaning of these philosophical-political essays, I found them stimulating and even captivating. The marvel for me was that when I returned at a later date to read them a second, third or even fourth time, I was rewarded with further insights. The journey led deeper and deeper into both Marx and Hegel.

In conclusion, Dunayevskaya vigorously argues that the second negation provides a conceptual ground for building society anew. In Hegel's Absolute, rather than finding a culmination, she claims to have discovered a new beginning. She draws insights from the pinnacle of Hegel's monumental philosophy for the political search for self-determination and freedom. Since the Absolute Idea is by no means "a mere unfolding of what was implicit from the start," it becomes a *new beginning on "a totally new foundation"* (179). Because of the powerful drive of the dialectic, thought "breaks through the barriers of the given" and reaches out "beyond the historic moment" (184). This new horizon makes Dunayevskaya's thinking exciting, revolutionary and distinctive. She follows Marx in asserting that a human society with entirely new human relations is our goal, and that there are virtually no limits to humankind's future development.

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