

Why Marx, Why Now?: A Recollection of Dunayevskaya's *Power of Negativity*

Anne Fairchild Pomeroy

<http://clogic.eserver.org/2004/pomeroy.html>



Raya Dunayevskaya

1. The 2002 publication, *The Power of Negativity*, is a collection of the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya. In it, the editors, Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson, pull together a vast array of Dunayevskaya's letters, communications, articles, and speeches concentrating on the Hegelian Absolute Idea. The collection traces the progress of Dunayevskaya's interest in Hegel from its preliminary stages to what can only be described as her ultimate passion. She is nothing if not intense in her conviction that it was time to resurrect Hegel for Marx and contemporary Marxism. The Hegelian Idea was one whose time had come. How firmly Dunayevskaya believed this is betrayed by the tone of urgency and frustration revealed in so many of the writings in this collection. She so clearly feels she is on to something and yet seems unable to be heard properly on the subject. Perhaps Dunayevskaya's announcement of the necessity of the Hegelian Absolute came too soon -- too soon for what she calls the Post-Marx Marxists who were too captivated by the new critical theory, too soon for a political landscape still laboring under the misconception that Soviet Communism had proved the wrongheadedness of Marxism, too soon for the diverse and factional mass movements that saw in one another only competitors vying for their slice of a very small pie. Or perhaps in some sense it was too late. Perhaps the extant interpretations of Hegel (and of Marx, for that matter) simply

precluded the openness necessary to hear her plea. Perhaps other voices had already captured the attention of Marxists. After all, Kojève was already lecturing in France on the *Phenomenology* in the late 1930s. Regardless, Dunayevskaya herself was, for a period of over thirty years, communicating the urgency of a return to Hegel. In one of her letters to Marcuse, Dunayevskaya accuses him of thinking that she is obsessed by Hegel's Absolute Idea; if such an accusation was made it may indeed have been largely correct.¹ But we would do well to remember that those who appear to harbor "irrational" obsessions today often prove to be tomorrow's visionaries. In other words, I believe that Dunayevskaya may have had good reason for her "obsession."

2. But the difficulty with this collection of writings is that the enormous quantity of material is not systematically linked. I do not believe this to be the fault of the editors. What is clear is that Dunayevskaya herself was still in the process of drawing the disparate pieces of her analysis together. Although she did treat the subject at some considerable length in *Philosophy and Revolution*, there is new material here which requires consideration and integration.² In *The Power of Negativity*, we are left, then, with a fascinating landscape of provocative fragments which I think require a more systematic restructuring in order to make clear the connections between them. What seems to me especially necessary is to get Dunayevskaya's Hegel back to Marx -- in other words, to close the circle and, in so doing, to connect the pieces into a solid edifice. This restructuring is what I would like to inaugurate in the following pages. I emphasize "inaugurate" here: this material is dense and the conceptual contents rich enough to merit a continuation of what will be begun here. Most of all, I hope to weave together the ideas presented in this relatively new volume into a fabric that will be more provocative than definitive or conclusive. How much Dunayevskaya herself would approve of the reconstruction I undertake I cannot know. I suspect that I may, in the final analysis, emphasize the immanence of the Idea more than she would care to. But this and other features will remain open to debate. Certainly, what is intended here is no final word in Marxism or Marxian interpretation. This is meant to be an addition to the ongoing dialogue about the place of the Idea in Marx and the place of Marx for us today -- an addition to and not an exclusion of extant scholarship.

3. The title of this essay, "Why Marx, Why Now?", clearly plays on the question that opened *Philosophy and Revolution* -- "Why Hegel, Why Now?" And it is meant to indicate the contention of my work here: that we do not really understand Hegel for Marx until we return to Marx. In other words, the two questions elide. In Hegel, Dunayevskaya found the answers to her questions about the nature of the revolution and what is to come in or as the post-revolutionary epoch. But I believe that this takes us right back to Marx -- to a real understanding of the meaning of his call for the abolition of wage labor. Those who have read Dunayevskaya's other work will recognize that this entails connecting together the material on labor from *Marxism and Freedom* with the material on Marx and Hegel in *Philosophy and Revolution*.³ In the final analysis then, I think that *The Power of Negativity* is not really about Hegel but about Marx in the worst (or best) way. For the way in which Dunayevskaya is capable of reading Hegel and particularly the end of the *Logic* is premised upon her understanding of Marx, of the unity of the Marxian corpus, of the imperatives of concerned praxis for the present and the vision of a future in which

real freedom and hence real humanity is truly realized. "Why Marx, Why Now?" -- because, as Jean-Paul Sartre so eloquently put it in *Search for a Method*, "Far from being exhausted, Marxism is still in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop. It remains, therefore, the philosophy of our time. We cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it."⁴

4. The driving premise of *The Power of Negativity* is that Post-Marx Marxists have gone terribly awry in their rejection of Hegel's idealism. She says, "we needn't prove the materialism of Hegel [as Lenin was trying to do] but rather the idealism of Marx."⁵ She circles around a single still point. The object of her obsession is the last paragraph of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, and she returns to it again and again. This paragraph is, she maintains, essential to understanding what Marx meant by revolution, what comes after the first revolution, the negation of negation, the new beginning, the realization of freedom. In his *Philosophic Notebooks* Lenin believed he had discovered in Hegel's *Logic* a capitulation to materialism in the transition to Nature indicated at the end of the section on the Absolute Idea, but Dunayevskaya insists that he needed to read on in order to understand Marx fully. Especially important, she believes, are the lines that follow: "The transition here therefore must be taken to mean that the Idea feely releases itself in absolute self-security and self-repose. By reason of this freedom the form of its determinateness also is utterly free -- the externality of space and time which is absolutely for itself and without subjectivity" (*PON*, 72). "The self-determination in which alone the idea is, is to hear itself speak" (*PON*, 105).⁶ The difficulty lies in trying to fathom the totality of Dunayevskaya's meaning. Often, at crucial moments, she will lapse into Hegelian terminology which, when one is attempting to clarify Hegel, can be singularly unhelpful. We need, therefore, to wash a bit of the abstraction off of this material and, more importantly, to make clear and explicit the structural integrity of the whole and, therefore, the rationality of the position. There are, implicit in this work, ontological claims that tie this work directly back to her understanding of Marx as a humanist. That understanding of the totality of Marx's philosophy as grounded in humanism allows for this understanding of Hegel's importance for the vision of the post-capitalist world to come, but those ontological elements need to be made explicit again in order for us to fully comprehend why Dunayevskaya thought the Hegelian Absolute Idea so very important. To complete this task I am going to examine and connect together several recurrent themes in *The Power of Negativity*: Dialectics and Movement, Freedom and the First Negation, Revolution and the Second Negation, and finally, Freedom Realized as The New Society. I will conclude with some reflections on the importance of this work for us today.

Dialectics and Movement

5. In order to understand and fully appreciate Dunayevskaya's accomplishment, it is crucial to recognize that, for her, the beating heart of Marxism is the dialectic. This is why she advocated and practiced a repeated return to Hegel. She hopes that by sending the Post-Marx Marxists back to Hegel they will get the dialectic right and, in turn, finally get Marx right.

6. One cannot adequately understand any aspect of a temporal and fluctuating reality without the dialectic. As movement is the nature of the appearance of actuality, dialectic is the nature of that movement. "Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work" (PON, 84).⁷ For Hegel nothing, not even his own thought, stands still. Consider his description of history -- it is a constant turning and overturning, and upward and outward spiral generated by the presence of the idea(1) in the real.⁸ . . . [E]verything is self-transcendence, self-activity, self-development" (PON, 198). Where there is temporality, there is dialectic. But in order to understand why Dunayevskaya considered the dialectic to be of such importance it is necessary to recall the text that broke open her understanding of Marx: *The 1844 Manuscripts*. Certainly what Marx so appreciated in Hegel's philosophy was that "the attempt to get to the ultimate, is it not just Substance, that is, a static thing, but Subject, self-creative and developing. . ." (PON, 199). Marx's focus, however, was not on Subject in the abstract but on the subject as human being and thus also on the human condition. In the *Manuscripts* Marx clearly articulates the role of the human subject as mediator of the social objectivity. The world is a world seen, touched, tasted, torn down, built up, beatified or damned. The human being is constantly engaged in acts of mediative creation and recreation of her or his social reality. "[T]he productive life is the life of the species. It is life engendering life. The whole character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character."⁹ "Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my *own* existence *is* social activity. . . ." ¹⁰ We are the agency of a mediation constantly overthrowing the past and issuing forth a novel present (with its new possibilities for the future). The dialectical or historical materialism of Marx is captured here -- the human activity is the conscious mediation of settled objectivity to new objectivity. It is important to note that this notion of the human being as subjective mediator of the objective world is not confined to the *Manuscripts*, nor even to the early writings (as many readers might expect). This particular presentation of human mediation is, in fact, the basis of the critique of capitalism in *Capital* vol I. It holds a place of prominence in the *Preface* to the *Grundrisse* and stands as the declaration of the nature of human labor opening the chapter on "The Labor Process and the Valorization Process" in *Capital* where Marx says, "Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature." Marx goes on to indicate, however, that human labor is not like the activity of any other creature. The fundamental difference involves the engagement of ideas. "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. . . ." ¹¹ It is the idea that distinguishes the human producer from the animal producer and accounts for the natural alteration and augmentation that is the basis of the appearance of surplus value.

7. But this is the alteration upon Hegel: it is *we* (as concrete imaginative projective beings), not the Idea (as abstraction), who are the motive force, the efficient cause of the dialectical movement of the real/material world. Arguably Hegel himself might agree with this. Certainly he sees the human being enacting and realizing the Idea in or as history, but the difference seems to be one of emphasis. We are pushed, in the final

analysis, to ask the question: Is the human being the agent of the Idea or is the Idea its own agent? The question is really about which conditions the other. This is not unimportant as it reaches into the core of the matter -- freedom itself. One must ultimately decide whether the human being is going to be posited as the medium of the Idea's self-movement or whether human mediation is accomplished through the Idea. If the latter, then the human being is the ultimate subject as Marx would have it. Is this really what is implied in Hegel? I think not, and certainly Marx thought not. And this is how Marx turned Hegel "on his head." For Hegel had presented forms of motion of the dialectic only "in its mystified form, the dialectic . . . seemed to transfigure and glorify what exists" (as expressive of the Absolute Idea). However, Marx wanted an understanding of what exists and "a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore it grasps its transient aspect as well. . . ." [12](#) The agent of such transition is the human being, demystifying what exists by understanding his of her role in its construction, continuation, alteration, destruction. At very least the focus, for Marx, is crystal clear. Marxism is "a philosophy of human activity" (*PON*, 129-130) and it is Marx's focus on the human being, his humanism, that contains an insight not otherwise achieved. In it, he has gone beyond Hegel and has grasped the idealism as it is possessed, enacted, and known by the human being. What is strikingly interesting and appropriate is that Marx's surpassing of Hegel on this matter is a simultaneous retention and is, therefore, a true sublation. For the Idea is no less present, even in some sense no less absolute (and we shall see why this is true in subsequent pages), but now it is dialectically united with the material reality in human activity. So, if it is the case that dialectic is both the description and method of the movement of the temporal and real and if such movement is at least on some level effected by the human agent, we need to examine this activity and ascertain why it can be discovered and expressed as negation.

Freedom and First Negation

8. In order for there to be movement there must be change and in order for there to be change there must be negation. If a "substance" is X now, it can only change in reference to that particular characteristic if it becomes -X. This particular truth has found expression in the fragments of Heraclitus and in the Socratic "Theory of Opposites." It is a fundamental tenet of existentialism, a springboard of postmodernism. But whether one subscribes to a substance metaphysics or not, the necessity of negation for change remains. [13](#) Either there is "something" that changes or the change is all there is. Either way, the change itself is formal: purely formal change or the formal change of some content. What was this is now that. What was spatially or even temporally here is now there. "The Notion is the power of Substance in the fruition of its own being, and therefore, what is free. . . . It is certainly a form, but an infinite and creative form. . . ." (*PON*, 86-87). [14](#)

9. It is the presence of the idea in human consciousness that effects such negation. It is the presence of the idea in human consciousness that gives us our particular power of negation and hence of alteration, for through the idea I can consider formal reality freely. I can consider what is not yet the case by considering other formal possibilities. Formal

possibilities, *qua* formal (ideal), are indefinite and the vast array of this multitude of possibilities can be considered in their pure ideality. In fact, I can turn them over with frightening rapidity. This paper might be pink, not white, or blue or yellow or beige or purple, etc. As Marx says in *Capital I*, "What separates 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 existed ideally."¹⁵ Ideation allows a consideration of what might be the case but additionally, because the human being is also a physical subject, s/he is capable of effecting this new form (where possible) and making it a physical or material reality. I dilute some red food coloring and spill it on the paper -- my idea is enacted and I have changed the world. This is my freedom, the freedom which is my being. "If we listen to what the Idea is, and we know that there is no difference between Idea and freedom, then it will be equally the nature of the fact and the nature of cognition itself. That is one of the forms of getting to the transformation of reality -- what Marx called the realization of freedom" (*PON*, 207). Yet, formal possibilities, though indefinite, are not without limit because I am constrained by the material provided (both proximate and distant) upon which I can act, and this includes, of course, my own physical capabilities. But I am also limited ideally, by my own awareness of my ability to effect such change. This awareness, a function of self-consciousness, is, as we shall soon see, crucial.

10. But what does this have to do with the analysis of labor in Marx? The real tragedy (and final injustice) of capitalism is the enslavement of the human idea. This is what Dunayevskaya saw so clearly in *Marxism and Freedom*. She understood that labor power is the human potential for creative alteration of the natural world. This is why she was so captivated by the *Manuscripts*. In them she found the clear statement that human being itself was to be characterized by mediating creative activity. The political/economic analyses in *Capital* reveal that in the capitalist mode of social relations, the power of creativity which is made possible by the presence of the idea (as negation) in human consciousness is brought for sale on the market. This sale is an act of desperation. "Free" of means of production, "free" of commodities to either sell or to meet basic needs, the would-be capitalist laborer has no choice.¹⁶ Labor power is sold but activated; it is "purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live."¹⁷ As a result, this power to produce, to mediate, to alter reality by enacting the alteration of form originally "seen" only ideally, is purchased and put to use realizing products, commodities -- ultimately realizing only one thing -- surplus-value, capital. "The point is that of all the millions of commodities that are exchanged, there is only one that is alive, the living laborer" (*PON*, 200). And so the freedom of form is enslaved to one form. The human capacity to inform the world is enslaved to capital. What is needed is a revolution. But what is a revolution but a turning around or an overturning? What is revolution but a negation? And what is the organ of negation if not the Idea?

Revolution and Second Negation:

11. The first negation is the first revolution. For Dunayevskaya this was the negation enacted in the Russian revolution. This is a "no" to capitalism and manifests itself as the mere negation of the institution. In it, the worker carries out a revolution by a negation of her status in the capitalist system. Here the worker says "I am *not* wage labor." But this initial negation is merely preliminary and has no direction. This is because it is not yet self-conscious. The negation of the negation occurs when this act of self-determination "hears itself speak" (ref. *PON*, 105). The revolutionary truly hears herself denying her status as capitalist labor and, for the first time, understands its meaning. What does it mean to say that I am not wage labor? It involves a recognition of the positive content of the original negation. By hearing her own self-determination in the "no" to capitalism, the revolutionary recognizes herself as the Subject of revolution: the one who *can* say no -- the mediator, the free subject of the movement itself. It is one thing to say that a condition is unwanted but it is quite another to understand the power involved in the ability to both think and enact the alteration of the unwanted.[18](#)

12. This is real self-consciousness. I am the one who can say no. I myself am the source of the negative. No longer is it a mere "I am *not* wage labor" but now, the positive content reveals itself, "I *am* not wage labor". This is an understanding of the power of negativity. This is the equivalent of saying "I am the revolution" or, perhaps even more precisely, "I am the revolutionary." This is, I believe, true class consciousness -- consciousness that as a member of the laboring class I *am* the source of the valorization of capital, the source of its undoing and also, beyond that, the creativity that will envision and build a new future. The positive in the negative here is that I can say no -- that negation is possible, that negation is my possibility. I am negativity but negativity is my positivity. It is through negation after all that the world is changed. It is through negation that we produce anew and that, therefore, the idea(1) enters the world.

13. What is unleashed then is creativity itself. The second negativity involves the human being (humanity) hearing its act of self-determination as such. It is, therefore, a very special kind of consciousness. A coming to self-consciousness. As the recognition of the inadequacy of mere negation, as the recognition of the positivity of the act of negation itself as negativity, it entails humanity's self-consciousness as revolutionary. It is revolutionary being (human being) thinking itself. It is to know oneself as the source of negation and, therefore, to know oneself as a source of the movement of the real. The source of all movement is the contradiction of the actual. What is, might not be. What is not yet, might be. In hearing my own act of negation as a self-determination, I see myself for the first time clearly. I also, therefore, see humanity as this being -- the being of negativity, the dialectical being, the being which is the source of creativity -- and self-determination as an absolute right.

14. Here then is the ontology that I think reaches back to Dunayevskaya's earliest understanding of the Marxism humanism. The human being is the source of change and, therefore, the true source of capitalism's surplus-value. It is the fact that the human being possesses labor-power, the potential to produce more than s/he requires to re-produce herself physically from day to day, that capitalism can put labor to use as the source of surplus-value. It is, in short, human creativity, dialectical being, that allows capitalism to

operate but in capitalism this is not yet self-conscious. I do not yet realize that I am the creative being. And so, the second negation is the negation of the form of social relations that is capitalism and, because the specific operation of capitalism involves the enslavement of the negation itself (the creative power of the human being), the negation of the negation is the real return of the human being to herself, the 'freedom of freedom' if you will and thus the ultimate humanism. The consciousness achieved in the second negativity, consciousness of oneself as the source of negation, consciousness of one's nature as creative of the movement of the real, must necessarily be a simultaneous consciousness of the absolute injustice of the exchange of a wage for labor-power -- not a mere formal or legal injustice but a real injustice. The becoming of the Absolute Idea is, therefore, the liberation of *human* being. At the moment at which humanity knows itself to be the source of negation, capitalism will be obsolete. When such self-consciousness occurs it will necessarily entail a reappropriation of the human capacity. The vital recognition is that this positive negation is mine and cannot be authentically lived unless it is mine. Since capitalism requires the service and subservience of this ability, this self-consciousness enacted *is* the eradication of capitalism.

15. Negation is, therefore, absolute because, to quote Hegel, contradiction is the "root of all movement and life, and it is only insofar as it contains a contradiction that anything moves and has impulse and activity" (*PON*, 61).¹⁹ Or, to bring it back to Marx, "there is nothing immutable but the abstraction of the movement -- *mors immortalis*."²⁰ If indeed all is movement, and if indeed the contradiction is the source of the movement, and if further the human being is the self-determined source of the negativity that can serve as contradiction to any actuality, then humanity is, in this sense, absolute. Therefore, the Idea that is freedom, even operating *as it always must* on the level of the particular, is still absolute.²¹

Freedom Realized as The New Society

16. This is the first true freedom of humanity. It is only when the human being as self-determination hears herself speak that she truly understands what freedom is. Freedom has become self-conscious. It knows itself. It is not as some abstract right granted by institutions. Real freedom is the self-known self-possession of one's creativity. If I, as the source of negativity that produces the contradiction that is the source of movement and life, understand myself as such, I return myself to myself; I recognize myself as free. The actual is no longer a prison of determination but the field of the potential world to come. From the actual I am invited to enact my being freely. Likewise, in the self-recognition that is the second negativity I see, for the first time, the other, not as a competitor but as also mediator and, therefore, also free. I understand that there can be no freedom which does not simultaneously will the freedom of the other.²²

17. Thus the second negativity which is the self-determination involved in the first negativity hearing itself speak -- "that is *my* voice" -- is a new beginning. It is, in some sense, the only beginning, at very least the first self-conscious and free beginning. As Dunayevskaya says, it is "not just a new continent of thought, but a new kind of person" (*PON*, 227). If I am the freedom that moves reality, then I am not merely creative in a

loose sort of aesthetic sense, but I am ultimately and completely responsible for my being. It is ironic in some sense that Dunayevskaya was so critical of Sartre because, as we see here, her position leads to the kind of existential responsibility promoted by Sartre in "Existentialism is a Humanism."²³ What I am as the free being is responsible, but I must recognize the meaning of my freedom. As this second negation is the first true freedom it is also then the first true responsibility and therefore the first true sociality. As Marx repeatedly says, Man is a social being. For the first time a genuine social ethic is possible not through the imposition of externally grounded and externally validated moral strictures, but as the conscious enactment of my being. Self-liberation is the unleashing of the very possibility of my being human, i.e., ethical, the overcoming of "the contradiction between the individual and society or between what we would call petty bourgeois individualism and the truly social individual" (*PON*, 39).

18. The absolute Idea is, in this manner, "internalized" by which it is made concrete in a realization simultaneously individual and universal that I am the movement of the real. In that realization, the Absolute Idea becomes one's form of being. I know myself as the source of movement and know, therefore, myself as the true author of the reality that will result from my action. Thought and practice truly unite here finally in and as self-consciousness which takes upon itself the burden of true freedom. "[H]uman thought is inseparable from human activity and both result from the overpowering urge to freedom" (*PON*, 132). My envisionments will become out reality. Humanism is its own end.

19. Here then is the Marxian totality of which Dunayevskaya speaks captured best in Marx's own words.

Communism . . . as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social being -- a return become conscious . . . the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity. . . .

The entire movement of history is, therefore, both its actual act of genesis and also for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its coming-to-be.²⁴

That the process of its coming to be is "comprehended and known" is the self-determination hearing itself speak. We return to the Hegelian quotation which we now, in the presence of the Marxian analysis, begin to hear. ". . . [T]he Idea freely releases itself in absolute self-security and self-repose. By reason of this freedom, the form of its definiteness also is utterly free. . . . The self-determination in which alone the idea is, is to hear itself speak" (*PON*, 72). Hearing the Idea speak in our own voices we have released (freed) the Idea as the freedom of form in unleashed human creativity.

20. What then is the understanding of the absolute nature of self-transcendence and the understanding of the human being as the responsible conduit of this transcendence? What is the result of the self-consciousness that is the second negativity? It must be, in some very real sense, an existence as revolutionary. If the human being is in her very being the

source of negation and that negation is the continual transformation of the real, then the lived being of humanity is the appropriation of this very being. It is, therefore, a revolution in permanence. "For the Notion is revolutionary politics, not in the narrowly political sense as the 'organizational vanguardists ' would have us believe, but in the sense of 1917: free creative power" (*PON*, 133). But notice how the notion of revolution has changed. We always consider revolution to be revolution against, marked by discontent, sometimes even violence, and a desire that wants nothing more than the escape of the present condition. Here we must be talking about revolution for, marked by joyous restlessness, a harmonization of ends, and a desire that pushes a vision of the human potential into realization. Not a permanent realization of some utopian dream but the vision required and indeed integral to the activity of mediation, always overturning itself for the sake of the good of the individual in society and the society of individuals. The appropriation of freedom itself for the sake of the realization of humanity.

21. One need only think of the kinds of irrationalities that govern our social milieu to understand what such freedom might mean. We have the technology for fuel cell vehicles and yet we continue to deplete resources of natural gas and pollute the environment. This is not rational. We could extend the use of post-consumer recycling yet we continue to deplete natural resources and pollute the environment. This is not rational. We could utilize wind energy to produce electricity and yet. . . . The list could go on and on. When we ask ourselves why we do not enact the more rational measures the answer comes back: too costly for the industry, would result in the raising of prices, would require a total restructuring, etc. In short, "not in capital's best interest." I find that answer unacceptable. What is in humanity's best interest? The question almost answers itself. I am reminded of Plato's injunction that we should always measure the real by the standard of the ideal and not vice versa. We need to take back our being for the first time. Enough is enough. "So, both revolution and totality *as new beginnings* would start, not just a new continent of *thought*, but a new kind of *person*" (*PON*, 227).

Conclusions:

22. If what I have said in the preceding pages regarding *The Power of Negativity* is correct, then there are several immediate benefits to be derived from following Dunayevskaya's lead on the Hegel-Marx connection:

1. We obtain a better and more nuanced understanding of Hegel. Dunayevskaya allows us to understand that the Absolute Idea as a new beginning is entirely consistent with the Hegelian project. We are urged to see that we need not give up on Hegel because of the abstraction of his idealism. Marx certainly never did. He understood that we could not give up on Hegel, the true philosopher of movement, but that we could locate his Absolute Idea not in a transcendent space as an ideal principle driving its actualization with as much iron determinism as any scientific materialism, but rather as humanity's self-consciousness as the source of the new society.
2. We obtain a better and more nuanced understanding of Marx. Dunayevskaya's reintroduction of Hegel provides the only adequate understanding of the historical or

dialectical materialism. One sees that the actual material world is the field of ideal possibility. Dialectical negation is the engine of movement -- human negation is dialectical creation. The dialectic is no mere external force of mere theoretical form of the movement but is the movement itself. Any uncritical positing of a vulgar determinism is out of the question.

3. We obtain a better and more nuanced understanding of revolution. Dunayevskaya insists that we pay attention to Hegel, that we probe the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* again and again so that we can comprehend that revolution is not a mere violent negation of the extant but a coming to consciousness of our own being human -- not a party-line dictating the activities of its members but the unity of our thought and action which is the new society.

23. Several final conclusions emerge from the understandings thus achieved. It is clear that we do not yet hear ourselves speak the first revolution. We are still trying to think the dialectic and our thought in this regard is still so inadequate as to need to be brought back to it again and again. We are still trying to speak the dialectic and because we are still trying to speak it we have yet to hear ourselves speak. There are stirrings of course. This Dunayevskaya saw clearly. There is discontent clearly evidenced in mass movements (ref. *PON*, 245). There are ongoing struggles across the globe -- struggles against. We do not yet hear what these struggles reveal about the creative power of the working class. And until such time as we do, we will not yet have realized the revolution and ushered in the revolution in permanence.

24. But this realization takes us beyond Dunayevskaya because it leads us to see as primary the issue of how such consciousness is elicited. In a developed capitalist nation like the United States although we need to still fight constantly for the shorter workday, for lesser exploitation, for better benefits, for greater job security, etc, although we still need to take to the streets in protest against unjust actions engaged in by our government in our names, although we still need to battle discrimination and oppression on every front, there may be a larger battle to be fought and won. We need to battle for the coming-to-be of human consciousness and this battle will not be easy. More and more our airwaves, our television stations, our magazines, our newspapers are being dominated, controlled by huge corporate conglomerates. The recent loosening of the FCC's ownership regulations should serve as notice that the hegemonic control of consciousness is of primary importance to national and global corporations. Clearly capitalists have become aware of the importance of reproducing an ideology of disempowerment which could, on the view I have sketched out above, only be called an anti-humanism. We must respond in kind. It is a struggle for our shared future.

25. From this we can also conclude that class consciousness is still *the* issue for class consciousness is the revolution. This is not to be taken to mean that the "lower" classes need to become conscious of their "plight"; that would entail merely the negative consciousness. We need to go beyond that to the second negativity -- the positive hidden within the negative. The laboring class needs to become conscious of its power as the creative agency that drives capitalist profits and the creative agency that is the hope,

vision, and possibility of the new society. In other words, class consciousness entails the genuine empowerment of humanity itself. There is no question of laying out a blueprint for the future. We cannot know what we will do until we know that we are the doing.

[go to this back issue's index](#)
[home](#)

Endnotes

[1](#) Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), ref. p. 129. Hereafter referred to in-text in parenthetical reference as *PON*.

[2](#) Raya Dunayevskaya, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre, and from Marx to Mao*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

[3](#) For the important material on Marxian labor see, Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 Until Today* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), Chapters 3-5 and 7.

[4](#) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 30.

[5](#) Nor, should I add, need we prove the materialism of Marx. But some readings of Marx's materialism have been somewhat overzealous. We need to understand Marx's materialism as a declaration of the dialectical interdependence of the material and ideal and not a statement about Marx's rejection of the idea. Ideas, for Marx, emerge from within a actual world that is given and it is the "given-ness" of this world that serves as the unalterable social stratum (the materialism) within which we engage ourselves as social beings. But note well, that this actual world includes extent and prevalent ideas as well. This is, to my mind, the importance of Marx's talk of the world as "social."

[6](#) I am taking the quotes from Hegel directly from Dunayevskaya's text for consistency in translation. The equivalent passage can be found in A.V. Miller trans., *Hegel's Science of Logic* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc.), p. 825.

[7](#) Ref. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans., T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), § 81.

[8](#) Ref. G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).

[9](#) Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 76.

[10](#) *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[11](#) Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 283, 284.

[12](#) *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[13](#) Personally, I do not subscribe to a substance metaphysics, preferring the process model. However, the point here is that whether one is to say that there is something underlying the change or not, the change itself requires explanation.

[14](#) Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §160.

[15](#) Marx, *Capital*, p. 284.

[16](#) For the description of this double freedom of the worker see Marx, *Capital*, pp. 272-3.

[17](#) Marx, *Capital*, p. 290.

[18](#) It is important to note that such understanding arises only within and as a part of given historical/material conditions. Here the contradictions and crises that emerge from the functioning of capitalism as a form of social relations can serve as this material basis. Should one pursue this line of inquiry further it would become necessary to ask how these conditions serve as the ground from which such consciousness can emerge. But this would require a full-scale analysis of the formation of consciousness within the capitalist form of social relations, an important project no doubt, but one which is well beyond the scope of this reflection.

[19](#) Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 439.

[20](#) Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, trans., H Quelch (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), p. 119.

[21](#) This discussion should sorely embarrass the social/political realists: those who maintain that the current system cannot be changed or is somehow eternal, those who claim that idealistic or utopian thinking is "not realistic" and to be eliminated. There is no realism that, on this account, is not ultimately ideological.

[22](#) If this sounds like a Sartrean ethic, it certainly is. For an excellent discussion of this see Thomas Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: the Test Case of Collective Responsibility*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[23](#) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd.).

[24](#) Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 102-3.

Contents copyright © 2004 by Anne Fairchild Pomeroy

Format copyright © 2004 by *Cultural Logic*, ISSN 1097-3087.