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## Review Article

### Raya Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism

*Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 Until Today.* By Raya Dunayevskaya. New York: Columbia UP, Morningside edition, 1989. Pp. xxiii, 388. \$50.00. Paper, \$17.50.

*The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism: two historic-philosophic writings.* By Raya Dunayevskaya. Chicago: News and Letters 59, 1989. Pp. xii, 52. \$10.00. Paper, \$3.00.

Between the seventeenth century and the twentieth, I see three periods which I would designate by the names of men who dominated them: there is the "moment" of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel, finally that of Marx. These three philosophies become, each in its turn, the humus of every particular thought and the horizon of all culture; there is no going beyond them so long as man has not gone beyond the historical moment which they express.

Jean-Paul Sartre

A humanist Marxism that sought to recover the subjective side of Marx's ideas along with the Hegelian roots of the Marxian dialectic has long been associated with works like Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*, Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, and Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Somewhat less well known than these men is the late Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-1987) who was the author of three fundamental works of humanist Marxism, *Marxism and Freedom* (under review here), *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973) and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982). Also under review here is the posthumous, *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism* (TPMMH), which contains her 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes (what she calls, her "philosophic moment") and her last "Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy" (1987). The new 12-

page introduction to *Marxism and Freedom*, taken from a 1985 presentation at Wayne State University, which houses her papers (The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection), is an important addition to this new edition. It gives us information on the author's intellectual development from 1941 to 1985, on issues ranging from Hegel, Marx, and post-Marx Marxism, to her involvement in Women's Liberation and the Black dimension of American freedom struggles, as well as the relationship of her idea of Marxist-Humanism to organization. The question of organization is the focus of Dunayevskaya's last writing, as she was working on a new book, *The Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy: The 'Party' and Forms of Organization Born out of Spontaneity* (included in *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism*). As the new introduction to *Marxism and Freedom* provides an overview of all her work, *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism* gives us a fascinating glance at its origins, as well as her last reflections. For those who are familiar with *Marxism and Freedom* these new materials give another vantage point from which to uncover the richness and contemporaneity of her work.

Over the past twenty years much has been written, and rightly so, on Korsch, Lukacs, Marcuse and Gramsci, not only because of the questions they posed but also because they represent, at least in part, what Dunayevskaya calls "the Great Divide in Marxism" (*Marxism and Freedom*, hereafter M&F, 167): Each felt compelled to return to the Hegelian roots of the Marxian dialectic. This divide began with Lenin's reading of Hegel's *Logic* (1914-15), especially its last section on Notion, as seen in his famous *Philosophic Notebooks*. According to Dunayevskaya, Lenin's reading of Hegel led him to a completely different appreciation of dialectics. That Lenin could write, while reading Hegel, that "cognition not only interprets the objective world but creates it" and praises "intelligent idealism" over "crude materialism," is still a phenomenon too often glossed over by Marxists. For Lenin, dialectics took on new relevance as the dialectics of national liberation, specifically the Irish revolt, which Lenin believed could act as a "bacillus" for the proletarian revolution. Yet what did this mean for the post World War Two period? As Lenin reached Hegel's Absolute Idea in the *Logic* he noted that for Hegel "practice is higher than theoretical knowledge, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also immediate actuality." (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.38, 213) For Lenin this meant that "the whole thing now is *practice*, that the historical moment has arrived when theory is being transformed into practice, vitalized by practice." (quoted in TPMMH, 51). Dunayev-

skaya argued that the last paragraph of Hegel's *Logic*, a paragraph that Lenin had thought unimportant, took on great relevance for our age. It is in the last paragraph that Hegel writes of "absolute liberation":

the pure idea, in which the determinateness of reality is itself raised to the level of Notion, is an absolute liberation, having no further immediate determinateness which is not equally posited and equally notion. Consequently there is no transition in this freedom. (quoted in TPMMH, 37).

Dunayevskaya believed that this could be the basis for a new "Notion"; one where "everyone experiences 'absolute liberation: ' " a "Notion" which builds from the experience of the Russian revolution but also includes the experience of the following decades. "Now everyone looks at the totalitarian one-party state," Dunayevskaya writes, "*that* is the new that must be overcome by a totally new revolt."<sup>1</sup> This view, first developed in 1953, was the ground for her subsequent work, including *Marxism and Freedom*.

Raya Dunayevskaya, of the handful of post World War II Marxists who turned to the Hegelian dialectic, did so not in general, as Lukacs and Gramsci had done earlier but probed the culmination of Hegel's philosophy in his Absolutes. She saw in Hegel's Absolutes not pinnacles but what she called "a dual movement" a movement from practice that was itself "a form of theory and the movement from theory that is itself a form of philosophy and revolution." (TPMMH, vii). Central to this movement was the struggle of Blacks for freedom. Dunayevskaya writes of the Abolitionist movement as "one of the most glorious pages in American history" (M&F, 279), where white intellectuals became "the means by which a social movement—the movement of slaves for freedom—expressed itself." (M&F, 280) It was a truly American movement. Just as Marx separated himself from those who avoided the question of the slave's fight for freedom and spoke abstractly of their opposition to wage and chattel slavery, Dunayevskaya argues that "American politics has always been expressed in its sharpest form" (M&F, 279) in the Black struggle for freedom.

The crisis in production manifests itself in society as a whole, where the opposition to it includes what Marx called "new passion and new forces" which like women's liberation and youth movements may be outside production, yet whose questioning and struggles strike at the heart of capitalist society.

Specifically, she designated the post-World War II age as “an age of Absolutes.” On one hand, she held, we had to confront the fact that the Stalinist counter-revolution had destroyed the Russian revolution and transformed it into its opposite—state capitalism. Furthermore, this state capitalism (Dunayevskaya’s original analysis of Russia as a state-capitalist society is contained in *Marxism and Freedom*) was, along with the statification of U.S. capitalism, part of the new world stage of capitalism which was nuclear armed and threatening the survival of humanity. “Today we live in an age of Absolutes,” Dunayevskaya writes,

in an age where the contradictions are so total that the counter-revolution is in the very innards of the revolution. In seeking to overcome this total, this absolute contradiction, we are on the threshold of true freedom and therefore can understand better than any previous age Hegel’s most abstract concepts. (M&F, 41)

The workers response to the new stage of production—automation—was both revolt, as in East Germany in 1953, and outright revolution in Hungary in 1956. In the U.S., the very nature of work itself was questioned, as workers had asked in the 1949-50 miners strike in which Dunayevskaya was intimately involved, “What sort of labor should man do? Why should there be a gulf between thinking and doing?” (M&F, 3). What Dunayevskaya would spend the next thirty-odd years working out was how to create a new unity of theory and practice by being rooted in both the movement from practice as well as developing Marx’s Marxism for this age—what she called Marxist-Humanism.

The subtitle of the book “From 1776 Until Today” discloses its actual structure, the “movement from practice.” Part One is called “From Practice to Theory” and is spelt out in the title of the first chapter, “The Age of Revolutions: Industrial, Social-Political, Intellectual,” which ends with a section, “Hegel’s Absolutes and Our Age of Absolutes.” Already one can see that the first chapter, which takes up the activities of the Parisian masses, especially the *sans-culottes*, from which “the young Marx drew... the principles of revolutionary socialism,” (M&F, 32-3) as well as from the Philosophers of the French Revolution (Rousseau, Kant, Hegel), is situated within the context of “today’s” problematic: “Can man be free?” It was Hegel who met the challenge of the French Revolution and completely reorganized the premise of philosophy. In Hegel’s Absolute, Dunayevskaya writes,

there is embedded, though in abstract form, the full development of the social individual, what Hegel would call individuality ‘purified of all

that interferes with its universalism, i.e. freedom itself.' Here are the objective and subjective means whereby a new society, struggling to be born, is the concern of our age. (M&F, 39).

In a sense Hegel and Marx meet with the French Revolution and the question "What happens after revolution?" Hegel's accommodation with the Prussian state was a result of his wish to find a universal that could be above the particular opposing interests of bourgeois society. "Because Hegel could not conceive the *masses* as 'Subject' creating a new society," Dunayevskaya argues, "Hegelian philosophy... was compelled to return to Kant's idea of an *external* unifier of opposites. Hegel had destroyed all dogmatism except the dogmatism of the 'backwardness of the masses.' (M&F, 38). Marx was not satisfied with the political arguments for Hegel's accommodation with the status quo. Already in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, considered by many Marxists an application of Feuerbach's method to Hegel's work, Marx argues that "Hegel's true interest is not the Philosophy of Right but the Logic." For Marx, Hegel's accommodation with the state results from what Dunayevskaya calls "the *dehumanization* of the Idea," as though it is consciousness not human beings thinking thoughts. Marx writes that "in place of human actuality Hegel has placed Absolute Knowledge."

The first edition of *Marxism and Freedom* came off the press in 1957 and contained the original English translation of Marx's 1844 *Humanist Essays* as well as Lenin's Notebooks on Hegel's *Logic*. Although the 1844 *Humanist Essays* have been extensively discussed, few have dealt with Marx's "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic." Many Marxists have all too quickly jumped to the conclusion that Marx used Feuerbach's "transformative method" to criticize Hegel, yet Dunayevskaya suggests that it is in this essay that Marx criticizes Feuerbach and praises Hegel's "negation of the negation" and the "dialectic of negativity as the moving and creative principle," and goes through all of Hegel's major works, noting Marx's conclusion of "transcendence as an objective moment" in the Hegelian dialectic.

The idea of a new humanism as the vision of the future society was central to Marx's project and is to Dunayevskaya also. She finds through a "materialistic reading" of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* her "philosophic moment" for Marxist-Humanism. It was the idea of "absolute liberation" in the *Logic* that Hegel says "perfects its self-liberation in the *Philosophy of Spirit*" which led Dunayevskaya to work out the last three syllogisms of the *Philosophy of Mind* where Hegel, instead of closing the door to his "system" ended his presenta-

tion with the unceasing movement of the dialectic, manifested in "the self-bringing forth of freedom" and "the self-thinking Idea." Dunayevskaya believes she found "a new Hegel" (M&F, 9).

"It is the nature of the fact," Hegel wrote, "the notion, which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition." (M&F, 42)

It was in "mind," unshackled by Marx, who refused "to consider Hegel's Notion was related only to thoughts" (M&F, 10) that Dunayevskaya saw inherent the mass movements as the new society attempting to be born.

Part three, the core of the book on Marx, which I will discuss later, is subtitled "A Unity of Theory and Practice." It is this unity that Dunayevskaya argues is needed in Part five, "The Problem of Our Age: State Capitalism vs. Freedom," which returns to the "movement from practice as a form of theory" as Dunayevskaya has worked it out. "The main difficulty in seeing the elements of the new society in the present," Dunayevskaya asserts,

is that workers repeat many of the ideas of the ruling class until the very day the explosive break actually occurs....The elements of the new society present in the old are everywhere in evidence in the thoughts and lives of the working class. Where the workers think their own thoughts, there must be the intellectual to absorb the new impulses." (M&F, 282, 286)

Perhaps Dunayevskaya is able to glide so smoothly through Marx's categories because of her adherence to the dialectic and her refusal to separate theory and practice. Thus the discussion of the 1844 *Humanist Essays* is presaged by a discussion of the actual class struggle of the Silesian weavers revolt which necessitated Marx's break with Arnold Ruge. Marx wrote: "The Silesian uprisings began where the French and English insurrections ended, with the consciousness of the proletariat as a class." (M&F, 54). Dunayevskaya follows Marx in focussing on labor because it is "first of all the function of man. But labor *under capitalism* is the very specific function of man working at machines to which he becomes an appendage." (M&F, 56). With Marx's concept of alienated labor, we are again taken back to Hegel, but Dunayevskaya argues that the contradictions in society cannot be solved only by philosophy; "only the revolutionary activity of the masses will do away with the alienation of labor." (M&F, 58) Yet this does not mean the abolition of philosophy, on the contrary, what is needed is a philosophy of revolution, what Dunayevskaya calls "a total

outlook" which becomes realized, is so entwined with activity that the revolution become permanent. Dunayevskaya tells us in the new introduction that her original analysis of the Russian five-year plans, written when she and C.L.R. James had been co-leaders of the state capitalist tendency in the Workers' Party, had been connected to Marx's article "Alienated Labor" but had been turned down for publication. Herbert Marcuse, who was the first to write a serious analysis of Marx's *Humanist Essays* in Germany in 1932 and who drew out the centrality philosophy to economics, especially Marx's essay "Alienated Labor," wrote in the preface to *Marxism and Freedom*,

Dunayevskaya's book goes beyond the previous interpretations. It shows not only that Marxian economics and politics are throughout philosophy, but that the latter is from the beginning politics and economics. (M&F, 11).

Marcuse did not accept Dunayevskaya's analysis of connecting Hegel's Absolutes to the idea of "full liberation," and questioned the present-day relevance of the Marxian notion of the working class. On the other hand, Dunayevskaya argued that interpenetration of subjective and objective,

takes precedence over economics, politics, philosophy, or rather refuses to be rent asunder into three and wants to be one, the knowledge that you can be free. (TPMMH, 40)

In her 1953 Letters on Hegel's Absolutes it is *Capital* rather than Marx's *Humanist Essays* which Dunayevskaya connects to Hegel's "Absolute Idea." She contended,

just as Marx's development of the form of the commodity and money came from Hegel's syllogistic U P I [universal, particular, individual], so the Accumulation of Capital (the General Absolute Law) is based on the Absolute Idea. (TPMMH, 38)

Central to *Marxism and Freedom* are the eighty pages devoted to *Capital*. These pages still contain the most probing analysis I know. Whereas other writers, such as Rosdolsky, have seen a connection between Hegel's *Logic* and the *Grundrisse*, and thus to *Capital*, Dunayevskaya's examination of *Capital* does not rest on collapsing Marx's categories into Hegel's. The point is that Marx recreates the Hegelian dialectic on new ground. It is in this sense that Dunayevskaya's narrative of *Capital* comes alive. "Under the impact of the Civil War," Dunayevskaya writes, Marx "gave an entirely new structure to his theoretical work." It represents a "break with the concept of

theory” as a debate between theoreticians and the limits of a strictly theoretical work like the 1859 *Critique of Political Economy*. Yes, Marx’s original contribution, the two-fold character of labor, is in the *Critique*, but *Capital* undergoes what Marx calls a “turnaround.” “Where in his *Critique*, history is the history of theory; in *Capital*, history is the history of class struggle.” (M&F, 89). So up-to-date is *Capital* that it is not until 1866, after the end of the U.S. Civil War that Marx works out the seventy pages on the working day, and the struggle to shorten it. Marx wrote:

In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours’ agitation. (quoted in M&F, 84).

This new relation of theory with the activity of the workers represents the break with Hegel: “It is this that distinguishes it from Hegel’s *Logic* and yet contains it, for *Capital* is the dialectic of bourgeois society, its development and downfall.” (M&F 91).

Dunayevskaya argues that the changes Marx made between the 1867 German edition and the 1872-5 French edition of *Capital* (we still do not have an English edition based on that edition), are perhaps even more important. It was on the basis of the Paris Commune of 1871 that Marx rewrote his famous section “Fetishism of Commodities.” The Commune showed that the commodity form, which arose from specific value form of labor under capitalism, could have no other appearance because it was the truth of how things really are. Thus reification was related specifically to labor being transformed into a thing and the laborer’s fight against this thingification. It was only with the “freely-associated labor” of the Commune that Marx discovered the form that could strip away the fetishism of commodities. Thus Marxism is seen as “a theory of liberation or it is nothing” (M&F, 22); it is the “theoretical expression of the instinctive strivings of the proletariat for liberation.” (M&F, 89).

Dunayevskaya makes *Capital* so contemporary because that is exactly what Marx did. A philosophy of revolution, by its nature, cannot come on the scene, like the Owl of Minerva, after the event, its very nature is engagement in the world. As Gramsci put it in the “Problem of Marxism:”



...the philosophy of praxis is a reform and a development of Hegelianism... it is consciousness full of contradictions, in which the philosopher himself... not only grasps those contradictions but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to the principle of knowledge and therefore action. (*Prison Notebooks*, 404-5).

Dunayevskaya encourages us to "have our ears attuned to the new impulses from the workers." Nevertheless, she argues, that is where the task for intellectuals begins. Dunayevskaya took that task seriously enough to spend the next thirty years practicing it, as she tells us in the new introduction: "the dialectic logic of the Idea moves in the direction of what was implicit in the movement from practice," (M&F, 6) what needs to be done is to make that explicit. Today it is more obvious than ever before that ideas have a material force. Counter-revolution always has a material base but ideology too can play a determining role. On the other hand, revolutionary ideas are for the most part, until the hour of revolution strikes, the only weapon revolutionaries have. A need for discussion and openness to ideas is, therefore, a prerequisite for any revolutionary movement.

#### NOTES

1. TPMMH, 37. This quote is taken from her May 12th, 1953 letter which concentrates on Hegel's *Logic* and is specifically concerned with the last paragraph of that work, which Lenin had considered "unimportant" in his *Notebooks* (Collected Works Vol. 38).