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[For the Resurgence of Dialectic]
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First Installment in the Series: The Significance of Jean-Paul Sartre and Henri Lefebvre in Resurgence Efforts of Marx's Dialectic

Second Installment in the Series: The Significance of Jean-Paul Sartre and Henri Lefebvre in Resurgence Efforts of Marx's Dialectic

Third Installment in the Series: The Significance of Jean-Paul Sartre and Henri Lefebvre in Resurgence Efforts of Marx's Dialectic

Fourth Installment in the Series: Sartre’s Critical Interpretation of *Theses on Feuerbach*

Afterword by the translator

The resurgence of dialectic is a critical component to resurrecting Marxism and the Marxist dialectic. Both historical materialism, which was named by Friedrich Engels, and dialectical materialism, named by Georgi Plekhanov, only serve to explain materialism and trim down dialectic to mere method. In consequence, Marx's original dialectic, created via the criticism of Hegel's dialectic, is still understood by very few scholars and its place in the development of history is even harder to grasp.

In a previously published article (Omote 2012), I note that the most serious defect of Marxism has been the dualism of subject–object. Both Hegel and Marx worked with the ontological problem of the monism of subject–object beyond such an epistemological paradigm; as such, Engels could be held responsible for the creation of defective Marxism.

Can we resurrect Marx's dialectic by criticizing Engels, who named something else as dialectic? Or

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will it bring nothing instructive, as many brilliant criticisms against Engels have already been published (Cf. Levin 1975)?

Jean-Paul Sartre and Henri Lefebvre are two men who understood most profoundly Marx's criticism against Hegel's dialectic, which he unfolded in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Theses on Feuerbach*. This paper seeks to resurrect Marx's dialectic by investigating the studies of Sartre and Lefebvre.

The toughest opponents in this investigation are Louis Althusser and Wataru Hiromatsu (the latter of whom was a Japanese philosopher who lived from 1933 – 1994), who were strong proponents of the scientific epistemology learned from Engels and contributed substantially to the extinction of Marx's dialectic. I will also examine the defects in Althusser and Hiromatsu's theories on the path to resurrecting Sartre and Lefebvre.

1. Engels's dualism of subject-object and its ill effects

In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels writes:

Dialectics ····· comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending. Such processes ····· are, therefore, so many corroborations of its own method of procedure.

Nature is the proof of dialectics ·····

An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectics with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive or retrogressive changes. (Engels 1987, pp. 23–24)

Engels had already argued here both his own dialectic and picture theory. He considers dialectic as the universal law of motion and asserts that the concepts reflect the law. That is, the subject (or brain) reflects nature as an object and the human beings as one whole. Where did Engels get such dualism of subject–object or the epistemological misperception of such? It originates from the epistemology of the neo-Kantian school, which swept the German philosophical community at the turn of the century.

Engels, then, would appreciate Hegel only out of intellectual respect, criticizing him by the restrictions of the era and his "upside down" views, about which Engels' explanation is not entirely clear:

In this system [=the Hegelian system]—and herein is its great merit—for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development. From this point of view the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild whirl of senseless deeds of violence ...
but as the process of evolution of man himself. It was now the task of the intellect to follow the gradual march of this process through all its devious ways, and to trace out the inner law running through all its apparently accidental phenomena. ... Although Hegel was ... the most encyclopaedic mind of his time, yet he was limited, first, by the necessarily limited extent of his own knowledge and, second, by the limited extent and depth of the knowledge and conceptions of his age. To these limits a third must be added. Hegel was an idealist. To him the thoughts within his brain were not the more or less abstract pictures of actual things and processes, but, conversely, things and their evolution were only the realised pictures of the "Idea," existing somewhere from eternity before the world was. This way of thinking turned everything upside down, and completely reversed the actual connection of things in the world. ... The Hegelian system, in itself, was a colossal miscarriage—but it was also the last of its kind. It was suffering, in fact, from an internal and incurable contradiction. Upon the one hand, its essential proposition was the conception that human history is a process of evolution, which, by its very nature, cannot find its intellectual final term in the discovery of any so-called absolute truth. But, on the other hand, it laid claim to being the very essence of this absolute truth. A system of natural and historical knowledge, embracing everything, and final for all time, is a contradiction to the fundamental laws of dialectic reasoning. (Engels 1987, pp. 24–25)

In this way, Engels criticizes Hegel’s establishment of a system of the absolute truth, which Engel considers a contradiction. But such a contradiction is considered superficial by those who understand Hegel objectively, and such criticism as Engel’s does not explain the origin of the contradiction. Further, is it not a dialectic attitude to neglect Hegel on the ground of contradiction?

What lies behind such light-minded criticism of Hegel is Engels’ materialism, which he explains as follows:

... modern materialism sees in the latter [=history] the process of evolution of humanity, it being its task to discover the laws of motion thereof. ... Modern materialism embraces the more recent discoveries of natural science, according to which nature also has its history in time, the celestial bodies, like the organic species ...being born and perishing. ... In both cases modern materialism is essentially dialectic, and no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences. As soon as each special science is bound to make clear its position in the great totality of things and of our knowledge of things, a special science dealing with this totality is superfluous. That which still survives, independently, of all earlier philosophy is the science of thought and its laws ... formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history. (Engels 1987, pp. 25–26)

Engels’ “modern materialism” has nothing to do with Marx’s “new materialism” in Theses on Feuer-
bach; rather, it is more similar to what is found in *Encyclopedia (Or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts)* by Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach, and Denis Diderot. Furthermore, Engels has simplified dialectic to “the science of thought and its laws.” This additional evidence to the fact that Engels understands Hegel only from an external point of view, wherein the watcher remains inside of himself as subject. Unlike Hegel and Marx, Engels was obsessed with the epistemological misperception of the dualism of subject–object.

The party-orientation debate in pre-war Japan had similar issues. Both the “practical cognitive subject” school and the scientism of Tadashi Kato (a Japanese materialist) supported the dualism of subject–object, differing only in where to emphasize the subject or the object. The debate continued in the framework of neo-Kantian epistemology, so, inevitably, they were not able to understand Marx.¹

2. Marx’s dialectic and “new materialism,” which Engels did not understand

Engels referenced Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach for the first time in Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, but it is apparent that he did not understand Marx’s true message. To his credit, it is especially difficult to understand the first thesis, because it includes the consolidated history of philosophy; however, the point of the thesis is the monism of subject–object; that is, Marx had thrown away the previous epistemology and instead focused a great deal on the ontology.

I have already treated this point in another previous article (Omote 2006), so I will only summarize the point briefly here²:

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [Gegenstand], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was set forth abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity. In *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance. Hence

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¹) Cf. Omote 1974. I pointed out this problem in the note 1 of this previously published article, but I did not refer to the dualism of subject–object. This was my weak point. I will here reveal the proper treatment of the problem of epistemology in monism of subject–object in the third section herein.

²) Unfortunately, there are poor Japanese translations of *Theses on Feuerbach and Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, as is discussed in detail in Omote 2006. Several other scholars and myself are currently meeting twice a month to work on a better translation of *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, reviewing not only the original German text, but also French, English, and previous Japanese translations.
he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary," of "practical-critical," activity. (Marx 1976, p. 3)

Marx criticizes Feuerbach here and demands to grasp object as practice (i.e., as subject). Engels, however, did not understand Marx's intention and inevitably remained objectivist of old materialism, as Feuerbach did, and added that philosophy is the science of the law of thought. He grasped object, reality, and sensibility in the form of object and set the cognitive subject in front of them for the purposes of comprehension, because he postulated the dualism of subject—object.

Furthermore, Engels "regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude" as Feuerbach did, but Marx had previously found such attitude bourgeois in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

We shall now consider the relation to the worker, to labour and its object of this person who is alien to labour and the worker.

First it has to be noted that everything which appears in the worker as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears in the non-worker as a *state of alienation, of estrangement*.

Secondly, that the worker's *real, practical attitude* in production and to the product (as a state of mind) appears in the non-worker confronting him as a *theoretical* attitude. (Marx 1975, pp. 281–282)

Marx also criticizes the epistemological attitude in his *Second Thesis on Feuerbach*:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practise. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question. (Marx 1976, p. 3)

In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (no. 8, 9, and 10), Marx explains his new materialism, which he posits is superior to all foregoing materialisms:

8. All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

9. The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.
10. The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity. (Marx 1976, p. 5)

Marx’s “civil society” here is apparently a modern civil society based on individualism; that is, a capitalistic society and the “humane society, or social” society refers to one within an era post-class struggle (essentially, a society in which human beings can live truly as human beings). This explanation is enough to emphasize the difference between Engels’ “modern materialism” and Marx’s “new materialism.”

When did Marx fully and clearly grasp the significance of the dialectic for the first time? I assert that it was in the third manuscript, Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy and the general philosophy in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 in which, criticizing both Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx grasped the significance of the “negation of the negation” as history itself:

Feuerbach thus conceives the negation of the negation only as a contradiction of philosophy with itself—as the philosophy which affirms theology (the transcendent, etc.) after having denied it, and which it therefore affirms in opposition to itself.

The positive position or self-affirmation and self-confirmation contained in the negation of the negation is taken to be a position which is not yet sure of itself, which is therefore burdened with its opposite, which is doubtful of itself and therefore in need of proof, and which, therefore, is not a position demonstrating itself by its existence—not an acknowledged position; hence it is directly and immediately confronted by the position of sense-certainty based on itself.

But because Hegel has conceived the negation of the negation, from the point of view of the positive relation inherent in it, as the true and only positive, and from the point of view of the negative relation inherent in it as the only true act and spontaneous activity of all being, he has only found the abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history, which is not yet the real history of man as a given subject, but only the act of creation, the history of the origin of man. (Marx 1975, p. 329)

Opposite to Marx’s understanding of “negation of the negation,” Engels’ “neglection of neglection” traces the word superficially:

What is the negation of the negation? An extremely general—and for this reason extremely far-reaching and important—law of development of nature, history, and thought. ... Dialectics, however, is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought. ... Negation in dialectics does not mean simply saying no, or declaring that something does not exist, or destroying it in any way one likes. Long ago Spinoza said: Omnis determinatio est negatio—every limitation or determination is at the same time a nega-