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ON MARX, HEGEL, AND CRITICAL THEORY IN POSTWAR
GERMANY: A CONVERSATION WITH IRING FETSCHER

ABSTRACT. This paper consists of an introduction to the life and work of Iring Fetscher by the interviewer, followed by a conversation with Fetscher, and notes. In the interview, Fetscher discusses his relationship to Marxism, Hegelianism, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School, as well as his critique of Althusser. The contribution of Fetscher, an extremely well-known German specialist on Soviet and Marxist thought, is here discussed in greater detail than anywhere else to date in the English-language scholarly literature.

KEY WORDS: Marx, Hegel, critical theory, structuralism, democracy, ecology

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important interpreters of Marx in postwar Germany, where his name is almost as recognizable to the intellectual public as those of other prominent leftist thinkers such as Theodor Adorno or Jürgen Habermas, Iring Fetscher is not as well known in the English-speaking world. For three decades a Professor at the University of Frankfurt, Fetscher's work shows us another side of Frankfurt Marxism, one more directly engaged with reinterpreting Marx's work than with cultural critique, yet at the same time absorbing and responding to the writings of Adorno and his generation of Critical Theorists as well as to the Hegelian Marxism developed in the 1920's by Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch.

Born in 1922 into a liberal intellectual family, Fetscher was drafted and spent much of the Second World War on the Eastern front. As this interview shows, he first read Marx during the war. In May, 1945, a few days before the war ended, his father was killed during an SS raid on their home. After the war, Fetscher began to read Hegel and Marx more intensively while a graduate student at the University of Tübingen. A study visit to France during the late 1940's put him in contact with the French Marxist sociologist Lucien

Goldmann, and with the ideas of Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite, and other participants in the French Hegel Renaissance of that period. It was in these years that he also read Lukács. His 1950 doctoral dissertation on Hegel's philosophical anthropology, later published (Fetscher 1970), took up the *Philosophy of Mind*, the third and least-discussed volume of Hegel's systematic *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.

Soon after completing his dissertation, Fetscher became a prominent commentator on Marx in West Germany as a member of the editorial board of *Marxismusstudien*, a journal established by liberal intellectuals under the auspices of the Protestant Churches. This journal was instrumental in creating a wide-ranging debate in Germany on the young Marx during the 1950's. An earlier discussion of Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, launched during the pre-Hitler era by Herbert Marcuse ([1932] 1972) and others, had been cut off not only by Hitler's coming to power, but also by Stalinism's indifference or hostility to the young Marx. In a semi-autobiographical account he published in 1960, Fetscher noted that his work in the 1950's constituted "an attempt to analyze sociologically and critically the whole development of thought from the young Marx right up through Stalinism and its disintegration: an analysis from which emerges the picture of a tragic dialectical change from a humanistic point of view to an anti-human end" (Fetscher 1960, p. 89). Already in this essay, he was also taking issue with the interpretation of Marx by another young theorist on the left, Habermas. It was in this period as well that he began to carve out what became his Marxist humanist position.

The culmination of Fetscher's work during these years was the 100-page essay "The Relationship of Marxism to Hegel," originally published in 1960 in *Marxismusstudien* and later reprinted as the core essay in his book *Marx and Marxism*. Drawing on his earlier work on Hegel's anthropology, and heavily influenced by Lukács, Fetscher here critiques the tendency to overemphasize Feuerbach in most interpretations of the young Marx: "Commentators generally draw attention only to the influence of Feuerbach, who was certainly of some importance for Marx in his rejection of Hegel's spiritualism, but they forget to examine the extent to which the Marxian image of the human being in its essential structure is already present in Hegel"

([1967], 1971, translation slightly altered). Fetscher does not argue for an identity between Hegel and Marx, however, for it is in fact the humanist standpoint of the young Marx that in his view differentiates Marx from Hegel: “Marx does not accept Hegel’s identification of the human being with the ‘subjective spirit.’ For him the human being is a creature of flesh and blood . . .” ([1967] 1971, p. 55).

Also in this essay on Marxism and Hegel, Fetscher makes a sharp critique of what he views as elements of positivism in Engels, for whom “the two concepts of science (namely the Hegelian and the positivist) are still amalgamated in a manner of which the author is himself not properly aware.” This led to a situation where “the Hegelian components are completely lost for later philosophers” working in the tradition of “scientific socialism” ([1967] 1971, p. 63). Although Fetscher credits Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* with having begun the process of re-establishing the link between Marxism and Hegel, he holds that Lenin’s overall concept of Marxism falls short of Marx’s dialectical vision, in part because of his undialectical concept of the vanguard party to lead. To Fetscher, Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch in the 1920’s were the ones who more adequately reconnected Marxism to Hegel.

One of Fetscher’s most-cited essays, “The Young and the Old Marx,” also appeared in *Marx and Marxism*. Here he traces the pathway from the concept of alienation in the 1844 *Manuscripts* through the *Grundrisse* to the concept of commodity fetishism in *Capital*. To Fetscher, the critique of alienation is developed most explicitly in the young Marx and therefore the “later writings can be adequately understood only in the light of his first writings” ([1967] 1971, p. 24). However, in 1844 the road to the transcendence of alienation is left unclear while “in *Capital*, capitalist society is conceived of as a dialectical totality in which antagonisms tend to transcend present social conditions and are necessary at the same time” ([1967] 1971, p. 19). It might be noted here, in light of the current debate over post-structuralism, that Fetscher employs the Marxist concept of totality not as something which absorbs all particularity and difference, but as category which is internally differentiated, in fact torn asunder by deep antagonisms and contradictions.

In his later work Fetscher continued to elaborate and develop these themes, whether in his ongoing studies of Hegel (1971), in

his continuing studies in Marxist humanism (1965), in his writings on other topics ranging from Rousseau (1975) to ideology (1979) to the anti-nuclear movement (1986), or in his most recent book on Marxism and ecology (1991). More than two decades ago, he had already underlined the importance of ecology to Marxism, writing: "If Marx did not anticipate all the problems produced by the continuation of capitalist production for more than a century after the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, some of the most vital ones – such as pollution and depletion of natural resources – could at least be solved better and more easily within the kind of society he had in mind" (Fetscher 1973, p. 467).

In his most recent book Fetscher (1991) traces theoretically the problem of Marxism and ecology through the work of Marx, Engels, Ernst Bloch, the Frankfurt School, and contemporary writers on ecology. He reinterprets for today texts such as Frankfurt School member Walter Benjamin's famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940) critiquing the socialist movement's uncritical support for scientific and technological progress. Fetscher develops a stark indictment of the contemporary situation and argues that we face the need to change radically our present industrial civilization. If we do not succeed in establishing an ecologically balanced "alternative civilization," he writes, we face not only the danger of "nuclear destruction" but also the possibility of an authoritarian and autarkic "ecological dictatorship" (1991, p. 7). He does not present Marx as an ecologist *avant la lettre*, however, but as a divided thinker whose writings contain both a problematic economic "development optimism" and an "ecological consciousness" (1991, p. 106). With regard to the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe, he argues that their "suppression of all public 'critique from below'" helped to create even worse ecological problems than in Western Europe (1991, p. 233). Fetscher has also been unsparing in his critique of the political vacillations on immigration and other issues of the non-Marxist German Social Democratic Party, of which he is a member (1995).

Throughout his work, Fetscher has attempted to rescue what Bertolt Brecht termed "the great method," Marxism, from those who have misused and vulgarized it. He has focused his life's work especially on "the dissociation of Marx's critical thought from dogmatic

Soviet Marxism” ([1967] 1971, pp. ix–x). After the collapse of the authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union during the years 1989–91 did not lead to what many Marxist humanists had hoped for, the transformation of these societies in a leftist direction, some leftist philosophers such as Albrecht Wellmer (1993) have written that all forms of Marxism, including Marxist humanism, are dead, and that they in fact died long ago. Fetscher’s work points us in a different direction, toward the creative reworking and rethinking of Marxism as a humanism. Such a reworking is needed in response to current issues and debates, both practical and theoretical. But this is not the whole story. A reworking of the categories developed by Marx’s successors is also needed, because, with regard to Marx’s own writings, Fetscher contends, “the story of the interpretation of his work was, as in all cases of great thinkers, a story of misinterpretation” (Fetscher [1967] 1971, p. 25).

It is fitting that, after the collapse of communism, Fetscher has joined, along with other prominent Marx scholars in the West such as Eugene Kamenka and Immanuel Wallerstein, the Academic Advisory Body of the *Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA). This collection of the complete works of Marx and Engels, which began under orthodox communist sponsorship from Moscow and East Berlin in 1975, is today continuing under different sponsorship out of the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, after having experienced some grave difficulties in the immediate post-1989 period.

This interview was conducted at Professor Fetscher’s home in Frankfurt.

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Q: One question I have relates to the discussions of Marxism in Frankfurt in the 1960s. For example there was a conference in 1967 on Marx’s *Capital* (Euchner and Schmidt 1968). You were there, Alfred Schmidt, Oskar Negt spoke, and also Roman Rosdolsky and Nicos Poulantzas. What happened with this? This seemed to be a very interesting side of Frankfurt Marxism, really going into Marx, using some of the insights of Critical Theory. Yet it never seemed to get more of a hearing outside of Germany. I thought you answered Poulantzas there pretty well, but later on Poulantzas got more important internationally, as did Louis Althusser.

Fetscher: I think you are probably referring to the question of Marxist anti-humanism, which I never could really understand until much later. I think Alfred Schmidt told me that it was the reaction of French Marxists against making Marx look too innocent, making him into just cocktail party talk. But I think that it is not sufficient to make such a statement. Generally I think some Marxists even in Frankfurt, not the Frankfurt School people, but people elsewhere, were influenced by Althusser and by Poulantzas and by some of their categories, particularly their notion of ideological superstructures and so forth. I don't think this made any real progress in interpreting or making the Marxist critique applicable to modern society. I think the problem is that there was never a consistent debate after 1967. I organized the conference at that time, together with a publisher who financed the whole thing. We could not have received financial support from the University, which let us use an auditorium and that was all. Later on there was a divergent evolution from the Frankfurt School on the one hand and from some of the people influenced by Althusser on the other, and maybe from a third group influenced by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was very popular in the sixties and seventies and even later on. He was even taken up by some conservatives because Gramsci's categories could, of course, be applied without limiting them to the labor movement and the socialist revolution.

But I think there has been no consistent debate, it is true. In 1967 we even had two East German people, one a party representative, Otto Reinhold, and the other a more or less marginal Marxist from Leipzig University. The debate was quite funny because they had a very strong critical debate with Ernest Mandel. I think it was the only occasion when Frankfurt School people, Trotskyists, East Germans (doctrinaire Stalinists), and French Marxists came together. I tried to be diplomatic in the debate, because I wished that we should continue to discuss and not just to shout at each other. And this succeeded. I think the debate between Mandel and the East Germans, with their pro-Soviet position, was quite funny because it had something to do with the actual problem of what they call markets in socialist society. The East Germans said there is a kind of market relation between independent enterprises that are state owned. Then Mandel and others said either they are state owned, there is a collective

property structure, and there is no market, or there is a market and there is no longer socialism. I think this is what is being discussed in China and other places, where some people speak today about market socialism. Can there be a market relation between enterprises which belong to the same owner – the society at large? So it was a quite funny theoretical debate, but in fact it had something to do with the lack of productivity of East Germany. The man from Leipzig made it clear that they had not succeeded in really developing the productivity of the country.

Q: As to some of your students, Moishe Postone is an example, and also Helmut Reichelt. Reichelt wrote a very good book on Marx (Reichelt 1970).

Fetscher: That was a doctoral dissertation with me.

Q: These people like Schmidt and Negt – did they study with you also?

Fetscher: No, they were independent.

Q: Were they students of Theodor Adorno?

Fetscher: To some extent of Adorno, but of Max Horkheimer above all. Schmidt was an assistant to Horkheimer, and Negt was, at a certain time, an assistant to Habermas, but he had an independent origin. He came from a different background. I think I was the most liberal one. I didn't ask people whether they were orthodox, heterodox, revisionist or whatever.

Q: You were tolerant?

Fetscher: Yes, I was tolerant. I was interested in original people. Sometimes one laughed when Postone would make clear that even Horkheimer and I were, so to speak, traditional Marxists in a certain way. I never knew that I was traditional, but he had good arguments. This is quite interesting because I think he found out something that is very important and new. Certainly neither Horkheimer nor Adorno would have accepted that judgment about themselves. Jürgen Habermas reluctantly agreed, but was not so interested in a deep interpretation of Marx.

Q: Was Postone's dissertation also with you?

Fetscher: Yes. He took much time to rework it before it was published and I think the book (Postone 1993) is better now, but it was already *summa cum laude* as a dissertation.

Q: Except for that small book by Alfred Schmidt ([1971] 1981), none of the leading Frankfurt Marxists ever really answered Althusser, did they?

Fetscher: I was asked to write a book on Althusser in the very beginning, but I was fed up and somehow didn't write it. At that time I didn't know its importance for the French-speaking and Spanish-speaking world. It was very important in Latin America, for example.

Q: In the U.S. too.

Fetscher: I had letters also from America. They said, "What about Althusser?" I tried to understand why he did what he did. I think he wished to make Marxist theory into a real scientific theory, in the sense of traditional French concepts of science. That seems to me to make no sense because Marx's theory is something different, and that of course had something to do with his German background. So Althusser wished to transform the real Marx into a French thinker and do everything in that way.

Q: Almost a positivist?

Fetscher: A positivist, yes. Sometimes it gets very funny. When Marx realizes that the structure of capitalist society causes the individual to behave in a certain way, Althusser feels that this is a great discovery and should always remain like that. In fact this was a criticism by Marx. He wished to do away with this crippling structural impediment to human development. Althusser couldn't even see that. I thought also of his concept of ideology. Marxism should become a science which can be used by everybody, but at the same time we should have an ideology which is the basic of revolutionary political activities. It's very far away from Marx's critical concept of ideology. By the way, I had a Chinese student who wrote a book on ideology in Chinese, and he gave me an abridged German text and asked me to write an introduction. It's out in China. He's a professor in Shanghai. In this introduction I make a critique of the Soviets' use of ideology as Marxist ideology, communist ideology, capitalist ideology, everything as ideology. I think that's not the sense in which Marx used the term. We should not give up the critical aspect.

Q: What I would really like to ask you about, a little bit more, is Herbert Marcuse, especially with regard to his study of Hegel, *Reason and Revolution* (1941). I was very surprised that in the German discussion of Marcuse there is little mention of this book.

Fetscher: That's true. There has been much more discussion of his work on Freud and of his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). There are two versions, two German translations of the Freud book, *Eros and Civilization* (1955).

Q: Even in your book, *Marx and Marxism* ([1967] 1971), you don't discuss Marcuse in the long chapter on Marxism and Hegel.

Fetscher: I don't know if at that time I was suspicious about Marcuse because of his Heideggerian background. Also, the book had not yet been translated into German.

Q: I didn't mean to frame the question at you personally but in terms of the German intellectuals.

Fetscher: I think that the Frankfurt School people, especially Adorno, kept their distance from Marcuse. Adorno did so above all because he did not like his broad democratic outlook. I remember meeting Adorno once in the elevator at the University. I had written an article on the Frankfurt School in a newspaper. In the last sentence I wrote that some people say that the Frankfurt School is so aloof from practical politics, but in fact Marcuse is very much interested in the problems of today. He was furious, Adorno was furious. He told me that Marcuse wished every washerwoman to become a director of society or something like that. I thought that unconsciously Adorno took the Lenin formula "every cook should govern." Adorno was clearly elitist in this argument. He would never have written that, but I think personally he was an elitist man. An aesthetic, individualist man too. He had a kind of reluctance to accept Marcuse as a comrade in arms. Habermas had a debate with Marcuse which was published (Habermas 1968), and it was in the tradition of Adorno. Although I was not convinced by all that Marcuse said about this idea of a combination of the student movement and the Third World movements, I could understand where it came from. That was quite interesting because I had been an assistant to a professor who had been in turn part of the Dilthey Society, Eduard Spranger.

I think there was much Dilthey in Marcuse's background insofar as he said one has to understand what is going on and to accept, more or less to point out the sense of what is going on in a certain culture, in a certain society. Therefore, I even gave Marcuse praise for having taken the risk of error. He was interested in transforming actually existing society towards a more humane and freer society.

He was looking for who could be the motor of the transformation and he was sure that the American working class was no longer the motor, nor did he think it was the working class of the developed countries as in Germany after the Second World War. What could be the driving forces? Middle class students were then repudiating the inhuman society and what they called the rat race. He said that this was one point and the other was the social outsiders. The ordinary proletarians were no longer an arena of revolution. I thought maybe that was utopian and erroneous, but it was sympathetic.

Also I once had an interesting conversation on that with Georg Lukács. When Lukács criticized the Frankfurt school, he said that he had a very high regard for Adorno and saw him as a very important thinker, but unfortunately Adorno was so extremely pessimistic about really transforming society that he lived in the “Grand Hotel Abyss” (Lukács [1962] 1971, p. 22). You know Lukács liked Adorno’s sociology of music (Adorno 1973), with the exception of the criticism of Bela Bartok. Lukács said that Bartok was not popular music, but democratic music or something like that. Under the surface of course Lukács was a Hungarian nationalist. You could not criticize Bartok. Of course you could criticize Igor Stravinsky and maybe he overestimated Arnold Schönberg but Bartok should be considered courageous. And then I asked him about Marcuse, and Lukács said that of course Marcuse is a less important thinker than Adorno but more sympathetic as a democratic revolutionary, or something like that. And I would agree with him to a certain point.

Q: Did people in Germany think of Lukács as much more serious than Marcuse on Hegel and Marx?

Fetscher: Maybe, but I’m not sure, because you know, the later Lukács in his book *The Destruction of Reason* ([1954] 1981) is not really very good. With regard to Lukács’s *The Young Hegel* ([1948] 1975), I came to read it very early in the Swiss edition of 1948. I was still a student. I read it and I went at that time to a professor in Tübingen, Theodor Haering, who unfortunately had been a Nazi but was also a Hegel scholar with three thick volumes on the young Hegel (Haering 1929–38). And Haering was enthusiastic about Lukács, but he was still more enthusiastic about Ernst Bloch’s work on Hegel, which appeared a bit later, the book *Subjekt-Objekt* (1949). I think he found – and he was probably right – Bloch to be

a more original thinker and Lukács a more scholarly one. Anyway, with regard to what Lukács in *The Young Hegel* called the Frankfurt crisis in Hegel's thought, I think it's a very important discovery. As a study of the development of Hegel's thought I believe Lukács's book is certainly important. Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, of course, is on a different topic. It's not contradicting Lukács in that sense. Lukács wrote his book earlier while in the Soviet Union, but at that time he could not publish it.

Q: You wrote your first book on Hegel's philosophy, or was that your dissertation, in 1952?

Fetscher: In 1949–50. It's on the subjective spirit, the third volume of *The Encyclopedia*, the *Philosophy of Mind* (Hegel 1971).

Q: Wasn't this eventually published?

Fetscher: Yes, twenty years later, in 1970. My teacher at that time was Eduard Spranger, and he was very much interested in what we call *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie* [a Diltheyan "Cultural Sciences" [*Geisteswissenschaften*] approach to psychology – for background on Spranger's relation to Dilthey, see Rickman (1979) – interviewer], and it was his personal psychology. I was not interested in this very much. He asked me to compare Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit with *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*, so I wrote about 300 pages on Hegel and 20 pages on *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie*. And when I published the book I left the 20 pages out. Spranger had died seven or eight years before, so I could do that, since I wrote this book on Hegel not on psychology. I think it's still quite interesting. At that time I was very much influenced by Alexandre Kojève and by Jean Hyppolite. I studied in France in the late 1940s.

Q: Raya Dunayevskaya always told me that you originally came out of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church.

Fetscher: Yes, that is right, but it was by sheer accident. When I finished my doctoral dissertation in 1950 I had to look for a job. I was a junior Assistant which at that time carried a very small pay. You could not live on that. At that moment the *Evangelische Studiengesellschaft* [Evangelical Study Group] was a kind of central organization of the German Protestants in Heidelberg. They wished to set up a Commission on Marxism, having been asked to do so by the Geneva center of the World Council of Churches. So they set

up this Commission, headed by Professor Erwin Metzke, who died just two years after this. I was the youngest of the members, and the others were philosophers and also theologians, historians, and sociologists, but one, only one, was an economist. Then we started to publish *Marxismusstudien* [Studies in Marxism], and I was the editor of three or four of the volumes [for background, see Fetscher 1960]. Some of the chapters in my book *Marx and Marxism* were originally published there. In a certain way this was the first serious documentation on Marx and Marxism in West Germany. Marx was taboo, more or less. During the Cold War some said it shouldn't really be studied. I remember I had a friend in the East, in Leipzig, and I asked him to send me books. It was probably before the great divide. And he wrote me: "But you read it without being forced to do it. We have to do it, and we don't like it." That's always the consequence. If you are forced to read something then you are no longer interested in doing it.

Q: When were you born?

Fetscher: 1922.

Q: Did you fight in the war?

Fetscher: Sure, sure.

Q: Just out of the war, what about Marx interested you? How did you first get interested in Marxism?

Fetscher: I can tell you. It's of course a mix. It wasn't as though there was a single day when I suddenly discovered Marx. When I was a soldier in Belgium I bought a one-volume abridged edition of Marx's *Capital*. This was the very first time I came across Marx, and I had difficulty with the French translation and I think I never finished it. Unfortunately, I must also have lost this book. I remember very well, it had a picture of Marx. But the funny thing is I read it as a young soldier in Belgium doing occupation duty to rest from fighting in the East. I went to many, many book shops and I thought wow, perhaps I should read that. I never thought that it might be dangerous.

I did not think a second about it. Anyway, I carried it along with me and then I think I left it at home. I didn't carry it with me all the time in the war, that would have been too much. I think it took much longer, until the end of the war, until I came across Marx again. In my father's library there were many books, but not

Marx. He was a left liberal, but Marx was not in a German middle class library. Freud was available, and I read Freud very early, but I read Marx in German in a more easily accessible edition only after the war. I think I probably started with the very easy books like the *Communist Manifesto* and Engels' book on Britain and also his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Very early on I wrote introductions to Marxism in a journal for youth which was called *Die Zukunft* [The Future]. That was in 1946–47. I remember I had a friend who asked me, "Could you direct me to the easier texts with which to begin?" There was also (he is unfortunately already deceased) Ernst Reifenberg, a German Jewish psychiatrist who had fought in the French Army and came back to live in Germany. He had been an Assistant at the Tübingen Psychiatric Hospital, whose Director, Ernst Kretschmer (1888–1964), was a very famous psychiatrist. As a refugee in France, Reifenberg had been very influenced by [the French communist philosopher] Georges Politzer. He knew very well the works of Freud, Marx, and Politzer, and helped me to figure out the first books to read.

I think before reading *Capital* I probably came across Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* ([1923] 1971). For me, of course, after having started to read Hegel, this was very, very important, very impressive as an Hegelian way of interpreting Marxism. It took some time before I understood his interpretation of Lenin's theory of the party. He probably did too much; he overdid it. I would say he spiritualized Lenin's theory of the party; he made out of it a kind of absolute truth. It is of course doing away with any kind of really democratic foundation for socialism. Overall, however, I was very much impressed by Lukács. That was 1947–48.

Then in 1948–49 I was in Paris, and the next important Marxist I met was Lucien Goldmann. He was a man with whom you could talk for hours and hours about his Marxist interpretation of Blaise Pascal and of Jean Racine and so on. That was really very remarkable. And of course there was Alexandre Kojève with his very funny and original Hegelianism, and Jean Wahl, who was kind of existentialist Hegelian. Jean Hyppolite was a very serious scholar, whose quite interesting translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an interpretation and a translation at the same time. I recently looked into the letters I received in this period from Spranger who said:

“If you are in Paris you must enjoy Paris and don’t read too much Hegel. After all, Paris is much more interesting”. But in fact I came to Paris and found that the French had just discovered Hegel. It was a time when Hegel had for the first time made it in Paris. At that time there was a very lively debate between Hyppolite, Kojève, Wahl, and many others. They were not astonished that I was interested in Hegel. It was quite normal to be interested in Hegel. There was even this very interesting Jesuit, Father Gaston Fessard, who was an Hegelian, a rather rare species. And he at that time had great difficulties because the Pope [Pius XII] was anti-Hegelian, just as Stalin too was anti-Hegelian [laughs]. Father Fessard, unlike the Pope, had been an anti-Nazi who went into exile in London. In 1948–49 he had to be withdrawn from the forefront of the Hegel debate in order to be protected. But later on, after the death of the Pope, he was back. He wrote a quite funny interpretation of Ignatius of Loyola in an Hegelian way. The shrewdness of the Jesuits is fantastic! In order to justify his own Hegelianism he tried to prove that already [laughs] St. Ignatius had been unconsciously an Hegelian!

Q: You didn’t mention Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts*. Were they particularly important to you in that period or not until later?

Fetscher: Probably I discovered them, or I just came to them, before I came to read *Capital*. Much later, I had to read *Capital* intensively with Reichelt and others when they were my students. In one sense Reichelt thanked Althusser and his school because they took seriously the philosophical importance of *Capital*, even if they were wrong in interpreting it. Althusser’s *Reading Capital* was the book that I thought to be all right. Its consequences were mistaken, but they did the right thing anyhow.

Q: The final question I have for now refers to the point you made in your letter to me some months ago where you wrote that Marx is being treated as a “dead dog” in Germany.

Fetscher: Not completely, [laughs] but almost.

Q: You obviously don’t agree, so what do you think the importance of Marx is today?

Fetscher: I gave a radio interview just two weeks ago and I was asked just about the same question. They said, “For twenty, thirty years you have studied Marx and now it’s no longer worth it, because Marxist states have just disappeared.” I said, “You know I was never

convinced that the Soviet Union was a socialist country, at least not in the last thirty years.” It was certainly not what Marx had in mind – a society in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development for all” (Marx and Engels [1848] 1976, p. 506). And second, I think the main importance of Marx is his critique of the capitalist mode of production, and not a master plan or master key to the creation of a new society. He had little of this, and he was convinced that you should not go into the details of a future society. I think that in a certain way he was right and in another sense this was a mistake. He should have said at least something about democracy, guarantees of individual liberty, and things like that. But he was in a certain way in the tradition of the liberals, convinced that we have only to do away with the capitalist economic system, the capitalist state, and the suppression of the majority of society in order to have a completely free society. So he was a kind of liberal in the sense that he believed in the possibility of a classless and stateless free society, and he forgot that if economic exploitation or even economic differences were to disappear, there still would be many conflicts between country and city, between old and young, between people who are gifted and less gifted. There are lots of things that would have to be regulated with a certain amount of moral and institutional guarantees for the individual and for minority groups. I think he was overly optimistic in that sense.

The consequence was that people who tried to create – under conditions which were probably not very fit to do that – a Soviet society, had no limits to what they wished to do. They could create a bureaucratic society making believe that this was a free society. In spite of the fact that, as I proved in one of my first writings, “Marxism and Bureaucracy” (included in Fetscher [1967] 1971), Marx was a very staunch critic of bureaucracy, they believed that his critique of bureaucracy pertained only to capitalism, and that once we no longer had capitalism, then bureaucracy would cease to be a danger. I think this is a point where Max Weber was right. He warned against the danger of bureaucracy which he saw for socialism as well as for capitalism. Unfortunately Marx, after having criticized the final form of bureaucratic dictatorship in the form of Bonapartism, no longer had any interest in that question. He was eager only to develop his critique of political economy.

In a certain sense, in spite of the philosophical aspects of Engels, which I have often criticized (see Fetscher [1967] 1971), I think that as someone who understood democracy he was probably more aware of the problems than Marx. Engels gave us a model for the future political order (dictatorship of the proletariat) the New England colonies and their self-administration. I believe he thought highly of Australia and of the original democratic structure of the North American colonies. This is what Hannah Arendt idealized so much as well. In a certain way, I think Engels had that in mind, and not so much the Paris Commune which was, after all, very short-lived. Nobody knows what would have happened to it if it had not been crushed by the French Army with the help of the Prussians.

I think that Marx's critique of political economy is still very important but of course one has to take into account what has changed since his death. We have a much more global capitalist system with transnational organizations. Thus, in a certain way, what Marx thought, that revolution was only possible in many developed countries at the same time or at least together, is even truer today. We cannot have a revolution only in France or in Germany and not even only in Europe. But that also creates a great difficulty. Today we are not even able to continue – and that is a more immediate problem – any type of welfare state or ecologically corrected capitalism in one country because of these transnational organizations. Some of them have a higher budget than many of the small and medium-sized nations! I think Marx is still important as a theorist and as a methodologist. Of course, Marx would be the last to deny that our modern problems are in certain ways different from those he faced over 100 years ago. But I think in a certain way it's very true when people say that Marx is more important now than he was twenty years ago, because of the economic crisis all over the world, and also because of the ecological crisis which is now a burning question (see Fetscher 1991). In Marx's time the ecological problem was probably of minor importance, but nonetheless he already saw the outline of it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This interview took place while I traveled to Germany under a Study Visit Grant awarded by the German Academic Exchange Service. I would also like to thank Heinz Osterle for critical comments, Bart Dalrymple for assistance in transcribing the interview, and Sue Barkman for word-processing.

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