
Henri Lefèbvre and Contemporary Interpretations of Marx

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In recent years the literature that has appeared about, for, and against Marx and Marxism has increased to the point where it can hardly be surveyed. Yet it would be false to conclude that the debate over matters of content has been advanced. To the extent that this literature does not speak the language of the Cold War and attempt to establish a dubious "counter ideology," it produces (as political science or Kreminology) works full of information concerning the state of Soviet Marxist doctrines in terms of their dependence on current political trends. To the extent that Marxian theory itself still enters its field of vision, it is dulled by the fact that people (generally following Karl Löwith) classify it in the historical tradition of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, or else reduce it to an ahistorical interpretation of the problematic of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.

On the other hand, the group of authors honestly interested in the further development of Marxian theory is exceptionally small. They are able to abstract from what still frequently passes for Marxism in the Eastern half of the world without denying the objective significance of the East-West conflict for their thought. They have involved themselves intensively with texts of Hegel

and Marx, which by no means have finally been disposed of, without falling into the hair-splitting ontology—with its consecrated body of quotations—that is typical for the post-Stalinist period in Soviet philosophy. To this group belongs Henri Lefèbvre (who has recently become known in Germany through his acute analysis of Stalinism¹). His writings are indispensable to those who aim at an adequate (and therefore critical) understanding of Marx within the limits of the alternatives that have been institutionalized in the political arena: either calling dialectical materialism a “watertight world view” (Musil) or dismissing it out of hand as a product of the discredited nineteenth century.

If a publisher has decided to bring out an edition of *Le matérialisme dialectique*,² a work that appeared over three decades ago, it is because it has scarcely lost its actuality—aside from a few points that needed correction. The philosophical discussion of Marxism that began directly after the First World War with Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* and Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, and was especially furthered by Korsch, H. Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno, broke off with Hitler's seizure of power. Therefore, works on Marx from that period, as well as those written in western Europe in the late thirties, are still of great importance to us: not least because those works approached problems in a way far more political and closer to reality than was possible for the new West German attempts at an interpretation of Marx after 1945, which remained more or less academic. These were all essentially centered on the “young Marx,” in whom the authors (Thier, Popitz, Fromm) wanted to see an “existential thinker.”

Since Lefèbvre's book also seems at first glance to belong to the existence-philosophical, moralizing, and abstract anthropological school of interpretation, it seems necessary to make the reader somewhat more conversant with Lefèbvre's intellectual development.³ Only on that basis can the central concept of “alienation” in his *Dialectical Materialism* be understood and differentiated from interpretations using this concept in a sense almost exactly opposed to the Marxian one.

First, some dates in pre-World War II French philosophy. About the year 1930, the *philosophical* aspect of Marxism began to arouse interest in France. At the same time, a broad general receptivity toward Hegel, interwoven with attitudes toward Kierkegaard, was announced by Jean Wahl's book, *Le malheur*

de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel. Wahl is inclined to reduce the richness of Hegel's work to the stage of the "unhappy consciousness." With this emphasis on the romantic moment in Hegel, it becomes almost impossible to separate Hegel and Kierkegaard. Subsequently, the appropriation of the idealist dialectic is paralleled by an interpretation of Marx's early writings in the light of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. This process led to the birth of the French variety of existential ontology: to Existentialism. It was completed between 1933 and 1938, years in which Alexandre Kojève gave his now famous lectures on the *Phenomenology of Mind*⁴ at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes before students such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, R. Aron, and R. P. Fessard. These lectures follow the same questionable lines as Wahl and see access to Hegel's entire *oeuvre* in a *single* level of consciousness. With Kojève, it is the much-commented-on chapter "Dependence and Independence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage." Although he wants his interpretation of Hegel to be considered "Marxist," he does not focus on Marx's materialist "inversion" of the dialectic. Rather, as Fetscher emphasizes, Kojève already sees in the phenomenological dialectic *itself*, "all the ultimate consequences of the Marxist philosophy of history."⁵ Thus "motifs of thought" that first arose from Marx's critique of Hegel are ascribed to Hegel. But even Marx's position is not done justice, since Kojève lags behind his claim that one should elevate oneself to real history, that is, to the concrete forms of human relationships, which are determined differently at different moments in time. Instead, he is satisfied with the sterile definition of a Heideggerian "historicity of existence" that is supposedly present in the *Phenomenology of Mind* as an "existential"⁶ and radically "finite"⁷ anthropology. According to Kojève, the anthropological character of Hegelian thought becomes understandable only on the basis of Heidegger's emphasis on "ontological finitude," although the anthropology of *Being and Time* (which Kojève asserts in opposition to Heidegger's intention) adds nothing new to that developed by Hegel.

The supposedly broader "anthropological-ontological basis"⁸ with which Kojève wants to dote dialectical materialism is more liable to reduce it to a doctrine of invariable structures. Not the least of the ways that this would develop is in strictly political terms. Insofar as Kojève breaks the structural elements of the Master-Slave dialectic away from its specific historical background

(which must always be thought of with it), he inflates labor and the struggle for life and death into eternal factors, *à la* social Darwinism. Stripped of every concrete determination, man appears as an essence “which is always conscious of his death, often freely assumes it and sometimes knowingly and freely chooses it”; Hegel’s “anthropological philosophy” is viewed as “ultimately one . . . of death.”⁹ Anachronistically, and thus in a way that falsifies Hegel, Kojève equates the struggle for “recognition” with a “fight for pure prestige.”¹⁰ Human essence and knowledge constitutes itself with a decided “risk” of life. It is as if “self conscious existence is possible only where there are or—at least—where there have been bloody fights, wars for prestige.”¹¹ On the other hand, it matters little that he abstractly holds firm to the idea of the “realm of freedom” that Hegel anticipated and that has to be realized by Marxism.¹² It is a reconciled condition that does not occupy a situation, in which negativity (time and action in their present meanings) ceases, as do philosophy, revolutions and wars as well: his “political-existential” anthropology sharpened by “decisionism” bears fascistoid traces.¹³

If one starts from the premise that the Hegel and Marx exegesis outlined here was dominant in the France of the thirties, it becomes clear that Lefèbvre, even with all the unavoidable concessions to the spirit of the times, took a path all his own. Opposed to every ontology, to the late-bourgeois as well as to the Stalinist ones, he developed himself into a critical Marxist whose standards grew out of a materialist analysis of the course of history. His academic teachers were hardly appropriate to lead his thought in this direction. In Aix-en-Provence he studied Augustine and Pascal¹⁴ with the liberal Catholic Maurice Blondel, and at the Sorbonne he worked with Léon Brunschvig, the “intellectualistic” philosopher of judgment who was an enemy of every dialectic. What made Lefèbvre (by no means without conflict) turn to Marxism had little to do with university philosophy. It was the political and social upheavals of the postwar period, and more particularly personal problems, psychoanalysis, and association with the literary and artistic avant-garde, the surrealist movement.¹⁵ Lastly, it was the suspicion, which turned into a firm conviction, that philosophy as it had been handed down to us had demonstrated that it increasingly was less able to come to grips with, not to mention master, the problems posed by the historical situation of being and consciousness in society. At this point, the

call of Marx and Engels, in their early writings, for the “negation” of philosophy and the turn toward a *praxis* “which would realize philosophical insight,” seemed to offer itself to him. A possibility seemed to open up, not only of more or less articulately mirroring the fragmentation developing in modern existence—the way it happened in irrationalist ideologies—but of grasping it concretely, that is, as something which could be transcended.

Thus, from the outset, Lefèbvre’s Marxism is neither the positivistically limited one of the natural scientist who seeks to satisfy the needs of his world view, nor that of the practical politician to whom it is simply a means of rationalizing specific measures. Fetscher correctly indicates that fact,¹⁶ but when he sees the specificity of Lefèbvre’s view of Marx in *anthropology*, more discussion is required, so as to avoid the misunderstandings that lie close at hand in such an interpretation.

First of all, as critical theoreticians in general have repeatedly emphasized, Marx is not concerned with a “philosophical anthropology” in Scheler’s sense of static precepts concerning the “construction of the essence of Man.” Such an anthropology sets the impossible task of demonstrating the exact manner in which “all specific monopolies, achievements and works of mankind proceed” from a “basic structure of the human being,” including history and society, which, characteristically enough, Scheler handles in the rigidified form of “historicity” and “sociality.”¹⁷ However much anthropological writers have tried to incorporate change and becoming into the idea of human nature, the content of the history of this idea must, nevertheless, remain external to these concepts, because the way they pose the question is based on a strictly conceived hierarchy.

Marx is equally little concerned with probing the eternal structure of human labor in the manner of his fundamental-ontological interpreters who, like Kojève, also want to end up with an anthropology that is basically foreign to history. What emerges in Marx as the generally valid structure of human labor is a concept fixed by thought, in which conditions common to all stages of production can be determined. “But,” says the *Critique of Political Economy*, “the so-called *general conditions* of all production are nothing but abstract moments with which no actual historical stage of production can be grasped.”¹⁸ This position by no means typifies only Marx’s economic analyses. Precisely those early writings, which are always quoted in order to treat

Marx as an ontologist, yield little for such an interpretation. Thus the *German Ideology* stresses that by presenting the practical life-processes of men (not of *man*), independent philosophy loses its "medium of existence" and can be replaced at best by a "summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which arise from the observation of the historical development of men."¹⁹ To that sentence, Marx and Engels unequivocally add:

Viewed apart from real history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history.²⁰

As if the authors of these sentences had never written them, the ontologizing interpreters of Marx resolutely make what are explicitly referred to as helpful *concepts*, the results of the analysis of materials, precede the materials as their constituent being. No differently did Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung* brand the *πρῶτον ψεύδος* [primary lie—Eds.] of the metaphysical enterprise. Under the guise of radicalizing historical consciousness, history is eliminated. All that remains of it is that it exists: historicity.

Lefèbvre criticized both of these methodologically interrelated lines of interpretation, and not least of all Kojève's "neo-Hegelian deviation,"²¹ in which the "anthropological" and the "ontological" are linked. He exposed the weaknesses of German existential philosophy (Jaspers),²² no less than those of French existentialism and its Husserlian-Heideggerian roots.²³ This fundamental opposition is not weakened by the occasional resonances of an existential vocabulary in Lefèbvre's writings. He does not infringe on its materialist character, yet for him Marxism is not a philosophy of being, but a philosophy of concept.

The fact that in retrospect Lefèbvre now terms his 1925 attitudes "existentialist" should not be understood in the sense of the term established later. Rather, it means that he and his friends, under the pressures of the conditions of the time and the sterility of official philosophy, wrestled with problems which immediately affected their mental (and not only mental) existence. Day-to-day personal experience exposed the limits that were set by the bourgeois world on the free development of human talents and needs, and showed the extent to which modern society

suffered from a fragmented self, which the young Hegel had already called the "fountainhead of the needs of philosophy."²⁴

Granted, the critique of this fragmentation that Lefèbvre undertook during the years 1925–1929 did not yet fulfill the criteria which he later developed in the idea of a "critique of everyday life." To the extent that it does not disappear into the abstract immediacy of mere revolt, it remains caught in just that scholastic philosophy of whose insufficiency, as we have said, no one was more conscious than Lefèbvre himself. During those years, even he succumbed to the cult of the increasingly impoverished self—a "withdrawal neurosis,"²⁵ which could grow to the point at which the inner self is entirely cut off from the outer world and robbed of all content, is driven toward its own self-destruction at the same time that it claims to be concerned with human well-being. At the same time, Lefèbvre's withdrawal into pure interiority—more a symptom than a critique of what exists—is streaked with the slowly dawning insight that the world does not exhaust itself in Bergson's stream of consciousness, that what matters is finding one's way back to objects: "*Retrouver l'objet.*"²⁶

However, Lefèbvre's desire to escape from the bind of cramped subjectivity and to attain a more concrete medium of thought was not realized immediately. When he adhered to Communism in 1928, he saw less clearly than before. True, in 1930 he read Hegel, and Marx's *Capital*. But at first, the books that were decisive, as for many Marxist neophytes, were Engel's *Anti-Dühring* and Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*—books which, because of their materialist overzealousness, teach a massive objectivism rather than a scientific objectivity thoroughly penetrated by concepts. It is understandable that after adopting these dogmatic positions, Lefèbvre also interpreted the later Engels' statements on previous philosophy (which are in fact ambiguous) to mean that socialist theory, as a "positive science," abjures *all* philosophy. Thus, materialism becomes synonymous with a strict renunciation of abstraction. When Lefèbvre became aware of the contradiction contained in that position, namely that if one totally rejects abstraction (in particular, we must add, the theory of the equivalency of exchange, which is decisive for Marx), it is impossible to justify the scientific use of concepts, then conflicts with the Party became inevitable. Since the late twenties, the Party had been concerned with its "Bolshevization." Under the pretense of adopting the Leninist organizational model, it was

forming an apparatus to which, with Stalin's increasing influence over non-Russian Parties, every intellectual effort was ruthlessly subordinated.

One must start from this fundamental process of transformation of the French Communist Party in order to judge adequately the works Lefèbvre published between 1930 and 1940. They were against both modern authoritarian, irrational ideology²⁷ and against the attempts of Party Communists to either reduce Marx's teachings to a narrowly conceived economic theory, or to broaden them into a positive world view ("scientific ideology") and an abstract methodology of the natural sciences. Lefèbvre, similar to Karl Korsch in that respect, is not merely concerned with "situating" Marxism within philosophy or within science, since Marxist speculative philosophy transcends the empiricism of all the individual sciences. Lefèbvre knows that the way philosophy and science merge into the specifically Marxist concept of a *critique* is discontinuous and, therefore, it qualitatively changes them. That this *critique* claims to be a science not only does not stand in opposition to philosophy, it rests precisely on a philosophical distinction: that between immediacy and reflexion, appearance and essence.

These are categories linked with the name of Hegel. Lefèbvre explicitly rejoined Hegel's dialectic when in the early thirties he turned to questions of logic and of (historical) method, to the problem of "real humanism" and to the theory of ideological illusion. At that point, just as Lukács had done previously in *History and Class Consciousness*, he came up against the problem of the *objective* meaning of the Hegelian method for the Marxist one. He recognizes that this problem can be approached adequately only when the historical character of the Marxist method, energetically stressed by Lukács, is applied not only to its objects, but also to itself. In other words: neither for Marx nor for us is this method a materialist corrective of Hegel that is given once and for all. Just as Marx (and this is not simply a philological question) evaluated his relation to Hegel quite differently at different stages of development, we must also reinterpret afresh the Hegel-Marx relation with respect to continuity and discreteness, and according to the state of history and the nature of our theoretical interests that are determined by it. Thus something like a well-rounded "Marxist image of Hegel" is impossible for Lefèbvre.²⁸

He considers Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology* from the

viewpoint of a materialist philosophy of history which, as a "science of human reality,"²⁹ takes up in their transitory, historically concrete determinations those questions that can be hypostatized from philosophical anthropology and the "existential" movement and applied as such to a man in general. Because Lefèbvre also terms the Marxist science of human reality a "general anthropology,"³⁰ it seems necessary to return to Fetscher's statement concerning the basically *anthropological* character of his understanding of Marx, especially because we have tried to describe the way the anthropological-ontological interpretation of Marx deviates from the position of both Marx and of Lefèbvre.

As we have said, Lefèbvre's concept of anthropology does not aim at a supratemporal substance; for him man is contained in what Marx calls "the world of men, state, society,"³¹ that is, in an historical relationship that must, in turn, be examined in its present concrete form. The general human essence is whatever it is in its particular manifestation; this essence, however, presents itself at a particular stage of the conflict between man and nature. Perhaps one should say: at this stage, the stage of "prehistory," it is what it is *not*—an unfulfilled promise.

In two respects, this radical historical and philosophical conception of anthropology serves a polemical function for Lefèbvre. First, he needs it to render conceivable the work the concept has to do epistemologically, in terms of the "materiality" presupposed by dialectical materialism. In addition, it is opposed to the gross reduction of the critique of political economy into economism.

Marx stands in opposition to the metaphysical theses of the later Engels, canonized by Stalin and Soviet Marxism, that Nature as it existed before any human or social intervention, contains a dialectical movement; in opposition also to Lenin's attempt to "define" matter as a reality independent of consciousness and to view cognition as a copy of reality. For Marx the materialist, dialectical categories exist only as nodal points in historical *praxis*, that is, in a material reality that is continually being mediated through human actions that also belong to the material and objective world. Only this is "negativity"—"a moving and producing principle."³² It was not Marx's job to "fix" gnosiologically the materials worked by labor, and in which labor is incorporated: the specific determination of materials is just as much a passing moment of the production process as is their very disappearance. Every mediating act reconstitutes in a higher form the immediacy that it destroyed.

The necessity, expressed for the first time by the early Lukács, of limiting the validity of the dialectic to the historical and social world³³ has since then become the unspoken presupposition of every serious interpretation of Marx.³⁴ Lefèbvre could never be on good terms with a “materialism of the isolated object.” He always considered any concept of the material world that did not include its practical (or at least potentially practical) appropriations as a pure abstraction. Since Marxism was taught in its Stalinized codification for decades, thinkers such as Sartre,³⁵ for whom the *sacrificium intellectus* was too great, hesitated to adopt it for an unnecessarily long time.

The aspect of what Lefèbvre calls anthropology, which is directed against economism, is also a critique of naïve-realistic consciousness.

Even Marx himself, and not just his vulgarizers, occasionally falls into the error of raising what he opposes to a methodological norm—the reification of human relationships. His presenting the primacy of a negative totality over individuals suddenly turns into a kind of taking sides in favor of that totality. The reified power of historical-economic processes, their objectively alienated aspect, swallows up the subjective human side, which is then taken into consideration only under the heading of “ideological reflexes and echoes.”³⁶ The specifically social manifestations disappear into their economic essence. Lefèbvre, not incorrectly, believes that he remains true to the idea of a *critique* of political economy when he underlines the irreducibility of human and social spheres to the economic one.³⁷ That idea consists of not capitulating to the “natural” objectivity of the historical process as a whole. Marxian dialectic derives its claim to a greater objectivity in comparison with classical economists precisely from the fact that it defetishizes the world of commodities; that is, it reveals the subjective mediations of that world.

Whereas by “ideology” Marx meant primarily the realm of phenomena of consciousness as split off from *praxis*, in today’s society the rigid differentiation between economic and non-economic factors has become questionable. Today the apparatus, which, despite its centrifugal tendencies, functions more and more smoothly, is already ideological. It is this apparatus that has not only shrunken human consciousness, even the unconscious, down to its mere mirror image, but also has atrophied its general modes of behavior, primarily in the area of the consumer. The analysis of that area³⁸ should not be left to operational social behaviorism.

For Lefèbvre it is a section of a comprehensive "theory of everyday life"³⁹ that attempts to enrich Marxism (frequently subjected to economistic simplifications) with a previously neglected *sociological* dimension.

We now turn to Lefèbvre's extensive study of the concept of alienation, which made him famous to a degree matched by scarcely another philosopher. From what has been said of his use of the term "anthropology," it should be clear that for him (as little as for Marx), there is no question of rigidly fixing in a few formulae the relationship between society, the individual and nature. Thus, alienation must be redefined according to the historical constellation in which those elements interact; namely from the point of view of its "*Aufhebung*."

Lefèbvre's transition to socialism recapitulated the stages of Marx's "self-understanding" to the extent that his categories, like those of Marx, become progressively more concrete. Lefèbvre's independent development into a Marxist theoretician began with his study of the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, discovered in 1931, which in spite of their abstractness already had substantially more content than the then "official" materialist ontology. His study of the Marx of the Paris period found expression in what is certainly Lefèbvre's most important book from the thirties: *Dialectical Materialism*,⁴⁰ written in 1934-1935, published in 1938.

The book had to have been rejected within the Party, if only because it appeared at the same time as the *History of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union(B)*, which contained the chapter written by Stalin, "On Dialectical and Historical Materialism." During the period of Stalin's rule, this was clearly an obligatory text and, correspondingly, was quoted often. Whereas for Marx, historical and dialectical materialism (though he never used the expressions) had an identical content, and whereas he always objected to the "abstract materialism of the natural sciences . . . which excludes the historical process,"⁴¹ with Stalin the theory (degraded to a "world view") was dogmatically divided into dialectical and historical materialism, the latter being simply a special case of the former, which had to do with the most general laws governing the development of matter. Nature and history are both frozen into things in themselves: the constitutive role of human *praxis* for the changing "objectivity" (and, thus, the cornerstone of Marxian dialectic) remained uncomprehended.

It is understandable that Lefèbvre's book, which explicitly spelled out this last point and only granted validity to that objectivity whose character as product is perceived clearly, had come into conflict with a doctrine that invokes an immediacy unpenetrated with reflection, yet which, nonetheless, still boasts of itself as being scientific. At a point when the Party glorified the seven miserable "basic characteristics" of the dialectic and of materialism, which Stalin enumerated like a catalogue, as the high point of Marxist thought, such a view had to sow confusion since it destroyed the "clarity" that had been attained by the cataloguers.

In *Dialectical Materialism*, Lefèbvre follows an eminently *philosophical* intention.⁴² In the face of the institutionalized simplifications of the theory introduced by Stalinism and of its antagonism to humanity, he stresses the critical, humanistic impulse of the theory. The fact that his starting point is the 1844 *Manuscripts* does not at all imply a devaluation of the economic problematic, as it does in the case of those interpreters for whom Marx's work falls into "two parts which cannot be linked in any meaningful principled way."⁴³ On the contrary, Lefèbvre views Marx's development as a unified process in which the theme of "alienated labor" as well as its ideological derivatives, are handled more and more concretely from stage to stage; from Marx's book against Proudhon to the *Theory of Surplus Value*, there are no (economic in the more strict sense) texts that he does not cite. The fact that he holds firmly to this unified point of view should be appraised all the more highly since he did not have available the *Outline of the Critique of Political Economy*, the 1857-1858 "rough draft" ("Rohentwurf") for the *Critique of Political Economy*, which was published for the first time in Moscow in 1939 and 1941.⁴⁴ He could not see a text nearly a thousand pages thick, which, in terms of the history of Marx's development, establishes the link between the 1844 *Manuscripts* and the developed materialist economics of the middle and mature Marx. The rough draft—still "philosophical" and already "economic"—is more appropriate than any other of Marx's texts to place the discussion of the relationship of Marxism to Hegel's philosophy on a broader footing, since Marx himself, in his forewords and postfaces, often expresses himself unclearly and gives only sparse results on this score. It also speaks for Lefèbvre that he saw that with the preparatory work to the 1859 *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx began a second, far more positive approach to Hegel. The dialectic

tical method is necessary to really grasp as a system the structural relationships between the categories that bourgeois economists have presented merely as empirical results, to transcend them critically.⁴⁵ As Lefèbvre shows, this method has to derive the alienation that at first appears only abstractly in the products and the activity of the worker from the specifically *social* character that products and activities assume in capitalism; that is, in a totality that is just as much an objective structure as it is a movement that would not exist without the conscious will and purpose of men. Naturally the insight that through their activity men continually bring forth just those conditions to which they are subjected at first appears only to the theoretical consciousness. In everyday *praxis*, on the other hand, "individuals are subsumed under social production, which exists as if it were a destiny outside them; but social production is not subsumed under the individuals who manage it as their common property."⁴⁶ All of Lefèbvre's work, including *Dialectical Materialism*, takes up the task of revealing the illusory character of this social objectivity. Evolved through practice, it can only be dissolved through practice. But, Lefèbvre might be asked, what about the possibility of the dissolution (*Aufhebung*) of alienation, of a realization of the total man, if alienated conditions—which Marx still presupposes in *The German Ideology*—cease to be an "intolerable power against which men make a revolution?"⁴⁷ Even under the conditions of effective competition, private interests were socially determined from the start and could be pursued only in a given framework. And yet the gap between the interior and the exterior remained based on competition, which presupposed a minimum of individual consistency. Today, in the age of one-dimensional thought and relations (H. Marcuse), the relatively spontaneous procedure of "introjecting" the exterior into the interior through a self that can also oppose the exterior world is hardly possible any longer. Men identify themselves immediately with the social whole, which tends to reduce all opposition to silence with its oppressive abundance of goods.⁴⁸ What becomes of the multiple subjective forms of alienation (aesthetic, psychological), which Lefèbvre has examined in all his books, and whose "positive," that is, critical, side is only now coming to light, when society directly incorporates whole sectors of the superstructure into its political-economic process? Don't they have to disappear if the individual's identification with the life-styles imposed on him

reproduces itself mechanically? What epistemological value does the concept of alienation still possess when alienation has objectified itself as reality in such a way that it deprives men of the possibility of revealing it as, in Hegel's term, a "disappearing appearance"? Marx's critical reformulation of Feuerbach's conception of alienation refers to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, which implies, albeit idealistically, that man, essentially "self-consciousness," has been capable of grasping his own torn and shattered condition (and thus that of his world) and "with this knowledge" has raised himself above this fragmentation.⁴⁹ But already in Hegel, self-consciousness can manage to achieve this "only when revolting." Though materialist theory does not share the Hegelian belief that a conflict which has become conscious is one which has been concretely mastered, it still presupposes that the transition from the "class in itself" to the "class for itself" first takes place in individual thought, and only then do "knowledge" and "action" become one in collective *praxis*. Marx's pre-1848 revolutionary humanism assumes a fairly high (and increasing!) degree of independence of subjective forms of reflection from the relationships supporting them: the real possibility of becoming enraged. The possibility of revolt is minimized by the subsequent course of history—not by the developed critique of political economy. The latter's insistence on the strict objectivity of the process as a whole signifies more a qualitatively new level of capitalism than a "scientific" detour away from the needs of the individual. Nietzsche underscores the findings of Marx's analysis of commodities when, in *The Will to Power*, he makes the supposition that consciousness may well become more and more dispensable in the future and is "perhaps destined to disappear and to make place for a full-fledged automatism."⁵⁰ As opposed to that notion, Lefèbvre's conception of alienation seems harmless, because it holds all too firmly to the continuity of the prerequisites of individualistic society, which were already becoming debatable in the second half of the previous century. He overlooks the fact that theory must abstract from individuals to the extent that they become mere "personifications of economic categories."⁵¹

Thus, Lefèbvre is one of the few authors who do not erect a Chinese wall between Marx's youthful and his mature work, and who examine both the "philosophical" motives of the economic writings as well as the "economic" motives of the philosophical works. He rightly sees that the appropriate path leading to ques-

tions concerning the discipline of historical and dialectical materialism is to be found in the presentation of the *history of its origins*.⁵² This in turn is not separable from the history of the subject of its investigation: bourgeois society, a *concretum* in which every historical process is summed up. Marx, who starts from the fact that "economics" must first be created "as a science in the German sense of the term,"⁵³ describes his task in the following way: "The work in question . . . is the critique of economic categories, or . . . the critical presentation of the system of bourgeois economics. It is at the same time the presentation of the system and through the presentation the critique of the system."⁵⁴

Lefèbvre's writings do take the Marxian *desideratum* of the "presentation" of theory extremely seriously. There are several reasons why he leaves open many problems when questions about developing the flow of the total capital of society according to its adequate "concept" come up; why he hesitates to express the systemic character of the world without reservations.

For one thing, he lets himself be guided by the philosophical notion of the indissolubility of the universe into concepts that grasp it, apart from the fact that every system tends to destroy the specific content of the individual being, which is what ultimately matters. For Marx, it is not primarily a question of the universe in a metaphysical sense, but of a universe of facts that are mediated through the *negative* totality of society. Insofar as society is grounded in the abstract generality of exchange, and to that extent resembles an idealistic system, it remains linked to the natural form of human labor power and its products, that is, to qualitatively determined use value.

For another thing, the system of economic categories Marx had in mind is by no means present in a single form in his writings: if it were, a self-contained presentation of the system would be possible without difficulty. Thus, the analysis of forms of commodities as value, capital, and money, consists only in fragmentary formulations.

Third, and lastly—and this is the most important aspect—under current historical conditions, which are much different from those that Marx understood as capitalism, every systematic presentation of the critique of political economy must contain its own metacritique.

However great the objective difficulties in bringing the economic critique to the point required today, the existence of its

object cannot be doubted. Now, as before, progress has the character of a "density" that "exists" outside man and that is as yet unmastered. Only in this way can we explain why for Lefèbvre (similarly to Bloch, we may add) the critical meditation on science, to which Marxism once imagined to have raised itself, returns to utopia. It is as if reality refused itself to critical thought to such a degree that it can only stand in a negative relation to it. An historically unambiguous mediation between the bad that exists and the better that is possible is not present. It is not by accident that Lefèbvre has recourse to the romantic-sounding concept of "total man," as it was used by the young Marx at a time when he had not yet theoretically mastered the content of history. Today, when it appears that we are no longer masters of this content, that concept is again necessary in order not to fall into sheer historicism, in order to hold firm to the *telos* of a rationally installed humanity.

Translated by John Heckman

Notes

1. Henri Lefèbvre, *Probleme des Marxismus, heute* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965).
2. *Dialectical Materialism*, edited by Grossman (London: Cape, 1968). [Schmidt's essay originally appeared as an "Afterword" to the German edition of this work.]
3. He describes its stages exhaustively in the second volume of his extraordinary, part essayistic, part lyrical, part autobiographical work, *La somme et le reste* (Paris: 1959), under the title "L'itinéraire," pp. 357-559 (Cf. also Lefèbvre's self-presentation in the anthology *Les philosophes français d'aujourd'hui* [Paris: 1963], pp. 282-300.) A preliminary summary is offered in Iring Fetscher's essay, although it is more than a decade old, "Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie," in: *Marxismusstudien*, Schriften der Studiengemeinschaft der Evangelischen Akademien, vol. 3 (Tübingen, 1954), cf. especially pp. 175-182. On Lefèbvre's position after his exclusion from the Party, cf. my postscript to *Probleme des Marxismus, heute*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-145. Also instructive is Gianni Barba's essay, "Bibliographische Notizen zum Werk von Henri Lefèbvre," in: *Neue Kritik* (August 1965), Heft 31: 24-28.
4. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* edited by R. Queneau (Paris: 1947). An abridged version exists in English: *Introduction to the Reading of*

Hegel, edited by Allan Bloom (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1969). In addition to Kojève, Jean Hyppolite is especially responsible for the reception—mediated through existentialism—of Hegel into French consciousness. Even Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is unthinkable without Hegel's *Logic*. On French Hegelianism in general, cf. Iring Fetscher, "Hegel in Frankreich," in *Antares*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1952).

5. Fetscher, *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, p. 183.
6. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 219.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
8. Kojève, *Hegel. Versuch einer Vergegenwärtigung seines Denkens* (German translation of the above), Editor's preface, p. 9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
10. *Introduction to Hegel*, p. 41.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 41
12. *Ibid.*, p. 157ff.
13. This critical characterization of Kojève in no way detracts from his great services in the Marxist reinterpretation of Hegel (especially the *Phenomenology of Mind*) in this century. However—and it is this point that we are criticizing—Kojève's thought is prejudiced by the fact that he understands Hegel and Marx in terms of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which, among other things, results in his falling back to the position of an ahistorical Feuerbachianism, which Marx left early in his career. In that he isolates and hypostatizes categories like "struggle," "war," and "prestige," he comes close to that which, under the rubric "political anthropology," belongs in the European prehistory of right-wing authoritarian thought. Hence, the expression 'faschistoid.' (Author's note for the American edition.)
14. Pascal's relation to Jansenism is the subject of his doctoral thesis. Later Lefèbvre devoted a two volume study to Pascal which is of great methodological interest: *Pascal* (Paris: 1949 and 1954).
15. In 1925, during the heroic phase of surrealism, when Breton was attempting a sort of "popular front" between Left intellectuals and organizations friendly to the Communists, Lefèbvre, who then, along with Georges Politzer, Norbert Guterman, Georges Friedmann and Pierre Morhange, belonged to the group *Philosophies*, which was as yet by no means Marxist-materialist oriented, came into contact with the *Centrale surréaliste*. A contact which without doubt furthered Lefèbvre's politicization and broke off only in 1929, when he fully adhered to Communism with Morhange and Politzer (who in the meantime had become editor of the journal *L'Esprit*). Cf. Maurice Nadeau, *History of Surrealism* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 155, 161.
16. *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, cf. p. 176.
17. Max Scheler, "Die Sonderstellung des Menschen," in *Mensch und Erde* (Darmstadt: 1927), p. 246. On the materialist critique of the modern inclination to constitute something like a "unified portrayal of man,"

- see Max Horkheimer's seminal essay, "Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie," in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, IV, Jg, Heft 1 (Paris: 1935), p. 1-25.
18. *Critique of Political Economy* (Berlin: 1951), p. 242.
 19. *German Ideology* (N.Y.: International Publishers, 1947), p. 15.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Quoted by Fetscher, *Der Marxismus im Spiegel der französischen Philosophie*, p. 189.
 22. On Lefèbvre's critique of Jaspers, see *Rencontres internationales de Genève, 1948* (Paris/Neufchâtel: 1949).
 23. In a book which is no longer completely acknowledged by its author, because of its all-to-self-consciously Marxist tenor, but which is nonetheless important: *L'existentialisme* (Paris: 1946).
 24. "Differenz des Fichteschen und des Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 1, Glockner (Stuttgart: 1958) p. 44.
 25. *L'existentialisme*, p. 20.
 26. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
 27. See his studies, *Le nationalisme contre les nations* (Paris, 1937); *Hitler au pouvoir. Bilan de cinq années de fascisme en Allemagne* (Paris: 1938); *Nietzsche* (Paris, 1939), a book with a differentiated argument which denounces both the National Socialist's misuse of Nietzsche's philosophy and, equally, those motives in Nietzsche's thought which tend toward such a misuse.
 28. Nothing is more revelatory for the boundless dogmatism of the Stalinist era than Zhdanov's position in the 1947 philosophical discussion, in which he dismissed the "debate on Hegel" as a "rebirth of scholasticism" with the words: "The problem of Hegel has long been resolved. There is no occasion to take it up again" in *Über Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: 1951), p. 104.
 29. *La somme et le reste*, vol. 1, p. 87.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. "Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie," in Marx/Engels, *Die heilige Familie* (Berlin: 1955), p. 11.
 32. Marx, "Kritik der Hegelschen Dialektik und Philosophie überhaupt," in *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 33. Even here a dialectic structure cannot be ascribed to it *en bloc*. See Alfred Schmidt, "Zum Verhältnis von Geschichte und Natur im dialektischen Materialismus," in *Existentialismus und Marxismus* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1965), pp. 103-155.
 34. Ernst Bloch may applaud Engels' recognition of the dialectic of nature, but the concept of nature and matter developed in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* is not so much a refinement of Engels, but something much different: a mystical-teleological cosmology.

Henri Lefèbvre and Contemporary Interpretations of Marx

35. Sartre's astounding turning-point in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: 1960), owes extraordinarily much to Lefèbvre. When Sartre grasps the categories of his "phenomenological ontology" concretely and historically, he explodes them. He is concerned with grounding "Marxist knowledge," in opposition to Hegel's absolute knowledge, in a "historical and structural anthropology" (cf. p. 108), for which "human existence" (now viewed through its strict economic determination) is inseparably linked with the "understanding of the human."
36. *The German Ideology*, p. 14.
37. Here he refers to Lenin, who in his 1894 polemic against the "populists" already stressed that historical materialism constitutes not only the pre-conditions of a critical economics, but also of sociology. Cf. *Werke*, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1963), pp. 129-131.
38. It is available in a highly advanced form in the studies of Adorno, Horkheimer and H. Marcuse, who have furthered critical and also psycho-analytical insights. They have attempted to satisfy the demands of a "dialectical anthropology" by making the society whole, in which everything individual is imprisoned, transparent even within the most private experience.
39. It is based on the concept of alienation developed by Lefèbvre in the thirties and it is presented in the work *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: 1947). The second edition, of which two volumes have appeared so far (Paris: 1958 and 1962), is more important methodologically.
40. This had been preceded by a series of important publications, written in collaboration with N. Guterman.

Lefèbvre published the first translation of the *1844 Manuscripts* in the periodical *Avant-Poste* in 1933. In 1934, the introduction to the *Morceaux choisis de Karl Marx* contained the elements of a theory of consciousness that tried to go beyond the summary thesis that consciousness is a "reflex" of being. This theory was more closely argued, especially with reference to the situation of the Popular Front at that time, in the 1936 book, *La conscience mystifiée*. In the same year as *Dialectical Materialism*, there appeared the *Morceaux choisis de Hegel* and a text which had been completely unknown in France until then, *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique de Hegel*. This last text had a long introduction in which Lefèbvre—in opposition to orthodoxy—called attention to the objective meaning of Hegelian philosophy for Marxism and, in particular, attempted to show that a conception of Lenin centering on *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, of 1908, is unreliable. Both publications found almost no echo in the Party. In 1940, the *Cahiers* as well as *Dialectical Materialism* were placed on the *Otto* list of books forbidden and to be destroyed by the German occupation authority.
41. *Das Kapital*, vol. 1 (Berlin: 1955), p. 389.
42. In many respects he sees the problem "Marxism and philosophy" differently today. Although in the thirties he had already disputed the view that dialectical materialism was a philosophy in the traditional sense,

that is, a metaphysical system, he still held firm to the view that it is still a *philosophy*: one which is free from the limits of previous philosophies. The Marxist idea of the "*Aufhebung*" of philosophy did not seem to offer any special problem. In view of the fact that the "revolutionizing *praxis*" into which philosophy was supposed to be dissolved, never occurred, Lefèbvre today sees himself forced to pose anew the question of the meaning of philosophy. In the apparent failure of Stalinized Marxism, he thus no longer sees merely a deviation from authentic "Marxist philosophy." That concept itself has in the meantime become suspect to him. The crisis of Marxism is symptomatic of a crisis of philosophy in general. It should be reflected on by means of a "meta-philosophy." Beginnings of it are found in *La somme et le reste*, vol. 1, pp. 48 and 68; especially in parts VI and VII of the second volume, "What Is the philosopher?" and "Is There a philosophy?" cf. pp. 659-761. Cf. also the larger book which has appeared in the meantime, *Méta-philosophie* (Paris: 1965).

43. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Marx in Perspektiv* (Hannover: 1952), p. 165.
44. Since published in a single volume by Dietz, Berlin, 1953. [Known better in English as the "*Grundrisse*"—Ed.]
45. Caught as he was in the then obligatory, yet objectively senseless, division of Marxism into historical and dialectical materialism, Lefèbvre sees the origins of the latter only at this point. The general development of Marx and Engels up to *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) is supposed to be one toward "historical materialism" and to consist in a principled rejection of the Hegelian dialectic. A thesis which Lefèbvre's book, however much its structure was determined by it, refutes.
46. Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, p. 76.
47. *The German Ideology*, p. 24.
48. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 9ff.
49. *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. Baillie, p. 548.
50. *WW*, vol. 16 (Leipzig: 1922), Aph. 523.
51. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, p. 8.
52. A procedure he uses not only in *Dialectical Materialism*, but also in the two important books *Pour connaître la pensée de Karl Marx* (Paris: 1948), and *Pour connaître la pensée de Lénine* (Paris: 1957).
53. Marx to Lassalle, Letter of November 12, 1858, in Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 29 (Berlin: 1963), p. 567.
54. Marx to Lassalle, Letter of February 22, 1858, in *ibid.*, p. 550.