

Book Reviews

The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx, by Raya Dunayevskaya. Edited and introduced by Peter Hudis and Kevin Anderson. Boston: Lexington Books, 2002.

Reviewed by **Russell Rockwell**
Independent Scholar

Many of Raya Dunayevskaya's articles, letters, and lectures are published in this volume for the first time. Dunayevskaya's unique approach to ideas once prompted Daniel Bell, with the tone of an insiders' joke, to remark in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* that Dunayevskaya made, "a major theoretical effort to convince workers that a knowledge of Hegel's *Science of Logic* was necessary to understand Lenin." Bell's caricature of Dunayevskaya's efforts to include into her philosophic discussions rank-and-file workers, women, Blacks, and youth who took oppositional stances toward the given social order, does not help much in answering the real question here: What is Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism, where did it come from, and where is it going?

There are both easy and elaborate answers to these questions. The easy answer is that Marxist Humanism originated during that brief period in the 1950s and 1960s when some dissident Marxists in Eastern Europe as well as African socialists active in the anti-colonialist struggles found strong points of affinity with the writings of the young Marx on Hegelian dialectics, alienation, and humanism. During the time when the ideas of the young Marx were the subject of great debate among Western European intellectuals, Dunayevskaya was among the first to translate the key writings into English and make them available in the U.S. *Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 Until Today* was published in 1958. It included, as appendices, translations of Marx's key 1844 manuscripts – the humanist essays that were virtually unknown until the 1930s when they were first published in German – and Lenin's *Philosophic Notebooks on Hegel's Science of Logic*.

The easy answer as to where Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism is going has to do with the fact that, since her death in 1987, *The Power of Negativity* now represents the second book-length collection of her writings, most of them unpublished during her lifetime. As such, and with additional volumes in the planning stages, it would certainly appear that Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanist philosophy is, for the time being at least, here to stay.

The more elaborate answer (one that can be traced through this collection) as to what that philosophy really is, involves an 1844 manuscript penned but

unpublished in Marx's lifetime and neglected among succeeding generations of his followers. In "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic" Marx analyzes Hegel's absolutes – absolute knowledge, absolute idea, and absolute mind – each of which concludes a principal philosophic work. These are, respectively, *Phenomenology of Mind*, *Science of Logic*, and *Philosophy of Mind* (the final volume of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*).

The Dunayevskaya collection opens with a discussion of *Philosophy of Mind* in a section on "The Philosophical Moment of Marxist-Humanism." Included in this section is a letter to Grace Lee. During the 1940s and early 1950s Lee, in addition to the Trinidadian Marxist, C.L.R. James, were Dunayevskaya's closest political and theoretically inclined associates within the Johnson-Forest tendencies of American Trotskyism. The letter, in which Dunayevskaya outlines her approach to Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, foreshadows her eventual philosophic break with James. This was followed almost immediately by an emphatic exit from the whole of the Trotskyist movement. Another essay in the same section develops the context for Dunayevskaya, where Marx's unfinished assessment of *Philosophy of Mind* in his "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic" is dealt with by questioning the absence of this discussion of Hegel among later Marxists as well.

These selections, but others too, indicate that one of the deeper motivations underlying Dunayevskaya's close scrutiny of Marx's and Hegel's ideas was to re-establish the independence of Hegel's ideas. For example, Dunayevskaya believed that the characteristics of Marx's critical social theory most relevant today are inaccessible in the absence of a clear view of Hegel's dialectic before Marx. According to many of the texts included in this volume, there is a socially relevant Hegel that Marxists have tended to shun.

The content of the collection ranges from the type of correspondence I just described (with Grace Lee) to more fairly polished articles. Some are published for the first time, others previously in *News & Letters* newspaper, which Dunayevskaya founded in 1955 and still appears today. The collection also includes "notes" that, for example, contain detailed descriptions of her reading of Hegel's texts.

In addition, the collection documents important developments in the origin of the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic in the U.S. This documentation includes primary material demonstrating Dunayevskaya's initiation of a discussion of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, a topic not previously dealt with by American Marxists. Evidence of this can be found in her correspondence with Herbert Marcuse in the 1950s 1960s, where she first tested out her plans for a revitalization of the Hegelian dialectic. Marcuse, who would go on to write a preface for Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*, was the first to analyze the full range of Hegel's works from a Marxist perspective. For this reason he was certainly the proper person to engage, given his importance in firmly establishing the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic in the U.S. context.

Marcuse wrote his first book *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* in New York, where he lived following his escape from Nazi Germany. The fact that it was written in the U.S. is important in relation to the dialogue with Dunayevskaya. Following this, the work gained international recognition for

its theoretical precision and came to represent the first comprehensive analysis of nearly all of Hegel's major texts by a Marxist in any language. In addition, the book included the first extensive discussion in English of Marx's 1844 economic-philosophic manuscripts, one of the rare instances where Marx explicitly discusses Hegel's works, including *The Philosophy of Mind*.

Retrospectively, Marcuse's treatment of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* stands out from the rest. Dunayevskaya's view of Hegel's social relevance is clearly shaped by some of the key parts of *Philosophy of Mind*, following the point in the text where Marx's own analysis of it in his 1844 economic-philosophic essays leaves off. Dunayevskaya's approach contrasts sharply with Marcuse's. In *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse suggests that, in lieu of analyzing the *Encyclopedia* per se (i.e.; *Philosophy of Mind*), he will instead take account of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. The latter work, as Marcuse explains, was written by Hegel following the completion of the *Encyclopedia*, and represents the socially relevant core of *Philosophy of Mind*. It is Hegel's presentation of the practical implications of objective Mind, which takes up politics, civil society, the state, and so on.

Dunayevskaya's theory counters this in noting that shortly before his death – a decade after the completion of *Philosophy of Right* – Hegel added three syllogisms to *Philosophy of Mind*. Read from Dunayevskaya's perspective of both Hegel's own concerns and the long series of failed and aborted 20th century revolutions, these syllogisms (as she analyzes them) do seem far more relevant for critical social theory than yet another Marxist critique of *Philosophy of Right*. Dunayevskaya's interpretation credits Hegel with originating the concept of alienation, which Marx would go on to specify socially. But, especially in the terms of *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel also depicted what Dunayevskaya viewed as the new society. In the second chapter, Dunayevskaya concludes her summary of the final three syllogisms of Hegel's work by writing, "we have entered the new society." Dunayevskaya considers this dialectic in Hegel's thought as it moves from nature (as the mediation of social relations in the first of these syllogisms) to philosophy in the form of subjective cognition (where this mediating role is assumed in the second instance), to a "unification" of these opposites in the final syllogism. She quotes Hegel's conclusion that, "it is the nature of the fact, the notion, which causes the movement and development, yet this same movement is equally the action of cognition. The eternal idea in full fruition of its essence, eternally sets itself to work and enjoys itself as absolute mind." A few years later, Marcuse followed Dunayevskaya on the importance of this final syllogism of Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind*, writing in *Eros and Civilization* that, "the *Encyclopedia* ends on the word 'enjoys.' The philosophy of Western civilization culminates in the idea that the truth lies in the negation of the principle that governs this civilization – negation in the twofold sense that freedom appears as real only in the idea, and that the endlessly projecting and transcending productivity of being comes to fruition in the perpetual peace of self-conscious receptivity" (p. 105).

Recall that each of Hegel's works end with discussions of specific dichotomies. Absolute Knowledge in the *Phenomenology* "resolves" science and history; absolute Idea in the *Science of Logic* resolves the theoretical and practical

Ideas (the true and the good); and, absolute Mind in the *Philosophy of Mind* resolves nature and mind. But, according to Dunayevskaya the specificity of the last “resolution” is two-fold: Hegel deliberately summarizes philosophy as a whole, and attempts to demonstrate the identity of the latter and a future society free of social domination.

Dunayevskaya’s interpretation of the final three syllogisms of *Philosophy of Mind* includes the implication that Hegel’s dialectic which, when traced all the way through, has theoretical and practical relevance even after a complete assimilation of the social theory contained in Marx’s *Capital*. Marx often appeared confident that the philosophical/dialectic would “speak for itself” in the unfolding of history and theory. But Marxist inspired revolutions, so often based on political conclusions drawn from his work, have not only failed several times over, they have also experienced counter-revolutions from within. The Hegelian dialectic itself depicts, in minute detail, this sort of transformation *into* and identity *of* opposites as a first negation. But Dunayevskaya argues that Hegelian dialectic, seen through to the end, also offers a glimpse of what Hegel termed, “the positive in its negative,” negation of negation or, in Dunayevskaya’s perspective, a potential “good” society in the post-capitalist sense.

It can be argued then that *The Power of Negativity* goes even further than the idea projected by Hegel as a society free of social domination. There are suggestions in some of the pieces that Marx’s social theory can be incorporated into the Hegelian dialectic, perhaps just as much as Marxists have often argued the reverse. Several possibilities follow from this. One possibility is that an understanding of Hegelian philosophy itself, principally dialectic, has undergone a significant positive development despite the torturous twists and turns to which it has been subjected by Marxists and non-Marxists alike. Another possibility, undoubtedly closely linked to the first, is that history has developed in a way that the social relevance of certain Hegelian categories are much more readily recognizable today than a century or two ago. In one further twist, connected with observations found particularly in some of her last writings resulting from interchanges with Hegel scholars who were not adherents of Marx’s social theory, Dunayevskaya develops an immanent critique of Hegel’s dialectic proper. Here I will limit myself to a brief discussion of her observations on the consequential differences between Hegel’s *Logic* and the condensed version of it as it appears in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.

A letter to the philosopher Louis Dupre, written in the mid-1980s, contrasts Dunayevskaya’s interpretation of the last two chapters of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* with those of two other Marxists, Marcuse and Lenin. In this letter Marcuse is mentioned only in passing, while her arguments against Lenin’s reading of Hegel’s two versions of the *Science of Logic* are more detailed; that is, on the one hand the larger, “stand alone” *Logic*, and on the other, the smaller logic that opens the *Encyclopedia*. Briefly, Hegel’s dual presentation inadvertently contributed to what proved to be Lenin’s abortive attempt to grasp the revolutionary social implications of Hegel’s category, the absolute idea.

The larger *Logic* contains minutely detailed elaborations of the dialectic of the true and the good (theoretical and practical ideas). In order to get his point across, which is also a sharp critique of Kant, Hegel first posits the practical Idea as “higher” than the theoretical Idea – the former has not only the dignity of the universal but also of the “simply actual.” Yet, Lenin does not notice Hegel’s return to this issue in the same section. A few pages further into the “Idea of the Good,” the last section of the Idea of Cognition chapter (which leads into the concluding Absolute Idea chapter) Hegel states explicitly that the practical Idea is inadequate. It still lacks the “moment” of the theoretical Idea. The two final paragraphs that follow are essential for understanding the *Logic*. These passages confront the subordination and domination of the individual by the universal, emphasizing the power of the latter in terms of its very abstractness. Many Marxists have recognized the power of abstraction and have gone on to develop social analyses that go further than Hegel’s logical categories by themselves. For example, the research into the core of critical categories such as that being carried out by the U.S.-based Critical Theorist Moishe Postone, on Marx’s concepts of value, abstract labor, and indirect social compulsions, to name just a few. Yet, particularly in this letter, Dunayevskaya argues that while providing us with access to the key critical categories, Hegel himself still “left open the door for a future generation of Marxists” to abort serious philosophic studies of the dialectic of theory and practice. Moreover, particularly in the case of the unsurpassed activism of Lenin, the historical consequences are difficult to overestimate.

How did Hegel himself “open the door” to what Dunayevskaya regards as a sort of halfway dialectics that Marxists have not succeeded in surmounting? For example, in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel introduced Volition – a subheading that was not included at the same juncture in the larger *Logic* – over the section of the Idea of the Good. Translating it as action, which Marxists always believed to be their province, Lenin gravitated toward this interpretation at the expense of continuing his close reading to the end of the larger *Logic*. This is to be understood textually in Lenin’s own reading of the two logics, carefully researched in Dunayevskaya’s early 1970s work *Philosophy and Revolution* as well as subsequent writings, including the previously mentioned letter to Dupre. Moreover, the concluding pages of the larger *Logic* on the absolute idea refer to a transition from logic to nature. Lenin characterizes this concept as “materialistic,” and as Hegel’s “stretching a hand to materialism.” But Hegel concludes the larger logic (and not the encyclopedia logic) with reference to a second transition – from nature to mind. In fact, it is precisely the paragraph describing the second transition that Lenin dismisses as “unimportant.” He then concludes his study of Hegel’s *Logic* with reference to the smaller logic, a work in which Hegel does not include reference to the second transition. Dunayevskaya believes Lenin’s approach contributed to his failure to develop politically the highpoint he did achieve with his assessment of the *Logic* that, “cognition not only reflects the objective world but creates it.”

Committed to what she called philosophy as a force of revolution, many of Dunayevskaya’s articles and letters on Marxist-Humanism suggest the need

for a diffusion of concepts through dialogue that explicate socially effective and dominating abstractions. This collection succeeds both in its arguments for the need to develop a strong theoretical tendency primarily committed to furthering this aim, and in its own original contribution that may be its actual starting point.

Socialism or Barbarism: From the "American Century" to the Crossroads, by István Mészáros. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

Reviewed by **Brett Clark**

Department of Sociology, University of Oregon

The new historic phase of global hegemonic imperialism reveals an ever-increasing trend towards confronting social problems and challenges through military interventions. Whether or not the United States can be seen as waging an undefined "war on terrorism" or engaging in "preventive wars," war has become a mechanism of world domination by capital's most powerful state. In *Socialism or Barbarism: From the "American Century" to the Crossroads*, István Mészáros argues that the intensification and expansion of global conflict is not the result of "big power politics." Rather global conflict remains an inescapable contradiction stemming from the logic of capital. Competition results in the expansion and advancement of capital but its necessary companion, the drive for monopoly, results in the extermination of competitors. Mészáros contends that imperialism is the result of capital's relentless drive to monopoly. At the same time, capital's economic tendency for global integration is thwarted at the political level where historically a multiplicity of divided and opposed national states developed. Thus, ambitions to create a solitary state of the capitalist system are doomed to failure.

Mészáros remains one of the foremost Marxist intellectuals today. His previous works, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (1975, plus several subsequent editions), *The Work of Sartre* (1979), *The Power of Ideology* (1989), and *Beyond Capital* (1995) reveal the breadth of his knowledge and his commitment to engaging philosophy in an ever-pertinent manner. In *Beyond Capital* Mészáros examines the triumphs of capitalism as a world system dependent upon constantly renewing itself through socially and environmentally destructive operations. *Socialism or Barbarism* extends this analysis in a timely fashion, undertaking a discussion of global conflict, imperialism, and the fate of humanity.

Mészáros's thesis in *Socialism or Barbarism* is that the United States "casts an ever-darkening shadow on the future" as it strives to enforce its hegemony over the rest of the world (p. 27). As the U.S. continues to establish military bases throughout the world, it also positions itself to control global production and exchange of valuable natural resources (e.g. the recent and "successful" invasion of Iraq). To this end, the analysis that Mészáros provides here only becomes more timely and important. The supremacy of the U.S. in the global