

## **The Declining Importance of Hegel for Marx: James D. White's Provocative Work**

Paul Zarembka

Louis Althusser's position concerning the *tendency* in Marx's relationship to Hegel is that Marx was driven 'irresistibly to the *radical* abandonment of every shade of Hegelian influence'.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not one accepts Althusser's interpretation, it has been considered important enough to warrant heated discussion and commentary, and probably has represented the deepest attack on Hegelian Marxism. In 1996, James D. White published *Karl Marx and the Intellectual Origins of Dialectical Materialism*. He basically comes to the same conclusion using a much simpler method of analysis and without any reference to Althusser or most other anti-Hegelian Marxists.

Sean Sayers's review in *Historical Materialism* 5, unfortunately, does serious disservice to the importance of White's work.<sup>2</sup> While Sayers does undertake some summary of White's work, he does not capture what White has accomplished and thus diverts a reader who has many other issues struggling for attention. White argues that 'dialectical materialism' is not derived from Marx himself, at least not the Marx of his later work. Its origins arose from those who lived during and immediately after Marx's life, even from persons close to Marx, although the principal responsibility is Plekhanov's. On the other hand, White argues that there is an alternative, 'romantic' interpretation of Marx's later, published and unpublished, work, an interpretation which also sustains an argument of Marx moving away from his Hegelian conditioning earlier in life. Three questions seem to be thus involved and they can be separated: Did Marx abandon Hegelian conditioning? Did that abandonment lead Marx to a 'romantic' interpretation? And, finally, how did 'dialectical materialism' come to claim dominance after Marx's death? We will address the first, while leaving open for further discussion the question of where the Marx of 'late' Marx arrived and how the Hegelian interpretation received dominance.

Sayers claims that White provides 'no convincing evidence' that Marx was led to 'abandon the general historical framework which had up until then [1868] guided his social thought and completely to reverse his historical approach'.<sup>3</sup> Sayers claims that White's case

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<sup>1</sup> Althusser 1977, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Sayers 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Sayers 1999, p. 362.

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'turns almost entirely upon a dubious reading' of one letter from Marx to Engels in March 25, 1868 and therefore is 'flimsy in the extreme'.<sup>4</sup> This is simply erroneous. White provides evidence of Marx's changing perspective *before* Volume I of *Capital* was published, ie. before 1867, and provides evidence *after* that 1868 letter was written, particularly after Marx learned Russian and undertook intensive study of Russia development. While White does refer to the 1868 letter as 'a turning point in Marx's conception of socialism',<sup>5</sup> it is a turning point only in the sense of 'early evidence', not in the sense of 'decisive evidence'. In other words, one would not need to use an 1868 dating to understand the overall point of White's work; indeed, one could drop that letter in the wastebasket and still rely on the remaining evidence White provides. Sayers's review has the effect of setting-up White's work and then being able to slide into a dismissive conclusion (seemingly directed at all of us who may be so inclined): questions of interpreting Marxism 'cannot be resolved by poring over the words of Marx as though these have sacred authority'.<sup>6</sup> Yes, the Marxist tradition is a living one in which Marx himself is put to the test of new knowledge. However, we also do need to be clear where we have actually gone beyond or contradicted Marx and, for that, we need to 'pore over words' Marx wrote.

White sustains his argument that Marx abandoned his earlier Hegelian conditioning through a series of observations gleaned from a careful reading of the *trend* of changes in Marx's thinking, as demonstrated by several differing types of documentation. This series of observations, not at all based upon one letter, results in a real case to be thought about and confronted or confirmed. This evidence from White is not summarised by Sayers.

(i) In 1865, Marx completed the third, but not final, draft of Volume I, as well as most of the only full draft ever made of Volume III. Volume I is abstract, while Volume III is concerned with processes in time and space.<sup>7</sup> The concluding chapter (the only unpublished one to survive) of this draft of Volume I was entitled 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' and 'achieved a high degree of integration between his conception of the Subsumption of labour under capital and that of productive and unproductive labour' (as well as of Subsumption with Alienation).

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sayers 1999, p. 358.

<sup>6</sup> Sayers 1999, p. 364.

<sup>7</sup> Surplus-value of Volume I also represented a Universal, says White, while profits, interest and ground rent of Volume III represented Particulars; more, below, on Universal and Particulars.

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White claims 'Marx clearly wished to imply that as economic relations increasingly took on a capitalist character, their scale increased and this brought them ever closer to the world market and their point of culmination'.<sup>8</sup>

The first draft for Volume II was begun by Marx in 1865, and that volume needed to link the abstract of Volume I with the time and space processes of Volume III. The first draft of Volume II failed, however, 'to establish any necessary connection between expanded reproduction of capital and the extension of capitalist relations', the introduction of time and space. Accumulation of capital was to be 'a process which would reproduce its presuppositions, the capitalists and workers on an extended scale ... To be unable to show that capital created its own presuppositions, that it created Civil Society, was a serious difficulty for Marx's overall scheme of capitalist development'.<sup>9</sup> What had been the concluding draft chapter of Volume I was, consequently, left out by Marx when *Capital*, Volume I went to the publisher in 1867. This meant that 'subsumption' was almost completely eliminated from Volume I, including the references to subsumption which had been in the discussion of increasing productivity of labour.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, regarding accumulation of capital, 'very little remained of the argument that in its cycle of reproduction capital created its own preconditions on an ever increasing scale'.<sup>11</sup>

Although he pulled out 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production', Marx probably intended it to be incorporated somewhere, later. But, if White is correct, that could only happen if Marx could pull Volume II together in a manner which would serve as a link between Volume I and Volume III. Marx continued with a number of other attempts at Volume II but never succeeded in solving this problem.<sup>12</sup> The dropping of 'Results' reflects Marx's

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<sup>8</sup> White 1996, pp. 190–1.

<sup>9</sup> White 1996, p. 196.

<sup>10</sup> White 1996, p. 200; a remaining definitional passage was finally eliminated in the French edition.

<sup>11</sup> White 1996, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> We should note that White says that the edition of *Capital*, Volume II published by Engels is close to its 1860s version (White 1996, p. 282). But White also says that the first draft, 'Manuscript I', was

a significant document, because it embodied Marx's original conception of the 'circulation of capital'. This was a much more philosophical one than the rather dry and technical conception of circulation which emerges from Engels' compilation of Book II. In 'Manuscript I' 'circulation' functioned as a cardinal element in the system which Marx

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intellectual integrity in not wanting to publish something incomplete, and represents, on White's understanding, the *first* solid evidence of Marx moving away from his Hegelian conditioning.

It is important to note, however, that the first edition of Volume I did still contain Hegelian elements (White discusses these). And it was this first edition which was used for the Russian translation of Volume I, published in March 1872. That Russian translation served as one important element, but far from the only element, conditioning what was to become the dominant interpretation of Marx via dialectical materialism.

(ii) In 1868, Marx read two works of Georg Maurer on ancient communal organisation and in March wrote Engels concerning their 'extraordinary importance'. Those works confirmed that 'the reproductive cycle of capitalism did not necessarily mean the destruction of the ancient communities' and led Marx to understand that 'it was only destroyed by the deliberate application of force'.<sup>13</sup>

To illustrate the importance of the preservation of ancient communities, consider, by contrast, Lenin's 1893 analysis of how capitalism is formed. Borrowing from my own summary of his 'On the So-called Market Question',

Lenin reminds the reader that the article he is reviewing distinguishes, with the help of a diagram, development of capitalism in breadth from development in depth, and he comments that development in breadth is the Narodnik view. Lenin presents a kind of early input-output table as a counterpose, and illustrates a movement from a purely natural economy to a purely capitalist economy. He explains that his table does not include accumulation of capital, ... it seems that the key explanation for the exclusion is that surplus value is not being used for new constant capital and new variable capital, but rather is consumed by the capitalist. The differentiation of peasant production into capitalist production results, instead, according to Lenin's exposition, from the development of a social division of labour – and thus commodity production, then from commodity production to development of competition in which the stronger become capitalists and the weaker, wage labourers.<sup>14</sup>

Note the absence of a reference to application of force and the presentation of capitalism as some type of natural process. Although White has no reference to Rosa Luxemburg in his book, her

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had outlined in his first draft of 'The Critique of Political Economy' in 1857–58. (White 1996, p. 194)

<sup>13</sup> White 1996, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Zarembka 2000, pp. 198–9, parenthetical notes to citations deleted.

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*Accumulation of Capital* drove home this point of the necessity of force in the creation of the capitalism.

Regarding Marx's reading of Maurer, White also comments that 'if the communes existed or had existed in all parts of the world, then it was clear that man was Social by Nature. Socialism thus became identical with man's Natural state'. Rather than relying on Hegel, 'a great deal of what Marx had been trying to argue philosophically could be demonstrated by reference to history'.<sup>15</sup> This particular point partly connects to White's discussion of Marx's return to a 'romantic' understanding, but is outside of our scope.

(iii) After March 1868, 'Marx never employed the terms Universality, Particularity or Individuality again in his writings', the second German edition of Volume I abandoning these Hegelian conceptions. The first chapter of Volume I was revised to 'reduce drastically the occurrence of philosophical terminology, and render what remained inessential to the argument'.<sup>16</sup>

White's personal experience in developing this insight is quite interesting. Upon writing to him about his book, White replied to me privately:

... the question arose: why and when had Marx become interested in Russia? I worked backwards through Marx's correspondence and discovered from the letter to Engels of March 1868 that the interest had first been in peasant communities in general and only then in Russian agrarian communities. I was very pleased with this discovery and envisaged writing it up in an article form. But if I quoted the relevant passage it would contain the phrase about 'old Hegel' and the terms Universal and Particular. Obviously a footnote was needed to explain them. I had no idea what the terms could refer to, and had never seen them mentioned in any of the commentaries I had read on Hegel or Marx. I imagined that tracking them down would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. I took a copy of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* off the shelf, prepared to be aghast at the enormity of the task. When I opened the book at random, I was amazed to find both Universal and Particular on the first page I looked at. To confirm to myself how miraculous this coincidence had been, I flipped through other pages, but discovered that Universal and Particular was to be found on practically all of them. Experimenting with a copy of Marx's *Grundrisse* produced the same result. I was so spooked by this I thought I was having a weird nightmare. Marx's reference to the Romantics in the letter prompted me to have a look at pre-Hegelian thinkers, and, sure enough, they were full of Universals and Particulars too. So instead of a crisp footnote supplying

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<sup>15</sup> White 1996, p. 207.

<sup>16</sup> White 1996, pp. 207–8.

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definitions of Universal and Particular what emerged was a history of the terms (in modern times) from Kant through to Marx.<sup>17</sup>

(iv) In the 1872–5 French edition, says White, any remaining philosophical vocabulary becomes only stylistic.<sup>18</sup> And, with regard to primitive accumulation, reference to its ‘classic form’, seemingly suggesting a Universality of the English case, was eliminated.<sup>19</sup> (Engels, inexplicably, *maintained the earlier, pre-French-edition passage* in the third and fourth editions of Volume I published after Marx’s death, even as Engels included many other changes following the French edition.<sup>20</sup>)

Regarding the latter, we can reinforce White’s position by noting that, in the French edition, all of Part VIII, ‘The So-Called Primitive Accumulation’, was split off from having been two chapters of Part VII, ‘The Accumulation of Capital’, in the first and second German editions. This splitting was preserved by Engels in subsequent editions and Rubel discusses this change and related changes.<sup>21</sup> For some strange reason, Dunayevskaya had Marx’s change backwards and held Engels responsible for returning to an earlier supposed splitting.<sup>22</sup> She, as a Hegelian Marxist, had argued that the supposed change by Marx (collapsing two parts into one) pointed to her own argument that Marx ‘far from considering a separate Part 8 “justifiable”, held that the real logic of “so-called Primitive Accumulation” was that it was not merely the historic origin, but the logical continuation of the process of capitalist accumulation’.<sup>23</sup> She thought that the integration reflected a deeper Hegelian approach by Marx by the time of the French edition. By her logic, since the reverse is correct, the fact of the separation in the French edition should sustain an argument of the diminution of Hegel’s influence.

Another incident we note involves a change in a text on primitive accumulation appearing in Chapter 23, ‘Simple Reproduction’. In a passage referring to the capitalist having been able to advance variable

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<sup>17</sup> White to author, 8 December 2000.

<sup>18</sup> White 1996, p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> White 1996, pp. 208–9. In 1878, Marx himself cited the French version of the passage in replying to Mikhaylovsky. We must note, however, that Marx was writing in French. In any case, the translation of Marx’s letter on Mikhaylovsky is in Shanin 1983, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> See Anderson 1983, pp. 76–7, for further discussion.

<sup>21</sup> See Marx 1963, pp. 1700ff

<sup>22</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991.

<sup>23</sup> Dunayevskaya 1991, p. 139 fn.

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capital within a constant process of renewal, the edition as put out by Engels goes on to read:

But that process must have had a beginning of some kind. From our present standpoint it therefore seems likely that the capitalist, once upon a time, became possessed of money by some form of primitive accumulation that took place independently of the unpaid labour of other people, and that this was therefore how he was able to frequent the market as a buyer of labour-power.<sup>24</sup>

The more elaborated French text refers to capitalist's own labour and savings as background for initiating purchase of labour-power, and primitive accumulation is only referenced as to later discussion:

Mais avant de se renouveler, ce procès doit avoir commencé et duré un certain laps de temps, pendant lequel l'ouvrier ne pouvait encore être payé en son propre produit ni non plus vivre de l'air du temps. Ne fallait-il donc pas, la première fois qu'elle se présenta au marché du travail, que la classe capitaliste eût déjà accumulé par ses propres labeurs et ses propres épargnes des trésors qui la mettaient en état d'avancer les subsistances de l'ouvrier sous forme de monnaie? Provisoirement nous voulons bien accepter cette solution du problème, en nous réservant d'y regarder de plus près dans le chapitre sur la prétendue accumulation primitive.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, Marx has taken a precaution and reserved discussion of primitive accumulation to a later and distinct chapter, indeed, a distinct Part, of Volume I.

This fits White's argument that the second German edition and the French edition 'continued a process that had begun in the preparation of the first edition, that of eliminating the philosophical structure which had been built up in earlier drafts.' Marx's famous comment on Hegel in the Afterword to the second German edition 'were not a statement of what Marx's debt to Hegel ... had been in the past, but of how Marx wanted that debt to be understood in the

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<sup>24</sup> Marx, 1977, p. 714. We are using the Fowkes translation, close to the earlier English translation but not skipping over 'ursprüngliche' in 'ursprüngliche Akkumulation' as in the German fourth edition. The relevant German passage reads: 'Aber er muß doch irgendwo und irgendwann anfangen. Von unsrem bisherigen Standpunkt ist es daher *wahrscheinlich*, daß der Kapitalist irgendeinmal durch irgendeine, von unbezahlter fremder Arbeit unabhängige, *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* Geldbesitzer ward, und daher den Markt als Käufer von Arbeitskraft beschreiten konnte.' (Marx 1961, p. 597, italics in original.)

<sup>25</sup> Marx 1963, pp. 1070-1.

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future, that is not as an essential part of his system, but merely as a form of expression'.<sup>26</sup>

(v) Marx, of course, lived almost a decade after his revisions of Volume I and White identifies two significant interventions by Marx indicating his change in approach. In 1877 from N.K. Danielson, Marx received N.K. Mikhaylovsky's published reply, 'Karl Marx before the Tribunal of Mr. Zhukovsky', to an article by Y.G. Zhukovsky (both in Russian). Zhukovsky had understood Marx to be Hegelian, yet noted that Marx had presented primitive accumulation as having a fortuitous character to it, rather than having presented it as a Natural process, a Universal. Zhukovsky himself went on to suggest primitive accumulation as an effect of capitalism, not as a cause, with the origin of capitalism needing to be found elsewhere. Mikhaylovsky, also thinking Marx to be Hegelian, could not accept Zhukovsky's interpretation of Marx regarding primitive accumulation and thought of Marx's understanding of the development of capitalism as indeed a Universal. Mikhaylovsky then criticised Marx for his 'historico-philosophical view', including his reference to 'negation of the negation', noting the paradox that for the case of Russia it would mean that the peasant producer 'would be separated from the means of production in order that he should be later reunited with them – and all at the tremendous human cost that Marx had described so graphically'.<sup>27</sup>

Having read Mikhaylovsky, Marx in late 1878 drafted in French his reply. Here, Marx disowns Mikhaylovsky's characterisation of his work. Specifically, Marx rejects Mikhaylovsky's attempt to metamorphose an 'historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the Universal path every people is fated to tread'.<sup>28</sup> In other words, Marx denies the Universal to which he had been associated by Mikhaylovsky. Marx, however, was persuaded not to send in his reply for publication (White offers an explanation) and it took ten years before Danielson got Marx's reply published in Russia.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, Marx's 1878 position was unknown and the silence vis-à-vis Mikhaylovsky's published position, helped, in its way, to leave the field open for a continued belief in Marx's Hegelianism.

(vi) On 8 March 1881, Marx replied to a letter from Vera Zasulich asking him whether the Russian agrarian commune was bound to disappear. Having prepared several earlier drafts which have

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<sup>26</sup> White 1996, pp. 209-10.

<sup>27</sup> White 1996, p. 239.

<sup>28</sup> White 1996, pp. 241-2, translating Marx.

<sup>29</sup> Appearing in Geneva, presumably in the French original, two years earlier (Walicki 1979, p. 408).



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been preserved, in the final version Marx writes that the analysis in *Capital* 'provides no reason either for or against the viability of the Russian commune. But the special study I made of it ... has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum of social regeneration in Russia'.<sup>30</sup> As White sees it from the drafts, Marx clearly 'did not believe that the agrarian commune was doomed by spontaneous economic laws, nor that the destruction of the commune was a step forward in historical progress'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, says White in a rather dramatic coda to his analysis, 'if the world market could have drawn Russia so easily into its orbit and transformed its population into proletarians and bourgeoisie, then *Capital* would have been completed in the 1860s and Marx's special study of peasant communes would have been unnecessary'.<sup>32</sup> The drama is White's location of the incompleteness of *Capital* not on Marx's condition of health nor age nor other pressures, but rather on the major theoretical conundrum outlined above and never solved.

White's book is important. While recognising the considerable influence of Hegel on Marx, it does not stop there. It asks how that influence *changed*. It finds a very substantial diminution from 1865 on. A dismissive reading of White, such as Sayers's, does not help us make progress.

White's book interfaces with the question of the definition of accumulation of capital in Marx. White refers to the distinction between accumulation of capital (expanded reproduction) and extension of capitalist relations, and it is this distinction which is at the heart of the problem he sees Marx having in connecting together Volume I and Volume III via Volume II. Yet Marx's 'accumulation of capital' is itself ambiguous as to meaning and White does not himself offer a clear definition. This author has proposed that it be reconsidered/clarified as 'increase of wage-labour with its associated constant capital'.<sup>33</sup> Primitive accumulation is only the process of separation from means of production for the initial establishment of the capitalist mode of production, not a case such as late nineteenth-century Russia. If so, while the connection being sought by White may have also been the connection Marx thought he needed, that problem of the connecting link between Volume I and Volume III gets moved to an issue *within* the logic of Volume I. At a minimum, the problem of time and space (the extension of capitalist

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<sup>30</sup> White 1996, citing Marx, p. 274.

<sup>31</sup> White 1996, p. 277.

<sup>32</sup> White 1996, p. 279.

<sup>33</sup> See Zarembka 2000.

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social relations) is already posed by Volume I and Luxemburg's *Accumulation* takes on renewed importance.<sup>34</sup>

White has a puzzling conclusion. He writes that 'the irony is that from the vantage point of the present day Marx's attempts to revise his initial conceptions may well have been misplaced ... [since] capitalism seems set to become the Universal economic system throughout the world'.<sup>35</sup> The puzzle is that any factual universality of the capitalist system is quite distinct from the Hegelian philosophical Universal. Given all the pages that go before this tail end, it cannot be at all expected that White would fall into such an error. So, we can do no more than record his conclusion and note his use of the word irony.

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<sup>34</sup> I have attempted to restore a fuller appreciation of Luxemburg's work on accumulation in Zarembka 2000, Section III, and Zarembka 2001.

<sup>35</sup> White 1996, pp. 366–7.

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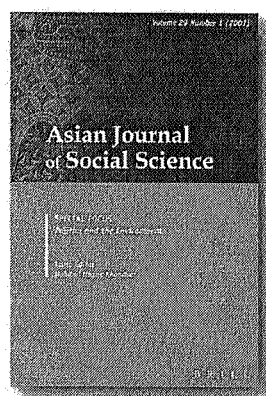
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