Marx on Epicurus: Much Ado About Nothing

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Marx's post-graduate career is better known than his graduate career, even though Marx first formulated the ideas that were to make him famous, or infamous, while a doctoral student. During this time Marx was taught many of the battles in the war between the ancients and the moderns. Soon after his graduation ancient philosophy became a closed book to him. There was no profit in reliving old battles; the vanquished could never defeat the victors. It was time to undertake new campaigns. But during his studies the battles raged. The works that survive from this time — Marx's letters, poetry, notebooks, and his doctoral dissertation *On the Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* (1840-41)[1] — give evidence of his intellectual uncertainty, and of his troubled soul. The Socratic dialectic and the Hegelian dialectic refused to resolve, and Marx had no peace until the discussion could be ended. Many years later, Marx was to write as if Hegel had been his only adversary, but by then his uncertainty had deserted him. In the 1873 Afterword to *Capital* he claims:

> My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking . . . is the *demiurgos* of the real world. . . . With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected by the human brain, and translated into forms of thought.

There is little trace of such "undialectical" epistemological realism in Marx's graduate work, all of which was written prior to his study of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1841). It begins to appear in the Introduction to Marx's *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (1843-44). In the earlier works Hegel is not the enemy. The Hegelian dialectic, along with Marx's critical reformulation of it, stand in opposition to the Socratic dialectic. It is fitting that Marx and Hegel stand together, since the ancients would consider the Hegelian and Marxian dialectical method to be in essence the same.

In the first section of this paper, the distinctions made by the ancients between dialectical and eristical natures and arguments

1. Page references for quotations from Marx's early works will be given in parentheses; they refer to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (NY: International Publishers, 1975), Volume 1. The thesis appears on pp. 25-107; and the preparatory "Notebooks" on Epicurean philosophy, compiled in 1839 and not intended for publication, appear on pp. 403-509.

Dionysius, Vol. XI, Dec. 1987, pp. 111-145

will be used to examine the nature of the modern dialectic, and of its advocates. The second section will be an exegesis of Marx's dissertation, showing that his misrepresentative account of Epicurean atomism is a reformulation of the Hegelian dialectic, intended to be a call to *praxis* addressed to his contemporaries. The third and final section will discuss Marx's unfinished history of ancient philosophy, of which his dissertation was to be the major part. Marx accepts Hegel's account of the ancients, and particularly Hegel's evaluation of sophistry, differing only in his attribution of revolutionary significance to the Epicurean *sophoi* [sages].

Dialectic, Eristic, and the Soul

Marx's dissertation is his first call to revolutionary *praxis*, the first *Manifesto*. Yet it has received relatively little attention from supporters and critics of Marx alike. This may be due in part to the *lacunae* in the manuscript, the substance of which must be inferred from the extant sections. As well, the thesis has the appearance of being an abandoned project. Marx failed to provide a promised "larger work in which [he would] present in detail the cycle of Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptic philosophy in their relation to the whole of Greek speculation" (29). This project can be partially reconstructed from Marx's "Notebooks" on Epicurean philosophy, as well as from indications given in the thesis itself. But the main reasons why the dissertation lies forgotten are two: its apparent irrelevance to the doctrines of Marx, the Marxist, and the difficulty a reader encounters in attempting to unravel its over-determined arguments. Once the arguments are unravelled, however, they no longer seem irrelevant to his later work. On the surface, Marx simply presents a unique, and somewhat unconvincing reading of Epicurus by means of a comparison of Epicurean and Democritean atomism. Since it contradicts what are taken to be the basic premises of Epicurean physics, the reading can be easily dismissed. Below its surface, Marx's thesis is a labyrinth. It argues for the superiority of Epicurus to Plato and Aristotle, for the superiority of Marx's projected history of philosophy to that of Hegel, and for the rejection, indeed, the annihilation of all things eternal or transcendent: God, the gods, contemplation, and German Idealism. There are even the first signs of Marx's later political doctrines in the surviving fragments of the dissertation's Appendix, the substance of which is a critique of Plutarch's polemic against the theology of Epicurus.

A guide is necessary for the labyrinth, and one is supplied by Marx's favorite playwright, Shakespeare. Marx's graduate work is much ado about nothing. In *King Lear* the Fool asks, "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" Lear replies, "Why, no, boy;

nothing can be made out of nothing" (Act 1, Scene 3). This is also the reply of Epicurus and Lucretius. Nothing comes into being out of nothing; and nothing is reduced to nothing. The universe is made up of the void and bodies that are reducible to atoms and their compounds. The universe always was as it is now, and always will be; the universe, or All, is infinite (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 38. 15-41. 12; Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* Book 1, passim).[2] Unlike Lear, Marx has a use for nothing. In his study of Epicurean physics, he gives it a function and quality, while still claiming it to be nothing. One might ask, as does Gloucester, to know it, since "the quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself" (Act 1, Scene 2). The Fool would understand the consequences of Marx's hidden use of nothing: "This cold night will turn us to fools and madmen" (Act 3, Scene 4).

To use a popular form of discourse, there are three determinations of nothing in Marx's work: nothing as the void; nothing as negation; and nothing as death. Often they are indistinguishable. But just as nature abhors a vacuum, so too it is difficult to speak of nothing without giving it some content. The first determination of nothing pertains to things in themselves. Epicurean atomism counterposes the void and atoms, or not-being and being. Marx is not satisfied with this counterposition and instead proposes the dialectical interdependence of what is and what is not, an argument he claims to find in Epicurus' notion of the *clinamen atomi*, the declination or deviation of the atom from the straight line. The void is thus given a function: it annihilates all that is, transforming it into the flux of becoming or the realm of appearance.[3] Its second use, or determination, pertains to speech. The notion of an interdependence of what is and what is not raises the questions: what does it mean to speak of not-being?, and how is it possible to speak of it in different ways? These questions have been discussed in Plato's dialogues and in Aristotle's logic. It would seem, then, that the role of nothing in the modern dialectic must con-

2. Compare Empedocles: "Fools, in their anxiousness, their thoughts do not reach far: they imagine that what was not before comes into being or that a thing dies and is completely destroyed" (fragment B 11).

3. It is worth noting that in a few passages of the "Notebooks" Marx compares atomistic physics and liberal economics: "The formation of combinations of atoms, their repulsion and attraction, is a noisy affair. An uproarious contest, a hostile tension, constitutes the workshop and smithy of the world. The world in the depths of whose heart there is such tumult, is torn within." This is "the war *ominum contra omnes*" (pp. 472, 475). Atomistic men occupy the void of civil society. For a discussion of liberal atomism see James H. Nichols, Jr., *Epicurean Political Philosophy: The "De rerum natura" of Lucretius*, (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1976), especially pp. 179-210.

front the ancients' understanding of the types of negation possible in speech. Poetic speech about the void or death is a thing apart, although Marx frequently has recourse to it. The third determination of nothing, as death, pertains to states of the soul. Marx, like most modern thinkers, only speaks poetically of souls. The mind, or self-consciousness, is the existential truth of "soul." Death is thus the existential confrontation of mind with nothingness, or of being with not-being. The purpose of speaking of not-being may be to confront death. It may even be to attempt to overcome death. This, in short, is Marx's use of nothing: the modern dialectic is a way of speaking about being and not-being by which the mind first attempts to annihilate all that is, and then attempts to overcome its absolute terror of death in a meaningless universe, its terror of being dissolved in the void of its own creation.

The ancients understood the relation of philosophy and dying differently. The Socratic dialectic, unlike the modern, does not "turn us to fools and madmen." In the *Phaedo* (80c-81a) Socrates describes philosophy as the practice or art of dying. Aristotle describes it as "immortalizing" (*Nichomachean Ethics* 1177b26 ff). Philosophy is something more than speaking about not-being. It is a way of life. And moreover, it is an activity of the soul, not of "mind" alone. Philosophy is the love of wisdom; modern thinkers believe it to be the possession of wisdom, or knowledge. The strongest criticism of the Socratic understanding of philosophy is given by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Mind*: philosophy is insufficient.

> The systematic development of truth in scientific form can alone be the true shape in which truth exists. To help bring philosophy nearer to the form of science — that goal where it can lay aside the name of *love* of knowledge and be actual *knowledge* — that is what I have set before me.[4]

Hegel attains the goal of Absolute Knowledge, or Science, by means of the *Phenomenology's* demonstration that the systematic, or logical exposition of philosophy and the temporal, or historical development of philosophy both necessarily lead to Science. Socratic philosophy was merely a moment in a now concluded dialectical development. Marx does not disagree with Hegel on this point. Indeed, the inspiration for Marx's abandoned study of later Greek philosophy is taken from "the admirably great and bold plan of [Hegel's] history of philosophy, from which alone the history of philosophy can be dated" (29-30). Both Hegel and Marx

4. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie, (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), p. 70.

distinguish between ancients and moderns on the basis of the distinction between philosophy and science. In answer to them, the Socratic philosophers would argue that history has not benefited them in the least: there exists only the distinction between philosophy and sophistry, that is, between the dialectical pursuit of wisdom and the eristical boast of possessing it.

In the *Republic* Socrates several times discusses the difference between dialectic and eristic. He distinguishes between them not only by examining the nature of speech, but also the nature of souls, since words are but "symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul" (Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 16a). In discussing the proper education of citizens in the *kallipolis* Socrates describes a test for twenty-year-olds — students of the youthful Marx's age — given to determine whether or not they have integrated their studies into "an overview which reveals the kinship of these studies with one another and with the nature of that which *is*." This is more than a graduate student's comprehensive examination; "it is the greatest test . . . of the nature that is dialectical and the one that is not." Those with dialectical natures are able to "go to that which *is* in itself and accompanies truth" (537c-d).[5] Those with undialectical natures go to that which is not. Even an education in the proper practice of dialectic may be harmful for some students. It may fill them "full with lawlessness." If the students do not have dialectical natures, they will "misuse [arguments] as though it were play, always using them to contradict,. . . like puppies enjoying pulling and tearing with argument at those who happen to be near." Socrates even describes this destructive form of discourse as "madness." Eristic leads some "into a profound disbelief of what they formerly believed;" and what is more, it leads to the slandering of philosophy (539a-d).

Earlier in the dialogue Socrates had said, "Oh Glaucon, . . . the power of the contradicting art is grand;" this is because "many fall into it even unwillingly and suppose they are not quarreling but discussing, because they are unable to consider what's said by separating it out into its forms [*diairesis*]." Dialectic discovers the divisions existing naturally in what is by means of *diairesis*, the activity of discerning the forms of things in themselves; and it speaks of things according to these discovered divisions. Eristic, on the other hand, pursues "contradiction in the mere name of what's spoken about;" it confuses things possible in speech with impossible divisions of what is; it corresponds to nothing (454a-b). Now, eristic is not simply error. It may also be playful, and it may

5. The translation used is by Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, (NY: Basic Books, 1968).

be madness. Its nature depends upon the soul of the one speaking eristically. Those who are prone to error differ from those who are like puppies, and both differ from those who are mad with the *power* of the contradicting art. The eristic soul may be contentious for the sake of winning an argument; in this it pursues some form of power over others. But it may also wilfully pursue power over all that *is* by means of contradictory speech. This is truly madness.

If the Socratic distinction between dialectic and eristic is to be capable of explaining the modern dialectic as a form of madness — as the "cold night" — then the soul that corresponds to it must first be examined. It may not be sufficient to refute the arguments of Hegel and Marx; their souls should be questioned to determine whether or not they have dialectical natures. It is possible to do this by examining the poetry and prose of Marx's student days, written while he wrestled with both the Socratic and the Hegelian dialectic. He even wrote two short Socratic dialogues, one of which survives. Marx refers to the missing dialogue, entitled "Cleanthes, or the Starting Point and Necessary Continuation of Philosophy," in a letter to his father (November 10-11, 1837). He had just read "fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to [him]." In the dialogue he sought to give his own "philosophical-dialectical account of divinity, as it manifests itself as the idea-in-itself, as religion, as nature, and as history." He even intended the dialogue "to be a new logic." But his efforts only resulted in a reformulation of the Hegelian system. Marx felt himself compelled to accept the "grotesque . . . melody" of the Hegelian dialectic, the new logic that enables men to give a complete account of all that *is*. But he also recognized that there was a price to be paid for accepting Absolute Knowledge: "For some days my vexation made me quite incapable of thinking; I ran about madly in the garden" (18).

The second dialogue is found in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844). In it, Marx engages Aristotle in a brief discussion on the question of whether or not man "owes his *existence* to himself," that is, whether or not man must acknowledge a Creation, or God, or any transcendental realm. It can be considered a Socratic dialogue because Marx does not misrepresent Aristotle when allowing him to question the first principles of his argument. Such openness to discussion is difficult to find in Marx's writings after 1844. Aristotle first asks: if a man owes his existence to no one, what of the mating of his parents? Marx replies that *man* always remains the subject in the process of procreation; man perpetually creates himself. Aristotle then asks: "Who begot the first man, and nature as a whole?" Marx replies that the question's formulation is in error; it cannot be answered. By abstraction,

Aristotle postulates the non-existence of man and nature, while asking Marx to prove them as existing. Aristotle must give up his question, or accept his own non-existence.

> Don't think, don't ask me, for as soon as you think and ask, your *abstraction* from the existence of nature and man has no meaning. Or are you such an egotist that you conceive of everything as nothing, and yet want yourself to exist?

Marx admits that Aristotle has a reply: "I do not want to postulate the nothingness of nature, etc. I ask you about its *genesis*." But Aristotle receives no answer. Marx ends the discussion by turning away from Aristotle and addressing the reader directly: "since for the socialist man the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labor, . . . so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his *birth* through himself, of his *genesis*." Aristotle's question "has become impossible in practice." Socialism is unquestionable. How did it become so? Be means of atheism, "*a negation of God*," that serves as the "mediation" between the non-scientific and the scientific understanding of man, between philosophy and Science.[6]

Aristotle would have considered Marx's concluding tirade to be an example of eristic, not dialectic. It cannot be called rhetoric since rhetoric is the persuasive presentation of dialectical argument (*The Art of Rhetoric* 1355b). Eristic "appears to reason but does not really do so." This is due to its premises, not its reasoning, which may not be in error. The premises of eristic arguments are illusory: "usually the nature of untruth in these is immediately obvious to those who have even a small power of comprehension" (*Topica* 100a25-101a24).[7] Marx's argument is both contentious and sophistical. This is because its motives are both the semblance of victory and the semblance of wisdom (*On Sophistical Refutations* 171b22-35). For the sake of appearing to win a victory Marx attributes to Aristotle the argument that it is possible to postulate the nothingness of nature without recalling that this is an argument he himself advances in his doctoral dissertation. Marx's criticism turns against him. Is he such an egotist that he could conceive of everything as nothing, and yet want to exist in the void? Would he argue in this manner for the sake of appearing to possess wisdom? Yes. In 1837 Marx thought the Hegelian dialectic a "grotesque . . . craggy melody;" by 1844 he has mastered its new logic.

Marx's poetry is as revealing as his prose. In a book of verse

6. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, (Moscow: Progress, 1974), pp. 99-100.
7. Translation of Aristotle's *Topica* by E.S. Forster, (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1976).

dedicated to his father in 1837, Marx wrote an epigram entitled "On Hegel:"

> Since I have found the Highest of things and the Depths of them also,
> Rude am I as a God, cloaked in the dark like a God.
> Long have I searched and sailed on Thought's deep billowing ocean;
> There I found me the Word: now I hold on to it fast. . .
> Words I teach all mixed up into a devilish muddle,
> Thus, anyone may think just what he chooses to think;
> Never, at least, is he hemmed in by strict limitations. . .
> Thus, each may for himself suck wisdom's nourishing nectar;
> Now you know all, since I've said plenty of nothing to you! (576-7)

Three voices can be heard in the first person singular. The first is that of Hegel, being mocked by Marx, the young Romantic. The second is that of Marx, simultaneously attracted and repelled by the power of Hegel's muddled speech about nothing. The third is again that of Marx, accepting Hegelian Science for the absolute freedom of will that Absolute Knowledge allows to all men, but criticizing Hegel for obscuring the liberating spirit of Science in Idealism.

The power of Hegel's manner of speech, his dialectic, lies in its apparent mastery of all things transcendent. In his epigram Marx obliquely refers to three ways in which the ancients represented or symbolized the transcendental. The depths of all things is Anaximander's *apeiron*:

> The origin of things is the *apeiron* [boundless; unlimited] . . . It is necessary for things to perish into that from which they were born; they pay one another penalty for their injustice according to the ordinance of time (fragment B 1).

The highest of all things is Anaxagoras' *nous*:

> The *nous* is something unlimited [*apeiron*] and self-ruling [*autokrates*], and is mixed with no other thing, but is alone for itself (fragment B 12).

The noetic heights and apeirontic depths of all things are equivalent and conjoined in God, the Word, or *logos*. In the first verse of the book dedicated to his father, Marx gives his own account of God as the Creator Spirit:

> All inspiring reigns his countenance,
> In its burning magic, Forms condense. (534)

But the Creator Spirit has been superceded by Hegel's *Geist* [mind; spirit]. The *apeiron, nous* and *logos* have been mastered by Hegel's Word, by the dialectic leading to Absolute Knowledge, God's knowledge of, and magic power over, all things. The power of the dialectic to attain its end depends upon Marx's single useful word: "nothing." Marx gives evidence of its power in a fragment of his unfinished novel, *Scorpion and Felix*. He advises those seeking to understand the Holy Trinity "to dream of *Nothing*." By ascending to the heights and descending to the depths of *Nothing* in their dream, they will come to know it: "Not-*Nothing-Not*: that is the concrete conception of the Trinity" (628-29). The aspiration of mystics is to become one with God in spirit through love; Marx attempts to become God in mind by annihilating all things transcendent.

The negation of God is a murder undertaken in order to acquire the magical, unlimited power of creating Forms in the void at will. The significance of Marx's nightmare of the soul is evident in Nietzsche's more sensitive formulation of the experience. Nietzsche, unlike Marx, longed to awaken from his mad dream, and feared he would not. In Aphorism 125 of *Joyful Wisdom*, entitled "The Madman," he writes:

> Wither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not [fall] unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? . . . Does not the night come on continually, darker and darker? . . . God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers?[8]

Long before either Marx or Nietzsche, Jean Paul also had the nightmare of the modern age, the dream of the self, ego, or mind endlessly falling as an atom in the meaningless void. But unlike either Marx or Nietzsche, Jean Paul did awaken to realize that the void is the mind's own creation. In the *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1804) he gives a Socratic reply to Marx's "dream of *Nothing*" when he writes of the spirit of the age, the *Zeitgeist*, that would "egomaniacly annihilate the world and the All, in order to empty the field and to gain free play for itself in the Nothing." In the "cold night" of modernity, man's soul is darkened by the mind's resentful aspiration to annihilate all that limits or transcends it: "the scorner of the All respects nothing but his own self, and in the ensuing

8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Joyful Wisdom*, trans. T. Common, (NY: Frederick Ungar, 1973), p. 168. Common's translation gives "dash on" where "fall" is more appropriate.

night he is afraid of nothing but his own creatures."[9]

When confronted with Socrates' test, "the greatest test . . . of the nature that is dialectical and the one that is not," Marx's prose and poetry reveals that he is unwilling to "go to that which *is* in itself and accompanies truth" (*Republic* 537c-d). He prefers the "grotesque . . . craggy melody" of the Hegelian dialectic, the melody that corrupts the soul. Those with eristic natures are captivated by the modern dialectic. It allows them wilfully to pursue power over all that *is* by means of contradictory speech; furthermore, its way of speaking about being and not-being eases the mind's terror of death in a universe emptied of all that *is*, in the meaningless void of its own creation. The "new logic" of eristic argumentation is no logic at all. It is a way of speaking that confuses speech with the referents of speech, with that which *is*. Negation thus appears to make something non-existent, and affirmation appears to make something exist. When the intention is not playful, when the eristic desire for the appearance of victory and of wisdom obsesses the soul, this way of speaking would negate the All in order for Mind to create a new world from itself in the Nothing. Eristic then claims to be the "burning magic" of the divine *logos*, the magic that creates "Forms" at will. Marx was captivated by the Hegelian dialectic, but his prose and poetry also reveal his initial hesitation to embrace it fully. He is aware that the power it claims to grant is a "magic" power, that it requires a fevered "dream of *Nothing*," and, in a rare example of understatement, that it would make him *rude*.

The Argument of Marx's Dissertation

The Foreword to Marx's dissertation explains the significance of his inspired, poetic claim, "Rude am I as a God." The god whose rudeness he emulates is Prometheus, but a distinctly Marxian Prometheus. In describing his dissertation's contribution to knowledge, the solution of "a heretofore unsolved problem" concerning the relation of Epicurean and Democritean atomism, Marx claims that previous studies have merely "babbled" on the topic. Among the babblers he places Cicero, Plutarch and Gassendi. He rejects out of hand the opinion of Leibniz, shared by many, that Epicurus was an inferior thinker and a plagiarist who spoiled and worsened what he took from others. Even Hegel "was hindered by his view of what he called speculative thought *par excellence*" from understanding the importance of Epicurus. Hegel's misunderstanding of Epicurus is similar to Plutarch's attempt to bring

9. Cited and translated by Eric Voegelin, in "The Eclipse of Reality," *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, ed. M. Natanson, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 193-94.

Epicurean philosophy "before the forum of religion." Marx sides with David Hume against these two representatives of "the theologising intellect:" philosophy has a "*sovereign authority* [that] ought everywhere to be acknowledged" [cited by Marx from Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*]. Epicurus was true to the "world-subduing and absolutely free heart" of philosophy, expressed in the confession of Prometheus: *haploi logoi, tous pantas echthairo theous* [In a word, I hate the gods]. Marx takes this rude battle-cry for his struggle against all those "who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity" from Aeschylus' drama, *Prometheus Bound*. He does not mention the response that Aeschylus has Hermes give: "I think this is no small kind of madness." By making Prometheus "the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar," Marx would have all men believe they are free to pursue what Hermes called madness (29-31, 37).

In the *Philebus* (16c-17a) a completely different Prometheus appears. Socrates gives an account of the dialectic, "the instrument through which every discovery ever made in the sphere of the arts and sciences has been brought to light," as "a gift of the gods . . . which they let fall from their abode." It reached mankind "through Prometheus, or one like him, . . . together with a fire exceeding bright," and was passed on to later generations in the sayings of "men of old," men like Anaximander and Anaxagoras, "who were better than ourselves and dwelt nearer the gods." There is no reason to hate all the gods; they neither deny their wisdom to men nor torture Prometheus for stealing it. The gods reveal to men that there is an "ordering of things" to be observed in "the task of inquiry, of learning, and of teaching one another." All things that can be said to *be* "consist of a one [*hen*] and a many [*plethos*], and have in their nature a conjunction of limit [*peras*] and unlimitedness [*apeiron*]." If any "clever modern man" fails to observe the ordering of all that *is*, he will be unaware of "the difference between a philosophical and a contentious [eristic] discussion."[10]

The Prometheus of Socrates brings all men the dialectic of philosophy, if they will have it. The Prometheus of Marx brings all men the eristic of Hegel's Science. In his "Notebooks" Marx writes:

> but as Prometheus, having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to settle upon the earth, so philosophy,

10. The translation of the *Philebus* used is by R. Hackforth, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, (Bollingen Foundation, 1980).

> expanded to be the whole world, turns against the world of appearance. The same now with the philosophy of Hegel.

Hegel's Science is "a total philosophy," but it has "sealed itself off." Marx realizes that "its heart is set on creating a world." It only requires that someone Promethean in nature take the fire of Hegelian Idealism and turn it to building houses, that is, to economics. Other Hegelians, "who understand our master wrongly, [believe] that *mediocrity* is the normal manifestation of the absolute spirit." Marx, on the other hand, will cast Science about him as Deucalion "cast stones behind him in creating human beings." Absolute Knowledge may lead to boredom, but Marx looks forward to the "titanic struggles" that always "follow in the wake of a philosophy total in itself." Rome followed the Epicureans, Stoics and Sceptics; so too a new world will follow Hegel (491-92). In contrast, Hegel had argued that the new world began with the French Revolution. In the concluding passages of the *Philosophy of History* he writes of it:

> Never since the sun had stood in the firmament and the planets revolved around him had it been perceived that man's existence centers in his head; i.e., in Thought, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality. Anaxagoras had been the first to say that *nous* governs the World; but not until now had man advanced to the recognition of the principle that Thought ought to govern spiritual reality.[11]

Marx, in criticizing the lack of revolutionary spirit of Hegelians, takes his inspiration not from the French Revolution but from Hegel's Idealism. This turn in the argument leaves one in doubt as to who stands on his head, and who on his feet. But these differences are secondary. Both Hegel and Marx accept the revolutionary, "world-subduing" spirit of eristic. Neither asks the Socratic question: if it is true, as Anaxagoras says, that *nous* governs everything, does it govern in accordance with the highest good? (*Phaedo* 97b-d) In either its Hegelian or its Marxian form, the modern dialectic is silent on questions of the good. Instead, it speaks of absolute freedom.

In the footnotes to a missing section of his dissertation, Marx explains why Hegelian Science must "create a world:"

> It is a psychological law that the theoretical mind, once liberated from itself, turns into practical energy, and, leaving the shadowy empire of Amenthes [*amentia*, madness] as *will*, turns itself against the reality of the world existing without it.

11. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, (NY: Dover, 1956), p. 447.

> . . . The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes worldly (85).

The resistance of reality, of that which *is*, to the madness of eristic thought compels Mind to deny or negate the world in order to *will* freely a new world of its own creation. Science is complete thought; there is nothing more to be thought. Once liberated from the need for thought, theoretical knowledge must become practical activity. There is nothing else to do. The call to *praxis* is sounded. But since the resistance of that which *is* is infinite when confronted by the will to power of a Science that denies its reality while attempting to master it, the *praxis* of eristic can never attain its goal. The world will not "become philosophical." If it is not so already, it cannot become so by an act of will. Thus, Marx's turn to *praxis* does not leave the "shadowy empire of Amenthes."

Marx claims that the world will be made to conform to Science by the "intellectual carriers" of the Hegelian system. However, only a few Hegelians recognize the "inadequacy which has to be made philosophical." Most are content to remain within the bounds of self-thinking thought. Marx describes them as the party of "positive philosophy," also known as the Right Hegelians. They do not cut a Promethean figure. In fact, they are boring. It is only the "*liberal* party," the Left Hegelians, that can achieve "real progress" in shaping the world to its will. All thinkers who resist revolutionary *praxis* are "slugs." It does not matter if they are not Hegelians. Since Hegel's Science supercedes all previous philosophy, all those who object to the *praxis* of eristic — Aristotelians, for example — belong "essentially" to the party of positive philosophy. And it is in this party that "the inversion [*Verkehrtheit*], we may well say the madness [*Verrücktheit*], appears as such" (85-87). Lenin later popularized this form of Marx's contentiousness by substituting post-Hegelian Marxist sects for pre-Hegelian schools of philosophy, but without intuiting, as did Marx at times, that there was a sense of madness in the argument that must be explained away. In the Introduction to his *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"* (1843-44), Marx himself no longer thought it necessary to make any apology for his revolutionary voluntarism. Germany was ripe for revolution; it should heed "the philosopher in whose brain the revolution begins." His thought would become "a material force once it seizes the masses." The masses are "a passive element, a material basis" for the "genius which animates material force into political power." Only those who have turned to eristic *praxis* demonstrate "that breadth of soul, . . . that revolutionary boldness which flings at its adversary the defiant phrase: I am nothing and I should be everything." Only they have the will to make everything of themselves and the resentment to make noth-

ing of everything that opposes them. Thus a few Left Hegelians and a few workers, all as rude as resentful gods, will constitute the form and matter of a new world to be created through "the actualization of philosophy."[12]

Marx first turns to *praxis* in opposition to the "theologising intellect" of Hegelian speculative thought in the Appendix of his dissertation. The party of "positive philosophy" opposes Marx's "liberal party" and its popular base just as Plutarch opposed Epicurus and his followers. The intent of the missing Appendix is evident in its headings and sub-headings, recorded in the dissertation's Table of Contents. It is divided into two parts: "The Relationship of Man to God" gives way to "Individual Immortality." Epicurean theology liberates all men from "Fear and the Being Beyond"; the "Degraded God" cannot prevent men from aspiring to become God themselves. But "Individual Immortality" can only be realized through *praxis*. The Epicureans recognized an unspecified "Longing of the Multitude." They were a revolutionary force struggling to overcome "Religious Feudalism" and "The Pride of the Elected," opposed by reactionaries such as Plutarch. Plutarch and the Right Hegelians are unmoved by "The Hell of the Populace," but not so Epicurus and Marx (33).

There are two surviving fragments of the Appendix itself. In the first Marx criticizes Hegel's intellectualized theism. Concerning Hegel's analysis of the scholastic proofs of God's existence Marx writes:

> Hegel has turned these theological demonstrations upside-down, that is, he has rejected them in order to justify them. What kind of clients are those whom the defending lawyer can only save from conviction by killing them himself?

What kind of men would turn to Idealism in the belief that Hegel can save them from God's wrathful judgment? Superstitious bores lacking in the will necessary to overcome God. They do not realize, as does Marx, that proofs of God's existence are either "mere *hollow tautologies*" or, in fact, "proofs of his *non-existence*, . . . *refutations* of all concepts of a God." The existence of God is the "*lack of reason;*" or, rather, it is the inability of some men to attain and realize Absolute Knowledge (103-105). If it is true that the existence of God cannot be proven, it is equally true that it cannot be disproven. Marx has only shown that speech about God is not about the realm of empirically known phenomena, and that attempting to prove the existence of God results in antinomies of

12. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* trans. A. Jolin and J. O'Malley, (Cambridge U.P., 1978), pp. 136-142, passim.

reason. While it may be true that for some, speech about God expresses the relation of mind to that which it fails to understand, in the tradition that Marx would refute speech about God expresses the soul's relation to that which transcends it. Faith is not ignorance. Marx equates the two in order to master the transcendental realm by means of Absolute Knowledge, that is, in order to attain an imaginary immortality. By doing so he reveals his fear of death.

The second fragment of the Appendix concerns death. It consists of a single citation. Plutarch criticizes the Epicurean doctrine, "Death is nothing to us:" this doctrine

> does not remove the terror of death, but rather confirms it. For this is the very thing that nature dreads, . . . the dissolution of the soul into what has neither thought nor sensation; Epicurus, by making this [i.e., death] a scattering into emptiness and atoms, does still more destroy our hope of immortality (75).

This a more telling criticism of Marx than it is of Epicurus. Marx's reply is unknown; the MS breaks off. But Epicurus' reply is known. In the *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus claims that his teachings allow men peace of mind by freeing them from false beliefs about the gods. Men cannot have peace of mind while they believe that the anthropomorphic gods of religious superstition can cause them pain after death. They must therefore give up this belief. Men also cannot enjoy peace while they desire immortality, since this is the desire to enjoy the pleasures of an anthropomorphic god for all time. Epicurus argues that they must therefore give up this desire, contrary to Plutarch's criticism. Epicurus does not say that the gods do not exist, or that they are not immortal, or even that men ought not to aspire to be like the gods. "The gods do indeed exist, . . . but they are not such as the crowd imagines them to be." In a virtuous life, a life dedicated to natural philosophy, a man may "live like a god among men; for life amid immortal blessings is in no way like the life of a mere mortal" (*Letter to Menoeceus* 123-125, 135b). Marx claims that it is possible to attain what Epicurus would argue is unattainable: the omniscience and immortality of the highest divinity. But if mortal man believes he is God, what is death for him, since he must die? Death is not nothing; that is, it is not of no concern. Death is nothingness; it is the absolute terror of the eristic soul, the proof of its mortality. The only way to alleviate or forget the terror is through *praxis*, the constant unthinking exercise of the will to power. *Praxis* has nothing to do with a life of virtue. So too, Epicurus' rejection of false opinions in pursuit of wisdom has nothing to do with Marx's rejection of philosophy in pursuit of revolutionary immortality.

Marx would have Epicurus accept the rude cry of Prometheus, "I hate all the gods," when in fact Epicurus would more readily have agreed with Hermes. This is not the only use Marx has for Epicurus. By means of a comparison of the Democritean and Epicurean atomistic theories, Marx makes Epicurus into an advocate of the eristic use of nothing, or not-being, typical of the modern dialectic. It is evident from the preparatory "Notebooks" that Marx knew his reading of Epicurus was misrepresentative. His study of the account of atomic declination in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* (II. 223, 251), which Lucretius "may or may not have derived . . . from Epicurus," served Marx "as justification for giving a quite different account of the matter from that of Epicurus" (416). He considered this part of the task of philosophical historiography. If one was not to be "merely a copying clerk," it would be necessary to separate "essential from unessential, exposition from content" (506). In reformulating Epicurean atomism Marx gives it a use for nothing; in the void Marx discovers "the dialectical power to negate," that is, the power to reduce everything to nothing (458).

To return to the argument of the dissertation: Marx claims it is puzzling that Democritus and Epicurus should be thought to have the same understanding of atoms and the void while being "diametrically opposed in all that concerns truth, certainty, . . . and all that refers to the relation between thought and reality in general" (38). Democritus believes atoms and the void to be the only truth; all else is appearance. The true principles of atomism are perceived by reason alone, and not by the senses. Since true principles are not evident in the realm of appearance, all is opinion. However, Democritus knows that men possess unopinionated, positive knowledge of phenomena. He becomes dissatisfied with philosophy because of the irreconcilable conflict between truth and the content of empirical knowledge, turning instead to an equally dissatisfying positivism. Despair results. This is intensified with the recognition that necessity prevails in the realm of truth. There is no free will. Necessity is fate, providence, the creator and law of the world; chance and free will are merely illusions of appearance. Consequently, Democritus' aetiological search for knowledge of nature in and for itself leads to the loss of ataraxy, or peace of mind.

In contrast, Epicurus believes that sensuous appearance is the only truth. No opinion based on subjective sensation is untrue. The multiplicity of true opinions liberates men from "the yoke of destiny which the natural philosophers have imposed" (Diogenes Laertius, X.133-4). Necessity is an illusion; all things are accidental, or depend on free will. Indeed, Epicurus even denies the necessity of logical inference (cf. Cicero, *On the Nature of the*

Gods 1.xxv). Epicurus has only contempt for the positive sciences, which lead men to despair. They contribute nothing to the perfection of the mind in ataraxy, the wise man's state of indifference to all things — even his own death — that allows him perfect freedom (38-45).

Democritus and Epicurus agree on several points: that atoms and the void lie behind appearances; that atoms in the void fall in a straight line; and that time is excluded from the realm of atoms and void (46, 63). How then to explain their differences? Marx argues that they all originate in Epicurus' postulation of a unique type of atomic motion in the void: the declination or deviation of the atom from the straight line. He is aware that the "notion of declination has often been made the subject of a joke. Cicero more than any other is inexhaustible when he touches on this theme" (46). But Marx hopes to redeem Epicurus and laugh last:

> The *declinatio atomorum a via recta* [declination of atoms from the straight line] is one of the most profound conclusions, and it is based on the very essence of the Epicurean philosophy. Cicero might well laugh at it, he knew as little about philosophy as about the president of the United States of North America (472).[13]

Marx's explanation of the significance of declination reveals the eristic use of nothing, or the void, that he attributes to Epicurus. Every falling body is negated in the straight line it describes while falling. If the void is considered as a spatial void, "then the *atom* is the *immediate negation of abstract space*, hence a *spatial point*." The atom ceases to exist; it "disappear[s] in the straight line." Being is negated in not-being. However, atoms must remain "purely self-sufficient bodies." In order to do so, they must negate the motion that negates them; that is, they must have another motion: declination. Atoms remain spatial points in the void. Being does not re-emerge from not-being. Solidity or mass "can only be added by virtue of a principle which negates space in its entire domain, a principle such as time is." This only occurs in the realm of appearance (48-49). Behind appearance the void, or nothing, is the All.

There is a *lacuna* in the MS of Marx's thesis preceding his discussion of declination. One missing chapter is entitled, "General Difference in Principle between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature." The surviving footnotes to this chapter reveal that it was concerned with the void, and most likely with the

13. In one sentence Marx manages to be rude to Cicero, to theorists of the American Presidency who find Cicero insightful, and, not least, to Canadians.

superiority of the Epicurean understanding of not-being. Marx's "Notebooks" are filled with passages that may have been part of this chapter. For example, Marx claims that "Epicurus makes the world empty from the start and so ends up with the completely indeterminate, the void resting in itself, the otiose god" (430). This functionless god is "*machariotes* [bliss], the pure rest of nothingness in itself, the complete absence of determination" (443). And in one evocative passage Marx writes: "*in the Epicurean philosophy it is death that is immortal.* The atom, the void, accident, arbitrariness and composition are in themselves death" (478). These statements are compatible with Marx's account of declination. God, or the All, is made nothing in the void. God is dead, murdered by "the dialectical power to negate." But then death, or nothingness, becomes the God to be overcome.

Marx's presentation of Epicurus as an advocate of the eristic use of nothing can be better understood by turning to Hegel. Marx claims that the Hegelian system of Science is an idealized form of Epicurean philosophy. He presents Epicurus as the first philosopher to understand the dialectic without idealizing it. However, this is an inversion; it is Hegelian Science that serves as the basis of his reading of Epicurus. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel writes evocatively of Mind's confrontation of death:

> Death, as we may call [the power of the negative], is the most terrible thing, and to keep and hold fast what is dead demands the greatest force of all. . . . [The] life of the mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being. . . . [Mind] is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it. This dwelling beside it is the magic power that converts the negative into being.[14]

Hegel is candid in asserting that Mind has a *magic* power enabling it both to create being from nothing and to overcome death itself. Man becomes immortal by the magic of eristic. Hegel reveals the magic words, or the new way of speaking that gives Mind its power, in the *Science of Logic*. He begins the *Logic* by stating that "Being . . . is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than

14. *Phenomenology*, p. 93. The quotations from Hegel's works in the following discussions are taken from *Phenomenology*, pp. 137-38, and *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, (NY: Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 82-83, 94, 105-6, 824. For extensive analyses of the significance of death in Hegel's thought see: Leah Bradshaw, "Death and Politics in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," Paper presented at the 1978 meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association; and, Alexandre Kojeve, "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," trans. J.J. Carpino, *Interpretation* 3/2,3 (Winter 1973), pp. 114-156.

nothing;" and that "Nothing is . . . altogether the same as pure *being*." This is not simply scepticism. In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* Hegel claims: "The scepticism which ends up with the abstraction 'nothing' or 'emptiness' can advance from this not a step further;" it casts "anything new . . . into the same abysmal void." When *nothing* is understood as "determinate negation, a new form has thereby arisen." By the magic of the dialectic's determinate negation

> the transition is made through which the complete succession of forms comes about of itself. The goal . . . is fixed for knowledge just as necessarily as the succession in the process. The terminus is at the point where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself.

Mind "transcends what is limited;" it attains Absolute Knowledge. Mind "transcends its own self;" it magically overcomes death.[15]

In the *Science of Logic* the determinate negation is a moment of both the dialectic of speech and the dialectic of history. The truth of being and nothing is the "movement of the immediate vanishing of one in the other," that is, becoming. Parmenides and the Buddha are transcended in Heraclitus. Parmenides "held fast to *being* and was most consistent in affirming at the same time that *nothing* absolutely is not; only *being* is." Hegel finds fault with this: "*from this beginning* no further *progress* can be made." The progress that Hegel has in mind — the overcoming of philosophy by Science — is made possible by the eristic affirmation of the existence of that which *is not*. Becoming is the vehicle of progress. Hegel argues that "there is nothing which is not an intermediate state of becoming between being and nothing." All things are either coming-to-be or ceasing-to-be in the sublation of becoming, that is, in the dialectical progress of the determinate negation. Hegel is here referring to Anaximander's *apeiron*, from which all things are born and into which they must perish, according to the ordinance of time (fragment B 1); but by describing the transcedent *apeiron* as a synthesis of being and nothing, Hegel attempts to master it. The

15. In one of Hegel's earliest works, *The System of Ethical Life* (1802/3), he writes: "Every single [person] is a blind link in the chain of absolute necessity on which the world depends. Every single [person] can extend his dominion over a greater length of this chain only if he recognizes the direction in which the great necessity will go and learns from this cognition to utter the magic word which conjures up its shape." G.W.F. Hegel, *"System of Ethical Life" and "First Philosophy of Spirit,"* trans. H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), pp. 185-86. The young Hegel resembles the young Marx. In his later works Hegel recognized no absolute necessity except the magic word order of the dialectic itself; the dialectic became all possible words, mastering all necessity, and conjuring up all things.

Hegelian dialectic is the ordinance of time, creating and negating all things in Mind's progress toward Absolute Knowledge. All philosophers who lived before Hegel must find their place in the unfolding of the dialectic begun by Parmenides and the Buddha. The development of all things, and the development of all ways of knowing and speaking of all things end with Hegel. The *Logic* concludes, not by affirming the future progress of becoming, but by asserting rudely:

> All else is error, confusion, opinion, endeavour, caprice and transitoriness; the absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life, self-knowing truth* and is *all truth*.

Only Hegel's Science *is*; all previous philosophy *is not*. By means of his eristic use of nothing, Hegel magically becomes God, masters death, and casts all those who would disagree into the abysmal void.[16]

In the Hegelian dialectic, all that *is* is becoming. Hegel presents becoming as a synthesis of being and nothing, but it is a synthesis in which being disappears, leaving only nothing, the void. By uttering the magic words of the dialectic, in their proper order, Hegel believes that he can call things from the void at will. Things, thinkers, and historical events appear and disappear in the flux of becoming, their sequence abruptly ending with the magical reappearance of being in Hegel's Absolute Knowledge, the life and self-thinking thought of being. Marx intentionally combines the new logic of the Hegelian dialectic and Epicurean atomism, with revolutionary results. All that *is* is appearance. The realm of appearance is the result of the declination of the atom from the straight line. Declination is the result of a dialectical relation of atoms and the void. The atom is negated as it falls in the void; it ceases to exist except as a spatial point, an aspect of the void. Being disappears, leaving only nothing. But who can possess the magic power of the dialectic? Marx steals it from Hegel and gives it to all men. All appearances are true, and all opinions based on appearances are true. All men are thus liberated from the necessity of recognizing that which *is*. All men can attain the

16. Compare Heidegger's lecture, "Being as the Void and as Abundance," in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Volume IV: *Nihilism*, trans. F.A. Capuzzi, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 188-196. Compare also Nietzsche, writing of the immoralists' repudiation of truth: "we shall conquer and come to power even without truth. The spell that fights on our behalf, the eye of Venus that charms and blinds even our opponents, is *the magic of the extreme*, the seduction that everything extreme exercises: we immoralists — we are the most extreme." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, (NY: Vintage, 1968), p. 396.

perfect freedom of Absolute Knowledge, if they accept the magic power of the dialectic.

Marx speaks identically of men and atoms. Men can have perfect freedom just as atoms that deviate from the straight line have perfect freedom. Declination "represents the real soul of the atom, the concept of *abstract individuality*." Abstract individuality is effective "only by *abstracting from the being that confronts it;*" in its "highest freedom and independence," it negates all being. Only declination enables atoms to repulse and combine. Atoms that do not demonstrate abstract individuality remain in the bonds of necessity. So too, only perfectly free men — men freed from the necessity of recognizing that which *is* by the power of negation — are capable of combining in free associations: "In the political domain there is the *covenant*, in the social domain *friendship*."All other men remain in the bonds of historical necessity (50-53). Epicurus, in contrast, does not make a direct comparison of men and atoms; indeed, no comparison is possible. Instead, he claims that men and gods are comprised of atoms. Men are complex mixtures of various types of atoms; gods are made of a single type, shared with men. From the "Notebooks" it is again evident that Marx was aware of misrepresenting Epicurus. In developing his notion that the concept of the atom is abstract individuality, Marx writes:

> in the genetic exposition of this philosophy one must not raise the inept question raised by Bayle and Plutarch, among others, as to how can a person, a wise man, a god, arise from and be composed of atoms. On the other hand, this question seems to be justified by Epicurus himself, for of the higher forms of development, e.g., God, he says that the latter consists of finer and more subtle atoms (505).

The reason for Marx's inventive presentation of Epicurus lies in his reformulation of the conclusion to the Hegelian dialectic's development: the Absolute Knowledge of the sage must give way to revolutionary *praxis*. Although the Epicurean sage's solitary pursuit of god-like ataraxy, made possible by the shared nature of men and gods, resembles the Hegelian sage's pursuit of self-knowing knowledge, it suits Marx to have Epicurus call on all men to cast off the bonds of historical necessity.

To return to Marx's discussion of declination: Marx claims there are three possible meanings of *apeiron* [unlimited; infinite], corresponding to three relations of atoms and the void. The first *apeiron* is a quality common to atoms and the void, "the infinitude of the All." The second is the opposition of the infinite multiplicity of atoms to the void. The third is the opposition of the unlimited void to the single atom (61). This allows Marx to accept the Epicurean reformulation of the Anaximandrian *apeiron* in

atomistic terms, in order to argue that the All must give way to Nothing, or the void. The third relation is especially significant for Marx's argument: it gives rise to the abstract individuality of the atom that negates itself in its straight fall through the void, and then negates its negation in deviating from the straight line. The atom's abstract individuality is best expressed in the words of Nietzsche's Madman announcing the murder of God:

> Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not fall unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as though infinite nothingness?

For the atom confronted by the infinite nothingness of the void, there is no straight line. Indeed, Marx claims that the power of the void compels all atoms to deviate from the straight line. In this claim Marx again differs from Epicurus, for whom declination is a property of only one type of atom. The gods and the highest part of men's souls are both comprised of atoms capable of escaping the bonds of necessity. These atoms are of an exceptionally fine type, like air or breath; and their declination is due to their nature, not due to the power of the void.

Marx denies that there are different and fixed kinds of atoms. Instead, he argues that there are "different determinations of one and the same kind;" that is, all atoms with differentiating qualities are determinations of the abstract individuality of the declinating atom. Through the qualities of size, shape and weight, the atom "acquires an existence which contradicts its concept; it is assumed as an *externalized being different* from its *essence*." Unlike Democritus and all other atomists, Epicurus "objectifies the contradiction . . . between essence and existence" in his differentiation of *atomoi archai* [indivisible beginnings] and *atoma stoicheia* [indivisible elements]. The non-corporeal atoms of the void, the *atomoi archai*, are the realm of essence; and the qualified atoms, the *atoma stoicheia*, are the foundation of the realm of appearance. When the *atomoi archai* become alienated from their essence by assuming qualities in the "transition from the world of essence to the world of appearance," the "absolute form" of the atom is "degraded to absolute matter, to the formless substrate of the world of appearance." Marx goes beyond Epicurus' atomistic reformulation of the Anaximandrian *apeiron* as "the substrate of nature, out of which everything emerges, into which everything dissolves," to claim that the void is the form and substrate of all things. The void is the realm of essence; the *atomoi archai* are but manifestations of its power. The "continual annihilation of the world of appearance" reveals that its foundation is "empty space, annihilated nature." Behind all that *is*, there is nothing, the void (54, 58, 60-62).

Marx restates this argument by presenting the void in another of its determinations. He cites Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura* V. 373-5):

> It follows, then, that the doorway of death is not barred to sky and sun and earth and the sea's unfathomed floods. It lies tremendously open and confronts them with a yawning chasm.

The void is the terrifying death of all things. But Marx then reveals how death can be mastered. The *atomoi archai* have overcome death because they *are* death:

> Abstract individuality [of the atom in the void] is freedom from being, not freedom in being. It cannot shine in the light of being. . . . For this reason the atom does not enter into the daylight of appearance. . . The atom as such only exists in the void. *The death of nature* has thus become its immortal substance (62).

If they are to be immortal, men must be free from being, or nature; they must be the death of nature. The death or negation of nature, of all this *is*, is the highest form of abstract individuality, the one which makes men immortal.

Man must *be* death, or nothingness, to be immortal. Marx explains this conclusion by discussing *time*, which he understands as temporality. Both Democritus and Epicurus exclude time from the realm of essence, but they differ in their reasoning. Democritus determines time "as eternal, in order that . . . the emergence and passing away, hence the temporal, is removed from the atoms." It is quite otherwise with Epicurus: "*Time*, excluded from the world of essence, becomes for him *the absolute form of appearance*." Time is, in the realm of appearance, what the abstract individuality of the atom is in the realm of essence, "namely, the abstraction, destruction and reduction of all determined being into being-for-itself," that is, into the void. Indeed, time is the manifestation of the power of the void in the realm of appearance. It is "the fire of essence, eternally consuming appearance, and stamping it with dependence and non-essence." How does man, ever the Promethean, steal the immortal fire of the void? There is no need for all men to steal it. When one of their number, Promethean in nature, attains Absolute Knowledge, he will reveal to all others what they have become. Marx is emphatic in his announcement: "*Human sensuousness is . . . embodied time, the existing reflection of the sensuous world in itself*" (63-64). Man *is* time, the death of nature, nothingness.

Marx's Hegelian reading of Epicurus is similar to Alexandre Kojeve's reading of Hegel. Kojeve interprets the *Phenomenology* to

state:

> Nature is Space, whereas Time *is* History. In other words: there is no natural, cosmic time; there is Time only to the extent that there is *History*, that is, *human* existence. . . . Man *is* Time, and Time *is* Man.

Furthermore, Hegel "*opposes* the Self (= Time) to *Sein* (= Space). Man, therefore is *Nichtsein*, Nonbeing, Nothingness."[17] There is a *power* to being nothingness, and it is realized in *praxis*, or "negate-ive Action," of two types:

> Action negate-ive of the given that Man himself is, or [the] action of the *Struggle* that creates historical Man; and Action negate-ive of the given that the natural World is, in which the animal lives, or [the] action of *Labor* that creates the cultural world, outside of which Man is only a pure Nothingness, and in which he differs from Nothingness *only for a certain time*.[18]

Man's only freedom is negative, exercised in the power to negate or destroy. He destroys his own nature, his world, and all that *is*, in order to be perfectly free in the void of his own creation. The void is his only creation; all things that inhabit it are determinations of the void; and all things that are not determinations of the void must be destroyed through negate-ive Action. In this eristic nightmare, Mind believes it is immortal because it is the power of the void. In the daylight, however, the power of the void exists as the destructive, "world-subduing" character of the eristic souls of certain mortal men.

Marx concludes his dissertation with a discussion of Epicurus' theory of the celestial bodies. In this Epicurus "stands in opposition not only to Democritus, but to the opinion of Greek philosophy as a whole" (66). However, his superiority lies not in his arguments, but in the nature of his soul, revealed by his arguments. Only on this point, and at this time, can it be said that Marx reached an agreement with Socrates: the examination of souls is more revealing than the examination of arguments. Marx argues that the type of soul common to the ancient philosophers and the eristic soul that he attributes to Epicurus stand in opposition. Unlike Socrates, Marx favors the eristic soul. All of the ancient philosophers, in their various ways, recognized that man is a limited being; the eternal and immortal, in which man participates,

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17. Alexandre Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr., (NY: Basic Books, 1969), pp. 133, 155.

18. Kojeve, "The Idea of Death," p. 156. This essay appears in the original French edition of the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, but was not included in the English edition. Compare Alexandre Kojeve, "Hegel, Marx and Christianity," trans. H. Gildin, *Interpretation* 1/1 (Summer 1970), pp. 21-42.

transcends him. Marx admits that the arguments of Epicurean atomism must lead to a similar conclusion: "*The heavenly bodies are . . . the atoms become real.*" Epicurus should have accepted them as "the peak and culminating point of his system." They resolve the contradiction between form and matter, between essence and existence; they provide nature with "immortal foundations." But Epicurus did not accept and revere them. When confronted with the result of his arguments, the immortality of nature, "his one and only desire [was] to pull it down into earthly transcience." The "*soul of the Epicurean philosophy of nature*" is expressed in this desire to master and even destroy the transcendent in order to attain "the absoluteness and freedom of self-consciousness." Marx contends it is "an absolute law that nothing that can disturb ataraxy . . . can belong to an indestructible and eternal nature;" and since all eternals, even eternal nature, would disturb the ataraxy of self-consciousness, "*it is a necessary, a stringent consequence that they are not eternal*" (69-72).

What of those who would disagree? Marx would silence them as he claims Epicurus silenced his opponents:

> Yes, in wrath and passionate violence he rejects the opposite opinion, and declares that those who adhere to [it] . . . exert themselves over absurdities. . . Their chatter is to be despised.

Because of the passionate violence of his soul, and not his arguments, Epicurus "deserves the praise of Lucretius:"

> religion . . . lies crushed beneath his feet, and we by his triumph are lifted level with the skies. (*De Rerum Natura* I. 79-80).

Lucretius praises Epicurus for leading a life of virtue, and for rejecting the superstitions and opinions of the many in his philosophical pursuit of wisdom. Marx would have men believe that Epicurus, in pursuit of the world-destroying power of the eristic, rejected philosophy itself as idle chatter and opinion. The answer to Marx's Promethean rudeness is given by Hermes, guide of souls, messenger of the gods, and, in this instance, spokesman for philosophers: "this is no small kind of madness."

The Wise Man, the Philosopher, and the Sophist

Shakespeare's Fool has proved to be a wise guide to labyrinthine passages of Marx's dissertation. The use of nothing in Marx's interpretation of Epicurean atomism reveals that although his soul initially may have been troubled by the conflict between the Socratic and the Hegelian dialectic, he soon enough became enraptured by, and mastered the grotesque, craggy melody of Hegel's

new logic. Epicurus served Marx as a means by which he could argue for the superiority of Science to philosophy, and for the necessity of a turn to *praxis* once Absolute Knowledge had been attained. Marx's unfinished study of the ancients — the "larger work" in which he would have presented "the cycle of Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptic philosophy in their relation to the whole of Greek speculation" (29) — undoubtedly would have portrayed the Epicurean sages as antiquity's Left Hegelians, armed with Science and contemptuous of all those philosophers who, in the words of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, merely "*interpreted* the world, in various ways." At their best, Marx might have argued, *philosophoi* [philosophers] aspire to be *sophoi* [wise men; sages], but fail; they succeed only in "worship[ping] their own mind" in some idealized form (66). In their own defence the Socratics would say that philosophy is a love of, or aspiration to *sophia* [wisdom], and not its possession: *to sophon ou sophia* [sagacity is no wisdom]. The sages who claim to possess wisdom are but *sophistai* (sophists). At their best, sophists are poor teachers of rhetoric. At their worst, they are tricksters who claim to know of a cunning *sophisma* [device; trick] that gives the mind power over all things. The philosopher is a sophist to the sage, and the sage is a sophist to the philosopher; each is a fool in the other's eyes. The difference between them is nothing, or rather the eristic use of nothing.

In Marx's dissertation, the three determinations of nothing — as death, as not-being, and as negation — are distinguishable by the nature of their referents. The eristic attempt to overcome nothing as death is a pathological state of the soul, expressed in the resentful denial that anything transcends or limits it. Nothing as not-being refers to the soul's relation to all that *is*. The death of the transcendent All is necessary if mortal man is to become immortal; speaking of not-being, or the void, is the way in which the eristic soul attempts to bring about the death of the All. Nothing as negation refers to the eristic contention that not-being *is*, and that being *is not*. This way of speaking appears to give speech a magic power over all things. All that *is* is negated; the magic words of the new logic then create a new world from that which *is not*. But words are symbols or signs of the soul's nature. The negation of eristic speech expresses the eristic soul's resentful desire to negate all things in order to create a new world in which death has no dominion. The new world is under the eternal rule of the eristic soul, crowned as Mind, and holding the orb and sceptre of *praxis* and will to power. The distinctions between theoretical, productive and practical knowledge, and the distinctions between knowing, producing and willing all disappear in the figure of Marx's Prometheus, the resentful man-god who steals Absolute Knowl-

edge, and, once possessing it, exercises its power in willing that the world and all men be made to conform to it. Prometheus is the *sophos*, the wise man who understands that knowledge is power, and Absolute Knowledge is absolute power.

Marx's "Notebooks" contain several fragmentary discussions that indicate how his projected history of ancient philosophy would have made the Epicureans into Promethean *sophoi*. The Epicurean *sophos* is the culmination of the development of *nous* in ancient philosophy. *Nous* is understood as "the *non ens* [not-being] of the natural; . . . the *nous* is the *philosopher's* own *nous* [mind]." Marx claims that "the *nous* of Anaxagoras comes into motion," developing not by means of Pythagorean or Parmenidean philosophy of being, but rather by those "mobile vessels of development," the Sophists. With the Sophists "the *nous* becomes *realiter* [in reality] the not-being of the world." Mind is free from nature, the world, and all that *is* because it is itself not-being, nothingness, or the power of negation. The "innermost form" of sophistry is Socrates, and the "immediate *daemonic motion* as such [of the development of *nous*] becomes objective in the *daemon* of Socrates." Socrates' *daemon* reveals that "dialectic is death, but at the same time the vehicle of vitality;" that is, Mind is itself the death of all that limits or transcends it, and thus the source of its own absolute freedom (435-37, 490, 498).

Plato clouded the dialectic in abstraction; the Epicureans did not:

> Plato saw in an individual as such, Socrates, the mirror, so to speak, the mythical expression of wisdom, and called him the philosopher of love and death. . . . Death and love are the myth of negative dialectic. . . Dialectic is the inner, simple light, the piercing eye of love, the inner soul which is not crushed by the body of material division, the inner abode of the spirit. Thus the myth of it is love. But dialectic is also the torrent which smashes the many and their bounds, which tears down the independent forms, sinking everything in the one sea of eternity. The myth of it is therefore death (498).

When the clouds of Plato's "mythical expression" are dissipated, wisdom is revealed as Mind's awareness of the daemonic power of its negative dialectic. By annihilating the independent forms and the limited many, that is, "the Highest of things and the Depths of them also" (576), Mind realizes the aspiration or longing of its "inner soul:" the attainment of wisdom and the perfect freedom of abstract individuality. The dialectic is not the means of the soul's "direct union with God" in ecstasy, as it is in Plotinus' "expression [of it], in which death and love and at the same time Aristotle's *theoria*, are united with Plato's dialectic." The di-

alectic is the means by which Mind annihilates God in order to possess His knowledge and power. The daemonic, annihilating *nous* aware of itself as such is the *nous* of the Epicurean *sophos*. Epicurean atomism is thus "the downfall of ancient philosophy" and its highest realization. For many the fall of classical Greece may have been an "unhappy and iron epoch" in which the "gods . . . died," but for the Epicurean *sophoi* it was a glorious time, the time in which Rome's power came to dominate the world (432, 492, 498).

The inspiration for Marx's unfinished study of the ancients was taken from "the admirably great and bold plan of [Hegel's] history of philosophy, from which alone the history of philosophy can in general be dated." The criticism of Hegel that Marx intended his work to establish was that although Hegel's System of Science recognized "human self-consciousness as the highest divinity," his Idealism prevented him from recognizing the "world-subduing and absolutely free heart" of the Epicureans (29-30). Marx's criticism can be given more substance by turning to Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.[19] In the Introduction to these lectures Hegel argues, as he does in the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, that Mind realizes itself, or comes to know itself and its power, in history. He states that "philosophy aims at understanding what is unchangeable, eternal, in and for itself: its end is Truth." But philosophy is not an aspiration to truth; "the objective science of truth" is possible. The eternal can be known by self-consciousness, or Mind. The history of philosophy is a succession of forms of Mind's consciousness of itself, leading to the absolute Idea, or Science: "The more progress made in this development, the more perfect is the Philosophy." Once a stage in Mind's development has been passed, the form in which it appeared is no longer philosophy, but rather idle and irrational speculation comparable to religious superstition:

> there can be no Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics or Epicureans today. To reawaken them would be to try to bring back to an earlier stage of development the Mind of a deeper culture and self-penetration.

Modernity, the final stage of development, begins with the notion of *cogito ergo sum*, found in the philosophies of Bacon, Descartes, and the mystic Jacob Boehme. It ends with the Hegelian System of

19. The quotations in the following discussion of Hegel's history of philosophy are taken from G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963): Volume 1, pp. 7, 12, 27, 45-46, 81, 298, 372-74, 379-80; Volume 2, pp. 233, 300, 304-6.

Science, beyond which no further progress is possible. Once the perfection of Absolute Knowledge has been attained, philosophy itself becomes unnecessary.

The historical dialectic that culminates in Science begins when the Parmenidean philosophy of being is overcome. Democritus is superior to Parmenides because of his recognition of nothing; in Democritean atomism "we find . . . the more ideal principles, the atom and Nothing," or being and not-being. But the Sophists were the first to find a use for nothing. Hegel considers the two most significant Sophists to be Protagoras and Gorgias. Protagoras claims: "Man is the measure of all things; of that which is, that it is; of that which is not, that it is not." With this dictum a "great proposition is enunciated on which . . . everything turns, since the further progress of Philosophy only explains it further: it signifies that reason is the end of all things." Protagoras gives reason the power to determine what is not, but he also limits reason by failing to recognize that it has this power; he simply distinguishes being from not-being in the manner of Democritus. It is Gorgias who first masters the negative dialectic: "the dialectic of Gorgias moves more purely in Notion than that found in Protagoras." This is evident in Gorgias' work, *On Being*, in which he contends that being does not exist. His argument is truly sophistic: what is nowhere does not exist; what is boundless is nowhere; what has no beginning is boundless; the eternal has no beginning; being is eternal; therefore, being does not exist. Hegel has Gorgias serve the same purpose in the history of philosophy that the Buddha served in the *Science of Logic*: the annihilation of *being* and the affirmation of *not-being*. In comparison to the Sophists, Epicurus is a fool. Hegel claims the age of the Epicureans, Stoics and Sceptics is in general commendible: "the pure relation of self-consciousness to itself is . . . the principle in all these philosophies." However, Epicurean atomism is an embarrassment in the history of philosophy, in particular Epicurus' claim that the gods and the human soul are comprised of atoms that deviate from the straight line: "With such empty words and meaningless concepts we shall no longer detain ourselves; . . . [Epicurus] has no thoughts for us to respect."

Hegel and Marx agree that the dialectical development of Anaxagoras' *nous* in world history has its true beginning not in Parmenides' philosophy of being, but rather in the affirmation of not-being common to the atomists and Sophists. Parmenides had an answer to sophistic refutations of the philosophy of being, but neither Marx nor Hegel allows him to speak it. Parmenides said that the nature of philosophy was revealed to him by a goddess. She told him of "the path of persuasion which is attendant upon

truth," and also of two paths leading away from the truth that should be avoided by all men. Philosophy affirms that being *is*, and that not-being cannot be. The first path away from truth begins in the belief that not-being exists, "for not-being you can neither know nor pronounce." This is the path taken by Sophists such as Gorgias. The second begins in the belief that both being and not-being exist. It ends in the same place as the first, but it is a long and winding path. On it "mortals wander who know nothing, the double-heads . . . for whom in all things there is a way that turns upon itself" (fragment B 6). This is the path taken by Hegel and Marx. They believe that all things begin in the dialectical relation of being and nothing; and that the power of the negative dialectic is realized not only in the history of philosophy, but in history itself. The "way that turns upon itself" is the path that Hegel and Marx claim all men must take, and indeed, that all men have taken. Parmenides, however, would consider their bold claims to stand at the end of the path, that is, at the end of world history as the highest realization of *nous*, to be the muddled and sophistic result of wandering away from philosophy.

Hegel and Marx both claim that the atomists and sophists of antiquity knew the power of the negative dialectic. They also both contend that Plato was a sophist: Hegel considers him to be the greatest sophist, while Marx presents him as a deceiver. In the footnotes to his dissertation, Marx recounts a story told by Aristoxenus and reported by Diogenes Laertius that because Democritus was "the prince of philosophers," Plato attempted to burn all of his scrolls and never once mentions him in his dialogues (87-88). Plato sought to hide the truth from all men. But his "mythical" dialogues have the truth as their esoteric content. Once understood, they reveal the *daemon* of Plato's Socrates to be the "innermost form" of sophistry, that is, the negative power of abstract individuality. In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel also distinguishes between esoteric and exoteric elements of the dialogues, arguing that the speculative esoteric element, "hidden from those who have not sufficient interest in it to exert themselves," is in fact the doctrine of "the unity of . . . Being and not-being." The "unity of opposites" is present to all men, "but the common way of looking at things always holds the opposites asunder." Parmenides has a common view of things; Plato does not. Hegel claims that in the *Sophist* Plato "proves, as against Parmenides, that not-being is." The doctrine of the unity of Being and not-being found in the writings of the Sophists is relatively undeveloped: "in further investigation Plato comes to the conclusion that not-being . . . is the essence of the other." Plato proves "that not-being is an essential determination in Being, and that the

simple, self-identical, partakes of other-being," or, that not-being underlies all that is. The "inmost reality and true greatness of Platonic philosophy" is its understanding of the power of Mind's negative dialectic. Beneath its exoteric presentation, the Platonic dialectic is thus the Hegelian dialectic; the esoteric element of philosophy is thus Science.[20]

Hegel misrepresents the *Sophist*. The dialogue states just the opposite: Plato has the Eleatic Stranger, a Parmenidean, argue against the sophistic assertion of the existence of not-being. The Stranger distinguishes between dialectic and eristic speech in a manner that accords both with Parmenides' account of the paths revealed to him by the goddess and with Socrates' account of "a gift of the gods," the dialectic, brought to mankind by Prometheus, "or one like him" (cf. *Sophist* 253d-254b, 258c-259c and *Philebus* 16c -17a). He allows himself to go beyond the limits of Parmenides' prohibition, "Keep back your thoughts from this way of inquiry," to discuss not-being, or, more specifically, the nature of negation in speech. Since he is a Parmenidean, the Stranger believes that the dialectical speech of *philosophoi* can be shown to be superior to the eristic speech of *sophistai* without any need to discuss the difference between dialectical and eristical natures (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1078b25). Socrates examines natures before arguments (*Republic* 537c-d, 539a-d). Socrates remains silent throughout the dialogue, not necessarily because he disagrees with the Stranger's argument, but rather because the Stranger would most likely be offended by a discussion of what is an eristical nature. The Stranger argues that negative terms are necessary in speech. Their use does not require that the existence of the non-existent be postulated. A negated term indicates some existing thing other than that which is indicated by the term being negated. Otherness is the essence of not-being, and not the reverse, as Hegel contends. *Otherness, being, sameness, rest,* and *change* are the "atomic" forms, revealed in all dialectical *diaireses*, in which all things participate. Unlike the sophist, the philosopher does not assert the existence of not-being. The philosopher's thoughts "constantly dwell upon the nature of reality;" but the sophist "takes refuge in the darkness of not-being, where he is at home and has the knack of feeeling his way" (254a-b). Tak-

20. Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 62-64, 66, 68; for the sake of consistency, "not-being" has been used where the Haldane translation gives "non-being." In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, p. 129, Hegel distinguishes between the "cloudy obscurity" of Plato's myths, "which are scientifically valueless," and the dialectic that underlies them, the dialectic that is "nothing else than the activity of the pure notion," and is comparable to the "scientific character [of] recent philosophy."

ing refuge in not-being is "the secret of [the] magical power of sophistry." It lies behind the sophist's claim, not only to know everything, but also to possess the power "to produce all things in actual fact by a single form of skill" (233a-d). The sophist is "an athlete of debate," skilled in "the art of eristic" (231e). He has a knack, or a trick by means of which he makes himself appear to be a wizard, capable of creating anything from nothing by speaking the proper words. In a "shadow play of words" (268c-d) he creates a false image of what *is*. In his shadowy night, all men become "fools and madmen."

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel claims that Mind has a magical power. He describes this power in the *Philosophy of Mind*, in an analysis of "the essential nature of magic as such." Hegel states that the term "magic" should not be used to describe the scientific understanding of primitive men. The mysteries of early civilizations "are of necessity thoroughly *unscientific* in character, belonging merely to the sphere of feeling and intuition." Magic properly describes "the final state of knowledge," Science itself: "*Absolute* magic [is] the magic of *mind as such*." There are two "magical modes of mind's activity . . . which *actually* exist." Mind exercises magic "over its *own* bodily nature, making this a subservient, unresisting instrument of its will." Mind also has "the power of . . . acting directly on its object," that is, the power to create its object in knowledge. There is therefore some truth to the claim of sorcerers to possess magical power over the sun, the moon, and the other heavenly bodies. Knowledge gives a man magical power not only over nature, but also over other men:

> a superior mind exercises a magical power over weaker minds; thus, for example, Lear over Kent, who felt himself irresistibly drawn to the unhappy monarch because the king seemed to him to have something in his countenance which he, as he puts it, "would fain call master."[21]

Lear, who has no use for nothing, is master to Kent. The Fool, whom Hegel does not mention, is master to Lear, though he is his subject. And Hegel, whose magical use of nothing has given him Absolute Knowledge, would be master of all men, living and dead, and subject to none.

What is the nature of the *sophisma*, the magic trick that gives a man absolute power over his body, the heavens, and all men? In the *Euthydemus* Socrates asks Dionysodorus and Euthydemus

21. G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's "Philosophy of Mind,"* [Being Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), together with the *Zusatze* in Boumann's Text (1845)], trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), pp. 97-98.

whether or not they "know some of the things which are, and not know others of them." The answer he receives causes him to swear, "O God! Here's a wonder and a manifest miracle!" Dionysodorus said, "If you know one thing, you know all things." He did not specify which single thing it is that gives a man absolute knowledge and the ability to work miracles (294a). Hegel answers for him: it is the new logic, founded on the trick of the dialectical unity of opposites. In Hegel's last work, the Preface to the 1831 edition of the *Science of Logic*, he claims that most men are enslaved by common sense, or what he terms the un-self-conscious thinking of "natural logic." Common sense is "unclarified and therefore unfree thinking." It is captive to "*identity*," in either its form as the "law of identity, . . . A = A," or as the Aristotelian maxim of non-contradiction. Aristotelian logic, the logic of common sense, "requires recasting."[22] Those capable of overcoming their enslavement to natural logic can attain complete freedom of thought by mastering the Hegelian dialectic, the dialectic premised on the identity of being and not-being, or A = non-A. Once the identity of identity and non-identity is accepted, all things are possible. But the new logic is nothing new. It is eristic speech, a sophistic trick. Aristotle analyzes it in his discussion of shrewd and contentious arguments: any argument, "if the contradictory is changed about, will result in all syllogisms being alike" (*On Sophistical Refutations* 182b; cf *Phaedo* 101d-e). A man who believes himself magically freed from the necessity of speaking of that which *is*, and from the necessity of not contradicting himself, will believe that all of his arguments are absolutely true. He is absolute in the dark night in which all other men are fools.

To return to the discussion of Marx's unfinished study of ancient philosophy: Hegel and Marx have their only significant disagreement in their respective evaluations of Epicurus. In fact, they reach diametrically opposed conclusions. Hegel thinks Epicurus a fool, while Marx would place Hegel alongside Cicero, Plutarch, Gassendi and all the others who have "babbled" in their misunderstanding of atomic declination (29). The reason for their disagreement lies not at the beginning of the historical development of *nous*, but rather at its end. Marx's reformulation of Epicurean atomism is deliberately derived from the basic categories of Hegel's dialectic. He does this in order to make the power of Hegel's esoteric dialectic available to all men. The new logic is evident in the realm of appearance, that is, in common sense. Marx agrees with Hegel that there can be no return to previous stages of

22. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, pp. 36, 38; compare *Phenomenology*, p. 79. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Volume 2, p. 223.

Mind's development: Absolute Knowledge has been, and could only have been attained in modernity. Historical parallels do exist, but in each instance apparent similarities hide differences in substance. For example, Hegel argues that while modernity resembles the unhappy epoch of late antiquity in which the ancient gods died in order that the Roman Empire and Christianity could arise, modernity differs in that God is dead, Absolute Knowledge has been attained, and the French Revolution has made possible a new Rome in which Mind alone governs. Marx uses this historical parallel, attributing the wisdom and will to power of modernity to the Epicurean *sophoi*, in order to criticize Hegel's lack of resolve to build the new Rome. Hegel's world-subduing spirit, like the French Revolution that inspired it, eventually became reactionary. The Left Hegelians, the Epicurean *sophoi* of modernity, will carry the revolution to all men. Armed with the power of the negative dialectic, they will all set out to destroy the remnants of the old world and to build the new Rome, not from the ruins, but from the absolute freedom of the negative dialectic itself. Their inspiration is taken not from Napoleon, but from the Terror, the modern manifestation of the dialectic as death.

The modern *sophos* has an eristic soul that aspires to annihilate all that *is* in order to create a new world from nothing. No matter how powerful his aspiration is, it cannot be fulfilled: all that *is* cannot be annihilated, and it is madness to attempt it. The modern *sophos* also aspires to destroy existing societies and governments and replace them with revolutionary regimes dedicated to realizing the absolute freedom of all men. The disagreement between Hegelian and Marxist *sophoi* on the manner in which the absolute freedom of the negative dialectic is to be institutionalized in a regime are of secondary importance. Again, the aspiration cannot be fulfilled, and it is madness to attempt it, although millions have died both in attempting and resisting it. Absolute freedom is the death of others; and a regime whose purpose is the arbitrary death of others will either be destroyed by its intended victims or turn on itself. Since the mad aspirations of the ersitic soul meet with the resistance of all that *is* and of all men who are neither mad nor spiritless, the modern *sophos* often exercises his boundless will to power in speech alone: all things are made to conform to his will in a new logic, the modern dialectic; world history and the history of philosophy come under his domination in exhaustive studies presenting them as manifestations of the dialectic. To turn one of Marx's criticisms of classicists against him:

> There is nothing easier than to rejoice in one's own . . . perfection on every occasion, easiest of all when dealing with the dead (498).

Philosophers may be called sophists, and sophists philosophers in an eristic dialogue with the dead, for the dead are easily silenced if they disagree. In Marx's history of the ancients, no troublesome questions are tolerated. Each character speaks only the lines written for him in order for the drama to reach its tragic end: sophistry silences all in order for the author himself to stand alone amidst the bodies of dead philosophers in the robes of an Epicurean *sophos*.

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