

ECPR General Conference, Oslo 2017

Friedrich Engels and Marxism as the Apex of Human Understanding

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Abstract. In 1886, Friedrich Engels published his classic article “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy”. In this important document on the early developments of Marxism post Marx, Engels lays out what he perceives to be the fundamental relationship between the ‘materialist conception of history’ and the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel. In this paper, I show that in his evaluation of Hegel and the Hegelian school Engels himself employs concepts taken from the philosophy of Hegel and uses them to style Marxism as the perfection of the true, revolutionary essence of Hegel’s philosophy. Marxism, Engels argues, is the perfect-most form of materialism and materialism, in turn, is the perfect-most form of philosophy as such. Therefore, Marxism is the actualisation of philosophy, its realisation in the world and the apex of human understanding. I then use this as an analytical prism for a reading of Engels’s intellectual development in the crucial years of 1840-50 and show, that throughout Engels applies the same concepts of essence and appearance on history, only changing what the essence is as his standpoint progresses to a materialist one: from the idea of Communism to class struggle. I then show that this remains Engels’s analysis 40 years later in the Feuerbach essay.

1. Introductory Remarks

In 1886, three years after the death of Karl Marx, Engels published his hugely influential article “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy”. In this important document on the early developments of Marxism, Engels lays out what he perceives to be the fundamental relationship between the ‘materialist conception of history’ and the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel. In this paper, I will use this article as a point of departure for a discussion of the driving motor of history according to Engels, based in his employment of Hegelian concepts in this text.

First, I will show how Engels in his 1886 text, by way of a Young Hegelian understanding of Hegel’s logic, styles Marxism as the apex of human thought and the realisation of philosophy in history. Engels does this, I argue, by employing the Hegelian categories of essence (*Wesen*) and appearance

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(*Erscheinung*). Using this argument as my analytic prism, I will then open up a discussion of Engels's conception of the realisation of the idea of Communism before and after 1848; I will show that Engels's move from a more traditional Hegelian concept of the idea of Communism asserting itself in the world to a concept of class struggle being the true motor of history is an application of those same categories of essence and appearance: the essence of history is class struggle, an essence that must appear. I will then bring this observation about the young Engels's concept of class struggle as the motor of history up to the 1886 text on Feuerbach, and I will attempt to show that even 40 years later Engels is still thinking about history in the same categories, and how his analysis of bourgeois society as well as his styling of Marxism as the apex of human thought are embedded into this framework. Finally, in my concluding remarks, I will offer some points for further discussion about the relevance of the experience of the 1848 revolutions to Engels's concept of the relationship between ideas and history. Before getting started, though, some preliminary notes on Engels are in order.

Discussing Engels is always also in some sense discussing Marx. While this is unavoidable—and not necessarily undesirable—it is something that anyone working with Engels in a scholarly way needs to reflect on. Though the 1886 text, which forms the point of departure for this paper, was written by Engels alone, and even after Marx had died, this does in no way lessen the problematic nature of their relationship vis-à-vis our effort to figure out what Engels believed. None the less, it is important to underscore that this paper is about *Engels*, and while it is impossible to isolate Engels completely from Marx (or Marxism at least), it is necessary that we resist the temptation of both a complete identification between Marx and Engels and a complete break – however much occupying this middle ground feels like a tight-rope walk.

Much of the trouble with Engels, in my opinion, stems from a standard reading of the relationship between Marx and him, dubbed 'The Andy Pandy Theory' by John O'Neill after the popular British children's show. In every episode of the Andy Pandy show, the titular character and his friend, Teddy, a bear, have to perform a little dance. Every time without fail Teddy gets the dance wrong and falls on his butt, and Andy Pandy has to show him how to do the dance properly. In the standard reading, O'Neill argues, the relationship between Marx and Engels is seen in much the same way: "the stiff and ponderous Engels attempts the same lines of thought as his intellectually more supple partner, but never quite does it properly".² This view is expressed in the fullest by the so-called "dichotomists"³ of the 60's and 70's such as Norman Levine, George Lichtheim, and David McLellan (and is carried on today by e.g. Terrell Carver) with Levine going so far as to write that "to defend a single Marx-Engels social science, is... to confuse and retard investigation into the

² O'Neill, 1996: 47. The naming of the theory is even better when you consider that Engels's nickname was "Freddy".

³ Hunley, 1991: 1-3

dual and conflicting systems of Marxism and Engelsism”.⁴ The purpose of these kinds of investigations into the philosophy of Engels seems to be not to investigate Engels, but to find differences between him and Marx, and always under the assumption that if such differences do in fact exist then Marx, not Engels, is by definition always right. The other extreme is no more desirable though: To “maintain the hyphenation” of Marx-Engels, as Levine calls it,⁵ and as was done in the both the SPD and the Soviet DIAMAT traditions leaves Engels with equally little of an individual identity. To both of these extremes, the net result is the same: Engels is not an independent thinker, or at least not a thinker worth investigating independently. For these reasons, in the following we will consider Engels as separate from Marx, but instead of throwing out the baby with the proverbial bathwater, we will instead take Engels seriously as an independent thinker and philosopher who was, in the most general terms, a Marxist, but who is also allowed to have his own opinions, separate from Marx’s and worth investigating in their own right.

2. Engels and Hegel, 1886

In December of 1885, Karl Kautsky, who was then the editor-in-chief of Germany’s foremost journal of socialist (i.e. Marxist) theory, *Die Neue Zeit*, commissioned Friedrich Engels to write a review essay of a book on Ludwig Feuerbach written by the Danish professor of philosophy C. N. Starcke and recently published in German.⁶ Engels accepted, and in 1886 his essay was published in two instalments in the March and April issues of *Neue Zeit*. In 1888, it was republished by the chief Socialist publisher of the day, J. H. W. Dietz, as an independent *Broschüre* with only very minor revisions.⁷ Engels’s essay, however, is less a review of Starcke’s book (though he does comment on it) and more a review in general of Feuerbach, the Young Hegelians, and Hegel in terms of their influence on the development on Marxism and the evolution of human thought and understanding in general. In the first part of the essay, Engels sketches out the internal contradictions of Hegel’s philosophy—as perceived by him, naturally—and their relation to the dissolution of the Hegelian school. In the second part, he comments on philosophy as such as well as on Feuerbach and Starcke’s treatment of it. In the third part, Engels comments more closely on the philosophy of Feuerbach and the decomposition of its genuine materialist impulse into abstract morality. Finally, in the fourth part, Engels begins by evaluating some of the other Young Hegelians

⁴ Levine, 2006: 89

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For details on the publication history of Engels’s essay, see generally Merkel-Melis, 2011.

⁷ In the following, I will be using the 1888 version of the text, which is also the one printed in Dietz Verlag’s *Marx-Engels Werke*. The 1886 edition is published in *MEGA I/30*, but as already mentioned the changes are only of minimal importance. Quotes will be given in English and are adapted from Vol. 26 of the *Marx-Engels Collected Works* with occasional revisions from me where necessary.

and then proceeds to link this to the development of Marxism as the fulfilment of the original critical impulse of Hegelian philosophy as hinted in part one.

By sketching out this evolution in German (i.e. human) thinking, Engels also creates an intimate bond between the philosophy of Hegel and the development of Marxism. This is not, however, just *any* Hegel: the Hegel that Engels connects Marxism with is specifically the *Young Hegelian* version of Hegel. This is demonstrated not just by the fact that the philosophers singled out by Engels as the ones continuing the development of human thought after Hegel are all specifically Young Hegelians,⁸ but also by the theoretical developments present in the text itself: The analysis which Engels performs rests on a Young Hegelian employment of Hegel's concepts of essence and appearance that begins with Engels distinguishing between the Hegelian system, or the *form* of Hegel's philosophy, and the Hegelian method, or its true *content*.

According to Hegel, form and content are only two sides to the same coin: the appearance, or *Erscheinung*. Appearance, on the other hand, is only ever an appearance *of* something, namely the essence, or *Wesen*. As such, in the last instance, any form and its content is only the expression of an essence. This movement is summarised by Hegel in his greater *Logic* in three distinct moments: First, a phenomenon appears as *simple essence*, i.e. essence in-itself. Then, it appears as *Dasein*, or being, i.e. an essence that is, that has *existence* and *appearance*. Finally, it appears in a form where essence and appearance are in accordance with each other and thereby it gains *reality* (*Wirklichkeit*).⁹ This, of course, is an extremely, almost perversely condensed summary of the relationship between form and content, essence and appearance in Hegel, but it suffices to say the following: Something is real only insofar as the form of its appearance corresponds to the essence of its content.

This cornerstone of Hegelian logic is applied by Engels in the text of his 1886 article. As with any phenomenon, Hegel's philosophy itself can also be separated into a form and a content, but because of the limitations of Hegel's own time, the form that he provided his philosophy in, i.e. the Hegelian system of philosophy, was not the most adequate form of its otherwise true content: the dialectical method (and hence it did not achieve active reality, *Wirklichkeit*).¹⁰ In Hegel, the dialectical method appeared only as *Schein*, not *Erscheinung*. In accordance with the mode of the Young Hegelian interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, which favours antinomic destruction over synthetic sublation,¹¹ Engels takes this to mean that "the proposition of the rationality of everything which is real is dissolved to become the other proposition: All that exists deserves to perish."¹² This

⁸ Engels, 1990: 381. Engels mentions D. F. Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Max Stirner, and Feuerbach.

⁹ Hegel, 1986: 16

¹⁰ Engels, 1990: 361-62

¹¹ Sass, 1962: 93, 95, 99

¹² Engels, 1990: 359

is, according to Engels, what Feuerbach not only laid bare but also “exploded”: that there was an internal discrepancy between the system and the method in Hegel’s philosophy. Consequently, the split in the Hegelian school came out of where the individual Hegelian chose to place their emphasis¹³ (this is also the reason why Hegel’s philosophy could foster both a conservative and a revolutionary strain, according to Engels¹⁴), a split which itself is also the result of a development into more adequate forms. It began, Engels informs us, as a discussion between self-consciousness and substance, a purely *philosophical* form; it proceeded into a discussion of the status of the Gospels, a purely *religious* or *theological* form; finally, it ended in “the destruction of traditional religion and the existing state”¹⁵ i.e., a purely *political* form. That this development proceeds in such a way could of course be purely coincidental. However, one important detail tells us that it is not: Engels’s account is essentially historically incorrect, something Engels, as an active participant in these discussions, must very well have known. While it is true that the themes mentioned by Engels are found in the discussions among the Young Hegelians, they are in no way present in such an orderly and neatly progressing fashion. Engels’s description of the internal development of the Young Hegelian school is a conceptual reconstruction of the development of philosophy’s true principle – not too dissimilar to Marx’s conceptual reconstruction of political economy in *Capital*, Engels’s own early reconstruction of the concepts of political economy,¹⁶ or Hegel’s reconstruction of metaphysics in his *Logic*. The method is essentially the same.

This dialectical (so to speak) development of the form and content of Hegelian philosophy, and thereby of philosophy as a whole, is also reflected in the development of the concept of philosophy as such. It, too, has a true content, an essence, and a series of appearances with varying degrees of correspondence to this essence and therefore varying degrees of reality. All historical development within the realm of philosophy is a dialectical struggle between materialism and idealism (this is “the great question” of philosophy¹⁷), in which materialism will eventually cancel out idealism as philosophy’s true content – its essence. Thus, for example, there is a progression from Hume to Kant, from Kant to Hegel, and from Hegel to Feuerbach.¹⁸ In Hume’s empiricism, reality is reduced to sense impressions, the existence of which can only positively be affirmed in the subjective mind, and as such any certainty of the existence of an outer world is denied. Kant is a reaction to this: While we cannot know anything about it, we can at least know a *Ding-an-sich* of some kind to exist outside our subjective consciousness. Hegel, again, is a reaction to Kant: We cannot think of “something” without also thinking concepts such as “nothing”, “quantity”, “quality”, etc. and so we

¹³ Engels, 1990: 363-64

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ In his 1843 *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*. See also below.

¹⁷ Engels, 1990: 365

¹⁸ Engels, 1990: 367-68

are necessarily capable of knowing something about the *Ding-an-sich*. The philosophy of Feuerbach, finally, is the introduction of the materialist principle itself: the primacy of matter over spirit. (Feuerbach's conception of materialism, however, is also incomplete; he perceives materialism to be the specific doctrine of the 18th century French materialists and therefore renounces it. In reality, Engels argues, materialism is not a particular doctrine but rather the general position of matter's primacy over spirit¹⁹). While the essence of philosophy is materialism, materialism itself also has its own true essence: natural science. The different phases in the development of materialism (which in turn is reflected in the development of the materialist position within philosophy) are tied to the development of the natural sciences. The materialism of the 18th century—condemned by Feuerbach for its mechanistic character—was mechanistic precisely because natural sciences of its time were.²⁰ The modern natural sciences of Engels's time, however, are dynamical: the discovery of the theory of evolution, the biological cell, and the changing forms of energy have proven the dynamic and historical character of nature.²¹ To correspond more adequately to its essence, therefore, materialism must also be dynamic and historical – and it is the great achievement of Marx that he rescued the dynamic, historical core of Hegel's philosophy from its dead and static incarnation in the Hegelian system and combined it with materialism.²² As such, Marxism is the highest form of philosophy because it is the most adequate form of materialism, and as the most adequate form of materialism it is the realisation of philosophy's essence, its *verwirklichung*, and thus the apex of human understanding.

3. The Essence of History

As I have argued above, the mature Engels of 1886 employs the Hegelian categories of essence and appearance in order to reveal the true development of philosophy and style Marxism as the realisation of its essence and the apex of human understanding. What I will now argue is that this is not something new or a delusion of the old and dogmatic Engels, now writing free from the yoke of Marx's opinions after the great genius has died – if anything, it is a return to form for Engels. I will attempt to establish that the intellectual development of Engels (and Marx) in the crucial years around the revolutions of 1848-49 is a development toward an application of these same categories on history. Just as philosophy has a true essence that must be realised, so does history. In the beginning, Engels identifies this essence as the idea of Communism, but in gradually adopting a

¹⁹ Engels, 1990: 396

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Engels, 1990: 385-86

²² Engels, 1990: 381. Here, interestingly, we do not have the total destruction of one side of the antinomy, but rather the more traditional sublation of the elements of idealism into materialism.

materialist standpoint the idea of Communism is replaced with what Engels now identifies as history's true essence: class struggle.

From Engels's first arrival in Berlin as a young military cadet and until the revolution of 1848, he underwent a rapid and sometimes self-contradicting intellectual development. From the beginning as a self-taught intellectual in Berlin in 1840-41, criticising Schelling and associating with both the Young Hegelians and the politically radical Junges Deutschland literary movement; through Moses Hess's Feuerbachian proto-Communism to befriending Marx; to beginning an interest in English political economy; to Marx and him criticising their fellow Young Hegelians both in the published *The Holy Family* (1844) and in the unpublished 1845-46 text cycle of *The German Ideology*; and finally to the almost-fully developed standpoint of historical materialism of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The most stable element of this development was Engels's association with the problems and themes of Young Hegelianism. From reading Strauss, Engels had been converted to Young Hegelianism even before he arrived in Berlin in 1840. Perhaps fittingly, the first work of Hegel's own that he read was the lectures on the philosophy of history, and it was precisely the central Young Hegelian theme problem of realising human freedom in history that became a cornerstone in Engels's thinking.

In an article from 1843 written for a British audience, Engels describes history as a clear and visible progress towards the realisation of the idea of Communism.²³ This idea, Engels tells us, "is not the consequence of the particular position of the English, or any other nation", but the "necessary conclusion" from the facts of "modern civilisation".²⁴ Thus, it can be arrived at—and does manifest itself out of—any aspect of this modern civilisation: The English arrived at it practically, from the pauperism caused by modern Capitalism; the French politically, from the insufficiency of bourgeois, liberal freedoms; and the Germans philosophically, from speculative reasoning. To the 23 year old Engels, then, the idea of Communism arrives in the world per historical necessity, and its realisation will conversely shape this world to its liking. The idea of Communism is the true essence of history, as "modern civilisation" reveals, its different aspects (economy, politics, philosophy) being only different more or less adequate appearances of this essence. Though history does have an ideal essence, this does not mean that as soon as this idea is recognised then history has realised its essence, or that the consciousness of individuals does not matter. Contrarily, when Babeuf's attempt at overthrowing the *Diretoire* and establishing Communism failed, it was precisely because "the public mind was not yet far enough advanced".²⁵ At this point in his development, then, Engels is still in accordance with many of his Young Hegelian colleagues: A

²³ "Progress of Social Reform on the Continent" (1843).

²⁴ Engels, 1975b: 392

²⁵ Engels, 1975b: 394

prerequisite for the realisation of the idea of Communism in the world, and thus the realisation of history's true essence, is that the consciousness of man has advanced far enough.²⁶ In another article, Engels describes the conditions under which this realisation will happen.²⁷ Now writing for the Germans and the French, Engels stresses the economic (or English) character of the coming change: "each successive crisis is bound to become more universal and therefore worse than the preceding one", he writes, and finally this will cause "a social revolution such as have never been dreamt of".²⁸ While the realisation of the idea of Communism is thus tied also to the material conditions, this is just one factor. Communism is the result of modern civilisation as such and in its totality, not of the material conditions specifically or even predominantly.

By 1845-46, this had changed. In the *German Ideology* text-cycle,²⁹ Engels together with Marx now gave primacy to the material conditions, and Engels and Marx famously write that "as individuals express their life, so they are... Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production".³⁰ They now identify the problem with their Young Hegelian colleagues to be precisely what Engels had argued just two years before: that it is not enough to change people's consciousness. It has not occurred to the philosophers of German ideology, they write, to inquire into "the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the connection of their criticism with their own material surroundings."³¹ German philosophy is now considered by Engels and Marx to be an aspect of (the idea of) Communism and the essence of history equal to the others, but rather the idea of Communism arrives in German philosophy precisely because of the material conditions. The idea of Communism is no longer an essence which manifests itself, among other ways, as German philosophy, it is itself part of that philosophy, which manifests because of the material conditions. The German path to the idea Communism is subsumed under the English, so to speak. For the same reason, it is not enough to change the consciousness of people, their ideas; a critique of the established, which alone takes the form of a critique of the established ideas and concepts, is no critique at all.³² The French path to the idea of Communism is also subsumed under the English by Engels: In an addition to the manuscript written in his hand, Engels tells us—in words repeated almost *ad verbatim* 35 years later—that,

²⁶ Here we have clear reminiscences to Bruno Bauer. See, e.g. Moggach, 2003: 114-17.

²⁷ "Outline of a Critique of Political Economy" (1843), which Marx later called a "brilliant sketch" for what would become his own critique of the categories of contemporary political economy in the 1859 *Kritik*.

²⁸ Engels, 1975a: 334

²⁹ As recent research from authors such as Terrell Carver has shown, it is a complete anachronism to refer to *The German Ideology* as a "book". If anything, it should be considered nothing more than a collection of manuscripts or fragments. See, e.g. Carver 2010 and Carver 2015. This is also evident from the critical editions published in *MEGA*² and in the *Marx-Engels Jahrbücher*.

³⁰ Marx & Engels, 1975: 31-32

³¹ Marx & Engels, 1975: 30

³² *Ibid.*

all struggles within the state, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise, etc., etc., are merely the illusory forms—altogether the general interest is the illusory form of common interests—in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another.³³

The essence of history is now viewed by Engels to be class struggle; the different political battles are only its different appearances.³⁴ Therefore, true Communism is not an idea in the Hegelian sense, i.e. something inherent to reality to which it automatically adjusts itself; it is rather “the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things”.³⁵ Communism is the movement to abolish class struggle, the movement to abolish the essence of history. Thus, by 1848 class struggle had come to the forefront of and Engels and Marx’s thinking. When the two left France to participate in the events of 1848, they did so with a stack of 1,000 freshly printed copies of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in hand.³⁶ This now world famous document begins, of course, with equally famous words about class struggle: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”.³⁷ Accordingly, their account of previous Socialist and Communist literature, as well as their optimism about the success of the coming revolution in Germany, is based in class-analysis:

The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilisation, and with a much more developed proletariat, than that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century, and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.³⁸

Class struggle is the real motor of history, not ideas, and Communism will be realised in the coming revolution through class struggle, because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be carried out under more mature conditions than previously seen. The events in 1848, of course, did not lead to a successful bourgeois revolution, nor were they followed by a proletarian one.

After 1848, the immediate concern of Engels’s writings was the continuation of the revolutionary impulse in Europe. Writing mainly for a British audience, Engels detailed the political developments of Germany and France and continued to hope for and expect a rekindling of the revolutionary flame. Contrary to what one would expect though, the first major publication by Engels *post* 1848 did not seem to concern itself with these topics: *The Peasant War in Germany*

³³ Engels & Marx, 1975: 46-47

³⁴ Engels, 1990: 391. See also further below.

³⁵ Engels & Marx, 1975: 49

³⁶ McLellan, 1996: 204-05

³⁷ Engels & Marx, 1975: 482

³⁸ Engels & Marx, 1976: 519

(1850) was an investigation of the 16th century Protestant peasant insurrections of the German states. However, it was also an investigation into the failures of these struggles and the relationship of those failures to the immaturity of the classes involved in it. As such, the parallels to 1848 are clear, as Engels himself says in the foreword.³⁹ The book (it is really more of a pamphlet) can therefore be seen both as a corrective to the Engels of 1843 and as a continuation of the thinking of the Engels of 1845-46. Class struggle is the true essence of all political struggles—in the 16th century no less than in the 19th—and the failure of the Young Hegelians to realise this is the reason for their wrongful evaluation of both the 1848 revolution and the Peasants' Wars, the latter of which they believe to be “nothing except violent theological bickering”⁴⁰ and not, as they truly were, class struggles. For that reason precisely, *The Peasant War* both opens and closes with class-analysis; what were the preconditions for the war in terms of class relations, what were the consequences? In light of this, Engels attributes the failure of 1848 to the immaturity of the German bourgeois class. Just as the leaders of the Peasants' War (such as Thomas Münzer) were not ready for power when they got it, because the class they represented was underdeveloped,⁴¹ so the bourgeois class of 1848 was not ready either⁴² – and in both cases they betrayed both the truly revolutionary class that backed them (the peasants and the proletariat, respectively) as well as their own, underdeveloped class. The conclusion of Engels's analysis is clear. It does not matter how much an idea has already asserted itself in the world—the idea of Communism being already present with Münzer, according to Engels—if the material and economic conditions are not sufficiently developed to accommodate it. It is no longer “the public mind” that needs to be far enough advanced, but the class relations. Ideas are not enough to sustain revolutions, because the true motor of history, its essence, is not an idea, but class struggle.

By 1850 class struggle has thus completely replaced the idea of Communism as the essence of history. To quote again from the opening lines of the *Manifesto*, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle” – meaning that history is nothing but the continuous development into more adequate representations of its essence. In every society, understanding class antagonism is the real key to understanding the social formations. Ancient slave society, feudalism, modern bourgeois society are all class societies, something we are only now able to see because Marxism has realised the potential of human understanding. As we shall now see, this is precisely the point of Engels's description of the relationship between Marxism and history in his 1886 essay. Marxism, Engels tells us, is the most adequate form of philosophy's essence, materialism. As such, philosophy is sublated, *aufgehoben*, and lifted into a new sphere of human

³⁹ Engels, 1960: 329

⁴⁰ Engels, 1960: 343

⁴¹ Engels, 1960: 400-01

⁴² Engels, 1960: 412-13

understanding: the materialist conception of history. Marxism's role, therefore, is to play the same part in the analysis of history that the natural sciences play in the analysis of nature by identifying the general laws of history.⁴³ Previously, Engels tells us, philosophers had thought that ideas were the true driving force of history, culminating with Hegel who believed this force to be not just "ideas" but "the Idea".⁴⁴ But the materialist conception of history show us otherwise. While the events of history do not on the surface seem to be analogous to those of nature—they seem willed and intentional rather than mindless, random, and chaotic—they actually are. While it is true that each individual seems to be and maybe even actually is free to follow his own beliefs and desires, the cumulative results of their many contradictory actions are rarely the intended ones, precisely because they are contradictory. As such, the surface-appearance of history actually is analogous to that and nature, and Engels is free to then make the comparison between Marxism and the natural sciences: both impose order on chaos, and the main principle of the order imposed on history by Marxist analysis is *class struggle*. Thus, class struggle is the true principle of modern society. Just as philosophy has progressed through stages of appearances corresponding still more adequately to its true essence, materialism, so also the societies of history have progressed through appearances that corresponded more or less adequately to their essence: class antagonism. Engels and Marx are able to see this precisely because under the conditions of modern society, the essence of history—class struggle—appears clearly; where the class character of all previous history was hidden, in modern society it is clear and apparent.⁴⁵ Engels no longer believes modern society to reveal with necessity the idea of Communism as its teleological end-goal; instead, he believes it to reveal its true character as a class society and the idea of Communism to be the real movement to abolish these class relations. Modern society appears now as *Erscheinung*, and not as *Schein*. As Marxism is the realisation of philosophy in its reality, so the modern bourgeois society is the realisation of class society in its reality – and Communism the abolition of its principle.

4. Concluding Remarks

As I noted in the introduction, arguing that Engels undergoes a development from a relatively traditionally idealist and Hegelian standpoint to a new, materialist one is rather trivial and not very controversial. On the other hand, I realise that my argument that this development should be understood in light of the Hegelian categories of *Wesen* and *Erscheinung* might be. However, I hope to have showed in the above that, at least potentially, there is something to such reading of Engels's intellectual development: Understanding Engels's relationship to the Hegelian categories

⁴³ Engels, 1990: 387

⁴⁴ Engels, 1990: 386

⁴⁵ Engels, 1990: 389

of essence and appearance and his preoccupation with the Young Hegelian ambition of realising human freedom in the world might help us better understand the role of his and Marx's critique of their fellow Young Hegelians. Read in this light, Marx and Engels's critique might have been not so much a "break" with or a departure from Young Hegelianism, but rather an intervention into the debate over *what* the essence of history is, which needs to be realised in order for human freedom to be realised, and *how* this essence is realised. These are discussions central to all Young Hegelianism: discussions of freedom, universality, and the state. Marx and Engels are not arguing that we should not try to realise the essence of history. They are arguing that this must be done, not through self-consciousness (as Bauer would have it) or humane religion (as Feuerbach would), not through the state as a vehicle of the idea, not through ideas at all, but by abolishing the very real preconditions for history's true essence, class struggle, through the equally "real movement" of Communism. In light of this, some questions for further examination become relevant:

- If the beliefs, desires, and aspiration of individuals are subsumed under the general impersonal principle of history, what room does that leave for personal freedom?
- Engels's shift of attention from the idea of Communism to the principle of class struggle seems to have happened before 1848 – what impact, if any, did the experience of actual (albeit failed) revolution have on Engels?
- If class struggle is the true motor of history, what happens when "the real movement" of Communism abolishes this principle? Does history stop? Or does it truly begin?
- Is there further connections between the application of these concepts of essence and appearance, in the manner of Engels, by the Young Hegelians and their ambition of realising human freedom in history?
- What implications, if any, does all this have for our modern understanding of Marxism? Is it only *curiosa*, or are there "real" implications for our understanding of Marxist theory?

These, however, are considerations for another place and time.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Specifically, September 8 2017 at 11:00 in room PAM SEM10 at the University of Oslo.

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