

Marx's Critique and Reinvention of Hegel's Theory of World History

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Abstract: Hegel's idea of world history is an important branch of his philosophical system, which mainly discusses the development, essence, meaning of history and the evolution of human reason. He believed that history is the process of realising the Absolute Spirit (*Geist*), which represents the evolution of human reason, and the end of history is the realisation of human freedom; the 'world spirit' is the unfolding process of the absolute spirit, and world history is the writing of the absolute spirit in different time and space. Marx, on the other hand, criticised Hegel's abstract thinking from the materialist conception of history. He thought that Hegel's idea of world history was unable to reveal the complexity and concreteness of real history, and ignored the concrete historical conditions and social practices. After critically absorbing Hegel's view of history, Marx reshaped the theory of world history, established that the subject of history is the real human being, and pointed out that the factors driving the process of history should be established in the real material production activities instead of the pure spirit (*Geist*) referred to by Hegel. Marx establishes a brand new mechanism of historical evolution, further establishes the foundation of the materialist conception of world history by clarifying the roles of labour, interaction and division of labour and their interrelationships in the process of historical evolution, comprehensively elaborates the theory of social history and world history, and reveals step by step the law of the development of human history under the state of alienation.

Keywords: Marx, Hegel, Theory of World History, Philosophy of History.

1. Introduction

Hegel's theory of world history is an important part of Hegel's philosophical system, which is mainly embodied in Hegel's dialectical understanding of the development of history and his thinking about the purpose of history, in which the discussion on dialectics and the absolute spirit makes Hegel's theory of world history play an important role in the whole philosophical system, and the theory elevates 'World history rises to the concept of world history', which provides people with an opportunity to learn more about the development of human history under the state of alienation, and provides a profound philosophical foundation for people to understand the development of human history. However, Hegel's theory of world history is clothed with the shell of idealism for the reality of world history, and the understanding of history only exists on the surface of abstraction; therefore, Marx, after recognising its reasonable kernel, criticised the abstraction of Hegel's theory of world history, and regarded the understanding of the reality of human beings and their world of life as the basis of the theory of history, and it is precisely on this basis that Marx really rejected Hegel's theory of world history, it is also on this basis that the negatives of Hegel's theory of world history are truly overcome and the positives retained. By criticizing Hegel's theory of world history, Marx gained a new understanding of the concept and content of world history. This is not only Marx's critique and transcendence of the theory of world history, but also his internal analysis of the historical reality of modern capitalism, and his sorting out of the laws of the historical development of mankind under the state of alienation.

2. Hegel's Theory of World History: The Idealist Interpretation of History

Hegel's theory of world history for the first time from the philosophical point of view of world history as a complete concept, he took the lead in the philosophical way to complete the examination of world history, to philosophical perspective to improve the examination of the world's history, for the understanding and grasp of the concept of world history, the understanding of the world's historical process has a very important significance. In his rational and discursive language, he understood world history as the process of the self-movement of the absolute spirit, and human beings and their activities in the process of real history as the means, tools and links of the self-realisation of the absolute spirit, which is the so-called 'rational cunning', and thus an idealistic interpretation of history.

(1) Hegel's method of observing world history

Hegel divided the way of observing world history into three kinds, namely, original History, reflective history and philosophical history. The original history is the history that historians have deeply felt, including their own direct and indirect experience, and the historians include the actions and events that they are familiar with in the 'work of conception'. Hegel points out that the original historical archetype comes from the Greek historians, 'They simply transferred what was passing in the world around them, to the realm of representative intellect[1]'. The archetype of reflective history comes from the German historian, and consists of 'the history of documentation', 'the history of experiment', 'the history of criticism', etc. It is the history of the historian in his 'own spirit', in the form of the 'history of his own mind', in the form of the 'history of his own mind'. It is the history of

the historian who organises and sums up ‘in his own spirit’, i.e. the history of introspection incorporates a more subjective content. Philosophical history incorporates the ‘rational’ mode of observation, a paradigm based on the spirit of objectivity, which Hegel also used as his own way of examining history. The philosophical history proposed by Hegel is a relatively perfect way of looking at the history of the world, as opposed to a original, reflective history. That is, for Hegel, in order to truly understand history, it is necessary to pass through the methodology of philosophy in order to finally grasp history and reveal the shape and evolution of world history. On this basis, Hegel took the self-movement process of ‘absolute spirit’ as the development process of world history in the language of discernment, thus forming his own philosophy of history. According to Hegel, ‘philosophical history’ is a way of observing history from the point of view of ‘reason’, which governs history, and is the basis of all existing things, and therefore determines the direction of history. In addition, Hegel believes that ‘reason’ is superior to external objects, and is the criterion for the existence of external objects in the world; therefore, the existence of reason does not need the power of external objects, and reason can realise its own purpose through self-development, which is the characteristic of the development of ‘thought’ in Hegel’s philosophy. This is the characteristic of the development of ‘thought’ in Hegel’s philosophy. “Reason” depicts and demonstrates the history of the world in the process of its self-activity, and the history of the world is inextricably linked with ‘thought’. This is the rationality of Hegel’s philosophical approach to world history based on his understanding of world history, i.e., it is a ‘rational’ rather than subjective understanding of history.

Hegel’s third way of looking at world history is a methodological advancement of the theory of world history in the step of cognition, and the philosophical method is a leap forward in the investigation of world history compared with the first two methods. Firstly, under the philosophical approach, ‘thought’ can be separated from “reality” and is independent of the record of historical facts; secondly, world history is governed by ‘reason’. Secondly, world history is governed by ‘reason’, which dominates everything in the universe; ‘reason’ is both the existence and foundation of the self and the final destination of the self’s activities; and finally, Hegel studies world history as a whole by combining “reason” and ‘actuality’. Hegel regards world history as a whole, and he elevates ‘reason’ and ‘world spirit’ to the same level. He believed that the essence of the knowledge of the ‘spirit of the world’ is eternal and unchanging, and that it reveals its single and unified character in the various phenomena of the world.

(2) The self-movement of the ‘Absolute Spirit’

In Hegel’s philosophy, he believed that ‘is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se[2]’ and that the Absolute Spirit is regarded as the final stage in the development of consciousness, representing the unity of individual consciousness and universal consciousness. Hegel’s description of the Absolute Spirit reflects the abstract nature of his thought.

Firstly, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the process of realisation of the absolute spirit. This process consists of several stages from consciousness to self-consciousness, to reason, to spirit, and finally to the absolute spirit. The first stage is the initial stage of consciousness, where the spirit exists in the form of direct perception, perceiving the concrete phenomena of the external world.

With the gradual development of consciousness, the consciousness has a concrete objectified knowledge of the objects, and begins to pursue the understanding of the essence of things. In the second stage, that is, the stage of self-consciousness, consciousness begins to know itself by way of self-reflection, that is, the ontology not only knows the object, but also determines the self through the knowledge of the existence of the object; Hegel describes the interplay between ‘self-consciousness’ and ‘recognition of the Other’ through the master-slave dialectic in this stage. In this stage, Hegel describes the mutual confrontation between ‘self-consciousness’ and ‘awareness of the other’ through the master-slave dialectic as how self-consciousness achieves self-confirmation through “confrontation”, ‘domination and domination’. In the third stage of rationality, the individual begins to understand the relationship between the principle of universality, i.e., rationality, and individual consciousness, and realises the unity of individual consciousness and universal rationality in the process of understanding and applying the principle of universality, and the individual’s legal consciousness, ethics, and morality are all developed in this stage. The fourth stage is the ‘spirit’ stage, in which Hegel emphasises the combination of spirituality with social and ethical life, and ethical life is practised at different levels of society and the state, which promotes the realisation of absolute spirituality, and the individual achieves unity with the whole in this combination, and realises the true freedom of the spirit. Finally, there is the stage of absolute spirit, i.e. the unity of art, religion and philosophy, in which Hegel considers these three to be the highest manifestations of the absolute spirit; art provides sensual forms of expression, religion expresses the soul’s quest for absolute truth, and philosophy realises the rational comprehension and systematisation of these manifestations; the absolute spirit achieves self-consciousness and its own unity and diversity through these three manifestations, and ultimately achieves freedom of spirit. unity and diversity, and ultimately freedom. Through dialectics, Hegel emphasises the unity of opposites and the movement of contradictions, in which ‘consciousness’ constantly negates and denies itself, and finally reaches the realm of ‘absolute spirit’. The concept of absolute spirit is itself the result of this highly abstract process of movement. As the highest form of idea, the very concept of absolute spirituality is the result of a high degree of abstraction of this process of movement its development process is the unfolding process of the self, which means that the self-movement of the absolute spirit is the dynamic process of constant change; this dynamic and self-generating characteristic makes the understanding of absolute spirit abstract, because it involves how the idea realises itself through contradictions and conflicts in different stages.

Secondly, Hegel closely linked the absolute spirit to the development of history and culture, seeing history as an arena for the self-realisation of the absolute spirit. This view requires that the universal consciousness of the individual be combined with the universal spirit, and that one grasps the broader socio-historical events and historical experiences while understanding the individual experience, linking the individual experience to the whole of history in the abstract. History is seen as the concrete expression of the Absolute Spirit in different cultures and times, but this combination of history with abstract ideas ignores the constitution of history as production and labour in society. Hegel talks about history not only as a collection of individual events, but also as a

universal process, embodying the overall development of the human spirit; this requires one to go beyond individual phenomena in analysing specific historical events and to understand them in the sense of extensiveness, and this way of thinking from the individual to the universal increases the abstractness of Hegel's theory of world history. In addition, Hegel regarded art, religion and philosophy as the three manifestations of the absolute spirit, and this categorisation itself is an abstract way of thinking, because these three manifestations represent the realisation of the absolute spirit at different levels. Therefore, although art, religion and philosophy come from life, Hegel's understanding of these three forms of expression still starts from the form of expression to refine the abstract concepts therein, and still goes round in circles from concrete to abstract thinking. That is to say, although Hegel's understanding of cultural phenomena rises to the level of concepts and theories, he is still unable to return to reality and discusses the inner logic and meaning at a more abstracted theoretical level.

Thirdly, Hegel's theory of world history shows the essence of world history according to the approximate route of his understanding of the 'world'. In Hegel's view, the development of world history is a process in itself, and the 'world' is the path of the natural territorial unfolding. In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel describes the starting point of world history as the East, from the East to the Roman state, and then to Germania, and Hegel discusses the movement of the spirit from 'direct consciousness' to 'direct consciousness'. Hegel discusses the movement of spirit from 'direct consciousness' to "freedom" and 'truth', which is the goal of world historical development, i.e., the result of the self-movement of the absolute spirit, and the attainment of spiritual freedom through the self-movement of the spirit and self-denial of the spirit; and the initial part of this process In the first part of this process, 'spirit' appears and develops in the form of "culture" in the Eastern societies. Hegel discusses the process of the movement of the absolute spirit as the process of the development of 'culture' by human beings as the process of the formation of world history. Hegel discusses the process of movement of the absolute spirit as the process of human development of 'culture' as the process of formation of world history, and 'culture' is only the manifestation of the absolute spirit, which is the symbol of Hegel's distinction of the absolute spirit in different geographical locations. 'The spirit of the world is, in general, "spirit" developing in time[3]' He tries to take the 'absolute spirit' as the principle of world history. This he states in his *Philosophy of History*: 'The final end of the whole world we take to be the consciousness of its own freedom on the part of "Spirit" and, indeed, the reality of that freedom[4]', i.e., the process of history and the development of the whole universe is ultimately aimed at the realisation of 'the Spirit' and the development of the whole universe. That is, the process of history and the development of the universe as a whole culminate in the realisation of the freedom of 'spirit', which in itself represents the self-identification of a 'consciousness' that has reached the point of rationality, morality, and social norms in society, Hegel believed that history is a purposeful process, that it is not a single collection of events, but a process of evolution towards a certain goal, and that this purposefulness makes the spirit of the world the basis for understanding history. Therefore, under Hegel's idealist interpretation, the course of world history is the path of activity of 'spirit', and the process of development of world

history is the process of activity of 'spirit's' self-realisation; therefore, the "matter" in the world includes knowledge, science, science, and the world of the world, and the world of the world is the 'spirit' of the world. Therefore, the 'matter' in the world, including knowledge and science, is only the product of the absolute spirit in the process of objectivity, i.e., the interaction with the external world in the self-movement of the absolute spirit.

3. Marx's Critique of Hegel's Theory of World History: Establishing the Basis of Real History

In the course of Marx's study of Hegelian history, his understanding of history was further refined, including the purposefulness and progressiveness of history, and the development of history as a dialectical process, full of contradictions and the unity of opposites. Although Marx's understanding of history and social reality has its roots in Hegelian philosophy, after gaining a deeper understanding of social history, his thought began to branch out differently from Hegelian historical thought; after studying a great deal of Western history, Marx had a certain budding understanding of the relationship between history and society, and concluded that the development of history could not be separated from its social and material basis, and that history is the result of the proletariat's breaking down of the old It was only after the proletariat had broken down the old social form - 'capitalism' - that history developed into a new and world history. The understanding of 'facts' was the beginning of Marx's historical thought, which originated from Hegel but transcended Hegel. Marx thought that Hegelian history focused on 'dialectics' rather than 'facts', but that historical facts were the basis for examining social history and constituting social history, as well as for the development of the world. Historical facts are an important component of social history and world history, so in order to discuss world history, it is inevitable to mention human beings, labour, interaction and practice, which are the elements of the materialist conception of history. After this, Marx criticised and transformed Hegel's idea of world history in terms of human beings, social reality and the relationship between them.

Marx dialectically recognised the rational aspects of Hegel's theory of world history before establishing his theory of social history. Hegel's philosophy of history refutes the old view that people in the past regarded social history as a product of individual will, and argues that there are inevitable, objective laws beneath the surface of history that are not subject to the will of man, and that the reason why history is able to move forward in its activity is that it is propelled by a transcendent subjective intention and consciousness, which in turn governs the activity of man and the composition of society. Hegel rescued history from the old metaphysics of the past, took world history as a whole with intrinsic connection, and the process of the development of world history is the process of dialectical negation of self-consciousness, and he used dialectics to explain the existence of the objective law of universal connection in world history, which was affirmed by Marx. However, Hegel's dialectic thus only constructed a basic framework for the idea of world history, emphasising the dialectical development of history, purposefulness and wholeness, concreteness, etc. History in this perspective is only a simple, one-sided accumulation of events, ignoring the

complexity, materiality, social practice and other characteristics of history. Therefore, while continuing to look at historical development with a dialectical perspective, Marx saw the importance of human beings as well as human labour and social practice for history, which is the base of world history that Marx reshaped on the basis of critiquing Hegel and taking productive labour as the base for world history and its formation. Marx mentions in Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 that in the socialist stage, man creates social history through his labour, and nature becomes humanized nature in the process; therefore Marx is emphasising the material basis and social practice on the basis of Hegelian dialectics, which fully affirms the role of man, and labour, and that world history is born in the process of human labour; this is Marx's response to the coherence between Hegelian dialectics and world history, and a direct refutation of Hegel's abstraction of the 'spirit of the world'. From Hegel's philosophy of history, Marx continued Hegel's affirmation of man as the subject of social history in his discussion of history, leaving behind his abstract conceptual thinking and fully affirming the importance of man and the practice of labour. Marx's view that the creative process of man's material labour requires the exercise of human agency, and that it is through the creation of labour that man distinguishes himself from animals, fully affirms the practical nature of man's existence in society to perform labour and make full use of the tools of his labour, as well as the social subjectivity of man to satisfy the needs of his own production and life through the means. This Marx stated in Theses on Feuerbach that 'But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.' In this way, Marx, after criticising the abstraction of Hegel's idea of world history, establishes a dialectical relationship between man and the world, which is not dominated by abstract ideas or spirituality, but is determined by concrete social practices and material conditions.

Knowledge of the 'world' is a prerequisite for understanding 'world history'. Marx thought that Hegel's theory of world history was a separate discussion of spirituality from the material life of production, and that in discussing the emergence and spread of civilisation and culture, he had neglected the material basis required for the emergence of civilisation and treated the emergence and development of culture as an independent movement of the spirit, which was a roundabout way of circling around in the field of consciousness. Therefore, after recognising the material prerequisites for the development of world history, Marx clarified the inseparable relationship between social history, human beings and the practice of material production, and in his Theses on Feuerbach he elaborated on the 'In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.', and man creates social relations in practice, and the structure and change of social relations expresses history. Thus, in establishing his idea of social history, Marx emphasised the importance of man, labour and interaction in the stage of civil society to the development of history, as Marx stated that 'Great industry makes every civilised country, and the fulfilment of the needs of every individual in those countries, dependent on the whole world, for it has annihilated the previous naturally occurring seclusion of the nations[5]', he believed that it was the production of large-scale industry that first created world history, and that the emergence and development of large-scale industry and the world market

played a key role in the material foundation of the process of history from 'national history' to 'world history'. At the same time, the development of history in this process is essentially driven by capital. Marx, after focusing on the production and practice of human society, revealed that capital as a kind of power, with the control of labour to achieve its own value-added, and the emergence of large-scale industry and the world market is the product of the value-added, flow and circulation of capital, and then the interaction of human beings occurs, and the world becomes a whole, and history begins to have a real 'world' significance. Marx also fully recognised that history under the logic of capital is also epochal, and that it will eventually change to a new stage with the demise of the private system of capital, so Marx integrated the critique of capital with the establishment of a world view of history.

Thus, it was after criticising the abstractness of Hegel's world spirit that Marx adopted historical materialism as a fundamental refutation of Hegel's idealism, fully affirming the roles of practice and history, and arguing that only through concrete social practice could he truly understand the process and changes of history. In this process, Marx identifies the class struggle as the main driving force of historical development, arguing that history is driven by the contradictions and struggles between different classes, which remains Marx's response to Hegel's abstract view of history, emphasising the importance of concrete social relations and conflicts of interest in the course of history.

4. Marx's Reinvention of the Hegelian Theory of World History: Communism as the Ultimate Destination of World History

Marx put forward a different point of view on the Hegelian theory of world history about the destination of world history, although he agreed that world history has a purpose, but for the ultimate direction of history Marx held the opposite attitude, he thought that the spiritual world emphasised by Hegel could not be the purpose of the development of world history, and that the realisation of the emancipation of human beings and their free and comprehensive development, and the move towards communism was the ultimate direction of world history.

Firstly, the free emancipation of man is the ultimate aim of historical development. When history breaks out of its isolation and becomes world history, the question of man's emancipation and development acquires reality, and the discussion of man's emancipation must begin with the question of man's essence. For when Marx and Engels criticised the idealistic nature of Hegel's theory of world history, they argued that spirit and thought could not solve the difficult problems of the real society, and that consciousness and the products of consciousness could not explain or change what exists, and that the question of reality must be answered in terms of the relations between men in the real society, with the reality of matter as the basis. In addition, they also criticised Feuerbach's view of the 'abstract man', and therefore proposed that 'the nature of man and his reality is the sum of all social relations', and that only from the standpoint of the materialist view of history can we examine history and "man" in history, and that only from the standpoint of the materialist view of history can we examine history and 'man' in history. "It is only from the standpoint of

the materialist view of history that one can examine history and the human being in history, and examine the human being in the context of real social conditions. Therefore, after the level of productive forces and the real conditions of social materiality, human beings begin to pursue their own freedom and emancipation, and it is only when a single individual realises his own free development that he can further realise the free development of all human beings. When discussing social forms in the introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx said, 'History is thorough and goes through many phases when carrying an old form to the grave. The last phases of a world-historical form is its comedy[6]', and Marx offered a substantial critique of capitalism, in which he argued that the complicated He believed that the complex relations of production in capitalist society were a shackle that deprived people of their nature and freedom, and restricted their productive and social activities. It was only after the class struggle that people would move towards universal 'emancipation', and that world history would move in a new direction under the impetus of a new class. Therefore, Marx's idea of world history starts from the nature of man, examines the reality of history, and ultimately points to the freedom and emancipation of man. In the course of the development of world history, the ultimate goal of human social development is to build a genuine alliance of free people, in which individuals can give full play to their talents and pursue their own freedom.

Secondly, the realisation of communism is the ultimate goal of the development of world history. In emphasising the influence of capital in the transformation of history into world history, Marx further criticised the dominance of capital in the evolution of history. After capitalism dominated the development of world history, the relationship between human beings and human beings and human beings and things changed, and human beings existed in society but were instead dominated by alien forces and lost their human essence. In socialised mass production, workers are appropriated without compensation for their surplus value and become commodities for the capitalists. The fundamental contradictions of capitalism under this relationship intensify, and the intensification of these contradictions leads to economic crises, which require the oppressed groups to unite in their struggles, to overthrow the capitalist system and to establish a new system. In this way, the birth of the proletariat

has an epochal and historical character. Although it is a product of capitalist society, as the lowest stratum of the society which is deeply oppressed, it is the key force to promote the historical process and social change, and carries the mission of overthrowing the bourgeoisie, so it is the most deeply oppressed, and its struggle is also more thorough. Under such a struggle, capitalism will surely come to an end, and the proletariat will lead world history towards a new trend, that is, communism. The true realisation of communism also involves the freedom and emancipation of man, and communism will be realised when man on a world scale achieves his own emancipation and freedom.

5. Summary

The construction of Marx's thought on world history is not only to depict to us the world history under materialism which is different from the spiritual world described by Hegel, and to construct a new view of world history, it is also to provide mankind with a method of knowing the world and observing the world by means of his own understanding of world history; According to Marx's mastery of world history, mankind, in the course of its long historical development, has gradually identified the bases of the historical order and firmly grasped the power to dominate history in the hands of the working people themselves, so that the world can in the future become a highly inclusive, multidisciplinary commonwealth, history can only go to the new world of common freedom and liberation for all mankind.

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