

February 27, 1961

Dear Com. Spence,

It was good to get the regards you sent with Dick, and I'm looking forward to seeing you soon. I hope we will have an hour or so "alone" -- at least on the question of China. I have "ulterior motives" (at least I'm honest on the question). Seriously, though, I am most anxious to involve you in collaborating with me on my new book, a counterpart to Marxism and Freedom, only this time the philosophic foundations for the struggles for freedom are related to the underdeveloped countries.

You may remember that both in the pamphlet on the Afro-Asian revolutions and in my conversation with you I stated that the state capitalist road in China must be counterposed to a truly independent path toward industrialization. You must have guessed that I was most envious of your specialization on China. It is impossible to know every field in our age of specialization in a comprehensive way that a serious Marxist study demands, but it is even harder to meet with alleged specialists who have any total view of their field, much less of Marxist philosophy. That is why you are so precious and why, frankly, I was disappointed not to have heard from you although you had promised to write me after you had finished reading my book. Dick's greetings, which showed you had not forgotten me, were therefore thrice welcome.

Now to plunge directly into some Hegelian concepts which may not appear to you to have any direct relationship either to Marx or to China; (just keep in mind that I have scribbled in the name Mao-Tse Tung next to the expressions "the noble type of consciousness ...related to state power", ~~and~~ next to "such a type is the haughty vassal" and "the type of personality which of itself renounces possessions and enjoyment, acts for the sake of the prevailing power");

"The noble type of consciousness, then, finds itself in the judgment related to state power in the sense that this power is indeed not a self as yet but at first is universal substance, in which, however this form of mind feels its own essential nature to exist, is conscious of its own purpose and absolute content. By taking up a positive relation to this substance, it assumes a negative attitude towards its own special purpose, its particular content and individual existence, and lets them disappear. This type of mind is the heroism of service; the virtue which sacrifices individual being to the universal and thereby brings this into existence; the type of personality which of itself renounces possession and enjoyment, acts for the sake of the prevailing power, and in this way becomes a concrete reality." (p. 526, Phenomenology of Mind)

"Such a type is the haughty vassal; he is active in the interests of the state-power...This estrangement, however, takes place in language, in words alone, and language assumes here its peculiar role...it is the power of utterance qua utterance which, just in speaking, performs what has to be performed...Speech however contains this ego in its purity; it alone ~~expresses~~ expresses I, I itself." (p. 328)

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"This type of spiritual life is the absolute and universal inversion of reality and thought, their entire estrangement the one from the other; it is pure culture. What is found out in this sphere is that neither the concrete realities, state power and wealth, nor the determinate conceptions, good and bad, nor the consciousness of good and bad (the consciousness that is noble and the consciousness that is base) possesses real truth; it is found that all these moments are inverted and transmuted the one into the other, and each is the opposite of itself." (p. 541)

Let you should consider these quotations as a manifestation of the highest alienation from reality, permit me to say that it is Hegel's analysis of the perversion which must take possession of the person who has fought for freedom when he was part of a real world that was alien to him, only to find on the day after victory that his own personality, by now becoming identified with the new state power, has made his philosophy more topsy-turvy than the real world was before its overthrow. It is one of the sections in the Phenomenology of Mind to which, you may recall from the early Marx essays which appeared as an appendix to my book, Marx refers when he states that the Hegelian method is far superior to Hegel's conscious purpose and in fact many ideas, which remain uncritical in Hegel, could become the basis, when read materialistically, for a devastating analysis of the state.

I happen to feel very strongly that Hegel had anticipated so many of the problems of our world because he had lived in a time of crisis, which he called "the birth-time of history" and which we know as the French Revolution and the Napoleonic empire that followed it. The dialectic method which resulted from the mind of this genius was the prerequisite for the Marxist philosophy of class struggle as a means of achieving that individual freedom which would be the basis for the freedom of all. The Marxists who failed to see anything but gibberish in Hegel and disregarded him in their "popularizations" of Marx's works were, by no accident, at the head of the International which collapsed during World War I. Just as Lenin, to reconstitute his own sense of "masses as reason", had to return to Marx's origin in Hegel, so we must, to grasp the true and driving force of Humanism not alone in Marx but in the struggles for freedom of our day, recapture the philosophic profundities in Hegel. I do not know whether you, like all of us Anglo-Saxons, suffer from inherent pragmatism, but I do know that you have the intellectual stamina and the youthful vigor that brings ideas to life, and therefore please, please, please let me take you on this "voyage of discovery" so that you can take me on the voyage of precise knowledge of the China of today, and together we could make a genuine contribution to the understanding of the problems of our epoch with a view to changing it.

Yours,