

## Short Essay #1

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In their accounts of history, Hegel and Marx have developed theories of progress which are used to illuminate the process of history dialectically. Both thinkers differ in their accounts of how this progress comes to be, and what it is that progresses. Hegel believed that progress is achieved through Spirit's realization of itself, through the attainment of Freedom by means of the cunning of reason. Marx believed that the idea of historical progress includes the development of the modes of production associated with a society and the exploitation of labor, eventually culminating into revolution. The subsequent liberation of the worker and changes in the ownership of wealth are the things that arise from the progress of world history.

Hegel argued that the consciousness of freedom is that which progresses throughout history -- "...a progress whose necessity it is our business to comprehend" (p. 54). This framework of understanding the progress of history can be understood as a change in the development of ideas over time. Spirit's realization of itself is the very thing that constitutes progress in history -- this occurs through the attainment of freedom. Freedom and progress are attained through conflict and even regression, where a dialectical relationship involving clashing ideologies is formed, and progressive ideas come to fruition and manifest historically, thereby overhauling draconian ideas of regress and non-freedom. Progress, therefore, involves the gradual liberation of the human Spirit, where ideas are the things shaping material conditions. The distinct ways in which the development of history occurs "is not just a harmless and peaceful process of growth like that of organic life, but a hard and obstinate struggle with itself" to realize the idea of freedom (p. 127). This realization of freedom is reflected in the nation-state and its workings in order to produce societies of free individuals comprising a whole. According to Hegel, the means by which history progresses involves the cunning of reason. The cunning of reason uses non-rational motivations to achieve a rational historical end -- thereby comprising the content of history and progress. Reason is a cunning animal

which shapes the goals of the means -- “But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges...It is what we may call the cunning of reason that it sets the passions to work in its service...” (p. 89).

The material of world history is constructed and represented through the formation of nation-states which embody the ideals of Spirit -- “The spirit's own consciousness must realise itself in the world; the material or soil in which it is realised is none other than the general consciousness, the consciousness of the nation” (p. 52). Not all states are constructed peacefully, and war and conflict are sometimes necessary elements in their formation. For example, slavery can sometimes internally generate ideas of freedom, and the conflict arising between the slavemaster and the slave births the consciousness of freedom and material instantiations of liberation. The cycle begins anew until the end goal of history is achieved -- complete realization of Spirit, whose content includes freedom. The idea of Freedom can be seen in the historical record wherein the development of an increasing amount of human freedom is codified. Beneath the nightmarishness of catastrophe lies the potential for development of progress. History is an ever-changing, shifting process in which rationality takes root, albeit this instantiation of it is not immediately evident. Passions and private interests are pitted against reason, the latter of which “rules the world”, but both are equally necessary in enacting change as the subjective particulars are conjoined with the universal. Reason is not so much a motivating force but a mode of questioning wherein rational outcomes are derived or sought after from conflict. Even if it is unbeknownst to the actor, actions have reasons which are not dependent on private or self-interests and passions -- they have a further purpose on the mobilization of historical movement towards a progressive end, and allow Spirit to realize itself -- “This vast conglomeration of volition, interests, and activities is the sum total of instruments and means which the world spirit employs to accomplish its end...” (p.74). Emotional impulses therefore fit into the larger story of how progress is attained, and the individual dialectical process mirrors that of the nation-state, which forms the particulars that are necessary to produce the universals of hard and

obstinate struggle of Spirit. Nature and Spirit are combined to produce freedom, where humans emancipate themselves from natural existence and make a world of our own design (a second nature), generate the idea of freedom of consciousness, and then institutionally universalize it.

Marx argued that the modes of production, or the exploitation of labor and the accumulated capital of the ruling class are the things constituting historical progress. The subsequent liberation of labor is the thing that evolves through the progress of world history. In his understanding of how the progress of world history occurs, Marx concerned himself with questions regarding how conditions influence life and how conditions can be changed through action. Marx believed that we are beings entrenched in a material world, and that the relation between man and nature was constituted by production and the satisfaction of needs. The “modes of production” are characterized by the relevant periods and technologies/ideas available at the time. The modes of production generate a division of labor wherein relations of ownership are established and maintained. As division and labor gets more complex, the question of freedom becomes increasingly at stake. Even with the risk of perpetuating unfreedom through the division of labor and continually exploitative modes of production of material and consciousness, will the revolution that spurs greater freedom still be possible? Progress in the social sphere is thus defined as progress in the material world through the development of technology, capital, and ideas. The division of labor is the source of class struggle, where production is organized around class and everybody wants control of production. Marx believed that the modes of production not only organized labor relations, but also life and ideas as people understand them -- consciousness of existence -- ideologies justifying ways of life. The material conditions of societies produce ideas which influence the workers’ understanding of needs and their satisfaction with their lot in life. The division of manual and mental labor subsequently produces the ideology of the ruling class. Revolutions come from a disruption of the mode of production. They arise out of the development of production coupled with the creation of a mass of propertyless workers, and a revolutionary set of ideals. As more wealth is produced, the worker becomes more exploited -- “And

from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour, have up to now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work..." (p. 295). Social conditions must change in order to produce revolutionary ideas in the first place -- "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (p. 209). Civil society is thus explained by its political economy and its modes of production. The conflict between the relations and means of production is the breeding ground for revolution. Marx believed that the means by which progress is instantiated involves changes in ownership of wealth. His view of history included the necessary progression of societies by way of stages, where capitalism is preceded by feudalism which is preceded by slavery. In each stage, the ruling class uses the technology and dominant ideas of the time to exploit the working class. However, intolerable internal contradictions arising from material conditions within these stages yield results by necessitating the overthrow of the ruling class -- "At a certain stage of development, it brings into the world the material means of its own destruction. From that moment, new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society, forces and passions which feel themselves to be fettered by that society" (p. 298). Marx believed that the proletariat would overthrow the ruling class and claim ownership of the means of production under communism when the relation of production no longer supports material progress.

Hegel and Marx's accounts differ in their accounts of historical progress, but there are also similarities. For one, both thinkers had teleologies of history where they attributed conflict as being historically necessary for the attainment of freedom, in Hegel's case, or worker's liberation, in Marx's case. Emancipation is the end goal of history, and this emancipation must be understood on a collective level. Both thinkers subscribe to the dialectical notions of history, where contradictions give rise to developments that occur in the course of history. For Hegel, this contradiction arises from ideas of freedom and servitude, but for Marx, this contradiction arises from material conditions and

class relations. For both thinkers, history is always in motion to produce a certain end. Both Hegel and Marx viewed history holistically, with the possibility of progress arising universally and within the collective. However, Marx (being a historical materialist), believed that material conditions give rise to changing ideas, rather than the reverse. The material and technological resources of society pave way for the formation of ideas which encourage revolution. Hegel centered the human rather than matter, so for him, ideas arose out of human ingenuity, which in turn produced the revolutionary sentiment that would amount to the carrying out of progress. Progress for Hegel implied the manner in which humans moved away from the natural world, whereas Marx believed that mankind was always suspended in the natural world. In addition, the emancipatory philosophies pertaining to both thinkers vary as well, given that Hegel believed in the conceptual notion of freedom in an abstract sense, whereas Marx believed that liberation should translate into material life and labor through the seizure of the means of production and change in the ownership of wealth. Both thinkers regarded historical events as having meaning and significance but for different ends. For Hegel, some historical events were signified by the natural progression from catastrophe to the manifestation of the logic of freedom which underlies these catastrophes. Hegel was unconcerned with events themselves -- he was more interested in their emancipatory significance in the grand course of history -- their furtherance of the ideals of freedom. For Marx, historical events were signified by their promotion or undermining of capitalist structures and other systems of domination in the hope that the institution of communism will necessarily follow after the toppling of these regimes. In essence, the ideas of both thinkers seemingly contradict each other, but there are fundamental similarities that could be gleaned from each of their philosophies. Both thinkers place a lot of faith in the progress of history and in the achievement of a historical end in which Spirit or the worker are liberated. Whether this unwavering faith is warranted in a society “where it is easier to imagine the world rather than the end of capitalism” -- or the realization of Spirit through freedom -- is a different issue that requires addressing.