

A Brief Analysis of Young Marx's Theory of the State: An Examination Based on the Crozach Notes and Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

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Abstract: The young Marx turned to academic research from the social arena, reflecting on Hegelian philosophy through practical concerns and critically inheriting the ideas of Feuerbach. In Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, he employed a method of "inverting subject and object", to challenge Hegel's vision of the rational state, proposing the significant notion that civil society determines the state. His contemporaneous Crozach Notes laid the groundwork for his deep historical analysis and the construction of his own political philosophy.

Keywords: Marx; The Crozach Notes; Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right; Theory of the State

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1 Introduction

In the development of Marxist philosophy, the ideological transformation of the young Marx and the formation of his theory of the state hold paramount significance. This paper aims to thoroughly analyze the background, developmental trajectory, and theoretical contributions of the young Marx's theory of the state, particularly through an examination of two pivotal texts: the Crozach Notes and the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. The young Marx's theory of the state did not emerge in isolation but gradually took shape against a profound historical backdrop and through intense intellectual engagement.

2 Historical Origins of the Transformation in Young Marx's Thought

2.1 Critical Reflection on Hegel's Philosophy

With the development of the capitalist mode of production, the backward feudal system became an obstacle to capitalist advancement, and the exploration of an ideal model for the state became a subject of inquiry among European intellectuals. Frederick William IV could not serve as the spokesperson for the emerging bourgeoisie. Between 1839 and 1841, Marx authored a series of manuscripts offering profound analyses of the foundations of Hegelian philosophy. Beginning in January 1842, Marx published political commentaries and philosophical works in the Rheinische Zeitung centered on the critique of Hegel's philosophy of law. This critique was intertwined with actual political struggles, marking Marx's first attempt to grasp Hegel's philosophy of law within a real-world context. After assuming the editorship of the Rheinische Zeitung in October 1842, Marx published numerous political commentaries, most of which focused on specific Prussian state issues. Through his research on these issues, Marx gained extensive knowledge of real-world state phenomena and facts. He began to develop practical insights into the relationship between landed interests and the state, as well as into political matters such as class distinctions, law, and state institutions.

2.2 Critical Inheritance of Feuerbach's Philosophy

Ludwig Feuerbach's ideas exerted a profound influence on the Young Hegelians. In the early development of Marx's thought, Feuerbach undoubtedly served as a crucial theoretical reference point. In 1839, Feuerbach published Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, initiating a critical examination of Hegelian philosophy that focused on its speculative nature. Feuerbach argued that only by rejecting this speculative empiricism could we truly comprehend "human history," and that human society and history could only be explained by starting from the concrete reality of history. This perspective profoundly influenced the Young Hegelians and Marx. In 1841, Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* thoroughly overturned Hegel's speculative philosophy.

2.3 Work Experience at Rheinische Zeitung

"Communism and the Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung," Marx articulated his stance on communism. He then published a third article in the supplement reviewing the Sixth Rhenish Provincial Assembly. These editorials vividly showcased the contemporary relevance of Marx's ideas, particularly in "The Debate on the Law Concerning the Theft of Timber," where Marx publicly defended the interests of the proletariat for the first time, condemning the inhumanity of property owners and directly targeting the feudal representative system. Marx analyzed the real political causes of each period, recognizing that the fundamental issues in the feudalism versus democracy debates across different eras were inextricably linked to material interests.

3 The Development of Young Marx's Theory of the State in Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

3.1 Critique of Hegel's Dialectic: Its Compromise and Dualism

Marx pointed out that the "mysticism" of Hegel's philosophy of law lies in logic, specifically Hegel's idealist speculative methodology. In Hegel's theory of the state, his attempt to preserve elements of monarchy and hierarchy within modern state institutions necessitated a

compromise between the rational state and irrational reality (Sun Bojie, 2017: 154). Marx noted: “Hegel regarded the separation of civil society and political society as a contradiction, which was his more profound insight. But his mistake lay in being satisfied with a superficial resolution of this contradiction and mistaking this superficiality for the essence of the matter.” (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 94) In Marx's view, the separation of the political state and civil society is a characteristic of democratic states, embodying the principles of bourgeois society. Because the bourgeoisie thoroughly liberated civil society from medieval hierarchical politics, the result was a complete separation between the particular private interests existing within civil society and the universal public interests embodied in the political state. This is undoubtedly a contradiction, but compared to the medieval situation, it represents a tremendous advance. In the Middle Ages, civil society and the political state were directly identical; the organic principle of civil society was the principle of the state (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 90). Thus, with the overthrow of the feudal state, the original unity between civil society and the political state vanished. Hegel clearly recognized this, which is why he took the separation of civil society and the political state as his starting point when arguing for the constitutional monarchy. However, the civil society Hegel described was not yet fully capitalist; it also encompassed various medieval class elements. Hegel stated Civil society is the battlefield of individual self-interest, the arena where all stand against all. Likewise, it is the arena where private interests clash with common particular affairs, and where both collectively confront the supreme perspective and command of the state (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 54) To resolve this conflict, Hegel sought solutions within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, aiming for the ultimate unification of the universal interests represented by the state and the private interests of civil society.

3.2 An Analysis of the Relationship Between Civil Society and the Political State

In Hegel's philosophy, the universal interest and particular interests are directly identical—that is, civil society and the state are one and the same. Hegel regarded the state as the spirit on earth, asserting that the essence of the modern state lies in its capacity to encompass particular interests as a universal entity. Within this framework, both universality and particularity can develop, and a rational state enables the realization of unity between civil society and the state. Marx pointed out that in Hegel's philosophy, the concept of “state” became an independent subject, while the actual relationship between the family and civil society to the state was transformed into an imagined internal activity inherent to the concept (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 10). Hegel attempted to subsume the family and civil society under the universal principle of the rational state, enabling individuals in civil society to consciously adopt this universal principle as an intrinsic goal when fulfilling their particular needs, ultimately achieving unity. After experiencing the “agonizing question” of the opposition between the rational state and real material interests—that is, the conflict between the “ought” and the “is”—during his *Rheinische Zeitung* period, and after studying the political histories of various nations, particularly Feuerbach's anthropological materialism, Marx demonstrated that Hegel's doctrine of the rational state essentially retreated into the realm of concepts to resolve the problems of the real world, proving utterly powerless when confronted with the challenges of real material interests. Marx argued that it is not the idea of the state that gives rise to the family and civil society, but rather the family and civil society that transform themselves into the state. They are the real subjects and driving forces. “The political state cannot exist without the natural foundation of the family and the artificial foundation of civil society. These are necessary conditions for the state. Yet the determiner is posited as the determined, the determiner as the determined, the producer as the product of its product (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 12).” By critiquing Hegel's mystical conception of the state, Marx arrived at the explicit conclusion that it is not the state that determines civil society, but civil society that determines the state. This insight gradually paved the way for a research path aligned with the new materialism.

3.3 Critique of Hegel's Subject-Predicate Inversion Problem

February 1842, Marx received the delayed publication of the “Fragments” and a letter from Ruge. The “Fragments” included Feuerbach's essay “Provisional Theses for the Reform of Philosophy.” From Marx's 1843 letter to Feuerbach, it is evident that he developed an emotional resonance with Feuerbach's ideas and unconsciously adopted Feuerbach's methodology in his critique of Hegel's philosophy of law. In his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx frequently employed Feuerbachian language and methodology. This Feuerbachian approach is particularly evident in his exposition on understanding civil society and democracy. Marx asserted that civil society constitutes “the realization of human essence” and that “humanity is forever the essence of all these social organizations” (Marx, Engels, 2004c: 66-67), thus determining that the state is determined by civil society—meaning the state is determined by human essence. When discussing the distinction between monarchy and democracy, Marx employed Feuerbach's method of critiquing religion to argue that Hegel, starting from the state, turned humans into subjectified tools. Democracy, starting from humans, turns the state into an objectified human. Just as religion does not create man but man creates religion, it is not the state system that creates the people, but the people who create the state system (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 52). Marx himself states in the text: “What is crucial is that Hegel everywhere treats the idea as the subject, while transforming the subject in the original sense of reality into the predicate.” (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 40) Hegel does this because he seeks to write a biography of abstract entities and ideas; thus, human activity and the like must become the activity and result of something else in his system (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 51). These textual references demonstrate that Marx employed precisely the “inversion of subject and predicate” method described by Feuerbach in his 1843 “Provisional Outline for the Transformation of Philosophy”—namely, “treating the predicate as the subject and the subject as the object and principle.” Marx's “task of the new philosophy is to restore to man the essence which Hegel abstracted from him.” Marx pointed out that Hegel inverted the relationship between the existence of the state and the concept of the state, making the elements of the state concept the subject and reducing the old forms of state existence to the predicate. In the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Marx quotes Hegel as asserting that all contradictions arising in the real state are superficial, not essential. Thus, Hegel intended to express that the contradiction between the class element and the principle of sovereignty is not the essential manifestation of the class element. Viewed through the lens of mediation, the class element is merely an intermediary link in the rational state—this constitutes its essence. Marx precisely employed Feuerbach's inversion of subject and predicate to reveal that the root of the separation and unity between

civic life and the state lies within civil society—the economic sphere—rather than in the rational state emphasized by Hegel.

4 The Development of Young Marx's Theory of the State in Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

4.1 The Significance of the Kreuznach Notes for the Composition of Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

In March 1843, after being forced to resign from the editorial board of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx withdrew from the public stage to his study. There he began a critical analysis of Hegel's philosophy of law and commenced writing his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. From May of that year, Marx resided primarily in Kreuznach until October, when he and Jenny set off for Paris. This period of Marx's retreat to his study became known as the "Kreuznach Period." During this time, Marx not only composed the manuscript of *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* but also compiled five notebooks of historical and political excerpts, collectively known as the Kreuznach Notebooks. The renowned professor Rabin pointed out a textual break in Marx's writing of *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: after the critique in section 303, Marx wrote a commentary on a passage, followed by excerpts from sections 304-307 of Hegel's *Principles of Philosophy of Right*. By convention, he should have begun commenting on these sections next. Interestingly, however, Marx wrote only one sentence before returning to comment on section 303, reengaging with its discussion. (Wang Xudong, 2019) It can be said that the Kreuznach Notebooks played a significant role in the development of Marx's thought. The Kreuznach Notes and *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* were written in close proximity. Although there is no direct evidence of the notes' use in *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the two works exhibit a remarkably close connection in terms of their ideological content.

4.2 Rejection of the hierarchical system

In *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx pointed out that Hegel's definition of the private class is contradictory: "The private class acquires political significance in the class element of the legislative power." (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 88) The private class does not possess political character in the life of civil society; it only acquires political significance when it manifests as a class element within state political activities. Therefore, "the class element is the political significance of the private class, i.e., the non-political class." (Marx, Engels, 2002b: 89) This likely corresponds to Hegel's description in Section 303 of the private class as "a class founded upon particular needs and the labor that brings these needs to fruition." However, Hegel further posits that private hierarchy also encompasses "hierarchy based on substantial relations." Here, private hierarchy belongs to the essence of the state and is imbued by Hegel with political contradictions. Consequently, Marx identifies a contradiction in Hegel's concept of private hierarchy: on one hand, private hierarchy is a non-political concept within civil society that embodies particularity without universality, acquiring political significance only when engaged in state political activities; Yet Hegel simultaneously regarded the private hierarchy as a substantive element of the state—a concept inherently universal. The private hierarchy thus represents the unity of particularity and universality. On this point, Marx appears to disagree with Hegel. Hegel proceeds from the premise of universal hierarchy, while Marx identifies Hegel's core thesis as the assertion that hierarchical distinctions in the political sphere originate from those in civil society. Private rank acquires its political significance only by adhering to the principle of rank differentiation in civil society. Thus, in Hegel's view, the ranks of civil society and those of political significance are identical. Through this method, Hegel unified civic life and political life. (Liu Bingjing, 2023) Marx expressed opposition to Hegel's conclusion, pointing out three contradictions in Hegel's argument: (1) Although Hegel based his views on the separation of civil society and the political state, and regarded this reality as consistent with rational development—as "a necessary link in the concept, the absolute truth of reason"—yet every passage in his exposition reveals conflict between civil society and the state; (2) he opposes civil society—as a private sphere—to the state; (3) legislative power is a form of authority within the political domain of the private sphere, an activity within political life. The relationship between civil society and the state is one of logical reflection, which is essentially a relationship of identity. Hegel's objective is to achieve unity within the state between the separated civil society and the political state, while simultaneously transforming the various estates of civil society themselves into constituent elements of the legislative estate. The commentary on Section 303 ends here, suggesting Marx merely pointed out Hegel's problem without explaining how the private spheres of family and civil society could retain their particularity when entering the universal political life to attain the highest concrete universality. After excerpting sections 304-307 of *The Philosophy of Right* verbatim, Marx returns to commenting on section 303 following his discussion of Hegel's derivation of political concepts from the Absolute Idea. This shift may relate to the fourth note in the Kreuznach Notebooks, which excerpts Ranke's *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Politik*. In these excerpts, Marx discovered numerous intriguing historical events.

4.3 An Analysis of the Historical Significance of the French Revolution

The five volumes of the Kreuznach Notebooks comprise Marx's summaries of French history—particularly the French Revolution—along with notes on the histories of Britain, Germany, Sweden, Poland, the Venetian Republic, and the United States. These cover numerous world historical events spanning from 600 BCE to the 1830s. These notes reveal Marx's focus on the origins and development of European states, urban systems, administrative and legal history, as well as transformations in complex political mechanisms and social thought. His critical analysis during this period aligns with his critique of Hegel's philosophy of law, sharing similar focal points. His excerpts and research on the French Revolution significantly influenced the development of Marx's thought and the composition of his manuscripts. (Zang Fengyu, 2022) In the thematic index of the second notebook of the Kreuznach Notebooks, under the heading "Property and Its Consequences", Marx began to contemplate the intrinsic relationship between property and politics, the origins of property ownership, the forms of property ownership across different historical eras, and the role of property relations in shaping the state and real political institutions. He focused on the French Revolution's proclamation of "equality before the law", listing headings such as "Property · The Relationship Between Owners and the Community... Equality and Property." He examined how different factions during the French

Revolution interpreted “equality”, pointing out that they achieved only legal and rights-based equality, not social equality in economic production and wealth distribution. The bourgeoisie, victorious in the revolution, disregarded the interests of the masses, revealing the incompleteness of political emancipation. In these notes, Marx acknowledged the historical neglect of popular sovereignty in political discourse. He noted the texts’ accounts of the enslavement of the laboring masses, developing a clear class perspective. He recognized the close connection between class struggle and economic interests, sought to resolve the problem of human “political alienation”, and gradually deepened his political philosophy of equality. Quoting Lanzinger’s *On the Causes, Nature, and Consequences of the July Events*, Marx observed: “The so-called shining example of equality before the law... this equality, by treating vastly different relations and objects with an identical attitude, intensifies in the most foolish manner the very inequality it seeks to abolish.” (Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin Works Compilation Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, 1980: 53) Here, Marx employed class analysis to examine the struggle between the bourgeoisie and feudal hierarchy, as well as between the laboring masses and the bourgeoisie, probing how property relations became the foundation for class composition and forms of political struggle. As he later noted: The French Revolution “completed the separation of political life from civil society,” (Marx, Engels, 2002: 100) It achieved “the victory of bourgeois property over feudal property, of the nation over localism, of competition over guilds, of the division of inheritance over primogeniture, of the landowner’s control over the land over the landowner’s subordination to the land, of the Enlightenment over superstition, of the family over the clan, of industry over idleness, and bourgeois rights over medieval privileges.” (Marx, Engels, 2005a: 74) Through studying the historical significance of the French Revolution, Marx gained deeper insights into civil society.

5 Summary

This paper examines the development of young Marx’s theory of the state, based on an analysis of the Crozach Notes and Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. The formation of Young Marx’s theory of the state had profound historical roots. Intellectually, he critically reexamined Hegel’s philosophy, recognizing that Hegel’s advocacy for constitutional monarchy was unsuitable for Germany’s circumstances and that Hegel’s philosophy of law had limitations in explaining Germany’s actual state life. Simultaneously, he critically appropriated Feuerbach’s philosophy, employing its methodology to address state issues, yet found its theories lacking in historical consciousness.

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