

Hegel in the Mirrors of Soviet Philosophy From Love to Hate and Back Again

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Vladimir Lenin was the ardent admirer of Hegel.

“It is impossible completely to understand Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel’s *Logic*” (Lenin).

Lenin began to read Hegel, the *Greater* and *Smaller Logics*, in Siberian exile in the late 1890s.

Reading Hegel, the materialist must “retrieve the pearl of dialectics ... from the dung heap of absolute idealism”



The grotesquely harsh and aggressive style of Lenin's philosophical creations is reminiscent of the paintings of Russian avant-garde artists or the *Manifesto of Futurism* by Marinetti.

Portrait of Marinetti (1925),
by Enrico Prampolini



The February Revolution (1924-1926),
by Pavel Filonov



Lenin is seeking arguments against neo-Kantians and positivists from Hegel's writings. At the same time, Lenin does not tire of exposing "mysticism" and defending materialism.

"Non-partisans in philosophy are just as hopeless dunces as they are in politics"
(Lenin).

In Hegel's Logic, Lenin is particularly attracted by the **principle of concreteness**, in which he sees "the spirit and essence of dialectics".

И. А. Ильинъ.

ФИЛОСОФІЯ ГЕГЕЛЯ

КАКЪ УМЪ

о конкретности Бога и человѣка.

ТОМЪ ПЕРВЫЙ.

Ученіе о Богѣ.

Изд. Г. А. Лемана и С. И. Сахарова.

МОСКВА
1918 г.

Ivan Ilyin

The Philosophy of Hegel as a Doctrine of the Concreteness of God and Humanity
in 2 vols. (1918)

The book was translated into German by Ilyin himself in 1946, and Philip Grier translated it into English in 2010.



Ivan Ilyin

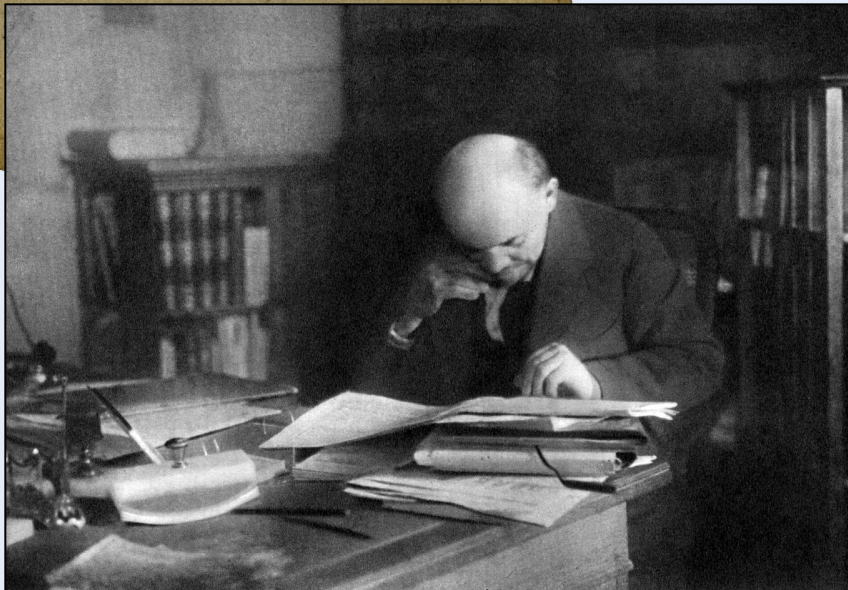
“The work is colossal in erudition and acuity of philosophical analysis... It is a complete insight into Hegel’s *Weltanschauung*, a vision through the eyes of Hegel... Neither the study of Hegel nor the study of contemporary Russian philosophical thought is any longer thinkable without this book of I.A. Ilyin”
(Aleksey Losev, 1918)

ПРОЛЕТАРИИ ВСЕХ СТРАН, СОЕДИНЯЙТЕСЬ!

ПОД ЗНАМЕНЕМ МАРКСИЗМА

5

In the last years of his life, Lenin called for “organizing a systematic study of Hegelian dialectics from the Materialist point of view”. He posed this task before the editors of the new journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*.



“We can and must elaborate these dialectics from all sides, print in the journal excerpts from Hegel’s principal works, interpret them materialistically. ... In my view, the editors and contributors of *Under the Banner of Marxism* should be a kind of “Society of Materialist Friends of Hegelian Dialectics” (Lenin).

Маркс и Гегель.

В своем предисловии к „Zur Kritik etc.“ Маркс говорит: „Первым трудом, выполненным мною для разрешения осаждавших меня сомнений, был критический пересмотр философии права Гегеля, предисловие к которому появилось в Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher,

ели меня к
ские формы
и так-назы-
находятся,
рые Гегель
века, гра-
последнего

Маркса, на-
указывает
д ли была
енной вну-
уржуазного
в науке в
подствовал
жая кляча
ется перед
ледствия“...
ика во всей
олько геге-
отправной
с,—не было
никто из
еши в его
школа не
было под-
Преимуще-
ения всех
ком чутье,

Под знаменем



A programmatic article by **Abram Deborin** “Marx and Hegel,” published in three parts (1923–4), gave a detailed Marxist reading of Hegel’s *Logic*.

Deborin was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*, an Academician and the Director of the Institute of Philosophy. He remained the most influential person on the Soviet philosophical Olympus until 1930.

Deborin managed to begin publishing the 15-volume *Collected Works* by Hegel (5 000 – 30 000 copies of each volume, and over 250 000 copies in all).

The editorial Foreword expresses the hope to complete the publication in three years. The work, however, lasted for a full thirty years (1929-1959). And the last, 15th volume, did not see the light.

Deborin himself released only the first volume. He gave the first three volumes of Hegel's *Collected Works* for the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

The pre-war volumes are on the left.



И. В А Й Н Ш Т Е Й Н

ГЕГЕЛЬ МАРКС ЛЕНИН



ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО

The declaration of love to Hegel
in Soviet style:

“Hegel, Marx and Lenin are three
giants marking three stages in the
history of revolutionary methodology”
(I. Weinstein).

Weinstein, Israel Ya.
Hegel, Marx and Lenin (1928)

The three giants are painted
by Dmitry Bazhanov

The times had changed. Philosophy has turned entirely into a servant of political ideology and a weapon in the battle for power. Serious Hegel studies have become dangerous. Deborin was attacked by the pupils of the Institute of Red Professors he directed. And Stalin blessed the youth for a war with *Hegelianness*.

In the 1930s, *Hegelianness* became a deadly political label. It was attached to pro-fascist oriented neo-Hegelians Giovanni Gentile, Julius Binder, Ivan Ilyin, on the one hand, and to Deborin, on the other.

Mark Mitin



Pavel Yudin



Red professors Mitin and Yudin became the new captains of Soviet philosophy

Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!

ГЕГЕЛЬ

и

ДИАЛЕКТИЧЕСКИЙ

МАТЕРИАЛИЗМ



партиздат

1932

A year after the defeat of the Deborinists, on the centenary of Hegel's death, a collective monograph *Hegel and Dialectical Materialism* comes out. The authors clearly sought to set a new trend in Soviet Hegel studies.

“Let the ideologists of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie, the priests, the social-fascists and the *Menshevizing idealists*¹ keep chewing, over and over, *Hegelianness*, the absolute idea, the goddikin, the idea of bourgeois state, law, etc. – the movement of pure, “dialectical,” “concrete” thoughts. Dialectical materialists, the followers of Marxism-Leninism, know that *Hegelianness* is dead, and it will not rise again” (Raltsevich).

¹ Stalin's characteristic of Deborin and his supporters.

М. АРЖАНОВ

ГЕГЕЛЬЯНСТВО
НА *службе*
ГЕРМАНСКОГО
ФАШИЗМА

ПАРТИЗНАТ 1933

Hegelianism at the Service of German Fascism (1933), by Mikhail Arzhanov

The key idea of Arzhanov is that the shift in philosophical fashion from Kant to Hegel reflects the economic and political evolution of bourgeois society. If neo-Kantianism was the philosophy of “classical capitalism,” then neo-Hegelianism is the philosophy of *imperialism*. And Hegel’s idea of the “end of history” was a premonition of the impending demise of bourgeois civilization.

Lev Vygotsky

the father of the cultural-historical psychology



“With full justification, Hegel used the concept of mediation in its most general meaning, seeing in it the very characteristic property of the reason. The reason is as cunning as it is mighty, he said. The cunning, generally, consists in mediating activity, which lets objects act on each other according to their nature and exhaust themselves in that activity, without any direct intervention in the process, but fulfills only its own purpose” (Vygotsky).

“There are problems that one cannot approach flying, but that one must approach on foot, limping... Hegel went limping towards the truth” (Vygotsky).



Mikhail Lifshits

Mikhail Lifshits is trying to understand the *logic of revolution* in modern culture. He transforms Hegel's concept of Spirit, as a subject of world history, into the concept of "pathos," expressing the objective force of historical circumstances.

Lifshits represents the socialist revolution as a clash of two "pathoses": the anarchic "passion for demolition," destroying the old world and equalizing individualities, on the one hand, and the power of self-preservation of culture, on the other. In his eyes, Hegel is an advocate of the latter power. He is a "great conservative of mankind."

After his expulsion from philosophy,
Lifshits worked as a restorer
of ancient icons in the
Tretyakov Gallery.



Lifshits as icon (2003),
by Taisia Korotkova.
Tempera, gesso, 12x16 cm,
the realistic icon painting technique.
CART gallery, Moscow

Lifshits sees in the *Science of Logic* the crystallized
experience of the Great French Revolution.

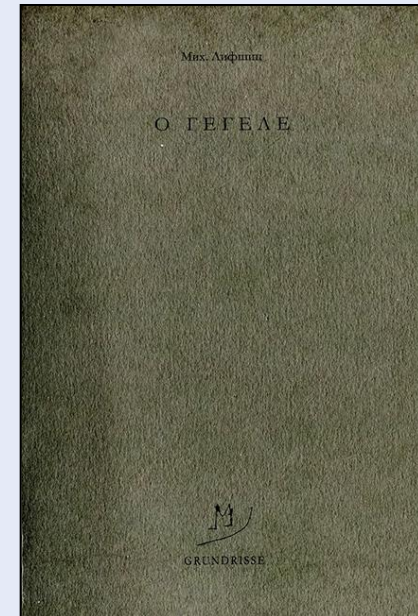
“Categories of *Logic* are the forms in which the
heated lava of revolutionary events hardens.”

“*Greater Logic* is the system of categories
which Hegel clearly understood as
the development of the ‘new principle’
adopted by the French Revolution.”

Lifshits’s view of history is the viewpoint
of an artist and aesthetician *ex professo*.

“History is a great poetess,
writing her tragicomedies
with blood and iron.”

Lifshits, M. *On Hegel* (2012),
the collection of manuscripts,
published posthumously

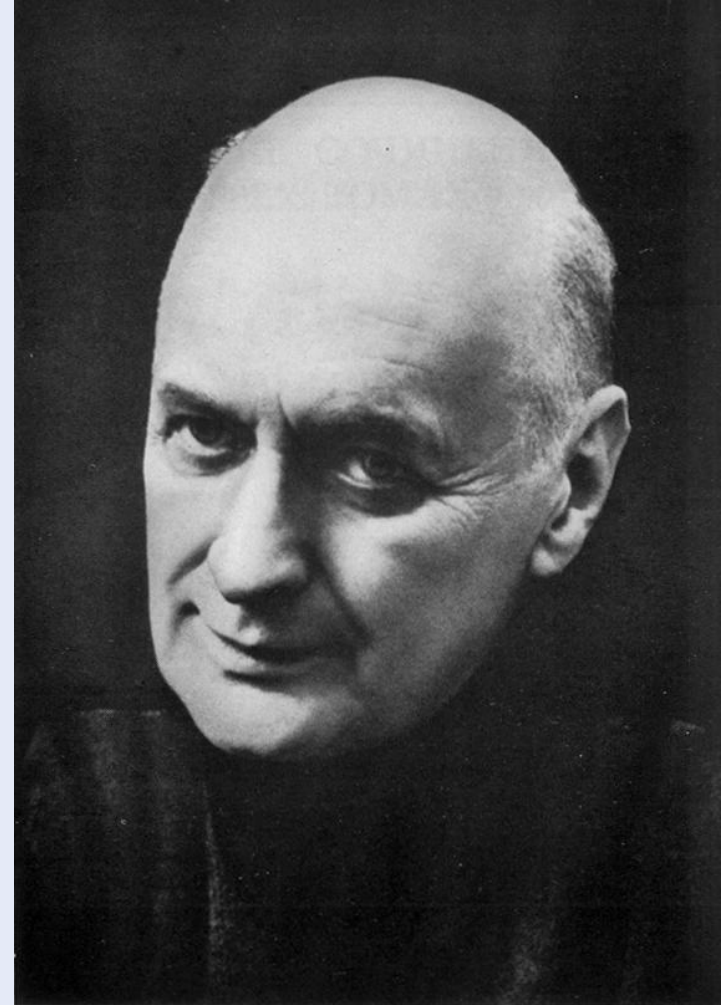


His favourite motto is *Restauratio Magna*.

“The great restoration of the truth of the old culture without retrograde ideas.”

“We can do nothing else. But if we do that, we will do all to be worthy of our role, our mission. Torn threads everywhere! ... Is *Stalinsshina* not a rupture of the revolutionary thread, although this thread, as has been said, implies a rupture? The gap in art, the moral gap, the gap in theoretical thought.”

The tragic awareness of the imperfection of life, of the irresistible limitation of one's epoch, gives rise to a *philosophical resignation*, Lifshits notes. But resignation does not lead him to renounce revolutionary ideals. Lifshits condemns the *philosophical Thermidorianism* of the mature Hegel, his alleged, within an “idea,” reconciliation of opposing social forces and interests.



“Hegel, as depicted by Deborin and his school, was an abstractly reasoning scholastic philosopher of little interest. ... There had happened a kind of depreciation of Hegel's philosophy, so that only a certain scheme of logical categories remained from it. ... Our interest in Hegel was of a completely different character. For us, in the teaching of the German thinker, its real content and deeply tragic attitude to the events of the French Revolution and the post-revolutionary era were important.”



In 1930, **Georg Lukács** came to the Soviet Union.
Already on the first day after his arrival, he met Lifshits.

MICHAIL ALEXANDROWITSCH
LIFSCHITZ
*in Verehrung und Freundschaft
gewidmet*

GEORG LUKÁCS
DER
JUNGE HEGEL

Lukács dedicated his book *Young Hegel and the Problems of Capitalist Society* (1948) to Lifshits, in token of “respect and friendship.”

This book had been written ten years earlier, and Lukács defended it as a doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR in December 1942.



Zinovy Beletsky

In 1943, at the height of the World War II, the manuscript by **Zinovy Beletsky** *The Role of German Philosophy in Preparing Germany for World Domination* was discussed at the meeting of the Directorate of the Institute of Philosophy. The author argued that Kant, Fichte and, especially, Hegel are the forerunners of Nazi ideology.

Beletsky refused to regard German classical idealism as a philosophical source of Marxism. "Idealism in philosophy," he quoted Lenin, "is a more or less clever defence of the clericalism (*popovsshina*)."

Beletsky wrote a letter to Stalin, and Stalin announced his verdict:

"Hegel's philosophy is an aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution and French materialism."



Evald Ilyenkov became the leader of the philosophical “thaw” in the Soviet Union. He treated philosophy as a science about thinking and thoughts – as Logic, with a capital letter.



Through his passionate love for Hegel, Ilyenkov received the nickname *Hegelyenkov*.

His friend Alexander Zinoviev portrayed in a wall newspaper how Ilyenkov, in the dark of night, was digging Hegel out of the grave in which Stalin and Beletsky had buried him.

A later cartoon by Zinoviev on the same topic



Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital (1960)

Ilyenkov is interested mostly in Hegel's method of *ascent from the abstract to the concrete* (using the expression of Marx). He develops the materialistic version of dialectics, comparing Hegel's Logic with the method of Marx's *Capital*.

"Not so clear and profound appears to be the part devoted to a criticism of Hegel, although, here too, Ilyenkov turns out to be one of the least 'Hegelian' among the current Soviet dialectical materialists, and one of those (it's not a paradox) who demonstrates a knowledge of *Greater Logic* first-hand."
(Lucio Colletti)

The Italian translation of 1961,
with an Introduction by Colletti.

АКАДЕМИЯ НАУК СССР

Э.В.Ильенков

ДИАЛЕКТИКА
АБСТРАКТНОГО
И КОНКРЕТНОГО
В „КАПИТАЛЕ“
МАРКСА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
АКАДЕМИИ НАУК СССР

Eval'd Vasil'evic Il'enkov
La dialettica dell'astratto
e del concreto
nel Capitale di Marx

Feltrinelli

Hegel accomplished the greatest revolution in the history of Logic since the time of Aristotle, Ilyenkov writes.

“This revolution, although it turned out to be the only one the Germans could dare at that time, yielded a fruit no less valuable ‘for the improvement of mankind’ than all the victories of Napoleon”.

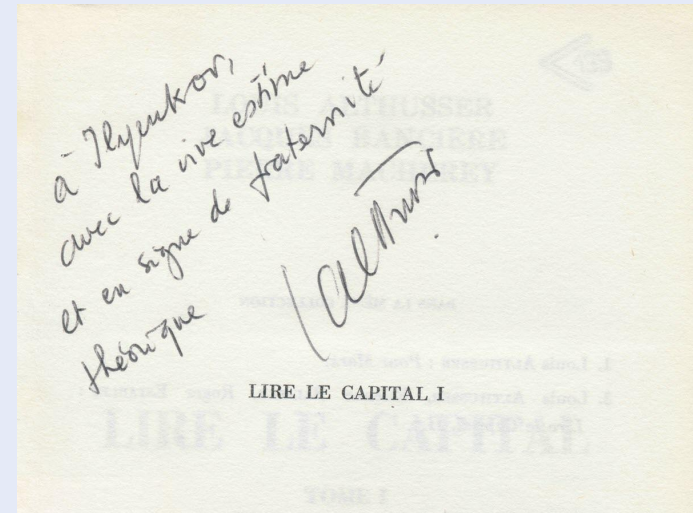
Ilyenkov made three presentations at Hegel congresses – in Salzburg (1964), Prague (1966) and Berlin (1970). He was not allowed to attend congresses in Paris and Antwerp.

The postcard of the
Moscow Hegel Congress

The 10th Hegel Congress was held in Moscow in 1974.

Lire le Capital

with an inscription by Louis Althusser:
“To Ilyenkov, with vivid respect and as a token of theoretical brotherhood.”



In the last two decades of the existence of the Soviet Union, the attitude towards Hegel was ambivalent. He was the most popular and widely read philosopher, excepting the founders of Marxism. In the 1970s, the two-volume *Works of Various Years*, including Hegel's early writings and correspondence, were published. There appeared the amended editions of all the main works of Hegel (with the exception of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*), and Mikhail Lifshits published the four-volume *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

On the other hand, the *anti-Hegelian* attitude was expanding in the Russian philosophical community. The increasingly influential party of subjectivists adjoins the formal logicians, who were traditionally hostile to Hegel. The subjectivists criticize Hegel for identifying thought with being, for "substantialism" (Heinrich Batishchev) and "ontologizing the processes of cognition" (Merab Mamardashvili), for "monologism" (Mikhail Bakhtin), etc. For liberal-minded philosophers, *Hegelianness* becomes a metaphor for totalitarian ideology.

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