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German Idealism, Greek Materialism, and the Young Karl Marx

Laurence Baronovitch

THE LIFE and work of Karl Marx deserve a better fate than the hostile criticism of university lecturers with closed minds who daily ‘prove’ his ideas to be wrong to their students. He also deserves a better fate than a miserable deification at the hands of Stalinist hack writers who have turned Marxism into a religion for which they write hymns of praise. Marx was neither a sinner nor a saint, nor for that matter was he an ivory tower scholar, but an active revolutionary who not only wrote on behalf of the working class, but also fought to organise them. The picture of Marx painted in so many studies is that of the great intellectual or high priest of scientific socialism. This is a false image as is the view that his entire work constitutes an integrated and monolithic system of thought that never went through any process of complex or contradictory development. This view belies the facts. The intellectual origins of Marx’s revolutionary theory of history and social change come from some surprising sources which this paper will explore—the brilliant beginnings of a flesh and blood radical whose later life of struggle can truly be described as heroic.

Despite the considerable prestige that his name carried throughout the international labour movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it is true to say that Marx’s works are available in greater number today and have a far wider readership than was the case at any time during his life. Without doubt, the reason for this present popular demand is that the Russian Revolution, one of the great cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, was dominated by a victorious Bolshevik Party whose leaders took their philosophy of class struggle and vision of social and economic change from the ideas and inspiration of Marx. The Russian Revolution of 1917, as the social and political upheaval par excellence of our time, has provided a tremendous impetus towards the study of Marx’s work. In recent years, this interest has proceeded along two distinct planes of enquiry, one being the origin of his revolutionary philosophy while the other has been concerned with the validity of his theories. The advent of the Russian Revolution and the decades following it also coincided with the appearance of many of Marx’s previously unpublished manuscripts and these, together with what had already been popularly known about Marx and his works, were pieced together by scholars to fill in the blank spaces of his early life. In particular, studies which focused on this period and the genesis of his historical materialism relied heavily on the source materials collected and printed in the Soviet Union. More important, however, scholars researching the evolution of Marx’s early thought were undeniably influenced by the viewpoint advanced by Lenin that the three main sources of Marx’s materialism were German idealist philosophy, French socialism and English political economy. Much of the literature devoted to studying the origin of Marx’s thought therefore began with his earliest working relationship to German idealist philosophy, and that of Hegel in particular, as far back as his university days. The studies of this period in Marx’s life have therefore tended to concentrate on his relationships, intellectual and otherwise, with his university friends, centered around the radically political “Doctors Club” at Berlin University where the philosophy of Hegel was discussed and argued over. This focus on intellectual relationships has certainly been of value. But recently researchers have probed more deeply into this early period and have been able to finally grasp the great importance of the young Marx’s considerable work on Greek philosophy. The picture that has now emerged is this, that there is a fourth ingredient to Marx’s revolutionary philosophy and one that both

accounts for its origin and also lies within its heart, namely, the spirit of freedom that he discovered in the Epicurean philosophy of nature.

Marx began his studies of Greek philosophy at Berlin from 1838 onwards when organizing material for his doctoral dissertation. He collected his preparatory data together in a series of *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy* in which he discussed the ideas of the ancient philosophers in a highly original and challenging manner. At the same time, these Notebooks also contain a section which peruses the history of philosophy and examines the position of Hegel's thought in this development. These studies provided Marx with valuable material for his overall objective, a dissertation contrasting the Democritean and Epicurean philosophies of nature which would demonstrate that the famous principle of the swerving atom in Epicurean natural philosophy was the reflection of a general principle of self-consciousness acting throughout the entire system of the great ancient's thought. The curious circumstance of finding a historical evaluation of Hegel's philosophy in a series of Notebooks dealing with Greek thought together with the young Marx's undeviating interest in the place of self-consciousness in ancient philosophy is a matter that certainly deserves close attention. In fact, these two points explain the reason for his seemingly strange choice of topic for a doctoral dissertation.

The thought that captured the imagination of students of law, theology, and the cultural sciences in general at the time when Marx arrived at Berlin University was that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who had held the professorship of philosophy there from 1818 until his death in 1831. Strongly influenced by the intellectual spirit of the French Revolution and the view that human existence was dictated by reason rather than faith, Hegel made the study of human consciousness and its historical progress his life's work. In his historical examination of the cultural development of this consciousness, he showed that thought was characterized by a progressive, forward movement set in real life. He therefore placed the responsibility for human action firmly inside the human brain and traced the development of reason and its process of advance from lower to higher forms of consciousness in his great work, the *Phenomenology of Mind*, one of the great milestones in the history of philosophy. This masterpiece, however, contained an unresolved inner tension, as examination shows that Hegel had joined together the enlightened, radical consciousness of his youth with the religious sentiments he had acquired later on in the period of European reaction to the spirit of liberty, equality, and fraternity. As it stood, Hegel's philosophy of mind left human beings as the souls of their own reason but made religion the high point of human spiritual life so that ultimately human reason served only the guiding purpose of the Holy Spirit and God controlled earthly affairs. In other words, Hegel's system of philosophy contained a radical and a conservative side and was particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation in the area of theology. In fact, it was in debates on religious subjects like the truth about the life of Jesus that the serious divergence within his thought first appeared in 1835. By the time that Marx had arrived at Berlin, Hegel's school of thought had already split into two hostile camps, the radicals or Left Hegelians ("Young Hegelians" as they are sometimes called) and the "orthodox" camp. Marx was introduced to Hegelian philosophy by friends and became enchanted by its "grotesque and earthy melody", as he himself described it at the time to his father, after some inner conflict. Not long afterwards he became an active member of the radical Hegelian club and a close comrade in arms of Bruno Bauer, one of the acknowledged leaders of the left who had lectured in theology at the University since 1834.

Regarding themselves as Hegel's heirs, the subjects the Left Hegelians discussed and debated most centered on the intellectual legacy that their spiritual master had left them, particularly their own intellectual relationship to his thought—in short, the position in the history of philosophy and culture that they themselves occupied as young German radicals

living within a conservative Prussian regime. Hegel had stood over German philosophy in their own life like a colossus and the issue if anything was where his disciples stood after his death. Bruno Bauer and Karl Köppen, a local history teacher, both with a strong interest in the history of religion and classical philosophy and both friends of the young Marx, studied this problem by looking for analogous situations in the past. In a study of Frederick the Great and his place in German history, Köppen argued that the stature of this famous king of Prussia, as a leader of the not long past German renaissance, originated in his expressing the sentiments of republicanism and hostility to narrow-minded religion which also characterized Greek philosophy after the death of that *ancient* colossus of thought, Aristotle. Bauer, on the other hand, was particularly interested in the historical position of the Left Hegelians and examined the relationship between ancient philosophy and religion from a different angle. His viewpoint came to dominate the thinking of his radical associates at this time, as it linked their position directly to a seemingly analogous situation in the past and suggested an explanation for their demise.

He maintained that the republican and liberal climate of the German Enlightenment had been smothered by a theological reaction. What had survived was the ancient Epicurean, Stoic, and Sceptic vitality that had fueled this greatest period of German history and that these systems of Greek self-consciousness lay dormant in Hegel's philosophy, its great intellectual heritage. Bauer and the Left Hegelians around him believed that the downfall of the Enlightenment in Germany paralleled the earlier downfall of this same post-Aristotelian spirit at the hands of Roman Christianity. It also seemed that their intellectual relationship to Hegel and his system of thought similarly paralleled the relationship of the post-Aristotelians to the all-embracing thought of that earlier master, Aristotle. The strange merging of the radical spirit of Hegel's thought at its highest stage of development, self-conscious mind, with the oddly coincidental Christian State of Prussia led Bauer towards a critical reassessment of the master's theology and thought in general which he introduced into the "leftist" tendency of Hegel's school between 1838 and the time when Marx left Berlin in 1841. The essence of his re-evaluation involved taking up Hegel's thesis of the ongoing development of mind and revitalizing it by transforming the passive role of self-consciousness, the point where the development of mind ended in the *Phenomenology* and where the ancient spirit of the post-Aristotelians lay dormant, into an active weapon of philosophical criticism. Bauer viewed this rescue of self-consciousness from Hegel and its restoration as the driving force of a vital and critical philosophy as a parallel to the revitalizing of philosophy by the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics after the death of Aristotle.

Marx's Epicurean studies are full of the theme of self-consciousness, reflecting Bauer's interest, but from a different perspective. While Bauer emphasized the *active* side of self-consciousness, Marx concentrated on its role in philosophy as an instrument of clarification and was particularly interested in its practical operation in the history of thought. He took up these themes in his Doctoral Dissertation, the subject of which was the history of Greek Atomism with the special motif of a sympathetic exposition of Epicurean philosophy and its famous swerving atom. This history reflected the intellectual progress of a philosophy, beginning with the Democritean explanation of the material basis of nature and ending with the Epicurean theory of substance. Democritus sought only to establish the atom as the foundation of matter, the basis of nature. He was not interested in creating a theory that would explain nature and its composition or the motion of the atom itself. Epicurus, on the other hand, was more concerned with a theory of the atom as he wanted to explain the creation of nature and proposed to solve his problem by making atoms come together to form substance. Theory and imagination therefore played a much greater role in the Epicurean philosophy of nature than in the atomism of Democritus, the important consequence of which was Epicurus'

generalization of his theory of the atom into a theory of knowledge. As Marx showed in his dissertation, Epicurus extended theorizing as a principle throughout his philosophy of nature and argued that it represented the freedom of the sage's reflective and self-conscious mind over material nature and its physical laws. It would be quite wrong, however, to think that Marx's Epicurus was just a mouthpiece for Bruno Bauer. The sources that Marx used for Epicurus clearly show that the sage regarded his atom as expressing the spirit of freedom, particularly freedom of mind. Epicurus himself is no silent witness, speaking to us from a fragment of his writing that has survived; he said, "I would rather serve the gods than be a slave to the determinism of the scientists." Lucretius, his greatest champion in ancient Rome, expressed this stand for freedom in elegant terms:

And if the first beginnings do not make by swerving, a degree of motion such as to break the decrees of fate that cause shall not follow cause until infinity, whence comes this free will?

This is a clear indication of the meaning of the swerving atom. It represented the principle of freedom central to the whole Epicurean philosophy. It combined freedom from the physical determinism of natural law with the autonomy of reflective mind, a freedom to think and to think critically. It symbolized a profound unification of natural philosophy and ethics which united the freedom of mind and the movement of matter under the banner of liberty.

Both the Doctoral Dissertation and the *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy* that were prepared for it are full of materials from ancient Greek and Roman sources, some of which Marx translated into German, or studies in their original languages. Altogether, these early researches reveal a remarkable degree of maturity in his examination of the classical sources and commentary on them. How many twenty-year-old undergraduates of today, one wonders, would find themselves equally at home in the philosophy and politics of Plato and Aristotle, the writings of Plutarch, Cicero, and Seneca as well as the verses of Lucretius? This is to say nothing of the young Marx's familiarity with such commentators on classical thought as Sextus Empiricus and Diogenes Laertius, early churchmen like Eusebius, or later metaphysicians like Pierre Bayle. The richness of his reading is obvious throughout the dissertation, where quotations from the works of Kant, Hume, Spinoza, and Descartes appear as do lines from his favourite Greek playwright, Aeschylus. It is an interesting fact that in the Foreword to his Dissertation, Marx declared Prometheus, the hero of Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Unbound*, to be "the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophical calendar". Quoting the confession of Prometheus near the end of his Foreword, "in simple words, I hate the pack of Gods," the young student seems to set the seal on his later life as a revolutionary.

His handling of the classical languages confirms the excellent testimony to this ability in his high school report. Quotations such as the one immediately above as well as those in the footnotes to the dissertation appear in the original Greek or Latin. For the *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy*, written between 1838 and 1840, he worked from Pierre Gassendi's 1649 edition of Diogenes Laertius published at Lyons. The footnotes to the dissertation come from another Latin edition of Laertius published in Germany in 1833. His achievements are all the more praiseworthy given the general lack of research into Epicurean philosophy in Germany at the end of the 1840s. Nonetheless, he made good use of what *was* available, acknowledging the importance of Köppen's study in his Foreword while deprecating Ritter's history of ancient philosophy later in the dissertation. The brightest star of classical studies in the German firmament at this time, of course, was Hegel's famous *History of Philosophy*. Marx generously acknowledged the importance of this work in his Foreword as an "admirably great and bold plan. . . from which alone the history of philosophy can in general be dated" and in which the general aspects of Epicurean, Stoic, and Sceptic philosophy were on the whole correctly defined. He followed these remarks, however, with the criticism that Hegel's

speculative attitude to the study of these systems of thought hindered his recognition of the fact that they were the key which enabled the *real* history of Greek philosophy to be understood. One aim of the dissertation, then, would be to correct this error.

In a very strong sense, the Doctoral Dissertation and all these early studies express Marx's intimate concern with the history of philosophy and his generalizations on this subject in the Sixth Epicurean Notebook are especially interesting. His thesis is that in the life history of a philosophy what originally started out as growth later developed into a principle while an original self-contained negativity or implied critique evolved into full blown opposition. He used the legend of Prometheus to illustrate this view,

but as Prometheus, having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to settle upon the earth, so philosophy, expanded to be the whole world, turns against the world of appearance. The same now with the philosophy of Hegel.

The most concentrated expression of a philosophy in this *curriculum vitae*, said Marx, was "epitomized in its subjective point, just as from the death of a hero one can infer his life's history." Seen in this light, his Doctoral Dissertation was an exercise which examined the historical birth and death of Greek atomistic philosophy. Marx believed that the history of a philosophy was marked at its birth by an *idea* containing an inner *critical* principle. In the course of its history, the idea developed, becoming actively combatant until it was finally elevated to the status of a principle which became the moving spirit throughout the system of thought, its Absolute. Looked at with this in mind, his dissertation is more easily understood. The theory of the atom in Epicurus' philosophy of nature expressed the life history of Greek atomism. His swerving atom represented the Epicurean Absolute, self-consciousness, or theory, and reasoning back from this summit of ancient atomism, one could trace the progress of this philosophy from the Democritean statements about matter to the Epicurean theory of substance and nature. This, then, was the function of the dissertation—a practical exercise that examined the evolution of an idea while, at the same time, clarified the inner development of Hegel's thought and Marx's intellectual relationship to the modern master.

The seven *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy* that Marx prepared as a fund of materials for his Doctoral Dissertation contain three basic ingredients: (1) texts on ancient philosophy translated into German; (2) commentary on the texts; (3) commentary on the history and development of philosophy arising from subjects in the texts. The content is variable. The *Fifth Notebook* comprises a long series of quotations from the writings of Seneca, Stobaeus, and Clement of Alexandria with little commentary from Marx. Other Notebooks are a complex mixture of all three constituents, a good example being Marx's long argument against Plutarch, the Roman disciple of Plato, whose hostile evaluation of Epicurean thought was severely criticized between the end of the Second and Fourth Notebooks. This long argument, however, is something more than a defence of the Epicurean position against Platonic philosophy. It is also a lengthy account of the historical significance of the role of a philosophy in the cycle of philosophical systems within which it appears. This particular discussion includes a subtle analysis of the role of "the wise man" in the development of philosophy and how the spiritual heritage of each sage of ancient Greece contributed its own expression to the unfolding evolution of thought in those great ancient days.

Throughout Marx's commentary on the historical role of the wise man, it is evident that his approach to the subject was motivated by his interest in the historical position of Hegel's philosophy. This comes out most clearly in the *Sixth Notebook*, where his digression on the inner character of philosophy is prefixed by an interesting paragraph on the motion of reason into reality in the history of Greek philosophy from Anaxagoras to Aristotle. Marx concludes these sections with an attempt "to define the subjective form of Platonic philosophy still further" by assessing D. F. Baur's study of the relationship between Plato's thought and

Christianity, published in 1837. This admirably rounds off the whole of his reply to Plutarch and provides an insight into how he applied his understanding of the history of Greek philosophy to help him clarify the historical role of Hegel's system of thought in his own time. The revealing lines are well worth quoting:

In expounding definite questions of morality, religion... Plato has recourse to the positive interpretation of the Absolute, and its essential form, which has its basis in itself, is myth and allegory. Where the Absolute stands on one side, and limited positive reality on the other, and the positive must all the same be preserved, there this positive becomes the medium through which absolute light shines... This has recurred in recent times, due to the operation of a similar law.

The theme of these lines is the relationship between the central principle of a philosophy and the reality of the world, particularly the *operation* of this guiding principle of Absolute in real life. The modern recurrence which Marx had in mind here was the appearance of Hegel's Absolute, his moving principle of World Mind in the positive reality of Prussian society.

The discussion at the beginning of the *Sixth Notebook*, I think, contains a deeper significance than first meets the eye. There is something present that is more than just a collection of curiously worded comments about the stuff of which philosophy is made and the means by which it develops. To my mind, Marx seems to be looking at the mental dynamics governing the entire intellectual progress of thought, with particular reference to the development of philosophy after the death of a sage, whose all-embracing wisdom, he says, "has sealed itself off to form a consummate, total world." His comments raise two distinct although connected issues. First, the relationship of such a philosophy to the world; secondly, the position of the disciple, or of any thinking person, for that matter, in relation to the "total world" of the sage's thought. Having advanced as a system of abstract notions and principles, a philosophy, said Marx, reaches a high point and emerges from a world of mental shadows to turn its attention to the real world. But having expanded to become a complete world of thought in itself, it finds itself standing opposed to the world as it really is, as a world of mind against a world of appearance and substance. This, he maintains, is what happened to the philosophy of Hegel. The result of this confrontation between a total philosophy and a total reality is that the world confronting the total philosophy falls into chaos. At the same time, the unified character of the system of philosophy is broken up and its general principle is "turned back into the subjective forms of individual consciousness in which it has life." The break-up of the "consummate total world" is accompanied by a storm in the history of titanic mental events in which the central principle of the system of thought, in Hegel's case, the Absolute or God, is reflected back from the real world and broken up into a fabulous play of theoretical colours in the minds of the followers of the sage.

It is interesting to recall here that many of the Left Hegelians were interested in theology and that the unity of the Hegelian school of thought broke up over theological issues from around 1835, with the publication of Strauss's book on the life of Jesus. There can be no real doubt that Marx is referring to Hegel and the position of philosophy after his death when he says,

He who does not acknowledge this historical necessity must be consistent and deny that men can live at all after a total philosophy... Without this necessity it is impossible to grasp how after Aristotle a Zeno, an Epicurus... could appear, and how after Hegel attempts, most of them abysmally indigent, could be made by more recent philosophers.

The historical necessity to which Marx refers has to do with the ongoing progress of thought in the minds of the adherents to a system of philosophy after its break-up in the face of reality. Hegel's Absolute, turned back from the world, found life and further development in the individual consciousness of his radical followers where its subjective forms were variously expressed in the dazzling display of colours that was soon to become the "revolutionary"

theology of Strauss, the critical theology and philosophy of Bruno Bauer, the humanist philosophy-cum-anthropology of Feuerbach, the shattering nihilism of Max Stirner and, of course, the life and work of Marx himself. From the furnace of Hegel's total philosophy of the nineteenth century, the colours of each of these "disciples" still glow warm today.

The historical necessity determining the ongoing development of philosophy, in Marx's view, clarified the reasons for the later philosophies of Zeno and Epicurus, among others, after the appearance of Aristotle's all-embracing system. Here, the practical evolution and theoretical dissolution of philosophy points directly to the issue concerning the position of the disciple after the death of the sage and, furthermore, his intellectual relationship, or that of any other thinking person, to the total world-expanded philosophy of any master of thought of his time. The master of his field of thought establishes its horizons and those who work in that sphere of activity "live" within the boundaries of knowledge he lays down. Thus an Einstein or Max Planck in physics, for example, a Darwin in biology, or a Marx in modern political philosophy. But the issue can also be presented in another way. When a system of philosophy or thought of any kind becomes "total", encompassing and expressing the entire universe of the ideas of its time and when, furthermore, as in the case of both Aristotle and Hegel, it imposes on consciousness a social and political order whose existence it rationalizes and whose spirit it expresses, what place remains for freedom, for developing one's own point of view and standing by it, for individual freedom to criticize and oppose the social and political world within which one lives both in thought and deed? Tied to the thought of any "master" the disciple becomes the property of that thought. In such a process, mentally free being is washed away and the solitary ego of the once free person now becomes the mouthpiece for the newly deified sage. Think, for example, of the position of freedom of thought and expression in a society dominated by such sages as Hitler, Stalin, or Mao. So, followers of recently dead gods or the new gurus of today for that matter, be wary of idols. They can vary from plaster idols to plastic ideas.

This question of freedom lay at the heart of those problems that the young student was grappling with in his *Sixth Notebook on Epicurean Philosophy*. Essentially, what he is reflecting on is the ability of man to diverge from the totality that encompasses him, be it a system of ideas or his own social environment, and discover his own unique being, his individuality and humanity. How, in fact, does man come to be free? If one turns the question round, pointing it rhetorically at the young Marx, it becomes: what is my intellectual relationship to Hegel's philosophy and how far am I its prisoner?

Much has been written about Marx's relationship to Hegel's thought, although having said this it should also be noted that there has been little exploration of his earliest working relationship with philosophy in general during his early years at Berlin University. There is much that can be considered to be an active dialogue with philosophy and its history in the *Epicurean Notebooks* and these, surely, are a kind of treasure chest that provides us with a very real insight into Marx's early thought. But the greatest prize to be found here is the means to understand the precise nature of his earliest intellectual debate with Hegel's thought, one that defines their relationship and also indicates the degree of his intellectual autonomy and freedom from that "consummate total world" of the German Aristotle. This road to freedom lay in his particular interpretation of Epicurean philosophy and the principle of its swerving atom.

Marx's interest in the nature of freedom appears in his *First Notebook on Epicurean Philosophy* where, after having taken considerable notes from Book Ten of Diogenes Laertius, he discussed in detail the relationship of the single atom to the atomic plurality of the world. When Epicurus regarded the atom as a single entity, said Marx, it was as a product

of the imagination, but when he combined them, a contradiction appeared in his thought because the combination became a unity of essentially free products of the imagination. The relationship between the single atom and the plurality of atoms in Epicurean philosophy, he suggests, expresses the immanent dialectic within his theory of knowledge, the basis of which is the single atom and the principle of an operationally free imagination. The principle of the atom originates in the freedom of mind but in its passage from an idea to the basis of reality the atom as a free creation of mind confronts its combined total product, the world, as something opposed to it. The theory of the atom in Epicurean philosophy, said Marx, broke down in the face of reality, but this was overcome by the same principle of “the free being of the imagination.” The great thing about Epicurean philosophy, he suggests, is that the sage elevated ideas above reality and made the task of philosophy one of proving that “the world and thought are thinkable and possible.” The principle behind this idea is described by Marx as “possibility existing for itself” or free mind. When Epicurean philosophy turned outwards to the objective world, free mind expressed itself in the atom. When, on the other hand, free mind came to define its own activity, thinking, it refused to be tied down by laws determining the thought process and therefore made arbitrariness its expression.

From the beginning of his Epicurean studies, then, Marx seems to have adopted the view that the ancient master made the principle of freedom the very basis of his theory of knowledge and, therefore, the moving spirit of his whole system of thought. It was in this sense that Marx later explained the curious swerve that Epicurus gave to the atom in his Doctoral Dissertation, arguing that this strange arbitrariness lying at the center of the Epicurean philosophy of nature was only a further expression of the general principle of free mind and imagination that operated consistently throughout his entire system of thought. It was not preordained that atomic motion should begin at one place and end at another according to a law of nature or of scientific thought. That was a rejection of freedom! The atom of Epicurus symbolized freedom by the very arbitrariness of its swerving and, strangely enough, modern nuclear physics confirms this swerving movement to be true of the atom and its particles.

In his Doctoral Dissertation, *On the Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, Marx strongly condemned the viewpoint of Cicero and other critics of Epicurus that the swerving atom was a mere fancy on the part of Epicurus, an idle addition that he inserted in his philosophy of nature only to distinguish it from the ideas of Democritus. This line of criticism, he said, was born of ignorance. On the contrary, the swerve expressed the *Absolute* of Epicurean philosophy, its central principle, the supremacy of thought and the free imagination over the circumstances of nature and human society. The motion of the Democritean *material* atom along a straight line was determined by the force of gravity in the real world. The swerving atom of Epicurus, as the antithesis of Democritean linear motion also represented the negation of material nature by consciousness, the triumph of human thought over blind fate and natural law. The Epicurean philosophy of nature, by the same token therefore expressed the pinnacle of Greek atomism, the triumph of theory. In his dissertation, Marx described this negation as *repulsion* and declared repulsion to be the first form of self-consciousness. In short, Marx argued that the atom of Democritus, the empiricist and scientist, had its motion determined by natural law or *necessity*. The atom of Epicurus, on the other hand, swerved away from determinism or laws of nature; it was the negation of these and the “law” governing its movement was freedom. Epicurus’ hostility to science and the laws of nature, in the eyes of the young Marx, was symbolized by his swerving atom, where freedom of motion reflected a freedom of mind, an intellectual autonomy. Outwardly, therefore, the Epicurean atom personified repulsion while inwardly, it was expressed

intellectually as self-consciousness, the light illuminating the Epicurean philosophy that was unknown to the early Democritean atomism.

Opponents of Marx's interpretation of Epicurean philosophy maintain that the surviving fragments of his thought do not contain many of the ideas that Marx ascribed to him. They are particularly hostile to Marx's idea that the swerving atom represented self-consciousness, the main principle of the entire Epicurean system. In short, they argue that the theories Marx proposed do not fit the facts. It is noteworthy that these critics do not lament the fact that so little of the thought of the great Greek materialist has survived, in contrast to the abundance of the works of Plato and Aristotle as well as a whole galaxy of lesser Greek thinkers. Neither do they wonder why this is so or at the fact that quite a few of the ancient fragments had been locked up in the Vatican archives for a millennium. Their way of looking at things is to regard the extant remains as a parcel of discrete facts rather than as an integrated and coherent outlook on life. This is the opposite to what Marx intended. His aim was to construct a coherent theory of the Epicurean natural philosophy that expertly used the sources he had to hand, and, all in all, he achieved an understanding of the ancient's thought that is both balanced and positive. By way of contrast, the judgments that Hegel made of Epicurean thought in his *History of Philosophy* were strangely negative. In his Introduction to the work, Hegel had declared *truth* to be the first principle of philosophy; but some of his comments on Epicurus are, at face value, quite out of character with this noble sentiment. Noting that the three hundred or more works that Epicurus is believed to have written have been lost, Hegel remarked, "It is scarcely to be regretted that they are lost to us. We may rather thank heaven that they no longer exist." One does not expect this kind of statement from a lover of truth. But the real difference between the interpretations of Marx and Hegel is thrown into relief by Hegel's argument that Epicurean philosophy is devoid of both thought and a general moving principle. In fact, he goes so far as to say that "it is this very lack of thought that has been made a principle" and that Epicurus tried to keep thought and theorizing out of his system. The whole spirit of the young Marx's writings on Epicurus diametrically opposed Hegel's standpoint. It is not a question of a disagreement on a few points in the content. What we have here are two fundamentally different ways of comprehending a particular system of ideas.

Despite commending the plan of Hegel's *History of Philosophy* in the Foreword to his Doctoral Dissertation, Marx observed that it had been impossible for Hegel to go into a detailed study of Epicurus and that his speculative approach prevented him from fully appreciating the value of the post-Aristotelian systems of thought. Taken together, these comments point to the origin of the difference in their attitude towards Epicurus and although Marx failed to go into detail about Hegel's failings, his indications are sufficient. When Hegel regarded the history of philosophy, he did so through the ready-made eyes of a sage whose mind had already developed a system of thought with a specific moving principle and spirit. In Hegel's philosophy, the moving principle was thought itself, abstracted into a kind of Universal Mind and associated with God. Quite literally, thought for Hegel became an almost holy thing, a ruling "Spirit" that existed above reality and incorporated the wisdom of the ages. Looking at the history of Greek philosophy from this standpoint, he was naturally uninterested in the historical circumstances, the material conditions that contained the progress of Greek thought. Nor was he concerned with the nature of this progress itself, the relationship between the various Greek systems, the details of the whole development. What caught his eye instead was the thought that stuck out as being great in this movement, the milestones of mind that went into making up the World Mind in its long journey down the ages. This long accumulation of thought drifted clear above the detail of reality. Seen in this light, Hegel's account of Plato's transcendental philosophy in his *History* was something more than intuitive brilliance; it was World Mind, up to the time of Hegel and focused in

Hegel's philosophy; looking at a part of itself thought was regarding a part of its own history. Looked at from this perspective, it is not difficult to see why the lofty moving principle of Hegel's philosophy found nothing of value in the Epicurean philosophy of nature except a repetition of the earlier Democritean system. Looking only for thought abstracted into principles that transcended their origin, Hegel could see virtually nothing of value in the entire Epicurean system; in fact, he only saw the reverse of abstract thought and this is why he accused Epicurus of banishing thought from his system.

The exception that Hegel made to his sweeping indictment of Epicurean philosophy was its ethics, in his view, the most interesting side of the system. The Epicurean philosophy of nature, he observed, "depends on the individuality of self-consciousness." His judgment on the operation of this principle when applied to natural philosophy, however, was undeniably negative. Could it have been anything else? Instead of applying self-consciousness to areas of the mind's mental activity, generalizing and reifying thought still further, Epicurus directed it to the world of atoms and nature. For Hegel, the direction in which the Epicurean principle had traveled was a very real weakness. For Marx, the consistency with which self-consciousness appeared as a principle operating throughout the Epicurean philosophy of nature was its greatest strength.

If Hegel's understanding of Epicurean thought was the judgment of a sage from the standpoint of a self-made system, the approach of Marx was very different. Hegel had pronounced judgment, but the very nature of his judgment reflected an inability to make a free and objective assessment. His judgment on Epicurus was indeed a judgment on himself; his moving principle or Absolute passed over such "detail" in Epicurean philosophy as its swerving atom, seeing only an oddity to do with natural philosophy rather than what it really was, in Marx's view, a representation of the great ethical principle that reflected the historical progress of the whole of Greek materialism. Hegel's consummate total world had its disadvantages, one of which was that it imprisoned the philosophical consciousness. He had denigrated the worth of the Epicurean principle of self-consciousness, but, for Young Hegelians like Marx and Bruno Bauer, the road to freedom in authoritarian Prussian society lay in self-conscious mind and it is not difficult to see to what extent Marx's involvement in Epicurean philosophy was a consequence of Hegel's attitude to it.

These two strikingly opposite attitudes to Epicurean philosophy and self-consciousness provide the connection between Marx's *First* and *Sixth Epicurean Notebooks*. The radical Young Hegelians observed that the moving spirit of Hegel's philosophy had ended its long journey of development by standing still in Prussian society and that self-consciousness, the highest point in this development, had never been usefully "activated" by Hegel. In fact, Hegel, as was apparent from his attitude to Epicurean self-consciousness, had deprecated this very pinnacle of his own system. His judgment on Epicurus was as good a place as any, then, for investigating the odd termination of development in Prussian society. This peculiar circumstance, I think, was responsible for arousing Marx's interest in Epicurean philosophy and his determination to investigate the whole of his system and its relationship to the history of Greek atomism. Thus, in his *First Epicurean Notebook*, he began his research by examining the representation of self-consciousness in the Epicurean philosophy of nature in order to create a working example of the progress of Greek philosophy. He began his study of the life history of Greek atomism by examining its ending in Epicurean philosophy as a theoretical principle, his reasoning being that from the death of the hero one could infer his life's history. Greek atomism ended its life in Epicurean philosophy as an abstract principle, a generalization that expressed freedom in both physical nature and in human thought. From its conception in the brain of Democritus as being the basis of all things, the atom had wound up its career as a theory that explained the composition of phenomenal nature. This *First*

Epicurean Notebook should therefore be regarded as an expression of Marx's interest in the history of an "Absolute" or general philosophical principle. In the *Sixth Epicurean Notebook*, however, he took this a stage further, advancing from the history of a principle to the mechanics governing the whole history of philosophy. What begins with notes on the origin and importance of a principle ends with a general discussion of the mechanics underlying the evolution of philosophy. Marx's reflections coincided with Bruno Bauer's interest at this time in revitalizing Hegel's thought by extracting self-consciousness from its premature interment and giving it critical claws to scratch back at the Prussian Establishment.

The Doctoral Dissertation itself is a disciplined piece of writing. By the time that Marx completed his preparatory *Epicurean Notebooks* at the end of 1839, he had worked out exactly what he wanted to say in his thesis and went on to express the ideas he had been developing neatly but forcefully in a finely detailed analysis of the difference between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophies of nature. He announced his motive for this theme at the beginning of his study as being an interest in the history of philosophy, and the dissertation gave him the opportunity to express his general interest practically. After his researches on Epicurus, he not surprisingly chose to contrast the two major focal points in the history of Greek atomism, the objective empirical foundation given to it by Democritus with the development of atomism as a materialist theory of knowledge by Epicurus.

The method he adopted when writing his thesis comes out clearly from its Table of Contents. In the first part of his work, Marx concentrated on establishing that the views of Democritus and Epicurus had separate identities, attacking popular notions that confused one with the other as mistaken. Once he had examined these various misconceptions and analyzed their causes, he outlined the opinions of both philosophers "concerning the truth and certainty of human knowledge." In this important third section, he showed how the different identities he had established also revealed fundamental differences of principle between the two ancients in which their views were opposed at each step while also containing their own contradictions.

The basic principle of Democritus was that, apart from atoms and space, the existence of everything else was a matter for conjecture. Because the atom that made up the sensuous world was too small to see, Democritus had said that "truth lay hidden at the bottom of a deep well" and believed that nature could only be understood through reasoning and by observation and experiment. But if the real world was unknowable at face value, it had nonetheless to be explained and, in consequence, Democritus, essentially a sceptic in his theory of knowledge, was driven to empirical natural science and the positivist method in order to discover truth. Epicurus, on the other hand, believed that "all senses herald the true" and that this position should be a dogma for the wise man. Believing the phenomenal world to be real, said Marx, Epicurus scorned both the scientist and his empirical method, preferring instead the calm and tranquility of thought and the company of his friends in his famous philosophers' garden. Thus Epicurus, who recognized the objective appearance of nature, turned against reality and preferred instead the subjective spaces of philosophy. Here, too, the contradiction deepens. Democritus believed that given laws operated through a multitude of conditions to produce causes and effects that, through comprehension, could explain nature. In other words, that existence was determined and had reason. Epicurus took a contrary position. The determinism of science, he maintained, limited freedom and, true to the pre-eminence he gave to the principle of freedom throughout his entire philosophy, he insisted that the existence of reality was a result of limitless chance circumstances, none of which could be rejected as explanations so long as they did not contradict the senses. His manner of explaining the world, said Marx, tended to destroy the reality he so firmly believed in rather than confirming its existence.

The whole of this third section is an exciting but brilliantly speculative *tour de force* in which the contradictory views of the two great ancient materialists are demonstrated by Marx to be absurd. Democritus, whose atomism established the basis of the objective world, denied its phenomenal reality and wandered around the world searching for knowledge that would give him the answers to the truth about existence. Epicurus accepted what he saw as reality, without hesitation, yet turned away from appearance, appalled by the certainty of a determined nature that could be circumscribed by scientific law and believing above all else in freedom and peace of mind. The pursuit of philosophy, he maintained, would best facilitate the discovery of freedom and therefore promote the happiness of the individual.

Readers of this section may feel somewhat puzzled by the title Marx gave it in his Table of Contents, "Difficulties Concerning the Identity of the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature." As one reads it, it does not seem that he experienced any difficulty in identifying differences between the two thinkers, neither does he convey here that these difficulties exist. His intention is more one of drawing out and commenting on the small differences of detail and their connection to the general principles of the two ancient systems of thought. As the Table of Contents indicates, however, this is the intended business of the fourth section of the first part of the Dissertation. Unfortunately, the whole of the original manuscript has been lost. What survived was a copy of his thesis made by an unknown hand which, guided by an unknown brain, decided to omit both the fourth and fifth sections of the first part. The loss cannot be made up. The exact circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the original manuscript and the creation of the copy are a mystery which may never be solved.

Marx began the second part of his dissertation with a detailed examination of the swerving motion that Epicurus gave to the atom, and advanced his own interpretation of its meaning. The atomism of Democritus and Epicurus, he argued, were essentially alike except for the famous swerve and this strange motion was no accidental addition or quirk on the part of Epicurus, as Cicero claimed it to be. On the contrary, it expressed the basic principle of his entire philosophy, a swerve "away from the restrictive mode of being" and a negation of determinism. Just as Epicurus regarded the atom as the negation of space by matter, so he understood its *materiality* in dynamic terms as represented by motion along a straight line. His swerving atom, in Marx's opinion, negating linear motion, freed consciousness from the determinism of physical theory. In this sense, the principle of the swerve stood as a symbol of freedom.

Marx's further reflections on the significance of atomic motion are undoubtedly revealing. He pointed out that swerving atoms negate the physical positioning of other atoms, creating a repulsion between them and that this synthesized the freedom of the Epicurean abstraction with the Democritean material atom. Looking at this union theoretically, said Marx, the stage was set for the conceptual development of atomic theory. Therefore, in the idea of repulsion lay the origin of the atomic *concept*, the great contribution of Epicurus to the science of atomism. He interpreted the Epicurean "swerve" of theory away from material reality as the origin of theoretical reflection in Greek atomism and declared repulsion to be the first form of self-consciousness. Put another way, Marx was looking at the role of negative dialectic in general terms and this is what the swerving atom in Epicurean philosophy really represents. It is the negation of material reality by theoretical reflection and the initial form of consciousness that is the essence of theory, self-consciousness. Applying negative dialectic to the human condition at this point in his discussion, Marx said that man could only become a being for himself, a free being that is, when he negated his other, more primitive side, "the power of desire and mere nature." Negative dialectic in the development of the human condition is thus expressed as the negation of primitive, material man by thinking, reflecting, self-conscious man. Just as repulsion in the Epicurean atomism expressed the synthesis of

theory and matter, so Marx in his Doctoral Dissertation expressed *human* being as the synthesis of man's primitive existence, his basic needs, and the reflecting, self-conscious side to his character, the life of his mind. Epicurus, he suggested, was the first student of atomism to understand the importance of synthesis and repulsion and how it related the world of the atom to the enquiring mind.

Turning to the qualities of the atom, Marx examined the ancient sources and their references to Epicurus and Democritus on this subject and concluded that Democritus was interested only in those properties that could account for differences in the *appearance* of matter. Epicurus, on the other hand, concerned more with a theory of the atom, concentrated on properties which emphasized its *composition*, such as weight. His attribution of weight to the atom had the consequence of placing each particle within its own center of gravity as a material and individual object. Once brought into the sphere of physical being, this substantial atom now contradicted the conceptual, abstract atom that Epicurus had created as the basis of his philosophy of nature. Epicurus, said Marx, dealt with this problem by objectifying the contradiction between theory and reality, so laying the foundation for "the science of atomistics." This judgment could equally have been made for Democritus, who, according to Aristotle, emphasized those properties of the atom which highlighted its material and corporeal nature, such as shape, position, and arrangement. In keeping with his theory of knowledge, Democritus sought to place the atom inside the arena of empirical research and observation, caring little for its theory. Modern nuclear physics has progressed along the pathway of initial experimentation followed by theory construction. That theory had indeed been relegated to a secondary position in the history of modern nuclear physics could well explain why particle physics is in such a messy state at the present time. In recent years, wild theoretical speculation has come to the fore with a vengeance with specks of matter, the existence of which have not been verified, being assigned such characteristics as charm, colour *and flavour* no less. What the ancient atomists would have said about the strange procedures and "recipes" of modern nuclear science one can only wonder at.

This ongoing contradiction within the Epicurean philosophy of nature between theory and reality, said Marx, explained why he separated the atom as the theoretical basis of nature from the indivisible and physical atomic substance on which nature is based. The Epicurean concept of the atom was an abstraction of consciousness freed entirely from reality. It was "freedom from being" as Marx put it. However, when the concept of the atom left the world of theory and entered into the reality of physical appearance, it came into a world of matter from which Epicurus had desired to separate it. Therefore in order to keep theory and reality separate, he created two separate spheres of existence for the atom, one being within the province of mind as a principle or concept and the other being the atom of the natural world, the bedrock of substance. Marx took the view that when Democritus founded the science of atomistics, he wished to go no further than illuminating its *physical* side. Epicurus, on the other hand, perceived that the theoretical side remained undeveloped and concentrated on the theoretical exposition of this basis of nature. Their difference of intellectual approach to the study of the atom remains with us today, positivism on one side and theorizing on the other.

Two of the most interesting sections in Marx's dissertation are those which examine time and the meteors. Both contain ideas which would interest the modern philosopher of science. The discussion of time and its place in the Democritean and Epicurean philosophy of nature, for example, examines the relationship between time, matter, and space. The section on the meteors continued the scientific theme by analyzing the relationship between this important branch of Greek astronomy and Greek philosophy. Democritus, said Marx, abstracted time from nature, making it absolute and as far as substance was concerned, unimportant. The Epicurean position was more complex. He made time synonymous with the development of

substance and visible in the appearance of matter. In this way of looking at things, time is change and a reflection of activity. It is the force that separates the atom as a concept from the atom as a material reality. Generalizing from these differences of detail, Marx concluded that time in the Epicurean philosophy of nature was represented by material appearance and was a kind of mirror image of thought. In other words, development and change in nature not only reflected the passing of time but also presented the atom as an entity having a material existence. Time, indeed, for Epicurus, became an integral component of sensation, his great criterion for truth.

Yet this raises the contradiction between theory and reality in the Epicurean atomism onto a further plane of difficulty which Epicurus was forced to resolve by extracting time from nature and placing it within consciousness. Acting as the link between consciousness and external nature, the senses, reflecting matter as it appeared in the world, came to embody the element of time represented in the appearance of objects. What is very noticeable in his discussion on time is that the young Marx is firmly on the side of Epicurus in adopting sensation as the primary criterion for truth. Indeed, one feels the existence of a certain affinity between the natural philosophy of the ancient and the intellectual vitality of the youthful German, a special relationship, an intellectual bond. Fortunately, in the last paragraph in this section on Time, Marx opened a window onto these gardens of the spirit, revealing the strong link between self-consciousness and Epicurean philosophy. Although he does not refer to Epicurus by name, he clearly implies that his atom represents “abstract individual self-consciousness,” its “natural form”:

Therefore: just as the atom is nothing but the natural form of abstract, individual self-consciousness, so sensuous nature is only the objectified, empirical, individual self-consciousness, and this is the sensuous. Hence the senses are the only criteria in concrete nature, just as abstract reason is the only criterion in the world of the atoms.

In this statement, Marx indicates that the real difference between the Epicurean and Hegelian theory of knowledge is an active self-consciousness contained in the ancient wisdom and he emphasizes this Epicurean self-consciousness many times in his dissertation.

Theory in the Epicurean philosophy of nature reached its high point in his astronomy. His attitude to the heavenly bodies, said Marx, differed from the entire outlook of Greek thought on this subject because he believed that the existence of these bodies was not determined by divine providence. Epicurus ridiculed the popular belief of his day that celestial bodies were holy or blessed, maintaining that this kind of irrational attitude originated in human fear or weakness. He was quite adamant that the study of the skies ought to bring calm and inner peace to the observer and not cause mental confusion. It was for this reason, said Marx, that he held the view that many different theories could explain the existence of the heavenly bodies. The single explanation allowed for easy contradiction breaking the golden rule of Epicurean philosophy that nothing should be allowed to disturb the calm of self-reflecting mind. In any case, the “single” explanation suggested either scientific law or divine explanation and it was the straightjacket of a determinism and the myth of divinity that Epicurus wished to overcome above all else. Multiplicity of explanation avoided this danger and removed fear and contradiction, leaving the mind tranquil.

Freed from the providence of the gods, the celestial spheres appeared to have been given a reasonable degree of autonomy in the Epicurean philosophy of nature. But, strangely enough, this was not so. Chance played a leading role in his astronomy and the existence and motion of the heavenly bodies was held to result from accident. The greatest contradiction in his astronomy, however, resulted from the fact that these objects represented physical compositions of real atoms which expressed his *theory* of the atom in a material form. Here, the individuality and reality of matter shone over the head of Epicurus, personifying the

creation of his mind. But just as the “immortal foundation” which he had given nature, to use Marx’s phrase, confronted him as a material reality, so too did this reality confront the active self-consciousness of him who had conjured up the theory. In this area of its existence, active mind was terminated by reality and the very existence of these bodies represented a disturbing challenge to the creative, self-reflecting mind. Epicurus therefore gave the heavenly bodies an insubstantial and transient character in order to preserve the cardinal principle of his whole philosophy—nothing could exist that forever disturbed the calm of thought. In his theory of the heavenly bodies, the contradiction between theory and reality presented itself in its sharpest form. By separating theorizing mind from material nature and making self-consciousness the supreme force and nature its product, Epicurus, said Marx, resolved the contradiction once and for all.

At the end of his dissertation, Marx warned of the dangers of self-consciousness in careless hands, pointing out that a self-consciousness detached from reality and raised into an absolute principle destroyed “all true and real science” and opened the door to “superstitious and unfree mysticism.” Epicurus, he maintained, avoided both these dangers because he comprehensively applied self-conscious mind to natural science so that, despite all its contradictions, his atomism became “the natural science of self-consciousness.” It was for this reason that he declared the great ancient to be the champion of the Greek Enlightenment. How prophetic too was this warning when one thinks of the future furious rift with Bruno Bauer and the latter’s “absolute principle” of self-consciousness.

The aspect of self-consciousness that the young Marx found most interesting in the Epicurean philosophy of nature was its practical value as an active analytical force. His representation of the Epicurean atomism was not just an imaginative falsification created to serve Bauer’s modification of Hegel’s thought at this time. To take this view is to badly miss the whole point of the Dissertation and fail to understand the reason for his almost pedantic emphasis on Epicurus’ resolution of contradiction. What Marx discovered in the ancient’s wisdom was something ready-made, one of history’s intellectual dress rehearsals in which an idea was paraded on the stage only to disappear for 2000 years. In the Epicurean philosophy of nature, Marx found that self-consciousness had been given a comprehensive dress rehearsal. He therefore contrasted the Epicurean and Democritean atomistics in his study in order to examine the role it played in the ancient wisdom and observe its consequences for the evolution of this sphere of knowledge. The view that Marx created a false Epicurus only to suit the needs of Bauer is contradicted by the facts of history. Many years later, Marx still found praise for Epicurus and occasional room for favourable mention of that grand old man of Greek materialism. The same could not be said for his former Berlin friend. By 1844, three years after he had completed his dissertation, Marx attacked and ridiculed Bauer’s views in *The Holy Family*. If Bauer soon became an enemy, Epicurus remained a lifelong friend. But, as I will show at the end of this paper, their relationship was something more than friendship. The fact is that Epicurus was Marx’s first and perhaps most lasting teacher.

The origin of Marx’s intellectual break with Bruno Bauer has always been something of a puzzle for students of this period of his life. Despite his enthusiasm for self-consciousness throughout the Epicurean studies, it is nonetheless true to say that Marx’s dissociation from abstract theorizing and the philosophy of self-consciousness began at the end of this “Greek” period. Some months after he had completed his dissertation, Marx appended a note to it in which he criticized Plutarch’s polemic against Epicurean theology. Commenting on Plutarch’s views, he attacked the idealist notion of formal possibility which allowed for the existence of *anything* so long as it did not contradict formal logic. As an alternative to *theoretical* possibility, he proposed *real* possibility, endeavouring to link thought to real existence and therefore directing the search for truth to the circumstances of real life. It was at this point that

he denied any intrinsic value to speculative philosophy beyond purely mental activity, and he did it with a flourish.

Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination. Come with your gods into a country where other gods are worshipped, and you will be shown to suffer from fantasies and abstractions.

The latter point was sadly proved wrong by the wholesale defeat of native gods throughout the southern hemisphere by the abstract Christian god and the symbolic cross, aided by missionary work, in the greater part of the nineteenth century.

Marx's Epicurean studies are a chronicle of the life and death of his intellectual relationship to Bruno Bauer. During the three-year period in which they were created, they reflect the evolution of the young Marx's thought with a marked clarity. Right at the beginning of the period, in fact, in his *First Notebook on Epicurean Philosophy*, Marx maintained that "What is lasting and great in Epicurus is that he gives no preference to conditions over notions." In the passages of this *Notebook*, Marx favoured "the freedom of the imagination" and theory over reality. Perhaps the clearest indication he gave of support for Bauer and the value of a philosophy of self-consciousness can be found in a curious and highly revealing section on the relationship between philosophy and history that appears under the title, "IV. General Difference in Principle Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature." The section referred to has been regarded by the various editors of *Marx-Engels Collected Works* as a part of his Doctoral Dissertation despite the fact that there is no connection between its content and the content of any other part of that work. Speaking generally of the development of philosophy and its relationship to the world, Marx suggested that there were two sides to this progress of thought. One was the objective relationship of ideas to the time in which they appeared and their effect on that particular period. The second side to this development had to do with the subjective element, "*The relationship of the philosophical system which is realized to its intellectual carriers, to the individual self-consciousnesses in which its progress appears.*"—in other words, the progress of a philosophy in the hands of the disciples of the sage after his death. Having already castigated Hegel's pupils for a lack of integrity in earlier paragraphs, Marx now turned to examine the subjective side of the relationship of Hegel's thought to the world or how it was 'realized' within the minds of its intellectual carriers, Hegel's followers. He suggested that there were two opposing camps or schools of the faithful, one being a *liberal party* and the other a school of *positive philosophy*. The *liberal party* was a party of *theory* that regarded philosophy as a concept and principle, its activity was that of critique, turning itself against the exterior world. The school of positive philosophy, on the other hand, was more interested in reality than theory. It took an opposite course to the theoretical criticism of the world by the party of theory, seeking instead to criticize philosophy, an activity which Marx thought of as philosophical introspection. Only the *liberal party* would progress, said Marx, because it was the party of theory and was aware of its principle and aim. The sensitive student of this period of Marx's life will correctly associate the figures of Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach with this passage. Bauer represented the liberal party whose aim was to revitalize self-consciousness and turn it against the exterior world as an active weapon of theoretical criticism. Feuerbach, on the other hand, was the most serious-minded critic of Hegel's philosophy active at this time. Between 1838 and 1841 he had published a number of articles crucially highlighting the serious weaknesses in the relationship of Hegel's dialectic to reality. But Marx, a friend to the philosophy of self-consciousness at this time, failed to understand their true significance.

By the end of 1843, Marx had worked for over two years as a radical journalist having left Berlin with a flea in his ear, no doctoral certificate, and no prospect of a lecturing job. The

doctorship was organized for him by family friends at the University of Jena but the lectureship proved more difficult. Now it was no longer a case of abstract theorizing but earning a living in the swim of life and the direction that Marx took in his Appendix on Plutarch began to assume a very real meaning for a radical ex-student looking for a job. If the young Marx had found a lectureship and returned to theorizing who knows what the consequences would have been for world history? He engaged, instead, in the worldly activity of journalism and came into contact with some important social problems as well as revolutionary thinkers like Moses Hess in Cologne. By the end of 1843, his attitude to abstract theorizing and the theoretical party had changed drastically, but so too had his attitude to the “party” that had criticized philosophy also undergone substantial revision.

In an article that Marx wrote for the journal of his friend Arnold Ruge at this time, entitled *An Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, he once again took up his old theme of the evolution of Hegel’s philosophy and the division within his school of thought. Speaking this time about the relationship of German philosophy to German history, Marx supported the efforts of the *practical party* to negate philosophy, or criticize it, but condemned the means by which this negation was to be achieved. Turning one’s back on philosophy, he said, achieved nothing.

You demand that the actual germs of life be the point of departure, but you forget that the German nation’s actual germs of life have until now sprouted only in its cranium. In short you cannot transcend philosophy without actualizing it.

These words are clearly directed at Feuerbach, who had produced a devastating attack on Hegel’s whole system between 1842 and 1843 in his *Vorläufige Thesen* and *Grundsätze*, overturning the whole idealism of the master’s dialectic and lodging it in substantial nature. But Feuerbach had already turned his back on the social and political problems of an emerging Germany, having retired to write *introspective* criticism of philosophy from his wife’s farm deep in the German countryside. Marx’s call to Feuerbach to quit the rural scene and engage in the political activity of *social* criticism went unheard. He had to perform this task himself, and the eventual development of his revolutionary materialism was the result. His sharpest criticism in this article, however, was reserved for the party of theory that he had praised so warmly only two years earlier. This trend, he now discerned, had failed to make any genuine progress. It continued to criticize the exterior world but remained unself-conscious about the practical value of its own activity. “It believed it could actualise philosophy without transcending it,” said Marx. Now, he had changed the direction at which he was pointing his lance and the aim this time was towards Bruno Bauer, his closest intellectual comrade in arms of only two years earlier.

By 1843, the indication that Marx had given in the Appendix on Plutarch of his belief in the importance of reality over theorizing had blossomed and was now in full flower. His emergence from the shadowy world of reflective consciousness into the sunlight of worldly activity had taken some five years. During that time, the star of Bruno Bauer had risen and set in Marx’s mind. This passing of time in his intellectual development was recorded by his support for Bauer’s party of theory around the end of 1840 or early 1841 and the swingback of his serious reappraisal of 1843. At the beginning of 1844, Marx had moved to Paris with his young bride, Jenny, and was now breathing the revolutionary air of its political clubs. He had also become reacquainted with Frederick Engels, with whom he formed a lifelong friendship. Engels’ experiences of industrial England and factory economics directed Marx towards political economy. Furthermore, Marx was in the course of writing a set of manuscripts the scope of which ranged from predictions of man’s future in communist society to a philosophical analysis of human nature. Set against this increasingly strong march into the storm and stress of political events, Bauer’s life in Berlin as the leader of a band of liberal

students critical of Prussian society assumed an ever feebler complexion. Marx's clarification of his intellectual relationship to Bauer had reached a final point of development towards the end of 1844 and was expressed in the devastating critique of *The Holy Family*. Here, the self-conscious, critical philosophy of Bauer's Berlin group was hurled out of viable existence. That Bauer's thought had failed to undergo any significant development between 1838 and 1844 compared to the dizzy progress made by the young Marx is indicated by the very maturity of the condemnation which reveals a wealth of political experience and the influences of other minds. He summed up the difference between Bruno Bauer's mental entrapment in Prussian backwardness and the progress of his own thought in a remark he addressed to Edgar Bauer, co-leader with his brother of the Berlin group, who can indeed be taken to represent his former university friend,

If Herr Edgar compares French *equality* with German self-consciousness for an instant, he will see that the latter principle expresses in *German*, i.e. in abstract thought, what the former says in French, that is, in the language of politics and of thoughtful observation. Self-consciousness is man's equality with himself in pure thought. Equality is man's consciousness of himself in the element of practice, i.e. therefore, man's consciousness of other men as his equals and man's attitude to other men as his equals. ... as therefore destructive criticism in Germany, before it had progressed in Feuerbach to the consideration of *real man*, tried to solve everything definite and existing by the principle of *self-consciousness*, destructive criticism in France tried to do the same by the principle of equality.

Having now traced the course of Marx's intellectual development from his Epicurean studies onto the approach road of his revolutionary materialism, two issues remain, one, the connection between the ancient materialism of Epicurus and Marx's journey towards communism, the other, the place of the Epicurean free spirit in his later life and work. On the face of things it seems strange that the young Marx did not discard Epicurus in consequence of his dissociation from Bruno Bauer's critical philosophy. After all, if he appeared to have discovered anything in Epicurean philosophy it was the critical freedom of self-conscious mind. Given the formal similarity between Bauer's views and those Marx ascribed to Epicurus in his dissertation, his widely different treatment of the two men demands an explanation. Bauer's philosophy of self-consciousness had developed into a particular principle, critical theory directed at the Prussian administration. Epicurean self-consciousness as described by Marx was not so much a principle that served an aim like that of Bauer, but rather more the reverse, the aim being to preserve the free spirit of thought from the limitations of reality. Marx interpreted Epicurus' swerving atom as representing the free spirit of self-conscious mind, the free spirit of ideas and the imagination in general. If the Epicurean perspective was of a *critical self-consciousness*, Bauer's vision was the opposite of this, *self-conscious criticism*. The former represented reflective mind forever free from those conditions in the world that shaped what could be possible. The latter represented mind critically directed towards the world.

At this point, it should be recalled that Marx finally clarified his relationship to Bauer as late as 1844. Between 1841 and 1843, he had earned his living as a journalist performing much the same activity as he was soon to strongly condemn in Bauer, criticism of the Prussian social regime. The difference between the critical activity of Marx and Bauer during this period, although subtle, was substantial. Bauer's criticism revolved around trivial aspects of the regime's maladministration; Marx's journalism was directed towards concrete social issues of the day such as laws concerning the obtaining of firewood by peasants or debates in the Prussian Parliament. Both Marx and Bauer had directed their criticism at the Prussian scene but whereas Marx had actively entered into this reality concerned to expose evils and campaign for justice, Bauer remained outside active struggle, adopting a scholastic approach to practical issues by expressing his opposition in an intellectualized *literary* form.

If Marx had discarded Bauer for the reasons outlined above, what he retained of Epicurus was not his ancient materialism but his philosophical introspection. In his dissertation, Marx emphasized the role of self-consciousness in Epicurean philosophy as an instrument of clarification and freedom, writing supportively of this activity. Nonetheless, he had also contrasted this introspection unfavourably with the critical activity of Bauer's liberal party referred to above. Indeed, he seemed to favour the externalization of philosophy at this time as a loose form of intellectual criticism of social circumstances. By 1843 to 1844, all was different and the great advance made by Feuerbach's introspective criticism of Hegel would have restored the Epicurean principle of a self-conscious and self-critical philosophy to favour. One of Marx's most telling remarks in his attack on Bauer at this time was that he and his followers had failed to make any progress because they were too busy criticizing the world rather than being critical of their own weaknesses.

The fact is that the revolutionary materialism that Marx worked out between 1843 and 1848 was a product of his intellectual relationship to the ideas of people like Bauer, Feuerbach, Hess, and Stirner and his self-conscious critique of their thought during this time. Indeed, this was when he first came into contact with radical humanism, Utopian communism, and Stirner's nihilism. The new materialism was very much a creation of Marx's concern to clarify his relationship to these gentlemen and the introspective activity of a free self-consciousness provided the philosophical heart, the motor force for his critiques of this period. The process began with his dissection of Hegel's political philosophy in 1843 and ended with an attack on Proudhon's economic thought in 1847. The watershed came in 1846 in a manuscript now called *The German Ideology*. This thoroughly introspective, critical analysis of both Feuerbach and Stirner became a platform for the first statement of the new theory of history and society which Marx and Engels had together created. If Marx's activity took the form of self-conscious criticism in these years, it was inspired by the free spirit of a self-aware, self-critical introspective mind. In this sense, the Epicurean legacy picked up by Marx was essentially a liberating spirit, one which placed the free movement of mind above all things. In Marx's case, it facilitated his critical movement through the ideas of others to the ultimate development of his own outlook. To summarize the spirit of Epicurean self-consciousness concisely, it is an integral feature of the entire dialectic of self-development, its true character being *negation* or *critique*,

The legacy of Epicurus also had another side to it, a marked hostility towards religion and a deep concern for justice. And it is in *The German Ideology*, precisely where Marx presented his newly worked out atheistic materialism for the first time, that one finds his reaching out for and defending this ancient heritage against the nihilism of Stirner. Stirner's understanding of Epicurus, said Marx, was schoolboyish. Like Hegel, he failed to distinguish Epicurean thought from that of the Stoics and Sceptics. Echoing his *First Epicurean Notebook* of 1838 in which he quoted Diogenes Laertius on Epicurus, "*Justice is not something existing in itself; it exists in mutual relations, wherever and whenever an agreement is concluded not to harm each other or allow each other to be harmed,*" he informed Stirner that the real basis of Epicurean philosophy was social justice and that the idea of the state resting on the mutual agreement of people was first proposed by Epicurus himself. If Marx did not utilize the Epicurean concept of justice in his dissertation, he most surely never forgot it after eight years. Furthermore, he responded to Stirner's argument that Epicurus' philosophy was less radical than that of the Stoics by openly defending his ancient atheism as the true and radical enlightening force of antiquity. It was for this reason, he told Stirner, that Epicurus was hated and his work censured by the holy fathers of Christianity. Marx had referred approvingly to this Epicurean irreligiousness in his Doctoral Dissertation, a fact which the holy fathers of Prussian state Christianity may not have taken kindly to, and which perhaps explains why his

dissertation was submitted to Jena rather than Berlin University. Atheism, justice, and freedom of thought— this is the connection between the ancient materialism of Epicurus and Marx’s journey towards communism.

In a very marked sense, this great Epicurean heritage, this spirit of liberty remained with Marx all his life. What, after all, did much of his later life and work in England represent but a struggle against the injustices of Victorian age capitalism on behalf of its victims? His whole critique of modern political economy and the years he spent writing *Das Kapital* reflect a fundamental spirit of justice at the heart of his very existence. If Marx’s pen was moved by such an inner morality, its critical direction was determined by a desire to comprehensively negate what there was and replace it with something better. Thus a negation of the continuing straight line of English social circumstances demanded a swerving away from the old conditions, and the greater part of the time that Marx spent in England was committed to persuading the other side of the economic coin to take this course of action and revolutionize society. Indeed, his struggle to set up political organizations such as The First International in order to negate the society that so strongly offended his sense of justice fully reflects the free spirit of self-aware mind in the Epicurean legacy he had inherited. Does not the shout for liberty, “Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains,” echo something of that distant Epicurean sentiment of freedom? Ultimately, freedom and justice are the two pillars of Marx’s own thought and, taken together, they express the force of negation in the dialectic of development and represent *challenge* to *any* existing order of things.

Where freedom and justice are denied, the smothered cry for liberty smoulders beneath the surface, ready to break out and challenge the existing order, ready to swerve away from it. Thus the true legacy of Epicurus was his revolutionary morality and it is this basic dignity and nobility of spirit that gave the cutting edge of purpose to Marx’s desire to change the world. In this century, it is a legacy that seems to have been entirely forgotten by those who have sought to effect social change in Marx’s name. Let future revolutionaries not forget that there can never be any oppressive state authority that can set a limit to freedom of consciousness or a personal sense of justice. The force of these great individual freedoms, of this great Epicurean legacy, will forever return to crack their new order asunder.