Norman Levine: ‘Marx’s Discourse with Hegel’ Palgrave Macmillan Basingstoke 2012

This work attempts to understand the philosophical relationship between Marx and Hegel in the years 1839-48. The author is aware that Marx’s approach towards Hegel is influenced by the fact that some of Hegel’s works are not known by him and that this could be important in terms of the assessment made by Marx about the philosophical significance of Hegel. Marx differentiates himself from the speculative philosophy and identity reasoning of Hegel. This means that he does not agree that philosophy is in a position of correspondence with reality, and therefore Marx utilises the approach of critique in order to indicate the discrepancy between reality and philosophy. Marx’s emphasis on critique is influenced by the Young Hegelians, Bauer and Ruge, but in general Marx is sympathetic to Hegel because he differentiates between Hegel’s system and method. He believes that the method can be utilised in order to understand historical reality. However the work of Feuerbach also convinces him that Hegel’s emphasis on the role of the idea should be replaced by the importance of social being in a material context. The result of these influences meant Marx became critical of Hegel’s failure to establish a viable subject of change and he argued after 1843 that the proletariat was the subject of transformation within capitalist society.

Within the process of the eventual demarcation of Marx from Hegel there is a process of continuity in terms of the retention of the method or research practices located within the Hegelian system. This means that the argument of a complete break made by Marx is problematical. Marx was influenced by Hegel’s understanding of essence, abstraction, totality, universal and particular, and other methodological aspects. Marx’s understanding of Hegel was flawed by his apparent failure to recognise Hegel’s comprehension of the dynamic importance of subjectivity and its relation to labour, and he also glossed over Hegel’s emphasis on the relation of the state to ethical principles. The result of this silence was an underestimation of the importance of Hegel’s criticism of the corruption of bourgeois society. Hegel was a supporter of capitalism but he was also opposed to the faults of capitalism that was represented by the excessive importance given to the process of making money. Hegel was a supporter of constitutional monarchy and a moderate reformer, but the emphasis of Marx became Hegel’s opposition to communism. This critique of Hegel could result in Marx having a dogmatic approach that was sometimes unable to recognise all that was revolutionary in the approach of Hegel.

Marx did not know of the works of Hegel written prior to 1807, and he did not have access to some of the collected works and important articles such as the one written about the English reform act of 1832. However Marx is aware of the importance of the Phenomenology of Sprit and the Science of Logic. This meant Marx was unaware of Hegel’s emphasis on the importance of subjectivity and its relation to the development of the Athenian polis. Hence Marx did not know that Hegel was elaborating the view that politics should be ethical and related to the concerns of the community. In other words Hegel’s standpoint was comparable to Marx’s conception of communism: “Marx’s own vision of communism, taking into account that his comments on communism are brief and scattered, was heavily influenced by the polis prototype. Although Marx did not approach the issue of communism from an ethical perspective – he approaches communism from the theory of labour – the ends of communist society resulted in ethical realization.”(p49) Consequently the themes of political self-determination and empowerment are located in the works of Aristotle, Hegel and Marx. But Marx did not register this similarity because of the incomplete character of his reading of Hegel.

Hegel was a reformer, but he was critical of revolution because of its apparent association with terror and the excessive concentration on the importance of self. He was also opposed to democracy and instead preferred government by a state that was able to develop officials who could act as a universal class, or on behalf of society. His caution about democracy did not mean that he was unaware of the significance of class struggle. He discussed the class conflict between the landed aristocracy and the disenfranchised urban population within Britain. Marx seemed to be unaware of this article, and so was not able to acknowledge Hegel’s understanding of the role of classes within historical development. Marx was also unaware of the importance of contemporary literature that explained Hegel’s interpretation of the role of the subjective in the practical transformation of the potential into the actual. This limitation was combined with an apparent lack of awareness of Hegel’s appreciation of the significance of the importance of political economy. The result of these omissions in the knowledge of Marx meant he vulgarised Hegel as a speculative philosopher, but he was able to appreciate the importance of Hegel’s method. This recognition has enabled Marx to acknowledge the importance of Hegel for the development of his own approach.

The standpoint of Hegelian orthodoxy was connected to the view that the non-congruence between reality and reason could be overcome by the role of philosophy. This meant the Hegelians denied that there was an unbridgeable schism between reality and thought. However the Young Hegelians disputed this understanding. They argued that the importance of self-consciousness was vital if the contradiction between reality and philosophy was to be overcome. Hence there was not an inherent identity between reality and reason and instead only the flourishing of self consciousness could overcome this discrepancy. The Hegelian Right argued that theology was primary in its relation to philosophy. Marx was a supporter of the Hegelian Centre until 1843, but he also recognised the importance of the critique of Bauer. He increasingly emphasised the importance of critique for understanding the limitations of capitalism, and therefore the origin of critique was the standpoint of the working class. This contrasted with the Young Hegelian conception of critique as the expression of self-consciousness. Marx did not want to abolish philosophy with his standpoint, instead he emphasised the importance of materialism, labour and the abolition of private property. Marx also transformed Hegel’s concept of practice to mean activity in the realm of politics.

In 1842 Marx wrote articles of a liberal character that identified him with the Hegelian Centre. He also denounced communism. His position started to evolve in March 1843 when he concluded the monarchy could not be reformed. Marx became a Left Hegelian, and he increasingly emphasised the importance of critique and politics. But his period as a Left Hegelian could be said to be brief as a he rapidly became a Communist. In contrast the influence of the Hegelian Centre was enduring. However the major difference between the Hegelian Centre and Marx was that the former supported capitalism and he advocated communism. But it also could be argued that both the Hegelian Centre and Marx were agreed on the important role of the subject, even if they had different definitions of what this subject was. Marx could agree with Michelet, one of the interpreters of Hegel, that: “Philosophy could be realized through the practical action of the subject. Politics was a branch of practical philosophy.”(p96) Unfortunately, Marx never satisfactorily grasped what Hegel meant by the role of subject as spirit, and as a result had a restricted understanding of Hegel’s philosophy. Marx’s conception of the subject was based on an emphatic rejection of the importance of spirit. Subject was defined as social labour, and this was related to the importance of work and the materialist reworking of the approach of Hegel. Marx’s continued allegiance to the Hegelian Centre after 1843 was defined by his rejection of the Hegelian system, which was defined as speculative philosophy, whilst retaining Hegel’s method for the study of social formations and historical development.

Marx’s dissertation indicated the influence of Hegel. He acknowledged the importance of history for an understanding of philosophy. But he also utilised the importance of Critique as the expression of what is required in order to overcome the non-congruence between philosophy and reality. This approach was to become an expression of the importance of praxis in later works. However he was also concerned to defend the philosophical standpoint of materialism, and argued that materialism was not reduced to the approach of empiricism and the perspective that ideas are reduced to sense perception. It was also necessary to understand the importance of social conditions for the development of thought. Marx utilised critique in order to arrive at important conclusions about Greek materialist philosophy: “Critique should be allied with materialism and Epicurus was also an exemplar of how materialism and critique could be conjoined. Then the union of materialism and free self consciousness would provide contemporary philosophy with a new role, the critique of actuality from a materialist perspective.”(p119) The work of Feuerbach was already important for Marx’s recognition of the philosophical importance of materialism. Marx’s materialism was elementary but it already represented differences with Hegel’s conception of the history of philosophy. Marx’s aim in his dissertation was to indicate the importance of materialism for Hegelian philosophy. However this standpoint was still based on the Hegelian principle that thought was the dynamic aspect that strived to realise unity and transformation of reality. External nature could realise purpose by its unification with thought.

Marx utilises Hegel’s ‘Science of Logic’ in order to understand Greek Philosophy. He recognises the importance of concepts for the purpose of defining what exists and the significance of the relation between essence and appearance. He also refers to the Hegelian application of possibility and necessity. Marx is also influenced by Hegel’s perspective that philosophy develops in terms of history. This approach was to become influential in Marx’s materialist conception of the development of society in terms of changing social formations. But he also modified this philosophy of history in terms of the recognition that the contradiction between philosophy and reality could not be overcome by a process of reconciliation. This is why he emphasised the importance of critique or self consciousness as being crucial if this contradiction between philosophy and reality was to be overcome. The prospect of transformation was connected to critique becoming practice. Marx already had the view that the role of theory was not sufficient to change reality. Instead philosophy had to be connected to practice if the contradiction between philosophy and reality was to be overcome.

Marx defended the integrity of Hegel in his dissertation and denied that Hegel had accommodated himself to the Prussian monarchy. He considered that the criticisms of Hegel were superficial and that Hegel had established his progressive credentials as a liberal because of the approach that philosophy was necessary to improve the world. The process of reconciliation between philosophy and reality represented the aims of liberal reform. However he also argued that the immanent development of Hegelian philosophy required that it become critique. This is why unlike Hegel he defends Socrates as the originator of critique and self-consciousness. Marx is to maintain this stance until his article ‘On the Jewish Question’ when he splits with Bauer and his conception of critique. The conception of subjectivity is then projected onto the role of the proletariat. To Marx subjectivity was the basis of critique and the possibility to overcome the disjuncture between reality and thought. But to Hegel subjectivity is destructive and represented the undermining of the universal. This is why he is opposed to Socrates and his criticism of the Athenian polis. Marx and Hegel also differ about materialism. Marx considered that materialism and idealism could be reconciled in terms of the recognition of the importance of reason for understanding nature. Hence Marx was not an orthodox Hegelian but he still defended the Hegelian Centre until 1843.

Marx defended Hegelian politics of liberal reform in his journalistic articles, but he disagreed with the Hegelian political philosophical standpoint that the state was the expression of the idea. Marx did not effectively support the standpoint of Ruge, who called for the unity of critique and political practice, until 1843. In 1842 Marx was critical of the communist ideas of Hess and was also not a Young Hegelian. He defended the Hegelian approach of liberal reform. He deferred to Hegel’s views of the state and only in 1843 contrasted the universal to the state in the form of the necessity of democracy. The influence of Hegel motivated Marx’s articles on a free press, divorce, and the call for a constitution. Marx did not have the methodology and understanding of capitalism that could have promoted a transition to a communist standpoint: “Marx could not make the transition to communism without activating the concepts of civil society, proletariat and revolutionary critique. The absence of these axial concepts during the 14 months from January 1842 to March 1843 substantiates the claim that Marx stood in the Hegelian Centre during this time.”(p161)

Marx articles under the title of ‘Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood’ did make him aware of the problem of poverty and the possibility for private property to undermine the universality of the state. However his answer to this problem was constitutional reform and the enhancement of legal equality. The renewal of the role of the political could over the problems created by the role of private property. He called upon the state to introduce measures to alleviate the hardship of the poor. This standpoint was still compatible with the views of the Hegelian Centre. Marx also supported in Hegelian terms the view that the monarchy could act in an enlightened manner. He was not a democrat or republican.

However Marx’s ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’ led to a process of differentiation from Hegel. Marx became an explicit supporter of the critique of Bauer and Ruge. He also became a democrat. It was in 1844 that Marx became a Communist when he wrote ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right – Introduction’, which is part of the Paris Manuscripts. In the 1843 article, Marx became critical of the view that the state was a universal, or the expression of the philosophical idea. Instead he suggested that civil society renewed by the role of democracy should be primary. This standpoint was based on the rejection of the Hegelian standpoint of the reconciliation of philosophy and reality. Instead philosophy should be about indicating the disjuncture between itself and reality. Marx also had a different conception of the relation between theory and practice. To Hegel, the role of theory was primary as the expression of the development of philosophy and its transformation of reality. In contrast: “Marx realized, however, that theory-in-itself would never change reality and the only weapon that could change reality was practice. The outcome of theory must be practice, because practice was the only way theory could be made an actuality.”(p185) This conception of practice was influenced by Ruge in 1843. Ruge argued that critique was important in order to indicate that reality diverged from philosophy. The way to overcome this discrepancy was by means of practical activity. This would bring about political reform. This meant Marx was suggesting that Hegel’s approach had problems for bring about the realisation of reform and so the alternative was to support the role of critique and its relation to practice. However Marx then differentiated himself from Ruge when he argued in an article about the rising of the Silesian workers that reform of the state was not sufficient for human emancipation. Instead transcendence of the state was vital for the realisation of human freedom.

In 1844, Marx completed his differentiation from Hegel in terms of the replacement of the importance of thought as the expression of labour with a materialist conception of labour as social labour. This development was a culmination of what had occurred in 1843. Marx’s Articles like ‘On the Jewish Question’ written in late 1843, and other articles of 1844, rejected Hegel’s conception of civil society. Hegel had considered civil society in terms of the mutual recognition and inter-subjectivity of the role of private property. Marx rejects this standpoint and instead emphasises society as cooperation and this approach is transitional to his acceptance of communism. In ‘On the Jewish Question’ he argued that human emancipation was impossible on the basis of the continuation of private property. Whilst in the article ‘Critical Notes on the Article “The King of Prussia and Social Reform” by a Prussian” he differentiated himself emphatically from Bauer and Ruge. He argued that critique limited to the political sphere did not tackle the problem of the limitations of civil society dominated by private property. He also began to distance himself from Feuerbach by implying that Feuerbach’s conception of species being was insufficient for understanding the contradictions of civil society based on the role of private property. An anthropological approach was not adequate for the study of social relations. But Marx still has favourable things to say about Feuerbach until 1847.

The process of demarcation from Hegel does not mean that Marx did not accept the continued importance of the influence of Hegel in his approach. Firstly, Marx utilised the master-slave relationship in order to develop his understanding of the class relations of capitalist society: “Marx used Hegelian methodology to characterize class relationships under capitalism. The struggle of the proletariat against the propertied classes was perceived by Marx in terms of the master-slave modality.”(p201) However the emphasis of Hegel on the importance of self-consciousness was transformed by Marx into the perspective that class conflict was related to the role of labour and the creation of the surplus product. Secondly, the relation of history to philosophical development. In other words Hegel argued that the capacity of the subject to realise the process of reason by objectification was a process that occurred in terms of history. Marx interpreted this process of philosophy becoming conscious of itself in terms of the role of labour within capitalism. Thirdly, Marx utilised Hegel’s method in order to transform the conception of the role of spirit into the understanding of the sequential development of social-historical formations. Marx utilised the Hegelian understanding of the organic whole to explain the character of the social system. He also used the concept of essence to explain the character of capitalism in terms of the accumulation of profit, and substance was the end result of essence or the production of surplus value.

In 1844 Marx interpreted the work of Hegel in relation to his recognition of the importance of political economy. This was expressed in the distinct parts of what is called the Paris Manuscripts. In the part entitled ‘The Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General’, Marx attempted to reconstruct the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ in a materialist manner. Hegel’s conception of the relation of substance as the outcome of spirit was modified to indicate that substance was related to the role of labour. The content of Spirit was replaced with the content of labour. Hegel’s interpretation of Alienation and objectification was transformed by Marx, and so these aspects were no longer the outcome of the role of self-consciousness and instead they became the expression of labour under the conditions of the domination of capitalism. Marx also argued that Hegel’s criticisms of the commercialism and egoism of capitalist society was an expression of an implicit critique that Marx would utilise explicitly in order to indicate the limitations of capitalism. Marx argued that Hegel’s conception of unhappy consciousness, and base consciousness, were the outcome of the limitations of capitalism. However Marx also insisted that Hegel could not outline how these problems of alienation could be overcome because his emphasis on spirit was unable to establish the practical conditions for the supersession of the estranged conditions: “By subsuming the activity of humankind under Spirit, Hegel perpetuated the exact conditions which bought alienation into existence: in the last analysis his philosophy preserved the estranged form because he never superseded the content, Spirit.”(p233) To Marx alienation could only be overcome by transforming the material conditions of existence and the attempt to overcome this problem at the level of self-consciousness would only succeed in reproducing the situation of alienation.

In other words Hegel was able to understand the importance of alienation and objectification. But he was unable to elaborate a strategy to transcend these conditions because of his emphasis on the role of Spirit. Spirit as the outcome of Speculative philosophy was impotent and powerless when contrasted to the material power of capitalism. Marx argued for a different strategy: “Rather than Spirit acting as content and subject Marx made human social labour the content and subject.”(p235) Labour had a significance that would enable it to overcome the conditions of alienation via a process of the material transformation of social reality. Hence Marx interpreted the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ as the elaboration of a system of idealist philosophy that justified the telos of spirit and self-consciousness and an expression of an important critique of capitalism. The task was to reject the former and to uphold the latter aspects of Hegel’s standpoint. This meant rejecting his system and upholding aspects of his method.

In ‘The Holy Family’ Marx outlines the problems with Bauer’s conception of critique. He argues that the emphasis on the importance of self-consciousness cannot become the satisfactory basis of criticism of the philosophy of Hegel. Instead an approach is required that can enhance the transformation of the material conditions of social relations. Marx was influenced by Feuerbach to adopt a materialist perspective, but he also effectively rejected Feuerbach’s anthropological approach and instead developed materialism as a sociological theory about society. The result was a practical philosophy that advocated changing the material conditions of social reality. In contrast the standpoint of Bauer was inadequate because his idealist stance meant he could only uphold change at the level of the theoretical and consciousness. This meant the type of critique advocated by Bauer was ineffective and had to be replaced by a form of critique that could advance the success of genuine practice: “In order to achieve this goal, the purpose of philosophy must be altered. Marx never called for the end or abolition of philosophy, but he did call for changing the purpose of philosophy. Philosophy would continue, but not as an examination of self-consciousness or reason. Philosophy would become practical, a force to discover and illuminate those material aspects in ‘civil society’ that perpetuated any form of social hegemony in order to eradicate it.”(p249)

Marx is suggesting that the realisation of the aims of philosophy is represented by the role of a social class, the proletariat. In this context Marx recognised the significance of those aspects of Hegel’s philosophy that contributed to materialism and criticised capitalism. Furthermore, Marx defended Proudhon in ‘The Holy Family’ because he was critical of private property, but Bauer is opposed by Marx because of the limitation of emancipation to the realm of the political. Marx is also supportive of Feuerbach for elaborating the importance of humanity as a social being and the role of cooperation. Marx was trying to defend the materialist aspects of Hegel and to oppose the idealist interpretation of Hegel provided by Stirner and Bauer. This meant a defence of the legacy of the Hegelian Centre against the claims of the Young Hegelians. Hence Marx defended the virtues of Hegel against the approach of Stirner and Bauer and attempted to show that these philosophers rejected any relation to materialism. They upheld the view that the self was supreme, either as the ego or self-consciousness. Marx argued that Stirner both distorted and copied Hegel, but what was most important was that Stirner denied the materialist aspects of Hegel.

In ‘The Holy Family’ Marx began to utilise the concepts of historical materialism such as relations of production. He also began to indicate the importance of political economy. This theoretical development culminates in ‘The Poverty of Philosophy’. In this work Marx critiques Proudhon because of the apparent imposition of logical Hegelian categories onto economic processes. Marx is quite adamant that Hegelian speculative philosophy should be rejected, even though the method of Hegel is useful for understanding economics and politics. Marx considered that Hegel had outlined the importance of historical development, and Marx utilised this understanding in order to comprehend social formations. He also used the work of political economy in order to develop an awareness of the importance of economics for the development of social systems. Hence by 1847 Marx already had an elementary understanding of the importance of relations of production and the productive forces for the development of social formations. He was also able to complete his differentiation from Feuerbach and establish materialism as the study of history and labour, or materialism was considered as sociology rather than philosophical anthropology.

Norman Levine also considers that Marx’s knowledge of Hegel has omissions that undermined his ability to recognise more adequately the significance of Hegel. The first of these omissions is his apparent lack of understanding of the importance of the material-practical and subjective activity in the work of Hegel. Using his interpretation of the work of Aristotle and recognising the importance of nature, Hegel recognised the importance of the relation of the subject to the transformation of the material environment. This meant practice, activity and labour was crucial to the process of the relation of the subject to nature. Hegel had an awareness of the material basis of the role of the subject: “In Hegel labour was a property of the subject, or the subject laboured in order to determine a material environment that sustained the life of the subject. Activity was inherent in the subject, or an immanent quality of the subject was activity.”(p286)

Secondly, Marx seemed to ignore Hegel’s conception of the state as the realisation of the role of the ethical. The development of inter-subjectivity in terms of the importance of mutual recognition and the relation of the self to the other culminated in the ethical character of the state. This perspective could become the basis of important criticism of capitalism because the egoism of the self of bourgeois society could not realise the ethical status of the citizen of the state. This meant that Marx seemed unaware that for Hegel the model of the state that should be reproduced was the Athenian polis. This model would represent the basis to evaluate bourgeois society and the state. Hegel regarded the state as the instrument that could reconcile the self with the citizen. He was critical of bourgeois society for developing an economic self that was not bothered with social concerns. Hegel argued that the state could advance mutual recognition that would express the ethic able to overcome the limitations of bourgeois society. Marx glossed over the importance of this standpoint in his ‘Critique of the Philosophy of Right’, and his ultimate communist perspective denied the role that the state could have in promoting ethical concerns.

In other words, Levine is arguing that Marx ignored Hegel’s recognition of the ability of the subject to transform the material at the level of activity and the ethical role of the state: “Marx chose to regard ‘logical pantheism’ as the substance of Hegelian Speculative philosophy and so he totally undervalued the importance of materio-practical philosophy in Hegel. Marx disabled the Hegelian subject. For Hegel ethics was an emanation from materio-practical activity, the will taking control of personality, and when Marx devalued the materio-practical he also crippled the importance of subjective activity in Hegel. In Marx’s interpretation of Hegel the subject, for the most part did not act, materio-practical intervention into the external did not take place and the source of intervention was omitted by Speculative logic.”(p294)

This criticism of Marx seems to be harsh. Marx was aware of the importance of the subject in Hegel but he considered that its expression as the role of spirit was an idealist view. Hence Marx considered that this conception of the subject had to be rejected and replaced by the role of labour. However we could agree with Levine that Marx underestimated the recognition by Hegel of the relation of the subject to the material environment in the form of practice. Thus it could be suggested that Marx did not sufficiently grasp sufficiently the level of similarity between his own conception of history and that of Hegel. In other words we can reconstruct aspects of a materialist understanding of history in the work of Hegel. Marx’s apparent failure to recognise this possibility does not mean that his reading of Hegel was faulty. Instead it is apparent that Marx’s reading of Hegel was incomplete and he had a tendency to dogmatism because of his view that Hegel’s system was essentially the expression of idealist speculative philosophy. Despite this criticism Levine himself has indicated that Marx was not unaware of the materialist potential of Hegel’s philosophy and he was sympathetic to Hegel because of the importance of his method for his own study of economics and history.

With regards to the state, Marx disagreed with Hegel’s view that the existing state could become the instrument of the realisation of ethical concerns. His ‘Critique of the Philosophy of Right’ is written in order to dispute the claims made by Hegel about the state. In this context it seems dogmatic for Levine to argue that Marx ignored the Hegelian view that the state is ethical. Instead Marx is trying to indicate that the state cannot be more powerful than the imperatives established by civil society. The actions of the state are influenced by the character of civil society. Hence Hegel’s standpoint represented ideological illusions that are unable to explain the role of the state. This means we require a different theory of the state that is not obscured by the mystifications of the Hegelian approach. In the last analysis Marx is denying that the state can be ethical. His aim is to abolish the state, as Levine has outlined.

Consequently, the apparent misreading of Hegel by Marx can be primarily explained by the philosophical and political differences that there are between these two great thinkers. This defence of Marx does not mean that we should be satisfied with Marx’s reading of Hegel because this reading is incomplete and influenced by Marx’s attempt to develop a distinctive approach that is not undermined by the limitations of existing idealist philosophy. Hence we can continue to extract from Hegel important views that advance our understanding of the processes of reality and thought. In this context we can question whether Marx is correct to dismiss the importance of spirit as an aspect of the process of development of the relation between subject and reality. We do not have to agree with all aspects of Marx’s reading of Hegel, even if Levine’s criticism of Marx sometimes could seem to be unfair and unreasonable.

Levine finally outlines what he considers to be the methodological aspects that Marx appropriated from Hegel. However he does argue that the purpose of method was different for Hegel and Marx. To Hegel, method was about explaining the realisation of the Absolute Idea, but to Marx method was important in order to comprehend social formations. Marx’s method was firstly based on the transformation of Hegel’s understanding of the role of the spirit with the productive importance of labour. Secondly, Hegel’s recognition of the importance of historical development became in the work of Marx the acknowledgement of the historical character of the relation between nature and labour. Thirdly, the Hegelian emphasis on the organic whole, and the relation of the parts to the whole, was utilised by Marx for understanding the inter-relations of social formations. Fourthly, the relation of the universal and particular could outline what was dominant and subordinate within capitalism. Fifthly, Hegel’s concept of essence could establish the character of capitalism, such as the importance of the production of surplus value. Sixthly, immanent development established the relation of essence to actuality, or the outcome of the essence, such as the relation of capitalism to imperialism because of the imperatives of surplus value. Seventh, the importance of relations indicated the identity and contradictions of the given mode of production. Eighth, the relation of the abstract and concrete could establish the universal aspects of the object of study and its specific features that are important for its functioning.

Levine contends that the aim of the method of Marx was to establish the regularities of a given mode of production rather than establish the laws of a linear process of history. Marx was not trying to predict the imperatives of transition from one mode of production to another, and instead was concerned to primarily explain the character of capitalism. He contends that this approach was different to the various interpretations of Marxist philosophy and history.

In conclusion it could be argued that Levine is making a controversial claim about what is Marxism. The very incompleteness of the work of Marx means that he did not provide a definitive and systematic elaboration of what it meant to be a Marxist. In this context it is principled and necessary for Engels to provide us with an understanding of Marxist philosophy. The problem is not with this process of elaboration but rather with the reduction of this development into dogma in the period of Stalinism. However with these qualifications in mind, it can be argued that Levine has provided us with one of the most important and detailed study of the process of the development of Marx’s thought. He outlines that Marx never rejected the philosophical gains of Hegel, and so could be considered a supporter of the Hegelian Centre, or the orthodox interpretation of the work of Hegel. His support for the Young Hegelians was superficial and temporary, and he regarded the work of the Young Hegelians as a vulgarisation of the achievements of Hegel. However he did recognise the importance of the role of Critique, which was elaborated by the Young Hegelians, Bauer and Ruge.

Levine repudiates convincingly the Althusserian view that Marx made a complete break with Hegel. Instead Marx was critical of Hegel’s idealism but aspired to develop his method for the study of society. He also acknowledged the importance of Feuerbach’s elaboration of materialism. It could be argued that Marx sometimes interpreted Hegel in an unsatisfactory manner, but Levine’s criticism in this regard is often harsh. Marx could not be expected to know all of Hegel’s works. He also rejected Hegel’s conception of the role of the Spirit because it was apparently anti-materialist. We do not necessarily have to copy Marx’s interpretation of Hegel. Instead we can develop a knowledge of Hegel that is suitable for our times and which recognises the importance of philosophy for the theory and practice of revolution.