

Hegelian Phenomenology and the Critique of Reason and Society

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Abbot Terrasson has remarked that if the size of a volume be measured not by the number of its pages but by the time required for mastering it, it can be said of many a book, *that it would be much shorter if it were not so short.*

(Kant, Preface to First Edition, *Critique of Pure Reason*)

Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* (Athlone Press, 1981, £6.95 pb, 261pp) would be much shorter were it not so short. It is unashamedly, and sadly, an extremely difficult book; not just in terms of the complexity and subtlety of the position it puts forward, but, primarily, in terms of the way in which this position is presented. But it is, nonetheless, in many ways an important book. For it challenges, at a fundamental level, the generally accepted framework within which Hegel has been interpreted; and, in so doing, it challenges accepted beliefs not only about the relationship between Marx and Hegel, but also about the philosophical adequacy of Marxism and the redundancy of Hegelianism. It contains a densely argued and philosophically sophisticated piece of Hegel scholarship which is mobilised against all the prevailing tendencies of contemporary social theory, and it will be of particular interest to 'the materialist friends of the idealist dialectic' [1].

In this essay my aim is two-fold: (i) to produce an account of some central themes of the book, and, in particular, of the reading of Hegel around which it revolves; and (ii) to offer a provisional assessment of the standpoint it adopts, not so much with regard to the textual credibility of the interpretation of Hegel from which it derives, as with respect to its immanent viability and more general implications. For Rose treats the conception of Hegelian phenomenology which she outlines as the only possible coherent theoretical basis for the development of a critical theory of subjectivity, culture, and hence, politics. She wants to appropriate aspects of Hegel's philosophy. The idea which the book develops is that the philosophical basis of Hegel's thought must be appropriated by Marxism if the latter is to be able to generate a critical politics. So it is the internal cogency of Rose's account of Hegel, rather than its historical veracity, which is important.

Hegel Contra Sociology announces itself as 'an attempt to retrieve Hegelian speculative experience for social theory' [2], and it concludes with a brief outline of a projected Hegelian social theory (labelled 'critical Marxism' - I will come back to this) as 'the exposition of capitalism as culture', 'a presentation of the contradictory relations between Capital and culture' [3] in the phenomenological (speculative) mode. In the meantime, it develops a philosophical critique of sociology and of Marxism, and a strikingly original interpretation

of Hegel's thought which focuses on the socio-political significance of his idea of speculative experience.

The argument is that Marx's critique of Hegel is based on a Fichtean reading of his system which fails to grasp the true meaning of his concepts of actuality and spirit, and that in fact these concepts provide the theoretical basis for the conceptualisation of the subjective mediations of objective social forms. Marx's own conception of practical materialism is seen as theoretically incapable of conceptualising such mediations, since it involves abstract dichotomies between being and consciousness, and theory and practice, which can only be unified *abstractly* in an 'ought'. Without such mediations, the relation between *Capital* and politics is seen to be indeterminate. *Capital* gives an account of the objective determinations of social relations, but Marxism is seen to be theoretically incapable of utilising this knowledge through a politics which accounts for how these social relations may be practically transformed *on the basis of their objective determinations*, because it cannot develop adequate concepts of subjectivity and culture [4].

In what follows, I first give an account of Rose's understanding of Hegel, contrasting it with that on which Critical Theory is based, since (i) this is a standard interpretation, and (ii) Rose's reading of Hegel functions as a reformulation of the foundations of Critical Theory; then I discuss its implications for Marxism, and I discuss Rose's understanding of Marx. I conclude with a few comments of a general nature on the overtly 'philosophical' character of the project that Rose outlines. One of the most interesting things about the book is that, while it criticises existing formulations of Critical Theory, it demonstrates and clearly endorses the explicitly 'philosophical' nature of its project.

Hegelian Phenomenology and the Radicalisation of Kant's Critique of Reason

Hegel Contra Sociology is perhaps best understood as a response to Habermas's account of the development of German philosophy from Kant to Marx, which prepares the ground for his formulation of Critical Theory as a theory of knowledge-constitutive interests, and to the understanding of the idea of metacritique, as the radicalisation of Kant's critique of reason, on which

that theory is based [5]. It is this interpretation of the idea of metacritique which determines the meaning Habermas gives to the statement that 'a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as social theory' [6]. As we shall see, Rose's reading of Hegel involves a reinterpretation of this fundamental axiom of Critical Theory, which changes its orientation from an, at least formal, directedness towards Marx back towards Hegel.

Habermas's understanding of the idea of metacritique has recently been elaborated by Garbis Kortian in his book *Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge University Press, 1980). A brief examination of the different ways in which Kortian and Rose treat the concept of metacritique will serve to introduce Rose's position and to situate it in relation to Critical Theory [7]. Kortian characterises 'metacritique' as an argumentative strategy with reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is taken to provide its paradigm [7]. He develops an account of the philosophical structure of Habermas's work in terms of the idea of metacritique, and he uses the difference in the form of the arguments that Hegel and Habermas use to determine the theoretical specificity of Habermas's work. Critical Theory generally, and Habermas's work in particular, are presented as a response to the failure of Hegel's attempt at metacritique: 'Critical Theory is intended as the experience and expression of the failure of the Hegelian concept' [8].

In agreement with Kortian's acceptance of a distinction between the epistemological structures of phenomenological and other forms of metacritical argument, but in opposition to his account of their difference, *Hegel Contra Sociology* presents a reading of Hegel which is built upon a claim for the epistemological superiority of the phenomenological form of Hegel's argument. Hegel's thought is counter-posed to that of the advocates of Critical Theory, and of sociological thought generally (of which Critical Theory is seen to be an instance, despite itself), as representative of the only possible form of thought capable of superceding the dilemmas of Kantianism, which are taken to be reproduced within all sociological thought (and most strikingly in Habermas) because of its reliance upon Kantian forms of argumentation [9]. So while Habermas claims that his own work is genuinely metacritical, and that Hegel's is metaphysical - in its failure to eliminate all 'absolute' presuppositions - Rose claims that only Hegel has achieved genuine metacritique, and that Habermas's work remains Kantian. The basis of this claim is that Hegel has been almost universally misunderstood.

Kortian uses the term 'metacritical' to characterise the epistemological structure of a theory which is, broadly speaking, 'critical' in the sense in which Horkheimer uses the term; that is, which reflects upon the relation between the epistemic subject engaged in critique and the object criticised; which reflects upon the presuppositions of critique [11]. Kortian distinguishes, none too clearly, between genuine or 'radical' metacritique - 'the movement associated with the "meta" is only radical so long as it resolutely refuses any ... absolute position' [12] - and metacritique which fails to carry through the radicalisation of critique which is its task [13] because it rests on some absolute presupposition, but which nonetheless presumably reveals some of the preconditions of critique. He places Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the latter group. This is the source of a certain amount of conceptual confusion since it means that the paradigmatic example of metacritique is a failed instance of that which it exemplifies. This is the result of defining it as an *intention*. But I think it is clear what Kortian is getting at.

Emphasising the specificity of Hegel's thought, Rose restricts her usage of the term 'metacritique' to refer to that particular form of reflection on the presuppositions of theory developed by those who rejected Hegel's philosophy; that is, quasi-transcendental reflection - inquiry into the ontological or sociological preconditions of critique by transcendental argument. Habermas's theory of knowledge-constitutive interests is established by an argument of this kind. This kind of argument is *quasi-transcendental* because its results are both *a priori* (as the ground of critique) and seemingly naturalistic (as external to the mind). Consequently:

The status of the relation between the sociological precondition and the conditioned becomes correspondingly ambiguous in all sociological quasi-transcendental arguments.

[14]

In opposition to such an ambiguous form of argument, Hegelian phenomenology is presented as a form of cognitive activity which successfully radicalises the critique of reason, which presents its social preconditions through a process of speculative self-reflection in which the exposition of critique and the derivation of its ground are united:

The exposition of abstract thinking and the derivation of the social institutions which determine it are completely integrated in the tracing of the education of self-consciousness at specific historical moments.

[15]

The reason that Kortian does not distinguish phenomenological and quasi-transcendental arguments in this way is that his reconstruction of Habermas's argument shares the presuppositions of Habermas's thought. In this sense, it is less a reconstruction than a restatement. It presupposes the validity of the interpretation of Hegel from which Habermas starts out. This interpretation (which is a standard one) maintains that Hegel

employs the radicalisation of critique, or this experience which he terms 'speculative', in the service of an absolute system of knowledge governed by the presupposition of the identity of thought and being.

[16]

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is taken to be grounded in idealist metaphysics. Rejecting this metaphysic, Habermas separates the idea of the self-reflection from the phenomenological form of its presentation. It is this abstraction which gives rise to the idea of metacritique which Kortian explicates.

Now, from the point of view of Hegel's thought, which Rose adopts, this abstraction of the idea of metacritical argument from its original form appears as a regression to that Kantian form of argument which separates off the subject from the object of critique, and defines their relation *abstractly*, in terms of a critical *method*. It was just this methodological conception of reflection which Hegel sought to overcome, because 'it takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an *instrument* and as a *medium*, and assumes that *there is a difference between ourselves and this cognition*' [17]. The methodological appropriation of the idea of the self-reflection of knowledge robs it of its primary critical function. Metacritique, as opposed to phenomenology, is thus an essentially ambiguous enterprise which attempts to reveal the presuppositions of critique through the direction of the critical method towards previously neglected aspects of human existence [18].

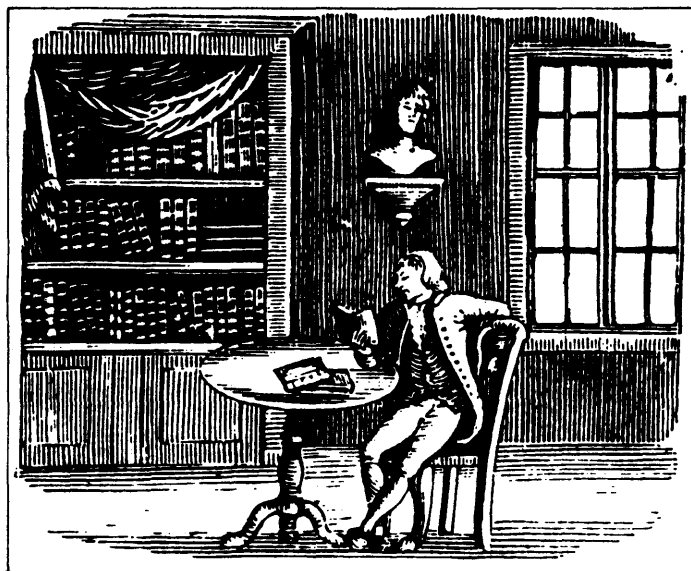
In Kortian's terms, we can say that the ambiguity of metacritically (quasi-transcendentally) established preconditions constitutes a failure on the part of those theories which are grounded on them to overcome, or to 'radicalise', critique. For their combination of *a priori* and naturalism gives them just that

'absolute' character which defines the objects of metaphysical thought. However, although they are philosophically unsatisfactory, Rose acknowledges the fact that such metacritical arguments can be extremely fruitful sociologically. Indeed, she argues that they are the method by which the basic paradigms of sociology were established. The first chapter of *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 'The Antinomies of Sociological Reason', gives a comprehensive, if condensed, historical account of the development of sociology in terms of its philosophical foundations in neo-Kantianism, which shows how a variety of sociological enterprises were established by different metacritical arguments, each designed to uncover different preconditions of neo-Kantian epistemology. Neo-Marxist sociology is also seen to exhibit this syndrome of reaction to, but incorporation within, neo-Kantianism. Although both attempted to overcome the philosophical problems of traditional sociology, it is argued that Lukács and Adorno in fact represent different positions within neo-Kantianism [19]. And Althusser is seen to combine neo-Kantian epistemology (his conception of science) with sociological metacritique (his theory of structures of social formation), and so to make 'all the classic neo-Kantian moves solely within a project of rereading Marx' [20].

Rose's argument is that Hegelian phenomenology is the only way out of these philosophically inadequate forms of neo-Kantianism. The reason a way out is needed (although this is never actually made explicit in the text - an example of its unnecessarily enigmatic stance) is that, while neo-Kantian metacritique may be 'sociologically' (i.e. descriptively) adequate, its philosophical inadequacies make it *practically* impotent, because it is incapable of generating a social theory in which the ground of critique, of theory generally - objective social determinations - is conceived other than as distinct from, and externally related to, consciousness. It is incapable of giving rise to a social theory which grasps its object in terms of the subjective mediations through which it is experienced and reproduced, and through which it can be transformed. The argument for Hegelian phenomenology (as opposed to simply 'contra sociology') rests on two premises: (i) that, despite almost universal belief to the contrary, Hegel's philosophy does not rely on the metaphysical presupposition of the identity of thought and being; that 'the fact that the Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute' [21] is not a *pre-supposition* of Hegel's thought at all; and (ii) that the philosophical foundations of Marxian materialism (as opposed to simply its sociological revisions) are themselves in some way Kantian or Fichtean insofar as they are not Hegelian.

Although a demonstration of the validity of this second premise is attempted, briefly, at the end of the book (to which I will return), it is assumed from the beginning. For it is claimed, without argumentation, that Kant's philosophy of consciousness, with its theoretical contradictions and practical moralism, 'can *only* be criticised if the infinite is knowable' [22]. We are offered an *exclusive* choice between the possibility of Hegelianism and the impasse of an impotent Kantianism, since, accepting Kant's critical destruction of previous metaphysics, Rose, along with Hegel, recognises that the infinite can only be knowable in its unity with the finite, i.e. as the absolute.

This doctrinaire insistence on the exclusive theoretical option of Kant (and Fichte) or Hegel, reminiscent of the falsely exclusive choices offered by Lukács in his essays on aesthetics in the thirties, but lacking their possible political vindication, is a theoretical flaw which has the unfortunate effect of closing the discourse articulated by the text at



just that point at which it promises to become most interesting. It leaves the question of the theoretical value of the position outlined (which is always also a practical question) unexplored, by implicitly assuming that it is the only way out of a certain theoretical dilemma. The perspective within which that dilemma arises, and epistemology, which determines its form, is never itself questioned. The compositional structure of *Hegel Contra Sociology*, which combines philosophical argument with textual citation in a complex and often ambiguous manner, and its terse, assertive style, which at times borders on the cryptic, are the formal correlates of this refusal to consider, concretely, the general significance of the position it puts forward (which is essentially a refusal to open a dialogue with the reader).

Let us examine the argument put forward in defence of the first premise (above) - the denial of any 'absolute' presuppositions in Hegel's thought. The bulk of *Hegel Contra Sociology* is devoted to its substantiation.

Rose's reading of Hegel, in conscious opposition to Marxist appropriations of his thought, revolves around her analysis of the roles played by that pair of concepts most often rejected, if not ridiculed, by those appropriations as representative of its systematic, and so idealist and ultimately theological, aspect. These are the concepts of the absolute and of speculation (in all its various forms as speculative thinking, speculative discourse, speculative experience, and, particularly important to Rose's interpretation, speculative rereading).

Marxist sociology has mystified Hegel by making a distinction between a 'radical method' and a 'conservative system'. As a result of this artificial distinction, the centrality of those ideas which Hegel developed in order to unify the theoretical and practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte has been ignored.

[23]

Rose sets out to reassert the centrality of these ideas. Her thesis is that 'Hegel's philosophy has no social import if the absolute cannot be thought' [24], since, as the unity of the finite and the infinite [25], it represents the unity, and hence the difference, of actuality and possibility. So, how can the absolute be thought? What are the conditions of such a form of thought? And how can they be derived without being implicitly presupposed? i.e. how can the transcendental circle, which involves

the implicit presupposition of that which is to be deduced in the specification of that from which it is to be deduced, be avoided? [26] How can the absolute be shown to be thinkable without this being presupposed in the form of the assumption of the identity of thought and being?

The key to this set of problems is the idea of phenomenology.

The only consistent way to criticise Kant's philosophy of consciousness is to show that the contradiction which a methodological, or any natural, consciousness falls into when it considers the object to be external, can itself provide the occasion for a change in that consciousness and in its definition of its object.

[27]

The only way to criticise Kant (*within the problematic of modern epistemology*, one might add) is thus through a phenomenology, which presents the forms of knowledge according to their own methodological standards, as they appear to consciousness, and which thereby presents 'the realm of appearance as defined by limited forms of consciousness' [28]. Such a presentation is a genuine radicalisation of Kant's critique of reason because it involves no presuppositions about the nature of knowledge as it is presented in a series of diverse forms, other than the bare axiom that knowing is 'the being of something for a consciousness' [29], which is a necessary condition of *all* epistemology; a universally shared presupposition.

Such a presentation, Hegelian phenomenology, is possible, because of the unity of the processes of cognition and reflection within consciousness. As Hegel explains in the introduction to the

Phenomenology,

Consciousness examines its own self.... [It] is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for the same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not.

[30]

The series of contradictory experiences which the observing (reading) consciousness undergoes as it progresses through the different historical forms of knowledge recreated in their determinate series by a phenomenology, is seen by Rose to lead, by implication, to the concept of the absolute. It is argued that the experience of the contradictory nature of hitherto apparently valid forms of knowledge subverts the distinction between finite and infinite on which those forms - as different relations between consciousness and objects external to it - were based, and implies a notion 'which does not divide consciousness or reality into finite and infinite' [31]: the absolute. As *implied*, however, the absolute is 'present but not yet known'. Only its *concept* is known. That it is present can be 'acknowledged but not stated' [32], since to state that it is present would suggest that it is present to consciousness (i.e. known), which it is not. This acknowledgement is not an abstract statement about the absolute, but an observation to which we have now attained, by looking at the experience of a consciousness which knows itself as an antithesis, as negative...

[33]

So, the concept of the absolute is derived, by implication, phenomenologically. It arises out of Hegel's critique of Kant's epistemology. But the derivation of the concept is equivalent only to 'the attainment of the observation that the absolute

is present'. We cannot yet think the absolute. How can this be done?

The absolute can *never* be 'thought' or 'known' in the ordinary sense of being a determinate object for consciousness (viz. Hegel's definition of knowledge, above), despite the title of the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*, because it is not a possible *object* of consciousness. It is not a possible object of consciousness because it is, by definition, beyond the opposition of consciousness and its objects, and 'consciousness is always this opposition between itself and its object' [34]. As 'implied' or 'alluded to', it cannot so much be 'thought' or 'known' as *experienced in a particular way*. It can be experienced negatively, or *speculatively*, as the formal unity of the multiplicity of contradictory experiences or relations by which it is implied. It is the production of such a form of experience of the absolute, which Hegel calls speculative thought, which Rose takes to be the purpose of a phenomenology.

In a phenomenology, a sequence of 'shapes of consciousness' is assembled 'in order to *see* the absolute by presenting the series of its determinations, of its misapprehensions' [35], both historically and contemporaneously. Because no one set of determinations, no one particular form of phenomenal knowledge, can grasp the absolute, philosophy is necessarily systematic. 'This idea of a whole which cannot be grasped in one moment or in one statement for it must be experienced is the idea of the system' [36]. But because the absolute is not a static totality, neither is the system through which it is presented. The essentially negative determination of the absolute means that its systematic apprehension is never-ending; it involves the continual re-cognition of phenomenal knowledge or prevailing forms of experience (which may themselves be changing) as speculative experience [37].

As I understand it from Rose's exposition, phenomenal knowledge is re-cognised, speculatively, by the observing (reading) consciousness of a phenomenology in the following way. The presentation of forms of natural consciousness (that is, of forms of consciousness 'natural' to particular historical periods) as forms of phenomenal knowledge (that is, as part of determinate cultural configurations), leads the observing consciousness to see their series as necessary, and to see them as determined. The experience this consciousness undergoes is speculative, it is the experience of 'the transgression of the limit between the positive and its condition' [38], because the recognition of determination which it involves explodes the distinction between the finite and the infinite which grounds the purely contemplative attitude of ordinary thought, which conceives of its objects as external to it [39]. It thus involves the concept of the absolute (as the unity of the conditions and the conditioned), in relation to which the prevailing form of phenomenal knowledge is revealed to be inadequate to its object (which is now conceived in its unity with, rather than as external to, consciousness).

So, speculative thought is the re-thinking of phenomenal knowledge from the point of view of the absolute, the re-thinking of phenomenal knowledge as inadequate knowledge of the absolute. As such it is a form of thought which acknowledges a lack of identity between the subject and predicate of propositions which represent phenomenal knowledge. Propositions, ordinarily construed, are taken to posit a false identity between the concepts with which they operate and the objects these concepts are used to represent, insofar as the logic of propositional grammar dictates that subject and predicate are conceived as independent prior to predication, and related by predication. From the perspective of the absolute, on the other hand, subject and

predicate are determinations which 'acquire their meaning in a *series* of relations to each other' [40], and which are consequently not independent of each other, but in some way mutually constitutive. This leads to the idea of speculative (re)reading; the reading of propositions as *speculative* identities. In such 'speculative propositions',

The subject of the proposition is no longer fixed and abstract with external, contingent accidents, but, initially, an empty name, uncertain and problematic, gradually acquiring meaning as the result of a series of contradictory experiences.

[41]

Rose's interpretation of Hegel's system is thus that it is constituted by the phenomenological representation and speculative rereading of phenomenal knowledge, and gives rise to 'knowledge' of the absolute through the speculative *experiences* which it provokes. And these experiences are 'critical'. For example, in terms of moral and political consciousness, its speculative apprehension involves experience of the fact that ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*, a term used by Hegel to designate the unity of the spheres of morality and legality, the practical realm) is misrepresented by the prevailing cultural forms through which it is experienced and reproduced.

Although it is an essentially negative mode of cognition, which reveals the 'untruth' of phenomenal knowledge in all of its forms, speculative experience is positive in three ways: (i) purely formally, insofar as it involves determinate negation [42], (ii) to the extent that it reveals the determination of the misapprehension which it uncovers (as we shall see, this is problematic), and (iii) insofar as the revelation of misapprehension contains, implicitly, the demand for a change in that which determines that misapprehension. I will examine the second and third of these 'positive' aspects of speculative experience, and the relation between them, in a moment, for this is the issue on which the way in which Rose's form of Hegelianism can contribute to the development of a critical Marxism rests. But first, I will quickly complete my account of Rose's position.

To sum up: according to Rose, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and any phenomenology for that matter,

... is not a teleological development towards the reconciliation of all oppositions between consciousness and its objects, to the abolition of natural consciousness as such, but a speculative presentation of the deformations of natural consciousness;

[43]

[it is] not the experience of consciousness recapturing its alienated existence, but the presentation of the formation of consciousness as a determination of substance, and (or rather *through*) consciousness' misapprehension of that determination;

[44]

... not a success, but a *gamble*. For the perpetual occurrence of inversion and misrepresentation can only be undermined, or 'brought into fluidity', by *allusion* to the law of their determination...

[45]

This open-ended interpretation of Hegelian phenomenology, and its culmination in speculative experience of the absolute, which Rose develops primarily through an examination of Hegel's Jena works, laying particular emphasis on the *System of Ethical Life* of 1802 as the first phenomenology [46], is used to produce critical reading of most of Hegel's mature works.

The *Philosophy of Right* and the *Logic* are read as phenomenologies, as representative of the 'standpoint of consciousness'. (Accordingly, one might say that

the *Logic* ends the *Phenomenology* rather than that the *Phenomenology* introduces the *Logic*. Whereas the former is a phenomenology of natural consciousness, the latter is taken to be a phenomenology of abstract, philosophical consciousness - a form of consciousness derived, historically, in the *Phenomenology*.) The *Aesthetics* is read as a 'philosophy', as representative of the standpoint of the absolute, of the collectivity. This is possible because the phenomenon it presents - art - is taken by Hegel to be historically transcended, to be 'no longer a formative, educative, political experience' [47]. The lectures on the philosophies of religion and history are read as methodologically mixed texts:

In both lecture series there is no sustained phenomenology. Instead the 'standpoint of the absolute' is abstractly and repeatedly stated and contrasted with the standpoint of religious relation, difference, representation or consciousness. The two texts reveal the *aporia* of subjectivity: the subjective standpoint is criticised by means of the exposition of its formation; but the absolute is thought as subject.

[48]

Significantly, there is no discussion of the *Encyclopaedia*.

It is a feature of Rose's interpretation that Hegel's phenomenologies are taken to involve speculative rereadings' of the propositions of phenomenal knowledge. Paradigmatically, these are the propositions of Kant and Fichte's philosophy which is taken by Hegel to be the philosophical articulation of the prevailing forms of knowledge and experience, determined by the bourgeois property form. So 'speculative rereading' is an Hegelian or 'philosophical' equivalent to Marxian critique (in the sense of the critique of political economy - we can see here how Rose's reading of Hegel reformulates the philosophical foundations of Critical Theory). It is at once a demonstration of the inadequacy of a particular theoretical perspective to a particular object, and a 'critique' of the form of social relations which 'correspond' to that perspective insofar as they determine it. However, as we noted at the start of this essay, Rose's claim for Hegelian phenomenology is much stronger than this. It is that it is the only philosophically adequate form of theory capable of critically conceptualising subjectivity and culture. It is to this claim that I now want to turn.

Hegelian Phenomenology and Marxism: The Critique of Society

There is an ambivalence in Rose's attitude to Marxism and to the question of the relationship between Hegelian phenomenology and Marxism, which reflects a crucial and unresolved ambiguity in her conception of phenomenology. This ambiguity is the result of a failure to resolve the tension within her account of Hegel's thought between its philosophical and socio-political aspects; the tension between its function as critique of reason and its function as critique of society. This, in turn, is a consequence of a failure to acknowledge the extremely limited sense in which a phenomenology can be socially critical, which is an effect of over-estimating the cognitive value of speculative experience. Perhaps the strangest thing about *Hegel Contra Sociology* is that while it gives probably the clearest account in English of the precise character of Hegelian speculation it fails to grasp the significance of the limitations it so expertly delineates. As I suggested earlier, this is because it remains within the problematic of modern epistemology.

The ambiguity in Rose's conception of phenomenology (essentially an ambiguity in her conception of the sense in which it can lead to knowledge of the social

determination of consciousness) is displayed in the statement, that in phenomenologies,

the illusions and experiences of moral and political consciousness are presented in an order designed to show how consciousness may progress through them to *comprehension of the determination of ethical life*.

[49]

On the basis of this claim it is further claimed that phenomenology is not only 'a presentation of political experience', but itself 'the definitive political experience' [50]. Marxism seems, very definitely, to have been *replaced*. But does speculative experience of the absolute really involve comprehension of the determination of ethical life? I think not. It involves only comprehension (in the politically crucial form of 'experience', it is true) of the fact that ethical life is determined. And this is a very different thing. A theory of this determination is still required. Only by exploiting this ambiguity in the phrase 'comprehension of the determination of ethical life' is Rose able to make such a strong case for Hegel.

This brings us back to the second and third 'positive' aspects of speculative experience noted above, to the question of the relation between the kind of determination revealed in speculative experience and possibility of real social change. For it is Rose's belief that a phenomenological social theory ('the exposition of capitalism as culture') is 'the only way to link the analysis of the economy to comprehension of the conditions for revolutionary practice' [51]. Such a theory is labeled 'critical Marxism' because the 'analysis of the economy' involved is to be Marx's. There are two problems here: (i) the reduction of Marxism to 'the analysis of the economy', and (ii) the incorporation of any form of *analysis, of theory*, within a phenomenological 'presentation'. I will argue that an examination of the nature of speculative experience and its theoretical conditions reveals a fundamental incompatibility (though not inconsistency) between Hegelian phenomenology and Marxian critique. And that, consequently, phenomenology is incapable of fulfilling the theoretical expectations which Rose has of it. But, first, let us see how phenomenology is socially critical, in its own right.

Rose takes speculative experience to be 'critical' not just epistemologically, in its independence from presuppositions, but also, and *consequently* (and this is the problem), politically, in its orientation towards other philosophies and to society. It is critical in this latter, dual, sense because it involves the recognition of a form of mediation between consciousness and its objects which is not acknowledged either by other philosophies, or by the existing forms of law and property relations to which these philosophies correspond. This recognition is taken to subvert both the validity of these philosophies and the legitimacy of the forms of social relation which condition them and sustain their credibility. Now, as we noted above, such negative criticism has a positive function, and it is here that a new problem arises which demonstrates quite clearly how limited is a social critique grounded in epistemology.

One of the positive functions of speculative experience is

to make a different form of ethical life possible by providing insight into the displacement of actuality in those dominant philosophies which are assimilated to and reinforce bourgeois law and property relations.

[52]

The problem is: (i) that this insight can contribute to the development of a new form of ethical life only in a minimal sense, and (ii) that merely to conceive

of the possibility of a new form of ethical life is, on Hegel's terms, epistemologically unjustifiable. The contradiction within Hegel's project registered here takes us to the heart of Rose's understanding, and defence, of Hegel's concept of speculation.

The reason it is unjustifiable even to conceive of an alternative form of ethical life is that to remain critical epistemologically, consciousness must posit no form of relation between itself and its objects which does not arise 'naturally' out of its self-reflection upon the objects present to it in phenomenal knowledge. And, as we noted above [53], Rose's 'materialist' appropriation of Hegel denies that the dialectic of consciousness is spontaneously self-generating, understanding it instead as the source of speculative experience. (Despite her description of Hegelian philosophy as 'the definitive political experience', in fact in contradiction to it, Rose acknowledges the political impotence of philosophy when she says that the 'possibility of becoming ethical' depends on neither the recognition of determination, nor on any moral decision, but on a 'transformation of intuition' [54]. The determination of which is, of course, by definition, beyond the individual consciousness.) So 'absolute ethical life' (the social ideal) is an 'unstatable' alternative [55]. What is more, even in this empty, abstract form it is unjustifiable.

Simply by virtue of being an alternative, Rose argues, however unspecified, the concept of the absolute 'contains an abstract imperative', a moment of *Sollen* ('ought') [56], despite itself, despite its purely negative derivation. For once it has been derived it cannot but present itself to consciousness as an alternative. Ironically, it is precisely the need to avoid the 'abstractness' of a 'positive' alternative (one which is 'posited' by consciousness, and unrelated to the existing state of things) which leads Hegel to defend an unspecified alternative, that is ultimately equally 'abstract' insofar as it too presents itself to consciousness as an 'ought' despite its phenomenological derivation.

But rather than rejecting the standpoint of consciousness as a starting point because of this contradiction, Rose acknowledges it and accommodates it within her exposition. It is here that the originality of her interpretation lies. Rejecting both 'right-' and 'left-wing' Hegelianism as attempts to resolve the contradiction by unjustifiably adopting one of its sides and neglecting the other, she embraces the contradiction as definitively characteristic of Hegel's thought, calling it 'the paradox of Hegel's philosophy of philosophy' [57], and taking it to show that an element of *Sollen*, of 'ought', of epistemologically unjustifiable striving for an alternative state of affairs, *must* be present in philosophy, and that this is quite consistent with Hegel's critique of Kant. This element of *Sollen* is taken to appear as a subjective limitation on speculative experience.

The argument is that once it has been acknowledged that the absolute cannot be thought (cannot become present to consciousness through its objects [58] while the dichotomies which its concept transcends remain a feature of the world which our consciousnesses inhabit, 'we can think the absolute by acknowledging the element of *Sollen* in such a thinking' [60], speculatively. This restatement of the idea of speculative experience from the point of view of its practical aspect reveals the unity of theoretical and practical reason in the unity of the epistemological and practical *limitations* from which speculative experience suffers. Such experience is presumably only subjectively limited in the sense that its objectively determined limitations appear as limitations of the subject.

So, 'thinking the absolute' speculatively is some-

thing of a Pyrrhic victory, both sociologically and practically. For while the acknowledgment and explanation of an unjustifiable element of *Sollen* in speculative experience reasserts its theoretical consistency, it also serves to emphasise both its theoretical and practical impotence [60]. This is particularly clear from a comparison of Rose's description of Hegel's idea of the vocation of philosophy with her understanding of his philosophy.

Philosophy, we are told, has the vocation 'to present a notion of law to our abstract consciousness which will re-form ethical life without being re-formed by it' [61]. It 'urges us to transform ethical life by re-cognising the law of its determination' [62]. This re-cognition, it is argued, 'commends a different way of transforming [it]' [63] from that of the arbitrary and tyrannical imposition of a new form without regard to determinations of the existing form - a mode of transformation paradigmatically represented by the Terror of the French Revolution, and taken to be theoretically articulated in the categorical imperatives of Kant's and Fichte's practical philosophies. But philosophy cannot specify *concretely* what this new mode of transformation is. And so, I would argue, it cannot bring about such a transformation. A 'notion of law' will not transform anything.

Rose describes Hegel's new mode of transformation as 'transforming the specific determination in relation to the totality of its real possibilities' [64]. No further specification is possible, because of the law of the determination of ethical life whose formal recognition is seen to lead to recognition of the necessity of such transformation, the specific form of which would determine the mode of transformation, is, *by definition*, unknowable in any ordinary sense of the word 'know'. It can only be known as the negation of all forms of determination which presuppose the independence of condition from conditioned. Hegel thus 'commends' an 'unstatable' alternative, and 'urges' us to seek it through the transformation of determinations which are 'unspecifiable'. This is where Marxism comes in.

The attempted incorporation of Marxist theory within Hegelian phenomenology which Rose undertakes is necessitated by the fact that, despite indications to the contrary, Hegelian phenomenology is incapable of generating knowledge of the concrete determinations which give rise to the correlation between forms of consciousness and forms of social relations which it presents, and by the fact that such knowledge is necessary if speculative experience of the deformations of natural consciousness is to lead to a transformative practice based on (rather than simply against) objective social determinations. But there is a fundamental contradiction here. For the absence from Hegelian phenomenology of a *theory* of objective social determination is no accident. It is a consequence of a particular epistemological argument, the one from which the phenomenological form is itself derived.

This argument maintains that to avoid the ambiguity, and practical impotence, of quasi-transcendentally established, Kantian, metacritical theories of the social determination of consciousness, the standpoint of consciousness must be criticised *immanently*. In a phenomenology, the critique of the standpoint of consciousness is achieved, exclusively, through its adoption; through its 'presentation' in a form designed to reveal its limitation. Such an adoption of the standpoint of consciousness is theoretically incompatible with any social *theory*. It involves the *presentation* of social forms (forms of social relation) in a form designated to provoke the reading consciousness into experiencing their determination of the forms of consciousness to which they correspond and along with which they have been 'presented'.

It does not involve a social theory. 'Theory' is precisely what it rejects.

Rose's ambivalence towards Marxism centres on this problem of the status of theory, and of the theoretical status of Marxism. It is the result of her strident critique of the philosophical foundations of Marxism, as they are presented in Marx's early writings. Her argument is that because of the inadequacy of his conceptualisation of the theory-practice relation, Marx 'misunderstood the relation between his own (later) discourse and the possibility of a transformed politics' [65]; that he misunderstood the *meaning* of his own discourse. She does not object to the analysis in *Capital*, but to 'any presentation of that analysis as a comprehensive account of *capitalism*, ... any pre-judged, imposed "realisation" of that theory, any using it *as a theory, as Marxism*' [66].

Now, it seems to me that what we have here is a straightforward confusion, and false identification, of the realms of theory and practice, in the idea of 'theory' which is presented. The idea of Marxism in the above quotation quite unjustifiably, and almost incomprehensibly, identifies the theorisation of an object, as opposed to its 'presentation', with the 'pre-judged, imposed realisation' of some theory of how that object *ought* to be. No allowance is made for mediations between social theory and politics. And it is *assumed* that the theoretical structure of *Capital* is such that it takes social reality to be an 'object' and ignores the subjective aspect of its reproduction.

Rose's problem is that she has no other conception of theory. Marx is placed within the Kantian problematic on the basis of a cursory reading of a few early texts, in which his philosophical position is neither fully developed nor discussed at any length [67]. But this negligent treatment of Marx (compare it to the care lavished on the details of Hegel's most obscure works!) is not contingent. For Rose's maintenance of the subject-object problematic of modern epistemology, while it allows her to conceptualise the mediation of the objective within the subjective (phenomenologically), rules out the *possibility* of a theoretical mode in which the subjective is mediated within the objective, and *this* is the only possible form of a materialist theory of subjectivity, culture and politics, which aims to go beyond the mere recognition of the 'deformation' of existing forms of phenomenal knowledge to theorise their real determinations and possible modes of transformation. The Hegelian approach which Rose adopts excludes the possibility of an understanding of Marx.

Conclusion: The End of Philosophy?

If *Capital* is not 'a comprehensive account of capitalism', or at least the beginnings of, and basis for, such an account, what is it? And how can it be of use to a theory which aims to present the contradictions between capital and culture, to expose capitalism as a culture? I do not think that there are answers to these questions which do not involve the abuse of basic hermeneutic standards in the reading of *Capital*. But where does this leave Hegel and Hegelian phenomenology?

The short answer to this question is '*outside Marxism*'. Rose's 'critical Marxism' is incoherent. But her idea of Hegelian phenomenology is not. It is merely limited. It represents the end-point of modern philosophy; a point at which the self-critique of epistemology has reached its limit, and from which it can progress no further, condemned to eternal repetition, the never-ending production of a speculative experience of society which remains trapped within the confines of the perspective it knows to be false

[68]. For through her critical reading of Hegel, Rose has arrived at just that point at which Adorno, whose path was more tortuous, came to rest: recognition of the fact that the essential negativity of the dialectic of consciousness means that it can have no resting place, can secure no 'true' knowledge [69].

Footnotes

An earlier version of this essay was read to the Philosophy Society at Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology in February 1982. I would like to thank those present on that occasion, and Chris Arthur, for their comments on the draft.

1 The strangeness of this phrase when taken outside of its strictly pedagogical context is particularly appropriate here, since it locates Rose's project most precisely while at the same time questioning its coherence. (For while historical materialists may be friends of the dialectic - practitioners, hopefully - are they 'friends' of the *idealist* dialectic?) The phrase at once asserts and subverts the idea of materialism. It raises the problem of subjectivity. By reconstructing the idealist dialectic as a dialectic of consciousness in the interests of materialism, Rose too raises the problem of subjectivity. However, as I hope to show below, by accepting the construction of such a dialectic *exclusively from the standpoint of consciousness*, despite the fact that material determinations are acknowledged, the phenomenological dialectic which Rose sanctions is incapable of solving this problem which it so acutely poses.

One of the implications which can be drawn from such an understanding of Rose's text is that while the phrase 'materialist friends of the idealist dialectic' registers a central philosophical problem of materialism - the problem of subjectivity - it does so in terms of categories which give rise to it, but through which it cannot be solved. In this sense, Joe McCarney is right to use the phrase to define a particular theoretical task, but wrong to suggest that it can be used to define a problematic. The construction of a problematic within which the problem of which it is an index can be coherently posed is the task! I would therefore suggest that *RP* becomes, not 'the house journal of "the materialist friends of the idealist dialectic"', but the house journal of those concerned to deconstruct and then reconstruct the enigma of which that phrase is the mark. (Cf. J. McCarney's correspondence, *RP* 80, pp. 51-52.)

2 *HCS*, p. 1.
3 *HCS*, p. 220.
4 *HCS*, p. 214-220.
5 Cf. Habermas, J., *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 2nd edition, H.E.B., London, 1978, Part One, 'The Crisis of the Critique of Knowledge', pp. 1-63.

6 Habermas, J., *op.cit.*, p. vii.
7 Rose does not discuss Kortian's book, though she does refer to it in a footnote as 'an excellent discussion of Habermas' (*HCS*, ft. 181 to ch. 1, p. 228). Elsewhere, it has been described as 'too static and one-sided' because of its attempt to 'thoroughly Hegelianise Habermas' (Kellner, D. and Roderick, R., 'Recent Literature on Critical Theory', pp. 141-170, *New German Critique* 25, p. 165). But it is for just this reason that it is useful here. It highlights the originality of Rose's reading of Hegel and demonstrates its effect on the philosophical foundations of Critical Theory.

8 Kortian, G., *Metacritique*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 29.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

10 Cf. *HCS*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-47.

11 Cf. Horkheimer, M., 'Traditional and Critical Theory', pp. 188-243, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. M.J. O'Connell, New York, 1972.

12 Kortian, G., *op.cit.*, pp. 29-30.

13 'Metacritique is true critique, or rather, it is what critique becomes when it is made radical' - Kortian, G., *op.cit.*, p. 29.

14 *HCS*, p. 14.

15 *HCS*, p. 185.

16 Kortian, G., *op.cit.*, p. 30.

17 Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford, 1979, p. 47.

18 Kortian expresses this distinction very clearly when he says: 'It is precisely by virtue of what is articulated through speculative experience that the discourse of the speculative proposition is to be distinguished from theoretical enterprises which are content to bring together different positive fields, and to pass from one to another by a transference (*metaphora*) which produces a synthesis in the metaphor and not in the concept.' Kortian, G., *op.cit.*, p. 28.

19 *HCS*, pp. 27-33.

20 *HCS*, p. 37.

21 Hegel, G.W.F., *op.cit.*, p. 47.

22 *HCS*, p. 44.

23 *HCS*, p. 42.

24 *HCS*, p. 42.

25 *HCS*, p. 47.

26 For an account of the expositional, rather than strictly deductive, structure of transcendental arguments, cf. S. K rner, 'On the Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions', *Monist* 51, 1967.

27 *HCS*, pp. 45-46.

28 *HCS*, p. 46.

29 Hegel, G.W.F., *op.cit.*, p. 52.

30 Hegel, G.W.F., *op.cit.*, p. 54.

31 *HCS*, p. 46.

32 *HCS*, p. 158.

33 *HCS*, p. 181.

34 *HCS*, p. 153.

35 *HCS*, p. 181.

36 *HCS*, p. 182.

37 'Absolute knowledge is a path which must be continually traversed', *HCS*, p. 182.

38 The phrase is Kortian's. Kortian, G., *op.cit.*, p. 28.

39 Rose's claim is that 'to see the determination in the act is to see beyond the dichotomy between act and non-act'. *HCS*, p. 205. The claim is crucial, for it is the experience of 'seeing the determination in the act', which it is claimed that only a phenomenology can give rise to, that is the basis of Rose's idea of political (educative) experience, which in turn is the basis of her critique of Marxism.

But while the reiteration of such a position may clear our philosophical consciences, and represents a timely reminder of the fallacy of epistemological absolutism, it remains impotent in the face of contemporary reality.

40 *HCS*, p. 49.

41 *HCS*, p. 49. This 'Hegelian' semantics hardly seems as original as Rose appears to suggest. By referring to the 'purely formal' positive aspect of determinate negation, I mean that it is positive insofar as it offers the limited truth about an object, that it is *not* some particular thing. I do not mean to imply that I agree with Hegel that a new form *immediately* arises, i.e. that the dialectic of consciousness is spontaneously self-generating (cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *op.cit.*, p. 51). Nor is Rose committed to this position. By construing spirit as a 'structure of recognition' rather than a metaphysical entity, she is absolved from the sin of making the Idea the subject of history. However, as we shall see, this undermines her claim for the political significance of phenomenology.

42 By referring to the 'purely formal' positive aspect of determinate negation, I mean that it is positive insofar as it offers the limited truth about an object, that it is *not* some particular thing. I do not mean to imply that I agree with Hegel that a new form *immediately*

43 *HCS*, p. 150.

44 *HCS*, p. 152, parentheses added.

45 *HCS*, p. 159, first emphasis added.

46 *HCS*, pp. 59-73.

47 *HCS*, p. 121.

48 *HCS*, p. 106. It is not clear to me how Rose can account for those texts which 'think the absolute as subject' or 'adopt the standpoint of the collectivity' since they transgress the 'critical' rule of relentless negativity. It is for this reason that it only seems possible to understand her reading of Hegel as 'revisionist', for it seems to invalidate a number of his mature texts. Not that this is a bad thing, of course; to attempt to render all of Hegel's texts consistent with each other, and to defend them, would be a bizarrely ahistorical, and futile, enterprise.

49 *HCS*, p. 50, emphasis added.

50 *HCS*, p. 209.

51 *HCS*, p. 220.

52 *HCS*, p. 208. Indeed, Rose describes this as 'the overall intention of Hegel's thought'.

53 See note 42 above.

54 *HCS*, p. 65.

55 *HCS*, p. 202.

56 *HCS*, p. 78, parentheses added.

57 *HCS*, p. 78.

58 While the absolute cannot ever be an object of consciousness, it is suggested that it could be 'known', 'naturally' in a society that was socially transparent insofar as each 'object' of consciousness, each piece of phenomenal knowledge, would contain and display its mediation of every other aspect of phenomenal knowledge, thereby giving the absolute in full, in a certain sense. This is the (purely formal) idea of absolute ethical life.

59 *HCS*, p. 204.

60 The, at least formal, theoretical consistency of Rose's position has not been grasped by other reviewers, who have accused her of falling back upon a left-Hegelian reading, and have then noted the inconsistency between such a position and other claims made for her reading. Such readings of Rose's text fail to get to grips with its central point, because they underestimate its subtlety. Berki, for example, thinking that he is arguing against Rose, concludes his review with the statement that Hegel 'emanates only "restlessness" but no direction', inferring from this, 'he is not "contra sociology"'. But the whole point of Rose's reading is to show the compatibility of Hegel's 'restlessness' with his contrariness to sociology, and thereby to specify *precisely* the way in which Hegel's thought is restless. Berki ignores rather than refutes Rose.

This kind of misunderstanding is compounded by Rose's use of the expression 'speculative thought', and her, at times unqualified, insistence that such 'thought' is thought of the absolute. It is most clearly revealed in the 'Yes, I did', 'No, you didn't' character of the exchange between Rose and Hawthorn on the question of whether Rose actually shows the absolute to be thinkable. As I argue here, Rose seems not to fully grasp the significance of her own position. (Cf. Berki, R.N., 'Thinking the Absolute', *TLS*, 23/10/81, p. 1242; Hawthorn, G., *London Review of Books*, Vol. 3, No. 21, and the exchange of letters between Rose and Hawthorn, *LRB*, Vol. 3, No. 24.

61 *HCS*, p. 184.

62 *HCS*, p. 187.

63 *HCS*, p. 201, parentheses added.

64 *HCS*, p. 191.

65 *HCS*, p. 219.

66 *HCS*, p. 219.

67 The section on Marx, 'The Culture and Fate of Marxism', is only six pages in length. Apart from a reference to the *Grundrisse* to support the misleading claim that 'Marx saw the appeal of art as eternal and ahistorical' (*HCS*, p. 216), the latest text referred to is the 'Theses on Feuerbach', which is treated, quite unjustifiably, as if it were a definitive statement of Marx's philosophical position. In general, the issue of the 'philosophical' status of Marxism is treated as if it were quite unproblematic. (For a detailed, and brilliant, reading of Marx's texts up to 1848, which addresses the dual question of the meaning of philosophy for Marxism, and its fate within Marxism, see Labica, G., *Marxism and the Status of Philosophy*, Harvester Press, 1980, trans. Soper, K. and Ryle, M. Labica's insistence on reading Marx, in the fullest sense of that term, produces an account of his early writings which emphasises the fact, and complexity, of the conceptual development they embody. Rose, on the other hand, both treats these texts as homogeneous, and considers that they represent the philosophical framework in relation to which the later, 'economic' works acquire their meaning.)

68 Cf. *HCS*, p. 182: 'Absolute knowledge is a path which must be continually traversed.'

69 Cf. Adorno, T., *Negative Dialectics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, trans. E.B. Ashton. Rose's own account of Adorno's thought (*The Melancholy Science*, Macmillan, 1978) provides an interesting point for a comparison of Adorno with Rose's Hegel.