

## Review of Hanzel's "The Circular Course of Our Representation"

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In his contribution to the volume "Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic, A Reexamination," Igor Hanzel makes a study of the logic Marx uses in Volume 1 of *Capital*. Each concept he takes up – exchange-value, wage, profit, price – Marx analyses using the "circular" logic exhibited by Hegel in the Logic. This is what Hegel was talking about when he described Philosophy as a "circle of circles." (*Shorter Logic* §15)

Hanzel describes this logic in the following terms: something *appears*, cognition discovers the *ground* of this appearance, a ground which contains more than the appearance, and the appearance is then reconstructed in thought on the basis of a comprehension of the ground. As Hanzel explains, this is the same movement of Science in which Copernicus and Galileo discovered that the heavens were not merely points of light in the sky, but orbs like the Earth; the movement of these orbs through space and the laws of that movement (and the ground for those laws, ...), had to be discovered and explained so that the appearance of their movement as seen from Earth could be explained. Thus, cognition returns to its starting point in what is given in perception, Being. This is the movement which Hegel describes in the Doctrine of Essence. This scientific approach is in contrast to for example explaining the movement of population from the countryside into the cities by the "force of attraction" exerted by the cities (the example Hegel used). Such a method does not go beyond appearance to discover its real ground, but simply applies a new description to what is already given in appearances without adding anything new.

Hanzel examines the German words used for the categories entailed here. *Schein*, usually translated as "illusory being" or "semblance" contains nothing other than what is given in Being. Hanzel makes the interesting observation that *Schein* is a mass noun, not a countable noun and has no plural form. This emphasises the essentially indeterminate character of *Schein*. *Erscheinung* (a countable noun), usually translated as "appearance," Hanzel points out that the German word *Erscheinung* is ambiguous. But "appearance" is ambiguous as well, and in just the same way. Hanzel proposes to translate *Erscheinung* as "appearance" where it indicates what is to be explained through its *Grund* (ground), and "manifestation" as the phenomenon once explained from its ground. "Appearance" has the same ambiguity, and in Hegel's use of *Erscheinung* or Appearance is intentionally "ambiguous," "double-barrelled" to use John Dewey's expression. That is, Appearance is the phase of cognition in which what appears is the manifestation *of something else*, the ground of the appearance. The concept of "appearance" implies a reference to something else of which it is the appearance *of*. This is the contradiction *implicit* in the concept of appearance. To use two different words, each of them supposedly lacking in internal contradiction, in place of the word with the implicit contradiction obscures Hegel's method and destroys the "movement."

Likewise, in my view, Hanzel, like everyone else in this discourse, misunderstands the Hegelian term, Essence or *Wesen*, as the *final outcome* of

going behind appearances, in the sense of when we say “the essence of matter is such and such.” But by Essence, Hegel meant the *whole process* of going behind what is given, and it is an *endless* process. It is one thing to say that price is the manifestation of value, but that is quite insufficient, for example, to explain the cost of a 2-bedroom house in Melbourne in August 2024.

At key moments in the movement of cognition the thinker is able to capture what is given in a nutshell, so to speak, and this is the Concept, *Begriff*, not ground (*Grund*). The Logic of Essence is continued after the phase of Appearance (the dialectic of Form and Content) via Actuality (the dialectic of Cause and Effect, Possibility and Necessity). Ultimately, the concept is concretised by *successive* such insights which go beyond the process of Essence, looking behind appearances, forming a concept which captures the process in a nutshell, so to speak. Successive such insights merge and modify one another as described in the Logic of the Concept to reproduce concrete reality in thought.

Hanzel is not entirely mistaken in his rendering of Volume I of *Capital* in terms merely of the dialectic of Appearance. *Capital* is a paradigmatic text which set out only to reveal the most general laws of capitalist development. It does not address itself to any really-existing capitalist economy, only capital in general. But if the topic is the relation between *Capital* and the *Logic*, it is worth mentioning if your analysis is that *Capital* Volume I reflects only the first two phases of Essence, not Actuality and the Concept.

I should mention, too, that ground is somewhat misrepresented, too. The movement from phenomenon to ground begins with the identification of some contradiction in conception of the phenomenon and what is discovered by going behind the phenomenon is the grounds of the contradiction which is itself to be revealed as another, albeit deeper, contradiction. It is in this way that the movement of Essence is an essentially infinite movement, not simply the finite revelation of what something really is.

This conception of the Hegel’s Logic as encapsulated by the idea of going behind the appearance to reveal it as the manifestation of “essence” (substituting the word “essence” for “concept”) is an impoverished representation of the Logic. As Hanzel says, Copernicus not only defended this idea (as he should have) but *exhausted* its content entirely. There is more to Science than that.

I think Hanzel is right though to see Marx’s use of Hegelian logic as manifested *multiple times* in the course of Volume I of *Capital* in how he dealt with each of the key insights and concepts, rather than looking for an image of the *Logic* in the overall trajectory of *Capital*. The analysis of the commodity relation is surely not the only insight in *Capital*?

Hanzel’s reflections of “capital as subject” are interesting. He cites Marx (v. 1, ch. IV) observing that value is an *automatic subject*: “in truth ... value becomes the subject of a process in which ... it valorises itself.” “a self-moving substance” ... “as such capital.” But Hanzel claims that Marx is using the idea here in the sense of an *appearance* of capital being an independent subject. This has to be the case because in Ch. IV of Volume I Marx is just introducing the concept of capital; the task of revealing its real dynamics still lies far ahead. Self-valorisation is an appearance, not real ground.

It is also worth noting that Hanzel can see the logic of Reflection and Appearance in Marx's analysis of value in the first part of Capital Volume 1, even though the concepts being dealt with here are obviously those of quantity and quality. Others, such as Chris Arthur, have taken this subject matter to mean that it is the Logic of Being which is entailed in this section of *Capital*. But Hanzel's interpretation of the *circular logic* exhibited in each concept cannot be extended to the Doctrine Being and the Logic of Essence where different forms of movement apply.

But then Hanzel asks whether Marx's idea of capital corresponds to the concept of Subject in the *Science of Logic*. "The ground of capital as a type of social relation," he says, so Marx is *not* using subject-substance or the concept of Subject in the Concept Logic in his observation about an "automatic subject" but from the Objective Logic, i.e., Essence.

But he goes on:

"Still, certain categories of Hegel's Subjective Logic can also be realistically reinterpreted. They could be viewed as corresponding to categories involved in the creation of thought projects of the future transformation of the (natural and social) world." ... [as in] Hegel's concepts in Teleology. ... "certain categories of the Subjective [i.e., Concept] Logic could also be realistically interpreted, that is, interpreted in such a way as to grasp in categories the structure of human practical action in transforming the world. Here I mean especially Hegel's cluster *Life* with its subcluster: *the living individual*, *the life process* and *the genus*." (p. 239)

Hanzel here suggests that the concepts found in the third section of the Logic of the Concept, the Idea, could be utilised to understand social movements. But surely this can only be the case if the *entirety* of the Logic of the Concept is realised in social life. But Hanzel rejects the idea of the category of Subject being relevant, because "capital is a social relation." So is a social movement.

Further, Hanzel wants to limit this application to *intentional* movements, as opposed to, for example, movements manifested by economic institutions and tendencies. I think he is mistaken here. While Structuralism is mistaken in ruling the Subject out of social science altogether, limiting the Idea to *intentional* subjects is also a mistake. Even social movements are not manifestations of a single will, but rather the combined process of many like or even antagonistic wills. Isn't it possible that social processes such as these could also be grasped with the concepts of the Subjective Logic?

Altogether, Hanzel offers a bewildering array on angles on the *Logic/Capital* relation, but his article is fruitful in the way he has brought out the richness of the relation.