

The End of Philosophy

Roberto Mozzachiodi

Abstract

This chapter aims to introduce the problematic of the end of philosophy in Marx and argue for its central place in the historical development of debates around the relation of philosophy to Marxism. Surveying the motif as it appears across the writings of Marx and Engels, the chapter will clarify the distinct formulations that make up the textual sources of this problem. It will then trace the waning of this problem during the Second International and locate its re-instantiation in the interwar years as a challenge to the so-called Marxist orthodoxy. It will then follow the displacement of this interwar formulation into French debates of the Cold War period, focusing specifically on Henri Lefebvre's role in re-surfacing the motif to challenge Stalinist dogmatism in the French Communist Party. The chapter will conclude by linking this longer pre-history to Louis Althusser's effort to respond to the end of philosophy injunction in Marx during the mid-sixties and track the influence that this legacy has had upon contemporary debates around Marxism and philosophy.

Keywords

Henri Lefebvre, Louis Althusser, György Lukács, Karl Korsch, French Communism, Leninist Philosophy

It is often assumed that Marx's thought can be conceptualized around a 'break' that divides his corpus into the early philosophical writing and the mature non-philosophical work of the 1850s and 1860s. This periodization is generally understood to be synonymous with the intellectual enterprise of Louis Althusser. As such, it is often considered a peculiarly French theoretical preoccupation – not least as the problem itself has come to be associated with a distinctly French conceptual idiom (i.e. the 'problematic' 'the epistemological break' [Althusser 2005, p. 32]).¹ However, the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx, which formed the basis of Althusser's rigid compartmentalisation of Marx and Engels's body of work, pre-dates this formulation, and indeed does not originate in the post-war French context. The 'end of philosophy' problematic connects the more provincial dimensions of the intellectual debates that took place inside and outside of the French Communist Party during the 1950s and 60s to a longer and more international theoretical trajectory that encompasses the broader sweep of philosophical debates that took place within the Second and Third Internationals. In particular it links them to a set of dissenting philosophical voices that were raised during the early years of the Third International. The dissenting voices of the young György Lukács and Karl Korsch emerged at a moment when there existed a genuinely explorative and experimental research culture attached to the gradual uncovering of Marx and Engels collected works. In this context, philosophers such as Lukács and Korsch active within the Third International reintroduced the spectre of philosophy into Marx to criticise a latent theoretical alliance that had formed across political and analytic splits of the Second and Third International around a superficial grasp of Marx and Engels's claim to have broken from Classical German Philosophy.

The interrogations that were pursued during this brief opening, when the question of

Hegel's relation to the Marxist tradition was yet to be settled, brought to the surface a problem that would cast a looming shadow over all subsequent theoretical trajectories taking Marx as a starting point: namely, how to put an end to philosophy, as Marx variously proposes, without by that token taking up a philosophical position to do so. This would lead to a potentially infinite regress: by means of what philosophical position does a Marxist judge the end of philosophy to be accomplished? What linked the anti-anti-philosophical gestures of Korsch and young Lukács was a dissatisfaction with the philosophical preconceptions that underpinned most authoritative interpretations of the end of philosophy motif in Marx. The consistent factor in these interpretations was a philosophically naïve, or simply unsubstantiated, justification for the rejection of philosophy as such or its dethroning by an insurmountable theoretical substitute such as positive science.

In what follows, I will summarily trace the development of the end of philosophy motif as it appears in the writings of Marx and Engels. I will periodise the formation of the end of philosophy problematic, as it becomes a prism for understanding Marx and criticising the ensuing legacy of authoritative treatments of Marx. I will then conclude by tracing the displacement of this problem into the French context. In particular, I want to trace the pre-history of Althusser's summation of the various failed attempts to respond to the end of philosophy conceit in Marx, which constituted the departure point for his own response in *For Marx*. This pre-history primarily revolves around the French Communist Party's journal *La Nouvelle Critique* [NC: 1948 – 1980] which was the intellectual forum in which Althusser would publish many of the era defining texts that would be included in *For Marx* and *The Humanist Controversy* during the sixties. Prior to Althusser's interventions in the journal, NC was also the arena in and around which the question of Marx's relation to philosophy and its end re-entered the fray of Marxist intellectual discussions in the mid-fifties. György Lukács and Karl Korsch's questions concerning the end of philosophy in Marx, which had been pitched against the orthodoxy in the inter-war years, took on a new relevance in the Cold War context, especially in NC which, in the first ten years of its existence, was thoroughly in thrall to Soviet cultural policy.

A central persona in these debates was Henri Lefebvre, who between 1948 and 1957 was on the editorial board of NC. Though underrepresented in the growing *corpus* of English-language translations of his work, the period of 1954–56 was among the most productive of Lefebvre's career. During these years, Lefebvre was pulled into a number of debates that sharpened his own interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx. The continuity of this problem within post-war French Marxist theory across the different historical conjunctures represented by Lefebvre and Althusser can be explained by the different eras the two represented in NC and the changing intellectual culture of the PCF more broadly. But it can also be explained by the persistent appeal that the question of philosophy in Marx has had, to this very day, over militant philosophers who remain unconvinced by the prevailing denials of philosophy both in the name of Marxism and anti-Marxism.

The End of Philosophy in Marx

Marx ascribed to the domain of philosophy as such, and of German Idealism specifically, a number of functions and meanings. Indeed, the contexts in which he engaged with philosophy, either within its discursive register or as an object of inquiry, spanned a range of problematics. These engagements corresponded to a specific set of intellectual, political and methodological ambitions and comprised distinct sets of disciplinary reference points at given moments in his scholarly and political career. No less discontinuous and shaped by the problematics in which he was writing was the motif of the end of philosophy that appeared at various moments in his writing. In order then to acknowledge the divergent intentions that Marx had with his different philosophical ends, it is necessary briefly to outline at least four distinct formulations of the end of philosophy that appear in Marx and Engels's writings and that will form the textual reference for the hermeneutic legacy I will be dealing with in this chapter.

The first appears in the *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843–4) and is later reformulated in a slightly different context in the *Paris Manuscripts*, also known as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844).² In Marx's *Critique* the German proletariat is presented as the force negating the bourgeois world. On the basis of its universal suffering and social power, the proletariat is conferred the desire and means to overthrow the present state of things. This it is to do as a material fulfilment of history's intrinsic dialectical movement, as laid-down, albeit only speculatively, by Hegelian philosophy. To that effect, Marx concludes:

As philosophy finds its *material* weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people, the emancipation of the *Germans* into *human beings* will be accomplished. ... The *emancipation of the German* is the *emancipation of the human being*. The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy (Marx & Engels 1975, 187).

In other contexts, this end of philosophy has been labelled the 'realisation' thesis (Feenberg 2014). The idea here is that the aspirations of Hegelian philosophy to deliver consciousness from estrangement – to dis-alienate man by ascending dialectically to a rational thought that aligns with the essence of reality – is an end that can be realised only *as* and *by* a real force in the world. Only a material force such as the one embodied by the desire for social change intrinsic to the historical condition of the proletariat would alleviate the *real* conditions of estrangement that precede the estrangement of consciousness.³ Such a material force would thereby transcend the limits of Hegelian philosophy that is only able to conceive of this dis-alienation in the form of advancing and increasing conceptual adequacy but not according to a transformation of the material conditions that generate alienation as such. Yet, in the so-called realisation thesis, Marx does not suggest abandoning philosophy as a reference point for thinking about emancipation from alienation. Rather he alludes to the coincidence of philosophy's ambition to construct a non-normative concept which is adequate to what is, on the one hand, and the realisation of the destiny of the proletariat, on the other. The encounter is given in the form "of the mutual 'abolition' of the two protagonists." (Kouvelakis 2018, 332) Marx

therefore welds the enterprise of philosophy to the fate of the proletariat by conferring upon the latter a set of properties that draw their significance from the former.

It is in this sense that Marx also argues that the “weapon of criticism” (Marx & Engels 1975, 182) plays a supplementary role to that material force necessary to realise philosophy. Marx here insists that philosophy is in fact a material force – a sentiment that goes back to an article published a year before in which he claimed: “Philosophy does not exist outside the world, any more than the brain exists outside man because it is not situated in the stomach. But philosophy, of course, exists in the world through the brain before it stands with its feet on the ground” (184).⁴ Even if philosophy professes an understanding of the world that ascribes to thought a transcendental status, it nevertheless occupies minds that exist in the real world. And, insofar as it retains a real existence, alongside its ideal existence, it does not disappear by a simple refusal or by “muttering a few trite and angry phrases about it” (180).⁵ In that sense, philosophy cannot be abolished without making that abolishment a reality. Accordingly, the supersession pursued within philosophy is necessary to, even if ultimately dependent upon, the proletariat.

The second end of philosophy is the one we encounter in the 11th of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it”⁶ (Marx & Engels 1969, 15). The aphoristic sentences that make up the *Theses* were composed in the spring of 1845 and later published by Engels in 1888 in his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, where the text was first given its title, prior to its inclusion in the *German Ideology* which was first published in 1932. Given this peculiar publication history⁷ and the aphoristic quality of all eleven theses it is harder to extract a single meaning from thesis 11, either from the text alone or the context. The common understanding of the 11th thesis is that it simply advances an imperative to change the world in actions over mere discursive interpretation. Moreover, the association it makes between the limitations of interpretation and what philosophers have so far achieved, and the presentation of change as a corrective to those limitations, has often led to the conclusion that Marx is advancing a claim about his own position vis-à-vis what philosophers have accomplished hitherto – that is, an implicit assertion that his position has exceeded the limits of philosophy as such. Read as a continuation of the thrust of the realisation thesis, the 11th thesis can appear as an injunction for political revolution – one with which Marx affiliated his own position – over a revolution in philosophy alone.

Later, however, the *Theses* would be invested with a somewhat different semantic charge by a number of periodisations appearing in Marx and Engels’s later prefatory remarks. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx would say of his and Engels’s intention “in the spring of 1845”, when the theses were written, that it was “to set forth together our conception as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience.” This is one of the few definitive periodising markers that Marx provides of his relation to philosophy following the manuscripts from which the *German Ideology* would be culled. It is one that retroactively ties the position beyond the ‘mere interpretation’ expressed in the 11th thesis to the content of his mature critique of political economy. It therefore implicitly marked a discontinuity with the so-called realisation thesis. In the same text, the status of the 1845 manuscripts, including the *Theses*, is inflected somewhat differently again. He says: “We

abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose – self-clarification.” (Marx & Engels 1969, 505).⁸ In other words, the texts themselves did not record a definitive settling of accounts with post-Hegelian philosophy but had the merit of allowing Marx and Engels to work out how to move beyond philosophy – even if the results of this clarification would be expressed elsewhere.

Some forty years after the *Theses* were drafted, Engels would consecrate the legacy of the 11th thesis for a generation of Marxist commentators to follow in his foreword to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888). There, echoing Marx’s statements in the 1859 preface, Engels explained the purpose of his text: it was precisely to carry out the work that had been left unfinished in the *German Ideology* – that is, to produce “a short, coherent account of our relation to the Hegelian philosophy, of how we proceeded, as well as of how we separated, from it”. Reflecting on the status of the 1845 manuscripts in the light of this ambition he says:

I have once again ferreted out and looked over the old manuscript of 1845–46 [*The German Ideology*] ...in an old notebook of Marx’s I have found the 11 Theses on Feuerbach, printed here as an appendix. These are notes hurriedly scribbled down for later elaboration, absolutely not intended for publication, but invaluable as the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook (Engels 2009, 1).

The philological significance that Engels attached to the *Theses on Feuerbach* not only reinforced the idea that the *Theses* recorded a significant threshold as regards the division between Marx and Engels’s earlier philosophical conscience and the new world outlook of a materialist conception of history but also framed the significance of this new world outlook in terms of an ‘end of classical German philosophy’.

At the end of the text, Engels claimed that Marx’s “conception [of history] puts an end to philosophy in the realm of history, just as the dialectical conception of nature makes all natural philosophy both unnecessary and impossible” (Engels 2009, 60-1). The implication was that Marx’s conception of historical development, based upon a scientific investigation of the laws shaping material processes and individual motives, had rendered obsolete a philosophical conception of history. In that sense, Engels revised somewhat the realisation thesis. The “German working-class movement” remained the “the inheritor of German classical philosophy”. Now, however, this encounter would be composed of the will of the working class to act upon history and a scientific theory that aims to produce an objective account of the interconnected material processes that comprise the movement of history.

This reading represents yet another inflection of the 11th thesis. According to the framework of the opposition between ruminative philosophical interpretation and practical change, Engels posits a necessary theoretical component to the revolutionary impulse of the proletariat. Unlike the reading of the 11th thesis that takes at face value the injunction for political struggle over discursive interpretation, Engels’s reading confers to scientific theory a supplementary but necessary role in this dynamic. But where the weapon of criticism had been the theoretical arm of the proletariat in Marx’s realisation thesis, for Engels, it was the progressive development of scientific discourse that was yoked together with the proletariat in its revolutionary course.

Engels's revision brings together arguments that Marx put forward about the epistemological superiority of a dialectical and materialist conception of history over philosophy with earlier arguments about the role of the proletariat as the bearer of philosophy's destiny. Echoes of the former can be traced back to the *German Ideology* where Marx refers to the inadequacies of philosophy on specifically epistemological grounds:

Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty phrases about consciousness end, and real knowledge has to take their place. When the reality is described, a self-sufficient philosophy [*die selbständige Philosophie*] loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever. (Marx & Engels 2010a, 37)

Here the end of philosophy results from the revelation of philosophy's erroneous departure point (the mind as primary) on the basis of a new departure point (matter as primary). In this formulation, Marx argues that the chief defect of (Hegelian) philosophy is its assumption that the criteria of objectivity are accessible by way of an application of a dialectical method to speculative propositions. In this sense philosophy comes to an end, not according to its own theoretical criteria, but because a sounder theoretical enterprise has proven the limitations of its epistemological aspirations from the outside. But in Engels's elucidation of this theoretical advancement, the proletariat, whose historical destiny continues to derive from and correspond to the realisation of philosophy, is assisted in its mission by a theoretical enterprise that has in fact outstripped philosophy.

The last formulation of the end of philosophy that is of relevance to our argument is one in which Engels appears to assign philosophy a posthumous vocation. In *On Dialectics* (1878) and *Dialectics of Nature* (1883), Engels describes philosophy as returning to life for the sole purpose of exacting revenge over the natural sciences "posthumously" for the "latter having deserted it." In *On Dialectics*, Engels registered that the desertion of Hegel in favour of positivistic natural science reflected the epistemological exigencies of a socio-economic reality more than a genuine theoretical development. As such, "dialectics too was thrown overboard...and so there was a helpless relapse into the old metaphysics" (Engels 1959, 456)⁹ in scientific discourses. With this turn, long-refuted philosophical reflexes and abstractions returned in new theoretical guises - especially as regards the conceptual ordering of results furnished by empirical science. Engels would make the point most vividly in *Dialectics of Nature*:

Natural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot, however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly ... from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy but unfortunately in most cases to the worst philosophy, and those who abuse

philosophy most are slaves to precisely the worst vulgarized relics of the worst philosophies ... they are still under the domination of philosophy. It is only a question whether they want to be dominated by a bad, fashionable philosophy or by a form of theoretical thought which rests on acquaintance with the history of thought and its achievements (Engels 1934, 210).

For Engels, the only way of countering such philosophical impulses from diminishing the genuine achievements of positive knowledge was to “return, in one form or another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking” (Engels 1959, 457). This, Engels claimed, was the objective of *Capital*, wherein Marx applied the dialectical method “to the facts of an empirical science, political economy” (460). From this perspective, dialectical philosophy must not come to an end, precisely because old metaphysical philosophy survives its own supersession by implanting one-sided thought determinations into the theoretical discourse that takes its place.

For Engels, therefore, all that survived of dialectical philosophy’s previous incarnation was its unique capacity to assist the conceptual arrangement and development of scientific understanding. According to Engels’s *Anti-Dühring* [1877], what remained of philosophy in Marx was a “science of thought and its laws – formal logic and dialectics” (40). Marx echoed this sentiment in his *Postface to the Second Edition* (1873) of *Capital* where, against his contemporaries who treated Hegel as a “dead dog”, he avowed his direct inheritance from his dialectical method. In *Capital*, Marx admitted, one finds a rational application of the dialectical method in the presentation of scientific material. The dialectic, Marx added, “does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary” (Marx 1982, 102) and for that reason served the purpose of lifting conclusions made within bourgeois science out of their state of abstraction.¹⁰ In this light, the afterlife of Hegelian philosophy appeared in the persistence of the negative as a critical heuristic in Marx’s treatment of one-sided thought determinations in bourgeois political economy. But the precise nature of the relationship between Marx and Hegel’s dialectical method was never explicitly dealt with by Marx. Even while he acknowledged taking cues from Hegel’s *Logic* while drafting the *Grundrisse* (1857–8) and engaged directly, if very briefly, with the question of his method in the notes that make up the 1857 Introduction to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1978, 81-109), Marx never managed to write those “2 or 3 sheets” that were intended to make “accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified” (Marx & Engels 2010b, 249).¹¹ On that basis, the writings of Engels dealing with this question in a more sustained manner would become an influential stand-in for interpreters of the following generation. Yet, as we will see, the late Engelsian inspiration, which shifted the register from the political to the epistemological, would play an important role in postwar elaborations of the end of philosophy problematic in the French context (Althusser & Balibar 2009, Lecourt 1975).

Against the Orthodoxy

The end of philosophy became an explicitly acknowledged interpretive problem in readings of Marx, especially for those committed to a critique of the legacy of ‘official’ interpretations, following the decline of the Second International and in the

midst of the consolidation of the Third International. It emerged when a number of European philosophers, studied in Hegelian philosophy, either through sustained direct engagement or through the work of interpretive mediators, found their way toward Marx and the Communist Party of their own countries. Arriving at Marx and the Communist movement in this way, they came with an awareness of the motifs of the end that ran through Hegel's body of work; the end of religion, the end of ethical life, the end of art and the end of philosophy itself in absolute knowledge and its realisation in the state (Rose 1995). Of this grouping of dissident Marxist communists, the most prominent figures were Henri Lefebvre, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács.

In each case these thinkers would reintegrate the full scope of the philosophical perspective and ambitions of the Hegelian project into their readings of Marx to get to the root of what distinguished his philosophical intervention and in particular the nature of his injunction to end or realise philosophy. In this sense they brought interpretative perspectives over the Marxian corpus that formed around the discontinuity of the motif of the end of philosophy in Marx's writing. This inquiry was pitched against unreflective understandings of Marx which papered over these ambiguities, and, in that regard, the way philosophy had been 'shoved unceremoniously aside'.¹²

These figures of the so-called "Western Marxist"¹³ camp explicitly contested the orthodoxy according to the framework of the end of philosophy problematic. Karl Korsch was among the first Marxist thinkers to launch a polemic against the philosophical incoherence of the orthodoxy according to the conceptual framework of the end of philosophy in his *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923) (Korsch 2013, 49/51-52). There and in his addendum to the text, *The Present State of the Problem of 'Marxism and Philosophy'* (1930), Korsch described the interpretative norms that had hardened around the question of philosophy in Marxism within and outside the Second International. These norms, which had distinct theoretical constituencies – mainly of the neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian variety (Sheehan 2017) – corresponded to a front that had formed around the question of the specificity of Marx's philosophy, resulting in the end, as in the terminus point, of philosophical development. He counselled against the pervasive philosophical eclecticism then characterising the Second International:

Any thorough elucidation of the relationship between 'Marxism and philosophy' must start from the unambiguous statements of Marx and Engels themselves that a necessary result of their dialectical-materialist standpoint was the supersession, not only of bourgeois idealist philosophy, but *simultaneously* of all philosophy *as such*.

In Korsch's view, the lack of attention paid to these statements reflected the continued hold of bourgeois conceptions of philosophy over the intended practical purchase of Marx's philosophical intervention. Such conceptions obscured from view the central problems for Marxist philosophy:

The problem is...how we should understand the abolition of philosophy of which Marx and Engels spoke – mainly in the 1840s, but on many later occasions as well. *How* should this process be accomplished, or has it already

been accomplished...Should this abolition of philosophy be regarded as accomplished so to speak once and for all by a single intellectual deed of Marx and Engels? Should it be regarded as accomplished only for Marxists, or for the whole proletariat, or for the whole of humanity...what is the relationship of Marxism to philosophy so long as this arduous process has not yet attained its final goal, the abolition of philosophy? (Korsch 2013, 49, 51-2)

In Korsch's view, the philosophical inertia that led to a revival of pre-Marxist philosophical positions to supplement a Marxist position in politics was a reflection and a reinforcement of the limits reached in the course of the concrete historical development of bourgeois society. He argued that most of the major thinkers associated with the Second International resolved that philosophical questions were unimportant in view of the new historical reality facing the Second International – a situation that had both theoretical and political dimensions. Theoretically, the philosophical problematic had been overtaken by natural science. Politically, parties affiliated with Marxist theory were gaining mass support within the working classes and a new International purified of its non-Marxist elements was on the horizon. In Korsch's view, when the orthodoxy did not uphold this tolerant indifference to philosophical questions, they either accepted that Marxism was a coherent scientific system that surpassed the explanatory power of philosophy as such, that it consisted of a fully-fledged philosophical doctrine embracing all philosophical questions or that it was a theoretical discourse that required philosophical supplementation from other metaphysical systems. All these cases represented a general philosophical blockage that had its counterpart in the forestalling of a truly revolutionary social practice.

Following Marx of the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Korsch insisted on the necessity of grasping “philosophies and other ideological systems in theory as realities, and to treat them in practice as such.” (72) This meant neither rejecting ideological systems in favour of pure science or political praxis shorn of theoretical principal, nor reverting to prior bourgeois philosophy systems. Instead, it meant linking philosophical inquiry to the requisites of revolutionary practice, mindful of the fact that practice is itself encumbered by the reality of ideological systems including philosophy. Korsch, therefore, stressed the dialectical relationship between intellectual activity, social consciousness and social practice as part of the total movement of revolutionary practice. From that perspective Korsch viewed Marx's critique of political economy as a continuation of his critique of ideological realities carried into the system of bourgeois economics. It was thus aimed at demystifying the specific forms of social consciousness corresponding to bourgeois economics in order to usher in the practical disintegration of its ideological hold over reality.

At roughly the same moment, Lukács had begun to problematize and re-instantiate Marx's realization thesis in what would become his *History and Class Consciousness*.¹⁴ His book raised deeper questions concerning Marx's relationship with the philosophical tradition and on that basis probed the connection between the proletariat, philosophy and its realization (Freenberg 2014, 91-121). The resultant inquiry offers a profoundly revised account of the end of philosophy in Marx by linking together insights from Marx's *Critique of Hegel*, the Hegelian conception of totality, contemporaneous theories of reification (namely Weber and Simmel), and an elucidation of the material and social abstractions described in *Capital*. In Lukács's version of the end of philosophy, the discrete reified practices constitutive of the

totality of capitalist social relations, and by extension the antinomies of bourgeois philosophy (i.e. the gulf between subject and object, freedom and necessity, value and fact etc.), were to be overcome in the coincidence of a knowledge of that totality and the praxis of the proletarian class-subject.

These efforts to reckon with the end of philosophy problem in Marx in the first quarter of the 20th century would serve as the intellectual sources for some of the most significant strands of Marxist theory in the following decades. It is well known that Korsch's and Lukács's formulations of the end of philosophy in Marx were central to the diverse theoretical developments that grew out of the Frankfurt School. Lukács's reconfiguration of the realisation thesis was the starting point for Theodor W. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* [1966]¹⁵ while Korsch's challenge to the evolutionist proclivities of the orthodoxy would inform Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of a non-linear historical materialism (Löwy 1995).

Lefebvre, Althusser and the End of Philosophy

In the formation of this intellectual heritage around the question of the end of philosophy in Marx, the place of French Communist intellectual culture of the interwar period tends to be overlooked in favour of the better-known trajectory of the Frankfurt School. Yet, curiously, the French course has played a considerable role in determining the development of the problem in later debates. Here I will focus specifically on the course that develops out of Lefebvre's role in this theoretical genealogy. I take his part in establishing the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx within the PCF during the Stalin years as foundational to a conceptual lineage that takes on distinct expressions in debates of the sixties in France. Lefebvre and his collaborator Norbert Guterman played a key role in introducing French readers to much of Marx's early writings and to markedly philosophical versions of Engels and Lenin. In the late twenties those revolving around the *Revue Marxiste* (1928–9) received from David Riazanov, the director of the Marx and Engels Institute in Moscow, untranslated versions of the *1844 Manuscripts*, the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Engels's *On Dialectics*, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* and *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*. From the year of the journal's existence up to the establishment of the Vichy government and the institution of the *Otto List*, which blacklisted a number of Guterman and Lefebvre's books,¹⁶ they would translate these texts and provide introductory commentary deeply informed by their pre-Marxist philosophical interrogations. Lefebvre's interwar intellectual concerns primarily revolved around the idealist philosophy of Schelling and Hegel. He was among the earliest generation of French intellectuals to use German idealism to challenge the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson which held a dominant position in French academia during the interwar years (Burkhard 2000). His trajectory toward Marxism out of such philosophical predilections was formed in a context of mounting political sympathy for fascism and nationalism across Europe. (Elden 2014, 67-9) Thus, by the postwar period his interpretation of Marx would substantially part ways from both the Stalinist orthodoxy and the new wave of existentialist Marxism (Poster 1975). Lefebvre was part of that initial generation of dissident Marxist philosophers who were contemporaneous with the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution and witnessed the growth of fascism across Europe. Like Lukács and Korsch, he played a role in shedding light over unknown dimensions of the Marxian and Marxist

corpus and followed Marx's own trajectory through German Idealism before reaching the end of philosophy in Marxism and political militancy. The reality of political activism within the Stalinist Party would however profoundly alter Lefebvre's understanding of the end of philosophy motif in Marx. (Lefebvre 1959, 33–7)

I will not dwell on the philological significance of Lefebvre's formative engagements with Marx and Hegel from the interwar years. Rather, I want to explore another overlooked period of Lefebvre's intellectual trajectory – a moment when the legacy of the end of philosophy motif had acquired renewed relevance in the French context. It is at this juncture that the question of the relationship of philosophy to Marx would be significantly inflected by the prevailing conditions of both Marxist intellectual culture and academic philosophical debate in France in the fifties.

1955 saw two important publications in the field of French Marxist debate. The first of these was Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the Dialectic*. This book brought attention to the interpretative centrality of the end of philosophy motif in reading Marx. Merleau-Ponty cast the legacies of Korsch and Lukács, which had been repressed in the Stalinist years, as the prelude to his own effort to definitively establish the philosophical status of Marxism against the anti-philosophical bent of the PCF and the existential Marxism and 'ultra-Bolshevism' of Jean-Paul Sartre. Following Andrei Zhdanov's cultural policy in the Soviet context, the PCF's spokesman on intellectuals Laurent Casanova developed a campaign in the late forties to minimize the initiative of intellectuals and their independence in relation to the party and its theoretical orientations (Caute 1964). The emergence of the party journal *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1948 coincided with the PCF's embrace of Zhdanovist cultural policy. For the first 7 years of its existence, the journal was the most dogmatic adherent to Soviet theoretical prescriptions among the party reviews. The writers of *NC* took up the gauntlet thrown down by Zhdanov to form a 'philosophical front' (Zhdanov 1950, 103). On the release of *Adventures of the Dialectic*, the PCF held a conference in which a number of *NC*'s most prominent intellectuals, including Lefebvre, issued ideological rebukes against the text. The publication of the transcript of the conference included a letter written by Lukács in which he distanced himself from *HACC* and by extension the aims of Merleau-Ponty in reinstating the urgency of its inquiries (Garaudy 1956).

In the same year, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* was published in full by the PCF's publishing house Éditions Sociales. This was the first French translation of all the notebooks after Lefebvre and Guterman's publication of the notebooks on Hegel (Lefebvre & Guterman 1938). A lot was at stake for the PCF in maintaining the image of a particular type of philosophical Lenin in the 50s; especially one untainted by Hegelian residues. The reception of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* was very much shaped by this historical context.

Within this context, Lefebvre took up a position that skirted the various debates and fronts that were forming around the publication of Lenin's notebooks and Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures*. Lefebvre's somewhat tendentious manoeuvre in these debates was both to contest Merleau-Ponty's effort to re-establish Marxism as a philosophy, and to avoid rehearsing Lenin's reflection theory as was the common recourse of PCF intellectuals in their dealing with counter-theorisations of subjectivity. Lefebvre did this by advancing Lenin's commentary on Hegel. In a lecture entitled "The

Philosopher and His Time”, delivered at the Hungarian Institute in Paris in June 1955 to mark Lukács’s 70th birthday, Lefebvre dwelt upon the attention the Hungarian philosopher’s 1922 book had gained in contemporaneous French debates (Lefebvre 1985). He argued that a philosophical alliance had formed across the ideological fronts represented respectively by “the team of young Marxists” of *NC* and by Merleau-Ponty, precisely around their shared adherence to the young Lukács’s interpretation of the realisation thesis in Marx. Merleau-Ponty praised the way *HACC* enriched the philosophical dimensions of Marxism but lamented the fact that Lukács had been subsequently forced to accept “the lessons of philosophical Leninism” (Merleau-Ponty 1974, 68) which had become a philosophy of conformity. The unity between these two antagonists, one defending Marxism as a philosophy in its explicit fidelity to the young Lukács and the other representing Marxism as a political ideology in its explicit rejection of young Lukács, was forged in what Lefebvre saw as their shared understanding of the nexus between consciousness, the proletariat and the realization of philosophy. For Lefebvre, the assumption in *HACC* that the consciousness of the proletariat had a privileged historical character, grounded in its identity with an absolute knowledge of the historical process, ultimately aligned with the notion of a proletarian science which had been adopted by the writers of *NC*. The idea of a proletarian science had its basis in the assumption that because scientific knowledge was the product of a society divided into classes, science itself, at the level of the concept, carried a class character. Only a science based on the universal subject could challenge its ideological instrumentalisation by a dominant class and move scientific knowledge toward objectivity (Lecourt 1977). This, as far as Lefebvre was concerned, was the argument from *HACC* heralded by Merleau-Ponty against the Stalinist orthodoxy. The ideological fault lines dividing the two fronts obscured the philosophical consonance that had been reached in their conflation of the consciousness of the proletariat and an absolute (or objective scientific) knowledge of the historical processes. For Lefebvre, if the proletariat had already become the bearer of the destiny of philosophy by dint of the general form that consciousness takes up in the process of proletarianisation, then the coincidence of the subject and the object of the revolution must necessarily have already taken place.

In the same year, Lefebvre restaged this same critique in a debate with Roger Garaudy (Garaudy & Lefebvre 1955) who had condemned Lefebvre’s dalliances with the ‘bourgeois’ sociologist Georges Gurvitch, who himself had explicitly criticised *HACC* on the basis that it dealt “with a philosophy and even more precisely with a metaphysics of the proletarian class” (Lefebvre 1985, 29).¹⁷ The outcome of this debate was Lefebvre’s insistence that theoretical research must remain autonomous from the ideological priorities of the party, citing Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks* in his defence. For Lefebvre, it was necessary to push beyond rigid conceptual abstractions that had been gleaned from Marx, and that the party had uncritically consecrated, especially class and proletariat. The responsibility of the intellectual was not, as Garaudy had suggested, to lean uncritically on Marxian categories and presume a systematic understanding of a capitalist mode of production that would reveal a logic of the proletariat. Rather, it was incumbent upon Marxist intellectuals critically to historicize such eternalised categories – to disclose the historically-specific hierarchy of relations that constituted the totality of class domination and in doing so come to an enriched understanding of the conditions for revolutionary alliances and actions.

In the following year, Lefebvre would draft his definitive statement on Lenin's philosophy, *Pour Connaître la Pensée de Lénine* (1957) – a text that would crystallise his own effort to establish a philosophical Lenin against the orthodoxy but also lay the foundations of his own re-interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx. In the text, Lefebvre made the case that all of Lenin's economic writings from the late 1890's onward were based on a consistent methodological principle. The common thread of Lenin's empirical research was that he treated his own socio-economic formation as a concrete living whole not reducible to a pre-existing formal model. This made Lenin's analyses open-ended so as to be able to critically disclose the conjunctural specificity of Marxian categories. Crucially, such examinations were sensitive to those intermediary vestiges of pre-capitalist modes of production that ostensibly fell outside the capitalist mode of production understood as a self-contained and totalising system. But it was from Lenin's philosophical writings, namely his writings on Hegel's Logic in his *Philosophical Notebooks* (1914-16), that Lefebvre extracted a philosophical elucidation of the theory of knowledge that underpinned Lenin's methodology. There, in his 'materialist' commentary of Hegel, Lenin laid out the "methodology and logic that Marx did not have time to elaborate" (Lefebvre 1957, 186) but which appeared in embryonic form in the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*. Lefebvre gleaned from Lenin's scattered notes a formulation of Marx's theory of knowledge that represented the fundamental gesture in the latter's prolonged struggle to overcome Classical German philosophy: the imperative for an on-going radical critique of the absolute knowledge claims of philosophy in all its variants. In his own context, Marx carried out this radical critique within the domain of political economy. For Lefebvre, therefore, the end of philosophy for Marx neither involved building a new philosophy to take the place of all that had gone before, nor denying philosophy as such in the presupposition of the constitution and inclination of the proletariat. Rather, it entailed an unending critical exposure of philosophical conceptions to their non-philosophical outside, confronting a systematic and absolutizing thought with those elements that were in excess of its formal logic. It was according to this theoretical principle, that Lenin had 'de-systematised' Marx's formal account of capitalism in *Capital* in his economic analyses of Russia at the turn of the century.

In same year that Lefebvre published his Lenin book, he was excluded from *NC* along with three other members of the editorial board. The fallout of this upheaval was that in the space of two years (1958-9), the editorial board of the journal was almost completely overhauled. It was in this context that Althusser rose to prominence within the party and beyond. With a series of articles published in *NC* and the party's other major intellectual journal *La Pensée: revue du rationalisme moderne* (1939 -_) Althusser would radically alter traditions of understanding that had been brought to bear upon the question of philosophy in Marx. Principally, he would depart from those who had been too much prejudiced by Stalin's profanation of Marxist philosophy to take up the task of constructing a philosophy in the name of Marx. In Althusser's view, anti-systematic reflexes such as Lefebvre's were understandable in view of Stalin's use of Marxist philosophy to justify state repression. But the ideological struggle internal to the intellectual arm of the PCF had set in motion a litany of theoretical paradigms that, though critical of Stalinism, would ultimately muddy the distinction between Marxist philosophy and the philosophy of his predecessors. In the early 60s, this theoretical inheritance showed itself most vividly, in Althusser's view, in the wave of Marxists content to bury Marx within a

problematic that he had broken from more than a century before: philosophical humanism.

Althusser's 1965 introduction of *For Marx* would explicitly clarify that the articles included in the text had been concertedly aimed at radically transforming the prism through which the Marxian injunction to put an end to philosophy had previously been understood. Indeed, in the introduction Althusser would trace the roots of his own theoretical interventions to the various failed attempts in the French context to carry out the abolition of philosophy in Marx's name. In this sense, Althusser's intellectual ambitions of the mid-sixties had been directly shaped by the theoretical preoccupations of his immediate predecessors within the intellectual arm of the party. Lefebvre's radical critique was acknowledged among the various interpretations that Althusser condemned as part of a necessary phase of anti-dogmatism. It was an interpretation that assumed the death of philosophy in the form of the "evanescent" life of philosophical negation (Althusser 2005, 29).

In a pivotal passage in his introduction, Althusser claimed that his own bid to substantiate Marxist philosophy had been occasioned by the withering of the constrictive conditions that had so severely muffled the question of philosophy within the party for so many years – here the reference was explicitly to the dogmatism of proletarian science. Pitched against this impetus, Althusser linked the theoretical demand he was aiming to address with the previously repressed legacies of young Lukács and Korsch. By then their names had lost their role as markers of ideological partisanship¹⁸:

The end of dogmatism puts us face to face with this reality: that Marxist philosophy... has still largely to be constituted ... that the theoretical difficulties we debated in the dogmatist night were not completely artificial – rather they were largely the result of a meagrely elaborated Marxist philosophy; or better, that in the rigid caricatural forms we suffered or maintained, including the theoretical monstrosity of the two sciences, something of an unsettled problem was really present in grotesque and blind forms – the writings of theoretical Leftism (the young Lukács and Korsch) which have recently been re-published are a sufficient witness to this; and finally, that our lot and our duty today is quite simply to pose and confront these problems in the light of day, if Marxist philosophy is to acquire some real existence or achieve a little theoretical consistency. (Althusser 2005, pp. 30-31)

Contrary to those intellectual histories that would counterpose Althusser's enterprise to a generic legacy of Marxist humanism, (Poster 1975) the legacy of the end of philosophy in Marx binds Althusser's contributions to another lineage of Marxist theory. This intellectual genealogy is one that comes together around an insistent concern for the question of the relation of philosophy and revolutionary politics in Marx. In this light, Althusser's self-described "theoreticist deviations" (Althusser 1976, p. 105) of the mid-sixties can be seen less as the apologia for party bureaucracy and Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy that they would come to be regarded as (Rancière 2011). Rather, they can be understood as an effort to recharge the stakes of a repressed legacy specifically around the question concerning the end of philosophy in Marx.

A Thousand Marxisms

Among the “thousand Marxisms” (Tosel 2009, 82) that would flourish following the decline of orthodox Althusserianism and actually existing socialism, many thinkers influenced by his problematic would continue to pursue the question of philosophy in Marx. (Labica 1980, Sève 1980, Garo 2000, Derrida 2006, Balibar 2014, Bensaïd 2009 and Badiou 2008). But where the exigency motivating Althusser’s new response to the end of philosophy in Marx was the decline of Stalinism, contemporary efforts to formulate a response have been forced to reckon with a new reality: the withdrawal of the organisational structures that had previously guaranteed the efficacy of Marx’s philosophy. What becomes an “improbable philosophy” for Etienne Balibar, precisely because it must “be out of step with any institution” (Balibar 2014, 118), becomes for Alain Badiou “the third era” of the existence of the Idea of communism distinguished above all by the fact that the “party-form, like that of the socialist State, is no longer suitable for providing real support.” (Douzinas & Žižek 2010, 13) While, for Jacques Derrida, the continued interpellative address of the end of philosophy injunction in Marx after the putative ‘death of Marxism’, brings into relief the undialectizable anachronism of a truly self-negating philosophy. (Derrida 2006).

Responses to this impasse have varied. Derrida insists on a necessary negotiation with the political-philosophical nexus in Marx’s thought. This would begin, he argues, with a re-configuration of the structure determining the relation between politics and philosophy in order once again to respond to the end of philosophy injunction in Marx. (Derrida 2006). Others, like Judith Balso, advocate abandoning the Althusserian-Leninist legacy altogether, urging the complete dis-articulation of philosophy from politics. The aspiration here is to give back theoretical autonomy to particularised political struggles against the universal reach of philosophical thought. (Douzina & Žižek 2010, 15-32). Badiou, on the other hand, proposes a response to the end of philosophy that substitutes the end for, “the watchword: ‘one more step’. Or that of Beckett’s Unnameable: ‘you must go on’” (Badiou 2011, 67). Or again “the end of this End” (Badiou 1999, 121, Toscano 2000) of philosophy. Yet, in view of what Bensaïd calls his “axiomatics of resistance” (Hallward 2004, 105), Badiou’s neo-Pascalian wager on the aleatory event – a well-subscribed current attributable to posthumous excavations of late Althusser (Althusser 2006) – converts the injunction in Marx into a militant attentism beyond all calculation. The other face of this distance-taking from institutionality is the “new revisionism” that emerged out of yet another periodization associated with Althusser – the post-revolutionary ‘crisis of Marxism’ (Althusser 1979) – that would bear the name Post-Marxism (Kouvelakis 2021, forthcoming, 5). Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau’s rehabilitation of liberal democracy as the ultimate horizon for universal emancipation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) becomes, in Stathis Kouvelakis’s estimation, an expression of “a substantial part of the “objective Spirit”, to quote Hegel’s term, of the historical moment marked by the defeat of the revolutions of the 20th century” (Kouvelakis 2021, 11). On that basis and in response to what Perry Anderson already diagnosed as a “poverty of strategy” (Anderson 1983, 28) in the hasty capitulations of late Western Marxism and what Bensaïd detected as “the eclipse of strategic reason” (Bensaïd 2007, 44) in the Marxisant renewals that followed, Isabelle Garo opts for a return to the strategic in her re-reading of Marx. This conjunctural rebuttal to both Post-Marxist revisionism and Post-Althusserian *attentisme* aims to re-establish the organic link between theory and practice around the priority of inventing concrete means of conquering power and

the conceptual mediations necessary to avoid the reversal of those means into ends. (Garo 2019).

With the critique, disgrace and forgetting of Althusser, and the more recent reconstruction of a subterranean Althusser against an orthodox Althusserianism, the longer trajectory of the end of philosophy problematic has fallen into the distance. The value of recounting this pre-history today is to show that Marxist thought and practice has always occupied a deeply uneasy relationship with the project of philosophical self-clarification and an even more unstable relationship with its intended philosophical self-negation. Yet the motif of the end of philosophy in the Marxian corpus has consistently served as a pivotal site for radicalising interpretations of the status of philosophy in Marx and revolutionary practice. It thus remains an important place for us to return in our efforts to understand the relationship between Marx, Marxism and philosophy.

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Notes

- ¹ Althusser imported both terms into the Marxist idiom from contemporaneous non-Marxist theories. The *problematic* was taken from Jacques Monod and the *epistemological break* was taken from Gaston Bachelard.
- ² The philosophical questions to which this end of philosophy was a response are pre-figured as far back as Marx's 1841 dissertation thesis *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. For a full account of Marx's broader trajectory toward this point see (Kouvelakis 2018, 238 – 332).
- ³ Lucio Colletti shows that beginning in his *Critique*, Marx specifies not only that Hegel's philosophy was 'upside-down' by making mind primary, but in addition that abstractions had taken root within the concrete reality that Hegel's philosophy attempted to reflect. (Marx 1975, 32–3). Marx's notion of 'real abstraction' has gained attention in recent years (Lange in this volume).
- ⁴ This quote comes from 'Rheinische Zeitung No. 191, July 10, 1842, Supplement'.
- ⁵ This quote comes from 'Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'.
- ⁶ This is also translated as "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."
- ⁷ For a detailed account see (Carver and Blank 2014).
- ⁸ This quote is taken from 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'.
- ⁹ This quote is taken from 'Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring* On Dialectics'.
- ¹⁰ Chris Arthur has followed up these late attestations and has attempted to reconstruct Marx's dialectical method in *Capital* via Hegel. See (Arthur 2002). Bertell Ollman and Tony Smith use Marx's famous 1858 letter to Engels as the departure point for their collection of recent writings on dialectics in Marx (Ollman & Smith 2008).
- ¹¹ This quote is taken from 'Marx to Engels in Manchester 16 January 1858'.
- ¹² Korsch uses Engels's description of the way Feuerbach treated Hegel to condemn his contemporaries in their dealing with philosophy in (Korsch 2013, 31).
- ¹³ In his 1930 'The Present State of the Problem of 'Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique' Korsch draws the distinction between the philosophical unity that had formed across the theoretical representatives of the Marxist Social Democratic Camp (Kautsky and Bernstein found philosophical concordance beyond their seemingly opposed political perspectives) and Russian or Bolshevik Marxism (the theoretical offshoot of Plakhanovian Marxism consecrated by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*) and the "works of Lukács, myself and other 'Western' Communists which formed an *antagonistic philosophical tendency within the Communist International* itself." In (Korsch 1925, 119).
- ¹⁴ "The author of these pages...believes that today it is of *practical* importance to return in this respect to the traditions of Marx-interpretation founded by Engels (who regarded the 'German workers' movement as the 'heir to classical German philosophy')". From 'Preface (1922)' in (Lukács 1990, xlv)
- ¹⁵ "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried." In (Adorno 1973, 3).
- ¹⁶ The 'Otto List' was a list of forbidden books drawn up by the Nazi Party in 1940 following their occupation of France. The list included 934 titles by 706 authors, and included works by Jewish writers, Communist writers, and anti-German books. Certain publishing house including Gallimard and Fayard were hit very hard by these repressive measures. See (Blakesley 2019).
- ¹⁷ Citation in Lefebvre taken from Gurvitch's *Le concept des classes sociales de Marx à nos jours* (1954).
- ¹⁸ Greek philosopher Kostas Axelos was central in introducing the work of both Lukács and Korsch to the French canon. The first French translation of the *HACC* appeared in 1960. It was prefaced and translated by Axelos in the *Arguments* series, a publishing spinoff of the journal of the same name with which Lefebvre was closely associated. See (Lukács 1960). Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* was published for the first time in France one year before *For Marx*. The text was also part of the *Arguments Series* and prefaced by Axelos. See (Korsch 1964).