

## Review of Slavoj Zizek et al., *Lenin Reloaded*

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*Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Zizek, Editors

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This is a collection of essays that aims at reinventing the Marxist revolutionary project in our day. What of Lenin's thought can be useful to present-day revolutionaries? Most of the essays were presented at a 2001 conference in Essen, Germany, "Toward a Politics of Truth: The Retrieval of Lenin." The editors intend this book as a broad challenge to the reign of capitalism and liberal-democratic politics. The titles of the four sections indicate the wide range of Lenin's thought under scrutiny: "Reinventing Lenin; Lenin in Philosophy; War and Imperialism; Politics and Its Subject."

Why Lenin? Revolutionary challenges to the existing social order are regularly met with warnings about the disastrous evolution from the Lenin-led takeover of the Russian state to the Gulag. The three editors argue that this is a scare tactic aimed at quashing revolutionary aspirations. An in-depth exploration of what Lenin in fact said is necessary to liberate us from the spectre of the Gulag. It is important too to note that Lenin, like ourselves, had no immediate ties to the original generation of Marx and his associates.

From the time Lenin first spoke out in his own voice, he refused to simply adjust Marxian theory to the exigencies of the situation, or to advocate opportunistic compromises. As the editors suggest, he instead intervened "in such a way that our intervention changes the coordinates of the situation." (p.3, all references are to this collection). The authors in this volume attempt to follow that example.

Further, rather than return to Lenin out of nostalgia, the editors' aim is to "reload" him-- to reinvent the revolutionary project. They explain: "'Lenin' stands here for the compelling *freedom* to suspend the stale existing ideological coordinates," especially today's thought prohibition against social revolution. These essays challenge today's "post-political consensus" by recapturing Lenin's revolutionary project. (pp. 3&4)

The best known of the three editors is Slavoj Zizek of Slovenia. His publications include *Interrogating the Real* and *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*. Sebastian Budgen is an editor of the journal *Historical Materialism*. Stathis Kouvelakis wrote *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*.

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I will discuss one particularly interesting essay from three of the book's four subdivisions except for "Lenin on Philosophy" where I deal with three of the four most substantive contributions.

### **"Lenin in the Postmodern Age"**

Terry Eagleton's elegant essay abounds in striking spatial and temporal images. Thus, to reveal not only the multiplicity of forces that together led to the Russian Revolution but also the special political configurations they in turn created, Eagleton speaks of those forces becoming "looped and braided into a new constellation." (p. 52) The Russian Revolution in turn released new forces in the world space of capitalism. He credits it with "blasting the national revolution out of the temporal continuum of the nation itself into another space altogether. There is a modernist, topsy-turvy logic at work here, in the so-called weakest link theory for which loss is gain, the old is the new, weakness becomes power, and the margin shifts to the center." (p. 53)

Eagleton exhibits a sharp eye for incongruities. Revolutionary movements, he contends, are properly seen as instrumental and temporary. They have a job to do--uprooting an existing social order. "The more you see revolutionary movements as instrumental, abnormal, strictly temporary, the less likely it is that their necessary emphasis on struggle, conflict, austere self-denial, and the like will be mistaken for the shape of a political future characterized by freedom, prosperity and peace." I agree, and believe we in the revolutionary movement too often mistake our own heavily instrumental behavior with human goodness more generally. Eagleton cites a socialist in Raymond Williams' novel *Second Generation* who tellingly states, "We'd be the worst people, the worst possible people, in any good society. And we're like this because we've exposed ourselves and we've hardened."

I think that the single-minded focus on struggle that Eagleton sees as necessary for revolutionaries can backfire and inadvertently poison our own efforts when the hard and cold-minded use of others become pervasive and habitual among the revolutionaries themselves. This is especially likely in prolonged and seemingly fruitless revolutionary struggles such as our own. Even though our joint purposes might be noble, we not infrequently encounter nasty attitudes toward each other. We then hear no end of high-minded justification for collective behavior that is in actuality plainly nasty.

Eagleton revels in the paradoxes and incongruities that characterize the Russian Revolution. Eagleton discerns a modernist dimension in Lenin's revolutionary practice: it adhered to tradition yet it also veered sharply beyond tradition. "And since there are no rules for determining this, we are speaking of a full-blooded innovatory art."

Picking up on the entirely accidental fact that James Joyce happened to be writing his *Ulysses* in the same Berne Library as Lenin was writing, Eagleton detects a similarity in modernist irony and paradox in their works. In Joyce's novel, "a seedy Dublin Jew can play Odysseus." In Lenin's hands, "the proletariat can stand in for an absent bourgeoisie and spearhead its revolution itself." The unevenness in development of Russia's proletariat, and the juxtaposition of archaic social structures and the altogether new, yielded a "folding of one narrative inside another." (p. 51) For Eagleton, events did not

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flow in a smooth chronological sequence. Rather the historical narrative is “fractured and recursive, resistant to any simple” sequential or chronological unfolding.

Further, the Russian Revolution shook up the spatial relations between nations. It would begin to “warp the global space of capitalism and fashion unpredictable new internationalist conjunctures, blasting the national revolution out of the temporal continuum of the nation itself into another space altogether.” (p. 53)

We have noted that Eagleton detects in these odd and new temporal and spatial juxtapositions the topsy-turvy configurations that he regards as modernist. After all, Russia, which had been on the distant periphery of European events, now occupied a central place. If the first victorious proletarian revolution broke out in a nation ill suited for that role, it nonetheless reshaped the spatial and temporal dimensions of the whole rest of the world.

Finally, Eagleton reminds us that general societal progress rests on a base of technological development. Even a child knows that it is not possible to enjoy a great work of music or literature with a stomach growling for food. But in the U.S., with its surfeit of gadgets, machines, and computers we tend to turn up our noses at Lenin’s embrace of a Fordist system of production. Lenin could not ignore the fact that Russia was an enormous, largely agricultural nation where a tractor was a rare possession.

In sum, Eagleton’s literary skills and trained eye are the basis for his fresh insights arising from the incongruities and unevenness of socio-cultural development in the years when Lenin led Russia. Sadly but not inexplicably, post-revolutionary Russia veered in the direction of a machine-like social and intellectual conformity that sapped individuality and eventually led to a system of strict, centrally controlled, social conformity.

### “The Philosophical Moment in Politics Determined by War: Lenin 1914-16”

Etienne Balibar’s essay is of interest primarily because he challenges the supposition that Lenin’s “Philosophical Notebooks,” are philosophical at all. These were notes by Lenin on his reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* soon after the outbreak of World War 1. Because these notes show some affinity on the part of Lenin, the materialist thinker, with the arch-idealist Hegel’s philosophy, they have received considerable attention. I will consider these notebooks in some detail later in this review. But if Balibar’s contention that Lenin’s so-called *Philosophical Notebooks* did not lead him to any further philosophical discourse --which is true -- and indeed do not constitute a philosophical work -- which I consider false--then that thesis is meaningless from the start.

From Balibar’s standpoint, Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* were merely private notes whose importance has been seriously exaggerated by those seeking an alternative to the official description that Lenin was a thoroughgoing materialist, unsullied by idealist thinking. Balibar claims that they consist of simple reading notes. They were indeed notes on Lenin’s reading of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* but by no means simple either in thought or style. They were not written for publication but rather for his own clarification.

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Balibar further contends that this critical reading of Hegel did “not lead to a *philosophical discourse* and was not intended to do so. On the contrary, after 1915 *Lenin never wrote any further philosophical work.*” (p. 209) In the section of this review dealing with “Lenin in Philosophy,” I will argue that this philosophical study deeply influenced Lenin’s subsequent thought and political activity.

### “Lenin in Philosophy”

I will review three of the most substantive essays that make up this section of the volume.

### “Lenin and the Path of Dialectics”

Savas Michael-Matsas’ essay is a heartfelt, almost desperate plea that the Marxist revolutionary effort not be abandoned. He urges us “*to enter the dialectical realm of questioning, searching to find the new, most tormenting, not yet known questions, which emerge in every dramatic turning point of history and cognition.*” (p. 102) I could feel Matsas’ anguish as he struggles against today’s general sentiment for giving up the revolutionary project. Instead he searches for new paths toward its renewal.

Matsas likens Lenin’s anguish when in 1914 every Social-Democratic party broke ranks to vote for its nation’s war credits to our own despondency and cynicism at the virtual abandonment of revolutionary socialism. How can revolutionary ardor be rekindled? The first task, Matsas asserts, is to pose the right questions.

When the Socialist International collapsed and World War 1 had broken out, Lenin thought it necessary to investigate some fundamental questions in the socialist movement. To that end he devoted September, 1914, to May, 1915, to reading Hegel’s *Science of Logic* in the Berne Library in Switzerland. Thus, in this period his preparation for leading the movement that would ultimately topple the czar and establish socialism consisted largely of intense philosophic study.

Remarkably, Lenin studied Hegel, known as a thoroughgoing idealist and so considered an opponent by orthodox Marxist materialists. Matsas views Lenin’s turn to questions of dialectics and epistemology, as his first decisive step toward overcoming the political catastrophe that had enveloped organized Marxism. While the common image of Lenin as a polemicist and organization man is true, it leaves out a vital philosophical dimension.

For Matsas, Lenin’s turn to Hegel’s philosophy represents his effort “to transcend it, to turn Hegel upside down, materialistically...” That is, he sees Lenin as performing a “materialist reversal of Hegel,” and so transcending Hegel’s dialectics on materialist grounds. Indeed, for Matsas this constitutes the original, i.e. historical, “*self- genesis and founding of Marxism.*” (p. 106) Later I will challenge Matsas’ assertion of an uncomplicated philosophical reversal by Marx and later by Lenin. But that in no way diminishes Lenin’s genius for searching out the deep philosophical roots for the political catastrophe that brought down the Second International.

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More specifically, Lenin read Hegel's *The Science of Logic*, which concerns fundamental questions of philosophy and not political issues. None of the essays in this volume offers a full explanation for this unlikely choice. Lenin himself might not have been fully cognizant of the reason. In general, we find in Lenin's detailed reading notes – virtually the sole source of our information about this encounter --his surprise at his own increasing appreciation of the insights of Hegel, the dialectician and an idealist not preoccupied with religion.

Matsas considers Lenin's thought process a return to the point of departure of Marxism itself. For Matsas, Lenin was investigating not only the foundations of Marxism but also further, what constitutes a foundation. Matsas argues that this return "demands the revolutionizing of all the historically developed forms of Marxism, without losing their truth content. It is the innovative act," Matsas dramatically calls it, "of self-refoundation, a veritable renaissance." (p. 107)

Matsas clings to the still widely accepted, Engelsian notion that idealism and materialism constitute two entirely separate and competing philosophical camps. Yet Matsas acknowledges that official Marxism's abandonment of Hegel and the dialectic in the era leading up to World War 1 left it in the iron grip of a mechanical objectivism. This mechanical objectivism obscured the relationship between subject and object as well as between theory and practice, and thus led to attitudes of centrism and reformism.

Matsas has, I believe, put himself in a conundrum. On the one hand, he recognizes the deadening and stultifying political consequences of a mechanical materialism in philosophy. But he insists on maintaining Engels' dichotomy between materialism and idealism, and its exclusive embrace of materialism.

Matsas cautions against an eclectic reading of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. Rather, he encourages reading them "as a *single, organic, developing, open totality*" so that the interconnection and unfolding of Lenin's reading can be traced. In Hegel's hands, Lenin realizes, logic is not limited to a system of formal rules governing correct thinking but rather becomes a discussion of the laws of development of both things and of thinking.

Lenin finds that the last page of *The Science of Logic* "disappears in what it grounds: the logical...as the universal interconnection of nature and mind." (p. 110) Fully as important, Lenin concludes that the heart of Hegel's logic is the dialectical method. Thus, Lenin arrives at a dialectical conception of historical and natural development that puts him at odds with the Second International's mechanical materialism.

Matsas offers us a conception of development that is both broad and penetrating:

"Development is not simply 'increase or decrease' that is produced by an external source of motion. It is contradiction, a unity of opposites having within itself, in its interior strife, the driving force of its self-movement." (p. 116)

This conception allows Matsas to suggest several contemporary fields of knowledge that can be drawn upon for further development of a theory of dialectics. These include the history of philosophy itself and of the various sciences; the study of language; and the study of the mental development of the child and of animals. From my experience as a

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child psychologist and a Marxist-Humanist, I agree with Matsas that drawing on these subjects might enrich the science of dialectical development.

In closing, Matsas highlights dialectics as the study of transition. He calls for further exploration of a theory of transition in situations of crisis. In that regard, he leaves some ambiguity as to whether the transition itself is at a point of crisis, or the theory, or perhaps both. Indeed this ambiguity with which Matsas leaves his reader might be intended as a springboard for further theoretical development.

### **“The Rediscovery and Persistence of the Dialectic in Philosophy and in World Politics”**

In his 1995 pathbreaking *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, Kevin Anderson gave a detailed, comprehensive account of Lenin’s fruitful encounter with Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. Anderson documented Lenin’s initial ambivalence in finding himself in some agreement with the arch-idealist Hegel. Writing in the tradition of Raya Dunayevskaya’s work, he also documented Lenin’s continuing ambivalence in that Lenin never referred publicly to this favorable encounter. Indeed it was not until the late 1930’s that Lenin’s so-called *Philosophical Notebooks*, written in Russian, were published in French and became known to a somewhat wider audience.

In this essay, Anderson traces the reception accorded Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* by influential Marxist thinkers. With rare but important exceptions, Lenin’s creative grappling with Hegel’s idealism and dialectics was not reflected in the published works of the leading Marxists of the 20th century. His interest in the Hegelian dialectic altogether was largely pushed aside.

But Lenin’s reading notes on the *Science of Logic* reflect a more receptive attitude and creative grappling with the challenge posed by Hegel. As Lenin digs into the material, Anderson shows that he no longer repudiates Hegel’s ideas solely because they could be considered idealist. Instead Anderson finds Lenin voicing appreciation of, for example, the fluidity of Hegel’s thought: “Hegel analyzes concepts that usually appear dead and he shows that there is movement in them.” (p. 126)

Anderson believes that for Lenin, “The key now was to appropriate critically Hegel’s dialectical idealism and to connect it to Marx’s materialism.” As against Engels’ dictum that idealism and materialism constitute two entirely separate, opposing camps, Lenin was “coming close to a position suggesting some type of dialectical unity between idealism and materialism.” (p. 127)

Anderson asserts that Lenin comes to appreciate the Hegelian roots of Marx’s core thought in *Capital*. “It is impossible,” Lenin wrote, “fully to grasp Marx’s *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, if you have not studied through and understood the whole of Hegel’s *Logic*.” In terms of a unity of idealism and materialism, Anderson emphasizes that in these Notebooks, Lenin goes so far as to say, “Man’s cognition not only reflects the objective world, but creates it.” For Anderson, this statement suggests: “an active, critical, revolutionary appropriation of Hegel’s idealism. Here the cognition embodied in

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revolutionary theory is not only the reflection of material conditions. It is also a reaching beyond those conditions, toward the creation of a new world..." (pp.127-128)

This reaching beyond the given in thought qualifies Lenin's thought as partially idealist in Anderson's view. Engels' rigid dichotomy between materialism and idealism falls short of accounting for Lenin's actual thought.

Perhaps the most notable influence of Hegel on Lenin's politics can be seen in the importance Lenin now accorded national anti-imperialist movements. He wrote of the Irish Easter Rebellion of 1916:

"The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene." (p. 130)

Lenin was now embracing new revolutionary possibilities, and stressed the need for flexibility. Thus, he criticized those who did not recognize the revolutionary potential in democratic national liberation movements which, in fact, have played a large role for present-day Marxists. Here referring directly to dialectics, Lenin wrote:

"They call themselves Marxists, but their conception of Marxism is impossibly pedantic. They have completely failed to understand what is decisive in Marxism, namely, its revolutionary dialectics." (p. 131)

Anderson thus makes a convincing case that Lenin's study of the Hegelian dialectic played a considerable role in his attitude toward the important issue of national liberation.

### **Hegelian Marxism in the Twentieth Century**

Anderson next turns his attention to the later fate of this Hegelian Marxism, embraced in significant ways, as we have seen, by Lenin after the collapse of the Second International. In France, Henri Lefebvre published a French edition of Lenin's Hegel notebooks in 1938. In his introduction, Lefebvre criticized those who wish to use Hegel's method but not his system. Louis Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* downplays the Hegel notebooks. Althusser's announced intention to "drive the shade of Hegel...back into the night" did not square with the undeniable fact that Lenin had given serious attention to Hegel after the collapse of the Second International.

Readers of this website will be on more familiar ground when Anderson traces the course of Hegelian Marxism in the United States. C.L.R. James' *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel-Marx-Lenin* was written in 1948. After the break-up of his political partnership with Raya Dunayevskaya, it was she who did most of the pioneering work in this area. She translated Lenin's Hegel notebooks into English by 1949 but could not get it published until considerably later. In Anderson's opinion:

"No Marxist thinker before or since, has delved as deeply or as creatively into Lenin's Hegel notebooks, appropriating them critically as ground for a contemporary dialectics of

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revolution. For example, Dunayevskaya pioneered the linking together of Lenin's perspectives on dialectics and on national liberation..." (p. 140)

It was Dunayevskaya who highlighted Lenin's statement that "Cognition not only reflects the world, but creates it," as a contrast to his earlier reflection-based epistemology. For Dunayevskaya it suggests that, "Lenin had gained from Hegel a totally new understanding of the *unity* of materialism and idealism. It was new understanding that subsequently permeated Lenin's post-1915 writings." (p. 140)

Nonetheless, Lenin virtually never wrote or spoke publicly about his Hegel studies. Anderson thinks this is an indication of how deeply mired in economic thinking established Marxism had become.

Dunayevskaya hailed Lenin's achievement of interpreting world events dialectically, especially around the contradiction between imperialism and national liberation. Nonetheless, she was deeply critical of Lenin's concept of a vanguard party. She emphasized the need for the Marxist movement to instead develop new forms of organization based on "what she termed the dialectics of organization and philosophy." (p. 142) These new forms, she asserted, would be grounded in the Hegelian dialectic and in Marx's largely unrecognized writings on organizational issues, especially his late work, "Critique of the Gotha Program."

Anderson concludes by urging us to face honestly the deeply divided and contradictory history of twentieth century Marxism. Attempts to return directly to Marx and to skip over Lenin and his generation have serious limitations. Anderson hails the tradition of dialectical thought within revolutionary Marxism. He wants it to be appropriated in today's Marxism, but critically. In my opinion, Anderson's rich and nuanced contribution in this volume provides us a fine example of just that kind of careful, critical, balanced and comprehensive treatment of an important but underappreciated strand in contemporary Marxism.

### **"Lenin as Reader of Hegel"**

I will now turn to the final essay in this section on philosophy. It is by Stathis Kouvelakis, who is one of the overall editors of the volume, and the author of two books on politics and philosophy. His essay is entitled "Lenin as Reader of Hegel: Hypotheses for a Reading of Lenin's *Notebooks* on Hegel's *The Science of Logic*." His essay highlights the tumultuous historical events that launched Lenin into, and surrounded him during, his study of Hegel.

Those of us who lived through the horrors of the Second World War may slight the enormous impact of the very first world war. The unprecedented and total character of World War I deeply disturbed the lives and outlook of the civilian population as well as the combatants. A few examples should serve to make the point.

The class structure of European society was altered by the new forms of organization of labor, which were stimulated by the war effort. Trade unions became integrated into the nation's war economy and so served less effectively as a counterbalance to the capitalist

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class. New means of disseminating news and government propaganda shaped public opinion, including that of the traditional working class. Trade union leaders were wooed into participation in national planning. By virtue of these social and ideological changes, the capitalist class was able to temper the working class's traditional enmity. Enormous intellectual shifts were also stimulated in the war years.

For Lenin, the shocking betrayal of comradely ties by the national sections of the international socialist movement stood uppermost in his mind. It violated the long-established socialist principle of organizational unity. The war reflected-- and further inflamed-- a surge of militant nationalism that directly undercut traditional socialist principles of internationalism.

What is of prime interest to us is that Lenin responded to this calamity not with his habitual swirl of political activity but rather with philosophical study. He chose the study of philosophy in order to undertake "a theoretical refoundation of Marxism" in Kouvelakis' felicitous phrase. (p. 168) Kouvelakis portrays Lenin's lengthy period of study of Hegel not as a retreat but rather as a deep grappling with ideas fundamental to Marxism. Lenin's withdrawal from the swirl of political activity gave him uninterrupted time and space to think deeply and along new lines. Kouvelakis points out that other innovative thinkers have also generated new lines of thought in conditions of self-imposed isolation.

### Issues of Form

Issues of form are closely linked to issues of meaning in Kouvelakis' approach. He highlights the experimental character of the writing in the *Notebooks*, which he characterizes as "an incredible *collage*" that gives the text "its *montage effect*." (p. 179) He likens this lack of pre-established form to other early 20th century experimental literature.

More particularly, Kouvelakis notes that at the very same time and also in the Berne Library, James Joyce was writing his novel *Ulysses*, also in a decidedly new idiom. Both writers, working in the opening decade of the 20th century, used a radically new, experimental prose to express fresh ideas. Kouvelakis thereby places the *Lenin Notebooks* in a historical context rife with new ideas and idioms. Both projects used a new prose style to convey a fresh outlook.

Kouvelakis asserts that Lenin felt forced by inexplicable events to think through the entire Marxist project from its philosophic ground up. His study of Hegel's philosophy offered Lenin a suitable vantage point because Marx himself had acknowledged Hegel's influence. Further, Lenin did not choose to study Hegel's political works. But neither Kouvelakis nor any of the other authors in this section on philosophy ventures a hypothesis as to why Lenin chose this particular work by Hegel.

In his 1973 essay, "From the Logic of Hegel to the Finland Station," Michael Lowy put forward two such hypotheses: first, that Lenin wished to return to the sources of Marx's thought and, second, that Lenin believed that the methodological shortcomings of Second International Marxism were based on ignorance of dialectics.

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Kouvelakis advances four perspectives on the Hegel notebooks.

1. Lenin was reacting against the Second International's "scientistic evolutionism and determinism with materialist pretensions..." (p. 170) Indeed, it is hard to overestimate the influence of imagery and explanations drawn from the natural sciences in late 19th and early 20th century social thought. In the Marxist philosophic camp, the writings of Engels, followed of Mehring, Plekhanov and Kautsky, were deeply imbued with notion of the primacy of the natural sciences, belief in ongoing progress, and confidence in European civilization. Today we associate this mindset with positivism. This set of beliefs was especially strong in Russia in reaction to its own belated modernization.
2. Lenin realized that the weak link in the Second International's philosophical base was its distance from Hegel, specifically his dialectical method as presented in *The Science of Logic*. His realization rested on a break with the philosophical position of Engels and the main current in the Second International, including Lenin's own earlier philosophical writings, to wit: materialism and idealism constitute two entirely separate and opposing camps; they are altogether external to one another.

For Kouvelakis, Lenin's notebooks do not dismantle the wall separating idealism and materialism, as Anderson asserts. Rather, Kouvelakis thinks that "the distinction between materialism and idealism is grasped afresh in dialectical terms, and thus in a certain sense relativized..." Kouvelakis nonetheless insists that Lenin continues to make a sharp distinction between materialism and idealism such that it is "reformulated, reopened, or more exactly, radicalized in the sense of a new materialism." For Kouvelakis, Lenin attempted to "*read Hegel as a materialist and in this way* open the way to a new beginning, a genuine refoundation, of Marxism itself." (p. 173)

3. I have already noted the strength of the idea of evolution and of other biological metaphors in accounting for social phenomena in this period. Lenin however insisted on a sharp distinction between Marx's idea of evolution and that prevalent in his own time. The Marxian idea was of evolution "by leaps, catastrophes, revolutions." Further, Lenin correctly identified the dialectic as the "revolutionary aspect of Hegel's philosophy." (p. 174)
4. Kouvelakis introduces the Russian writer Alexander Herzen as a figure who bridged Russian socialism and the European revolutions of 1848. Herzen was largely responsible for introducing the thought of the Young Hegelians of the 1840s into Russia. It was Herzen who coined the phrase "algebra of revolution" to refer to the Hegelian dialectic. The phrase was passed on to the influential Russian Marxist Plekhanov and from him to Lenin. Through these thinkers "the spirit of the '48ers" reached czarist Russia on the periphery of Europe.

**"Textures"**

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In this section, Kouvelakis further examines matters of form. He characterizes Lenin's text as a *collage*, fragmented, broken up, a veritable "linguistic babble." Indeed, Lenin wrote in a few languages beyond Russian. Altogether, the text is "radically broken up and incomplete" and presents a "*montage effect*." Indeed, Kouvelakis finds a "total absence of pre-established form," which gives the text a "completely experimental dimension." He postulates that this odd linguistic structure is related to its "attempted *materialist* reading of a canonical text of classical German philosophy," e.g., of idealism. (p. 179) That is, the philosophical tension Lenin experienced in attempting what Kouvelakis considers a materialist reading of a thoroughly idealist book by Hegel is reflected in the strained language and odd form of Lenin's digest of *The Logic*.

More specifically, the digest's "total absence of pre-established form," is related to its "completely experimental dimension" as a work that reaches back to the very emergence of materialism in philosophy. Kouvelakis uses the felicitous term "theoretical recommencement" to refer to this aspect of Lenin's reflections. Further, he sees this recommencement as centering on "the dialectic as logic of contradiction." (p. 180) Kouvelakis advances three important perspectives for reading Lenin's *Notebooks* in this light.

1. "The dialectic not as a 'method' external to its object... but as the very positing of the immanence and self movement of things grasped as thought, a thought traversed by the same movement..."(p.180)
2. This self-movement must not be understood merely as flux "but rather as a unity of opposites, contradictions internal to things themselves....The assertion of the creative power of *division*, the work of the negative, eliminates any evolutionist vision of 'transition,' and in particular of 'leaps' as an acceleration of 'evolution' or of 'opposites' as mere complementary terms within a totality." (p. 180)
3. This perspective is possibly the most important and surely the most difficult of the three. Kouvelakis asserts, "Self-movement is *transformative activity* and the grasping of this activity in its processual character, as revolutionary practice." (p. 180) He maintains however that Lenin's new emphasis is juxtaposed against his previous and better-known theory of reflection put forward in his 1908 *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*. Kouvelakis suggests that this "non-contemporaneity of problematics" accounts for the opposing interpretations and evaluations of the text--on the one hand rejected due to distrust of Hegel's categories, or, embraced because it is in continuity with Lenin's 1908 discussion on materialism.

Kouvelakis makes note of the enormous change in Lenin's attitude toward Hegel's thought from his initial opposition and skepticism found in his notes on Hegel's Doctrine of Being to the appreciation Lenin expresses toward the final Doctrine of the Notion. In a comment on the latter doctrine, Lenin reflects:

"It is noteworthy that the whole chapter on the 'Absolute Idea' scarcely says a word about God...and apart from that--*this NB*--it contains almost nothing that is specifically *idealism*, but has for its main subject the *dialectical method*--this is extremely noteworthy." (p. 184)

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Nonetheless, Kouvelakis claims that Lenin keeps his newfound appreciation of Hegel's dialectic within traditional Marxist confines as they had been expressed by Engels; by Lenin's philosophical mentor, Plekhanov; and by Lenin himself at an earlier time. Indeed Kouvelakis detects a continuing struggle in Lenin's mind between the traditional Engelsian radical separation and opposition between materialism and idealism, and a more complex and deeper appreciation for their interconnectedness.

Kouvelakis notes that the dialectic that Lenin comes to appreciate is not simply the flux observable from an outside position, but rather self-movement (or internally necessary movement). In Lenin's earlier philosophical thought, the process of reflection had played an extremely important role. Now reflection meant "assimilated to the work of thought...as a *process* revealing the objectivity of subjective knowledge as an integral part of the self-exfoliation of the world." (p. 188) Further:

"Just as the simple form of value, the individual act of exchange of one given commodity for another, already includes in an undeveloped form *all* the main contradictions of capitalism, --so the simplest *generalization*, the first and simplest formation of *notions* (judgments, syllogisms, etc.) already denotes man's ever deeper cognition of the *objective* connections of the world." (p. 201)

Lenin voices his appreciation of Hegel's idea not of movement or flux *per se*, but of self-movement:

"Movement and 'self-movement' this NB! Independent, spontaneous, internally necessary movement...who would believe that this is the core of 'Hegelianism,' of abstract and abstruse...Hegelianism? This core had to be discovered, understood...laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels did." (p. 186)

In what Kouvelakis considers "the real materialist reversal," Lenin takes issue with Engels who maintained that Hegel's Absolute Idea was dogma. Rather, Kouvelakis sees that in the self-referential character of Hegel's Absolute Lenin has brilliantly taken the dialectical process itself "to its point of self-reference, at which it is now one of its own moments." Kouvelakis refers to this as "the dazzling moment of the reversal of perspective..." (p. 193)

Kouvelakis believes this "real materialist reversal" by Lenin, together with his newfound appreciation for Hegel's philosophy, should be considered an enlargement of Lenin's fundamental materialism rather than an appreciation of idealism *per se*. For Kouvelakis, notwithstanding Lenin's newfound appreciation for Hegel's idealist thinking, there is a definite barrier beyond which a true Marxist may not venture. That barrier--the same barrier that so ruinously impeded Second International orthodoxy--is the Engelsian doctrine that on one side there is materialism and on the other there is idealism and never the twain shall meet.

This means that despite Kouvelakis' recognition that Lenin voiced substantial appreciation for the idealist strain within Hegel's thinking, he nonetheless believes it necessary to maintain Engels' dictum that materialism and idealism are warring and mutually exclusive philosophies. By holding tight to that Engelsian dichotomy, Kouvelakis is forced by his

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own accurate portrayal of Lenin's philosophical tract to turn intellectual handstands and complicate matters unnecessarily.

To my mind, this leaves Kouvelakis in the essay's concluding section sometimes reasoning like a dog chasing its own tail. On the one hand, Kouvelakis, invoking Zizek who is the volume's senior editor, asserts that grasping the dialectic as absolute method is to "localize the motive forces of their movement *in the immanence of their own contradiction.*" (p. 193) Or contrariwise, as Lenin himself states, "in this most *idealist* of Hegel's works there is the *least* idealism and the *most materialism.*" (p.194)

To my mind, it also appears that for Kouvelakis, idealism remains anathema and can enter the holy ground of Marxism only if it turns itself inside out in order to totally shed its idealism. The best idealism in the eyes of Kouvelakis and, at times of Lenin himself, is not idealism at all but materialism masquerading as idealism. But my main point is that Kouvelakis persists in thinking materialism and idealism are indeed incompatible and mutually exclusive philosophical polarities.

But this is the very Engelsian dichotomy that Kouvelakis said that he intended to critique, indeed to overcome. On this score, unfortunately, Kouvelakis' line of thinking takes us back to square one.

Along with Zizek, Kouvelakis does not view the movement from the Russian situation in February, 1917, to that of October as a shift from one stage to another. Rather the shift in Lenin's thinking, in Kouvelakis' view, represented "a radical questioning of the very notion of 'stage,' a reversal of the fundamental coordinates that define the very criteria of the 'maturity' of a situation." (p.195)

In conclusion, Kouvelakis gives us a detailed and in-depth analysis of Lenin's philosophical reflections on Hegel's thought that brings out the prominent roles played by quantum leaps and internal contradictions in political thought. Ultimately however Kouvelakis retains the Engelsian idea of an unbridgeable dichotomy between materialism and idealism. That idea in turn leads to complications in Kouvelakis' thinking, to internal contradictions, and to unnecessary twists and turns.

As a whole, this book shows a new appreciation of the dialectical character of Lenin's thought and of the need for a dialectical foundation for revolutionary movements today.