
Henryk Grossman and Critical Theory

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Abstract

In 1943, Henryk Grossman sent a draft of the study, eventually published in two parts as ‘The Evolutionist Revolt against Classical Economics’, to Max Horkheimer for comment. His very hostile response, Grossman’s drafts and the published study cast light not only on the changing relationship between Grossman and Horkheimer but also on the distance between Grossman’s classical Marxism and nascent mature Critical Theory. Grossman’s study identified the emergence of the idea of successive economic systems in the work of Condorcet, Henri Saint-Simon and Simonde de Sismondi in France, James Steuart and Richard Jones in England, culminating in Marx’s formulations which entailed the role of class struggle and capitalism’s tendency to break down. Hegel was not an influence on Marx’s conception of modes of production. In addition to a series of spurious and minor criticisms, Horkheimer objected that Grossman’s approach was positivist, that it misconceived Hegel’s philosophy, and that it amounted to a conventional history of ideas. In response, Grossman made some changes in his study, but these were designed to strengthen his main arguments and successfully reaffirmed his Marxist approach in the face of Horkheimer’s criticisms.

Keywords

Critical Theory, Henryk Grossman, Henryk Grossmann, Max Horkheimer, Marxism

After more than a decade and a half of collaborative participation in the activities of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main and its exiled descendant in the United States, Henryk Grossman, its outstanding economist, no longer regarded himself as part of its joint intellectual enterprise. This break has been mentioned but not examined in detail by historians of the Frankfurt School, because Grossman remained a

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classical Marxist and did not, like Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in particular, become a founder of or embrace the mature Critical Theory that emerged in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1989[1944]; Wiggershaus, 1994; Jay, 1996[1973]; Dubiel, 1985[1978]; Buck-Morss, 1977; Benhabib, 1986). The theoretical differences between Grossman and Horkheimer, the institute's director, became starkly apparent in a 1943 exchange between them, over a draft of Grossman's study published as 'The Evolutionist Revolt against Classical Economics' (1943a and 1943b). The dispute is a unique controversy between two of the foremost proponents of classical Marxism and Critical Theory. It casts light on distinguishing features of the contending approaches. One of the most important is historical materialism's explanation of historical change based on the interaction between the forces and relations of production, as opposed to mature Critical Theory's emphasis on human nature and humanity's relationship with material reality. Another is the relationship between high theory and empirical research. A third crucial difference is whether or not the working class has the capacity to be an agent of fundamental social transformation.

The rest of this section outlines Grossman's relationship with the institute. The following sections deal with Grossman's argument in his study, the thrust of Horkheimer's criticisms of it, in a long letter, and then the significance of Grossman's responses, to the extent that surviving sources allow. The final section draws some theoretical conclusions from the dispute.

Almost a generation older and vastly more experienced as a Marxist political leader and theorist than any of his colleagues, Henryk Grossman was the best-known active member of the Institute for Social Research, initially associated with the University of Frankfurt am Main, from the early 1930s until the mid-1940s. He had published academic articles since 1911 (as 'Henryk Grossmann', like most of his publications in German), and political texts since 1905. His *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems (zugleich eine Krisentheorie)* [The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System (Being also a Theory of Crises)] (Grossmann, 1929) made a major contribution to the Marxist theory of economic crisis, became and remains a reference point in the literature, and was very widely, if hostilely, reviewed. Grossman referred to his fellow members as 'my friends' in 1929 and the institute in Frankfurt am Main was a most productive and congenial workplace. He was an engaged member of the institute in Frankfurt and, from 1933, in exile in Paris, London and then New York, contributing articles and reviews to its journal and discussing his own research program and those of his colleagues, including Horkheimer, with them (see Kuhn, 2007: 164–7, 175–81; and *passim* for other details of Grossman's life and work).

In his approach to politics, Grossman was, from no later than the start of the 1920s, committed to the Leninist strategy that sought to link the working-class struggles which capitalism inevitably generates to the project of socialist revolution through the activities of a Marxist party. This was explicit in his *The Law of Accumulation* (Grossmann, 1929), his long critique (1928) of Fritz Sternberg, which prepared the way for the book, and his history of Marxism after Marx's death (2014[1932]). Far from being a mechanical theorist of automatic capitalist breakdown, as has been repeatedly asserted since 1929, his work from the 1920s to the 1940s complemented in economics the recovery of

Marxist politics by Lenin and Marxist philosophy by Lukács, whose *History and Class Consciousness* (1971[1923]) he praised (Grossman, 2014[1932]: 60).

Horkheimer and Adorno, whom Horkheimer had identified as his key collaborator by the end of the 1930s, moved decisively away from Marx and particularly his economic analysis. Confusing the distinction between ideology and material reality, they truncated Marx's 'critique of political economy', validating only its negative aspect, and identified its constructive side, the application of Marxist categories in the empirical analysis of developments under capitalism, as 'positivism', i.e. wrong.

The categories of Marxist economics are those of the 'anatomy' of society only in the ironic sense that they have the struggle against it as their epistemological assumption. They are not descriptive categories . . . Marx does not want, for instance, to positivistically show the laws according to which exchange 'now really' occurs. (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1985[written 1939]: 438)

In 1956, during a recorded discussion, Horkheimer found nothing objectionable in Adorno's logical extension of this conclusion – since the explicit aim of *Capital* was 'to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society' (Marx, 1976[1867]: 92) – that Marx was himself a positivist (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2011: 50).

The growing theoretical and political cleavage between Grossman and Horkheimer was compounded by other factors. While Grossman had adopted a very critical attitude towards Stalinism after the defeat of the German working class in 1933, under the impact of the Spanish Civil War he swung back to regard Stalin's Russia as playing a progressive international role around 1936. Other members of the institute recognized the repressive, authoritarian nature of the Russian regime.

The fortunes of the institute's financial resources also had an impact on Grossman's attitude to Pollock and Horkheimer. The deep US recession of 1938 had a severe effect on those funds, managed by Pollock, Horkheimer's principal administrative lieutenant and lifelong chum. Perhaps his theoretical confidence in the capacity of capitalist states to avoid crises made him complacent (Pollock, 1941, 1942b). To preserve his own position as the bearer of theory, the director, through Pollock, cut back the salaries of the institute's associates and attempted to drive the few not considered essential off the payroll altogether. Pollock's behavior at Grossman's 60th birthday party on 14 April 1941, the details of which have not survived, led to a deep rupture. By 1943, Grossman was thoroughly alienated from the institute in New York.

I Grossman's Marxist revolt against mature Critical Theory

Still hoping to find sympathy from Horkheimer, the big boss of the institute now on the west coast, Grossman complained to him about Pollock by mail, as is apparent in correspondence between Horkheimer and Leo Löwenthal (1996a [written 1942]: 384). Grossman indicated, however, that he was still committed to being involved with the institute, even if on his own terms. And he responded critically to the request for a contribution to a book that would elaborate Horkheimer's own superficial and literary (gangster) rackets theory of class and economics. Grossman's letter of early 1942

included a late draft of a very substantial article in English. 'The Evolutionist Revolt against Classical Economics' was eventually published in two parts in the *Journal of Political Economy*, based at the University of Chicago (Grossman, 1943a, 1943b). The institute reimbursed a third of the cost of its lucid translation into English (Grossman, 1942).¹

The theoretical differences between Grossman and the approach that defined the 'Frankfurt School' were apparent in this study and Horkheimer's extensive critique of it in draft. The institute, whose files contain a vast amount of Horkheimer's correspondence, include only the part, more than 4,000 words long, of Horkheimer's reply that he provided to Pollock and Löwenthal for comment, before sending the whole to Grossman. None of Grossman's relevant letters survive: there was one, of 14 handwritten pages, complaining about Pollock (Horkheimer, 1996a: 384); its successor, which accompanied his draft article and continued the complaints; and his 22-page response to Horkheimer's comments on the draft (Horkheimer, 1943c). The Grossman collection in the Archive of the Polish Academy of Sciences does contain drafts of Grossman's article (notably Grossman, 1943c and 1943d).

A long, early draft of what became Grossman's monograph *Marx, Classical Political Economy and the Problem of Dynamics* had included a discussion of whether Marx was the first to introduce an historical perspective into economics (Grossman, 1937: 31–3, 53–62; Grossman, 2015[1941]). Extended and developed, material cut from that draft was incorporated into 'The Evolutionist Revolt'. The article demolished the misconception that Marx, under Hegel's influence, was the first to argue that, over the long term, the basic structure of economies had changed. Marx's originality lay elsewhere. Grossman examined the French works of Nicolas Condorcet (1743–94), Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825) and Simonde de Sismondi (1773–1842), the subject of his 1924 monograph (Grossman, 1924); the English writings of James Steuart (1712–80) and the Reverend Richard Jones (1790–1855); and Marx's treatment of modes of production. In this way, Grossman showed 'how dynamic or evolutionary thinking actually entered the field of economics' (Grossman, 1943a: 381).

The most influential works of classical political economy, including those of Adam Smith and Ricardo, Grossman pointed out, did not recognize that economic development took the form of successive modes of production.

The classicists took a rationalistic rather than a genetic approach to the past. All previous societies were measured with the rational yardstick of free trade. That is why they knew of only two ideal states: the 'original state of things', occurring before the fall from grace, as it were, and the bourgeois state in their own days, of more or less free trade and competition. (Grossman, 1943a: 385)

There were theorists outside the mainstream of political economy, in both France and England, whose views were shaped by the political revolutions in America and France and the industrial revolution in England. So:

The subject of our analysis is a current of thinking which emerged in the social sciences during the last third of the eighteenth century and became triumphant during the first half of

the nineteenth century: the concept of the evolution of human society through a succession of stages, each superior to the preceding one. (Grossman, 1943a: 385–6)

On the basis of his study, Grossman concluded:

It is apparent that by the time Karl Marx (1818–83) began his work, in the forties of the last century, the application of evolutionary concepts to economic institutions and the formulation of the doctrine that economic systems are historical in character had been basically accomplished. Marx himself pointed that out repeatedly, though it was left to him to complete and sharpen the analysis. (Grossman, 1943b: 513–14)

Marx's evolutionist precursors were capable of 'the generalization of an empirically and inductively constructed series of particular observations'. Jones went even further. He 'considered it his function to test and correct the prevalent theories against actual historical developments and to formulate concrete experience into new theoretical viewpoints and categories' (Grossman, 1943b: 509).

In contrast to the earlier evolutionists, Marx shared Hegel's dialectical concept of the development of the 'cultural whole', the totality of modern bourgeois society, as the object of his analysis (Grossman, 1943b: 514, 517). But Marx, like Sismondi and Jones, saw development as 'a succession of objective economic stages of different economic structures'. For Hegel the essence of development was 'the progress within man's *consciousness* of an idea of freedom' (ibid.: 515). Without using the expressions, Grossman therefore distinguished between the materialism of the evolutionist political economists and Hegel's idealism, by contrasting two meanings of 'development': material evolution (in the work of the political economists he discussed) and development of the 'notion' or 'concept' (in Hegel's system). Unlike the evolutionist political economists, Hegel also believed that historical change had come to a halt with the 'consolidation of middle-class society' (Grossman, 1943a: 383).

Expressing his own revolutionary politics and echoing his earlier conclusions about the implications of Marx's theory of economic crisis for working-class action (e.g. Grossmann, 1929: 602–3; Grossmann, 1928: 157), Grossman quoted *Capital* on the importance of knowledge about the laws of economic development: society 'can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs' (Grossman, 1943b: 516).

'By attributing to Marx the first application of evolutionary thinking to economics, critics have obliterated the original contribution that Marx really did make to our understanding of history and the specific differences between Marx and his predecessors' (ibid.: 518): his account of how transitions between economic systems occur. This had a number of aspects. The first was that the old mode of production gives rise to processes that lead to its own supersession (ibid.: 518, 519). Revolution becomes necessary because legal property relations and political power do not change at the same pace as the productive forces, all 'are subject to the law of uneven development' (ibid.: 519).

The second original contribution in Marx's stages theory of economic development and the political point of 'The Evolutionist Revolt' was his demonstration that capitalism

necessarily declines and disintegrates. This Grossman identified with his account of Marx's theory of economic crisis. Third, recapitulating the Leninist analysis in *The Law of Accumulation* and one of his long entries in Elster's dictionary of economics (Grossman, 1929: 602–3; Grossman, 2014[1932]: 84), Grossman maintained

... that no economic system, no matter how weakened collapses by itself in automatic fashion. It must be 'overthrown' ... '[H]istorical necessity' does not operate automatically but requires the active participation of the working class in the historical process. ... [T]he main result of Marx's doctrine is the clarification of the historical role of the proletariat as the carrier of the transformative principle and the creator of the socialist society ... In changing the historical *object*, the *subject* changes himself. Thus the education of the working class to its historical mission must be achieved not by theories brought from outside but by the everyday practice of the class struggle. (Grossman, 1943b: 520–1)

As a young revolutionary leader, almost four decades earlier, Grossman had also emphasized the centrality of class struggle in both the formation of working-class consciousness and revolution. Here this was expressed in clear, Lukácsian/Hegelian terms. In his dialectical concept of history, Marx 'follows Hegel, for whom history has both an objective and a subjective meaning, the history of human activity (*historia rerum gestarum*) and human activity itself (*res gestas*)' (Grossman, 1943b: 521).

II Horkheimer's objections

Mature Critical Theory, then being formulated by Horkheimer and Adorno, underpinned Horkheimer's objections to Grossman's study. An aphoristic miserablism, it reduced movement towards liberation to emaciated faith in an idealist, pre-Marxist conception of human nature, in conflict with the supremely powerful logic of the forces of production, while admitting the possibility that at least a few could engage in critical thought: a pessimistic version of the 'antinomies of bourgeois thought' which Lukács had exposed (Lukács, 1971[1923]: 110–49; Lopez, 2014; Gangl, 1987: 153–4). It criticized the established, overwhelmingly powerful order, which the working class could not challenge, in unsystematic and often obscure terms.

The influence of Horkheimer's collaboration with Adorno in reformulating Critical Theory was very apparent in his letter to Grossman. He recapitulated, in particular, points made in theses on class that Adorno had recently sent him. These included references to Marx's observation that in Hegel important insights were inverted; the significance of Nietzsche; and trade unions as rackets (Adorno, 2003a[1971]: 95, 100, 105). At this time, fundamental elements of mature Critical Theory *in statu nascendi* were associated with Horkheimer's and Adorno's putative theory of rackets, which they soon abandoned. But an element of it which became a core feature of mature Critical Theory was the conclusion that, thanks to the 'culture industry', the working class was no longer capable of acting in its own interests (e.g. Horkheimer, 2013[1947]: 109). Another was the assertion, taken over from Pollock, that state control meant crises were no longer an essential feature of the economic system.

The long letter Horkheimer wrote about the draft of Grossman's study had several purposes. It offered a perfunctory defence of the theory of rackets. Its often brutal tone was consciously designed to put Grossman in his place: the uppity old institute employee was continuing to complain about the way Pollock had treated him. Yet the critique was 'not written just for Grossman but also for the purpose of defining certain basic ideas about dialectics which are usually forgotten among people like Gr[ossman]' (Horkheimer, 1943a, 1943b). The letter was an attempt to demolish not only 'The Evolutionist Revolt' but also what Horkheimer understood as Grossman's entire theoretical position. Horkheimer wrote to Pollock that the study was 'a rotten piece of work' (Horkheimer, 1943a). The vocabulary in his long reply to Grossman was more sophisticated and less blunt but the message was the same. In trying to explain and apply Marx's categories to the real world, the study was 'positivist'. Like 'traditional textbooks' on the history of ideas, the study listed series of facts without revealing their inner connection (Horkheimer, 1996b: 401). A sentence which Horkheimer urged Grossman to change or strike out, 'engaged ... in the mainstream business of the history of ideas as, decades ago, it let the "fundamental" drown in a blind calculation about surface appearances; a concession that is quite unworthy of you' (ibid.: 402, also 411).

Contempt for Grossman's research and appreciation of Marx's insights into capitalism's social and economic *material* processes expressed the rejection of scientific endeavour in general as 'positivism', complicit in domination, which was entailed in Horkheimer's and Adorno's emerging critique of the Enlightenment. Indeed:

... you have simply taken over [the position] common amongst those progressives that calls Hegel a mystic and Nietzsche a romantic. And I think, moreover, that so long as that continues, in other words so long as Marxism does not explicitly differentiate itself from positivism (and for this, practice and goals are not sufficient, rather the distinction concerns the whole structure of the theory), Marxism really collapses into positivism in the sense that it becomes nothing other than a branch of the academic activities of the past. (Horkheimer, 1996b: 411)

According to Horkheimer, the positivism of 'The Evolutionist Revolt' was, moreover, inherently conservative: 'If one reads your text carefully, one finds that the enthusiastic degradation of the author of *Capital* into a social scientist, which you undertake, has an apologetic side in relation to history, which is only just reined in by the content of the [i.e. Grossman's] thesis' (Horkheimer, 1996b: 411, also 401). In a similar vein, by agreeing with Sismondi's demonstration of the 'historical justification' for earlier economic structures Grossman could provide an apology for fascism: 'Or don't you think, perhaps, that the proof of objective necessity could be provided just as well for fascism, which draws in all the currents of late capitalism like a whirlpool, as to earlier economic phases and perhaps even better' (ibid.: 411).

Horkheimer bolstered the verdict of 'positivism' through criticisms of Grossman's account of Hegel and his own exposition of dialectics. The citation in 'The Evolutionist Revolt' of Hegel's apparently hostile comment about biological evolution, for example, missed its significance as an attack on positivism: 'He really meant that those who

reduce development to a succession of facts totally misunderstand its radical nature' (Horkheimer, 1996b: 409). Use of the terms 'sociologizing', 'historizing' and 'historicism' likewise indicated Grossman's positivist transgressions (ibid.: 401, 402, 410).

In his draft, Grossman had wrongly implied that the fundamental Hegelian term '*Begriff*' [notion or concept] had its common-sense meaning (Horkheimer, 1996b: 408). The notion was not the 'simple opposite of objective occurrence' but the way a thing is understood in theory, its nature. Hegel overcame the external counterpositions, such as 'consciousness and being, notion and reality, essence and appearance, spirit and nature, thought and occurrence', of previous philosophy (ibid.: 407). The location of the notion in the object itself, made it possible to grasp the 'irreparable contradiction of social reality'. For Hegel's was an 'objective idealism', in which 'the idea is conceived of as the totality and not as a separate sphere of consciousness'.

As a consequence, in Hegel something like a counterposition of theory and the reality of history plays no role at all. Your picture of Hegel is already one which, under the pressure of positivism, has resulted in the limitation of the Hegelian dialectic to the spirit as a sphere of the cultural superstructure: you polemicize against Hegel as though he was Dilthey. (Horkheimer, 1996b: 404)

Hegel's conception was 'modified and made more precise' by Marx (Horkheimer, 1996b: 406–8). Grossman had failed to grasp a crucial insight which Marx had developed and without which 'neither Marx's method nor a single one of his decisive categories is intelligible' (ibid.: 404, also 409–10). He had, by implication, reproduced the errors of pre-Hegelian philosophy (ibid.: 406–8). As in his presentation of the relationship between the notion of a thing and the thing itself as external, Grossman employed other pre-Hegelian counterpositions of categories.

The argument that the evolutionist political economists had more influence on Marx's conception of stages of economic development, Horkheimer interpreted as 'reverence for Jones at Hegel's expense' and the 'misunderstanding . . . that Hegel can be placed as an element in the materialist philosophy of history along-side Jones and Sismondi' (Horkheimer, 1996b: 401, 402–3, 409, 411, also 410). 'The decisive Hegelian moment in the critique of political economy is not that of dynamics or development . . .' Horkheimer insisted. 'Rather, the Hegelian experience in Marx genuinely consists in conceiving of the force of the merely factual at the same time as the possibility of its supersession, by virtue of its own principle' (ibid.: 404).

An aspect of the problem was that Grossman's interpretation of Hegel had drawn on unsatisfactory primary and secondary sources. He should have referred to Hegel's earlier *Science of Logic* (2010[1812–16]), which was 'the key to the process of objectivity in the movement of the notion' (Horkheimer, 1996b: 407–8), rather than the later *Philosophy of Nature* (2004[1817]) and *Philosophy of History* (1914[1837]). This judgement was backed up with a reference to Lenin (Lenin, (1976[written 1914]: 233), without mentioning his name. In the letter accompanying the draft of his study, Grossman apparently wrote that he disagreed with the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of history offered by Marcuse and had 'found no evidence for such a view in Hegel'. Horkheimer protested that Grossman's study not only failed to cite any of Marcuse's work on Hegel but

referred to the reactionary Georg Lasson, presented 'as a modern student of Hegel'. Nor were 'other works from our circle' referenced (Horkheimer, 1943a: 408).

Horkheimer made other, many and varied, observations about and objections to 'The Evolutionist Revolt'. The study did not acknowledge the ambiguous nature of 'progress', a theme of mature Critical Theory that had already been explored in the director's recent publications. His increasingly pessimistic outlook led to the conclusion that the Enlightenment promise of progress had led to barbarism.

Drawing on his own work on the philosophy of history, in internal criticism of what he described as Grossman's 'mainstream business of the history of ideas', Horkheimer suggested other corrections (Horkheimer, 1930; Horkheimer, 1987[1930]). The idea of historical progress did not originate, as he assumed Grossman had contended, with the Enlightenment but went as far back as Aristotle. The ancient Greek philosopher was a bourgeois thinker, if the definition of bourgeois is not strictly economic. Enlightenment thinkers, moreover, 'knew precisely that negative aspects of history were not a consequence of mere error but of real relations'. Giambattista Vico, supposedly an early 18th-century predecessor of evolutionary thinking 'despite his adherence to the cyclical theory' of history, should have been mentioned (Grossman, 1943a: 387; Horkheimer, 1996b: 402, 403).

As a substitute for knowledge of early evolutionist economic literature, the institute's director grasped in the air for arguments to blacken Richard Jones' name. Marx's use of Jones against Ricardo was merely an ironic, dialectical move. Grossman should have mentioned that there are 350 pages on Ricardo when he pointed to the 70 pages on Jones in Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*. Jones' colleagues were bigoted opponents of scientific criticisms of creationism; an observation presumably prompted by the study's reference to Hegel's apparent rejection of biological evolution (Hegel, 2004[1817]: 20; Horkheimer, 1996b: 409; Grossman, 1943b: 515). The term 'courage' should not be applied to Jones, the English reverend and public official, for writing against the Jewish stockbroker Ricardo (Horkheimer, 1996b: 203–4).

In his letter, Horkheimer did not directly criticize the revolutionary political or economic arguments of 'The Evolutionist Revolt', by means of his pessimistic attribution of 'domination' to humanity's relationship with nature and adoption of Pollock's view that economic crises were no longer intrinsic to capitalism. But he was so outraged by Grossman's study that, in a notable exception to his normal practice of not mentioning György Lukács by name (Gangl, 1987: 151), the institute's director singled out the author of *History and Class Consciousness* for a sideways kick. Horkheimer attempted to discredit Lukács by suggesting that he differed from Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's views about the applicability of dialectics to the natural as opposed to the social world (Horkheimer, 1996b: 408). Given Grossman's views about Lenin, reference to him was supposed to be a powerful authority. Although there was no explicit reference to Lukács in 'The Evolutionist Revolt', his influence was apparent, particularly in the most overtly political final section. Grossman and Lenin both regarded the proletariat, in Lukács' terms, not only as an object of history but also as its potential subject. Horkheimer had already had doubts about this conception in the 1920s (Abromeit, 2011: 120–1, 150) and by now had given up all hope that a working-class movement could bring about radical, positive change.

III Grossman's responses and the validity of Horkheimer's criticisms

While he mounted objections to fundamental aspects of Grossman's entire project, Horkheimer just did not get the central argument in 'The Evolutionist Revolt' and ignored its important distinction between idealist and materialist conceptions of development. Mainstream economics, as argued at length in *Marx, Classical Political Economy and the Problem of Dynamics* (Grossman 2015[1941]), was essentially static and ahistorical. 'The Evolutionist Revolt' identified how an aspect of Marx's analysis of capitalist dynamics, fundamental changes between modes of production, drew on the insight of evolutionist political economists that economic systems, including capitalism, are transient. Marx extended this insight, identifying 'the objective and subjective conditions necessary for the *transition from one system to another*', including the role of revolutionary class struggle (Grossman, 1943b: 518). Grossman was *not* making an argument that the evolutionary political economists had the same *methodological* significance for Marx as Hegel's dialectic, that he acknowledged and about which Horkheimer presumed to teach him. The published article did not suggest that the evolutionist political economists influenced Marx's or, as Horkheimer put it, 'the materialist philosophy of history' at all.

Grossman ignored Horkheimer's accusation that his approach was positivist. This was an attack on the whole conception of the article and, for that matter, Marxism as a scientific guide to action. Both involved the investigation of problems through theoretically informed empirical research. 'The Evolutionist Revolt' examined Marx's predecessors in the analysis of modes of production, understood as ensembles of forces and relations of production, and the circumstances in which they elaborated their ideas. Like Marx's in *Capital* and the drafts which were published as *Theories of Surplus Value*, its approach was historical materialist rather than an Hegelian focus on the inherent logic of the development of ideas, and still less the antinomy of human nature and humanity's relationship to the natural world, that characterized mature Critical Theory. Marx and Grossman employed the same method in their more strictly economic works. Their integration of theory and empirical investigation was far from the positivist myth of allowing the facts to speak for themselves. Nor was their acknowledgement of the way in which Sismondi established an historical explanation of capitalism a precedent for arguing that Nazism was legitimate. This accusation by Horkheimer confused 'justification' in the distinct senses of 'explanation' and 'moral approval'.

So Grossman clearly did not regard his own work as a mere positivist juxtaposition of facts. In 1924 he had identified Jean-Baptiste Say's naïve empiricism and praised 'Simonde de Sismondi for tak[ing] up anew the methodological problem of the Physiocrats': 'in the study of economic phenomena, [they] reject mere empiricism and use the *constructive method*' (Grossman, 1924: 6). Since the First World War, references to empirical evidence in his own academic studies were *explicitly* embedded in a Marxist framework. The historical materialist method was apparent in the way 'The Evolutionist Revolt' explained the antecedents of Marx's theory of successive modes of production. Marx 'took over the heritage of Saint-Simon and Sismondi in France, of James Steuart and Richard Jones in England, and of certain elements in Hegel's philosophy of history'

(Grossman, 1943b: 514, 517, 521). In contrast to conventional histories of ideas, Grossman argued that real, material events were crucial for the recognition that there were distinct stages in *economic* development:

[T]he ‘sociologising’ of economics is not and cannot be regarded as a purely intellectual development flowing from Hegel’s dialectics or any other book . . . the advocates of the evolutionary idea whom we are dealing with here based their universal laws and predictions on history, on actually observed evolutionary tendencies. Their ideas are the theoretical reflection of such great historical phenomena as the French and American revolutions and the industrial revolution in England. (Grossman, 1943a: 384)

Although the main argument and conclusions, which the head of the institute found objectionable, were unchanged in the published study and Grossman rejected many of Horkheimer’s criticisms of his exposition of Hegelian theory, he did accept others.

The accusation that Grossman had fallen back into the false, positivist, pre-Hegelian counterposition of categories ignored Hegel’s conception of *differentiated* totality (e.g. Hegel, 2010[1812–16]: 740). Marx, Lukács and Grossman employed such categories within the framework of an historical materialist conception of totality, notably in the analysis of alienation/fetishism/reification. Hence Grossman’s identification, following Marx, of working-class struggle as the link between ‘the objective and subjective meaning of history’ (Grossman, 1943b: 521; for Grossman’s appreciation of the totality of economic relations and relationship between Hegel and Marx, also see Grossman, 2015[1941]: 51, 53). Nor did Grossman agree that Hegel’s comments about biological evolution had the arcane meaning Horkheimer attributed to them, a view still consonant with much contemporary interpretation (e.g. Wandschneider, 2013: 111; and Spahn, 2015: 683–4).

On the other hand, the second part of the published study indicated the specific meaning of the word *Begriff* (notion or concept) in Hegel and spelt out Marx’s methodological debt to Hegel’s dialectics, although this was somewhat tangential to the core of its argument. The allusion to Lasson was modified and, on Horkheimer’s prompting, Grossman reassessed the value of Marcuse’s work and cited it (Marcuse, 1955[1941]; Grossman, 1943a: 383). But rereading Marcuse only confirmed Grossman’s interpretation of Hegel on the main issues in dispute. So Grossman used a reference to Marcuse’s book to *strengthen* his argument that Marx’s historical perspective on economic relations owed more to political economists than Hegel. And his observation that ‘Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* ends with the consolidation of middle-class society’ was only a marginal paraphrase of Marcuse (Marcuse, 1955[1941]: 226, 229; Grossman, 1943a: 382–3).

The revision of the treatment of Hegel did not involve citation of the *Science of Logic*. That would not, however, have altered Grossman’s assessment of Hegel, which was consonant with Marx’s, particularly as ‘Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* spells out the key concepts of his dialectic more clearly than any of his other writings’ (Rees, 1998: 39).

Drafts of Grossman’s study suggest that he made only minor additional changes consonant with Horkheimer’s comments (Grossman, 1943c, 1943d). But the published version would have been stronger if it had provided a more precise characterization of Hegel’s idealism. It still, as Horkheimer pointed out in his comments on the draft, gave

the impression that Hegel's philosophy was one of subjective consciousness rather than an objective idealism. But an improvement along these lines would not have undermined Grossman's (and Marx's) basic argument that Hegel was an idealist. 'The Evolutionist Revolt' clearly and convincingly specified what Marx rejected in Hegel (including idealism and the hostility to the concept of material, specifically biological evolution) and what he embraced (dialectics in particular). Horkheimer's point that inherent contradictions could give rise to the supersession of objects of study was therefore entirely consonant with Grossman's approach and argument, as was the contention that Hegel saw development as the consequence of the internal contradictions in objects, not as successive external stages (Horkheimer, 1996b: 409). Grossman's Marxism, embodying his own recovery of Marx's economic analysis and the insights into Marx's politics and philosophy recovered by Lenin and the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, was fundamentally counterposed to the mechanical Marxism of Karl Kautsky and Joseph Stalin.

While fleshing out Hegel's influence on Marx, Grossman did not alter his assessment of Jones' influence. The published study clearly differentiated between them by stating that the conservative Richard Jones made his evolutionist observations 'though ignorant of the Hegelian dialectic' (Grossman, 1943b: 507–8). Horkheimer's assertion that Hegel was not relevant to the issue of development or dynamics in political economy actually conceded Grossman's point that Marx's concept of successive modes of production owed nothing to Hegel. The obverse of this conclusion, with which Grossman also had no issue, was that Jones and Sismondi did not usher in a new stage in the history of the philosophy of history. Furthermore, recent scholarship has demonstrated the influence of Sismondi on Hegel's conception of social change (Pradella, 2014: 428, 435, 440, 442, 447–8).

In response to Horkheimer's historiographical comments, Grossman made only a minor change. The first part of the published study mentioned Vico, as Horkheimer had suggested, but only in order to refute the director's own descent into the conventional history of ideas. The analysis was 'not concerned with individual, isolated representatives of the evolutionary idea; such representatives appeared as early as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', that is, some predated Vico (Grossman, 1943a: 385). Contrary to Horkheimer's implication, Grossman did not argue that the idea of progress was a product of the Enlightenment. He did maintain that the industrial, American and French revolutions gave rise to a new, social scientific approach to progress, which instead of '[e]ternally unchanging laws' looked for 'the law of change itself' (ibid.: 382). Horkheimer and Adorno themselves soon associated the idea of progress with the Enlightenment (1989[1944]: 41–2).

Addressing Horkheimer's objection to the assertion that Enlightenment thinkers attributed 'irrational conditions' to 'error' or 'prejudice' may have improved the accuracy of the study's account of their thought. But the point did not undermine any step in Grossman's argument that there was no current of theories about historical economic stages before the industrial Revolution. The dominant Enlightenment view was, in any case, that the remedy for society's ills was the correction of 'error' and 'prejudice' through education.

Horkheimer's attempts to portray Jones as an anti-Semite were desperate and pathetic, presumably inspired, like his reading of the acknowledgement of Sismondi's

insights as a potential endorsement of fascism, by horror at events in German-dominated Europe. Neither Jones nor Grossman had referred to Ricardo's Jewish religion or stock-broking. Grossman, however, noted that Jones 'was very conservative in his political thinking' and had a relationship with the better-known conservative political economist Thomas Malthus (1943b: 509).

The only comment on Grossman's political and economic analysis in Horkheimer's letter was very indirect: his attack on Lukács. But he botched his case in two ways. First, he mistakenly assumed that Stalinist criticism of Lukács was in the spirit of Lenin. Second, Horkheimer stated that Lukács' crime was to argue that dialectics was applicable only to ideas. In fact, at one point in *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács maintained that dialectics was relevant only to human society and not to nature but, at another, just that the dialectics of society and nature were different (Lukács, 1971[1923]: 24, 207; also see Lukács' response to this criticism, Lukács, 2000: 102, 106–7; and Feenberg, 2015: 233–7).

Whether in response to Horkheimer or for other reasons, Grossman did revise the final section of his study: he hardened it up politically. The same English typescript into which the clarification of the meaning of '*Begriff*' in Hegel and Marx was inserted included similar, extensive handwritten redrafting of Grossman's conclusion about Marx's theoretical and political innovations (Grossman, 1943c: 10–19). This went into the published version of the article. In contrast to Horkheimer's beliefs that the working class had been completely subordinated and that capitalist economic crises could be avoided, Grossman *reaffirmed* Marx's analysis of the inevitability of class struggle and capitalism's tendency to break down.

Despite the hostile tone of Horkheimer's critique, Grossman replied to it in serious terms with a long letter. To Leo Löwenthal, the institute's director generously acknowledged that Grossman's 'reaction to my letter, though quite crazy as usual, was not indecent. It shows a broken but still relatively honest intelligence. Of course, he does not accept my criticism, but he, at least, tries to put up a theoretical discussion [*sic*]' (Horkheimer, 1943c). In the spirit of continuing dialogue, Horkheimer decided not to respond.

IV Enduring insights

An anonymous reviewer in an early issue of Dwight Macdonald's radical US journal *Politics* soon praised the treatment of Hegel in Grossman's 'most rotten piece of work', while Morton White of Columbia University thought it provided 'an excellent discussion' of Marx's approach to history (Anonymous, 1944: 92; White, 1945: 326). Later indications of the study's value were its republication twice during the early 1990s, in a collection on Marx and another on early political economists (Grossman, 1990, 1991). Examination of Horkheimer's criticisms of the article in draft does not undermine the validity of these judgements.

The clarity of Grossman's ('textbook') expression and organization of material contrasted with the increasingly obscure language and disjointed structure of the main texts of mature Critical Theory. In his attempt to use his new approach to demolish Grossman's study and entire project, Horkheimer did not succeed. While some of his

criticisms were valid, they were tangential to the main case made in ‘The Evolutionist Revolt’. He refrained from any direct comment on the study’s revolutionary political argument that Grossman grounded in an historical materialist analysis. This signalled his own trajectory away from the Marxist emphasis on the importance of the working class as an historical subject, class struggle, and the interaction of the forces and relations of production towards the attribution of ‘domination’ to humanity’s relationship with nature (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1985, 1989[1944]; also Adorno, 2004[1966]: 321–2; Horkheimer, 2013[1947]: 66–7).

The published version of Grossman’s study included and was strengthened by modifications in response to some of Horkheimer’s criticisms. It exemplified, in Horkheimer’s words, ‘the Hegelian experience in Marx [which] genuinely consists in conceiving of the force of the merely factual at the same time as the possibility of its supersession, by virtue of its own principle’. ‘The Evolutionist Revolt’ conducted a dialectical Marxist analysis, based on the appreciation of the development of the forces and relations of production, to draw its conclusions not only about the introduction of evolutionary thought into economics but also the capacity for the working class to be an historical subject and the crisis-prone nature of capitalism.

Around the time of its inception, mature Critical Theory, in the form of Horkheimer’s attack on the approach to the history of economic ideas and capitalism’s laws of motion in Grossman’s study, failed as a critique of Marxism. It remains a flimsy and fragmented foundation on which to build analyses of the capitalist economic structures and developments. The final pages of ‘The Evolutionist Revolt’ can be read not only as the conclusion of Grossman’s foregoing analysis but also as a persuasive rebuttal of fundamental elements of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s most celebrated ideas.

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