

Kaveh Boveiri, *Marxian Totality: Inverting Hegel to Expound Worldly Matters*. Leiden: Brill (Historical Materialism Book Series, Volume 322), 2024. ISBN:978-90-04-70397-1

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Marxian Totality: Inverting Hegel to Expound Worldly Matters, published in 2024 by Brill as part of its Historical Materialism series, constitutes a critical intervention in contemporary historical materialist thought, representing the first book-length monograph to interrogate the concept of totality from the *dual* perspective of philosophical and socio-political ontology. This extensive treatise draws upon a vast array of classical and contemporary philosophical texts to elucidate the distinctive phenomenological and dialectical features of Marxian totality, with a resolute focus on its methodological architectonics. The author's philosophical journey, which began amid the 1979 Iranian Revolution and was refined in protracted engagements with eminent thinkers like Yvon Gauthier and Frieder Otto Wolf, brings an existential hermeneutic depth to his work. Dedicated to Danny Goldstick and bolstered by the unwavering support of his partner Niloo in periods of somatic adversity, the monograph seamlessly intertwines rigorous ontological analysis with a poignant autobiographical phenomenology. Throughout, the writing resonates profoundly with contemporaneous existential crises, such as economic alienation, ecological estrangement, and geopolitical antagonisms, positioning it as an untimely yet prescient contribution to the dialectical tradition.

The text articulates its inquiry through four fundamental moments, each embodying a dialectical progression in the exposition of totality. The initial moment critiques undialectical conceptions, unmasking their epistemological inadequacies. The second proffers a critical hermeneutics of Hegelian totality, centered on the *Science of Logic* as the paradigmatic site of idealistic dialectics. The third dissects the ontological shortcomings of two canonical Marxist interpretations: Georg Lukács's *reified holism* and Karel Kosík's *dialectics of the concrete*. The fourth

moment, culminating in the book's penultimate section, undertakes a genetic-phenomenological tracing of the developmental ontology of Marxian totality across Marx's opus. The concluding chapter extrapolates the methodological implications for praxis. Augmented by a prologue, epilogue, and appendices furnishing textual exegeses, this architectonic reflects the ambition to sublate fragmented Marxist epistemologies into a cohesive *dialectical ontology*, thereby bridging speculative philosophy and sociopolitical emancipation.

The Prologue inaugurates the inquiry by invoking Marx's enduring ontological primacy, as evidenced by his preeminence in citation indices (Arts & Humanities Citation Index, 1993–2000) and the aporetic fragmentation afflicting contemporary leftist praxis, manifest in schisms over Brexit, the 2017 US elections, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, a dialectic of imperialism. Marx's project was not a prescriptive teleology but a *totalizing theorization* of capitalist ontology, a task Boveiri furthers in this phenomenological reconstruction. The book is divided into three parts: Part I (Chapters 1–4) establishes the theoretical scaffolding through negative dialectics; Part II (Chapter 5) presents a genetic ontology of totality's evolution; Part III (Chapter 6) resolves methodological antinomies.

The central thesis revolves around the dialectical inversion of Hegel's idealistic ontology, transmuting it into a materialist phenomenology that grounds totality in the concrete contradictions of historical being. Contra Hegel's *Science of Logic*, wherein the Absolute Idea enacts a closed, teleological sublation of contradictions within an idealistic totality, Marx effectuates an ontological reversal: ***totality becomes a processual category, dialectically mediated by the material relations of production, class antagonism, and commodity fetishism as reified forms of social being.*** This inversion is not simply a negation but a preservative sublation, wherein Hegelian logical categories are repurposed to disclose the alienated essence of capitalist ontology. Methodological consistency pervades Marx's oeuvre, obviating any epistemological rupture between the early anthropological humanism and the mature political economy. By tracing this ontological genesis, Boveiri undertakes to forge a unified epistemological foundation for Marxist praxis, subtly alluding to its applicability to neoliberal reification and ecological alienation, themes that resonate with our existential horizon of total planetary crisis. This thesis thus positions the monograph as a phenomenological

reclamation of Marx's method, synthesizing speculative dialectics with the exigencies of historical materialism.

The inaugural moment, delineated in Chapter 1, deconstructs undialectical conceptions of totality, exposing their ontological fallacies. We find criticism of the atomist-rationalist paradigm, exemplified by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, for its reductionist epistemology, wherein reality is atomized into discrete facts, privileging parts over holistic mediation. Similarly, the organicist and organicist-dynamic ontologies of Friedrich Schelling and Othmar Spann are unmasked as hypostatizing the whole, engendering a static, ahistorical totality that elides dialectical negation. This negative dialectic clears the phenomenological field for a Marxist ontology, wherein totality emerges as a self-mediating, evolving structure.

The second moment, Chapter 2's exegesis of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, dissects Hegel's triadic ontology, from the Doctrine of Being's indeterminate immediacy through Essence's reflective mediation to the Notion's conceptual self-determination, revealing the idealistic closure of the Hegelian totality. The Absolute Idea, as the consummate sublation of contradictions, precludes genuine historical openness, confining praxis to a retrospective phenomenology (the Owl of Minerva). Here, we find a critique that underscores how this ontological enclosure necessitates Marx's materialist inversion, transforming speculative dialectics into a revolutionary epistemology.

The third moment, encompassing Chapters 3 and 4, proffers a sophisticated critique of post-Hegelian Marxist ontologies. Lukács's conception in *History and Class Consciousness* is indicted for its reified holism, wherein the proletarian standpoint hypostatizes the whole against its parts, verging on an organicist essentialism that undermines dialectical negation.

Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete*, while lauded for its phenomenological integration of praxis, labor, and historicity, distinguishing concrete totality from pseudo-concrete appearances, is faulted for its lexical ambiguities (*Objekt-Gegenstand*) and neglect of Marx's textual ontogenesis. This analysis exemplifies a dialectical phenomenology, sublating the insights of these predecessors while exposing their epistemic lacunae.

The fourth moment, Chapter 5, constitutes the ontological apex, enacting a genetic-phenomenological reconstruction of Marxian totality.

Nascent dialectical motifs are discerned, commencing with Marx's 1837 "Letter to His Father" and his epigram on Hegel: methodological logic, praxis in epistemology, and mathematical dialectics, prefiguring mature ontology. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* reveal totality as the phenomenological inversion of alienated labor. *The German Ideology* and *Theses on Feuerbach* give a prototype of its materialist genesis, emphasizing sensuous praxis over contemplative epistemology. The *Grundrisse*'s oscillatory dialectics between the chapters on money and capital manifest totality's categorial movement. *Capital* consummates this ontology through systematic sublation, from the abstract immediacy of commodity fetishism to the concrete mediation of surplus value.

Chapter 6 extrapolates the methodological implications, repudiating an epistemological rupture between *Grundrisse* (method of inquiry) and *Capital* (method of exposition), positing them as dialectical moments within a unified investigative ontology. This synthesis aligns with the ecological dialectics of our time, where capitalist totality engenders planetary estrangement.

Notwithstanding its ontological profundity, the monograph's phenomenological abstraction imposes certain epistemic constraints. Its preponderant reliance on textual hermeneutics, while exegetically impeccable, eschews empirical concretization, lacking phenomenological reductions of totality to historical instantiations, such as the value form contradictions of the 2008 financial crisis or the alienated labor of the "gig economy."

This speculative emphasis may attenuate the book's efficacy as praxis, confining it to an esoteric epistemology accessible primarily to philosophical adepts.

Engagement with contemporaneous Marxist ontologies is somewhat parochial. Conspicuous absences include David Harvey's spatio-temporal dialectics of neoliberal accumulation or Nancy Fraser's intersectional phenomenology of social reproduction, which could enrich Boveiri's totalizing framework. The dense prose, laden with Hegelian terminology (*Aufhebung*, *determinate negation*), presupposes advanced familiarity with phenomenology, potentially alienating philosophical neophytes, despite the appendices' clarifications. The ecological implication of the Prologue, while ontologically promising, remains underdeveloped, forgoing a fuller dialectical analysis of nature's commodification as a capitalist externality, a significant missed opportunity given re-

cent history's anthropogenic crises.

Moreover, Kosík's critique, though hermeneutically acute, occasionally recapitulates existing analyses rather than offering novel ontological insights, and the text's prolixity may overwhelm without sufficient epistemic scaffolding. These aporias suggest avenues for subsequent phenomenological extensions, particularly in applied dialectical ontology.

As the inaugural monograph on Marxian totality from an ontological-sociopolitical nexus, *Marxian Totality: Inverting Hegel to Expound Worldly Matters* is ontogenetically pioneering. The dialectical inversion of Hegel revitalizes Marxist epistemology, sublating idealistic speculation into materialist phenomenology and challenging orthodox reifications (base-superstructure determinism) as well as poststructuralist deconstructions (Derrida's *différance*, which undermines totalizing coherence).

The *Grundrisse-Capital* synthesis augments hermeneutical ontologies, converging with Guido Starosta's evolutionary subjectivity in *Marx's Capital, Method and Revolutionary Subjectivity* (2016) and Michael Heinrich's categorial dialectics in *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (2012).

By framing totality as a hermeneutic tool for dissecting interconnected antinomies, Boteivi proffers an epistemic lens for contemporary existential dialectics: economic precarity as alienated being, ecological catastrophe as nature's negated otherness. The monograph's existential dimension, manifest in the acknowledgments of mentors and somatic struggles, lends it a phenomenological authenticity, humanizing speculative dialectics. Its emplacement within the Historical Materialism series affirms its role in propelling avant-garde Marxist ontology, likely catalyzing further inquiries into dialectical phenomenology and its socio-political teleology.

Marxian Totality: Inverting Hegel to Expound Worldly Matters is a significant contribution to the historical materialist literature on totality, performing a phenomenological inversion of Hegelian dialectics to reveal the material ontology of totality. Its strengths – exegetical precision, methodological integration, and contemporary relevance – are balanced by its abstract epistemology, limited scope, and dense hermeneutics. Boveiri's genealogical tracing of the ontology of totality and its practical implications provides a solid epistemic foundation for future research, while his autobiographical phenomenology deepens its exis-

tential significance. Essential for advanced philosophers exploring dialectical ontology, epistemology, and phenomenology, the book encourages extensions into applied dialectics, especially concerning the global contradictions of our era. It establishes a key position in the Historical Materialism series, and I confidently believe it heralds a renaissance in Marxist ontological thought.