

Interpretation

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Marx on Self-Consciousness, the City and the Gods

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In his doctoral thesis on the *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* Marx sought to demonstrate that Epicurus' most significant contribution to the history of philosophy was his transformation of atomistic physics into a critique of Greek theology and philosophy. Marx praised Epicurus for freeing philosophy from its servitude to theology, and for showing that the highest human good, *ataraxia* (tranquility), depended on freeing man from fear of the gods.¹ Marx further praised Epicurus for his claim that in order to free man from fear of the gods, self-consciousness must be liberated from the city. My reading of the dissertation and the notebooks written in preparation for it leads me to suggest that the motivation for Marx's interest in explicating Epicurus' attempt to free man from the city and the gods may be found in his belief that Epicurus' critique of Greek philosophy established the foundation for the critique of the philosophy of transcendence in the modern state. By exposing the political-religious myths of Greek philosophy Epicurus provided the basis for an alternative to the political-religious myths developed by Christianity and Hegel.

The significance of Marx's explication and defense of Epicurus' attempt to free man from the city and the gods may be somewhat doubtful, however, since his doctoral thesis cast him into the midst of a war that seemed to have been long over. Epicureanism, having launched the most devastating attack on the teachings of Plato and Aristotle in antiquity, found new vitality in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century attacks on an orthodox tradition which sought to combine the teachings of Christianity with those of Plato and Aristotle. Certainly, as one scholar recently observed, Epicurus and Lucretius, his greatest exponent, were "widely read in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were a source of inspiration in many ways for the new philosophic-scientific enterprise" (Nichols, 181–82). Yet by the close of the eighteenth century the Enlightenment seemed to have assured the place of the materialist and mechanistic spirit of Epicureanism and the consequent view that humans are naturally

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individual beings. Most significantly, the Enlightenment had come to accept the Epicurean teachings that humans are not by nature political animals and that religion has no place in the political order. Why then did Marx choose to rekindle the flames of battle when there was no war to be fought, no victory to be won?

Marx, knowing that his contemporaries were familiar with Epicureanism, sought to resurrect the political-theological teachings of Epicurus because the full significance of his critique of theology and philosophy was lost to them. Their readings were biased by the commentaries of Cicero and Plutarch, and more recently, by Gassendi.² Gassendi was often cited by Enlightenment thinkers for his seventeenth-century attempt to supplant Aristotelianism with a new reading of Epicurus. According to Marx, however, Gassendi only had the effect of furthering the servitude of philosophy to theology. Two problems issued from this misunderstanding of Epicurus. First, Epicurus' critique of Greek thought, and thereby a complete understanding of that thought, had been lost. Second, an incomplete understanding of Epicurus' critique of Greek thought meant that Marx's contemporaries were unable to reach a proper understanding of the place of philosophy and theology in the modern state. The continued subordination of philosophy to both theology and the city kept the "highest divinity," human self-consciousness, in chains.

Marx's interest in the relationship of philosophy to the city and the gods has been neglected in favor of three other issues which address the place of religion in Marx's thought. The most general issue which has been addressed is the question of whether Marx's thought is, as Tucker contends, religious-mythical or, as Bottomore argues, devoid of any religious overtones (Tucker; Marx 1964, xii). Whether Marx relies, albeit in secular form, on any remnant of traditional political-theological ideas, or rejects them in favor of a radically new philosophy is a longstanding controversy (Wessel). Another controversy has developed over the allegation that Marx abandoned an early interest in religion only in his later work. Sidney Hook argues that the concept of alienation in the early writings "is originally and primarily religious in nature," but in the later writings Marx constructed an economic approach freed of "poetic fantasy" (Hook, 5). Lobkowitz argues, to the contrary, that Marx never took religion seriously and that his "view on religion and atheism did not change as the years passed" (Lobkowitz, 306). Still a third area of disagreement concerns the origins of Marx's radical break with Hegelian "theology." For many years it was assumed that Feuerbach was the determining influence on Marx's early break with Hegel. More recently it has become fashionable to see Bauer as the primary influence (Lobkowitz; McLellan; Rosen). The relative significance of the Young Hegelians is assumed to be crucial for the development of Marx's political philosophy. Bauer's rejection of theology is different from that of Feuerbach, and the distinction, the argument goes, is essential to grasp the development of Marx's thought properly.

The question of the alleged religiosity or religious slant in Marx's thought, whether found in his early work or throughout his writings, must come to terms with the fact that even his earliest effort clearly rejects any semblance of religious imagery or theology. One may even go a step further and suggest that Marx's rejection of religion may not even be an issue of any particular importance since it is a commonplace of nineteenth-century thought. Moreover, because religious matters are irrelevant in Marx's later work, except insofar as he continued to maintain that religion is a reflection of the alienation which masks the material contradictions of the modern state, there is some justification for concluding that religion is of little importance in both his early and later writings.

To trivialize or ignore Marx's early struggle with the relationship between religion and politics is as problematic as the attempt to find a religious dimension to his writings, however. Marx sought to expose the mythical foundation of the modern state precisely because he appreciated the importance of religion. He believed that religion is a false consciousness which expresses the separation and withdrawal of man from man. Yet religion has its own truth. Marx rejected Kant's critique of religion for merely denying the existence of God because Marx recognized the significance of the multiplicity of religious belief. "All gods," he wrote, "the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have a real existence" (1976a, 104). On the one hand, Marx did not doubt that "religion is only the illusory sun about which man revolves so long as he does not revolve about himself" (1970, 132). On the other hand, he considered religion, given that man has yet to revolve around himself, the most crucial development of human consciousness. The existence of religious belief is proof "of the existence of essential human self-consciousness" (1976a, 104).

The above statement typifies both Bauer's and Feuerbach's inversion of what had long been accepted as proof of the existence of God: the multiplicity of religious belief demonstrates not the presence of God in the world, but of men who create gods in their own image. In admitting Marx's indebtedness to Bauer and Feuerbach we run the risk of being directed away from Marx's argument. Whatever truth he found in religion remained a limited truth, however, he went beyond his teachers by recognizing that the critique of religion is the prerequisite to the critique of politics.³ For Marx, it was not enough to point to the falsity of religious doctrine. The limits of the religious mind revealed the limits of a human consciousness not wholly freed from the bonds of the state. *The political-theological question, that is, is it both possible and desirable to free man from the city and the gods, is so significant to the history of political philosophy that I consider it to be the most significant religious issue which Marx raises.*

The motivation for Marx's study of Epicurus was not an interest in antiquity as such, but his desire to expose the mythic origins of the modern philosophy of transcendence. In returning to Epicurus, Marx sought to expose the root of

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the tradition which culminated in Hegel, the philosopher and theologian of the modern state. Accordingly, this study begins with Marx's understanding of the theological-mythical character of Hegel's philosophy.

Following a discussion of Marx's confrontation with the modern philosophy of transcendence, I shall return to the subject of Epicurus' attack. Here I am not so much interested in Marx's defense of Epicurus as I am in Marx's argument with the originators of the philosophy of transcendence. In part, this is an attack on Aristotle, but even more it is an assault on Platonic political philosophy. Marx well understood that Plato and Aristotle, each for his own reasons, failed to free philosophy from the gods and the city. In discussing the notebooks and the dissertation itself, I shall address two issues which Marx raised in his discussion of the limits of Platonic political philosophy. Marx thought that he had uncovered the limits of Plato's approach to the political-theological question both in his account of the life and death of Socrates and in his use of myth. In both matters I shall compare Marx's approach to Plato's account of Socrates with that of Hegel. Marx's treatment of Socrates borrows much from Hegel, yet where he turns from Hegel, we are better able to appreciate the significance of Marx's approach to both the ancient and modern struggle with religion and politics. In Hegel's view, the Platonic Socrates, in seeking to free self-consciousness from the city at the same time as confronting the city, was the first to pose the problem of self-consciousness correctly. However, Hegel also insisted that Socrates' and Plato's understanding of self-consciousness was limited by their denial that philosophy could lead to absolute knowledge, or wisdom, in this world. Whereas Socrates had posed the right question by introducing the quest for self-consciousness, it was left to himself, Hegel thought, to show that self-consciousness could be fully realized by mortal men in the state.

Marx thought that Hegel had started from the same point as Socrates when he supposed that self-consciousness necessarily "tends to extend itself, to expand, to spread through the whole domain of the reality given to man and in man" (Kojève, 82). Yet Marx denied that Hegel had gone beyond Plato in demonstrating that philosophy had in theory, and in fact, extended self-consciousness to the point of absolute wisdom, a wisdom that comprehended the totality of being. Marx denied, in other words, that Hegel's restatement of the Platonic problem of self-consciousness led to its successful resolution. Marx made it clear that Hegel had only repeated, albeit in a more sophisticated manner, the same mistake made by Plato. For similar reasons Marx returned to Aristotle. Hegel had recognized Aristotle as the first to offer a solution to the Socratic quest by suggesting that self-consciousness could be realized in the state. Hegel saw this as a step toward the realization of self-consciousness, albeit a step within the Platonic mold. Marx, however, saw in Aristotle only the development of the Platonic doctrine which was later to emerge in Hegel.

I shall conclude my discussion with a presentation of Marx's account of the

relationship between Epicurean physics and the Epicurean attempt to free philosophy from its dependence on the gods and the city. I shall consider that part of Marx's detailed discussion of the distinction between Epicurean and Democritean physics which allows us to reach the more significant matter, Epicurus' critique of Greek theology and philosophy. Epicurean philosophy founded the basic distinction between science and theology, Marx argued, in order to establish the principles for the "natural science of self-consciousness" (Marx 1976a, 73). In the concluding chapter of the dissertation, Marx argued that the natural science of self-consciousness did more than overcome the limitations of Democritean physics. Most significantly, Epicurus rescued philosophy from the city and the gods to which it had been chained by his predecessors. In defending Epicurus, Marx assumed that he had successfully answered the political-theological questions which were raised by Aristotle and Plato. He further assumed that that answer provided the basis for understanding the political-theological issue of the modern age.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSCENDENCE

In his study of Epicurus Marx sought to expose the origin of the myth of the philosophy of transcendence in order to free consciousness from the city and religion. In the foreword to his doctoral thesis Marx identified his task as one with that of Prometheus who, in reply to the gods, said: "Better to be the servant of this rock / Than faithful boy to Father Zeus." Better, in other words, to suffer the consequences for shattering the omniscience of the gods in bringing forth the truth to mankind, than to be like "those poor March hares who rejoice over the apparently worsened civil position of philosophy." For Marx, breaking the hold of the state and religion over philosophy was necessary in the fight against "all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity."

The inability of modern philosophy to recognize self-consciousness as the "highest divinity" was nowhere more evident to Marx than in its failure to recognize the great paradox posed by the place of religion in the modern state. As the modern state became free from the grip of religion, religion assumed a place as significant as any it had achieved in the past. The failure of philosophy to understand the practical significance of religion was associated with another issue of even greater importance. Philosophy, rather than recognize the true significance of religion in the modern state, abandoned the critique of the state and religion and instead remained firmly entrenched in the transcendent tradition which derived from Platonic political philosophy and Christianity. Philosophy, rather than having freed man, continued to justify his dependence on the city and the gods.

Hegel, the greatest philosopher of transcendence, provided a justification for

the illusions which continued man's dependence on politics and religion. Feuerbach confirmed Marx's view that "the secret of speculative philosophy is theology." Indeed, Hegel was limited by his inability to break fully with the very tradition which he sought to supplant. Hegel only turned theological demonstrations upside down in order to justify them (Marx 1976a, 103).

In characterizing Hegel's method as "theological," Marx knew that Hegel's solution to the problem of wisdom could hardly be associated with traditional religious concepts. Hegel could not accept the earlier systems since they required the existence of a transcendent God, and in so doing denied the ability of self-consciousness to return fully to itself. What was the reason, then, for Marx having characterized Hegel's method as theological? Hegel's idea that self-consciousness could only be realized by a mortal man at a particular moment in history, that is, by the philosopher in the modern state who knows that he is fully self-conscious, had distinguished his from earlier theological systems. Yet Hegel's belief that self-consciousness was, in fact, realized in the modern state did no more to solve the problem of self-consciousness than the Platonic idea that wisdom or self-consciousness could not be realized by man and the Christian idea that the "synthesis of the Particular and the Universal, is effected only in and by the beyond, after man's death" (Kojève, 67). Marx rejected Hegel, then, for he committed the same mistake as past "theologians" by having held that the state had solved the problem of self-consciousness in theory and fact.

Marx called Hegel's idea that the state overcame the particularity of civil society the "theological notion of the political state" (1970, 119).⁴ As Christians are equal in heaven and unequal on earth, so too individuals are equal "in the heaven of their political world yet unequal in the earthly existence of civil society" (1970, 80). Christianity mystified reality by inverting the relationship between man and God; man created God, not God man. So, too, Hegel mystified the modern state; the constitution was a creation of people, not as Hegel argued, the people a creation of the constitution. Just as religion established God as the creator in order to escape the pain and suffering of existence, so too, the constitution, in order to overcome the conflict within civil society, established the modern state. The idea of unity in the modern state belied the independent existence and alienation of the private sphere. Marx argued that the content of civil society (property, contract, marriage) lay outside the constitution. As "the actual man is the private man," civil society "is the accomplished principle of individualism" (1970, 81–82). The state did not overcome the individuality of civil society. Political life was, for Hegel, only in the air, the ethereal region of civil society. Hegel's state was thus the spirit; it transcended the conflict rooted in civil society just as Christ transcends the flesh of this world.

Marx rejected Hegel for following in the tradition initiated by Plato and transformed by Christianity into a philosophy of transcendence. In the disserta-

tion Marx suggested that Hegel's failure to break with the philosophy of transcendence derived from his failure to grasp the significance of myth in Platonic philosophy. Although Hegel understood that Christianity, "the consummate philosophy of transcendence," bore a profound resemblance to Platonic philosophy, "the heartbeat of the philosophy of transcendence," he was unable to establish properly the cause of and relationship between the respective transcendent doctrines (Marx 1976b, 498). Certainly Hegel distinguished Platonic philosophy from Christianity in the following way: the Platonic method begins with dialectic turning man inward toward his own consciousness, while Christianity proceeds with Christ as the beginning of consciousness, for where grace is bestowed the subject is brought to consciousness of sin. Moreover, Hegel was aware that the distinction between consciousness of self and consciousness of sin required distinguishing between Socratic irony and grace, and that neither the Platonic nor the Christian ideal solved the problem of self-consciousness. The last great philosopher of modernity, as well as its last great theologian, Hegel remained firmly entrenched in the speculative tradition which had originated in Greece, however. Having failed to realize the significance of Platonic myth, he continued down the path of transcendence which Plato had opened and which Christianity blazed.

In arguing that Marx's struggle with Hegel led him to attack the Platonic root of Hegelian philosophy, I may draw support from Sidney Hook's claim that "in repudiating Hegel, Marx is also repudiating Plato and the whole Platonic tradition" (1971, 35). Hook insisted that Marx, in opposition to the Platonic tradition, returned to Aristotle's naturalism for the basis of his dialectical materialism. There is, however, a significant problem in Hook's reading of Marx's relationship to Hegel, Plato and Aristotle. We may assume that Marx knew that Hegel himself had clearly accepted the superiority of Aristotle, whom he considered "excels Plato in speculative depth" (Hegel 1983, 2:119). Indeed, Marx had considered that Aristotle, even as he had turned from his teacher, was firmly planted in the tradition which Plato had originated. The significant struggle for the history of philosophy was not so much that which obtained between Plato and Aristotle as the one between the tradition founded by Socrates and developed by Plato and Aristotle and the tradition developed by Epicurus. Perhaps it is more correct to say that the critical struggle was, as Hegel had sought to demonstrate, one between philosophy and theology.

Epicurus directed Marx back to Plato's account of Socrates, which warranted Socrates' designation as the founder of both the philosophy of self-consciousness and the philosophy of transcendence. In Platonic philosophy Socrates is presented as the first to break with the teachings of the city and the gods by turning man to himself. Because he was the first to show that the true source of self-consciousness was neither the city nor the gods, he was the first to suggest the philosophy of self-consciousness. Yet because he was unable to break entirely from the city and the gods, he sought refuge in myth and laid the

foundation for the philosophy of transcendence. Marx, holding that it was Platonic philosophy itself which, in turning man away from the city and the gods, sowed the seeds for the destruction of the philosophy of transcendence, recognized Epicurus as the first to expose the myth of transcendence in Platonic philosophy.

In the notebooks prepared for his study of Epicurus Marx, following Hegel, argued that “the first Greek wise men are the real spirit, the embodied knowledge of substance” (1976b, 436). Marx meant by this that these first wise men were only capable of mimicking the laws and moral life of the city. These pre-Socratic wise men “are only the vessels, the Pythia, from which the substance resounds in general, single precepts, their language is as yet only that of the substance become vocal, the simple forces of moral life which are revealed.” The first wise men were unable to take a critical stance against the city because they “extol state life as real reason.” For these first wise men philosophy was therefore impossible, since their consciousness was merely a reflection of the existing moral and political climate obtaining in Greece at that time.

Marx attributed the fall of the first *sophos*, and thus the rise of philosophy, to the teachings “embodied in Socrates as its demiurge” and in Platonic philosophy (1976a, 36). He wrote that the “the reason why Socrates is so important is that the relation of Greek philosophy to the Greek spirit, and therefore its inner limit, is expressed in him” (1976b, 438–39). With Socrates the relationship between the *sophos* and the city is forever changed. The principle of philosophy becomes, in the embodiment of the *sophos*, the subjective spirit of his own consciousness. The subjective spirit is now the vessel of substance which “knows that it has the ideality in itself, is the judgment of the concept.” In Socrates, the subjective spirit of consciousness is born of the city, but it takes a subjective striving, a leap, a falling away from the city. The subjective spirit is a force internal to spirit itself, it is Socrates’ *daemon*. Socrates’ wisdom is his consciousness “that he carries the *daemon* in himself.” His philosophy is the “abstract determination of the good” which brings man to himself, just as it separates him from the city. Socrates’ philosophy is therefore “essentially his own *wisdom*, his own *goodness*” (1976b, 439).

Yet the *daemon* of Socrates, even as it detached him from the city, directed him toward the city. Socrates did not withdraw from the city, nor did he wrap his relationship with the city in mystery; he was not a seer, “but a sociable man” (1976b, 436). Socrates’ purpose was “in practice the determination of the individual spirits, education and teaching” (1976b, 438). His calling was to teach about the world. Marx, citing Hegel as his authority, wrote that Socrates’ method was a “dialectic trap through which human common sense is precipitated out of its motley ossification . . . into the truth immanent in human common sense itself” (1976b, 494). Socrates’ teaching is a practical activity “by which he leads single individuals out of the determination of substantiality to determination in themselves.” Thus while Socrates leads men away from the

city, he never abandons it. Instead, he confronted citizens in an effort to provide the city with a new foundation.

Socrates, Marx argued, remained rooted in the life of the state, as he insisted that he owed “his right to exist only to the laws of the state to which he belongs, to its religion,” which appeared to him as his own nature. Socrates’ refusal to break with the laws and religion of the city was the cause of his death. Thus in the *Apology* Socrates himself is presented as saying that he cannot cease from the practice of philosophy, even though it may mean his death, since he was attached to the city by the god (30b–e). Because Socrates insisted that he owed his existence to the city and the god he was unable, in both thought and action, to free consciousness from the city and its myths.

In Marx’s estimation the death of Socrates provided the evidence of the limits of Socrates’ teaching. The true free spirit, contrary to Socrates, “endures and overcomes all contradictions and . . . need not recognize any natural conditions as such” (1976b, 438). The true free spirit is a self-determined individual, who will act according to his own consciousness, unencumbered by the laws of the city. Socrates, by his own admission, owed too much to Athens to separate himself radically from the city and thereby survive. Socrates’ death proved the deficiency of his daemon and thus the limits of his self-consciousness.

Marx recognized that Socratic dialectic was, in part, an expression of Socrates’ love which turned him toward the city. Yet at the same time the “practical motion” of dialectic led him to collide with the city, and this, in turn, led to his death. Embodied in Socrates’ life are both love and death, creativity and destruction, which return man to himself at the same time as tying him to the city. Even though he was the judge of his state he must perish “precisely because he is born of the substantial” from which he could not escape.

Marx’s approach to the death of Socrates may be attributed to the influence of Bauer’s insistence on the necessity of radically separating self-consciousness from all material concerns. However, if the point was Bauer’s radical self-consciousness, would Marx have ignored another possible interpretation, for example, a promethean one which would have seen in Socrates’ death a radical separation from Athenian life? Marx, in other words, could have seen in the death of Socrates a radical step toward the fulfillment of the idea of self-consciousness and a turning away from the laws and religion of the city. This is, in fact, what Hegel said in regard to the death of Socrates.

Marx, contrary to Hegel, was unwilling to see in Socrates’ death, as opposed to his life, any resemblance to a promethean act. Marx saw little more in Socrates’ death than his failure to break from the city and fully express his self-consciousness. Socrates offered a critique of the city, but a critique which was necessarily limited inasmuch as it was bound to the city. Socrates must die, and Plato can do no more than create an Ideal, never comprehending the limits of the city or his philosophy.

Plato, according to Marx, used myth to justify Socrates’ commitment to a

life of philosophy because he was unable to give an adequate justification for Socrates' account of the philosophical life as a preparation for death (*Phaedo* 64a). Socrates himself is presented in the Platonic dialogues as having admitted that his account of the immortality of the soul is no more than a myth necessitated by philosophy's inability to demonstrate that "there is no escape from evil or salvation for it (the soul) except by becoming as good and wise as possible" (*Phaedo* 107d; *Republic* 614b–21d). Platonic myth, as Marx understood it, was a literary way out of the dilemma posed by Socrates' philosophical life necessarily having culminated in his being put to death by the city. Platonic philosophy required that Socrates provide a mythic account of the philosophic life because it was unable to overcome the fact that Socrates' dependence on the city and the gods led to his death.

The question one should ask when reading Plato is, according to Marx: "why is this mythologizing to be found in those dialogues which mainly expound moral and religious truths" (1976b, 497)? Consider the fact, Marx wrote, that the *Parmenides* is free from myth. Plato's use of myth was no more than an admission of his inability to free self-consciousness from the city and the gods. On the one hand, this demonstrated that Plato's recourse to myth was an admission of the limits of his philosophy. On the other hand, Marx recognized this as further proof that true knowledge is human, sociable and attainable.

In turning the life of Socrates into a "comprehensive, world embracing philosophy" Plato had been accused of creating a philosophy with the character of religion. Marx, in opposition to this, considered Plato's literary use of myth. By insisting that myth is no more than a Platonic device necessitated by the inability of the dialectic form to account for Socrates' death, Marx sought to rescue him from the Christian cast to which he had been reduced. In the notebooks written in preparation for the dissertation Marx compared Christianity, or "personified religion," with Platonic philosophy, or "personified philosophy," and concluded "that the philosopher Socrates is related to Christ as a philosopher to a teacher of religion" (1976b, 493). The philosopher and teacher of religion are both concerned with *psyche* (the soul). The relationship between Platonic philosophy and Christianity may be found in the "relationship of Platonic ideas to the Christian logos, the relationship of the Platonic recollection to the Christian restoration of man to his original image" (1976b, 495). In recognizing that both Platonic philosophy and Christianity sought to transform the human psyche through myth, Marx did not intend to equate the doctrines. The Platonic myth of recollection was an attempt to overcome the inability of Socratic dialectic to provide a reasoned argument for choosing the philosophical life over any other life. The mythical presentation of the rewards and punishments in the world to come was an educational device to supplement Socrates' inability to demonstrate that the just life was good for its own sake. Marx believed that a proper understanding of Platonic myth revealed the implicit atheism of the Platonic philosophy.

Christianity went further than Platonic philosophy because it took Socrates' mythological claims about life after death and transformed them, through an account of the death and resurrection of Christ, into a philosophy of transcendence. Just as Christianity turned the Platonic quest for self-knowledge into an answer, Platonic myth became the Christian truth. Christianity, as Marx understood it, adopted the myth of life after death because it denied the possibility that a psyche could be directed to its "original image" in this world. Christianity, having abandoned this world altogether, sought to lead men by convincing them of the truth of the immortality of souls.

In rescuing Plato from the weight of the Christian tradition Marx was not about to abandon the Platonic origins of Christianity. In distinguishing Plato's recourse to myth from the Christian doctrine of transcendence Marx was able to expose the origin of the philosophy of transcendence. According to Marx, however much Platonic and Christian teachings differed, they both sought recourse to myth because of their inability to overcome the attachment of self-consciousness to the city and god(s). The true significance of discovering the origin of the philosophy of transcendence was, of course, that it enabled Marx to uncover the origin of Hegel's "theology."

It seems ironic that Marx found the origin of Hegel's "theology" in Plato's use of myth. I say this because Hegel was the source of Marx's view that Socrates was the originator of the principle "that man has to find from himself both the end of his actions and the end of the world, and must attain to truth through himself" (Hegel 1983, 1:386). Marx learned from Hegel, in other words, that Socrates was the first to return man to himself as the originating point of consciousness. Marx also followed Hegel in holding that Socrates' method, even as it drew men into themselves, was "no withdrawal from existence," since his philosophical teaching required social intercourse. Socrates' wisdom, according to both Hegel and Marx, was human and sociable.⁵ Why, then, did Marx begin to abandon Hegel's approach to the problem of consciousness? Perhaps a further consideration of Hegel's treatment of Socrates will be of some help. Hegel, contrary to Marx, considered it important to discuss that side of Socratic irony which taught the limits of consciousness; that is, consciousness is surprised when it is led to doubt. Socrates' own wisdom is that "he knew nothing and therefore taught nothing" (Hegel 1983, 1:404). In conversation with Socrates one comes to the conclusion "that what we knew has refuted itself." Hegel considered the limits which were implied by the daemonic urge to self-consciousness as fundamental to the teaching of Socratic irony.

I cannot attempt to explicate the Socratic teaching. However, it is important to raise the question of why Marx refused to consider seriously even so basic a tenet of Socratic irony as Socrates' insistence that his daemon only instructed him in what not to do and never told him what action to take (*Apology* 31d). Because Marx broke with Hegel on this matter, we must assume that he was aware of that side of the Socratic teaching whose significance he denied. Why,

then, did he reject that side of the Socratic teaching which insisted on the necessary limits of human wisdom? Perhaps we may begin to understand the reason for Marx's position by pairing it with another issue where he broke with Hegel. Hegel recognized that it was precisely Socrates' attachment to the city which enabled him to begin to free self-consciousness from the city. By refusing to escape from the city and save his life, Socrates pointed to the dependence of consciousness on the city, but at the same time he pointed to that which is beyond the life of any particular city. In pointing to the nature of the whole of which the self and the city were only parts, Socrates suggested the possibility for self-consciousness to attain absolute wisdom even though, in the end, he held that human wisdom was limited by nature.

Hegel, of course, in his critique of the limits of the Socratic teaching, stands as a modern thinker in opposition to Socrates. For Hegel, Socrates' genius "is not Socrates himself, not his opinions and conviction, but an oracle which, however, is not external, but is subjective, his oracle" (1983, 1:422). Hegel considered this a historical leap toward self-consciousness but limited in that Socrates' genius remained, in part, unconscious rather than a pure expression of self-consciousness. Socrates knew, as Kojève points out all philosophers must know, that "that man is Wise who is capable of answering in a comprehensible or satisfactory manner all questions that can be asked him concerning his acts, and capable of answering in such fashion that the entirety of his answers form a coherent discourse" (Kojève, 75). Hegel, who thought he had proved that he had demonstrated this wisdom, rejected Socrates for denying the possibility that philosophy could result in this wisdom. Hegel was willing to recognize the limit of human knowledge as Socrates presented it, yet he still maintained that this was a limit conditioned by history, rather than one inherent in man's nature. Hegel attributed Plato's inability to see the unity amid the diversity of the speculative project to his historical situation. Only in the modern world can absolute independence return into the unity of the idea.

Hegel's discussion of Plato's limited understanding of freedom is particularly interesting, given Marx's later perspective, when he reviewed Plato's "suppression of the principle of individuality" in considering the abolition of private property in the *Republic*. Hegel argued that we may see in Plato's abolition of private property "the very limit of the Platonic Idea—to emerge as an abstract idea" (1983, 2:113). By abstract, he also meant that Plato was not idealistic enough in his onesided presentation of individual freedom. Plato was only capable of seeing the opposition between individuality and the unity of the state. Concrete individuality in private property, or the family, as it is a possession and stands in a living relation with the person—"in which my person as such comes into existence, into reality"—is destroyed in Plato's *Republic*. There are no private persons, only man as the universal individual in the state. "But Being to Philosophy," Hegel objected, "is no abstraction, but the unity of the universal and reality, or its content." Instead of destroying the individual

conscience, as Plato does, philosophy sees that the individual “connects itself with the whole, chooses a position for itself, and thus makes itself a moral fact” (1983, 2:109). Hegel, in opposition to Plato, chose to side with Aristotle, who he considered had recognized the same mistake in Plato.

Yet Hegel also held that Plato “sometimes ignored” subjective freedom “because it proved itself to be what wrought the ruin of Greece” (1983, 2:109). Hegel understood, for example, that Plato’s abolition of private property is evidence that he knew and taught that the unfolding of self-consciousness threatened to undermine the city. The abstract idea of the city is not, as Marx would have it, only an admission of an inability to elevate self-consciousness beyond the confines of the polis. The abstract idea is, as is myth, a means to elevate men from particular to universal understanding. Hegel warned against the mistaken belief which sees in the myth itself a simple presentation of what is most excellent in Platonic philosophy. The true meaning of Platonic myth is not revealed in the simple representations in the dialogues.

Hegel did hold, as Marx was to hold later, that Plato’s doctrine of the immortality of the psyche was, in a sense, no more than popular philosophy which permitted him to present Socrates in heroic form (1983, 2:1–48; 1:443). Yet, as we have seen, Hegel observed in Plato and Socrates a deeper teaching which Marx either denied or ignored. Plato’s use of myth is, for Hegel, a device to teach that “the truth lies within us and the spiritual content within us must be brought into consciousness” (Hegel 1984, 413). He did not believe that Plato’s myth of the immortality of the psyche should be understood in a theological sense, that is, in terms of the soul’s existence before birth and after death. Hegel’s view of Platonic myth is thus neither what Marx took it to be, a popular answer to a wrong question, nor what Christian theologians took it to be, a true answer to the fundamental question. Hegel, instead, argued that Plato’s myth of recollection and immortality is Plato’s truth that “consciousness in the individual is in reason the divine reality and life; that man perceives and recognizes it in pure thought, and that this knowledge is itself the heavenly abode and movement” (1983, 2:41). Although Socrates was wrong in supposing that self-consciousness could not be obtained by mortal man, he at least posed the right question by directing man to all that which constituted self-consciousness.

Plato’s account of Socrates’ death is, for Hegel, a contribution to the history of consciousness. The mythic view of immortality provided, as did Socrates’ death itself, for the return of consciousness to the city at the same time that it pointed consciousness away from the city. Hegel took the judgment of Socrates by Athens and Aristophanes’ account of Socrates’ teaching to have shown Plato’s contribution. Aristophanes understood that Socratic philosophy posed a threat to the city, since “the idea of law had been shaken” (1983, 1:426). Having summarized the exaggerated and humorous account of Socrates in the *Clouds*, Hegel observed that Aristophanes was correct in suggesting that Soc-

rates' reflecting consciousness was a threat to the city. In considering the account of Socrates' trial in Plato's *Apology* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Hegel concluded that the charges were true. Socrates both denied the city's teaching on the gods and he led the youth astray. The justice of both charges followed from his placing "the contingency of judgment in himself, since he had his Daemon in his own consciousness, (and) thereby abolished the external universal Daemon from which the Greeks obtained their judgments." Hegel was not persuaded that Socrates' apology was intended as a defense. Instead, Hegel argued that Socrates in his very trial still refused to accept the laws of the city. By refusing to recommend a punishment for himself, he denied the authority of the guilty verdict and thus the authority of the laws. Indeed, Socrates' struggle for self-conscious spirit brought about his death, but by forcing his death, he furthered the cause of self-consciousness, in Hegel's view.

Now we may assume that Marx knew, both from his own reading of Plato's dialogues and from Hegel's commentary, that Socrates' insistence on the necessary limits of his wisdom was a considerable element of Socratic irony. Interestingly, Marx chose not to comment on this aspect of dialectic and instead considered only that part of Socratic irony which taught the positive side of self-consciousness. Marx's failure to discuss anything other than the power or positive side of self-consciousness leads us to conclude that he was unimpressed by whatever purpose Socrates might have had in confronting us with the limits of human knowledge.

Marx, of course, could not accept that there was a nature which ordered the whole any more than he could accept that human knowledge was subject to anything other than material and thus temporal limits. He never seriously considered Socrates' discussion of the limits of human wisdom because he rejected both the dependence of consciousness on the city and the natural order in which human wisdom was capable only of sharing in a glimpse of the parts. Marx, then, saw in Plato's account of Socrates only an implicit acknowledgment of the limits, not of nature, but of the Socratic teaching.

I shall not consider the adequacy of Marx's account of Socratic dialectic. For our purpose it is enough to recognize that what Marx takes to be the essential element of dialectic, that it returns man to himself by recognizing "the truth immanent in common sense itself," may rightly be considered only one part of Socratic irony. In crediting Socrates with making a significant contribution to the development of self-consciousness, Marx only valued Socrates' daemon for showing that self-consciousness was an activity emanating from the individual. Having identified Socrates' wisdom as human and sociable, Marx held that that part of the Socratic teaching which taught the limits of human wisdom merely reflected Socrates' inability to free consciousness from the gods and the city. Plato's metaphysical doctrines, such as the transmigration of souls and theory of forms were, in Marx's view, merely attempts to overcome, in speech, Socrates' inability to free consciousness from the gods and the city. As such, Plato

mystified Socrates' teaching because he could provide a satisfactory account neither for Socrates' pursuit of philosophy nor for his death.

Marx's onesided approach to Socrates has been attributed to the influence of Feuerbach's insistence on the divinity of man, Bauer's power of self-consciousness, or the thought of both. It seems certain that during the writing of his dissertation, Marx was not fully exposed to Feuerbach's position, and it would thus be difficult to make the case in regard to his thought (see McLellan, 85–116). We may accept the notion that Marx was, to a certain extent, influenced by Bauer's thought. But this position, even if correct, does not explain the significance of Marx's position. The most interesting question about this position concerns his refusal to consider that part of the Socratic teaching regarding the limits of wisdom. The answer does, in part, point to the influence not only of Bauer, or any particular thinker, but also to Marx's stand on the side of the Enlightenment in opposition to Platonic philosophy. Indeed, Marx's attraction to Epicurus is in itself to be expected, as many children of the Enlightenment sought to return to his teachings. Jefferson, for example, called him "our master Epicurus," to whom we may return to save philosophy (including the teachings of Jesus) from the mysteries of Platonism (Jefferson, 14:386, 15:219). Marx, in common with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thinkers, was in large part attracted to Epicurus because he taught that that portion of the Platonic teaching which addressed the limits of man's wisdom ought to be disregarded.

There is, however, another reason for Marx's approach to Socrates and for his denial of Hegel's account of Socrates' contribution to the history of self-consciousness. In rejecting the significance of Socrates' view of the limits of self-knowledge, he sought to lay bare the origin of Hegel's mistaken assumption that he had answered the problem of self-consciousness. Marx agreed with Hegel's assertion that Plato was wrong in supposing that man's quest for knowledge must always remain just that, a quest. Marx accepted, in principle, Hegel's proposition that self-consciousness could be fully realized by mortal men. Let us put it this way: Marx understood what was at stake in Hegel's assertion that it was both necessary that self-consciousness be attained in history, and that he, Hegel, had attained self-consciousness in his philosophy of the modern state. Having asserted that Hegel had failed to show that the abstract Idea had become Concrete (that the idea had not been realized with the state), Marx returned to the root of transcendence in order to expose Hegel's failure. Having shown the reason for Plato's recourse to myth, and having identified it as the origin of Hegel's "theology," Marx sought, in returning to Epicurus, to reopen the case which Hegel thought he had closed.

I have not developed Marx's understanding of Epicurus' break with Platonic philosophy. I have only stated Marx's contention that Epicurus established an alternative to the philosophy of transcendence which originated in Platonic philosophy, and I have sought to show that Marx returned to Plato as the begin-

ning point of his critique of the philosophy of transcendence. How had Epicurus, according to Marx, undermined Platonic philosophy? In order to answer this question we must first recognize that Epicurus' critique of Platonic philosophy is not confined to Plato. In fact, Marx's observations on Epicurus' contribution to the critique of the philosophy of transcendence which originated with Plato are most explicit when directed toward Aristotle. Before addressing Marx's discussion of Epicurus' critique of Aristotle, I shall turn briefly to Hegel. Like Marx, he considered that Aristotle had remained within the speculative tradition which Plato had originated. Hegel, for example, thought that it was particularly significant that we understand "how far Aristotle carried out what in the Platonic principle had been begun" (1983, 2:117). But there is another reason for examining Hegel's approach to Aristotle. What Hegel took to be Aristotle's contribution to political philosophy was exactly what Marx had identified as the reason for Epicurus' rejection of Aristotle in particular and Platonic philosophy in general. In considering the difference between Marx's and Hegel's understanding of Aristotle, we are better prepared to appreciate Marx's purpose for returning to Epicurus. In returning to Epicurus' critique of Aristotle, Marx was able to expose the limits of the philosopher closest to Hegel and thereby to criticize Hegel himself.

First, I shall consider the grounds for Hegel's assertion that Aristotle carried out what Plato had begun. Hegel had warned against committing the kind of error which Hook committed in distinguishing Plato's speculative philosophy from Aristotle's naturalism. Yet Hegel also suggested that it was quite easy to make the mistaken distinction between Aristotle's "realism" and Plato's "idealism." Aristotle's method encouraged the error, since he "always seems to have philosophized only respecting the individual and particular" and seems to have had no unifying principle which accounted for the Absolute in its totality (1983, 2:117, 137, 229). The form of Aristotle's philosophy gave it the appearance of denying the totality of speculative philosophy. Moreover, since Aristotle had rejected both abstract Platonic ideas (including the immortality of souls), and the principle that wisdom cannot be achieved by man in this world, it was easy to see his turning from Plato as a radical departure from his Platonic origins. Nevertheless, the subjects of Aristotle's method "still form a totality of truly speculative philosophy," since through contemplation the philosopher is able to absorb all particular subjects of philosophical inquiry (1983, 2:118, 228). Aristotle understood in thought, at least, that absolute wisdom was possible and that its comprehension of totality was opposed to the destruction of the individual and particular. In contemplation one was able to know that totality comprised the individuality of substances which, in their self-determination, ultimately pointed to the universal end, or to the one Absolute, the idea of God. It is interesting to note here that Hegel concluded the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* with a quotation from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in which he set forth his idea of a God who, having no involvement in the world, is the essence of pure

contemplation. Now while it would be wrong to equate Hegel's idea of God with that of Plato or Aristotle, it is revealing that Hegel had thought that Aristotle's "theology" had gone a long way toward developing the proper understanding of the Absolute. Although Aristotle's method was limited insofar as he was unable to develop a "unifying principle" which made concrete the particular conceptions of knowledge, he went further than Plato in recognizing that man could attain self-consciousness through divine contemplation.

In Hegel's treatment of Aristotle's political philosophy we find a discussion of the extent and limit of Aristotle's contribution to the development of self-consciousness. The limits of Aristotle's speculative power could be seen in his approach to individual freedom. Although Aristotle recognized, as Plato had not, that individuality was not destroyed in the concept of the state, he was unable to conceive of the freedom of individuals in its highest sense. In commenting on Aristotle's *Politics*, Hegel observed that Aristotle could have no knowledge of natural right, since "the idea of abstract man outside of any actual relation to others" could not yet be known (1983, 2:208). Aristotle's characterization of man as a "political animal" prevented him from understanding that the whole of which the individuals were parts did not lessen the independence of each particular individual. Because Aristotle was unable to see the complete independence of the parts he, too, was unable to see the nature of that which bound the whole together.

Yet Hegel did admit that, in part, Aristotle's treatment of the citizen was superior to that of many thinkers of his own era who were unable to see beyond the isolated individual to the spirit which holds the parts together (1983, 2:209). Aristotle knew that the individual and state shared, at least in potentiality, a common end (*Ethics*, 1094b1–10). In the *Ethics* Aristotle said that the end for man is *eudaimonia* (happiness), and that in its highest form *eudaimonia* is divine *theoria* (contemplation) (*Ethics*, 1178b3–1179a). In the *Politics* Aristotle, according to Hegel, recognized that the perfection of the individual is obtained in the state as a whole, and that the object of the science of politics is therefore the *eudaimonia* of the individual brought to its greatest perfection. Aristotle, even though he was incapable of seeing the abstract independence of the individual in relation to the state, realized that divine *theoria*, or the individual's attainment of self-consciousness, was potentially realized in the state. In so doing Aristotle, to the extent that it was historically possible, prefigured Hegel's own realization that self-consciousness was realized in the state.⁶

Marx accepted a good deal of Hegel's account of Aristotle, but unlike Hegel, who had praised Aristotle as the first to realize that self-consciousness was made absolute in the state, Marx turned to Epicurus to demonstrate that Aristotle only contributed to the dependence of self-consciousness on the city and the gods. I shall turn now to Marx's account of Epicurus' critique of Greek philosophy. As Marx understood it, Epicurus took the first step in freeing consciousness from the chains of Platonic philosophy in his critique of Aristotle.

EPICURUS AND THE CRITIQUE OF GREEK PHILOSOPHY

In the first part of the dissertation Marx sought to establish that a proper understanding of Epicurus was necessary if philosophy was to comprehend its origins in Greek philosophy. The first part is, in large measure, an attempt to refute the accepted opinion that Epicurus had little to contribute to the history of philosophy other than that which he took from Democritus. Here Marx's goal was to show that Epicurus was diametrically opposed to Democritus because he, unlike Democritus, went beyond physics to a critique of philosophy and theology. When Epicurus denied any relevance to the gods, abolished the idea of immortality and saw in the heavens no more than accident and chance, he exposed the myth of the city and the gods (Epicurus 1926a, 58–81).

The most important distinction between Epicurus and Democritus was to be found, Marx observed, in their respective treatments of the “contradiction in the concept of the atom between essence and existence.” The greatest part of the dissertation is, in fact, an analysis of their respective approaches to the contradiction between form and matter in atomistic physics. That Marx's dissertation is meant to be more than a defense of the superiority of Epicurean physics becomes more apparent, however, when we consider the argument of the second part of the dissertation. The four chapters leading up to the concluding chapter on “The Meteors” show that Democritus' reduction of the contradiction between the existence and essence of the atom to a matter of necessity denied the possibility of science while holding to abstract theological explanations.

Below I shall discuss two of the four topics which Marx considered in order to clarify the distinction between the Epicurean and Democritean philosophies of nature. I shall then consider the concluding chapter, where Marx argued that Epicurus' discussion of “The Meteors” is the culmination of his attempt to overturn Greek theology and philosophy.

In the first chapter of the second part of the dissertation Marx drew a distinction between Epicurus and Democritus by considering their accounts of motion. Marx argued that Democritus was aware that the first principle of motion, that atoms fall in straight lines, contradicted the second principle of motion, that atoms are repulsed. If atoms fall in straight lines, they will never collide and thus will never be repulsed. Yet without the repulsion of atoms they would never meet, and the world would never have been created. In order to escape from this contradiction Democritus argued that atoms are forced to collide by necessity, that is, by a force external to the concept of the atom. Democritus' recourse to necessity, Marx argued, leaves the contradiction between the principles of motion and the world of appearance intact. Democritus simply ignored the contradiction by positing an external principle of necessity.

Epicurus, contrary to Democritus, posited a third principle of motion which allowed him to argue that the cause of repulsion is within the atom itself and not due to external necessity. According to Epicurus, the atom deviates from

the straight line due to an internal principle of declination. This swerving from the straight line frees the atom from the determination of the line and allows the concept of the atom to be completed in repulsion. In repulsion the atom “abstracts from the opposing being and withdraws itself from it” (1976a, 51). Because the principle of repulsion is within the atom itself, it is the “soul of the atom.” Epicurus, in contrast to Democritus, transformed necessity into self-determination.

Epicurus’ primary motive for resolving the contradiction between the essence and existence of the atom was not simply to establish the self-determination of the atom. Rather, the purpose was to reach the concept of abstract individuality which “appears in its highest freedom and independence” in swerving away from pain and confusion, in attaining ataraxia (1976a, 51). Marx apparently did not believe that it was necessary to criticize Epicurus’ claim that the pursuit of ataraxia was the motivating principle behind both Epicurus’ physical and ethical philosophy. Marx had no need to offer such a critique, since the very purpose of his dissertation was to show that Epicurus’ dogmatic insistence on the unity of the ends of physical and ethical philosophy created the possibility for the critique of Greek philosophy and theology. This seems to explain why Marx may conclude a chapter on Epicurus’ principles of motion by commenting on what would otherwise seem to be misplaced observations. He asks that we “consider the *consequence* that follows directly from the declination of the atom.” The realization of the atom in Epicurus’ highest beings, the gods, who swerve away from the world and do not bother with it, also meant that the chief human good, ataraxia, is to be pursued without the gods. Epicurus’ doctrine is also more than an attempt to free man from the gods. Just as the concept of the atom is realized in repulsion, so too, “repulsion is the first form of self-consciousness.” Human desire leads to the initial meeting and then repulsion of men which, in turn, culminates in their recognition that they are not merely products of nature, but conscious beings.⁷ This consciousness “conceives of itself as immediate-being, as abstractly individual.” Man first comes to consciousness, then, in recognizing his alienation from the gods and other men. In recognizing abstract individual consciousness, Epicurus was the first to recognize natural right. Marx, having assumed that Epicurus’ doctrine culminated in an attack on both Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, concluded the chapter with the remark that the declination of the atoms becomes in the “political domain” the covenant, and in the “social domain” friendship (1976a, 53). What seemed to be extraneous comments, or perhaps afterthoughts, are, for Marx, the necessary outcome of Epicurean physics. I shall return to the political-theological question raised by Epicurean physics in my discussion of the last chapter of the dissertation.

In the second chapter Marx considered Epicurus’ and Democritus’ respective treatments of the contradiction between the immutable essence of the atom and the necessarily variable material properties which atoms acquire in existence. If

in essence the atom is unchangeable, how can it possess qualities—size, shape and weight—which are subject to change in the world of appearance? How, in other words, can that which is unchangeable be subject to change? According to Marx, Democritus simply ignored the necessary contradiction between the concept of an unchanging atom and the changing atom of “concrete nature.” Instead, Democritus considered the properties of the atom “only in relation to the formation of the world of appearances, and not in relation to the atom itself” (1976a, 55). By limiting his investigation to the world of appearances, Democritus was forced to conclude that the material qualities of the atom were attributable only to necessity. Democritus’ inability to explain the contradiction between the essence and existence of the atom led him to abandon philosophy for empiricism. He was thus left to conclude that everything which is, is of necessity. In attributing everything to necessity Democritus was unable to offer a critique of existence.

The material properties of the atom were, for Epicurus, “differences which the atom in itself possesses” (1976a, 55). Epicurus did not doubt that the idea that atoms possess size, shape and weight contradicted the very concept of the atom. Moreover, according to Marx, Epicurus recognized that the qualities of the atom were themselves negated in their very existence. Epicurus accepted the contradiction, because to deny it would mean abandoning the abstract individuality in the concept of the atom, and/or the self-determination of the atom in the world of appearance.

Instead of a simple resolution of the contradiction Epicurus gave new meaning to the material appearance of the atom by asserting that “the world of appearance can only emerge from the atom which is complete and alienated from its concept.” Epicurus’ attention to the world of appearance followed from his position that “all senses are heralds of the true.” Here, too, Marx argued that Epicurus surpassed Democritus, for although he maintained that knowledge is derived from the senses, he insisted that the subjectivity of knowledge does not reduce “sensuous qualities to things of mere opinion.” The sensuous world is “objective appearance.” Because Epicurus “takes a dogmatic, not a skeptical position,” he “was the first to grasp appearance as appearance, that is, as alienation of the essence, activating itself in reality as such an alienation” (1976a, 39, 64). Epicurus, rather than seek to overcome the alienation either through recourse to necessity or the gods, preserves self-consciousness by maintaining its willingness to live with the contradiction.

Although I have chosen not to discuss the third and fourth chapters of this part of the dissertation, they too are intended to prove that Epicurean philosophy is superior to Democritean philosophy because by refusing to attribute all contradiction to necessity, the precondition for the science of self-consciousness is established. Marx clearly established the relationship between atomistic physics and self-consciousness when he stated that “what appears theoretically in the account given of matter, appears practically in the definition of the Wise

man” (1976b, 432). This may be observed in the second part of the dissertation in considering the resemblance of Marx’s account of atomistic physics to his discussion of Socrates’ role in freeing self-consciousness. The first wise men were similar to the Democritean account of matter, that is, their appearance seemed to be a necessary reflection of the substance of Greek life. Epicurean atoms are like Socrates in that their principle is developed in collision. Just as the atom comes to reflect upon itself after colliding with other atoms, so too Socrates’ self-consciousness is the result of colliding with men.

Yet self-consciousness was no more completed by the collision of atoms than by Socratic dialectic. In the concluding chapter on “The Meteors” Marx completed his argument that Epicurus’ dogmatism allowed him to take a critical stance toward Greek religion and philosophy and that in so doing he established the natural science of self-consciousness. Here Marx considered Epicurus’ doctrine that the theological account of the heavens prevented access to the true knowledge of causes by attributing the movement of the heavens to the gods. In denying the immortality of the heavenly bodies Epicurus argued that the heavens may be explained by a multiplicity of causes. Epicurus thus argued that the proper observation of the heavens and earth demonstrates that there is “more than one account of their nature which harmonizes with our sensations” (1926a, 59). Single explanations, such as that which religion teaches, contradict our sensations and thus disturb our peace of mind. By disturbing our peace of mind religion makes men fearful and unable to achieve the highest human goal. The importance of the primary goal of ataraxia becomes especially clear in light of Epicurus’ statement that “if we were not troubled by our suspicions of the phenomena of the sky and about death . . . we should have no need of natural science” (1926b, 97).

In rejecting all attempts to attribute immortality to the heavens Epicurus carried atomistics to its final conclusion and, in so doing, founded the natural science of self-consciousness. Marx considered this of no small moment, since in establishing the principle of absolute individual self-consciousness Epicurus was forced to deny not only popular belief in the gods but the account offered by the philosophers. Moreover, he was forced to reject the conclusion which his own method seemed to suggest. Epicurus had admitted that the heavenly bodies were atoms which had become real. He also admitted that if the essence of the atom (which is unchangeable) had become concrete in the heavenly bodies (had assumed the qualities apparent in existence), those bodies were necessarily immortal. Yet if this was so, if the contradiction between the form and matter of the atom was resolved in immortal heavenly bodies, then another problem arose. If the contradiction between the form and matter of the atom is overcome in the heavenly bodies, then abstract individuality was negated by the universal atom. The existence of the universal required the destruction of abstract individual self-consciousness, and this, in turn, resulted in man’s anxiety and confusion. Because Epicurus believed that anxiety and confusion result

from a belief in the universal, he was forced to deny, against the normal method of his theory, the immortality of the heavens. Marx argued that Epicurus' dogmatic insistence on abstract individual self-consciousness was "the soul of the Epicurean philosophy of nature" (1976a, 72). It was the soul of the Epicurean doctrine because here Epicurus maintained the commitment to abstract self-consciousness at all costs.

The natural science of which Epicurus spoke, a science devoid of theological obfuscations, constituted true *theoria*. This contemplation was not necessary in and of itself, but only in order to overcome the fears perpetuated by religion and philosophy. Just as there are no gods guiding the heavens, there is no divine *theoria* (a contemplation good in and of itself) which men should seek to emulate. *Theoria* served only to further the possibility that *ataraxia* could be achieved when men were freed from the city and the gods.

Aristotle is the immediate object of Epicurus' critique of Greek theology. Marx observed that Epicurus' opposition to the idea that the heavenly bodies are gods led him to hold Aristotle in the same contempt as he held traditional Greek religious teachings (1976a, 67). Certainly Aristotle had distinguished the mythic teachings on the gods which are useful for law and life from what he took to be true knowledge, derived from principles of motion which show only "that the heavenly bodies are gods and that the divine encompasses all nature" (*Metaphysics*. 12:1074a–b34; *On the Heavens*. 1:270). Aristotle correctly asserted that the opinion of the many, that the gods intervene in human affairs, serves only a political purpose (1976a, 67). Yet he also denied access to the correct knowledge of causes because, rather than rejecting popular judgment on the gods, he accepted the opinion of the many to the extent that it comported with his physics. Aristotle was not willing to separate the philosopher from the city and the gods. He had tied self-consciousness to the city and its gods when he suggested that the best *eudamonia* was one with divine *theoria*, and that that divine *theoria* was perfected in the best city. Moreover, since Aristotle considered *dikaioσύνη* (justice) and *philia* (friendship) both necessary and good for the city, *dikaioσύνη* and *philia* were essential to the life of the philosopher. Aristotle's teaching was therefore no better than the religious beliefs of the many, because in accepting the interdependence of philosophy, theology and politics, in accepting the dependence of self-consciousness on the city and gods, men were left confused and fearful. Epicurus furthered the cause of self-consciousness because he was willing to blame those who believe that man needs heaven and the city (1976a, 68).

Epicurus held that it was both possible and necessary to free man from the city and the gods. Just as the chief human good, *ataraxia*, is to be pursued without the gods who swerve away from the world and do not bother with it, so, too, the philosopher was most happy when he withdrew from politics. Politics was nothing more than a social contract which could, at best, provide the conditions for the pursuit of *ataraxia*. For Epicurus "there is no profit in secur-

ing protection in relation to men, if things above and things beneath the earth and indeed all in the boundless universe remain matters of suspicion" (1926b, 99). *Dikaiosyne* exists in order to free man of suspicion and is thus nothing more than "a pledge of mutual advantage to restrain men from harming one another and save them from being harmed" so that they may pursue natural science, a science whose goal was *ataraxia* (1926b, 103). And as *dikaiosyne* was reduced to a covenant which creates the condition for men to retire from the world in the pursuit of *ataraxia*, so too, *philia* (friendship) was reduced to a private matter. For Epicurus, *philia* was necessary to the education of the philosopher and thus to the complete life. Aristotle, too, had urged the necessity of *philia* for the education of the philosopher (*Ethics*, 1155a3–1163b18). But for Aristotle *philia* was also necessary for the life of the city. Epicurus completed the destruction of Aristotelian political philosophy, because in reducing *philia* and education in private matters and politics to a covenant, he taught that self-consciousness must not depend on the city. Aristotle was no more able than Plato to free man from the city and the gods. Therefore, he had only developed the mythological character of Platonic philosophy by chaining self-consciousness to the city and the gods.

CONCLUSION

Epicurus was the first to expose the political-theological myth of Platonic philosophy by showing that it was both possible and desirable to free man from the city and the gods. In considering the political-theological question Marx, like many Enlightenment thinkers, was drawn to Epicurus because Epicurus, the most formidable opponent of Plato and Aristotle in antiquity, provided the means for attacking their intellectual heirs in later political thought.

Marx recognized that Epicurus was closer to Aristotle and Plato than to himself, however. While he was attracted to Epicurus' attempt to overcome the fear which led alienated men to believe in the gods, he recognized that Epicurus only resolved the alienation in *theoria*. For Epicurus, the true knowledge of causes produced *ataraxia*. For Marx, fear and alienation could not be overcome through *theoria* alone. Regardless of Marx's fascination with Epicurus, the least one may say is that he takes a modern stance in opposition to the ancients. Marx, as a modern, considered Epicurus only one step, albeit a critical one, in the march of progress. Epicurus, by contrast, had no interest in the future, for he was not fearful of death (Marx 1976b, 444).

In seeking to free consciousness from the city and the gods Marx assumed that he understood Plato, the originator of the philosophy of transcendence, better than Plato understood himself. Marx differs from modern social scientists who assume that they may grasp the essential political-theological questions without seriously attending to those arguments which they have rejected be-

cause he, at least, understood the significance of Platonic philosophy. Nevertheless, he arrived at the conclusion that man must be freed from the city and the gods without having attended to the complexities of the arguments presented in the Platonic dialogues. Perhaps this was so because Marx was more interested in overcoming the perplexity which Platonic philosophy induced than he was in the problem of philosophy as Plato understood it. If Marx's willingness to pass on to what he perceived to be the greater issue, unmasking the material basis of religious belief and the modern state, leaves the Platonic questions unanswered, it is because his motive may be, after all, similar to that of Epicurus. This seems plausible, since Marx admitted that his admiration for Epicurus was due in no small part to the fact Epicurus considered philosophy a means to ataraxia.

NOTES

1. *Ataraxia*, according to Epicurus, is a state of tranquility or peace of mind which the philosopher may attain when he is freed from fear and confusion.

2. Brundell argues that Gassendi sought to replace Aristotelianism with Epicureanism, but an Epicureanism acceptable to Christianity.

3. See Marx's early comments on the difference in the relationship between philosophy and the state and religion and the state in "The Leading Article in No. 179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung*," in the *Collected Works*, 1:184–202.

4. See Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where he used religious analogies to criticize Hegel's idea that the conflicts between the state and civil society are overcome in a constitutional monarchy ("the monarch as the actual 'God' man") and through bureaucrats ("Jesuits and theologians of the state") (1970, 24, 46).

5. Compare this with Rosen's assertion (1977) that Marx's view of Socrates, as does the whole dissertation, derives from Bauer's approach to self-consciousness.

6. Hegel's view of Aristotle is highly problematic, since it is not at all clear that Aristotle really meant that eudaimonia for the individual and the state were at all the same. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (177a11–1179a32) Aristotle appears to argue that divine theoria brings the greatest eudaimonia, and that this eudaimonia, by virtue of its divine quality, was best in itself, but not necessarily as such for man. Elsewhere in the *Ethics* and the *Politics* Aristotle collapses the distinction between what is best and what is best for man. One possible explanation for this contradiction may be Aristotle's recognition of the tension between the philosopher who contemplates for the sake of theoria and the citizen who serves the city. Because the eudaimonia of the philosopher and the eudaimonia of the city are the same only in the best city, the divine city, it does not seem likely that Aristotle is so facile in reaching the point which Hegel attributes to him. In fact, Aristotle may be even closer to Plato than Hegel knew in admitting of the tension between philosophy and the city.

7. The background for Marx's presentation of the initial state of self-consciousness as the battleground of human desire seems to be Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

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