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Review of From Marx to Kant

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with Verene's general account of the *Phenomenology*. To put it bluntly: if Verene is right about the nature of Absolute Knowledge and of Philosophical Science, then Hegel is wrong—or else he is a greater ironist than even Bertolt Brecht suspected. Or perhaps the irony lies in the interpretation itself, which may be just a shade too ingenious. Is it really necessary to destroy the *Phenomenology* in order to save it?

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Dick Howard. *From Marx to Kant*. SUNY Series in Philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. Pp. xiv + 300. Cloth, \$39.50. Paper, \$14.95.

During the past decade Dick Howard has been arguing that we need a return of "the political." *From Marx to Kant* continues this argument, and as the title suggests, its main thesis is that the work of Kant, not that of Marx and Hegel, formulates a suitable theoretic platform for expressing this need. But what is meant by "the political"? In an earlier book, Howard writes: "My frequent use of the concept of 'the political' has been criticized by friends who find it . . . too vague."¹ A similar criticism can be launched in general against his latest book: crucial terms are seldom sharply defined and the line of argument is often unclear. Nonetheless, we can discern that the call for a return of the political is basically a plea for the creation of a public sphere in which citizens actively exercise their political judgment. Thus what characterizes the political is not power and group interests but the existence of a widespread public debate on moral, social, economic, and political issues. Another essential feature that Howard ascribes to the political is that it is open-ended: normative claims that emerge within this sphere are continually put into question. One important ramification of this interrogative structure of the political is that it contradicts the view that history has some definite and final *telos*.

We may extrapolate from these two aspects of the political two reasons why Howard holds that we need a return of the political: political decision-making cannot be left to legislators alone but also requires extensive public debate; and, political enlightenment is a continuous and dialogical learning process. From this perspective it is not surprising that he rejects the work of Marx and Hegel as inadequately expressing the need for a return of the political. He argues, for example, that Marx offered a flawed economic substitute for the political by claiming that the developmental logic of capital would transform the proletariat from a universal class "in itself" to a universal class "for itself" (i.e., as conscious of its historical mission). Reproduction of capitalist ideology is seen as one negative result of this reductionistic

1. *The Marxian Legacy* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), xii. In my description of Howard's concept of the political I have also used his "The Politics of Modernism: From Marx to Kant," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 8:4 (Winter 1981).

schema of political enlightenment from without; another is repression by the Leninist vanguard party. Additionally, Howard repudiates, of course, Marx's contention that communism solves the "riddle of history." He is equally critical of Kant's ethics, expounding the (all-too) familiar thesis that this ethics is centered around a formal monological subject—the good will. His alternative is a political reconstruction of *Critique of Judgment*. The esthetic judgment as a reflective judgment can function as a model for political judgment. Howard argues that political judgment in this form expresses the theoretical possibility of and need for a return of the political: "The discursive process by which reflective judgment establishes validity claims moves beyond the formal monological subject. Reflective judgment obeys the imperative to 'think in the place of the other'. It implies the existence of a common, and ultimately a communal, sense that permits this interchange" (65). In other words, the existence of "common sense" makes possible that political decision-making is rooted in general public debate, whereas the maxims of this common sense signify that adequate political will-formation can only be reached through such a debate. *From Marx to Kant* concludes that *Perpetual Peace* puts flesh on these bare bones. Howard's interpretation of the right to universal hospitality may serve here as an example: "The 'law of hospitality' demands that the particular states interact explicitly. They must communicate, exchange, learn to think in the place of the other. Isolationism would fix their content like a contract that shuts off further enlightenment" (267).

Howard's project is incomplete in at least three respects. First, his book leaves the question open whether the Kantian republic as an instance of the political is consistent with a capitalist economy. This is unsatisfactory, not only in light of Kant's own view on this question but also because it obscures the reason for Howard's concern with Marx in the first place. Second, the book does not provide a detailed discussion of various problems that arise from making the judgment of taste the model for political judgment.² Third, it leaves us with an unresolved tension in Kant's work between a "closed" monological ethics and an open-ended dialogical politics.³ The viability of Howard's project depends on whether it can successfully come to terms with these three issues.

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2. Such a discussion can be found in Ronald Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). Beiner and Howard share a common view of the political. Their political reconstruction of *Critique of Judgment* is based on Hannah Arendt's earlier attempt in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). The other major influence on Howard's Kant interpretation is the work of Jürgen Habermas.

3. One solution to this problem is to reconstruct Kant's ethics as dialogical and as formulating an open-ended historical ideal—the moral society of legislators. The neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen developed this line in *Ethik des reinen Willens*. Howard, however, dismisses the Marburg School (283n.), wrongly holding that his marginal criticism of Karl Vorländer implies a rebuttal of Cohen as well.