Preface

Now and again in the history of ideas a thinker is declared dead only to be awakened by new controversies in his field. So it was with Spinoza who was resurrected by the argument between Mendelssohn, Jacobi and Lessing. This was also the case with Hegel, who, following the epic rupture in philosophy in the mid 19th century, became obsolete. Along with him the intellectuals called *Young Hegelians* would have fallen into oblivion had it not been for Karl Marx's presence in the group. His roll in the international labor movement and in the communist revolutions of the 20th century assured him a monumental status for more than a hundred years. The Young Hegelians were swept along in this hero worship, but as inferior thinkers overshadowed by Marx. In 1989, however, after the pitiful collapse of state communism in Eastern Europe, Marx, at least in the triumphant western world, was quickly declared "history."

There have always been moments in which seemingly "dead dogs" have only been sleeping and were woken up. Just as Spinoza was resurrected in the prelude to the French Revolution, Hegel and the Young Hegelians were called back to life in the revolutionary atmosphere after World War I. Looking back on German philosophy in the era of the World Wars, Helmuth Plessner writes about the 1920s: "As in the 30s to 40s of the 19th century, in the strange lines drawn from Hegel on the one hand over Feuerbach to Stirner, B. Bauer and Marx, and on the other, to Kierkegaard, there developed in the post-war period (after the First World War W.E.) radical doubts about the function of philosophy in society. As it did then, philosophy sees itself as a pioneer and at the same time as a transcending prelude to a revolution, the completion of which should render itself superfluous."

The uprisings of the 60s in the 20th century, which sought to realize much philosophy, were informed by memories of German democratic traditions. Between 1965-1969 the *Sammlung Insel* published not only texts by Knigge and Jochmann, Forster and Rebmann, but also by Marx, Heine, Heß and Ruge, excellently edited and annotated. For the first time since 1848 Karl Gutzkow's work, *Germany on the Eve of its Fall or Greatness,* appeared in this collection. This revitalization of ideas from the 1840s was later summarized by Jürgen Habermas in his lecture series entitled *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: "Today the situation of consciousness still remains the one brought about by the Young Hegelians when they distanced themselves from Hegel and philosophy in general. And the triumphant gestures of mutually surpassing one another, in which we gladly overlook the fact that we remain contemporaries of the Young Hegelians, have also been in currency since then."(p.53)

Today, those who perceive a crisis-ridden, out of joint world and who once again are attracted to the hopeful pre-march texts of the Young Hegelians, will be able to read them with a deeper understanding. Not only has the state-

communist prescribed authority of the Marxian pronouncements about the petty bourgeois nature of the Young Hegelians imploded, alternative departures from Hegel's thoughts, as articulated by the Bauer brothers, Moses Heß, Arnold Ruge and Max Stirner can now be re-evaluated in their own right. Michael Kuur Sørensen's book opens up another essential aspect: the transformation of the pre-march ideas through the experience of the European revolutions in 1848/49. The traumatic influence of the defeat of this revolution for the history of democratic-revolutionary thought has barely been touched upon until now. It is the merit of Sørensen to have portrayed the dramatic reconstructions of Marx, Heß, Bruno Bauer and Arnold Ruge's pre-march thoughts following the failure of the revolution in 1848, competently and with a fine sense for the intimate connections between theory and experience.

Certainly, Karl Löwith spoke of a "revolutionary break in the thinking of the 19th century" in his epic work *From Hegel to Nietzsche*. But he saw this break only on the level of ideas. Actual revolutions played no role in his perspective. Michael Kuur Sørensen belongs to a young generation of historians of ideas, that no longer classifies ideas only according to hidden interests, but for whom ideas are grounded in the subtle interplay between enthusiasm and realism, and in the history of the success of ideas vis-à-vis the history of their disillusionment when confronted with reality.

As we know the failure of the "unwanted revolution," as it was called by the late historian Wolfgang J. Mommsen on the occasion of its rather modest 150-year anniversary in 1998, provided the direction for the subsequent history of Europe. The "German question" remained unresolved, and the date on which the German-Catholic minister and revolutionary leader Robert Blum was executed in Vienna—the 9th of November 1848—became a fateful day for the Germans. The aftershocks of the defeats of 1848 in the texts of Marx, Heß, Bauer and Ruge, and the noteworthy modifications of their theories—dimensions which Michael Kuur Sørensen has worked out splendidly—gives to the study of the Young Hegelians a whole new depth and direction.

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