



MONASH University

Society as its Goal

Karl Marx and Ethical Life

Michael Lazarus

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Politics Department

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| *Abstract*

This thesis argues that Karl Marx's immanent critique of capital provides a conception of ethical life. My interpretation situates Marx within a shared tradition of ethical inquiry, placing him in close dialogue with Aristotle and Hegel. The conception of ethical life found in these three thinkers challenges the prominent notion of ethics as individual duties and laws by conceiving ethics as integral to (or inseparable from) political life. Within this tradition, ethical life is understood in terms of mutually recognised modes of understanding underpinned by rational social organisation. This thesis reconstructs Marx's social thought by putting his social ontology and concept of value at the centre of his conception of ethics.

I argue that this reconstruction of Marx necessitates a revaluation of his importance for contemporary social thought. In particular, I take issue with the claim that there are insufficient resources in Marx for an ethical critique of capitalist modernity. The thesis begins with an examination of the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Gillian Rose, two thinkers who emerge from the British New Left, but who find Marx's social thought wanting. I treat their seminal 1981 works, *After Virtue* and *Hegel Contra Sociology*, as brilliant works of diagnosis that are nevertheless impoverished in their understanding of Marx's ethics. Despite their closeness to, and sympathy for, his thought, neither MacIntyre nor Rose recognise Marx as belonging to the ethical tradition they champion, the first through Aristotle, the second through Hegel. I suggest their turn from the analysis of capitalism to the ethics of Aristotle and Hegel is a backward step and one rendered unnecessary by the integration of this ethical tradition in the work of Marx himself. With this misconception in mind, I attempt a detailed reconstruction of the concept of ethical life in Aristotle, Hegel and Marx. Their shared view of ethics as integral to social life (of social life as itself ethical) serves as the grounds for my discussion of the genesis and development of Marx's social thought in the latter half of the thesis. I conclude by suggesting that Marx's value-form theory is both a continuation of Aristotelian and Hegelian themes and his most distinctive theoretical achievement.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Name: Michael Lazarus

Date: 23/01/2020

*For E.P Thompson,
who continues to inspire.*

*That's in the future. Our
present care is with the present.
The future will be shaped
by those who control it.*

- Sophocles, *Antigone*.

[1334-5]

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Abbreviations

Aristotle

- EE* *The Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- NE* *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin. 2nd Ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999.
- Pol.* *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

All other references are taken from the two volume *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984 and cite the standard Bekker pagination.

G.W.F Hegel

- EL* *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. I have also consulted the translation by William Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975. When I have used this translation, W appears before the page number.
- NL* ‘On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, on its Place in Practical Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Right’ in *PW*.
- PbG* *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood. Oxford: Oxford, 2018.
- PR* *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- PW* *Political Writings*, trans. H.B Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- SEL* *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)*, trans. T.M. Knox. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.
- SL* *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Following di Giovanni I supply the volume and page number from Hegel’s *Gesammelte Werke*. I have also consulted the translation by A.V Miller. Abingdon: Routledge, 1969.

When applicable the references note the Paragraph followed by the page number in the above editions.

Karl Marx

- Cap* 1-3 *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Pelican, 1976. Volume 2, trans. David Fernbach. London: Penguin, 1978. Volume 3, trans. David Fernbach. London: Penguin, 1981.
- CHDS* ‘Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State’ in *EW*.
- CJM* ‘Excerpts from James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy* in *EW*.
- EPM* ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ in *EW*.
- EW* *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Gr* *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus. London: Penguin, 1973.
- MECW* 1-50 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *Collected Works*, Volume 1 – 50. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975 – 2004.
- OJQ* ‘On the Jewish Question’ in *EW*.
- RIPP* ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production in *Cap* 1.
- TSV* 1-3 *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part 1, trans. Emile Burns. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1963. Part 2, trans. S. Ryazanskaya. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968. Part 3, trans. Jack Cohen and S. Ryazanskaya. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972.

Other frequently referenced texts:

- AV* Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd Ed. London: Duckworth, 2007.
- HCS* Gillian Rose. *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 2nd Ed. London: Verso, 2009.

To comprehend the possibilities of emancipation, social theory must grasp the present. The challenge social theory faces today is to provide a conception of modern life that allows the present to be known as both conflictual and transmutable. The conflicts of modern politics, emanating from the public life of citizens and institutions, are by no means unrelated to the conflicts of private life, emanating from the decisions of moral agents, sellers and buyers. However, emancipatory thought too often dissociates these spheres into isolated realms, a procedure that Theodor Adorno names the ‘severance of morality from politics’, which results in an ‘extreme contrast between public affairs and private existence’.¹ Ideally, social theory should provide a bridge between these two realms, instead it has tended to reproduce this tension between political emancipation and personal morality. Precisely what intellectual resources might allow this tension to be transcended thus remains an open question. Curiously, however, the tendency has been to look everywhere but at Karl Marx.

This work is a *reconsideration* of Marx’s social theory and its relation to other traditions of critical inquiry. But why ‘reconsider’ when Marx’s place in the pantheon of Western political thought is hardly under threat? Marxism was so prevalent as a form of intellectual critique during the twentieth century that in 1981 Alasdair MacIntyre could call Marxism ‘the most influential adversary theory of modern culture’.² Yet, it was during precisely this period, beginning in the late 1970s, that Marxism started to lose its coherence and authority.³ This deterioration corresponded with the popularity of various currents (such as post-structuralism) which moved markedly away from the traditions of critical inquiry established in close reference to Marx’s social theory. These trends

¹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), §116/180.

² *AV*, 61.

³ In 1978, Michael Eldred and Mike Roth note this moment: ‘After a period of stimulated activity in Marxist theory, triggered off by the movement towards de-Stalinisation of the fifties, which reached its height towards the end of the sixties along with the Student Movement, May ‘68 in France, the anti-Vietnam War Movement, Marxist theory is again entering a period in which many parts of Marxism are coming under attack. Paris, which serves as some kind of barometer of fashionability in the intellectual world, has already moved into full gear against the Althusserian Marxism, which was the delight of left-wing intellectuals the world over during the sixties and the early part of the seventies. Again, Marxism is being pronounced dead or at least inadequate to the tasks of understanding the modern world and is being shunned by those who are concerned with areas that are not encompassed by orthodox Marxism’, *Guide to Marx’s Capital* (London: CSE Books, 1978), 7.

sidelined Marx's social theory in a way that has seen little recovery.⁴ Marx might be seen as foundational and historically significant, but his value as a thinker of the present remains disputed at best and repudiated at worst. Even those intellectual traditions derived from Marx (notably critical theory and, some strands of, post-structuralist thought) are hesitant to posit the immediate relevance of his social theory.⁵ Such disregard notwithstanding, during the last two decades an undercurrent has emerged which rejects this common-sense, insisting instead on Marx's contemporaneity.⁶ Following the Global Financial Crisis – the biggest crisis of capital since the Great Depression – serious interest in Marx has flourished, no doubt due to the pressing need to understand the structure and nature of contemporary capitalism.⁷

This thesis does not explore the contours of the contemporary financial crisis. Indeed, examined from a Marxist perspective, the current crisis is much more than an economic one – it is a crisis of the 'conjuncture'.⁸ The reverberations of bad subprime mortgages have shaken the world market and the legitimacy of the political mainstream has spiralled from easy prediction to crisis. In a situation of global unease, the public sphere has seen a collapse of the political centre. The once accepted neo-liberal economic and political paradigm is now widely viewed as a failure and is subject to mounting challenge –

⁴ This thesis is detailed by Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983). For varying perspectives that share this common periodisation, see Razmig Keucheyan, *The Left Hemisphere*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2013), 7-50; Stathis Kouvelakis, 'The Crises of Marxism and the Transformation of Capitalism' in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 30-8.

⁵ This problem is evident in a recent exchange between Axel Honneth and Jacques Rancière, one a towering figure in Frankfurt School critical theory, the other in the French post-structuralist tradition. Rancière promotes a politics of equality and Honneth an ethical life of just institutions, which includes a reinvention of market socialism. The disagreement between Rancière and Honneth is at one level foundational. There is little incorporation of ethical subjectivity in Rancière, and little incorporation of political emancipation in Honneth. However, at another level the *agreement* between Rancière and Honneth is implicit. Regardless of the political and ethical conflicts of contemporary life, they share an attitude towards Marx. Marx might be part of the traditions they traverse, but for them he has a largely diminished importance in contemporary social theory. Their exchange demonstrates the interpretive barrier which my interpretation of Marx attempts to overcome. My argument advances that Marx's immanent critique of the structural components of capitalism provides a conception of ethical life. See, Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth, *Recognition of Disagreement*, ed. Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Also, Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 51-70 and Axel Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (London: Polity, 2017), 27-50.

⁶ I discuss various strains of this interest throughout the thesis, highlighting especially the value-form interpretation of Marx's thought. Although I try to push the implications of these readings to include a wider understanding of the social, rather than economic, dimensions of Marx's philosophy.

⁷ David Harvey is perhaps the most famous figure in the renewed popularity of Marx's *Capital*, which saw sales of the book spike following 2007. There has been discussion in contemporary continental philosophy on the 'idea of communism', centred around the figures as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek. See *The Idea of Communism*, Volume 2 ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2013).

⁸ *Cap* 3, 969-70.

although as yet, it has by no means been overcome. In the midst of austerity and depression and in the face of an intensifying polarisation between the left and the right, Marx's social theory is necessary. In today's world, political actors are seeking theoretical frameworks with which to make sense of the contemporary conjuncture. The mounting irrationality of our world demands rational theorisation. It is here, as a theorist of society, and capitalist society in particular, that Marx is particularly indispensable. Marx, I will argue, helps us comprehend the alienation experienced in everyday life, the persistence of ideology in the supposedly post-ideological political realm and the struggle of workers, from France to China, in a putatively post-class world.⁹

Marx's voluminous work – as neither his critics nor his defenders would dispute – contains an extended reflection on political action, ideology and economic theory. The role of ethics within his theoretical and conceptual architecture is, however, less easily gleaned. Vulgarised politically and philosophically, Marx's thought has often been read as a positivistic science concerned with economic distribution rather than an immanent critique of modern social forms.¹⁰ When Marxism is reduced to a programmatic demand for the common ownership of the means of production (as opposed to being understood as the *critique* of the very form of capitalist production), the normative and ethical aspect of Marx's social theory is lost. Such a view assumes that communism retains the same structure of value production while changing the way the results of production are distributed. This vulgarisation renders the key conceptual function of Marx's thought as workers control of *the existing form of production*. By comparison, a normative view holds that Marx's critique of the value illuminates the necessity of overcoming the form of capitalist production itself through rational action. Further, through his explication of sociality, Marx identifies the manner in which the entire fabric of social life under capital is dominated by the form of value. Since, for Marx, the social conditions for fully actualised, concrete freedom are immanent in the overcoming of capital, action can only be *conceived* as rational in so far as it pursues that end and only *realised* as rational in so far as it achieves it. Rather than something that hinges upon individual choices, therefore, Marx's conception of ethics conceives the good life as the realisation of a particular kind

⁹ For an account of 'post-ideology' see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London: Verso, 2007).

¹⁰ Marx responds to the first vulgarisation of his thought in this respect in *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *MECW* 24, 87-88. Marxism as economic distribution is one aspect of what Moishe Postone calls 'Traditional Marxism', *Time, Labour and Social Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7-15. His targets are such accounts as Ronald L. Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1956).

of social world – a social world in which rationality prevails and humans can recognise each other in concrete transparency. Under the value form, fully actualised rationality is impossible, although it is promised. To be truly free, subjects must overcome the forms of domination which mask and mystify the social world (including bourgeois morality itself) and ask a wider set of questions about the total composition of social life.

I argue that not only is a concept of ethical life present in Marx's work, but this concept allows his understanding of modern social relations to be adequately *critical*. Marx's account of alienation and abstract labour does not just amount to a description of capitalism, it provides an immanent critique of modern social relations. Within this conceptuality resides his critical account of the human capacity, rationality and self-awareness which are present under capitalism, but which are not fully realised. Marx's vision of emancipation is underpinned by a concept of human flourishing. While this concept is discerned via critical and philosophical social inquiry within capitalism, wherein human virtues do exist, albeit in stunted or one-sided forms, the concept may only be actualised by a free humanity, flourishing in the rich soil and clear light of a society built around transparent social relations. However, locating this conception of ethics requires a reconstruction and elaboration of both the form and content of Marx thought.

This task requires an engagement with central problems in Marx interpretation, beginning with the thesis of the two Marxes. As I outline in Chapter 1, a series of important interpretative issues emerged from the rise of the New Left in the mid-1950s, with its rejection of the sterility of the old Stalinist left and its establishment of a humanist philosophy. At that time, however, the question of Marx's relationship with philosophy was complicated by a division, rigidly insisted upon by Louis Althusser, between his early and late works. A choice was then imposed: one might be for the early humanism, or for the late scientism, but one could not traverse this interpretive divide. This split left the question of Marx's philosophy unresolved. In following their separate paths, New Left humanism and Althusserian structuralism both lead Marxism to distinct (but interrelated) dead ends.¹¹ It is true that the New Left introduced ethics as a political

¹¹ While both humanist and Althusserian perspectives continue to produce valuable contributions to Marxist theory, the tendency has been for an effective use of a pre-existing framework rather than a sustained philosophical development of the tradition. In this way, the intellectual resources of both traditions can easily become exhausted.

problem. Yet, when asked what Marx might add in this respect, most accounts fell silent. The myth of the young vs. old Marx – Marx the philosopher *vs.* Marx the economist – had been created and it is a myth that has to some degree endured.¹²

My account of Marx brings together the central humanist claims of his early writings with the conceptual logic of his later critique of capital – an incorporation and elaboration not usually undertaken by his commentators. More specifically, this thesis argues, contra Anglo-American interpretive orthodoxies, that Marx provides a way to think about ethics that overcomes the division between fact/value by way of his immanent critique of social relations.¹³ I argue that his early social ontology, first developed in 1844, is deepened in his mature theorisation of social relations in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. This demonstrates a *continuation* thesis contra Althusserian structuralism and a *development* thesis contra New Left humanism¹⁴ Althusser once suggested that it is ‘child’s play to reduce *Capital* to an ethical inspiration, whether or not one relies on the radical anthropology of the *1844 Manuscripts*’.¹⁵ I take a contrary position. Rather than treat the search for an ethical inspiration behind *Capital* as a childish reduction, I argue that this text is enriched by an interpretation that elucidates its ethical dimensions. At the same time, I depart from New Left readings which all too often focus on Marx’s early works at expense of his mature social theory. Such an approach, I argue, fails to register the significance of Marx’s development of the thematic of alienation in his critique of political economy. Although Marx’s mature social theory advances a systematic logic largely absent in his earlier writings, his concept of abstract labour shows how the extraction of surplus value necessarily involves alienation.

¹² Jonathan Wolff claims ‘Marx gave up philosophy early in his life, and thought of himself more as a scientist’, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101. While Marx’s theoretical project changed focus considerably in the mid-1840s towards the critique of political economy and he directed considerable polemical effort against various philosophers, the idea that Marx ‘gave up on philosophy’ fails to provide a meaningful classification of his mature critical theory. On this issue, a distinction needs to be made between changes in Marx’s own assessment of his theoretical project and the philosophical nature of that theoretical project itself.

¹³ The ethical content of Marx’s thought is frequently discounted. In recent prevailing orthodoxies, provided by Analytic Marxism and Althusserianism, Marx is frequently painted as an ‘amoral’ or purely ‘scientific’ thinker. In both accounts, the insights of Marx’s social thought fail to extend to the ethical realm. I discuss some aspects of Althusser’s thought in Chapter 1.

¹⁴ Chapter 1 focuses on the work of Shlomo Avineri, István Mészáros and Bertell Ollman, amongst others.

¹⁵ Louis Althusser, ‘The Object of Capital’ in Louis Althusser, et al, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 290.

This is the context within which I situate Marx's broader problematics and their place in the Western tradition of political theory. Here I contend that Marx's ethical thought enriches recent debates in social and moral philosophy.¹⁶ Marx's social theory allows a critical comprehension of the modern world in terms of the social forms that make up social relationships. This relational mode of thinking not only overcomes contemporary conceptions of ethics as individual action, but also provides a normative critique of modern society.¹⁷

To do this, I bring the best accounts of Marx's early texts into dialogue with the contemporary literature on *Capital*.¹⁸ Further, the recent revival of work on *Capital* has coincided with the emergence of serious interest in Hegel's philosophy in Anglo-American scholarship.¹⁹ These discussions have helped push Marx's thought back into the theoretical problems of post-Kantian philosophy and away from the monopolies of the economists. Some of the most impressive recent work on the relationship of Marx to his philosophical ancestors recast the role of Hegelian logic in Marx's critique of political economy.²⁰ However, the normative dimension of Marx's mature work is often missing from accounts that stress its logic. Questions about the ethical implications of his critique

¹⁶ Frequently Marx's polemical comments against the moralists of his day are taken to be sufficient evidence that he rejected ethics altogether as part of bourgeois philosophy. This argument, while having support in textual isolation, discounts the substantive relationship between politics and ethics in Marx's thought. While Marx rejects 'empty phrases about "justice"' (*MECW* 24, 268), I argue that there is a substantive ethical dimension of Marx's social theory. See for example 'Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality', *MECW* 6, 312-40.

¹⁷ This view takes Kantianism and Utilitarianism to be the dominant moral paradigms. These positions are examined in Chapter 2.

¹⁸ There has been a flurry of commentaries surrounding the 150th anniversary of its publication in 1867. For instance, *Reading Capital Today*, ed. Ingo Schmidt and Carlo Fanelli (London: Pluto, 2017).

¹⁹ Especially notable is the work of Robert B. Pippin and Terry Pinkard. Martin McIvor relates the revival of interest in post-Kantian scholarship to Marx's philosophical project, commenting that 'these inquiries have not yet been followed through into a reconsideration of the ideas of Karl Marx', 'Marx's Philosophical Modernism: Post-Kantian Foundations of Historical Materialism' in *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Chitty and Martin McIvor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36. I take this task to be particularly important for tracing the normative approach of Marx's work. Fredric Jameson has criticised this trend, especially Pippin, as predicated on a 'lowering of the volume of Hegel's dialectical claims' as a 'rescue operation, which makes Hegel respectable and allows him re-entry into the fraternity of professional philosophers', *The Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), 10-11. While emphasising the general professional and political standpoint of this trend of interpretation, Jameson too easily dismisses the philosophical significance of a revival of Hegelianism and with it, the possibilities for a positive Marxist engagement with this current. Martin Hägglund aims at such a synthesis, successfully bringing to bear the insights of this revival of Hegel and the normative value of Marx's thought, see *This Life* (London: Profile Books, 2019), esp. 212-332. Unfortunately, this book appeared too late in my project to incorporate adequately into my discussion. Hägglund does open up the path for a renewed discussion of Hegel and Marx in light of the Anglo-American Hegel and the value-form Marx.

²⁰ Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2014); Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, ed., *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016); Patrick Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).

of political economy have often been relegated to the background. I pursue these questions through the prism of Marx's social ontology and the ethical dimensions of his concept of labour. The approach makes it possible to think beyond the classical fact/value distinction by instead conceiving of Marx's immanent critique as also developing a concept of ethical life. This concept builds off and incorporates other traditions of ethics. Concurrently, a renewed interest in Marx's attitude towards ethics has resulted in a series of scholarly collections in the last five years. However, no full-length manuscript has reassessed the relation between Marx's social and ethical thought and recent work on his value-form theory.²¹ This work aims to initiate a sustained discussion within that space.

I argue that Marx's value-form theory provides the crucial means for understanding the ethical dimension of his immanent critique. This interpretation highlights the thought-form determinations operative in Marx's critique of bourgeois economic categories. The most basic category for Marx's understanding of modern society is 'value'. The value-form is the abstraction from which Marx derives the dual characteristics of commodities in capitalist production, in terms of their practical use and necessary exchange. Commodities appear before us reflecting both qualities and quantities. Common-sense depicts exchange as driven by individual use: human subjects buy and sell what is wanted or needed. However, as a result of the *need* to continue the accumulation and valorisation of surplus value, human ends inevitably lose out to the ends of capital's reproduction. Things cannot be said to be exchanged based on how useful they are for human beings. Instead, the market trades commodities based on their exchange principle: 'value'.

Marx, more than any other philosopher, exposes the social mechanisms that underpin the whole process of exchange. For much of contemporary thought, 'value' carries either a strictly economic (the monetary price of a commodity) or a seemingly moral (*I value this*) usage. For Marx, the logic of exchange means people come to associate things with their exchangeable price or, when put in a more determinate form, the money *cost* of a

²¹ Tony Smith's *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), provides a comprehensive account of the normative impact of Marx's concept of value. His critique of contemporary liberal political philosophy has implications for Marx's relationship to ethical thought as a whole. Michael J. Thompson, ed., *Constructing Marxist Ethics: Critique, Normativity, Praxis* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) provides the widest range of responses to the problem of ethics. See my review, *Contemporary Political Theory*, 15:4 (2016): 472-6. Dan Swain focuses on the political dimensions of Marx's ethics of self-emancipation, *None so Fit to Break the Chains* (Boston: Brill, 2019).

commodity. Marx suggests 'value' in capitalist society is something quite different to price. Value, in his view, is a social relation mediated by commodities. The commodity Marx identifies as playing the crucial role in this social relation is human labour-power. An understanding of Marx's ethical thought must confront the manner in which *value* is both a real relation *and* an abstraction that carries in its common usage the antinomy of the commodity and its fetishism. Marx seeks to understand the full human consequences of value beyond either economic usage or individual decision making.

Marx claims value is measured by the socially determined quantities of labour power necessary for its creation. Beyond providing what he thinks are the *facts* of capitalist production, he argues that the social relations underpinning this concept of value are structured by domination because they rest on the generalised exchangeability of measurable units of labour-time. Marx calls this 'abstract labour'. The concept of abstract labour is the nexus between his mature value theory and the concept of alienation present in his early writings. What is important about Marx's account of the value-form and his concept of labour is what it suggests about the paradoxical nature of exchange in capitalist 'society'. On one hand, exchange is generalised in such a way that relations that can only be comprehended *socially*. On the other hand, exchange can only operate by atomising, individualising and dominating the seller of labour-power. Marx derives an ethical *claim* from conceiving this *fact* in all its determinates. The result of his analysis of capitalism is the necessary negation of the value-form. This provides a means with which to discuss the ethical structure of his critique of political economy.

The domination of capital pervades modern life and its logic structures human relationships and interactions. Marx's claim to have elucidated the essence of the processes that mystify and obscure real relations – which are, in fact, structures of domination – relies upon his conceptualisation of labour. Under capitalism, according to Marx, human labour is made abstract and alienated, limiting and distorting the ability of humans to control both their own functions and society at large. The pervasive fetishism of the commodity seeps into all aspects of being.

This thesis contributes to a renewal of Marx's political theory in terms of his critique of modernity and the modes of existence characteristic of modern social relations. It suggests that modernity cannot be reduced to the latest stage of the capitalist mode of

production. Instead it ought to be understood as the distinctive paradigm of social relations dominated by modern property relations. In Robert B. Pippin's account, modernity is understood in terms of autonomy, 'the nature of both the independence and the dependence or finitude of modern communities and individuals.'²² In Hegel, this required a historical and collective view of subjectivity, born by the concept of world spirit. Marx's critique of modernity is similarly conscious of the antimony between independence/dependence and communities/individuals. However, it denies that autonomy (understood as it has been from Kant onwards) can be assessed independently of the determinations of capitalist social relations.²³ Marx's critique of political economy comprehends the systematic nature and structure of capitalism from a speculative logic that identifies the antinomies of bourgeois categories and social forms. By comprehending the capitalist mode of production in its conceptual dimension, Marx comes to understand the present in thought. This involves a totalising view that parallels Hegel's speculative philosophy. For Hegel, world spirit is self-moving and the subject of social life. However, it cannot become fully conscious. Condemned by the famous ruse of reason, rational knowledge of history occurs in the form of speculative philosophy. Marx develops this insight in terms of capital, which in its self-valorisation, its constant reproduction, creates a logic which defines social life and subjects all forms of being under its force. An analysis of the interaction between capitalist social forms and human labour shows that the activity of human beings is estranged and alienated. In this way, Marx finds that the domination of social being is intrinsic to the capital relation. The practical life of capital, by necessity, produces and reproduces unfreedom. This unfreedom can only be undone by actors who become aware of this logic and act practically and rationally to overcome it. Emergent subjects with an interest in breaking with this logic must recognise that their collective task requires the negation of capital and the establishment of institutions which are transparent and allow people to see their freedom actually realised in themselves and others. The ethical organisation of just institutions must be seen in political terms since the ethical composition of social life is organised politically.

²² Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 149.

²³ *Gr*, 158.

In this account of social being, Marx dissolves the strong distinction between politics and ethics common to contemporary philosophy.²⁴ This should not be taken to imply that ethics is subordinate to politics or vice versa. Instead, Marx conceives of ethical life as the culmination and realisation of a political practice that seeks human emancipation. Ethics without politics is empty; while politics without ethics is blind. In a distinctive way, this relationship between ethics and politics is part of Marx's adoption (and adaptation) of a tradition with an expansive conception of ethical life – a tradition he shares with Aristotle and Hegel.²⁵ In Aristotle, Marx finds an ontology of social being. Since humans are political by nature, the basis for ethical existence is provided by the activity of practical rational actors as they contribute to the political life of the *polis*, the city. For Hegel, reality itself is ethical. The expression of decisively modern and collective self-understanding is the composition of rational institutions, determined by subjects who can objectively determine their social life beyond the egotism of civil society to the mutual recognition and self-consciousness of ethical life. Marx's takes from Hegel a historical conceptualisation of shapes and forms of being as socially determined and relational. Like Hegel, Marx seeks the reconciliation of social conflict in mutual recognition. Marx shares with Hegel and Aristotle the need for a politics that sees human action as rational and goal driven.

Marx's ongoing dialogue with the tradition of ethical life in Aristotle and Hegel establishes an important philosophical component of his critique of political economy. His value-form theory builds upon Aristotle and Hegel while making his distinctive contribution clear. For Marx, the modern world cannot be known without understanding capital. This understanding is prerequisite to incorporating the insights of Aristotle and Hegel, who Marx turns to in order to show that the hidden 'secret' of the commodity form is capable of grounding a coherent account of an abstract form of sociality which is historically specific to capital. Capital is a social relation, the form of value which is realised as *value* in the production and circulation of commodities. Capital is value-in-

²⁴ This division became widely established in its modern form with Machievelli: 'The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must be prepared not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need', *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1961), 50.

²⁵ While many commentaries have focused on Hegel's relation to Marx, until much more recently Aristotle's place in Marx's social thought has been overlooked in the literature. The landmark work is Scott Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx* (La Salle: Open Court, 1985). Georg Lukács noted this connection earlier, despite some exaggeration, proclaiming 'When all is said and done, there are only three great thinkers in the West, incomparable with all others: Aristotle, Hegel and Marx.', 'Interview: On His Life and Work, *New Left Review*, 1/68 (1971): 58.

process, the limitless, infinite movement of things which take their socially recognisable form in commodities and money. In its continued accumulation, its limitlessness, capital is a force that self-creates by extracting the living and creative activity from human labour. The contradiction here is between the prevailing social relation which is both dynamic and self-valorising and its abstract and alienated condition of existence. Humans activity is isolated, at odds with the sociality of production, expressed in the abstract sociality of fetishised social relations. In the negation of these relations, Marx conceptualises the social as transparent and rational. He locates a realised concept of society, in the overcoming of abstract social forms. This realisation is the human control of the social world, to grasp the human potential beyond the mode of individual commodity producers. For Marx, a society of associated producers allows rationality and transparency to be institutionalised and mutually recognised.

* * *

The title of this thesis, *Society as its Goal*, is taken from a passage in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In a remarkable section, Marx diverges from his exploration of the intricacies of political economy to draw a picture of the early Parisian working class movement. He writes:

When communist *workmen* gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same time they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means has become an end. This practical development can be most strikingly observed in the gatherings of French socialist workers. Smoking, eating and drinking, etc., are no longer means of creating links between people. Company, association, conversation, which in its turn has *society as its goal*, is enough for them. The brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their work-worn figures.²⁶

This quotation provides a useful point of departure for the argument I want to advance. Here Marx does more than reflect on the cultural activity of a newly emerging working-class movement. More significantly, he also demonstrates his developing philosophical stance, an articulation emanating from the standpoint of labour. This standpoint emerges

²⁶ *EPM*, 365. Second emphasis added.

in conjunction with a newfound critique of the content of labour activity as estranged under capital production.

Marx comes to the view that capitalist social relations limit the potential and capabilities of human subjects, humans-as-they-could-be realised according to their species-essence. In developing his conception of estranged labour in teleological terms, the ethical dimension of Marx's thought is first posed. He relates a conception of this human essence – rational, historical and goal directed activity - to a theory of needs in which human capabilities can be met in accordance with collective decision making and rational production. Marx suggests that means and ends are not counterposed; humans cannot simply be taken as a means for others, but means cannot be reduced to their ends. The phrase, 'what appears as a means has become an end' expresses the sublation of this division into the *telos* of ethical life, society. The collective means becomes an end in itself. For Marx, this is conceived concretely in a negation of the abstract labour of capitalist production. Concrete ethical life becomes the concrete control of concrete labour. The work-worn figures Marx describes find dignity in a politics that seeks collective expression in rational association. The 'brotherhood of man'²⁷ represents a conception of society that discerns sociality through the fragmentation and atomisation of individual life, in which workplaces are seen as just another aspect of the private life of the sole autonomous producer. In rejecting this alienated existence, Marx sees in the nexus of workers the reality of a shared political existence which he calls 'a community of men'. This *reality* is both the realisation and application of socially transformative activity, of being-and-becoming of unalienated labour and the negation of the value-form. For Marx, to take the standpoint of labour means adopting the view of a total society, and with it, a universal, concrete and shared understanding, human freedom as ethical life.

What is 'society' for Marx? Marx uses 'society' as a category which pertains, following Hegel's *Logic*, to the 'exact determination and discovery of *objective relations*'.²⁸ By treating human actors as not essentially isolated individuals but defined by their place in the total social system of production and reproduction, Marx conceives of the social order as the

²⁷ I refrain from using masculine pronouns to denote humanity at large. Although through convention and in some cases mistranslation, 'man', 'men' and 'his' appears frequently in texts I have quoted, in line with contemporary progressive convention, I have used terms like 'humans', 'human being', 'human subject', 'people', etc.

²⁸ *SL*, 21:13.

capitalist mode of production. Societies differ in kind depending on how these relations are structured historically. The forms of structure vary, but their common characteristics can be understood from the standpoint of the totality. The domination characteristic of every previous productive formation, Marx argues can be negated if production is rationally organised. Insofar as the sociality of capitalism is hidden from those who produce it, it is an abstract sociality. This is why Marx also uses 'society' to mean a sublation of those relations into a social formation where real relations are readily apparent, self-transparent and rational.

Marx rejects the Enlightenment conceptualisation of society in the narrow terms of the singular autonomy of the individual. From the perspective of the individual, society is a collection of atomised humans, entering into a governed polity via contract and agreed sovereignty. This ontology generates a notion of government as the protector of individuals against the government which in turn designates government as tyranny as such and implies an idealised picture of the citizen. In this view, the separation of individuals is a necessary condition of private interest, which motivates human action. Society arises from the need to regulate and legitimise the interests of private interaction by exchange. Gain is supposed to be the compelling feature of human interaction and 'rationality'. Hegel described this understanding and its reflection in bourgeois 'civil society' as 'the spiritual animal kingdom', a world of 'deceit' in which:

This individuality, real in itself, is at first again a *singular* and *determinate* individuality; it knows itself as the absolute reality, and this absolute reality is therefore, as individuality becomes conscious of it, an *abstract, universal* reality, which, without filling and content, is merely the empty thought of this category.²⁹

With the term 'civil society', the Enlightenment thinkers created a model citizen fundamentally bourgeois in nature. The materialism of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke defined a social philosophy which was then translated by Adam Smith and David Ricardo into political economy. The thread that ran throughout was the depiction of human nature as egotistical and self-interested. In this way, they created a metaphysical starting point of the atomised individual and a *model* for thinking about society. In its most explicit and developed versions, classical political economy depicts all modes of social organisation according to the values of bourgeois social relations.

²⁹ *PbG*, ¶397/157-8.

These notions of civil society express a fundamental split between the world of politics and that of commerce. Society itself is conceived as divided and fragmented between two contradictory notions: the world of the private individual who is the producer, owner, buyer and seller of commodities, and the realm of government, which is the nexus of social structures and interactions that make it possible for individual sellers of commodities to meet each other at the market. This bifurcation presupposes an extant a *social* system that has been created by human actors. By drawing attention to this, Marx highlights the limitations of ahistorical and particular standpoints. He has this in mind in the tenth of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, that ‘The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity’.³⁰ This makes it clear that the standpoint of his social enquiry is equally a distinct way of conceptualising society. Elegantly, Althusser describes the *Theses on Feuerbach* as ‘those few lighting flashes which break the night of philosophical anthropology with the fleeting snap of a new world glimpsed through the retinal image of the old’.³¹ Within this process, of the new society emerging from the remnants of the old within the antagonisms of contemporary life, Marx finds revealed an image of transformative possibilities: ‘The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society’.³²

Through six chapters, I trace the importance of Marx’s social thought by excavating the specific usages of the category of ‘social’ in his thought. This task is primarily developed by tracing the ancestry of his thought in Aristotle’s social ontology and Hegel’s speculative logic. I group the three thinkers – Aristotle, Hegel and Marx – together as constituting a shared tradition of thinking about society that locates ethics within social relationships which are, in turn, mediated by political concerns and action. For Aristotle, society is prior to the individual. Ethics must be understood in terms of political life and organisation. Humans are conceived of ontologically as political animals and politics is the exercise of our ethical natures. For Hegel, the human subject seeks recognition. Conflict and domination are life and death struggles for subjectivity that must be sublated through mutual self-understanding. Individuals are seen not in isolated

³⁰ Karl Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, *EW*, 423.

³¹ Louis Althusser ‘From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy’, *Reading Capital*, 29. The present work is a rejection of Althusser’s reading of Marx. The practice of Marxist theory found in Althusser has left a lasting legacy very different from the philosophical understanding of Marx found here. While the above quotation is premised on a rigid and schematic periodisation of Marx’s thought, the imagery contains an insight to the impact of Marx’s philosophical intervention.

³² *MECW* 6, 211.

singularity but in relation with others, both in terms of their conflicts and dependence. Marx locates domination in the social relations of production. When the form and content of these relations are defined by capital, they take on characteristics independent of human control and agency. Instead, the products of human creative activity take a fetishised form. Products of human labour dominate our lives and appear as objects beyond our control. If Aristotle saw freedom in the teleological function of the polis and Hegel perceived it in the rational state, Marx saw the *telos* of humans in a society of freely associated producers.

For Marx, Enlightenment thought was unable to think *coherently* about social reality. Political economy sought to ground an understanding of society in individual production, locating the post-French revolutionary age as the epoch of the individual producer – the free commodity owner and seller. Marx’s reckoning with political economy establishes a mode of thinking about society and sociality that regards the form of social interaction in question as an expression of relations inherent to capital itself. For Marx, human relations are mediated by things. But these things, although embodied in various objects and means of production, derive their meaning from estranged social relations. Thus, capital itself is a relation *and* a thing, and is paradigmatic of way human relations are mediated in bourgeois society.³³ Marx’s thought aims to advance human possibilities, realising them concurrently with the negation of capital. In conceiving of free human activity as ‘freely associating producers’, Marx’s thought follows Aristotle’s definition of the good life as human flourishing. Simultaneously, he also affirms an association of collective institutions, a view in basic accordance with what Hegel finds in absolute ethical life. These intellectual connections draw out the ethical dimension of Marx’s thought which have been insufficiently recognised while also placing him in a tradition of critical inquiry that conceives of ethics as a historically and socially embedded rational practice.

The intellectual landscape covered by this thesis shows that rational inquiry is always set within social, historical and intellectual traditions. In a similar manner to what Alasdair MacIntyre calls ‘tradition-constituted enquiry’, I argue that Marx’s social thought and its

³³ *Gr*, 327.

relevancy today can only be understood ‘when placed in the context of traditions’.³⁴ The conception of rational enquiry, is ‘embodied’ in tradition, which as MacIntyre points out,

the standards of rational justification themselves emerge from and are part of a history in which they are vindicated by the way on which they transcend the limitations and provide remedies for the defects of their predecessors within the history of that same tradition.³⁵

This insight is suggestive of the reading of Aristotle, Hegel and Marx in this thesis. It helps push past the tired tropes of Marx scholarship, especially those pertaining to his relation with Hegel. By arguing that Hegel and Marx are best comprehended as parts of a shared rational tradition, the danger of allowing one tradition to foreclose the other is mitigated against: both the self-referential closure of absolute idealism and the presumed infallibility of the materialist conception of history are avoided. Instead, I focus on their shared attempts to realise the forms of rationality required for beings to become at home in their social world. Ethical life is the realisation of this notion. However, Marx differs from Hegel and from Aristotle in his own vision of what exactly this good life constitutes. Similarly, for Hannah Arendt, Marx ‘adopts’ the Hegelian tradition but at the same time, maintains ‘a concurrent rejection of its authority’.³⁶ The advantage of this insight is that the problematic relation between Hegel and Marx is preserved as an open question. This helps us to read tradition not as a fixed and moulded finality, but as an open and dynamic relation.

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The thesis is divided into three parts, each containing two chapters. Part I introduces key contemporary issues in the understanding of Marx’s thought by way of a historical metacritique of the New Left and its decline. I examine subsequent critiques of Marx in recent political theory made along Aristotelian and Hegelian lines. In diagnosing the limits of these readings, I prepare the ground for an immanent reconstruction of Marx’s

³⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶ Hannah Arendt, ‘From Hegel to Marx’ in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 73.

social theory. I examine the intellectual tradition shared by Aristotle, Hegel and Marx to stress the dialogic partners needed to overcome the aporia in the scholarly discussion. Part II traces the conception of ethical life in Aristotle and Hegel and suggests lines of continuation in Marx. In this way, I directly situate Marx within broader traditions in the history of political thought, allowing a better understanding of his thinking of sociality *contra* various forms of methodological individualism. Part III offers a reconstruction of Marx's social ontology with a chapter on the 1844 writings and a chapter on his mature texts, mainly the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

Chapter 1 deals with the complex of interpretive problems concerning Marx and ethics that emerged in the Anglo-American New Left, from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. I argue that the schism between 'humanist' and 'structuralist' interpretations failed to overcome (and, in fact, more deeply entrenched) the myth of the 'young' versus 'old' Marx. This schism left key conceptual problems (dialectics, human essence, scientific method) substantively unresolved and directed subsequent discussions into a restricted, and largely unproductive debate. Although during this period fruitful headway was made in mapping the importance of Marx's social thought, even the best of the humanist readings did little to seriously incorporate the value theory contained in *Capital*. On the other side of the debate, the most rigorous Althusserians upheld the philosophical importance of *Capital*, albeit at the expense of a distorting portrayal of Marx's relationship with Hegel and his debt to the broader concerns of German Idealism (alienation, subjectivity, totality). The inability to even *partially* settle such debates has had significant impact on the interpretation of Marx's social thought. More specifically, Marx's attitude to ethics and its relation to his political theory was left underdeveloped. The breakdown of the New Left in the late 1970s and the downturn of class struggle signalled a broader breakdown of Marxism as a tradition of social theory. I connect this decline and fall with two philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre and Gillian Rose, who respond with some sophistication to the problems left unresolved by New Left interpretations. In their distinctive ways, one turned towards Aristotle, the other to Hegel. Both were intellectually formed by the New Left and both authored distinctive criticisms of Marx in their principle works.

In Chapter 2, I undertake a more through-going examination of MacIntyre and Rose's major contributions to social theory: *After Virtue* and *Hegel Contra Sociology*. Both books

were published in 1981 and offer erudite critiques of modernity. I argue that despite the power of both texts, MacIntyre and Rose rely on thin accounts of Marx. For MacIntyre and Rose, Aristotle and Hegel respectively provide the resources for modern ethics and an emancipatory project. Yet these philosophers largely ignore the substantive critique of modernity contained in Marx's critique of political economy in which he immanently examines the main categories of modern social relations in the form of value. Of course, the reconstruction of a radical Aristotle (MacIntyre) and a radical Hegel (Rose) are valuable. However, their apparent polemical treatment of Marx is at variance with the substance of their accounts of modernity which are conceptually indebted to key elements of Marx's critique of capitalism. Rather, I read MacIntyre and Rose's work as part of a tradition of theorising ethical life which strengthens, rather than rejects, the intellectual resources in Marx's social theory.

Part II deals with these questions in terms of the history of political theory. I argue Marx's thought must be understood with a more expansive dialogue with both Aristotle and Hegel. This dialogue is outlined in Chapter 3. Both Aristotle and Hegel locate ethical life in the socially recognisable forms of action related to the polity and both thinkers chart the realisation of human rationality, as a teleologically informed process, in political terms. What conceptually constitutes the good life in Aristotle's Athens bears a striking resemblance to the social substance of Hegel's rational state. Both understand human flourishing in terms of practices that are socially validated and collectively comprehended. They provide an ontology of political and social beings, understood teleologically in Aristotle and historically in Hegel. The connection between these two thinkers triangulates their connections with Marx and introduces the three as constituting a tradition of thinking about ethics and politics together, within the concept of ethical life. This concept understands social life in terms of the shared rationality and mutual recognition which makes political life ethical.

This tradition runs against the prevalent ontology of contract theory and classical political economy. Chapter 4 examines this ontology of individualism as presented in Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* and expressed in political theory through Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. Defoe's *Crusoe* puts the naturalisation of "bourgeois man" into stark relief. Marooned on his island, Robinson Crusoe lives isolated and apart from society. Yet the homogenous and empty time experienced by the protagonist of the

novel reflects the homogenous and empty time of abstract labour in a commodity producing society. Here the myth of 'natural man' meets the reality of capitalist development. The novel provides an ideological expression of the naturalisation of an individualist ontology that is uncritically incorporated into political economy. Marx satirises the novel at important moments in development of his concept of value: first in *The Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847, then in his Introduction to the *Grundrisse* in 1857, and finally in the important presentation of value in the first chapter of *Capital*. Marx's use of the Robinson myth illustrates his critique of the social philosophy of the Enlightenment and his historicisation of the social forms specific to capitalism.

Part III reconstructs Marx's writings in terms of social ontology and value-form. Chapter 5 presents Marx's social ontology of labour from his 1844 writings. Through his concept of 'species-essence', he offers an account of the alienation of humans under capitalist production. In his early examination of political economy, Marx challenges this standpoint with a distinctive account of estranged labour. Capitalism refuses humans their ability to control their own productive activity and alienates them from the process and product of this activity. Capitalist production renders society a form of captivity by reducing humans into individual workers who relate to the world first and foremost by selling their individual labouring capacity which becomes the source of another's profit. Marx views this relationship as one of estrangement from the individual's being-for-self from their being-for-others. He conceives of this estrangement as denying the potentiality of human beings to rationality and collectively realise their capacities in concert with others. Here, Marx's concept of labour is teleological. Capitalist production limits humans to selling their capacities for a wage, rather than developing these capacities to allow for human flourishing. Marx rejects that humans can be fully themselves when production is organised privately and hinges on the domination of labour relations.

Chapter 6 develops these insights through reconstruction, contending that Marx's late writings continue and deepen the themes of alienation and 'species-essence', but with a new level of sophistication. Marx's conceptualisation of capital employs a speculative logic that understands the composition of social relations via an immanent critique of economic categories. He charts these relations in social forms (commodity, money, capital), which are grasped as dialectical unities that shape the domination of human

labour in capitalist society. Drawing on the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, as well as lesser known texts, this chapter focuses on how Marx's understanding of the fetish character of the commodity is essential to an ongoing critique of capital. This chapter supplies justification for the thesis as a whole and legitimises the critique set out in Part I and Part II. The chapter brings to bear the full conceptual shape of Marx's thinking about society and the form of value constitutive of modern capitalism. In his conception of society, Marx attempts to unveil the nature of modern domination by the speculative unfolding of social relations in terms of a logic of social forms. My conclusion further draws out the impact of this discussion.

* * *

The claim for Marx's contemporary relevance advanced here runs contrary to some common objections which deem his thought as outdated or outmoded. To many commentators, Marx and Marxism should be left to gather dust safely within a cabinet of nineteenth century relics – among which are also included industry, mass strikes and mass socialist parties.³⁷ Or worse, it is argued that Marx and Marxism are inextricably bound to a defective Eurocentrism in which blanket European development is pitted against the pre-capitalist 'barbarism' of the New World.³⁸ Others add to this charge by drawing attention to the gendered nature of Marx's lens.³⁹ How could such an anachronistic, orientalist and sexist Marx speak to our contemporary concerns?

This raises a subsidiary question about the critical contribution that might be made by

³⁷ A view held by recent portraits such as Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx* (London: Penguin, 2017).

³⁸ This is the accusation most famously made by Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 21, 149-157 and *passim*. Kevin B. Anderson's rigorous *Marx at the Margins* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) provides a robust and scholarly defence of Marx against the claims of Eurocentrism in general and Said, in particular; see 9-41. In my view, while Said is right to find fault in Marx's orientalist 1853 article 'The British Rule in India' (*MECW* 12, 126-7), he bases the substance of his entire critique on this article. This means Said ignores the sensitivity to Indian resistance in 'The Future Results of the British Rule in India', written a month later, where Marx suggests Indians will only benefit from colonisation if they throw off 'the English yoke altogether', *MECW* 12, 221. Said also ignores the changes in Marx's position on race and capitalist development, which culminate in Part 8 of *Capital*, 'Primitive Accumulation'. See the discussion of this process below in Chapter 4.

³⁹ This view is influentially put by Juliet Mitchell, *Women's Estate* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 99-122. Mitchell's polemical target is the strategic approach of Marxism to women's oppression. While she works with and against Marx, in Lise Vogel's words, Mitchell 'views production as an aspect of experience essentially external to women', *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 15.

those of Marx's influences whose vision – or aspects thereof – was antithetical to a modern, emancipatory politics. After all, whatever we might say about Marx, there is no doubt that Aristotle's lens *was* gendered. Equally, his defence of slavery is as anachronistic to us as it is ethically abhorrent.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is plausible to read Aristotle as definitively anti-modern for all the wrong reasons. Similarly, Hegel's explication of his concept of the state in the *Philosophy of Right* has led to the long-standing accusation of a conservatism that upheld the authority of the incompletely modern and frequently illiberal Prussian state.⁴¹ Read more generously, Hegel's defence of the state would seem to imply liberalism, or at best, social-republicanism.⁴² While I have little space to explore these critiques, my reading of these thinkers is contemporary. By bringing their conceptions of human flourishing and freedom in line with the equality of race, gender and sexuality, we both prove that they are in part modern and we push this side of their thought against the less modern parts.

Marx's understanding of social relations, unlike the experience of modern capitalism, does not discriminate along these lines. Throughout the thesis the concept of labour I assign to Marx is without gender or race. Gender and race have *always* shaped the character of labour under class society and without an understanding of these oppressions, the contemporary character of social relations is impossible to grasp. Addressing these two rich, and now large, literatures is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Fine work on Marx's attitudes to these questions are continuing to be produced as the importance of these forms of oppression become increasingly crucial for radical social theory.⁴³ Another notable absence in this thesis is Friedrich Engels, himself a contributor (however contested) to Marxism's understanding of oppression. Engels' place within Marxism and his contribution to either Marx's thought or to what becomes 'Marxism' is missing from this study. This is not to totally dismiss Engels with an ease all

⁴⁰ *Pol.* 1253b15-1255a3.

⁴¹ Shlomo Avineri rebuffs this position in *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 176-193 and Terry Pinkard starts his *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), ix with a comment on the falsity of this position.

⁴² See Robert Fine's discussion of this reading, *Political Investigations* (London: Routledge, 2001), 10-5.

⁴³ To list just a couple of examples on race, in addition to Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, see David R. Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017). On gender, Heather Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2013); Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory* (London: Pluto, 2017). Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99%* (London: Verso, 2019) is a fine example of the popularisation and extension of Marx's analysis to contemporary questions of the relation between race, gender and capital today in an effort to advocate a 'universalism that acquires its form and content from the multiplicity of struggles from below', 84, 69.

too common within the study of Marx.⁴⁴ Nor is it the space for an assessment of the controversies surrounding Engels' editorship of *Capital*, his popularisations of historical materialism in *Anti-Dühring* or the nature of his philosophical approach. This evaluation would be the task of a different study.

This work presents Marx as a thinker for today.⁴⁵ His critique of capitalism exposes the manner in which capital valorises itself by absorbing living labour. Capital is a dead weight that bears upon the living and 'lives the more, the more labour it sucks'.⁴⁶ The history of society has been the history of the denial of human beings the ability to rationally control their own labour by the structures of division and separation imposed by entire epochs of domination and servitude.⁴⁷ Modern life is mediated by economic markets and political institutions that not only seem out of the control of human subjects but objectify that lack of control in forms of domination. Further, the domination of modern life distorts and fetishises the social forms that mediate experience. If social theory is to provide a conception of freedom from this domination, it must reveal the origin and function of these fetishes. In doing so, social theory must investigate the barriers to the rational self-understanding which would allow human actors to realise a transparent social world. The politics of the modern world are coloured by the unfreedoms of racial and gendered oppression, state repression and militarism, set against the disequilibrium of labour relations and market exchange. The politics of freedom relates not just to the nature of political structures, but to the forms of human action which *motivate* the questioning of these relations. For freedom to be thought in political terms, freedom must become the concern of ethics; simultaneously its principle and ground. Simply put, political life must meet ethical life. A rational social order is one in which rationality is realised in the social forms that allow freedom to be embodied in the ethical life of the polity; in the institutions self-created and controlled by human actors aware of their roles and responsibilities as recognised in their social individuality. This idea of political emancipation relies upon a conception of ethical life. To struggle against domination on the basis of a shared social existence gives an ethical status to

⁴⁴ For a recent example, see Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 12.

⁴⁵ This space has opened significantly with Hägglund's *This Life*. His normative conceptualisation of Marx's notion of freedom provides a crucial new opening for the relevance of Marx's thought for contemporary philosophy and politics, see *This Life*, 212.

⁴⁶ *Cap* 1, 342.

⁴⁷ As the famous opening line of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* reads, 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.', *MECW* 6, 482.

Marx's thought that is both located in the immediate objective nature of labour, in the labour process itself, and at the same time, in the subjective potential for agency. For all the things denied to humans under the abstract sociality and the domination of capital, potentiality remains an enduring *reality and hope*.

| *Part I*

| 1. *The Decline & Fall of the New Left*

Making sense of the contemporary status of Marx's social thought requires a level of historical excavation. Today, when decades-old debates seem less pressing and increasingly byzantine, an analysis of the main lines of contestation between differing interpretations within Anglo-American Marx studies reveals not just the specific issues bearing on an interpretation of Marx but the problem of tradition in the study of Marx in general. The political and philosophical conjuncture of the New Left produced the most serious and sustained English-speaking engagement with Marx's philosophy. The strength of the 1970s 'humanist' interpretations of Marx constructed, in part, against Louis Althusser and Althusserianism defined a particular approach to reading Marx that engaged and widened the philosophical importance of his newly published early writings, especially the concept of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.¹ Marx's intellectual development is the main focus of the 'humanist' readings, especially in regard to his philosophical responses to Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx is often painted here before or against *Marxism*, escaping the official and doctrinaire textbooks extolling 'really existing socialism' and all its really existing alienation. However, the failings of these readings were significant, often suffering a myopic treatment of Marx's early writings at the expense of *Capital* and value-form theory.² At the same time, Althusser's promotion of the philosophical import of *Capital* was predicated on a faulty treatment of Hegel's presence in Marx's mature work and an 'epistemological break' between an 'idealist' and 'materialist' Marx.³ This left the question of ethics in Marx's thought conceptually unsupported. Either Marx's early work was the definitive statement of his ethics, or ethics was a form of bourgeois ideology and his critique of political economy had no ethical dimension at all.

¹ Althusser's intervention was directed against the humanism that had become synonymous with rightward shifts in the Western Communist parties (see note 31 below) and the 'theoretical Leftism' of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch which was starting to regain popularity along with the humanism of Western Marxists like Eric Fromm.

² Notable efforts to relate Marx's early writings to his value-form theory include Fredy Perlman's 'Commodity Fetishism' essay which introduced the English translation of I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, trans. Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1973). However, Perlman problematically argues that after the *EPM* Marx 'abandons his earlier conception of a human essence', xx. While Perlman is right to be critical of a view of human essence as a return to nature, Marx's understanding of social forms should be seen as a historical expression of essence.

³ Jacques Rancière's contribution to *Reading Capital*, which is the most sensitive to the relation between the *EPM* and *Capital*, was omitted from the English translation. See his 'The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy', in the complete English edition of *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 73-174. For a critique of Althusser's interpretation of *Capital* see Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 28-35.

This chapter introduces in brief the problem of ethics in New Left interpretations of Marx. Part 1 assesses the major treatments on this topic in Anglo-American Marxism. The effort to understanding Marx afresh, apart from Stalinist barbarism and imperialist Western capitalism was particular to the political emergence of the New Left, born of the twin crises of 1956: the Soviet liquidation of workers' councils in Hungary and the British invasion of the Suez Canal.⁴ The Soviet invasion of Hungary and Khrushchev's secret speech exposed on mass the truly oppressive nature of the so-called 'Socialist States' and provided a turning point for the Marxist left. While national Communist parties pushed for internal reform and the supposed process of 'de-Stalinisation', a left emerged that distanced itself from the politics of the official Moscow line.⁵ Social movements driven by politics of civil rights and women's liberation shook the parochialism of the old left. The 'march of history' was disrupted the subjectivity of political action. The intellectual resources of Marxism now required an account not only of economics and politics but a complete reinvention of how action was theoretically conceived. Freedom was not only now seen in political terms, but also as an ethical problem.

Intellectually, 'socialist humanism' emerged as the New Left's clarion call for a reinterpretation of Marxist philosophy.⁶ In an article titled 'The New Left', E.P. Thompson wrote of the 'fundamental break' with the orthodoxies of both Stalinism and imperialism now taking place, as disparate yet significant 'renaissance of socialist theory':

The laboratory work is still continuing, in journals, clubs and splinter parties, in sociological theses and in novels, in discussions in cafés, communes, workshops, trade union meetings. It would be possible to trace a recurring pattern in Communist post-

⁴ See E.P. Thompson, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest' in *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, ed. Cal Winslow (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 36-47.

⁵ These parties had their roots in the Bolshevism of the initial post-revolutionary period. However, the defeat of the revolutionary period, the degeneration of the Communist International and the purging of the Trotskyist Left Opposition, saw the confirmation and affirmation of the doctrine of 'socialism in one country' at the expense of revolutionary internationalism. This process is detailed in C.L.R. James' *World Revolution 1917-1936* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993). The mass Communist parties became more or less the mouthpiece for USSR foreign policy, which meant often making alliances with Western imperialism. In Ernest Mandel's words, 'the transformation of the Communist parties from forces acting for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in their respective countries (and of the Communist International from an instrument for the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist system and capitalism on a world scale) into instruments primarily for the defence of the Soviet fortress which increasingly entailed the automatic adaption of the tactics of these parties and of the Communist International to the zigzags of Kremlin diplomacy', *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: NLB, 1978), 14-5. Following James, the heterodox Trotskyist analysis of this process pointed to the USSR as 'bureaucratic state-capitalism'. For the prominent British version of this view, see Tony Cliff's *Russia: A Marxist Analysis* (London: International Socialism, 1964). MacIntyre was a member of Cliff's group, the International Socialists, from roughly 1960 to 1968, see Neil Davidson, 'Alasdair MacIntyre as a Marxist' in *Holding Fast to an Image of the Past* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2014), 152-179.

⁶ For the political background see, E.P. Thompson, 'Socialist Humanism' from the summer 1957 edition of *New Reasoner*, republished in *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, 49-88.

1956 'revisionism' – the humanist revolt, the rejection of dogmatic in favour of empirical methods of analysis, opposition to authoritarian and paternalist forms of organisation, the critique of determinism, etc. But this would tell us more about the shedding of old illusions and the re-valuation of old traditions, than about the affirmation of the enduring and the discovery of the new. It would tell us nothing about the crucial question: the confluence of the dissident Communist impulse with the left socialist tradition of the West and with the post-war generation. It is at this point of confluence that the New Left can be found.

Thompson identifies with the humanist revolt a 'renewal of interest' in the 'young Marx' and with it the concerns with 'moral agency' and 'individual responsibility within the flow of historical events'.⁷ Thompson's enthusiasm for new modes of political expression and a reshaped Marxism was limited to humanist Marxism, giving some credence to his view that a shedding of the old does not always reduce the most enduring and effervescent new growth.⁸ While the humanist renewed interest in Marx's philosophical inheritance, few took seriously the sophistication of European Marxism.⁹

By the late 1970s, after a slow dissipation, the New Left had terminally declined. The demise of the New Left as a political and theoretical project resulted in an intellectual void within Marxism. The strongest aspects of the renewal of interest in the young Marx had given theoretical expression to a political moment. However, with the defeat suffered by the onslaught the onset and period of neoliberalism, Marxism could no longer claim to speak to the movement initiated in 1956. Many who worked from the best traditions of Marxist social theory departed from Marxism altogether, citing Marx's deficiency to provide a mode of thinking suited to fundamental questions of modern society. Part 1 introduces the problem of ethics in New Left commentaries of Marx. This scholarship set the mould for subsequent discussions of Marx after the dissipation of Marxism in the late 1970s.

This exodus is addressed in Part 2 with a discussion of Alasdair MacIntyre and Gillian Rose and their respective relationships to the New Left. Both philosophers were formed by the Marxism of the New Left, in particular the thought of Georg Lukács, but built their reputations on sophisticated accounts of modernity that were critically removed from Marx. MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (AV) and Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* (HCS), both published in 1981, showed the

⁷ E.P Thompson, 'The New Left', *The New Reasoner* 9 (1959): 7-10.

⁸ The failure of British Marxism to incorporate the sophistication of European Marxism, resulted in a tendency for the weaker humanist accounts to reflect liberal politics.

⁹ For instance, Adorno's critique of domination and Benjamin's concept of history were largely unnoticed in the English-speaking world. Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) is a seminal text in this regard.

trajectory of Marxists who now gave up on Marx. I argue their departure from Marx reflects, in part, the weakness of New Left understandings of Marx's ethical thought. This context helps understand the shift in both MacIntyre and Rose's thought in the early 1980s. Tracing the emergence of MacIntyre and Rose from the British New Left, illuminates aspects of these thinkers often lost or forgotten. Especially since MacIntyre is most often painted as a post-Rawlsian communitarian and Rose's work has been the subject of very limited commentary.¹⁰ Placing each thinker in the context of the New Left provides a sense of their intellectual conjunctures prior to their 1981 works.¹¹ This setting not only allows deeper reflection on the relationship to Marxism of *AV* and *HCS* than subsequent reception of their work has allowed, but also provides a departure point to assess the radical implications of their critique of modernity. This interpretation is more historical in character than those that either read *AV* and *HCS* purely in terms of their polemical targets or as general responses to post-modern rejections of philosophical rationality and universality.¹²

I contend that important aspects of each work are characterised by the decline and fall of the New Left and its legacy on the subsequent intellectual climate during the 1980s. This deterioration provides a point of departure for contemporary political theory. The possibilities of a rational and universalist approach to social theory still require restoration and point to central aspects of Marx's thought that must be strengthened accordingly. The relationship between his dialectics of social form and the ethical content of his theory of alienation and commodity fetishism must be re-evaluated in this light and reconstructed.

After the fruitful period of Marx scholarship in numerous 'humanist' readings of Marx, the decline of the Anglo-American New Left and the fall of European Western Marxism resulted in a theoretical impasse on the question of Marx's ethical thought. Key interpretative issues in

¹⁰ For MacIntyre as a communitarian, see Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Brian W. Fuller's recent article on Rose is an excellent exception. He notes that aside from 'a smattering of early reviews' Rose's social theory 'remains little understood today', 'Back to Hegel? On Gillian Rose's Critique of Sociological Reason', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 69:2 (2018): 265. See also, Andrew Brower Latz's *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018). Earlier treatments tend to focus on her discussion of religion. For instance, Vincent W. Lloyd, *Law and Transcendence: On the Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹¹ This approach is not an attempt to explain each thinker by way of biography, but instead to situate their thought in relation, and as a reaction, to British Marxism. In this way, I provide a historical metacritique of both thinkers.

¹² MacIntyre locates the emotivism of G.E. Moore and its influence in analytic moral philosophy as the most pristine example of the crisis of morality, whereas Rose's continental approach is directed at the then popularity of Habermas. For post-modernism see Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991) and *Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), especially 33-92; Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998).

Marx's philosophy were left unresolved and dissolved into shibboleths. The questions of Marx's dialectic, his relation to Hegel, his materialism *or* idealism, his theory of human nature etc., became largely secondary questions since Marx had once and for all 'discovered the rational kernel' of the dialectic.¹³ The legacy of this position is the increasingly narrow understanding of Marx's theory in terms of historiography, political sociology and economics. Marx's theory of history and political revolution became the overwhelming focus of Anglo-American Marx studies throughout the 1980s.¹⁴ Marx's social theory was sidelined *within* Marxism as Anglo-American studies of Marx narrowed in to historical analysis with 'a Marxist framework'.¹⁵ Mike Davis promotes this interpretation as 'historical sociology'.¹⁶ According to Davis, the problem in Marx studies was the turn in the late 1970s away from the debates about modes of production towards 'intensely microscopic battles over the value form, the transformation problem, and the role of Hegelian logic in *Capital*'.¹⁷ However, the situation was more like the reverse of what Davis argues. Anglo-American scholarship reflected an interest in Marx's *Capital* as 'economic theory', often pertaining to the applicability of Marx's 'sociological' concepts to contemporary capitalism.¹⁸ Even then, the debates regarding *Capital* were quite minor when compared to the largely historiographical debates which *directly* concerned modes of production analysis.¹⁹ This

¹³ Scholarly texts concerned with Marx's philosophy largely clarified issues and developed insights from earlier debates, rather than the originality of the New Left interpretations. Althusser notes the issue of the 'inversion' of the dialectic, 'raises as many questions as it answers', *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 89. Irrespective of a critique of Althusser's reading, this problematic is flattened in many subsequent accounts of Marx, structuralist or otherwise.

¹⁴ The notable exception to this trend was Marx's adoption into Anglo political philosophy, re-branded and de-Hegelianised as Analytic Marxism. Marx's thinking about ethics (as justice) was certainly a major concern of many Analytic Marxist studies, but the conception of ethics at play was often defined quite narrowly by the conventions of Analytic philosophy. This method of analysis superimposed a predetermined conceptual framework on Marx's thought, rather than reading the text on its own terms within Marx's dialectical philosophy and contextual frames of reference. The founding document of this approach was G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). Other major works include John Roemer, *Analytical Foundations of Marxian Economic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Norman Geras, *Marx & Human Nature* (London: Verso, 1983); Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Richard W. Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). See also the major collections Terence Ball and James Farr, ed., *After Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Alex Callinicos, ed., *Marxist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Robert Wane and Kai Nielsen, ed., *Analyzing Marx* (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Perry Anderson argues the 'backward zone' of Anglo-American Marxism had now become 'most advanced' through the rise of historiographies from the mid-1970s. His prediction of this leading to a strengthening of Marxist culture, unfortunately did not play out and was more an expression of decline, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1984), 24-27.

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas* (London: Verso, 2018), 20. Davis goes as far as to describe this view as 'Lukácsian', ignoring the critical comments Lukács makes against such positions. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁸ The major debate about *Capital* was prompted by Ian Steedman's *Marx After Sraffa* (London: NLB, 1977) and furthered in the exchanges collected in *The Value Controversy*, ed. NLB (London: Verso, 1981).

¹⁹ This tendency often also pertained to discussions of *Capital* itself. For instance, in Antony Culter et al, *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), the authors claim the central concept in *Capital* are 'inadequate' and in fact 'obstacles' to the (Althusserian) theoretical work needed, 2-3. They draw special

turn presented Marxist social theory as an addendum to an economic analysis, whether expressed in historical or sociological, or directly economic terms. From the late 1970s, Anglo-American Marx studies reflected a growing distance from developing the kind of philosophical understandings of Marx that had been pioneered over the two preceding decades. While some close studies appeared throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, the intellectual status of Marx's social theory had comparatively weakened by the late 1970s.

Part 1

New Left commentaries tended to focus on Marx's philosophy in general, rather than the specific problem of Marx' relation to ethics. The return to the themes of the young Marx was carried in proxy battles over Marx's early writings, most importantly the *EPM*. In 1961, Henri Lefebvre expressed this mood when he wrote, 'At a time when dogmatism is crumbling and dissolving, the early writings of Marx become the first importance. They enable us to reinstate the problems raised by his ideas and by Marxism, problems which are still fundamentally our own ones'.²⁰ Concurrent to this regeneration of Marxism via Hegelian themes, the same early texts had been used to present Marx far from his own 'Marxism'.

The split of Marx from Marxism was the problematic which guides Althusser's efforts to develop Marxist philosophy in *For Marx* and *Reading 'Capital'*, separated by just months in 1965. The influence of his interpretation amongst Anglo-American Marxism increased considerably with regular translations in New Left publications from early 1967 and throughout the 1970s.²¹ Althusser sharpened the philosophical issues in interpreting Marx to the 'terrain of the confrontation between Marx and Hegel'.²² In this respect he offered a distinctive new interpretation of Marx's early writings; that of periodisation based around the concept of the 'epistemological break'. Here Althusser fundamentally challenges the Hegelian character of the Marx's philosophical concepts. Where Marx used the term 'essence' throughout the early

attention to the category of 'value' and assert that 'this concept and the concepts and problems dependent on it should be rejected', 10. The work is largely a continuation of the debate prompted by the co-authors Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst's *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, John Sturrock (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 19.

²¹ The lynchpin essay of *For Marx*, 'On Contradiction and Overdetermination' was published in *New Left Review* 1/41 (1967): 15-35.

²² Althusser, *For Marx*, 13.

writings to denote a concept of human nature,²³ Althusser contended that the concept is jettisoned after 1844.

For Althusser, the early Marx remained trapped in Hegel and Feuerbach's humanism and that concepts like 'alienation, species-being, total being, "inversion" of subject and predicate' remain 'impregnated' in Feuerbach's philosophical problematic.²⁴ Only in Marx's sixth critique of Feuerbach can it be said that a break emerges in Marx's work. The break becomes fully visible in *The German Ideology* and the full implications evident in *Capital*. This break is a radical departure, a discontinuance, from Hegel and Feuerbach and from classical models of philosophy.²⁵ Marx had to 'retreat' from the ideology that premised Hegel's bourgeois humanism to found a scientific socialism, 'the concept "socialism" is indeed a scientific concept but the concept "humanism" is no more than an *ideological* one'.²⁶ Humanism, as the theory of a realisation of human essence, present in the early works, becomes in Marx's mature writings '*theoretical anti-humanism*' based on a 'unique rupture' expressed in three ways:

- (1) The formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc.
- (2) A radical critique of the theoretical pretensions of every philosophical humanism.
- (3) The definition of humanism as an ideology.²⁷

For Althusser, 'This rupture with every philosophical anthropology or humanism is no secondary detail; it is Marx's scientific discovery.'²⁸ Hence in rejecting the human essence, Marx gives up 'ethics to science', bourgeois philosophy for Marxism.²⁹

Althusser went even further, applying his critique of Hegel to *Capital* and contending that the 'trace' of Hegel's influence is found in the '*vocabulary*' of the discussion of value at the beginning of Volume One. Accordingly, Marx's uses the *word* value to mean 'two *completely different things*'. Rather than locating value as a category form which includes the dialectical moments 'use-value' and 'exchange-value', Althusser argues that Marx should have removed the Hegelian 'division' of value from the beginning of *Capital*. Althusser demands 'we ought to *rewrite Part 1 of Capital*' to

²³ For example, *EPM*, 329.

²⁴ Althusser, *For Marx*, 45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-9, 223.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

expunge the Hegelian influence.³⁰ This reading presents a distinct problem for Marx studies, since it encourages a highly polemical rendering of the confrontation between Marx's materialism and Hegel's idealism misrepresenting the role of Hegel's logic in Marx's mature work. In painting Marxism as a 'science', the ethical aspect of Marx's social theory is dismissed and a dualist division between science and ethics (fact and value) is applied. Althusser's philosophical redefinition of Marx's 'scientific discovery' was directed against the liberal and ideological character of humanism,³¹ 'obsessed' with questions of ethics but weak in terms of a materialist philosophy.³² Althusser's intervention set the terrain for a contestation that created a bifurcation between the early and young Marx.

The responses to Althusser in Anglo-American studies strongly defended the early Marx and provided rigorous and lengthy defences of the concept of alienation. The most influential treatments, those by Shlomo Avineri,³³ István Mészáros³⁴ and Bertell Ollman³⁵ defined a reading of Marx that shared Hegel's humanist concerns but provided a basis for a humanism in line with Marx's emancipatory politics. For these scholars, the early Marx provided the decisive statement of his thought.³⁶ These interpretations provide convincing analysis of his early thought but tended to overlook (or seriously mischaracterise) the import of value-form theory. Aside from presenting a thesis of continuation between the young and mature works, these studies did little to give sufficient detail on the operative content of alienation in the mature texts. Without an

³⁰ Added to this, Althusser rejects the Hegelian 'negation of the negation' used in Chapter 32 (see *Cap* 1, 929) and the discussion of commodity fetishism in Chapter One. Louis Althusser, 'Preface to Capital' in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 89-90. However, it should be noted that Althusser changes his position in the *Preface* from 1969 from the earlier *Reading Capital*. Cf. 'From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy, *Reading Capital*, 9-72. Alex Callinicos softens Althusser's critique of Chapter One, justifying Althusser's comments as 'common-sense' considering the series of different versions make it 'a difficult and unsatisfactory text', *Deciphering Capital* (London: Bookmarks, 2014), 164. This view implies that Marx's modifications lead to confusion rather than a highly considered starting point. I reconstruct the opening argument of *Capital* in Chapter 6 below, to emphasise the central importance of the opening abstraction in Marx's social theory.

³¹ The adjoining political dimension was the right-wing shift in Western Communist Parties which 'pursued policies of unity with socialists, democrats and Catholics', guided by certain slogans of related resonance, in which the accent is put on the 'peaceful transition to socialism', on 'Marxist' or 'socialist humanism', on 'dialogue', etc.' *For Marx*, 11. See also Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976), 39 and *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: NLB, 1980), 107. For the impact of post-1956 de-Stalinisation and the Sino-Soviet split, see Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 1-53.

³² Althusser, *For Marx*, 238.

³³ Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). MacIntyre endorsement is on the back cover: 'His brilliant book is essential reading'.

³⁴ István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin, 1970).

³⁵ Bertell Ollman, *Alienation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

³⁶ Of course, there were notable some exceptions, including Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom* (London: Pluto, 1975). Her discussion of the relationship between *Capital* and Marx's politics, especially the US Civil War, was important, 81-149. MacIntyre wrote a brief review of the book, which praises the return to Hegel and her account of theory linked with practice but his criticism of her treatment of the USSR is highly dubious. See 'Algebra of Revolution', *Universities and Left Review* 5 (1958): 79-80.

elaboration of the specific character of alienation in *Capital*, not only was considerable ground implicitly given to the Althusserian position, but the philosophical positions became ossified into opposing interpretive orthodoxies.

Avineri's sensitivity to the themes of German Idealism in Marx's thinking gives significant weight to contention that the *social* character of Marx's thought is essential to his philosophical method. The book draws from the whole of his *oeuvre* to present a philosophical Marx at odds with the 'relativist positivism' of doctrinal Marxism. This view is grounded in an analysis of alienation that provides the 'possibility of a radical revolution in man's conditions that will enable man to achieve the full potential of his self-creativity'.³⁷ Avineri locates Marx's understanding of species-being (or species-essence) as related to the Hegelian enterprise of basing 'ultimate freedom on a universal recognition of men's dependence upon each other ("association")'.³⁸ This contention is strengthened by Avineri throughout by reference to Marx's late works: 'alienation cannot be overcome while productive relations alienate human relations into relations between objects', the view of 'capital as man's alienated self goes back to the 1844 *Manuscripts*'.³⁹ The upshot of this analysis is a strong affirmation of the social aspect of Marx's thought, although Avineri neglects to make the link explicit between Marx's concept of social association and ethics. While Avineri provides a strong case for the continuity of the themes (and language) of the young Marx in the later texts,⁴⁰ his discussion of value lacks detailed determinations. Apart from the 'verification and vindication' of the early work, there is no prolonged discussion of the form of value, or Marx's development of the concept of labour in terms of the character of abstract labour, labour-power, labour-time etc. *Capital* is seen as 'a detailed study of the economic aspects of the process enunciated by Marx in his *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*', but without any mention of *how* Marx develops these themes.⁴¹ Avineri's detailed analysis of the themes of the early work fail to take up the significance in Marx's social thought if value is seen as a social relation and not merely an economic category.

A similar problem pervades Mészáros' book. He clearly articulates that '*none* of the meanings of alienation as used by Marx in the *Manuscripts of 1844* dropped out of his later writings... the concept of alienation is a vitally important pillar of the Marxian system as a whole, and not

³⁷ Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 86.

³⁸ Ibid., 92. Avineri's reading of Hegel in this text is notably weaker than in his later, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

³⁹ Ibid., 108-9, 117-19.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁴¹ Ibid., 119-20.

merely one brick of it'.⁴² The book has an explicit and narrow focus on the *EPM* but nonetheless Mészáros' interpretation has an authoritative weight. The book provides a view of alienation as 'the inner dynamic of his structure of thought as a whole' which provides philosophical import in terms of ethics and ontology.⁴³ Significantly, Mészáros identifies the concept of a historical human nature which challenges a dualistic ontology between 'actuality' and 'potentiality' by the mediation of productive activity, which aims at human freedom.⁴⁴ Mészáros makes clear that Marx does have a concept of ethics. Marx sees ethics not as some 'Hume-type' notion but as the total 'realisation of human life-activity as internal need'.⁴⁵

However worthwhile this reading might be, Mészáros exaggerates his reconstruction of Marx's text, painting the fragmentary *Manuscripts* to be a 'systematic' text.⁴⁶ While numerous references are provided for the continuation of the theme of alienation in later texts, Mészáros fails to outline *how* the theme is continued, without even a preliminary discussion of value. This leaves unanswered questions of the relationship between what Mészáros regards as systematic in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the systematic ordering of concepts in Marx's critique of political economy.⁴⁷

Ollman's interpretation of the *EPM* provides a stronger account of *Capital*. Several short chapters detail a close relationship between Marx's concept of value and alienated labour, grounded in a method Ollman describes as 'internal Relations'.⁴⁸ This method underscores the connection between parts in a totality, related dialectically, which allows a concise discussion of value and commodity fetishism and the centrality of alienation to this project. Yet problems emerge from the presentation. Ollman contends that 'We have already gotten considerable insight into what Marx meant by "labour" from the analysis of his earlier writings. This meaning remains basically the same in *Capital*'.⁴⁹ This claim contradicts the weight of the conceptual difference between Marx's latter distinction between labour and labour-power and his specific discussions of abstract and concrete labour. The relation between alienation and abstract labour, the most fertile ground for a comparison between the *Manuscripts* and *Capital* goes unmentioned.

⁴² Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 227.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 162-7. However, as Norman Geras points out Mészáros is far from consistent, *Marx and Human Nature*, 53-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁷ I take later approach is Chapter 6 below.

⁴⁸ Ollman, *Alienation*, 12-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

Ollman's account is limited to the discussion of alienation and its retention though *Capital*.⁵⁰ This contention remains conceptually underdeveloped here, as elsewhere in the 1970s work by the Anglo-American humanist Marxists.

Ollman's vastly influential book popularised three additionally problematic approaches. The first was to argue Marx should be considered with some isolation from earlier thinkers,

It is the intellectual's disease – a disease from which I am not wholly immune – to treat one thing by discussing everything which bears the slightest resemblance to it. When applied to Marxist exegesis, this means that Aristotle, Locke, Hegel, Feuerbach, Rousseau, the Roman Catholic Church and many more people, ideas and things are used in extended analogies to highlight Marx's meaning... To assert that Marx, like Aristotle, had a teleology, or that like Rousseau, he believed man a social animal, or that, like Locke, he wanted man to be free is to mislead people into thinking that the similarity is more than that of a lowest common denominator.⁵¹

This attitude seeks to understand Marx's concepts in part removed from the residence of earlier ideas and themes in his writings. This view maintains that the excavation of Marx's intellectual positions is in some ways at odds with understanding Marx. Second, this interpretation has implications for the relationship between Marx and Hegel. While Ollman locates the heritage of the method of 'internal Relations' in Hegel, Ollman's second problematic is the divorce of Hegel's system from method. Ollman attempts to 'rule out Hegel's concrete theories (which Marx always rejected) and [uphold] the philosophy of internal relations (which he always accepted)'.⁵² This divorce leaves Hegel as a conservative politically with a method that required Marx's materialist turning. Method is given priority without a sense of the content of Hegel's dialectical system.

The third problem is Ollman's view that there is no 'Marxian ethic'. His approach starts strongly, suggesting a Marxian ethic would 'have concentrated on showing how the distinctive forms of our ethical life, such as treating approval and disapproval as value judgements, are internally related to the whole social fabric out of which they arose.'⁵³ Ollman recognises that Marx is 'motivated' by 'some idea of "the good"' but is ambivalent if a theory of ethics can be derived

⁵⁰ Ollman also constantly confuses the Lukácsian notion of 'reification' with Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. See Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London: Verso, 2014), 36-7.

⁵¹ Ibid., xiv-xv.

⁵² Ibid., 37.

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

from Marx's 'commitment to human fulfilment'.⁵⁴ Ollman emphasises that Marx does not separate fact from value, suggesting 'any surgical division into facts and values... [is] destructive of his meaning'.⁵⁵ Ollman acknowledges two important factors in assessing Marx's relation to ethics, the presence of 1) a conception of the good; and 2) the condemnation of capitalism through empirical analysis. However, Ollman disputes that these two elements of Marx's social thought can provide an ethical theory with normative content.⁵⁶ Ollman shies away from the upshot of both of these theoretical positions and fails to deliver the full conceptual strength of the theory of alienation.

Instead, Ollman draws off Robert Tucker to argue, ethics 'is only possible on the basis of a suspended commitment'.⁵⁷ Tucker, along with Allen W. Wood, (the 'Tucker-Wood thesis'), defined the conventional view of Marx's relation to ethics in Anglo-American Marxism.⁵⁸ Tucker argues Marx's theory 'does not start by raising the question of the supreme good for man or the criterion of right conduct; these questions are not raised by Marx *as questions*'.⁵⁹ Explicit in Tucker's argument is that any attempt to relate Marx to ethical philosophers fails from Marx's very own disavowal of morality.⁶⁰ Tucker removes from the equation a view of ethics that, following Aristotle and Hegel, binds politics with a conception of ethical life. Tucker's thesis leads to an isolation of the question of ethics from Marx's broader thematic and a desire to hold Marx's social thought to external standards, rather than grasping the operation of Marx's concept of immanent critique.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44-5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁶ The sensitivity of Ollman's position is defended well in Ruth Groff, 'On the Ethical Contours of Thin Aristotelian Marxism' in Michael J. Thompson, ed., *Constructing Marxist Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 322-324. From a reading of Aristotle, Groff argues that Marx does have a moral theory which is demonstrated in *Capital*. She sees this theory as Aristotelian – 'that the good for human beings is to realise our species-being' but denies these two elements amount to 'a full-blown normative theory', 325. I argue in what follows, Marx's concept of capital has more normative power than Groff (and Ollman) afford.

⁵⁷ Ollman, *Alienation*, 46.

⁵⁸ Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970) and Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), esp. Part 3; 'Marx Against Morality' in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 511-524; 'The Marxian Critique of Justice', in *Marx*, ed. Scott Meikle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 91-130. The debate has been discussed extensively, for example: Norman Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', *New Left Review* 150 (1985): 47-85; George E. McCarthy, 'The Last of The Schoolmen: Natural Law and Social Justice in Karl Marx' in *Constructing Marxist Ethics*, 202.

⁵⁹ Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 16. Following Tucker, Miller argues that without explicit discussion of individual moral behaviour, at best Marx is seen to gesture toward ethical questions without providing any answers, *Analyzing Marx*, 24-31. Mészáros takes apart Tucker's reading in a five page footnote, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 331-336.

⁶⁰ Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, 19.

By following Tucker's schema, Ollman's efforts to locate an ethical theory in Marx fail. This view assesses normative claims from a standpoint that supposes objectivity from its external position. However, to make good on the problem of the fact/value distinction requires a comprehension of the immanence of Marx's social theory. Immanent critique appraises social criticism, ethics included, with a normative position internal to the categories under investigation. As Moishe Postone has argued,

an immanent critique does not judge critically what 'is' from a conceptual position outside of its object - for example, a transcendent 'ought'. Instead, it must be able to locate that 'ought' as a dimension of its own context, as a possibility immanent to the existent society... The adequacy of an immanent social critique depends on the adequacy of its categories. If the fundamental categories of the critique (value, for example) are to be considered critical categories adequate to capitalist society, they must express the specificity of that society. Furthermore, as categories of a historical critique, the categories must be shown to grasp the grounds of an intrinsic dynamic of that society, leading to the possibility of its historical negation - to the 'ought' that emerges as a historical possibility immanent to the 'is'.⁶¹

The relationship between 'is' and 'ought' in immanent critique is a dialectical and self-reflective relation between the categories internal to the critique. The 'ought' cannot be a set of external criteria but must emerge from the content of the 'is'. The 'is' must be located concretely by historical categories, but allowing for the possibilities of the 'ought' to arise as essential to the dialectic – rather than 'is' and 'ought' as two poles without mediation. Without a sense of immanent critique, the conceptual character of alienation is lost – it becomes a concept *without* clearly distinguishable ethical content. As I have argued, the Anglo-American humanist accounts presented a Marx that was philosophically rich, however the question of ethics was not only unclear but was discussed as a specific problem quite separate from his immanent critique.⁶²

The predominant view of Marx's ethics was established in the early 1960s. In addition to Tucker's thesis, Eugene Kamenka's *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* was a significant and early discussion. In this book, Marx's social thought and key concepts are considered with a view to assess his standing as an ethical thinker. The originality of Kamenka's treatment is the textual depth he allows in assessing the specific possibility of an ethical theory in Marx. He addresses the ambiguity in Marx's own attitude towards ethics and the continual legacy of this ambiguity in his

⁶¹ Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 87-90.

⁶² According to Avineri, Marx's immanent critique is his inversion of Hegel, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 5, 9-10, 34, *passim*. This view is too narrow to provide a sufficient definition of immanent critique.

dogmatic ‘disciples’ from Engels to the Marxism of the Soviet Union’s official philosophers.⁶³ Kamenka contends that morality for the early philosophical Marx is linked to the ‘unflowering of man’s essential being (*Wesen*) and an essence, according to Marx, is always truly universal. The human essence or spirit is what is common to all men: their eternal nature’.⁶⁴ Kamenka argues this concept is part of Marx’s ‘primitive ethic’, which reflects the ‘logico-ethical’ influence of German Idealism but he fails to ‘make any real attempt to get to grips with the problem of relating and distinguishing man’s universal essence, his *Wesen*, and his existence as a particular, empirical, being’.⁶⁵ Accordingly, Marx’s mature writings ‘turn viciously’ on his earlier view of human essence.⁶⁶ Where the early Marx expresses ‘the unsystematic flashes of insight’ concerning the freedom of human activity at the expense of the empirical, the late Marx focused on the ‘instability and incoherence of evils, glossing over the concrete foundations and positive character of goods’.⁶⁷ Kamenka argues that Marx rejects a normative conception of ethics: he ‘expounds no moral “principles” or standards according to which political economy is tried and found wanting’ and ‘was not able to escape the dualism required by normative theories; he could not exercise either individualism or the upholding of “ends” from his thought’.⁶⁸ Although Marx might have written in ways that emulate ethics, Kamenka contends, ‘how do we distinguish his ethical demands from other demands?’... He cannot distinguish ‘approval’ from ‘liking’ except by a circular reference to goods, he cannot show how ethics, seen as a system of demands is to be distinguished from economics, the science of demands in general; he cannot explain how ethical distinction came to be made or moral judgements came to maintain themselves’.⁶⁹ On this basis, Kamenka dismisses the possibility of ‘a genuine study of the ethical content of Marx’s thought’.⁷⁰ For Kamenka, Marx’s failure to set out an explicit set of ethically coherent standards means that not only does he have no grounding for a normative critique, but what is considered ethical is unclear. The shift in Marx’s thought away from essence and towards a deterministic historical analysis might express disapproval of capitalism, but it hardly founds an ethical theory.

⁶³ Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 1-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123, 146.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 195-6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 70, 95.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-3. Kamenka firms up this argument in his much stronger toned *Marxism and Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

Kamenka's treatment pre-empts a significant perspective in Anglo-American interpretations of Marx and ethics.⁷¹ Marx's failure to write directly about ethics is taken as a lack of interest in ethics as such, rather than a difference in approach. Similarly, Marx's dialectical mode of critique is treated with scepticism.⁷² This results in an inability to understand the immanent character of his critique. Through an examination of the internal character of the categories of bourgeois forms, Marx overcomes, rather than confirms, a dualistic split between the 'is' of his theoretical comprehension of modern society and the 'ought' of a world beyond the social form of capital. Marx's thought has normative importance, but this conception of ethics is not relegated to the normatively applicable standards of individual action but to the ongoing conception of sociality expressed through the mediation of human relations. Kamenka claims that 'Hegel and Marx both saw thought as an essence, and not as a relation'.⁷³ Kamenka understands essence as an unchanging and historically indeterminate phenomenon, posited separately from the relations which comprise social forms. In this way he finds a movement away from the essentialism of the early writings, rather than a deepening of this commitment in Marx's critique of political economy.

The problem that emerged from the New Left treatments of Marx was that his attitude towards ethics was not only seen as contested, but on what terms it was said to apply was also unclear. Marx's social thought could hardly be said to provide an ethical understanding, not the least because even the most philosophically careful found agreement on what ethics might be (a concept of the good or criteria for individual action) impossible. Without a tradition of strong reconstructions of Marx's social thought to address those issues, those concerned with these issues easily moved away from Marxism as the New Left deteriorated. The specific manifestations of this departure are evident in the relationship to the New Left, Marx and Marxism in the intellectual narratives of MacIntyre and Rose.

⁷¹ In a review of the book, MacIntyre praises the philosophical literacy of Kamenka's treatment. Although he criticises Kamenka's 'seriously confused' method which abstracts Marx from his social context, MacIntyre advocates Kamenka's separation between Marx's early thought (focused on freedom) and his later thought (focused on poverty). MacIntyre argues the later Marx is economic, 'Marx and Morals', *International Socialism*, 14 (1963): 35.

⁷² Kamenka's method is majorly influenced by John Anderson. So much so that reviews described his Marx as 'proto-Andersonian', Conal Condren, 'Political Theory' in *Surveys of Australian Political Science*, ed. Don Aitkin (North Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 58; D. McCallum, 'The Ethical Foundations of Marxism' by E. Kamenka, *Reviews, Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 41:1 (1963): 120-4. See also, Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism*, xviii.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 23. Kamenka goes on to mistakenly claim that Hegel's absolute is 'an impersonal, non-human force' (23), which misrepresents what Hegel means as self-consciousness knowing itself in history, *PbG*, ¶803/318.

Before *AV*, MacIntyre had been a notable figure in the British New Left.⁷⁴ He became a well-established philosopher during the first period of the New Left,⁷⁵ with a series of significant essays for New Left publications; including ‘Notes from the Moral Wilderness’ for *New Reasoner*⁷⁶ and ‘Breaking the Chains of Reason’ for the New Left collection *Out of Apathy*.⁷⁷ Until the late 1960s, MacIntyre wrote from within the Marxist tradition and his subsequent publications reflect a continued interest in the themes and concerns of Marxism as a mode of social critique.⁷⁸ Although working until 1970 in Britain as a high-profile philosopher (at Manchester, Oxford, Leeds and a short period in the Sociology Department at the University of Essex), MacIntyre’s work defied the typical focus of British analytic philosophy.⁷⁹ MacIntyre directly engaged Marxist and radical sociology.⁸⁰ He was explicitly influenced by the sociological and philosophical work

⁷⁴ MacIntyre had organisational connection to the Student Christian Movement (SCM), Communist and then Trotskyist left, see Davidson, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre as a Marxist’, 129-181. For an account of the intellectual atmosphere of the New Left, which emphasises MacIntyre’s importance, see Paul Blackledge, ‘The New Left: Beyond Stalinism and Social Democracy’ in *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, ed. Evan Smith and Matthew Worley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 45-61. See also John Gregson, *Marxism, Ethics and Politics: The Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (London: Palgrave, 2019), 89-134. These perspectives are written from the viewpoint of the International Socialists (later the Socialist Workers Party).

⁷⁵ Peter Sedgwick examines the political differences between the ‘old’ New Left (1957-61) and the subsequent decline in the movement in ‘The Two New Lefts’ in *The Left in Britain 1956-68*, ed. David Widgery (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), 131-153.

⁷⁶ MacIntyre was on the editorial board of the newly formed *New Left Review*, which merged in 1960 from the New Left publications *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*. See Perry Anderson, ‘The Missing Text’, *New Left Review*, 2/114 (2018): 33-4 and Michael Kenny, *The First New Left* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), 26. For the formation of the journal, see Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: Verso, 2015), 361-366. The editorial board was dissolved and restructured in 1961. See Sedgwick, ‘The Two New Lefts’, 144 and E.P Thompson, ‘An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski’, *Socialist Register* 1973, 10. Thompson and Williams were part of the first editorial board. For the competing view, from the standpoint of the restructured editorial board, see Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, 135-140; and for the whole period, Duncan Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect? A History of New Left Review* (Monmouth: Merlin, 2007), 1-42.

⁷⁷ Many of the essays of this period are collected in Alasdair MacIntyre, *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism*, ed. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009).

⁷⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity* (London: Duckworth, 1968, 1995); *Marxism* (London: Fontana, 1970); *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Duckworth, 1971), and most recently *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁷⁹ MacIntyre’s status as an analytic philosopher can be seen in his inclusion in such volumes as *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), 254-260; *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 205-225; Bryan Magee, *Modern British Philosophy* (St Albans: Paladin, 1973), 236-248; and much more recently, *Conversations on Ethics*, ed. Alex Voorhoeve (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111-131. MacIntyre’s critique of the analytic tradition from a position *within* the tradition bears some similarity to G.E.M Anscombe. Her essay on is/ought is a central influence on MacIntyre’s critique of moral philosophy, see ‘Modern Moral Philosophy’ in *The Is/Ought Question*, ed. W.D. Hudson (London: The Macmillan Press, 1969), 175-195.

⁸⁰ See Neil Davidson, ‘Alasdair MacIntyre’s Lost Sociology’ in *Sociological Amnesia*, ed. Alex Law and Eric Royal Lybeck (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 159-179. MacIntyre’s approach to contemporary British sociology can be seen in the essays collected in Part 2 of *Against the Self-Images of the Age* and ‘The Idea of a Social Science’ in *Rationality*, ed. Bryan R. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 112-130.

of Marxists including George Thomson,⁸¹ Lucien Goldmann,⁸² Karl Mannheim,⁸³ C.L.R. James and Michael Kidron.⁸⁴

MacIntyre's Marxism was most decisively formed by his reading of Georg Lukács. MacIntyre's *Marxism: An Interpretation* is one of the earliest works in English to draw upon Marx's *EPM* and Lukács' early work – at this point both only available in German.⁸⁵ In this way, *Marxism* prefigured the philosophical humanism of the New Left by highlighting the centrality of Marx's conceptions of alienation, human essence and freedom and its relation to Hegel's thought. MacIntyre's early essays are shaped by a critical reading of Lukács, who for MacIntyre provides Marxism with its most philosophically elaborated understanding.

Significantly, MacIntyre locates the origins of *AV* in the thesis of his 1958/9 essay 'Notes From the Moral Wilderness'.⁸⁶ In this early essay, written from a Marxist standpoint influenced by Lukács, MacIntyre seeks to establish an approach to ethics that avoids the pitfalls both of the Stalinist and the liberal critic of Stalinism. MacIntyre describes both positions as one-sided, views that come at the topic from seemingly opposite perspectives but are internally related by the same logic. MacIntyre explains that the Stalinist associates what is moral with a deterministic historical model that gives supremacy to inevitable economic development – the *is* of the laws of history. On the other side, the liberal critic passes moral judgement on the singular events in front of them, but without ever looking to put these issues together into a broader historical understanding. The *ought* of moral value sits separate from the *is* of history. MacIntyre sees these positions as 'photographic negatives'.⁸⁷ MacIntyre's argumentation has its basis in a critique of Enlightenment conceptions of morality. He writes, 'Both the autonomy of ethics and utilitarianism are aspects of the consciousness of capitalism; both are forms of alienation rather than moral guides'.⁸⁸ MacIntyre's critique of liberalism contends that ethical intelligibility is an

⁸¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism: An Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 80; 'An interview with Giovanna Borradori' in *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (London: Polity, 1998), 256; 'On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century' in *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2013), 20

⁸² *AV*, 110. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century' in *What Happened in and to Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2013), 20, 33; 'Pascal and Marx: On Lucien Goldmann's *Hidden God*' in *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 76-87.

⁸³ MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 64.

⁸⁴ MacIntyre, 'On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century', 33. See his discussion of James, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 273-315.

⁸⁵ MacIntyre, *Marxism*, 22, 27, 47.

⁸⁶ *AV*, xvii.

⁸⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness' in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism*, 46-7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

expression of alienation. At this point, he sees Marx as providing the decisive political and ethical critique of liberalism:

As against the Stalinist it is an assertion of moral absolutes; as against the liberal critic of Stalinism it is an assertion of desire and of history. To begin with the contrast with the liberal. The liberal sees himself as choosing his values. The Marxist sees himself as discovering them. He discovers them as he rediscovers fundamental human desire; this is a discovery he can only make in company with others. The ideal of human solidarity, expressed in the working-class movement, only has point because of the fact of human solidarity which comes to light in the discovery of what we want. So the Marxist never speaks morally just for himself. He speaks in the name of whole historical development, in the name of a human nature which is violated by exploitation and its accompanying evils.⁸⁹

In this view, through the mediation of class activity, the character of ethics is rendered as a dialectical and collective ‘discovery’. This realisation of human potentiality is what allows a fundamental break with capitalism. His assessment of Lukács continues to be modified.

In ‘Marxist Mask and Romantic Face: Lukács on Thomas Mann’, MacIntyre praised Lukács’ ability to draw out the philosophical importance of Marx’s discussion of fetishism in *Capital*, Volume 1. Famously, *History and Class Consciousness* ‘strikingly anticipated’ the concept of alienation in the yet to be released young Marx. As MacIntyre notes, ‘When in 1931–2 Marx’s so-called *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* became known, it was clear that Marx himself had defined his own thought near its outset in precisely the terms of that same Hegelian framework which Lukács had once more spelled out.’⁹⁰

MacIntyre regards Marx and Lukács as parallel thinkers, both responding to the unresolved antinomies of German culture and philosophy between 1780 and 1850, dichotomies of ‘value and fact, law and inclination, reason and the passions, society and the individual’.⁹¹ Marx and Lukács conceptualised capitalist social relations as inherently alienated and reified, modes of being that mask the real relations of modern life. MacIntyre points out that these conceptualisations claim to overcome the relations that ‘imprison everybody else’.⁹² MacIntyre

⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Marxist Mask and Romantic Face: Lukács on Thomas Mann’, *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 63. MacIntyre adds, ‘This confirmation of Lukács’ interpretation – Lukács could not possibly have known of the contents of the manuscripts in 1923 – was a brilliant literary reconstruction for which his disowning of *History and Class-Consciousness* has never allowed him to claim the credit.’ Lukács’ disavowal is made clear in the 1967 Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 64.

draws attention to the Hegelian-Marxist conception of revolutionary *praxis* as found in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* and Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* as an attempt to transcend and resolve the contradictions of German philosophy and capitalist society.⁹³ In his discussion of Marx and Lukács, MacIntyre stresses that their understandings of the antinomies of modern life are essential to the form of their critique. The problem for MacIntyre is, however, that this position requires Marx and Lukács to find a 'vantage point outside their own society and culture'.⁹⁴ The perspectives both authors depend upon – a concept of human nature for Marx and of class-consciousness for Lukács – are both external to their present worlds – and thus both risk looking longingly into an unrealised ideality. This question plagues MacIntyre's reflections on Marxism. In his period as a Marxist, this vantage point is located successfully in Marx's concept of alienation. However, in *AV* he distances himself from Marx's conception of an unalienated human nature and Lukács explicitly.⁹⁵ Lukács' position comes to be seen as the embodiment of the failure of Marxism as political practice. While MacIntyre continues to insist on the significance of the 'fact-value' distinction in modern thought, he rejects his earlier claim that Marx offers a viable alternative.

In MacIntyre's view, Marxist assessments of the pervasive domination of capitalist ideology and social relations acutely highlight 'the moral impoverishment of advanced capitalism'. However, this condemnation of capitalism fails to provide adequate ethical resources of the future society to be generated. MacIntyre deems that Marxism 'at this point... tends to become Nietzschean fantasy', producing an optimistic imaginary of idealised proletarian action. He associates this position with Lukács' 'ideal proletarian', who is posited in *History and Class Consciousness* as the true bearer of historical and practical knowledge. MacIntyre suggests that Lukács' ideal is a fantasy at odds with the critique of capitalism provided by Marxism. Accordingly, if the Marxist is to take seriously the 'refusal of all such fantasies' in Trotsky's late writings, they would be forced 'into a pessimism quite alien to the Marxist tradition, and in becoming a pessimist he would in an important way have ceased to be a Marxist... This conclusion agrees of course with my own'.⁹⁶ MacIntyre hints at his own personal narrative in this passage.⁹⁷ For this reason, MacIntyre concludes that Marxism 'is exhausted as a *political* tradition'.⁹⁸

⁹³ Ibid., 67.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁵ This point will be elaborated in detail in Chapter 2 below.

⁹⁶ *AV*, 262.

⁹⁷ Especially considering his own writing on Trotsky, see Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Trotsky in Exile' in *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 52-9.

⁹⁸ *AV*, 262.

In his post-*AV* work, MacIntyre commonly returns to Lukács as the exemplifier of the Marxist tradition as both a theorist and political actor.⁹⁹ MacIntyre's writings on Marxism are a prolonged assessment of Marxism as a tradition of critique. Lukács' place in this tradition is especially significant. For this reason, MacIntyre's rejection of one meant the rejection of the other. However, this association raises a series of issues of MacIntyre's critique of Marxism. I argue that if Lukács anticipated the *EPM* in *History and Class Consciousness*, Marx's social theory provides a wider set of resources than Lukács' reconstruction in *History and Class Consciousness* allows. Marx's social theory must be understood through the prism of his critique of political economy and his understanding of the social relations of modernity. MacIntyre's failure to consider the depth of Marx's critique of social relations results in a mis-assessment of Marx's import to ethical thought.

AV attracted considerable interest immediately and became a landmark text of Anglo-American academic 'virtue ethics'. One expense of this success was that MacIntyre's background and familiarity with Marxism was quickly forgotten and his philosophy was flattened to the label of 'communitarian'.¹⁰⁰ Considerable recent attempts to understand MacIntyre's thought in relation to Marx and Marxism has helped remedy this attitude.¹⁰¹ This reinterpretation provides a sound basis for accessing MacIntyre as a significant commentator of Marx in his own right. Added to MacIntyre's standing as a 'fierce critic of modernity',¹⁰² I unify MacIntyre's commentary on Marx and his overall philosophical project to provide a departure point to reassess Marx's thought in terms of ethics and modern social relations. When *AV* is read as a *response* to Marx and Marxism as a theoretical tradition, the lines of familiarity and demarcation are better put into relief.

The same tension between the endurance of Marxism as a tradition and its critique exists in the work of Gillian Rose. However, her relationship to Marxism is more oblique. Rose's thought is situated within the later generation of the British New Left, which followed the social struggles of the late 1960s.¹⁰³ By the late 1970s, the intellectual climate of British thought was of a significantly different character compared from its initial period up to 1968. By this point, the term 'New Left' no longer signified the political and theoretical project of a socialist movement

⁹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 153-161.

¹⁰⁰ To take just one example, Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁰¹ See for instance, *Virtue and Politics: Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism*, ed. Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

¹⁰² Terry Pinkard, 'MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity' in *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. Mark C. Murphy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 176-200.

¹⁰³ For an oral history of this period see *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, ed. Ronald Fraser (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

in Britain but was much more confined to the intellectual milieus around specific journals and publications (such as *New Left Review*, *Telos*, *Radical Philosophy*) and related more to the examination of specific theorists and topics. Especially evident in this later period is the increasing interest in Frankfurt School critical theory. New Left publications, most notably *New Left Review* and its publishing venture New Left Books (now Verso) facilitated the importation of continental philosophy and 'Western Marxism' into Britain with extensive translations of European Marxists (including Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Lucien Goldmann, Theodor Adorno, Alfred Schmidt, Louis Althusser and Lucio Colletti) as well as a number of critical surveys published either in article or book length.¹⁰⁴ Rose responds polemically to Western Marxism (and the Marxists listed above) in *HCS*, tracing the influence of neo-Kantian sociology on the intellectual formation of Marxist sociology. The popularity of Frankfurt School sociology was particularly pronounced in places like Britain where Marxist theory had both weak native traditions and a dominance by orthodox and dogmatic interpretations.¹⁰⁵

The defeat of the struggles of 1968 demanded a questioning of the theory and practice of Marxism. Although substantial social struggles and industrial militancy continued through the 1970s, the failure of these movements produced significant challenges for the conceptualisation of Marxist thought which was considerably weakened by the middle of the decade. Sociologically, this prompted a reassessment of technology and contemporary labour relations. For some this meant a wholesale dismissal of the substantive claims of Marxism,¹⁰⁶ for others it required a meaningful attempt to rethink labour relations and processes within a Marxist conceptual framework.¹⁰⁷ Although the empirical claims of these debates remained contested, the theoretical conjuncture saw the disintegration of the critical traditions of Marxist thought

¹⁰⁴ For instance, *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, ed. New Left Review (London: NLB, 1977). The editorial note to this collection of essays, most of which appeared earlier in *New Left Review*, gives the intention to provide 1) a representation of the 'major theoretical systems within the tradition of Western Marxism' from 1917 to 1977 and 2) an assessment of the 'legacy' of this tradition to 'a younger generation of Marxists', 7. The New Left interest in Western Marxism always intended to incorporate its best features into Anglo-American Marxism. Significantly, *New Left Review* oversaw a major translation project of Marx and Engels' work, including *Grundrisse*, *Early Writings*, *Capital* and many of their political writings.

¹⁰⁵ Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1984), 49. See also Raymond Williams, 'Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945' in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 233-251 and for a viewpoint of the relationship between Marxism and British philosophy see Charles Taylor, 'Marxism and Empiricism' in *British Analytical Philosophy*, 227-246. Ollman draws on this essay in his discussion of Marx and ethics, *Alienation*, 45.

¹⁰⁶ To take two famous examples, Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (London: Heinemann, 1976) and André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, trans. Michael Sonenscher (London: Pluto, 1982).

¹⁰⁷ Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978); Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation* (London: Verso, 1979) Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State* (London: Macmillan, 1979) and David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

associated with the post-war era. According to Perry Anderson, Western Marxism had suffered a 'head-on defeat'.¹⁰⁸ By the late 1970s, the two dominant trends of continental Marxism, French structuralism and German Frankfurt School critical theory, had shifted in dramatic ways. The former destroyed by the 'ordeal of May [1968]',¹⁰⁹ soon to be replaced by post-structuralism and the latter to be reconfigured into a distinct (and markedly more conservative) 'second generation' under the auspices of Jürgen Habermas.¹¹⁰

Rose's thought is a critical response to the emergence of this intellectual paradigm.¹¹¹ Her first work, *The Melancholy Science*, a study of Theodor Adorno, is far from 'An Introduction' as the subtitle claims and not a typical work in the genre of intellectual biography. Its style itself precluded it from standard associations with an 'introduction'. According to Howard Caygill, 'Rose relished hearing stories from defeated readers of her first work, and would crown them with the information that it began life as a commission to write a cookery book'.¹¹² *The Melancholy Science* is rather an imposing intervention into critical theory, an announcement that genuine interpretation is itself critical. More specifically, the book is a reply to Habermas' reformation of the Frankfurt School.¹¹³

Rose insightfully probes the relationship between Marxism and the Frankfurt School. She points out the 'paradox' of the English-language scholarship, which both extols the virtues of the Frankfurt School for its departure from dogmatic Marxism but then presents this thesis in a 'dogmatic historiography' that falls short of articulating on what positive grounds the Frankfurt School goes beyond Marxism, or on what grounds this move is required.¹¹⁴ Rose underscores the need for an 'immanent critique' to adequately recognise 'the theoretical complexity of the work' and to 'locate it within the various traditions to which it belongs, and criticise its shortcomings, political, philosophical, or sociological, by examining its internal structure'.¹¹⁵ Rose takes issue with accounts of the Frankfurt School that take a biographical and descriptive approach. By

¹⁰⁸ Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 39. See also, Razmig Keucheyan, *The Left Hemisphere*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2013), 46-50.

¹¹⁰ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 10. Although dedicating the substantial weight of chapter 3 to Habermas' thought, Anderson fails to outline any differences between the generations of the Frankfurt School, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, 56-67.

¹¹¹ I will not elaborate on Rose's understanding of post-structuralism, which is developed in *Dialectic of Nihilism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) and *Mourning Becomes the Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹² Howard Caygill, 'Preface', in Gillian Rose, *Paradiso* (Emersons Green: Shearsman Books, 2015), 7.

¹¹³ Martin Jay, 'The Conversion of the Rose', *Salmagundi*, 113 (1997), 43.

¹¹⁴ See Rose's review of Susan Buck-Morss and Zoltán Tar in *History and Theory*, 18:1 (1979): 126.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 133.

lessening the influence of Marxism on Adorno and Benjamin, fundamental features of their thought go unexamined, let alone explicated. For Rose, criticism that is not immanent is hollow.

Rose locates the central themes of Adorno's work in relation to his immanent critique and concept of reification.¹¹⁶ In this view, forms of thought are treated to an internal analysis that pits 'reality against ideals' to criticise both 'without assuming a different fixed reality or a dogmatic standpoint'.¹¹⁷ An immanent critique assesses forms of thought or social being that have become formal and thing like – reified – when isolated and takes this view to task within its own conceptual scheme.¹¹⁸ Rose draws out the importance of this method to avoid reductive Marxist analysis of 'superstructure' and centres Marx's social theory in his understanding of value.¹¹⁹ Adorno, writes Rose, 'aims to show that the modes of thinking which he examines conform to the pattern of thinking outlined in the theory of value, especially in the way which they are abstract and ahistorical'.¹²⁰ Her treatment of Adorno stresses the operative role of Marx in his work, most clearly through the prism of reification and contrasts Adorno's positions against the Marxism(s) of Lukács, Benjamin, Brecht and Marx himself.¹²¹ Her perspective on Adorno is at once critical and sympathetic.¹²²

Rose maintains that 'Adorno still offers an important challenge to Habermas'.¹²³ Not only has Habermas 'abandoned the analysis of the commodity-form as the basic unit of social analysis' but he also 'denies the possibility of "immanent critique"'.¹²⁴ This direction, according to Rose, limits the possibilities of a philosophy that can understand the inner relation of theory and hence the relation between theory and practice – which becomes blind and 'instrumental'.¹²⁵ In her view, value theory and immanent critique allow a critical theory that avoids the cul-de-sac of Habermas' 'reconstruction' of historical materialism along Kantian lines. This critique becomes much more explicit in *HCS*.¹²⁶ Rose describes Habermas' thought as 'new-fashioned neo-

¹¹⁶ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, ix.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 66, 198.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 35-41.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹²¹ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 39, 45-66 and 141-177.

¹²² On this point see Howard Caygill, 'The Broken Hegel: Gillian Rose's Retrieval of Speculative Philosophy', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 9:1 (1998): 19-27.

¹²³ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 190.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 184, 190-1.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 191.

¹²⁶ Peter Osborne notes 'Hegel Contra Sociology is perhaps best understood as a response to Habermas' account of the development of German philosophy from Kant to Marx', 'Hegelian Phenomenology and the Critique of Reason and Society', *Radical Philosophy*, 32 (1982): 8-9.

Kantianism', and estimates that his popularity in Anglo and German had become the 'unifying force in the international world of sociological reason'.¹²⁷ Rose notes the 'great irony' in the Frankfurt School's journey from Adorno's real attempt to resolve Kantian problems in critical theory to Habermas' 'strict' Kantian model.¹²⁸

Added to her involvement in the disputes over the tradition of the Frankfurt School and Marxism, Rose's thought was directly influenced by the specific character of the British New Left. *The Melancholy Science* originated as a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Leszek Kolakowski and Steven Lukes, both significant figures in the first New Left.¹²⁹ Rose's Adorno book reflects this background, drawing extensively on the debates and problematics raised in the English language Marx scholarship and in journals such as *Telos* and *New Left Review*.¹³⁰ While a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex she was a founding member of the Centre for Social and Political Thought, a multidisciplinary project set up in 1978 by Marxists including Mészáros, Tom Bottomore and Christopher J. Arthur.¹³¹

The approach shared by the thinkers associated with the Centre for Social and Political Thought was a close engagement with Lukács' work. Mészáros, himself a student of Lukács, played a major role in Lukács' reception in English-speaking Marxism.¹³² *Marx's Theory of Alienation* quickly became a landmark work in English language Marx studies. It offered a close reading of the *EPM* with a presentation decisively shaped by Lukács, from his early writings and *History and*

¹²⁷ *HCS*, 38-9.

¹²⁸ *HCS*, 39.

¹²⁹ MacIntyre's 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness' had in fact been a reply to Kolakowski's *moral* critique of Marxism. *AV*, xvii-xviii. E.P Thompson drew on MacIntyre extensively in his 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', 50-93. Kolakowski's wonderfully titled (if nothing else) rejoinder, 'My Correct Views on Everything', *Socialist Register* 1974, neglects to respond to Thompson's adoption of MacIntyre's critique. Steven Lukes paved the way for a British Marxism that considered sociological methodology, analytic philosophy and Western Marxism as normative social theory, see especially *Essays in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1977). His *Marxism and Morality*, published in 1985 considers this problematic in terms of analytic philosophy, however his interest in the political resources of the New Left (as well as the book's dedication to Peter Sedgwick, see note 71 above) denotes a quite distinctive approach.

¹³⁰ Her critique of Althusser, presented as a 'Note' in the first chapter of *HCS* is illustrative of this New Left concern, 39-42.

¹³¹ It was her research on neo-Kantianism during this time that lead to the publication of *HCS*. Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2010), 42. Andrew Chitty and Gordon Finlayson provide a short history of the Centre for Social and Political Thought on the University of Sussex website: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cspt/about/short_history.

¹³² István Mészáros, ed. *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), as well as Tom Bottomore's contribution 'Class Consciousness and Social Consciousness' in *Ibid.*, 49-64. István Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of the Dialectic* (London: Merlin Press, 1972). See also André Tosel, 'The Late Lukács and the Budapest School' in *Critical Companion to Marxism*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 170-3.

Class Consciousness to his late work on realism.¹³³ Mészáros 'systematic' reading portrayed a strongly philosophical Marx, who via the prism of alienated labour could offer a way to think about economics, politics, morality and aesthetics.¹³⁴

Bottomore was a central figure in the foundation of British Marxist sociology. Although insistent on the empirical validity of sociology as social science, directly at odds with Rose,¹³⁵ his Marxism set the background for her intervention.¹³⁶ Bottomore's intellectual project was to ground Marxism as a tradition in classical sociological thought which could grasp the nature of twentieth-century capitalism.¹³⁷ In this way, he sought to 'constitute Marxism as a system of sociology', defining Marxism as sociology rather than a philosophical or historical worldviews which 'broaden out into arguments against the possibility or desirability of any positivist social science'.¹³⁸ In this view, Bottomore's approach maintained a 'certain distance between the sociology and the philosophy', with a sociology that assesses 'rival theories... in their explanations of the facts of social life'.¹³⁹ This project involved both a return to Marx's primary texts¹⁴⁰ and prominent interpretations.¹⁴¹ Bottomore introduced a Marx into radical British sociology that was directed at both contemporary social conflicts and 'towards a scientific theory of society'.¹⁴² The upshot of this project was an advance in English of Marx and the early thinkers of Western Marxism (Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci, Lefebvre), however at the high expense of flattening the critical accepts of Marx's method to a positive science with its primary strength in its empirical claims rather than its philosophical approach.

¹³³ See for instance, Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 70, 117, 279, 290, *passim*.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 98-99, 233.

¹³⁵ Rose alludes to Bottomore and the 'prevalent dogmatic Marxism' cryptically in *Paradiso*, 41. There is an exceptionally vague discussion of the fact/value distinction in Tom Bottomore, 'Karl Marx: Sociologist or Marxist' in *Sociology as Social Criticism* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1975), 80-4.

¹³⁶ Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, 40. Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, vii.

¹³⁷ See for example, T.B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), 17-32.

¹³⁸ T.B. Bottomore, *Marxist Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, ed. T.B Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (Middlesex: Penguin, 1963). First published in 1956, this collection was one of the first non-Soviet collections in English. It also included extracts from yet to be translated texts like the 1844 texts and the *Grundrisse*. Bottomore then translated the *EPM* in full in one of the first widely available translations, Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. T.B Bottomore (London: C.A Watts & Co. LTD., 1963). Marcello Musto fails to note the significance of either translation, 'The "Young Marx" Myth in Interpretations of the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', *Critique*, 43:2 (2015): 259-260.

¹⁴¹ Tom Bottomore, ed., *Karl Marx* (Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973); *Interpretations of Karl Marx* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) and Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, ed. *Readings in Marxist Sociology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

¹⁴² Bottomore, 'Karl Marx: Sociologist or Marxist' in *Sociology as Social Criticism*, 76. See also in the same collection, 'Conflict and Social Change', 163-180 and 'The Prospects for Radicalism', 203-211.

Rose was impacted by Bottomore's promotion of the sociological Marx and Marxism as sociology.¹⁴³ Bottomore located the origins of Marxist sociology in Georg Simmel, who he translated into English.¹⁴⁴ It was the reception of these traditions of Marxist sociology, starting with Simmel, that Rose subjects to critique in *HCS*.¹⁴⁵ Rose explores the same problem space as Bottomore, however *critically*. The differences are also clear in Bottomore's latter reading of Adorno, which shared more with Kolakowski than with Rose.¹⁴⁶ Bottomore's view is that Habermas is closer to Marx than Adorno, stressing Habermas' 'rigorous critical scrutiny and reconstruction' of historical materialism in close reference to Marx's thought.¹⁴⁷ This view substantially ignores Rose's critique of Habermas and confirms the positive Anglo acceptance of Habermas' departure against Rose's forewarning.

Arthur was also a significant figure at Sussex. A doyen of British Marx studies, he bridged the earlier generation of New Left thinkers like Mészáros with contemporary value-form interpretations. Arthur edited with a precise philosophical introduction, an early edition of *The German Ideology* and engaged with both Mészáros' account of the *EPM* and Lukács in his 1986 *Dialectics of Labour*.¹⁴⁸ Arthur takes Lukács' reading of Hegel to be an exception in a paucity of Marxist accounts of Marx's relation to Hegel.¹⁴⁹ Arthur's recent interpretation of *Capital*, which he calls 'systematic dialectics', a thesis that reads *Capital* in light of Hegel's systematic logic, has been an important intervention in current debates about Marx's method.¹⁵⁰ Arthur's work maintains the centrality of Lukács work in contemporary philosophical interpretations of Marx's work.

In both *The Melancholy Science* and *HCS* Lukács is a central figure of Rose's interest. In the first book, Adorno's conception of reification is paralleled to Lukács'. Rose takes aim at Lukács for the 'misattribution' that the term reification (*Verdinglichung*) appears in the discussion of commodity fetishism in Chapter 1, Section 4 of *Capital*, Volume 1.¹⁵¹ According to Rose, Lukács generalises Marx's concept. Reification abstractly applies the fetish character of the commodity

¹⁴³ Peter Osborne, 'Gillian Rose and Marxism', *Telos*, 173 (2015): 65.

¹⁴⁴ Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), see especially 'Introduction to the Translation', 21-35.

¹⁴⁵ *HCS*, 26-29.

¹⁴⁶ Compare Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, 27-49, 58, 89 to Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, trans. P.S Fella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 341-395.

¹⁴⁷ Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, 24, 76.

¹⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, ed. Christopher J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970).

¹⁴⁹ Christopher J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). I draw off this work in chapter 6.

¹⁵¹ I give a more detailed treatment of this problem in Michael Lazarus, 'The Legacy of Reification: Gillian Rose and the Value-Form Theory Challenge to Georg Lukács', *Theses Eleven*, forthcoming.

to apply to all phenomena but fails to unfold the correspondingly concrete conceptual determinations that must be developed speculatively by the transition from one social form to the next (commodity to money to capital). Reification lacks an account of capital and surplus-value, concepts which the analysis of the commodity is dependent upon. The resulting ‘debasement’ of reification has resulted in its usage *without* a serious consideration of Marx’s theory of value.¹⁵² In *HCS*, Rose radicalises her criticism of Lukács’ understanding of value theory. Rose writes:

Lukács omitted many details of Marx’s theory of value, and of the analysis of capitalist economies which followed on in *Capital* from the analysis of the commodity form. As a result ‘reification’ and ‘mediation’ become a kind of shorthand instead of a sustained theory.¹⁵³

While this allowed Lukács to generalise Marx’s concept of reification to the social structures of advanced capitalism (with the influence of Weber and Simmel), *History and Class Consciousness* fails to reconstruct and develop Marx’s analysis of value in *Capital*. For Rose, Lukács is the figure responsible, not just for an abbreviation of Marx’s value theory but the conversion of Marxism into method. In the opening essay of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács writes that ‘Orthodox Marxism... does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the “belief” in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a “sacred” book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*.’¹⁵⁴

Rose reflects on this passage on several occasions throughout her work, demonstrating that Lukács’ ‘most un-Hegelian injunction’¹⁵⁵ is a ‘famous apology’¹⁵⁶ for the ‘spirit of Marxism as method... reclaimed from Marxism as dogma’.¹⁵⁷ Rose does not go so far as to present Lukács’ statement as erasing the speculative character of his discussion which could now understand ‘new areas of social life’,¹⁵⁸ capitalism itself ‘as a culture’.¹⁵⁹ However, she does take the view that his methodologist definition is symptomatic of his conversion of Marx’s value theory into a

¹⁵² Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 38-9. This issue will be dealt with below.

¹⁵³ *HCS*, 31.

¹⁵⁴ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 1.

¹⁵⁵ Rose, ‘Review of Susan Buck-Morss and Zoltán Tar’, *Theory and History*, 126.

¹⁵⁶ Gillian Rose, ‘From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking – Hegel and Adorno’, *Judaism and Modernity* (London: Verso, 2017), 57.

¹⁵⁷ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ *HCS*, 31.

¹⁵⁹ Rose, ‘From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking’, 59.

formalist method. As I'll elaborate in Chapter 2 below, Rose ties Lukács' 'selective generalisation' of Marx' value theory to his definition of Marxism as method.¹⁶⁰

Rose affords importance to Lukács' failed but innovative attempt to think past the problems left by Kant.¹⁶¹ The central essay in *History and Class Consciousness*, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', attempts to surpass the limitations and antinomies of German Idealism by way of the historical standpoint of the proletariat. Lukács' central concept of totality, mediates between the social form in the processes of capitalist commodity production and the consciousness of the proletariat (as further mediated by the party).¹⁶² Despite the speculative power of Lukács' concept of reification in coming to terms with the structures of capitalism, his

very success in demonstrating the prevalence of reification, of the structural factors inhibiting the formation of political, proletarian class consciousness, meant that he could only appeal to the proletariat to overcome reification by apostrophes to the unification of theory and practice, or by introducing the party as a *deus ex machina*.¹⁶³

For Rose, Lukács' appeal is hopelessly subjective and in effect limits the ability of radical theory to come to terms with modern thought. Lukács acts as the representative of Marxist thought which ultimately fails to come to terms with the modern culture, ethics and political realities it aims to critique. Her reflection on this failure is set in the breakdown of Western Marxism. *HCS* acts to confirm the failure and make good on the radical potential of Hegel's philosophy. Without this potential mobilised, Rose argues the critical and emancipatory project of Marx's thought fails. According to Rose, the weakness of the resources that ground Marxism must be overcome if Marxism is to have a future.

Conclusion

While MacIntyre in *AV* is decidedly not a Marxist, Rose calls for a Marxism beyond Marxism, a critique of Marxism that allows self-reflective thinking on Marxism as a tradition of critique.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ *HCS*, 31.

¹⁶¹ For a detailed treatment which builds upon Rose's assessment, see Daniel Andrés López, *Lukács: Praxis and the Absolute* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

¹⁶² Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 83-222.

¹⁶³ *HCS*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ *HCS*, 235. She identifies with an 'alternative "cultural Marxism"' in *Paradiso*, 41. In a 1987 conference paper, Rose's close intellectual colleague Jay Bernstein said, 'Gillian and I are Hegelian-Marxists... exoterically hegelians and esoterically marxists... What is esoteric for Marx and exoteric for Gillian and I is Hegel's "doctrine," or better,

Rose's challenge has, however, been overlooked. In contrast to MacIntyre's work, especially *AV*, *HCS* has received very little attention.¹⁶⁵ To surmise possible reasons for this: MacIntyre was already a very well-known philosopher and *AV* appeared with the major Notre Dame University Press. It had widespread success and enjoyed second and third editions (1984, 2007). His intended audience ('plain persons') extended beyond academic moral philosophy and was maximised with well-defined and erudite prose.¹⁶⁶ By contrast, in 1981 Rose had only published her Adorno dissertation and *HCS* first appeared with the obscure Athlone Press (later reissued in 1995 with Rose's death and with Verso in 2009). Anthony Giddens wrote the original blurb: 'This is probably the sort of book whose significance will take some while to sink in. It is written at a very scholarly level, and is not suitable for an undergraduate level.' The terse and demanding nature of the work further restricted the readership to a highly specific readership.¹⁶⁷ Rose's thought has been subject to little subsequent critical investigation.¹⁶⁸ Only her intricate but poetic death-bed autobiography, *Love's Work*, attracted popular attention.¹⁶⁹ Despite these differences in

procedure of developing speculative propositions', quoted in Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*, 97-8. Bernstein pays debt to both MacIntyre and Rose in *Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xiii-xiv, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Compare the treatment of both books in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Donald N. Levine's review of *AV*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (1983): 700-07 and Kathleen Toth's of *HCS*, 88:4 (1983): 828-830. Levine's 'Review Essay' is considerably longer than Toth's review and takes MacIntyre's positions with much more seriousness. He writes: 'At the heart of any sociology after MacIntyre must be a research program informed by a neo-Aristotelian, post-Durkheimian vision: one that seeks to identify the social and cultural functions proper to particular historical settings, to delineate the external resources and internal practices needed to realise them, and to show ways of establishing conditions that both sustain us in the quest for the good and furnish us increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.', 706-7. In the next issue, Toth fails to read Rose's book on its own terms, instead dismissing the book as unsuccessful in its key claims: 'At a more substantive level, it is again far from clear what can be derived from Hegel as interpreted by Rose', 830.

¹⁶⁶ *AV*, xv. Richard J. Bernstein favourably likened MacIntyre's dramatic narrative in *AV* to an 'extremely dense novel', 'Nietzsche or Aristotle: Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*', *Soundings*, 67:1 (1984): 6-9.

¹⁶⁷ Even prominent Hegel scholars found the style of the book 'difficult' and 'irritating' to use H.S Harris' words in a review for *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 13:4 (1984): 425-6.

¹⁶⁸ Martin Jay pointed out in the late 1990s, despite her power as a thinker, 'her influence seems to have been relatively modest', 'The Conversion of the Rose', 46. The structural sexism which prevents due recognition to many female philosophers should be noted in this context. Recently, Latz's *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* provides the first full-length treatment of her political and social philosophy and its reception, with attention to her interlocutors and salient archival research.

¹⁶⁹ In her intimate account of intellectual work, love and grief, *Love's Work*, Rose details a relationship with a Catholic liberation theologian 'Patrick Gorman', whom she convinced to 'to deepen his Marxism by reassessing its relation to the works of Hegel', *Love's Work*, 67. In addition to a precise statement of the need for Marxism to take Hegel seriously, there is another layer of autobiography here. I think this pseudonym might be taken from Agatha Christie's 1961 novel *The Pale Horse*. The tragic closing paragraph of *Love's Work* reads: 'I like to pass unnoticed, which is why I hope that I am not deprived of old age. I aspire to Miss Marple's persona: to be exactly as I am, decrepit nature yet supernature in one, equally alert on the damp ground and in the turbulent air. Perhaps I don't have to wait for old age for that invisible trespass and pedestrian tread, insensible of mortality and desperately mortal. I will stay in the fray, in the revel of ideas and risk; learning, failing, wooing, grieving, trusting, working, reposing-in this sin of language and lips.' In *Paradiso*, Rose expands on this, 'Miss Maple is the code name for this movement from loss to grace', representing 'Nemesis – justice' a 'knight' not of 'resignation' living with the memory and ghosts of the past, but a 'Knight of faith'. This knight 'lets her lost ones go, whether injured or injurious, and turns her attention to the astonishing nature of what is normally expected until she becomes both invisible, hidden and quite ordinary visible', 18-9. Rose's identification with Miss Marple gives a sense of the mystery of appearances and the human emotion contained and tested in the pursuit of truth. This theme is central to Rose's work.

reception, considering the joint year of publication, no significant commentary considers the relationship between both MacIntyre and Rose as critics of Marxism with relation to New Left traditions and themes.¹⁷⁰ Accordingly, I assess the corresponding theses, considering recent editions and reissues of *AV* and *HCS* as evidence of an ongoing interest and impact of both MacIntyre and Rose. Beyond the view that paints each as decisive critics of Marxism, I suggest that the work of each thinker not only originates intellectually in Marxism, but that this influence is present, in however tortured a way, in their 1981 works. Assessing the relationships to Marxism in this light allows a stronger vantage point to comprehend their critiques of modernity, *against the self-image of the age*.¹⁷¹ The significance of these critiques is how MacIntyre and Rose illuminate the relation between modernity and ethics. For MacIntyre, ethics is the rational practice of the virtues and for Rose, absolute ethical life allows for freedom without domination. Despite providing compelling accounts, the question that animates the next chapter is both their claims that Marx's thought is devoid of ethics. I argue that in both cases, this claim in effect discounts the power of MacIntyre's virtues and Rose's ethical life.

¹⁷⁰ A partial exception is Peter McMylor's *Alasdair MacIntyre* (London: Routledge, 1994). However, Rose's thought is confined to a single, albeit lengthy footnote, 183. Perhaps MacIntyre's misidentification as a communitarian has meant that his thought has generally been relegated to the debates in Anglo political philosophy, although MacIntyre's longstanding hostility to the Frankfurt School may have contributed to this as well. In addition to his polemical *Marcuse*, in *AV* he writes that the Frankfurt School 'unwittingly collaborate as a chorus in the theatre of the present' (31) and in an earlier formulation, in their post-Marx critical theory represent a 'slow decline from the sublime to the ridiculous', Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Ideology, Social Science, and Revolution', *Comparative Politics*, 5:3 (1973): 337. Jeffery L. Nicholas, *Reason, Tradition and the Good* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2012) provides an extended account of MacIntyre and the Frankfurt School and Kelvin Knight's *Aristotelian Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) is an excellent survey of both analytic and continental interpretations of Aristotle in the context of MacIntyre's work. Pippin's *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem* considers both MacIntyre and Rose's work against the broader background of modern philosophy Kant to Heidegger but is much more interested in Rose's discussion of 'Hegel's theory of sociality', i.e. the social character of Hegel's absolute and its implications in modern sociology and political theory, 181-2. Pippin considers MacIntyre to have a 'pre-modern perspective', that is 'a priority of community' over 'modern doctrines of self-determination', 15, 64. Most recently, Rahel Jaeggi's *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (London: Belknap Press, 2018) attempts a synthesis between Anglo-American political philosophy in the form of MacIntyre and Charles Taylor and Honneth era Frankfurt School theory. She argues that MacIntyre should not be seen narrowly as a communitarian but a thinker of 'crisis prone social dynamic'. Jaeggi compares his narrative account of tradition with Hegel's more 'robust' account of the 'conception of problems as contradictions', see Part 4.

¹⁷¹ This phrase is used by both to describe their philosophy; as the title MacIntyre's 1971 essay collection and in Rose's *Judaism and Modernity*, v.

| 2. *MacIntyre and Rose Against the Self-Image of the Age: A Future Before Marx?*

Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (*AV*) and Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* (*HCS*) first appeared in 1981. Each book set forward a grand vision of the dualist and fragmented character of modernity and the resources needed for an adequate critique, drawing respectively from Aristotle's understanding of the virtues and Hegel's concept of the absolute. MacIntyre returns to Aristotle to overcome the fragmentation of the dominant conceptions of moral understanding – utilitarian and Kantian. In like fashion, Rose maintains that Hegel provides the intellectual resources to remedy a body of social thought ridden with Kantian dualism and a set of social relations that are correspondingly fragmented. What both MacIntyre and Rose identify are the substantial methodological problems inherited in modern thought that must be confronted if there is any chance to challenge the status quo. I take both claims as complementary and insightful and sketch their distinctive arguments in reference to Aristotle and Hegel. However, both books conclude with severe, yet underdeveloped, criticisms of Marx and Marxism. Deemed by MacIntyre to be suffering from a type of utilitarianism and, by Rose, a deficient account of subjectivity, Marxism is declared unable to overcome the ethical crisis of modernity. I suggest these conclusions are exaggerated. When Marx is read with the rich determinations of both Aristotle's teleology and Hegel's speculative logic, it becomes apparent that the solutions offered by MacIntyre and Rose are much less convincing than their overall diagnosis. I underscore how Marx's concept of labour and value-form provide a rich critique of modernity and an account of ethical life.

Not only does the thought of MacIntyre and Rose originate in a sophisticated Marxism, both belonging for a period to the British New Left, but each philosopher follows Marx in seeking a comprehensive diagnosis of the ills of modernity and an exhaustive account of the resources needed for its critique. Yet in their principle works, MacIntyre's *AV* and Rose's *HCS*, they reject Marx's critique of modernity as ethically impoverished. In both books, paradoxically, Marx's presence continues to be felt in a number of ways – his work serving not only to guide their analyses of modernity – but to shape their sense of ethical life beyond capitalism. However, at the conclusion of each book, MacIntyre and Rose offer short but dismissive critiques of Marx, encouraging readers to locate their texts (and their politics) beyond and without the conceptual categories of Marxist

thought. To both thinkers, Marxism itself is exhausted and needs to be *rethought*. In implicitly accepting and explicitly disavowing Marx in this way, MacIntyre and Rose introduce a certain tension into their work, inviting closer scrutiny both of their own analyses of modernity and of their reading of Marx as inadequate to its challenges.

In this chapter, I show that MacIntyre and Rose provide complementary and compelling critiques of modern political and ethical thought. Their work shares the objective of pointing out how contradictions in thought reflect real contradictions in social being and, consequently, pivots around a critique of dualist modes of thought: fact/value, subject/object, theory/practice, agency/structure, concept/intuition etc. As they would have it, these antinomies limit, not just how we see but also how we act upon, the world, establishing an indissoluble link between thought and action. Having become firmly embedded, not just in our thought but in our social practices, according to MacIntyre and Rose, such antinomies are inclined to be resistant to anything less than a radical praxis. For both thinkers, the central dualism that structures modern life is the antimony between the individual and the community. The primary task of a critical social theory is thus to develop a radical ethics that does not simply mediate this dualism in theory, but overcomes it in practice. Believing such an ethics cannot be found in Marx, MacIntyre and Rose instead look back behind him, the former to Aristotle, the latter to Hegel.

However convincing their account of the relation between modernity, ethics and politics, both MacIntyre and Rose (or so I will argue) fail to adequately present the strength of Marx's social thought, insights both thinkers rely upon. MacIntyre returns to Aristotle and Rose to Hegel on the grounds that Marx failed to provide the resources needed to counter the ethical void of modernity, neglecting the quality of Marx's synthesis of those two thinkers. Indeed, as I go on to show, the power of Marx's social thought lies precisely in the preservation and animation of Aristotelian and Hegelian themes in his critique of capitalist social relations. The argument is thus not that MacIntyre and Rose fail to provide devastating analyses of modern thought or that they are completely wrongheaded in turning to Aristotle and Hegel. Their polemical efforts to discard Marx are based on misreadings that fail to come to grips with the residues of Aristotle and Hegel in his own thought. I argue that the richest philosophical resources in Marx originate from these thinkers and the most fruitful reading of Marx's social thought reconstructs his social ontology and value theory in light of Aristotelian and Hegelian

philosophy. It is because MacIntyre and Rose fail to realise this that a series of contradictions begin to emerge within their respective analysis.

The New Left origins of MacIntyre and Rose manifest in both thinkers an attraction to Marx's critique of modernity. The influence of Marxism shapes and informs their work, each thinker conceiving of their work as part of an emancipatory philosophical project. In this task, however, both break with Marxism, believing it does not have the resources needed to overcome the ethical vacuum of modernity. This chapter aims to examine in greater depth the content of their positions as argued in their 1981 works *AV* and *HCS*. These texts demonstrate their closeness to Marx and at the same time, their fundamental points of departure. This chapter discusses the criticisms of Marx made by MacIntyre and Rose but affirms the central arguments made by both books. I examine their readings of Marx and subject their overall conclusions to an immanent critique.

When assessed as sustained engagements with Marxism, the critiques of modernity offered by MacIntyre and Rose can be better understood as parallel critiques of capitalist modernity. There is an issue of terminology worth noting. In *AV* and *HCS*, both authors infrequently use the term 'capitalism'. MacIntyre uses the term 'modernity' to refer to the 'the dominant social, economic, and political order'¹ and the couplets 'advanced modernity',² 'liberal modernity'³ and 'liberal individualist modernity'.⁴ In *AV*, 'capitalism' is used only in references to Marx or Marxism.⁵ This demonstrates most strikingly MacIntyre's desire to construct his own distinctive thesis of the modern social order, and perhaps also to separate himself from the particular language of Marxism. Rose does not use the word modernity in *HCS*⁶ but instead 'the Modern'⁷ as a distinct period historically specific to bourgeois property relations. She seems to use the phrase 'private property relations' over 'capitalism', since her critique of Marxism involves a distinction

¹ *AV*, xvi.

² *AV*, ix, xv.

³ *AV*, 146.

⁴ *AV*, 195, 259.

⁵ *AV*, xvi, 262.

⁶ She does, however, use the word 'modernity' in the Preface to the 1995 edition when reaffirming the possibilities of Hegel 'for a renewal of critical thought in the intellectual difficulty of our time', viii.

⁷ *HCS*, 151.

between Marx's critique of capital and *Marxism* as a 'pre-judged' and distorted theorisation of *capitalism*.⁸

Despite terminological differences, both books are centrally concerned with the forms of thought that correspond to modern society and the problematics inherent within the structures and relations of modern culture as a whole. In my view, both *AV* and *HCS* provide accounts of modernity that must be understood as *capitalist modernity*, not only because the formation of thought analysed by MacIntyre and Rose are set against the historical periodisation *after* the development and revolutionary breakthrough of the capitalist mode of production, but because both accounts hinge on the antinomies of modern thought that are historically specific to capitalist social relations.⁹ Common to both is the understanding of modern society as 'fragmentated'. This term denotes the breakdown of unities and totalities, the individualisation and compartmentalised of existence and understanding.

The concept of 'fragmentation' figures prominently in both *AV* and *HCS*. MacIntyre uses the term to denote the incoherence of moral theory and practice 'detached' from the traditions of understanding that provide knowledge and practice with a unified meaning.¹⁰ Accordingly, modern moral thought reproduces itself through fragments. The collapse of the unified tradition of moral philosophy that preceded modernity is masked by microscopic investigation into each fragment. Rose also reviews the fragmentation of 'social life'¹¹ in terms of thought¹² and labour relations.¹³ For Rose, as for MacIntyre, ethical life is 'fragmented and arbitrary'.¹⁴ There is a barrier to understanding and

⁸ Rose claims (quoting Fernand Braudel) that Marx himself 'did not use' the word capitalism, 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking – Hegel and Adorno', 57. In response to Braudel, Callinicos provides references to instances where Marx did in fact use the word *Kapitalismus*, *MECW* 32, 124; *MECW* 34, 124; *MECW* 43, 449; *MECW* 45, 356. See *Deciphering Capital*, 24.

⁹ Contemporaneous debates in Marxism focused upon 'modernity' as a conceptual problem. See Marshall Berman, *All That's Solid Melts into Air* (London: Verso, 2010), first published in 1982 and the responses between Perry Anderson and Berman in *New Left Review* 1/144 (1984): 96-113 and 114-123. Anderson's reply is extended in 'Marshall Berman: Modernity and Revolution' in *Zones of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), 25-55. For an assessment of both Berman's conception of modernity as experience and Anderson's as historical periodisation, see Peter Osborne's insightful discussion, *The Politics of Time* (London: Verso, 1995), 3-9.

¹⁰ *AV*, 1, 55.

¹¹ *HCS*, 55.

¹² *HCS*, 81.

¹³ *HCS*, 71.

¹⁴ *HCS*, 81.

conscious ethical action in the separate spheres of thought fundamental to the modern world, leaving it an ‘uncomprehended world’.¹⁵

I examine how in diagnosing modern thought as dualistic and antinomical, MacIntyre and Rose, point to the manner in which the fragmentary nature of modern society is embedded in the fragmentary nature of modern thought. Each seeks a standpoint from which a critique of dualism can be made. MacIntyre takes the standpoint of Aristotle’s teleology, centring his view on the conception of human nature as goal-directed potentiality. MacIntyre distinctively argues for an ethics based upon Aristotle’s understanding of the virtues, which allows a full account of the rationality of human practices and traditions. Rose adopts Hegel’s concept of absolute thought, which conceives of the speculative proposition as an infinite and self-sufficient standpoint of truth. The absolute is the identity of the phenomenal world and human knowledge, *the science of philosophy*. Absolute thought sees truth in the identity of reality with practical knowledge, the two united in absolute ethical life. Common to these conceptualisations is the need for totality against the dualism that serves as the intellectual roadblock to the realisation of Aristotelian practical reasoners or conscious Hegelian subjects. While this concern with totality is important, each standpoint limits itself to a preliminary critique of modern society. Both authors claim to go beyond the limitations of Marxism. These claims severely discount the ability of Marxism to answer the challenges of modernity. Yet both MacIntyre and Rose fail to seriously consider Marx’s critique of capital. Without an analysis of capital as the universalising social relation of the modern world, both thinkers are unable to analysis the specific logic of modern thought and being. Simply put, without a critique of capital, MacIntyre and Rose produce a mistaken critique of Marx. They ignore the originality of Marx’s understanding of productive activity as the mediation of modern social relations.

Part 1

In MacIntyre’s account of modernity, the fundamental breakdown in the intelligibility of moral rationality occurs in the Enlightenment. The ‘Enlightenment project’ – best represented in Hume and Kant – rejected Aristotle’s teleological view of human nature and its corresponding conception of moral rationality in the socially recognised practice

¹⁵ HCS, 179.

of the virtues. MacIntyre contends that the severing of this link resulted in a dualist and partial comprehension of social reality. In his account, modernity is fundamentally predicated on the loss of a collective morality which was once socially conceived in an account of virtue but has now been lost in a modern bureaucratic and individualist culture. Modern morality reflects the fragmented nature of society, isolated from social processes and language that would allow rational and shared understanding of ethical meaning and action. Thus, modern thought after the Enlightenment is predicated on a crisis of intelligibility. Seen from his perspective, attempts to counter the Enlightenment – either by Marx or Nietzsche – were limited by their own foundation in Enlightenment presuppositions. Their own viewpoints were compromised by the very alienation and amorality they diagnosed in modern society.

MacIntyre advances a return to Aristotle's virtue ethics to provide a rational basis for ethical life. Yet he seeks to treat Aristotle's ethics *historically*. This requires MacIntyre to locate Aristotelian ethics, firstly, as an expression of the relationship between ethical and political life at Athens and secondly, as a historical tradition capable of improvement and modification.¹⁶ MacIntyre refashions Aristotle's ethical theory for modern conditions and injects it with a politics that contradicts the established order. MacIntyre describes his politics as 'revolutionary Aristotelianism'.¹⁷

MacIntyre's account provides a convincing identification of key issues in the formation and character of modern moral philosophy and social thought. However, his account weakens as he attempts to construct an Aristotelian ethical theory that can provide the sufficient political basis for a revolutionary position. This weakness is evident in his treatment of Marx. MacIntyre's claim that the individualism of the Enlightenment is replicated in Marx's thought (and continued in Marxism as a political practice) is particularly problematic because it neglects the ethical dimensions of Marx's social ontology and its specifically Aristotelian character. For Marx, the telos of human beings is realised in a specifically human flourishing made possible by the collective control of this labouring activity. This is evident in the concept of 'species-essence' in the early

¹⁶ MacIntyre claims that while Aristotle is not a historicist, Hegel is 'to some greater or less degree' Aristotelian, *AV*, 277. It is interesting to note that MacIntyre also distances himself from Hegel, suggesting his historicism 'excludes all claims to absolute knowledge', *AV*, 270.

¹⁷ This term originates in Kelvin Knight's work, see 'Introduction', *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (London: Polity Press, 1998), especially, esp. 21 and in the same collection Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good', 235.

writings, but is also enhanced in Marx's mature critique of political economy. The latter provides an account of the fragmentation of modern social relations in the contradiction between private property and collective labour and the fetishism that arises from these processes. Although in *AV*, MacIntyre adopts a political and intellectual history indebted to Marx, he distances himself from precisely that conceptual understanding of the commodity that allows an immanent critique of capital and a dialectical unity of fact and value. As a result, the book ends with a politically hesitant and largely unpersuasive call for the revival of the community. How MacIntyre arrives at this position is worth examining.

In *AV*, MacIntyre opens his critical appraisal of modern moral philosophy with the problem of disagreement. Modern philosophy, he suggests, uses the nomenclature of morality – 'reason', 'virtue' etc. – but lacks any coherent account of ethical life because it has become divorced from the social framework that would give it meaning. Attempts at constructing accounts of morality can now only be made using the fragments of traditions long destroyed, ripped from their social content and reified into empty abstractions.¹⁸ Contemporary morality can appeal to the terms, concepts and motivations of moral language but this can only result in the incommensurability of competing views to settle philosophical disputes. MacIntyre suggests that moral philosophy is in a 'grave disorder', where 'We possess indeed simulacra of morality... But we have – very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.'¹⁹

In MacIntyre's account, modern moral thought is detached (from the now lost) collectively understood and rational frameworks that provide moral knowledge with content.²⁰ As a consequence, moral practice becomes incoherent. As he would have it, the impasse of morality is not limited to, the generally internal, perspectives of particular branches or schools of philosophy. It fundamentally frustrates all efforts to settle philosophical problems. Accordingly, philosophical discussions become unsolvable not just between different stands – but internally - since the absence of a rational conceptual scheme leaves a severe disconnect between different approaches. Deprived of a rational foundation, according to MacIntyre, modern moral thought becomes 'emotivist', with

¹⁸ *AV*, 33.

¹⁹ *AV*, 2, 11.

²⁰ *AV*, 10.

appeals to feeling and intuition serving as the basis for morality, without shared criteria of what constitutes moral value.²¹

This crisis of knowledge is inherently tied to the ‘failure’ of the Enlightenment. MacIntyre builds his thesis by providing an intellectual history that ties social practice and structure to moral philosophy. Conceiving modernity as ‘one distinctive type of social order’,²² MacIntyre suggests that the fragmented societal structure of modern society is reproduced in moral philosophy with the abstraction of the ‘individual’, which in modernity becomes isolated from history and is seen as the primary unit of moral reflection. Despite the inability to agree on the basis of moral action, MacIntyre suggests there is ‘a deep cultural agreement’ in the ‘contemporary social world’ that is fundamentally bureaucratic and individualist. The antagonists of various behavioural models, whether they be regulative or libertarian, supposedly at odds, are rather antinomies of the same Enlightenment rationality. Thus, the Enlightenment project was doomed to fail, not because of the falsity of the positions made by the particular theorists themselves, but because the foundation upon which all their constructions were predicated was faulty. MacIntyre notes of such figures as ‘Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot, Hume, Smith’:

They inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action and, since they did not recognize their own peculiar historical and cultural situation, they could not recognize the impossible and quixotic character of their self-appointed task.²³

The philosophers of the Enlightenment lacked the self-awareness to understand the full extent of the ‘process of historical transformation’ at hand – they failed to understand their own time in thought - and thus could only inherit and build their positions on a fragmentary understanding.²⁴ The relation between fragmented social life and philosophical thought is reflected in the antinomies of modernity. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, especially Kant and Hume, were unable to recognise the social and historical conditions that produced the incoherent and fragmented scheme of moral philosophy. Lacking consciousness of the total process, but attentive to the demands of

²¹ *AV*, 33.

²² *AV*, 34.

²³ *AV*, 51, 55.

²⁴ *AV*, 35. This point relates to Hegel’s claim, ‘Every philosophy is the philosophy of its own day, a link in the whole chain of spiritual development, and thus it can only find satisfaction for the interests belonging to its own particular time’. *LPH*, 45.

specifically of modern problems, such as the relation of knowledge to experience,²⁵ Kant and Hume theorised *within* the limitations of the fragments, rather than seeking to overcome the barriers to thought and action presented in modernity. MacIntyre seeks to historicise this impasse with a history of philosophy, or what ‘Hegel called philosophical history’ which provides the structure of his argument in the first half of the book.²⁶ By tracing the changing character of moral philosophy beginning with the Enlightenment, MacIntyre constructs a *social* history of philosophy.²⁷ The social aspect of this philosophical history is the desire to assess the character of modernity as it is embodied in the composition of contemporary of social life and explain how thought relates to society as a whole.

The historical narrative is crucial to MacIntyre’s account in another way. The historical setting allows a distinct advantage over the ‘persistently unhistorical treatment of moral philosophy... [the] abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest of culture’.²⁸ By ‘historicising’ modernity, MacIntyre is able to identify both the inability of Enlightenment thought to self-understand the relation between social life and thought and the subsequent and persistent problem of accounts of philosophy that fail to register that history – let alone situate their own thought in the present. The failure of philosophical thought to think in historical terms, means for MacIntyre, modern thought is largely unaware of the crisis at hand. Thus, for MacIntyre, moral philosophy is inherently sociological.²⁹

In *AV* the rise and consolidation of the Enlightenment is revealed to be a result of a fragmentation of social life that is itself modern. MacIntyre dates the transition between 1630-1830. These dates coincide with the beginnings of the English Civil War, the first

²⁵ Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 51-55.

²⁶ *AV*, 3. This approach relates to Hegel’s understanding that the history of philosophy is itself the philosophy of history, *LPH* 1, 6. However, save from a few passing comments, direct reference to Hegel is a noticeable absence in *AV*. Considering the character of his critique of Kant bears such resemblance to Hegel’s own, MacIntyre’s account of modernity lacks a full engagement with subsequent ‘post-Kantian’ critics of Kant. Earlier writings reflect MacIntyre’s considerable interest in Hegel. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre, ed., *Hegel* (Garden City: Anchor, 1972); and many of the articles in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism*.

²⁷ This is not to suggest MacIntyre provides a social history akin to the New Left Marxist historiography (best exemplified in works like E.P Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*), but more specifically an account of philosophy that acknowledges the social realm as an objectively determining category.

²⁸ *AV*, 11.

²⁹ *AV*, 23.

capitalist revolution, and the July Revolution of 1830, an explicitly bourgeois revolution which acted to further consolidate capitalist rule in France after 1789. More specifically, MacIntyre focuses on the development of Enlightenment thought after the English Revolution and the shift that comes *after* the French Revolution. Post-revolutionary Europe had

a secularised Protestant back-ground, an educated class which linked the servants of government, the clergy and the lay thinkers in a single reading public, and a newly alive type of university exemplified in Königsberg in the east and in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the west. The French eighteenth-century intellectuals constitute an intelligentsia, a group at once educated and alienated; while the eighteenth-century Scottish, English, Dutch, Danish and Prussian intellectuals are on the contrary at home in the social world, even when they are highly critical of it.³⁰

This analysis is consistent with Marx's view of the French revolution as a bourgeois revolution. A historical process that destroyed the feudal *ancien régime* and marked a new epoch with a historically specific social system based on private property relations and the split between the individual and the collective.³¹ This interpretation locates a shift in thought from the pre-revolutionary period, an intellectual movement against the old regime and absolutism and that of post-revolutionary thought, attempting to understand the new paradigm.³² German Idealism provides the most coherent effort to achieve in thought the implications of the French revolution of 1789-1815.³³ MacIntyre follows this narrative, noting that 'Kant recognised the French Revolution as a political expression of thought akin to his own'.³⁴ This view closely resembles Lucien Goldmann's Marxist account of the relation between Kant's thought and the French Revolution, which underscores both the world-historic importance of Kant's individualism and his confidence in the progressive section of the German bourgeoisie.³⁵

³⁰ *AV*, 37. Compare Lucien Goldmann's strikingly similar point about the contradictions within 'tragic' thinking of the seventeenth-century, *The Hidden God* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), 33.

³¹ *Cap* 1, 1052; 'On the Jewish Question' in *EW*, 229-234.

³² Marx notes in the *Postface to the Second Edition of Capital* that the advances of British political economy had a direct relation to the consolidation of the rule of capital and reflected first the desire to explain the social system and then to mask and apologise for its evils. *Cap* 1, 97.

³³ Hegel notes that what happens 'in the form of actuality' in France is 'burst forth as thought, spirit, concept' in Germany. He points to the opposition of the two nations as a dialectic in 'this great epoch of the world's history'. History has been brought up into the present with the conjuncture of the French Revolution and German Idealism, *LHP* 3, 409. See also Herbert Marcuse's illuminating discussion, *Reason and Revolution* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1955), 3-29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, 282. See also, *Immanuel Kant* (London: NLB, 1971), 26-7, 36. Theodor W. Adorno relates Kant's transcendental subject to the 'a priori' domination of subjects, objectified by exchange value, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2003), 178.

The post-revolutionary thinkers of the eighteenth-century reflect on a world that is distinctively bourgeois and the problems that arise from these social relations are specifically *modern*.³⁶ Conditioned by new realities, thought following the revolutionary period becomes increasingly concerned with the character of these new conditions. The thought of this century becomes increasingly critical in wake of the emergence of the new social order.

Kant is the foremost antagonist in *AV*.³⁷ The individualism of Kant's practical philosophy is located as the origin of the 'distinctively modern standpoint', foundational to the logic of modern moral thought.³⁸ Kant's philosophy is presented as the turning point in modern moral thought, for both the seriousness of his attempt to postulate a rational basis for morality and the consequence of his failure to provide sufficient justification. According to MacIntyre, Kant based his moral philosophy on two points. First, for morality to be rational it must be uniform (in the same way as 'the rules of arithmetic') and '*binding* on all rational beings'. Since the moral law is universally applicable and inclusive of all rational beings, moral justification is the design of maxims that conform to the law. This results in a morality that seeks justification in the will of individual subjects to act in such a way that complies to the moral law as the moral imperative. Hence a key element of morality is the task of determining a test for moral maxims. Kant rejects a traditional test of moral maxims in the desire and realisation of happiness. Believing, as MacIntyre puts it, that 'our *conception* of happiness is too vague and shifting to provide a reliable moral guide'. Secondly, Kant rejects another traditional view which tests moral maxims in the belief of God. Since if one was to accept God's commands as what one 'ought to do', it would be necessary prior to this knowledge to have an existing set of maxims to judge action by.³⁹ Instead, Kant's practical reason is determined by:

principles which both can and ought to be held by *all* men, independent of circumstances and conditions, and which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion. The test for a proposed maxim is then easily

³⁶ Note for example Kant's comment that 'All industries, arts, and crafts have gained by the division of labour – that is to say, one man no longer does everything, but each confines himself to a particular task... where every man is a jack of all trades, there industry is still sunk in utter barbarism', Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (Abingdon: Oxford, 2005), 56-7.

³⁷ *AV*, 39, 43.

³⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1998), 183.

³⁹ *AV*, 43-5.

framed: can we or can we not consistently will that everyone should always act on it?⁴⁰

MacIntyre finds the basis of such justification inconsistent. Specifically, he points out both moral and non-moral positions can both be made universal following Kant's moral schema. Since moral maxims are supposed to be binding on all rational beings, for Kant, morality is seen in terms of obedience to the moral law by the individual will. By locating morality in the moral law rather than happiness as the end of moral action, Kant divorces rational action from 'our desires'.⁴¹

MacIntyre's stress on Kant's movement away from the traditional basis of morality is important for his argument, because it locates a point in which the direction of moral philosophy is sought to be justified in reason but 'fails' by Kant's own criteria. He locates Kant not just as a historical forerunner for subsequent accounts, like in that of Kierkegaard, who understands morality in individual choice, but also the heir of Diderot and Hume.⁴² Diderot divides natural desires from the 'artificially formed and corrupted desires' of society and 'like Diderot', Hume 'understands particular moral judgements as expressions of feeling, of the passions, for it is the passions and not reason which move us to action'.⁴³ For Hume, reason and desire are separate in a way parallel to Kant.

MacIntyre represents Kant and Hume, not as the great antagonists of moral philosophy, where one can be validated against the other, but as philosophically conjoined, sharing the same historical presuppositions and thus the same historical failure. Both Hume and Kant are attempting to found morality on the divorce of reason from desire. Kant *is* responding to Hume's empiricism, which locates morality in the passions, but in doing so he repeats the same dualist divorce of reason from desire.⁴⁴ From this perspective, a gulf between the 'is' of the empirical and the categorical 'ought' frames moral thinking that derives its foundational stance from Kant or Hume. For MacIntyre, the split between 'is' and 'ought' represents the failure to provide a rational justification for morality – both Hume and Kant fail to supply such a test for moral action. *AV* presents the problem of dualism as the central, unavoidable, feature of the Enlightenment. For

⁴⁰ *AV*, 45.

⁴¹ *AV*, 46.

⁴² *AV*, 46-7.

⁴³ *AV*, 47-8.

⁴⁴ *AV*, 49.

MacIntyre, the failure of the Enlightenment is historically conditioned. He argues that it is wrong to understand these thinkers as a series of ‘contributors to a timeless debate about morality’. Rather they should be seen as the ‘inheritors of a very specific and particular scheme of moral beliefs, a scheme whose internal incoherence ensured the failure of the common philosophical project from the outset’.⁴⁵ MacIntyre remarks that this project was ‘bound to fail’.⁴⁶

MacIntyre draws out the implications of his critique of the Enlightenment for an analysis of advanced modernity. He does this through an assessment of the social sciences as inheritors of the dualistic conceptual scheme. Accordingly, moral ‘value’ becomes severed from the ‘facts’ of social science. MacIntyre deems this view as mechanical, since no fact is given a value, “‘Fact’ becomes value-free, “is” becomes a stranger to “ought” and explanation, as well as evaluation, changes its character as a result of this divorce between “is” and “ought””.⁴⁷

As MacIntyre would have it, the division between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is institutionalised by the structures of modern society and its corresponding systems of knowledge. As a result, moral philosophy becomes unable to coherently understand moral action and social science becomes positivistic, positing individual empirical facts as truth.⁴⁸ For MacIntyre, the notion of ‘fact’ is drawn from the same fraught history as moral philosophy: “‘Fact’ is in modern culture a folk-concept with an aristocratic ancestry.”⁴⁹ MacIntyre is not claiming we cannot know facts about the world, but rather that the empiricist tradition elevates fact and leaves reason unknowable in conceptual terms, creating a gulf between facts and morality.⁵⁰ It is the *dialectical* opposite of Kant’s rationality, which in effect takes on the same one-sided shape.

⁴⁵ *AV*, 51.

⁴⁶ *AV*, 52. This phrase is ironically borrowed (without citation) from Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 111.

⁴⁷ *AV*, 84.

⁴⁸ For a related point, see Lukács for an account of the ‘gulf between the subject of an action and the milieu of the “facts”’, *HCC*, 23.

⁴⁹ *AV*, 79.

⁵⁰ As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, in addition to Marx, MacIntyre’s critique of the social sciences in *AV* significantly bears Hegel’s imprint, see ‘Morality versus Ethical Substance; or Aristotelian Marxism in Alasdair MacIntyre’, *The Ideologies of Theory*, Vol. 1 (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1988), 181-2. The influence of Hegel is evident in an earlier essay, ‘which relates Hegel’s discussion of physiognomy and phrenology in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to modern empiricism, since both attempt to explain human action ‘in scientific clothing’. As MacIntyre points out, when history is philosophically conceived in Hegel, he ‘provides a more ultimate kind of knowledge of human beings than inquiries whose theoretical structure is modelled on that of the natural sciences’. MacIntyre supports Hegel’s position, which suspends historical

The dualist conceptual scheme MacIntyre identifies in Hume and Kant provides the intellectual foundation for the dominant modes of thinking in contemporary social theory. MacIntyre views a progression and intensification of the fact/value distinction most clearly in bureaucratic rationality. He maintains that positivistic sociological thinking has become entrenched in the institutional and bureaucratic mentality and practice of modern society. For this reason, he describes the ‘contemporary vision of the world’ as Weberian, essentially defined by the rationality of bureaucratic institutions and limited by a sociological mode of thinking.⁵¹ Weber argues that means-end relationships are understood quantifiably, measured and supported by the ‘scientific’ status of varying modes of social knowledge which are said to encompass ‘a set of universal law like generalisations’.⁵² The prediction and advice of managers and experts provide policy sets, detailed research and dominant ideological support for the operation of the present social order, precisely from the positivistic claims of this knowledge.⁵³

MacIntyre shows that Weber was right to stress the bureaucratic nature of modern social organisation, but points to the character of his thought pivoting on ‘dichotomies’: ‘Questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be rationally settled. Instead one must simply choose—between parties, classes, nations, causes, ideals.’⁵⁴ Weber fails to provide a rational basis for values, reproducing the Kantian antinomy between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, ‘fact’ and ‘value’. Weber’s sociological account can shed considerable light on the nature of bureaucratic organisation but ultimately replicates rather than overcomes the dualist division within modern thought.

MacIntyre’s argument, as I have presented it so far, is an account of the origins of the fact/value distinction in the Enlightenment and its longevity as the dominant form of rationality into the ‘culture of bureaucratic individualism’.⁵⁵ The first half of *AV* is an assessment of this crisis in thought that closely relates the incoherence of ethical thought

understanding with the ‘self-knowledge’ of conscious rational agents. This essay pre-empts the critique in *AV*, ‘Hegel on Faces and Skulls’ in *Hegel*, 225, 235.

⁵¹ *AV*, 109. For the role of Weber in his work, see McMyllor, *Alasdair MacIntyre*, 109-125; Keith Breen, *Under Weber’s Shadow* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 153-207.

⁵² *AV*, 86.

⁵³ *AV*, 88-9.

⁵⁴ *AV*, 26.

⁵⁵ *AV*, 71.

to ‘the politics of modern society’.⁵⁶ Here MacIntyre’s own conception of politics is important, especially since he distances himself explicitly from the prevailing orthodoxies of modern political thought.⁵⁷ This provides the intellectual space for his promotion of Aristotle and the practice of the virtue, which occupies the second half of *AV*. If modern ethics and politics can be deemed in every respect compromised, then looking for an alternative in Aristotle appears plausible.

However, when MacIntyre’s conception of modern politics is examined closely, Marx’s presence is central in both implicit and explicit terms. Most clear is the imprint of Marx’s historicism. MacIntyre is a critical, but close reader of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, which is referenced at two different points in *AV*. MacIntyre maintains ‘there is much to learn’ from Marx’s historical approach,⁵⁸ especially the insight that the human dramas of action and narrative are informed by particular social contexts and backdrops.⁵⁹

The Eighteenth Brumaire demonstrates the dynamic character of Marx’s theory of history. Marx investigates through the narrative of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1851 coup d’état, the relation between class interests, political forms and collective action. In this text, Marx offers a palette of historical factors which motivate and condition the political factions into conflict. ‘Tradition’ is one part of the transmission of the inspiration to action, classes comprising different ideas and conceptions of reality.

Just as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says, and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must still more distinguish the language and the imaginary aspirations of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality.⁶⁰

Marx does not reduce individuals to their most immediate class interest but reveals that individuals are always part of a wider fabric of class relations. Political action is a reflection of this fabric and the conflicts between actors have to be viewed within this matrix. Tradition bears upon class struggle and political strategy, shaping the form of

⁵⁶ *AV*, 71.

⁵⁷ *AV*, 33-4.

⁵⁸ *AV*, 110.

⁵⁹ *AV*, 215.

⁶⁰ *MECW* 11, 128. Translation modified in reference to Terrell Carver’s rendering in *Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56.

consciousness. Marx illustrates how consciousness is structured by social relations and allows an insight into what social forms of organisation and action subjects might take.⁶¹

This mode of analysis is central to *AV*, where the Enlightenment is interpreted as a qualitative transformation of thought occurring in concert with a universalising societal transformation. MacIntyre's association of intellectual developments in reference to the English and French Revolutions relates the Enlightenment to the historically specific development of modern social relations.⁶² In this way, MacIntyre's detailing of the shift in modern thought follows Marx in charting this intellectual movement as part of larger social process. MacIntyre draws off the *Theses on Feuerbach* in his account of the dualism of Enlightenment materialism. He refers to, but does not site, the third theses, which reads:

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society.

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.⁶³

Marx counterpoises the mechanical materialism that insists on a dichotomy between objective circumstances and subjective activity to the self-changing and rational activity of praxis. 'Circumstance' denotes the empirical world, which mechanical materialism places above conscious action. By contrast, Marx maintains that society is made by human actors, who through their activity transform themselves. The mediation of productive activity mediates the dialectical relation between subject and object, pointing to human rationality and universality. As Ernst Bloch suggests 'Marx is waging a war on two fronts: against mechanistic environmental theory, which tends ultimately to fatalism with regard to existence, and against the idealistic subject theory, which culminates in "putschism", or at least in excessive optimism with regard to activity.'⁶⁴

⁶¹ MacIntyre emphasises the relation between consciousness and prediction in 'Prediction and Politics' in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism*, 259.

⁶² *AV*, 37, 49, 90.

⁶³ *EW*, 422.

⁶⁴ Ernst Bloch, 'Changing the World: Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*' in *On Karl Marx* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 71.

MacIntyre ignores the mediation of labour activity between the subject and object. The relation between forms of activity and social practice is left undistinguished in MacIntyre's account. This means his concept of the 'social' fails to account for the mediations between humans (social relations) and between objects of production (commodity fetishism) that configure and distort modernity. Modern fragmentation does not mean total disassociation but instead an inability to recognise real human relations. Nevertheless, he pulls from the third *Theses* an interesting distinction contained in materialist dualism. He points out, that the mechanical account of human action contains an inherent form of manipulation. Mechanical materialism relies upon the acceptance of laws which determine 'the predictability of human behaviour' and at the same time 'a thesis about the appropriate ways to manipulate human behaviour'. The materialist claims to know the laws that govern action. If the agent knows the relevant laws, they can attempt to engineer an outcome. MacIntyre credits Marx with understanding that in this scheme 'such an agent is forced to regard his own actions quite differently from the behaviour of those whom he is manipulating'. Those manipulated are assigned presupposed laws in the terms set by the mechanical account. Variations within this account appear to the manipulated agent as expressions of will but are in reality deceptive.⁶⁵ MacIntyre stretches Marx's *Theses* to account for the mechanical character of modern social science. What must be noted is how Marx's observation of this transition to mechanical explanations of human behaviour is a crucial stage in MacIntyre's argument.

AV is underpinned by a historicism that grasps morality in terms of the ability of human actors to comprehend their own understanding objectively as ethical reasoning.⁶⁶ Moral philosophy must provide rational knowledge on which humans can act. Without a shared understanding of what moral action consists of, moral language will invariably reflect dualist fragments. Thus the modern epoch itself is unintelligible in the terms internal to its own frame of understanding. This paradigm is challenged in MacIntyre's presentation of his own Aristotelian view, where 'the facts about human action include the facts about what is valuable to human beings (and *not* just the facts about what they think to be

⁶⁵ *AV*, 84-5.

⁶⁶ MacIntyre defends his historicism against his critics in the 'Postscript to the Second Edition', *AV*, 266-72.

valuable)', justified teleologically, where 'a hierarchy of goods' provide 'the ends of human action'.⁶⁷

Marx stands in the shadows compared to the overarching theoretical import of Aristotle in *AV*. The second half of the book acts as a vindication of Aristotle's ethics.⁶⁸ When MacIntyre makes explicit the basis on which the Enlightenment project fails to offer a rational basis for morality, he points to the rejection of an Aristotelian notion of a teleological human nature. In Aristotle's teleological conception of ethics, according to MacIntyre,

there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. Ethics therefore in this view presupposes some account of potentiality and act, some account of the essence of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human *telos*. The precepts which enjoin the various virtues and prohibit the vices which are their counterparts instruct us how to move from potentiality to act, how to realise our true nature and to reach our true end. To defy them will be to be frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that good of rational happiness which it is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue. The desires and emotions which we possess are to be put in order and educated by the use of such precepts and by the cultivation of those habits of action which the study of ethics prescribes; reason instructs us both as to what our true end is and as to how to reach it.⁶⁹

In this summation of the main thesis of *AV*, ethics is understood in terms of the fulfilment of human potential by reasoning actors. Ethical life realises human potentiality over a morality of immediacy, teleologically mapping out the movement from one state to the next. In this view, ethics is science in the sense of the knowledge that realises and grasps reality as it moves human actors to the realisation of our natures. The essence of human nature is rational and the virtues are what specific determinates allow the cultivation of ethical practices, grasping the rational and directing action. Failure is just as essential to understanding as success, since it is the capability to achieve or to fail to achieve which provides humans with the knowledge of what we want or what we desire. This conception of ethics has much to recommend, with an emphasis on rational activity as the realisation of human potential.

⁶⁷ *AV*, 84.

⁶⁸ *AV*, 118.

⁶⁹ *AV*, 52-3.

MacIntyre shows it is the rational ordering of these human features through practices which allow the comprehension of the possibilities and paths to our ends. MacIntyre's teleological conception makes rationality intelligible by the shared practices that would allow the development towards human good. MacIntyre locates his account of moral action in socially shared and conceived criteria. In this way, morality is comprehensible only in social terms, as embedded in the context of social bonds and structures. MacIntyre charts this conception of morality in a history of the virtues – as the socially recognised form of morality. From this view, every morality requires a kind of social structure. Virtue is defined in relation to the excellence (*arête*) of human practices. First in Homer's epics, where 'morality and social structure are in fact one and the same'.⁷⁰ Then, in the virtues at Athens, where virtue is located in relation to the moral community of the *polis*. In Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*, the tragedy is in the knowledge of the impossibility of moral resolution. The tragedy is the realisation that the conflict cannot be resolved. The conflict is between two socially understood duties – the family and the state. Both duties relate to the laws of the *polis*. It is precisely this impasse that deems it tragic.

In Athens, according to MacIntyre, the virtues are inherent in the conception of citizenship. So to exercise the virtues is to be a good citizen.⁷¹ Aristotle generalises this position to present 'the rational voice of the best citizen of the best city-state'. Ethics is politically conceived, since the 'city-state is the unique political form in which alone the virtues of human life can be genuinely and fully exhibited'.⁷² For Aristotle, as for MacIntyre, the telos is the good life (*eudamonia*). MacIntyre, is however, not interested in rehearsing Aristotle's position, but he instead attempts to outline a conception of the virtues that is both at one with Aristotle's teleological view and decisively modern.

On the first task, Aristotle's virtue ethics is presented as the beginning of a long tradition, now mostly lost, of conceiving of the practices that allow a fostering of internal goods. Excellences of character and intelligence cannot be reduced to Kantian dualisms which reduce the good to 'distinct criteria by which to judge the goodness of a particular individual, but rather with one complex measure'.⁷³ Accordingly,

⁷⁰ *AV*, 123.

⁷¹ *AV*, 135.

⁷² *AV*, 148.

⁷³ *AV*, 155.

The application of that measure in a community whose shared aim is the realisation of the human good presupposes of course a wide range of agreement in that community on goods and virtues, and it is this agreement which makes possible the kind of bond between citizens which, on Aristotle's view, constitutes a *polis*. That bond is the bond of friendship and friendship is itself a virtue. The type of friendship which Aristotle has in mind is that which embodies a shared recognition of and pursuit of a good.⁷⁴

MacIntyre pits Aristotle's citizen against the modern liberal atomist understanding of society, in which 'political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection.'⁷⁵ They possess at best that inferior form of friendship which is founded on mutual advantage.⁷⁶ It is only in a collective society that moral goods can be universally recognised. When these goods can be exercised by the virtues, human freedom is realisable. Collective rationality offers the realisation of ethical life, rather than simply reflecting individual conflict masquerading as ethics. Thus a rejection of the present *moral* order necessitates a rejection of the present *social* order. MacIntyre looks to Aristotle to provide a tradition of ethics that accords to human practices the generation of goods internal to rational action. The unity of human life unifies these goods teleologically into the good of human life.⁷⁷ In my view, MacIntyre's elaboration of Aristotle's ethical reasoning is convincing.

The second task of MacIntyre's conclusion is to chart a modern conception of the virtues and it is here that the project most clearly breaks down. As MacIntyre himself acknowledges, Aristotle needs to be conceived historically.⁷⁸ At this point of *AV*, the political resources for this historical rehabilitation become increasingly pertinent. MacIntyre fails to offer the depth of argument put in the first half of the book. He stresses the role of modern conflict,⁷⁹ the inability of the institutions of the modern state to foster practices internal to goods⁸⁰ and the example of modern virtue in narratives

⁷⁴ *AV*, 155.

⁷⁵ MacIntyre is not blind to Aristotle's offensive views on slavery, women and non-Greeks but sees them as at odds with Aristotle's virtue ethics when conceived historically. *AV*, 159-60.

⁷⁶ *AV*, 156.

⁷⁷ *AV*, 203.

⁷⁸ *AV*, 159.

⁷⁹ *AV*, 164.

⁸⁰ *AV*, 194-5.

(including St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa, Frederick Engels, Eleanor Marx and Leon Trotsky).⁸¹ MacIntyre unequivocally rejects the modern bureaucratic state:

It must have been clear from earlier parts of my argument that the tradition of the virtues is at variance with central features of the modern economic order and more especially its individualism, its acquisitiveness and its elevation of the values of the market to a central social place. It now becomes clear that it also involves a rejection of the modern political order.⁸²

While this rejection is well founded, it is unclear how a conception of politics that interrogates the historically specific condition of individualism can be incorporated so easily with ancient ethical frameworks. If the ancient conception of ethics was predicated on Greek public life, implanting this view to modernity leaves the question of modern subjectivity unanswered. This is no small omission. MacIntyre allows for a modern subject but fails to address how this might be understood in Aristotelian terms, or if this requires a stretching of Aristotle that reaches beyond the framework provided in his conception of ethical reasoning. MacIntyre risks schematising Aristotle rather than successfully integrating an Aristotelian conception of ethics into a view of modern politics. This tension negates the power of his own historical method.

For this reason, MacIntyre's understanding of Marx requires attention. There is a tension between this aspect of his argument and the radical analysis in *AV* (especially the similarity of the opening chapters with Marx's theory of history). There is some reason to doubt MacIntyre's own comment that 'Marxism itself is only as marginal preoccupation', which flattens how Marx is simultaneously a figure of utility and of critique in *AV*.⁸³ MacIntyre regards Marxism as the most significant, yet failed critique of liberalism.⁸⁴ He presents Marx's historical understanding as insightful, but when generalised into a theory, Marxism became just 'one more set of symptoms disguised as a diagnosis'.⁸⁵ While MacIntyre is correct to criticise the reductive and dualist base/superstructure model featured in the most reductive versions of Marxism, he is wrong to universally associate

⁸¹ *AV*, 199.

⁸² *AV*, 254.

⁸³ *AV*, x.

⁸⁴ For an assessment of MacIntyre's discussion of Marx in his latest work, see Michael Lazarus, 'Politics in the Conflicts of Modernity: Aristotelian and Marxist', *International Critical Thought*, 9:3 (2019): 463-479. This article contains an extended discussion of MacIntyre's reading of Marx.

⁸⁵ *AV*, 110.

this schematic model with Marxism as a whole.⁸⁶ Marx's understanding of value is speculative (in the Hegelian sense); he proceeds immanently from one category to the next, through an internal examination of the categories of political economy and the corresponding social forms. MacIntyre argues that Marxism claims the same 'law-like' predictive powers of social science and is fundamentally Weberian.⁸⁷ This view becomes especially important for the practice of Marxism, since as Marxists 'organise and move towards power' they take on the bureaucratic and managerial logic of modern thought rather than politically challenging the modern state. Marxism replicates liberalism by means of a Weberian embrace of the instrumentality of political power.⁸⁸ Marxists become authoritarian in power, using whatever means are necessary to defend their self-prescribed rationale.

Further, in thought Marxism fails to provide a coherent moral standpoint. To MacIntyre, Marx's thought does not overcome the antinomies of modernity, but is subject to them. This is shown in 'Marxism's own moral history', which betrays 'relatively straightforward versions of Kantianism or utilitarianism.'⁸⁹ MacIntyre extends his critique of Marxism to Marx, claiming the defective moral standpoint results from Marx's ontology, since

Secreted within Marxism from the outset is a certain radical individualism. In the first chapter of *Capital* when Marx characterises what it will be like 'when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations' what he pictures is 'a community of free individuals' who have all freely agreed to their common ownership of the means of production and to various norms of production and distribution. This free individual is described by Marx as a socialised Robinson Crusoe; but on what basis he enters into his free association with others Marx does not tell us. At this key point in Marxism there is a lacuna which no later Marxist has adequately supplied. It is unsurprising that abstract moral principle and utility have in fact been the principles of association which Marxists have appealed to, and that in their practice Marxists have exemplified precisely the kind of moral attitude which they condemn in others as ideological.⁹⁰

This assessment of Marx's ontology refers to a significant passage, one of the few in *Capital* where Marx directly discusses communism, or what he calls in his later writings, the free association of producers. Marx asks us to 'imagine' that production will have the

⁸⁶ AV, 60.

⁸⁷ AV, 215, 114.

⁸⁸ AV, 109.

⁸⁹ AV, 261.

⁹⁰ AV, 261.

same character as Robinson's work on his island – the immediate interaction with nature for 'utility' – but labour will be on a social rather than individual basis.⁹¹ MacIntyre accuses Marx of simply socialising alienated labour and accepting the individualist ontology of Defoe's character. Far from this, to preserve a 'communist' Robinson requires a full reconstruction of Marx's social ontology.⁹²

MacIntyre paints Marx's rhetorical inversion of Robinson as emblematic of a social theory with an individualist core. What he fails to recognise is that this inversion is mediated by the inner-relation of labour. Marx's value theory views capital as a relation formed by the domination of abstract labour. Far from positing a radical individual as the protagonist of his social thought, Marx wants to overcome the barriers that reduce the human actor to the fragmentations of the division of labour and an abstract form of sociality. Mediated by fetishist relations, human actors are prevented from the forms of intersubjective recognition that could be rationally understood.

Marx's social thought is premised on his thinking of labour in ontological terms. This conceptual work is first defined in his 1844 writings about humans as species-beings, with an essence defined by the practical, rational and creative activity of labour. Productive activity is what forms human reality for Marx and can only be understood in the social and historical form it takes. In *Comments on James Mill*, Marx reveals how capitalist social relations, which limit and restrict the social capacity of labour results in the rule of money – the alienated mediator of production and humanity.⁹³ Money is valued for its own sake rather than in the utility of its ability to exchange one useful thing for another. What Marx expresses here in naturalist terms, is the estrangement of the social activity of humans by the economic relation of money. The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* demonstrate the devastation on the worker under isolated modes of being generated by a capitalist economy. Not only is labour controlled and individualised in a way diametrically opposed to the collective nature of labour processes, this alienation results in a loss of humanity for the worker. This social ontology is maintained and strengthened in the concept of labour operating in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

⁹¹ *Cap* 1, 171.

⁹² This is the focus of Chapter 5 below.

⁹³ MacIntyre makes a negative reference to James Mill's conception of politics. *AV*, 227.

Marx sees the atomisation of alienated labour in social terms – as the result of the human relationships that comprise, produce and reproduce capital. Marx’s social ontology foregrounds the social character of reality and builds a critique of the fundamental limitations of human potential by the operation of processes placed outside of human control and influenced by the thing-like fetishism of the market. Marx’s critique of political economy establishes that bourgeois political thought not only posits an abstract individual that stands apart from history but bourgeois thought is incapable of understanding that reality is shaped by humans *socially*. When severed from history, humans play no other role than bearers of economic categories. Marx’s social ontology provides an understanding of sociality in unalienated labour – species-being beyond capital, not as the inverse of individuality, but as the sublimation of the individual with the collective. Social forms contain the inner movement and unfolding of human experience defined as historically conditioned ontology, mediated by labouring activity. Marx conceptually unfolds how the processes that condition our present individuality are forms of domination and control *structurally determined* by the logic of capital itself, which takes on an ontological character. Hence, Marx’s understanding of capital is one of social relations, at once dynamic, mediated and immanent. MacIntyre’s claim fails to provide compelling reasons why Marx’s social ontology simply inverts liberal individualism. Despite more recently drawing insights from *Capital*,⁹⁴ his claim in *AV* of Marx’s individualism does not hold up to a reconstruction of the role of social ontology in value-form theory. This is further evidenced by the absence in *AV* of any exposition of the relation between political and social relations as understood by the operation of markets and production. Apart from an approving but unsubstantiated reference to commodity fetishism and a vague gesture towards production, work and the division of labour, the manner in which the logic of modernity is one shaped by productive relations remains absent.⁹⁵

AV concludes with the desire to go beyond Marxism. MacIntyre’s attempt to locate a politics to combat advanced modernity envisions the solution in fostering the virtues in the small-scale community.⁹⁶ In the closing paragraphs of *AV* he writes:

⁹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 93-4.

⁹⁵ *AV*, 107, 227-8.

⁹⁶ MacIntyre has always rejected the title and grouping of ‘communitarian’, seeing his project as a much more radical enterprise.

What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different —St. Benedict.⁹⁷

Through the practices and moral questioning cultivated in the community, MacIntyre envisions a critique of the status quo to emerge – since practical reasoning requires a confrontation with the governing powers. *AV* is ambiguous about how this might occur given the locality of the small-scale community, stressing that the ‘particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated’.⁹⁸ By making the particular the focus of his account of ethical cultivation, the universal becomes distinct and undefined. In MacIntyre’s account there is a contradiction between the ability of the community to advance to a totalising questioning of the social order and his assessment of the overdetermined desires of capitalist consumer culture. This assessment cannot help but reduce the community to the character of *particular* aims.

While MacIntyre offers a modern conception of politics to scaffold his analysis of modernity, his return to Aristotle at the expense of Marx, negates the historical and political specificity from which his critique relies.⁹⁹ Perversely, MacIntyre exemplifies (and in an amplified way) precisely the problem he finds in Marx and Lukács; namely, the adoption of ‘a vantage point outside their own society and culture’.¹⁰⁰ If MacIntyre was less quick to label Marx’s ontology individualist, there would be a stronger basis to locate the Aristotelian dimensions of Marx’s critique of capital. Instead, MacIntyre is forced to build a critique of modernity on a pre-modern moral philosophy.¹⁰¹ His sketch of Classical Athens and Medieval Europe may be insightful for shared moral codes before the modern dichotomy of individual and collective, but falls short of providing the

⁹⁷ *AV*, 263.

⁹⁸ *AV*, 221. His later texts repeat the same formulation, see Lazarus, ‘Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity’, 474-7.

⁹⁹ MacIntyre acknowledges the problems of presenting Aristotle as ‘*the* protagonist against whom I have matched the voices of liberal modernity’ and attempts to circumvent this by way of placing Aristotle as part of a tradition. *AV*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, ‘Marxist Mask and Romantic Face’, 63.

¹⁰¹ *AV*, 118.

mediations required to bridge *modern* antagonisms and antinomies of thought and social being *historically specific to capitalist modernity*.

Part 2

HCS is a radical reinterpretation of Hegel and the consequences of such a reinterpretation for modern social thought. Through an immanent critique of sociology, Rose argues that modern thought is at an impasse, trapped between Kant and Hegel. The antinomies expressed in Kant's transcendental thought, which divides theoretical and practical reason and limits the ability think about reality, is reproduced in subsequent sociological thinkers. Attempts to move beyond Kant that have not fully grasped the alternative in Hegel's speculative thought, according to Rose, are caught between Kant and Hegel. She paints these efforts as Fichtean. By this she means critics of Kant that remain beholden to Fichte's inadequate attempt to resolve Kant's antinomies. The failure of modern social thought, in important ways, shares Fichte's failure and remains intellectually subordinate to Hegel's critique of Kant, thus remaining in essence neo-Kantian and neo-Fichtean. Rose repeats the refrain through *HCS*, that modern thought is marooned at the Fichtean 'station on the road between Kant and Hegel'.¹⁰²

Rose includes Marx and Marxist thought in this categorisation. She accuses Marx of producing a Fichtean critique of Hegel and Marxist sociology as fundamentally neo-Kantian in character. After detailing her interpretation of Hegel, Rose finishes the book with a call for a reformation of Marxism, what she calls a 'critical Marxism'.¹⁰³ This project is an effort to purify the continued reproduction of Kant's dualism through Hegel's speculative thought by *thinking the absolute*. For Rose, Hegel's speculative thought offers the true bypass to Marx's replication of Kantian dualism. Rose depicts Marx's antagonism to Hegel, found especially in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, as betraying a dualism that can only be clarified by integrating Hegel's absolute. According to Rose, Marx's reversion to Fichte's dualist and pre-Hegelian position can be absolved by the speculative position of Hegel's absolute thought. In other words, Marx can be corrected and recovered by a reconstructed interpretation of Hegel's unified

¹⁰² *HCS*, 26, 39, 226.

¹⁰³ *HCS*, 235.

method and system, which does not just resolve Marx's dualism but allows Marxism a future. There is considerable merit in Rose's interpretation of Hegel as a *radical* critic of specifically modern private property relations. The novelty, and to some extent breakdown, of her reading is her claim that Hegel's speculative thought cannot just clarify but surpass the internal weakness of Marxism. While Rose criticises those Marxists who misunderstood Marx's most speculative moment – his critique of political economy – it is unclear how Rose herself actually employs the insights from Marx's value theory. Given her sweeping accusations concerning Marx's dualism, Rose's critique of Marx work is considerably undeveloped. Contra Rose, I suggest that the critical nature of Marx's thought can be reconstructed and reinvigorated by his critique of political economy.

HCS opens with a blistering genealogy of Kant and neo-Kantian thought. Rose suggests that classical sociological thought, despite opposing methodological frameworks, operate within a positivistic and neo-Kantian paradigm.¹⁰⁴ Subsequent social scientific approaches, including Marxism, have been unable to adequately escape these limitations and revert back to the Kantian incoherence. This approach is necessary since

The very idea of a scientific sociology, whether non-Marxist or Marxist, is only possible as a form of neo-Kantianism. This neo-Kantianism bars access to the philosophy of Hegel, and, consequently, inhibits discussion of Marxism from the standpoint of its philosophical foundations... Hegel's thought anticipates and criticises the whole neo-Kantian endeavour, its methodologism and its moralism, and consists of a wholly different mode of social analysis.¹⁰⁵

Rose explicitly strives to 'retrieve Hegelian speculative experience for social theory, not by means of any ingenuous and ahistorical "return to Hegel", but, first of all, by recognising and discussing the intellectual and historical barriers which stand in the way of any such rereading'.¹⁰⁶ As such, Rose is attempting to retrieve, from a reconstruction of his speculative thought, a tradition of Hegelianism that does not reduce Hegel to either a 'left'/'right' or method/system dichotomy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Rose argues that neo-Kantianism shares the same fundamental problems as Kant. Goldmann on the other hand, disputes the identification of the neo-Kantians with Kant, in an effort to preserve Kant's critical philosophy for Marxism. Goldmann's treatment of Kant is itself neo-Kantian, but it is worth pointing at a difference in the approaches of Kant and his successors. See *Immanuel Kant*, 108-130.

¹⁰⁵ *HCS*, 2.

¹⁰⁶ *HCS*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *HCS*, 36, 44, 196.

For Rose, modern sociological thought inherits the methodologism of Kant's dualism by the 'separation of objective and subjective validity, of the question of right from the question of fact, of an empirical from a transcendental account'.¹⁰⁸ Kant's 'rigorous' distinction between fact and right, results in a rift between the validity of facts and moral value. According to Rose, Kant's transcendental thought posits objective validity as

established for what can be presented to us as an object within the limits of the constitution of our sensibility, and the functions of our understanding (*Verstand*). Objective validity is restricted to the condition of the possibility of objects of experience, of appearances, and to the conditions of all knowledge of objects. The task of justification is to show how 'the subjective conditions of thought' and of our sensibility possess objective validity and not merely subjective validity, and thus how experience in general is brought into existence.¹⁰⁹

In Rose's account, Kant is unable to transcend the antinomies between thought and reality and ultimately postulated objective validity as unknowable beyond the realm of experience.

From this basis, Rose charts how post-Kantian thought gave birth in the early twentieth-century to scientific sociology. Best represented by Durkheim and Weber, scientific sociology purported to offer both the 'substitute' for 'traditional theoretical and practical philosophy' and provide a unique status for knowledge in its own right.¹¹⁰ Durkheim accepts Kant's epistemology but seeks to found moral judgements on social facts, moral terms as values. Rose suggests that in labelling values as 'facts', Durkheim naturalised their character as objects, allowing values to be 'classified, compared and explained according to the logic of any natural science sure of its object domain'.¹¹¹ According to Rose, Weber's method upholds this logic in reverse, positing that values can be understood by the methods of social science but not facts.¹¹² Weber's sociology is the scientific inquiry into values, in turn equating values with science.¹¹³ From this standpoint,

¹⁰⁸ *HCS*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *HCS*, 3.

¹¹⁰ *HCS*, 15.

¹¹¹ *HCS*, 18-9.

¹¹² *HCS*, 19.

¹¹³ *HCS*, 20.

Weber was able to develop a consistent and critical sociology of capitalism without making value-judgements, that is, judgements of its validity. For the very value which gives rise to the kind of science he practised, a science which limits itself to understanding values and not assessing their validity, is an exemplar of the same kind of rationality which is the defining characteristic of capitalist society. Just as the development of a Protestant ethic made possible the transition from value to instrumental (goal) rationality, science in such a society is goal-rational. It examines the relation between means and ends but does not assess the ends themselves.¹¹⁴

Weber's value-oriented sociology, defined by a methodological distinction between values and validity, expresses the logic of an instrumental rationality that is both representative of social science and capitalism. Rose contends that the ends of science and of an individualistic society correspond to promote ends, which are not evaluated and deemed valid by the means used to pursue these ends, but by the values of such action. Subjective belief orients action and seeks its validation *as values*.

Rose argues that Weber and Durkheim's opposing methods do not reflect a fundamental opposition, as conventional sociological interpretations often claim, but actually a one-sided formalism founded in the Kantian antinomy of value and validity:

In each case once the precondition had been established (validity for Durkheim, values for Weber), the object (values for Durkheim, validities for Weber) could be classified, and explained or 'understood' as a natural or given object according to the rules of a general method.¹¹⁵

The function of Rose's discussion is to establish how the 'paradigm of validity and values' not only had its conceptual framework in Kant but attempts to understand society according to the schemas in this framework that were forced into a dualism between fact and value and a formalistic method that prioritised one over the other.

Rose's critique of sociological reason is dependent on her interpretation of Hegel. She characterises his thought as radical, offering the decisive critique of methodological thinking. Rose relates methodological thought to the limitations of the social relations that yield them, which prevent a conception of social life without these dominating relations.¹¹⁶ She argues 'absolute ethical life' is for Hegel, 'freedom without

¹¹⁴ *HCS*, 22.

¹¹⁵ *HCS*, 23.

¹¹⁶ *HCS*, 36.

domination'.¹¹⁷ Her position maintains that Hegel's critique of bourgeois property relations is required against Kant's antinomies and necessary for the continuation of the critique of bourgeois property relations. This analysis has considerable power. However, in hinging her account of Hegel on this critique, Rose both brings Hegel into line with Marx's critique of capitalist social relations and pits Hegel *against* Marx. Ironically, she mirrors the latter's polemical attitude towards the former. This opposition loses coherence at important moments. Before examining this breakdown, the shape of her argument needs outlining. This allows an understanding of the connection between Hegel's critique of Kant and a critique of private property relations.

According to Rose, Kant's thought is limited by his restriction of knowledge to the finite. Kant divides judgment into theoretical and practical reason, which operate distinctly from one another. It is the former that informs and justifies the latter. This division acts 'to justify cognition before practising it (method)'. By justifying thought *prior* to its method, theoretical reason 'does not know itself at the very point where its self-examination commences'. Rose suggests this results in all knowledge beyond the finite – God, things-in-itself, the will – as unknowable. Accordingly, if we are unable to know ourselves as 'subjects of experience' we are unable to know ourselves 'as moral agents capable of freedom' which means 'that the social, political and historical determinations of all knowledge and all action remain unknown and unknowable'.¹¹⁸ Rose carefully repeats the point, charting the gulf between Hegel and Kant:

limitation of 'justified' knowledge of the finite prevents us from recognising, criticising, and hence from changing the social and political relations which determine us. If the infinite is unknowable, we are powerless. For our concept of the infinite is our concept of ourselves and our possibilities.¹¹⁹

Rose's solution to Kantian methodologism is found in Hegel's speculative thought, which she argues provides a holistic and immanent critique of society. Hegel questions Kant's restriction of thought, insisting that the infinite can be known. Hegel's attempt to unify theoretical and practical reason is not through the imposition of any specific method

¹¹⁷ *HCS*, 97.

¹¹⁸ *HCS*, 47.

¹¹⁹ *HCS*, 48.

onto the contents of thought or experience but through a speculative approach to thought. Hegel's absolute unifies the finite and infinite.¹²⁰

Rose argues that the dualism between finite and infinite in Kant's theoretical philosophy has a collating relation in his practical philosophy between morality and legality. Unifying these relations, Hegel provides an account of the transformation and unification of the antinomies of theoretical and practical reason in the history and shape of consciousness, 'culminating' in a conception of 'absolute ethical life'. Rose's Hegel allows an overcoming of the limitations of the traditions of thought of the modern age, to think infinitely and find truth in self-knowledge.¹²¹ For Rose, ethical life allows thought to reconcile with reality and since reality is itself ethical, the organisation of society is best conceptualised in the idea of absolute ethical life. The implications of this argument are drawn out throughout *HCS*.

Rose demonstrates that Hegel's thinking hinges on the counter position between 'absolute ethical life' and 'relative ethical life'. Hegel develops a critique of the atomised individual of natural law contract theory which abstracts humans from their social relations and paints this abstraction as an 'empirical observation'. This theory of society is constructed methodologically *prior* to definite social relations but predicated on the organisation of 'private property relations of the entrepreneurial class'. For this reason, natural law is unable to understand the relation 'between society and the individual' and imposes a schematic 'ideal which *should* dominate real relations'.¹²² From 'an observation of particular fragments of social life', natural law elevates the individual to encompass the totality of human affairs. Rose connects this thesis to her critique of Kant and Fichte, suggesting 'in Hegel's eyes, they represent its culmination'. Both separate the 'empirical realm of necessity' from 'the moral realm of freedom', reducing the individual to the primary unit of consideration (will) and disregarding desire from moral consideration (duty).¹²³ The dualism between theoretical reason (necessity) and practical reason (freedom) formalises the latter and *prevents* freedom from being conceptualised as a unity of thought and action.

¹²⁰ *HCS*, 50.

¹²¹ *HCS*, 50.

¹²² *HCS*, 55.

¹²³ *HCS*, 57-8.

Rose relates the antinomies in Kant and Fichte to ‘relative ethical life’, ‘the system of the political economy of bourgeois property relations in which law is separated from the rest of social life’.¹²⁴ The isolation and fragmentation of bourgeois property relations are based on egotism, inequality and competition, not identity, moral equivalence and social recognition. Kant and Fichte’s thought relates to *real* social relations,¹²⁵ but abstracts ‘from all specific, historical aspects of social life, and thus reaffirm an abstracted, “moral” individual who only represents one part of it. Relative ethical life is the life of isolated individuals who exist in a relation to each other which excludes any real unity.’¹²⁶ In this way Kant universalises subjective will into moral judgments. Fichte, commits the opposite error, neglecting the subjective to formulate ‘blueprints’ which impose ‘society’ upon the individual.¹²⁷

By making the abstraction of the property relation central to her discussion of Hegel’s critique of Kant and Fichte, Rose draws a strong link between the epistemological problem of finite knowledge and the ethical possibilities of freedom. Accordingly, for Kant, the moral ‘the ought’ and ‘the pictorial’ God are both beyond knowledge.¹²⁸ Fichte also rejects the knowability of God and in doing so fails to account for human freedom. His effort to go beyond Kant’s ‘ought’ results in the embrace of the ‘ego’, the subjective subject – which only offers a distorting mirror to Kant’s position. By denying the infinite can be thought, each thinker sees freedom not in social terms, but against the ‘necessity’ of the finite. Kant and Fichte, in Hegel’s words, attempt a ‘flight from the finite’. The division between the finite and infinite results in faith and reduces the empirical by a strict opposition between this cognition and that which cannot be known.¹²⁹ The opposition of each pole denies their interconnectability and the possibilities of conscious transformation. According to Rose, in Kant and Fichte the ‘real relations of domination are legitimised and reproduced in these conceptions of freedom and of God’.¹³⁰ For Rose, Hegel’s absolute offers the decisive challenge to methodological and finite thinking. In her interpretation, it is important to note that the absolute is *not* God, but a thinking that knows ourselves in freedom. In the unfreedom of various preceding

¹²⁴ HCS, 59

¹²⁵ HCS, 64.

¹²⁶ HCS, 60.

¹²⁷ HCS, 61.

¹²⁸ HCS, 92, 100-1.

¹²⁹ HCS, 104.

¹³⁰ HCS, 104-5.

societies, religion has been the vehicle in which freedom has been presented in a distorted manner, as a misrecognition of freedom. So for God to be unknowable, ‘we are unknowable, and hence powerless’.¹³¹

Rose repeats throughout *HCS* variants of the phrase, ‘Hegel’s philosophy has no social import if the absolute cannot be thought’.¹³² Rose develops her definition of the absolute, first in ordinary consciousness with the example of the comment, “‘I absolutely refuse’”, in which the absolute is a ‘position which brooks no compromise with all that it rejects’. This negative conception of the absolute – ‘what it is not’ – also has a positive side. This positivity seeks meaning in the negative by incorporating the finite, by relating the infinite to the finite by their inner unity. This identity is a process of negation. Rose explains this in terms of dialectical sublation – to ‘preserve’, ‘abolish’ and ‘transcend’. The absolute cannot be ‘posited’ or ‘grounded’ but must be advanced speculatively by a philosophical history that recognises the absolute once more as subject.¹³³ This subject is self-mediated by its object, by ‘recognising the object as itself and itself as the object’.¹³⁴ This is Rose’s understanding of Hegel’s famous statement that ‘everything depends on conceiving the true not as *substance*, but just as much as subject’.¹³⁵

Rose investigates the possibilities of a modern determination of absolute ethical life, in the wake of particular modern contradictions. The modern arises from the death of Greek culture,¹³⁶ but Ancient Greece ‘stands for a just society, for a limited but realised form of justice’.¹³⁷ Speaking through Hegel, Rose writes that in his thought ‘Greece plays an impossible rôle’.¹³⁸ Rose presents the ethical world of the Greeks as a counterpoint to modern life. She notes the Greek concept of freedom was restrictive (slavery, gender

¹³¹ *HCS*, 98.

¹³² *HCS*, 45, 98, 101, 107, 108, 218, 223, 229.

¹³³ *HCS*, 108-112.

¹³⁴ *HCS*, 114.

¹³⁵ *PbG*, §17/10. This unity allows substance to be expressed in its historical shape as the ethical ‘life of a people. *PbG*, ¶349-50/141. The coming-to-be of the absolute through its self-awareness through the shapes of consciousness allows spirit to overcome alienation and become freedom. As Werner Marx notes, ‘This ethical substance of a people, which permeates and determines the doings of all individuals, is as such already in unity with the ‘self,’ which is essentially activity. But this unity of substance and subject, the mores and customs existing and prevailing on their own, like their realisation in the ‘action of all’, is still immediate and to some extent unconscious: the spirit still ‘has to advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately’. *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Peter Heath (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 55.

¹³⁶ *HCS*, 170.

¹³⁷ *HCS*, 134.

¹³⁸ *HCS*, 120.

etc.), but existed without the abstract thought of the moderns.¹³⁹ Individual nature is ‘not split up into private and public, natural and moral’.¹⁴⁰ Conflict was not found in the dualisms particular to modernity, but

Greece stands for a society in which there is no subjectivity and hence no representation. It stands for a society which contains conflict and injustice, but which is substantially free, and hence the conflict and injustice are transparent and intelligible. In Greek society only a few are known to be free, but this freedom is concrete and realised. Those who are not free are known as slaves, and conflict between equally valid social spheres is recognised by all. In later societies all are re-presented as free, but freedom is not realised for any, and the lack of freedom is not known.¹⁴¹

In turn, Rose examines the social conditions for art.¹⁴² The culture and self-understanding of the Greek world expressed in aesthetic form,¹⁴³ first in Homer and then in tragedy.¹⁴⁴ Rose understands the concepts of nature and freedom that operate for the Greeks formed by a ‘simple’ division of labour. The Greek hero makes himself through his impact on the natural world. Rose contrasts this relation to work with modernity:

There is no private property, because individuals are not defined by law according to their right to own property, as persons. Productive transformation both of the physical world for the necessities of life, and of the ethical world, valour and courage, occurs according to custom and that custom (*Sitte*) is the unity of the society (*Sittlichkeit*).¹⁴⁵

Tragedy presents the conflicts of the Greek world in terms of the polis.¹⁴⁶ Athenian tragedy, as Rose points out, is conflict and disruption of the ‘substance and unity of ethical life’. Accordingly, in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the conflict cannot be seen as one of the individual in conflict with the state for the very reason that the concept of the individual ‘is not a private interest opposed to the public interest’ but the conflict is instead, ‘between family right, the right to bury the dead, and communal right, the law of society’.¹⁴⁷ Antigone is an important example for Hegel, since she symbolises the social and political dimensions of ethical life – the ‘unity of the society (*Sittlichkeit*)’ – within the

¹³⁹ HCS, 136.

¹⁴⁰ HCS, 138.

¹⁴¹ HCS, 134.

¹⁴² HCS, 130-1, 144.

¹⁴³ HCS, 133.

¹⁴⁴ HCS, 136-144.

¹⁴⁵ HCS, 139.

¹⁴⁶ In the *Natural Law* essay Hegel contrasts modern life with the tragedy of the Greek world, where ethical life meant for the Athenians a struggle between contradiction and fate in the public realm. NL, 152-4.

¹⁴⁷ HCS, 141-3.

community of the polis. Greece is an ‘impossibility’ and a ‘fiction’ because its divisions are not modern ones.¹⁴⁸ Its justice was limited and its possibilities now distant. Rose presents this concept in the figure of Athena, the Goddess who unifies the polis and philosophy as absolute ethical life. She cannot be a subject, because the Greeks had no subject, the free related to each other transparently through the ethical life of the polis.¹⁴⁹

Modern society creates the subject. This modern category is predicated on the disunity of social life. Rose contends that the modern abstraction inherent in private property relations is not only upheld in the abstractions of dominate forms of thought before Hegel, but the modes of thinking that claim to understand social life from abstractions which fundamentally restrict the possibilities in understanding the world and our actions within. Here Hegel’s absolute bears particular importance, not in a methodological ‘spurious absolute’, but in *absolute ethical life*. Rose draws from this analysis of the relationship between dualism and property relations, that Hegel sees ethical life in an alternate form of property relations, which opens up ‘the most complex issue in Hegel’s thought’.¹⁵⁰

Rose’s account highlights the role of labour in Hegel’s thought. She makes central the mediation of productive activity to social relations, as a means which bind human activity and nature.¹⁵¹ She writes, ‘the simplest form in which human agency dominates or controls its most basic needs is productive labour’. This ontological point about labour as human activity is connected to the domination and division of labour. Rose continues:

Each individual produces according to his particular interests with the result that the labour and the products become increasingly diverse and fragmented. This division of labour gives rise to surpluses which cannot be used by the individual who produced them, but can be used to satisfy the needs of others.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Like MacIntyre, *AV*, 165-180, Rose also provides an account of feudalism concluding with the French Revolution, *HCS*, 173-183. However, Rose understands this period defined by feudal property relations and a Church that imposed vows to increase its power and wealth. At odds with MacIntyre, Rose suggests this pre-capitalist period did not allow collective understanding and social roles. Since, ‘The real bondage of the feudal system is even less visible than the bondage hidden by the definition of people as legal persons.’, 175-6. See also her critique of ‘virtue’, 180. I am inclined to see both MacIntyre and Rose as one-sided on this point, especially since the strength of Rose’s argument throughout *HCS* suggests that the legal abstractions unique to capitalism present the greatest challenge for thought.

¹⁴⁹ *HCS*, 120-1, 88, 221.

¹⁵⁰ *HCS*, 62.

¹⁵¹ *HCS*, 69-71.

¹⁵² *HCS*, 70-1.

This conception bears close resemblance to Marx's conception of labour. Rose reads Hegel on this point as closely to Marx as possible. While Rose highlights the misrecognition of this labour relation, her account *assumes* the conceptual understanding of labour as understood in Marx's critique of political economy, in which real relations of exchange and property formalise relations into abstract things. Through exchange, humans are made "identical" in the same formal way that things exchanged are identical'.¹⁵³

Rose renders the conceptual weight of labour and property relations in a way uncharacteristic in both Marxist and non-Marxist approaches to Hegel. This allows Rose to sharpen the concept of absolute ethical life by understanding Hegel's thought pointing to the limitations of private property relations as barriers to a 'just society'.¹⁵⁴ 'Bourgeois private property' is ridden with contradictions. It relies on the individual's private property validated by society as a universal, which means property itself is abstracted from the conception of society.¹⁵⁵ The human is now defined by the abstraction of private property.¹⁵⁶ Rose notes:

How can there be any reference to absolute ethical life in a society based on bourgeois private property, on lack of identity, on relative ethical life, where the real totality can only appear to these isolated individuals as abstract and unreal?¹⁵⁷

This passage points to an important similarity in approach with Marx, who ties the individualism of modern society to the nature of the social system based on abstract labour and individualisation of commodity exchange. Capitalist social relations entrench the 'values' of the market and encourage individuals to see worth in profitability rather than in an ethical life (irrespective of whether that ethical life is understood in Hegel's or Marx's terms). The centrality of property relations to mapping other forms of social interaction is the dimension of Hegel's political and ethical thought Rose wants to bring out.

¹⁵³ HCS, 72.

¹⁵⁴ HCS, 74.

¹⁵⁵ HCS, 78.

¹⁵⁶ HCS, 92.

¹⁵⁷ HCS, 79.

A comparison with Marx's critique of political economy is inescapable. Marx adopts from political economy the centrality of private property in the creation of capital but develops an immanent critique of the limitations of this position. Marx insists that a critique of capital is necessarily a critique of the historically specific form of *production*. Capital is a relation that arises from the production process. This allows Marx to understand property as a relation mediated by labour. He sharpens this view by an account of the dual nature of abstract and concrete labour. However, it is significant that Marx's incorporates Hegel's discussion of property into his value theory. Marx's discussion of the *Philosophy of Right* acknowledges a dimension of Hegel's thought that goes unnoticed in *HCS*. Marx develops a critique of Hegel's theory of property relations into his theory of capital production. In this way, Marx makes direct use of the *Philosophy of Right* in the construction of his theory of value. Notably in the opening pages of *Capital*, Marx references Hegel's theory of needs. Unlike animals, Hegel notes that humans share collective needs, 'dependence' which creates universality between humans since they produce new needs to satisfy and 'abstract' particular needs. Hegel suggests that the private property relations of 'civil society' adopt the particular needs of the 'bourgeois' citizen.¹⁵⁸ Marx references this passage to confirm Hegel's point, but to expand it in relation to the dual character of labour (abstract and concrete) in the production of value. Human needs are fulfilled by use-values, but the creation of such values takes place in a 'social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers; these proportions therefore appear to the producers to have been handed down by tradition create and multiply needs and "show his universality"'.¹⁵⁹ In the *Grundrisse*, Marx stresses that the character of exchange essential to capital is 'not exchange in general', i.e. not just the exchangeability of commodities on a market, but the exchange of labour capacity, which the worker sells temporarily (in the form of a working day) in exchange for 'for the quantity of substances required in order to reproduce the eternalisation of his life [*Lebensäußerung*]. The specific character of this exchange relation is the 'inherent in the nature of the concept [of capital] itself'.¹⁶⁰ Marx's discussion relates closely to the discussion of alienation in the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel writes,

I can *alienate individual* products of *my physical and mental* [*geistigen*]*skills* and active capabilities to someone else and allow him *to use them for limited period*, because,

¹⁵⁸ *PR*, §190/228.

¹⁵⁹ *Cap* 1, 135.

¹⁶⁰ *Gr.*, 293.

provided they are subject to this limitation, they acquire an external relationship to my *totality* and *universality*. By alienating the *whole* of my time, as made concrete through work, and the totality of my production, I would be making the substantial quality of the latter, i.e. my *universal* activity and actuality or my personality itself, into someone else's property.

He adds that this relation between property and labour holds the difference between 'a slave and a modern servant or hired labourer' since the *modern* character of production produces private property.¹⁶¹ To Marx, the significance of both sections of *The Philosophy of Right* is their insight to modern productive relations. Note the similarities with this passage from the *Grundrisse*:

The fact that labour is a constant new source of exchange for the worker as long as he is capable of working - meaning not exchange in general, but exchange with capital - is inherent in the nature of the concept itself, namely that he only sells a temporary disposition over his labouring capacity, hence can always begin the exchange anew as soon as he has taken in the quantity of substances required in order to reproduce the externalisation of his life [*Lebensausserung*].¹⁶²

The meaning of alienation is once present in this passage from *Capital*:

Things are in themselves external to man, and therefore alienable. In order that this alienation may be reciprocal, it is only necessary for men to agree tacitly to treat each other as the private owners of those alienable things, and, precisely for that reason, as persons who are independent of each other.¹⁶³

Marx develops the central insights of Hegel's discussion into a systematic understanding of production in terms of the exchange of labour-power as abstract labour. Marx's account of productive activity takes property relations to be a determination of alienated production, not its cause. Marx's debt to Hegel is evident but he deepens the insight by stressing the way alienated property is conditioned by a social process of alienated production.

The precise character of Marx's discussion of property in Hegel has implications for Rose's account. Her focus on private property over productive relations misses the critical core of Marx's insight in his mature critical theory and omits a discussion of Marx's adoption of Hegel's discussion of alienated property. While Rose admits that

¹⁶¹ PR, §67/97.

¹⁶² Gr., 293.

¹⁶³ Cap 1, 182.

‘Hegel had no “solution” to the contradictions of bourgeois productive and property relations’, she claims

Marx did not resolve these aporias in Hegel’s position. He inherited them and returned to a pre-Hegelian position by reading Hegel non-speculatively and by reviving the dichotomies which Hegel had sought to expose as rooted in bourgeois social relations.¹⁶⁴

Rose ignores the question of the logic of Marx’s critique of political economy. As I argue below, Marx’s approach here is speculative.¹⁶⁵ He regards value, the self-valorisation of capital, as a historical subject. Marx’s critique of capital orders the categories of modern social forms in terms of a solution to abstract labour and social domination. However, Rose focuses her critique of Marx on his early writings. In one of the most striking passages of the book, Rose presents her understanding of absolute ethical life and critique of private property relations in contradiction to Marx. She writes,

The speculative reading... developed here suggests that Marx hypostatised Hegel’s ‘concept’ of the state in a way utterly at odds with Hegel’s thinking. For Hegel, the whole aim of absolute ethical life was to eschew the domination of the *concept* of pure practical reason. Absolute ethical life is a critique of bourgeois property relations. It may be elusive, but it is never dominant or pre-judged. Minerva cannot impose herself. Her owl can only spread its wings at dusk and herald the return of Athena, freedom without domination.¹⁶⁶

In this passage, Athena embodies socialism. Absolute ethical life, as it appeared in a limited form with the Greeks, represents the possibilities for different property relations. According to Rose, this critique can only have importance if the absolute can be thought. This speculative proposition is radically at odds with the existing order, since it dissolves the dualisms in bourgeois thought and property relations. Hegel declares in the Preface of *Philosophy of Right*, that the dusk flight of Minerva marks the departure of thought at the point in which ‘philosophy paints its grey in grey’,¹⁶⁷ Rose takes this to mean,

Hegel presents here not a quiescent justification of the *status quo*, but a speculative proposition: that it is the time, after the time of art and religion, for the owl of Roman Minerva, the esoteric *concept* of philosophy, to *spread* its wings and to turn back or rather forwards into Greek Athena, the goddess of the unity

¹⁶⁴ HCS, 233.

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 6 below.

¹⁶⁶ HCS, 97.

¹⁶⁷ PR, 23.

of the *polis* and philosophy, absolute ethical life, the exoteric unity of theory and practice, of concept and intuition.¹⁶⁸

The contrast of Minerva to Athena presents the relation between the task of philosophy and that of society.¹⁶⁹ Rose demands that Hegel is not read as the bourgeois philosopher *par excellence*, but that speculative philosophy aims at absolute ethical life, the restoration of the unity between philosophy and society. If the elusive character of Hegel's thought can be severed from the characterisation of its stasis and domination, Rose brings out the most radical elements of Hegel's critique of modern society – here Athena appears as Janus-headed,¹⁷⁰ presenting both ancient political life and a post-capitalist impulse. The force of this argument has much to recommend it. Rose insists that the absolute substantiates the radical nature of Hegel's speculative philosophy:

The overall intention of Hegel's thought is to make a different ethical life possible by providing insight into the displacement of actuality in those dominant philosophies which are assimilated to and reinforce bourgeois law and bourgeois property relations. This is why Hegel's thought has no social import if the absolute cannot be thought.¹⁷¹

To push Hegel in such a direction requires an interpretation that rejects the platitudes which paint him an enthusiastic and conservative supporter of the Prussian state.¹⁷² The suggestion that Hegel's absolute thought offers the most advanced way to understand modern social relations involved Rose interpreting his system less as an exposition but as a *new reading*.¹⁷³ In this sense, her account has considerable merit in understanding the crisis of modernity.

However, Rose's Hegel also responds to a different problematic: a defective reading of Hegel in Marxism. Rose is correct to point to the poverty of the most dogmatic Marxist

¹⁶⁸ HCS, 88.

¹⁶⁹ In Marx's doctoral thesis, he describes the 'dull ending' of Greek philosophy as the 'chaining of Athena to Heracles so that she could not flee'. It is interesting to note he previously wrote 'Minerva' before amending to 'Athena', MECW 1, 34.

¹⁷⁰ There is a resemblance here to Walter Benjamin's Angelus Novus.

¹⁷¹ HCS, 223.

¹⁷² Fine, *Political Investigations*, 5-23.

¹⁷³ As Tony Gorman has commented, her anachronistic but 'ironic distortions' are calculated: 'It should be noted in this respect, that *Hegel contra Sociology* is dedicated to the 'intriguer': 'Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* describes the function of the figure of the intriguer within the *Trauerspiel*. This shadowy character dwells in the interstice between the stage and the stalls, the court and the commons, and under the cover of various masks and disguises actively plots to subvert the sovereign power. Rose is a philosophical intriguer.' 'Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism', *Radical Philosophy* 105 (2001): 28. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2003), 95, 97, 210.

accounts that perpetuate the dismissive cliché of Hegel as the uncritical champion of the existing Prussian state.¹⁷⁴ This type of understanding reduces Hegel to biographical and philosophical foil, simply a straw-man for Marx to ‘transcend’. Rose presents Hegel’s system as a critique of thought through the prism of property relations. Hegel’s performance in *HCS* mirrors Marx’s in *Capital*, charting the determinations of social relations through a historically specific series of abstractions. However, Marx’s critique of political economy is only alluded to, risking a similar straw-man Marx. Given the sophistication of her thesis, her comments on Marx are overly dismissive and lack detailed engagement. It also means, ironically, that Rose commits the opposite error to the Marxists’ straw man Hegel. In the *Dialectic of Nihilism*, she notes that ‘emphasis on the differences between Marx and Hegel’s thinking’ has ‘obscured the continuity’ of specific aspects of their thought.¹⁷⁵ However, Rose’s account in *HCS* is directly explicitly at the *differences* in their thought.

Rose bases her criticism of Marxism on the division between system and method, common to Marxist accounts of Hegel. She begins with a detailed account of what she calls neo-Kantian Marxism, sociological thought developing in response to neo-Kantianism, but beholden to its conceptual paradigm. The genealogy that focuses on the dualism of validity and values in Weber and Durkheim is extended, through Georg Simmel, to Lukács and Adorno. These two figures present Rose’s closest intellectual influences. While she has sympathy for the significance of their efforts to break from neo-Kantianism, Rose concludes that this effort was a failure. Lukács and Adorno’s neo-Kantian origins were too readily carried into their philosophical critiques of modern culture. However, their combination of a formalism inherited from Simmel and a ‘selective generalisation of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism’ resulted in a new methodolgy which was no escape from the neo-Kantian problems they were trying to avoid:

Adorno’s sociology of illusion, like Lukács’ sociology of reification, remains abstract. Both Lukács and Adorno endorsed the traditional Marxist distinction between Hegel’s conservative system and his radical ‘method’. This very distinction, however, is a conservative, neo-Kantian one, and the effect of

¹⁷⁴ To take just one example, John Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1998), 30-35.

¹⁷⁵ Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, 3.

endorsing it is that the most radical aspects of both Hegel's and Marx's thought, which follow on from Hegel's critique of the methodological mind, are lost.¹⁷⁶

For Rose, only the presuppositionless absolute can overcome Kantian formalism, which fixes concepts and severs the inner dialectical movement and relation. Even the most 'Hegelian' Marxism that seeks to escape Kant is still structurally bound to its dualist logic. What is interesting from the passage above is that it accuses Lukács and Adorno of missing the most radical elements, not just of Hegel, but also Marx; namely his value theory. Yet, an exposition of this theory is *absent* from *HCS*. Rose contains her critique of Marx to the introduction and conclusion, the bookends of the text. If not *Capital*, which she seems to accept without clarification, what is Rose's critique of Marx?

In Rose's view, Marx misread Hegel's speculative philosophy. Rose claims that Marx hypostatized Hegel's thought in his early critiques of *The Philosophy of Right*. Rose asserts 'Marx was quite wrong to accuse Hegel of deriving reality from the concept in *The Philosophy of Right*'.¹⁷⁷ She presents the dialectical structure of *The Philosophy of Right* as the experience of the will shaping the institutions that comprise the rational state. Marx suggests Hegel's presents the modern state as the subject, rather than the predicate and in doing so inverts the real relation between the state and civil society.¹⁷⁸ Rose contends that in this move Marx assigns a formal identity foreign to Hegel. However, Rose only focuses on only one aspect of the inversion. She omits the political context of Marx's texts, the polemical nature of this conjuncture (the disavowal of the Young Hegelians, his political activity) and how these factors might impact on his early critique of Hegel's dialectic.

But Rose does little to prove the problems with Marx's view, providing the same citation at both points. This assumes a great deal and provides only a literal interpretation. Rose risks taking Marx's critique at his word, rather than seeking the subaltern dynamics of his thought. Marx's texts are treated with the same polemical blister as Marx treated Hegel's. Robert Fine warns against taking Marx's polemical comments as his definitive position. He comments, 'If there is one way we should *not* read the relation between Hegel and Marx, it is through Marx's own account of it! Not only does he give us a distorted and

¹⁷⁶ *HCS*, 36.

¹⁷⁷ *HCS*, 89, 97.

¹⁷⁸ *CHDS*, 79-84.

one-sided caricature of Hegel, but also diminished view of himself.’¹⁷⁹ Fine’s own account of the early Marx is decisively influenced by Rose, but he rectifies Marx’s earlier comments with the dialectical logic of *Capital*.¹⁸⁰

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel centres his reconstruction of modern political theory in the concept of civil society outlined by English political economy. Marx’s critique of political economy adopts this insight but employs it to the overall determining structure of his societal theory. Contra the myth of the young Marx, *the entirety of Marx’s social thought* from 1843 to *Capital* is within the problematic established by the Hegelian project as expressed in the *Philosophy of Right*. Rather than comprehending this as a problem of limitation or immaturity – as the Althusserians or right-Hegelians might have – Marx’s dialogue with the *Philosophy of Right* recognises the text as a central reflection on the nature of modern social forms. The standpoint of political economy is first incorporated systematically into a theory of politics by Hegel, however critically. Yet it is up to Marx in his engagement with *Philosophy of Right* to come to terms with the fundamental character of social reality. Marx is attempting, via a dialectical logic, to do something similar to Hegel, who in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* defines philosophy as ‘its own time comprehended in thought’.¹⁸¹ Philosophical truth recognises its own historicity and becomes self-conscious, knowledge of itself as the absolute. By charting the sequence of categories that compose capital starting with value, Marx seeks to grasp the nature of modern social relations *in thought*.

In my view, *The Philosophy of Right* does dialectically develop an immanent understanding of the modern state, proceeding from the most abstract phenomena to the most concrete through a progression of logical categories. Hegel seeks to understand reality in thought and to do so requires the ordering of concepts specific to real relations. These determinations are understood in terms of a world with specifically modern features. While I agree with Rose that Marx’s polemic is unhelpful in terms of a meta-critique of Hegel’s dialectic,¹⁸² what is absent in her criticisms of Marx is the significance of his

¹⁷⁹ Fine, *Political Investigations*, 79.

¹⁸⁰ Fine was a colleague of Rose’s at Warwick and he references her influence on his reading of Hegel, see *Ibid.*, ix, 20, 148, 160.

¹⁸¹ *PR*, 21.

¹⁸² *HCS*, 52-3; see also Fine, *Political Investigations*, 61-78.

political conclusions or the limited nature of the text as a fragmentary commentary of only paragraphs §261 to §313, never intended for publication.

Marx's critique of Hegel's constitutional state and its structure addresses the issues of the monarch and the Estates system. In his view, Hegel naturalises the monarch. Even if 'all that is required in a monarch is someone to say "yes" and to dot the "I"', there is little rational about the relations of a royal lineage.¹⁸³ The Estates system mediated and unified by the universal - the bureaucracy - also obscures the class relations Hegel outlines earlier in his account of property relations in §65-§79.¹⁸⁴ Marx questions the universality Hegel attributes to the bureaucracy and suggests the standpoint of social relations cannot be understood from this false abstraction. The detail and attention given to each determination and derivation in the first sections of *The Philosophy of Right* become increasingly tenuous in the later sections of the book, the sections Marx details. There is some truth to Adorno's comment that, 'As though the dialectic had become frightened of itself, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel broke off such thoughts by abruptly absolutising one category - the state'.¹⁸⁵ This 'abrupt' moment, as I see it, the politics of the final sections of *The Philosophy of Right*, are left absent in Rose's account.

Detailed scrutiny of Rose's discussion brings out further problems. Marx himself is not directly discussed in Rose's lynchpin first chapter which outlines her critique of neo-Kantian Marxism, and save a handful of passing comments, direct discussion of Marx's work is limited to the final pages of the book. Even then, Rose quotes almost exclusively from the early texts, leaving open the question of the relationship between Marx's early and late writings to Hegel. Rose, however, sharpens her critique, *only* on the grounds of the early texts.¹⁸⁶ She asserts that Marx has a Fichtean understanding of Hegel.¹⁸⁷ For Rose, Marx's accusation of conceptual determinism in Hegel is actually a Fichtean

¹⁸³ *CHDS*, 89, 159.

¹⁸⁴ *CHDS*, 105-115. Richard Dien Winfield points to these factors in the Introduction to his translation of Joachim Ritter, *Hegel and The French Revolution* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 33-4. However, he is wrong to suggest here that Marx 'accepted the originally liberal notion that politics can never rise above particular interests'.

¹⁸⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 80.

¹⁸⁶ There is a single reference to the Introduction of the *Grundrisse*, but on his famous comments on Greek art, not on the method of political economy. *HCS*, 231.

¹⁸⁷ This characterisation has been argued recently by Tom Rockmore, 'Is Marx a Fichtean?' in *Returns of Marxism*, ed. Sara Farris (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 129-42.

dichotomy between activity and nature.¹⁸⁸ Accordingly, by rejecting the absolute standpoint, Marx reverts to pre-Hegelian dualisms structured on the antinomy of idealism and materialism. Hegel however, overcomes this antinomy by an absolute standpoint that reengages the object that the practical nature of private property relations suppresses.¹⁸⁹ Rose argues Marx revives ‘the dichotomies which Hegel had sought to expose as rooted in bourgeois social relations’.¹⁹⁰ In her view, Marx provides a false *telos* for philosophy in human practice, he imposes an unjustified ‘ought’ onto historical action and cements a division between theory and practice. Marx claims to account for actuality but rather imposes a Fichtean opposition onto *praxis*, which denies an account of subjectivity. Rose quotes from the first and forth *Theses on Feuerbach* to demonstrate Marx’s gyration of dichotomies. However, Rose does little credit to the critique of dualism in Thesis III, VIII and XI.¹⁹¹

Rose argues that Marx’s early writings, especially evident in his concept of species-being lack an adequate form of subjectivity. This in effect reduces subjects to “bearers” of economic functions, such as “capitalist” and “worker”, and the remainder of human personality is *directly* reduced to this defining function.¹⁹² Central to Rose’s critique is Marx’s distancing of himself from Hegel’s phenomenological presentation that allows the actual to be thought and re-represented.¹⁹³ Subsequent responses have seen issues in the sweeping nature of her interpretation. Peter Osborne suggests Rose uncritically adopts, without explanation, Habermas’ position in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.¹⁹⁴ Habermas’ explanation of the importance of Kantian synthesis in Marx’s materialism stresses Fichte’s influence on the social formation of labour in Marx’s 1844 writings. Habermas is critical of what he deems a ‘*reduction of the self-generative act of the human species to labour*’.¹⁹⁵ For Habermas, Marx conceives of knowledge as a materialistic synthesis. This is problematic since labour is instrumental in modern society. However, as Postone points

¹⁸⁸ HCS, 229.

¹⁸⁹ HCS, 230.

¹⁹⁰ HCS, 223.

¹⁹¹ Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ in *EW*, 422-423.

¹⁹² HCS, 231.

¹⁹³ HCS, 231.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Osborne, ‘Gillian Rose and Marxism’, 63n24. See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (London: Heinemann, 1972), 43-63.

¹⁹⁵ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 40-2.

out, Habermas transhistorically ‘grounds the growth of instrumental reason and action not socially, in a structure of labour-mediated social relations, but in labour as such’.¹⁹⁶

Rose shares Habermas’ distance from Marx’s social ontology, suggesting the concept of nature contained in ‘species-being’ is unjustified.¹⁹⁷ In this view, nature becomes the utopian end, an ideal nature which distorts a speculative account of real relations. But like Habermas, Rose fails to develop the implication of these criticisms to Marx’s critique of political economy. Instead she merely counterpoises the theory of commodity fetishism to Marx’s abstract oppositions as outlined in the *Theses on Feuerbach*.¹⁹⁸ Without developing or reconstructing either Marx’s earlier positions with any depth or his value theory, *let alone the relations between them*, Rose oversteps and exaggerates the implications of her position.

Christopher J. Arthur also points to issues in Rose’s account, offering a much closer reading of the text. Although he agrees that Marx’s argument ‘does bear traces of the presence of Fichte’, he suggests Hegel has the same usage. Arthur casts doubt on Rose’s discussion of alienation, bringing attention to the different role of the terms ‘Entäußerung’ (to externalise) and ‘Entfernung’ (to make alien) have for Hegel,¹⁹⁹ Marx and Rose. Where Marx is critical of ‘Entäußerung’ throughout the *Phenomenology*, Rose uses ‘Entfernung’ more specifically and restricts the scope ‘to a historically specific period’.²⁰⁰ Rose makes the peculiar comment that:

Marx’s use of ‘alienation’ as characteristic of capitalist society has obscured the force of Hegel’s historically-specific use of alienation to present the antinomies of revolutionary intention in pre-bourgeois societies.²⁰¹

While this may be true of the famous master/slave dialectic, the problem is not with Marx’s use of alienation but an account that fails to make sure the historically specific determination in both Hegel and Marx. Especially significant but omitted is the relation

¹⁹⁶ Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 241.

¹⁹⁷ HCS, 229.

¹⁹⁸ HCS, 233.

¹⁹⁹ See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 35-6.

²⁰⁰ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 67-8. Tony Smith assesses Arthur’s response to Rose, suggesting ‘this only establishes a terminological difference between Hegel and Marx’. Smith argues that Marx may have been ‘unfair to Hegel on the question of objectification and alienation’ that ‘both Arthur and Marx himself overlooked’, see *The Owl of Minerva*, 22:1 (1990): 108-112.

²⁰¹ HCS, 234.

between alienation and abstract labour, the *connection* between the early work and *Capital*. Marx's concept of alienation has more depth than Rose allows.

However, Rose draws Marx close to Hegel in two key ways. The first is to acknowledge the polemical nature of some of these passages, suggesting that when Marx isn't 'self-conscious about his relation to Hegel's philosophy or to Feuerbach's materialism' he is able to capture 'what Hegel means by actuality or spirit'.²⁰² The second is viewing Marx's theory of commodity fetishism as 'the most speculative moment in Marx's exposition of capital. It comes nearest to demonstrating in the historically-specific case of commodity producing society how substance is ((mis)-represented as) subject, how necessary illusion arises out of productive activity'.²⁰³ Given this suggestion, and Rose's critique of Lukács and Adorno's inability to adequately build off Marx's value theory, she risks a similar fault *on her own terms*. Rose fails to move beyond the assertion of this critique.

Fundamentally, *HCS* lacks a serious *engagement* with the logic of *Capital*.²⁰⁴ This means that not only is her discussion of Marx drawn off a very selective reading of his early texts but she fails to see the critique of political economy is developed from Marx's social ontology. Instead Rose presents Marx's work as partial. This ignores how Marx orders his critique of political economy and how he proceeds immanently from the commodity to capital, as social forms defined by value. Rather, Marx's understanding of value offers an understanding of the mode and shape of life under capitalism and how these forms are specifically defined and distorted by the character of the exchange relation.²⁰⁵ The understanding of value – as a historical form of social relations and processes – is developed by Marx over an extended engagement with Hegel and classical political economy. Marx's development of the logical categories beginning with the most general abstraction of capitalist society, the commodity, allows further concretisation of each component of social life, since no aspect of life is untouched by the logic of the

²⁰² *HCS*, 230-1.

²⁰³ *HCS*, 232.

²⁰⁴ This is in direct contrast with the brief but sharp discussion of value in *The Melancholy Science*, 59-66. Her comment that Adorno's concept of reification 'does not mobilise Marx's distinction between abstract and concrete labour, nor does it lead to any theory of the extraction of surplus labour', 61. Given her stress on these Marxist categories for her critique of Adorno, it is a major admission that *HCS* omits ignores the importance of Marx's value theory when assessing his relation with Hegel.

²⁰⁵ Rose cites Hans-Georg Backhaus' seminal essay 'On the Dialectics of the Value Form', *The Melancholy Science*, 219. However, she fails to make any specific comments on value theory or critically assess Backhaus' position. The essay is translated in *Thesis Eleven*, 1 (1980): 99-120. Murray critically replies to the essay while noting the importance of Backhaus' contribution to value-form analysis which emphasises the *critique* of Ricardo's (and the neo-Ricardian) labour theory of value, *Mismeasure of Wealth*, 229-38.

commodity. Marx constructs a theory of capital that seeks to understand its form and relation in modern society. By treating *Capital*, not as economic theory, but as a critique of economic thought itself, Marx's theory of value can be understood as an immanent critique of the economic categories specific to capitalism rather than a reduction of all life to economics.

Contra Rose, the value-form provides the logic of Marx's critique in *Capital*, only when seen alongside the conception of social ontology contained in his concept of labour. Rose's critique of Marx is seriously limited as it lacks an account of the concept of capital or an examination of its relation to speculative thought. However great Hegel's understanding of the progression of thought and composition of the modern state, it is Marx who provides an account of the being of capital. Without this, Hegel's absolute thought finds little application. Only when Hegel's logic can be read with Marx's concept of capital can the speculative character of Marx's thought be gauged.²⁰⁶ The perfunctory character of the critique of Marx in *HCS* leaves the book without a sense of on what terms Marx's thought is actually to be comprehended. Rose provides the reader with a sophisticated account of Hegel's speculative thought, which relies in part upon Marx's critique of political economy, but fails to offer any depth in her treatment of Marx himself.

Part 3

The similarity of approach advanced in both works confirms important features of modernity. *AV* and *HCS* identify the crisis of contemporary thought in a historically constituted moral framework that in its fundamental form is Kantian.²⁰⁷ Kant's dualism rigidly dislocates concepts and modes of being into antinomies, like those of thought and reality, fact and value, theory and practice. These one-sided relations restrict thought to partial aspects and prevent the comprehension of each moment in a greater dialectical whole. To overcome dualist thinking is to allow a reconciliation with reality and an objective standpoint for reason. MacIntyre and Rose see dualism as socially produced and embedded in modern society. A critique of modern thought necessitates a critique of

²⁰⁶ Rose critiques Derrida for forgetting that 'Marx's account of commodity fetishism depends' on Hegel's *Logic, Mourning Becomes the Law*, 67. See also, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, 166.

²⁰⁷ See also their respective comments on contemporary philosophy. MacIntyre, 'On Having Survived the Academic Moral Philosophy of the Twentieth Century'; Rose, *Love's Work*, 130.

modern society. Politics becomes crucial to an understanding of the limitations of ethical life restricted by the institutions and property relations of capitalist modernity. Both authors understand Athenian political life as a reflection of ethical life, now lost but in need of recovery, albeit transformed and reconfigured in the present. The penultimate sentence of *AV*, notes ‘the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time’.²⁰⁸ The absence of morality from the modern world has made the poverty of modern culture oblique. Here Rose agrees,

We are left with the realisation of the barbarism of our abstract culture, of how we have reproduced that barbarism by denying the ethical, by fixing (positing, *setzen*) the illusion that we are absolute or pure consciousness in our moral law or in the law of our hearts.²⁰⁹

The loss of ethical life, for Rose, as for MacIntyre is barbarism, which is already governing the logic of modern culture. The role and function of Marxism determines both accounts of this barbarism.

What becomes clear from reading MacIntyre *with* Rose is the desire to conceptualise politics in terms of a social theory of ethical life that rejects the individual as the protagonist of positivistic social science and demands the return of a collective rationality. Dualist modes of thinking – radical or otherwise – are equally unable to bypass the status quo. For this reason, both theorists call for a serious revaluation of the resources of critical thought. Here the tensions between MacIntyre and Rose and the required resources for critique – ancient and modern – come out distinctly.²¹⁰

One such tension arises from their attempt to critique the perspective of modernity from Aristotle or from Hegel respectively: from *the* thinker of pre-modernity (upheld in medieval science and by the schoolmen) as compared to Hegel as *the* thinker of the French Revolution. While it is clear that MacIntyre’s Aristotle is one informed by the

²⁰⁸ *AV*, 263. MacIntyre is making reference to the poem ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’ by C.P. Cavafy. See *The Collected Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15-17.

²⁰⁹ *HCS*, 192.

²¹⁰ I leave aside the very interesting question of Nietzsche. Chapter 9 of *AV* is titled, ‘Nietzsche or Aristotle’ and sees Nietzsche as the most serious critic of the Enlightenment, however ‘illegitimately generalised from the condition of moral judgment in his own day to the nature of morality as such’, *AV*, 113. While *HCS* only has passing references to Adorno’s Nietzsche (35-6), in prefacing the second 1995 edition, shortly before her death, Rose puts that she seeks in a ‘nonfoundational and radical Hegel’ the overcoming of ‘the opposition between nihilism and rationalism’. *HCS*, viii. She also rejects MacIntyre’s reading of Nietzsche in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 140. Here her inclusion of Weber as a figure to ‘renew the classical tradition of ethics for the modern world’ is a departure from her critical assessment in *HCS*.

political realities of the modern age – for instance, he disassociates himself from Aristotle’s view of slavery, women, foreigners – he sees the basis for the foundation of an ethical reality in a lost Aristotelian community. Rose rejects the community as an adequate foundation for politics, which points to real limitations in MacIntyre’s politics. Commenting on communitarianism in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, she writes:

Politics begins not when you organise to defend an individual or particular or local interest, but when you organise to further the ‘general’ interest within which your particular interest may be represented.²¹¹

There is a deficiency in MacIntyre’s politics between the particular and universal. How can moral reasoning develop to a point of a challenge to the political status quo without a wider universalisation of political direction? How can the particular struggle transform into a politics of the city as the universal, the *polis*. Considering MacIntyre’s critique of Marxism’s inability to confront the state, it could be argued that he becomes a victim of his own critique, and that the pessimism of his assessment of Marxism reduces his own vision of an emancipatory politics.²¹² Given that MacIntyre and Rose reject Marx’s social thought as inadequate in its critique of capitalism and its optimistic promise to offer a rational and ethical life, the obvious question that arises from their work is what is to be done for those committed to a conception of emancipatory politics?

Both thinkers identify Marxism itself as the necessary point of departure. The concluding critique of Marxism in *AV* is a categorical attempt to go beyond Marxism and rethink a critique of the present without the individualist baggage. On the other hand, Rose sees the significance of her project as thinking past Marxism’s internal barriers. As she declares at the end of her book, ‘This critique of Marxism itself yields the project of a critical Marxism.’²¹³ For the Rose of *HCS*,²¹⁴ the political implication of her critical Marxism are rather more conventional than her analysis:

²¹¹ Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 4.

²¹² This position does not see MacIntyre as an anti-modernist as has been suggested by some, e.g. Timothy Hall, ‘Justice and the Good Life in Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), 122. Rather, MacIntyre’s moral philosophy relies on a modern political and sociological analysis. *AV*, 23.

²¹³ *HCS*, 235.

²¹⁴ Gorman argues that Rose’s latter work is ‘no longer predicated upon a politics of revolutionary transformation’ and gives up the project of critical Marxism, ‘Gillian Rose’, 31-6. While this emphasise shapes the form of critique of her later works, Osborne insightfully highlights Rose’s fleeting attitude to Marx in *Judaism and Modernity* and *Mourning Becomes the Law*, ‘Gillian Rose and Marxism’, 55-67.

To expound capitalism as a culture is thus not to abandon the classical Marxist interests in political economy and in revolutionary practice. On the contrary, a presentation of the contradictory relations between Capital and culture is the only way to link the analysis of the economy to comprehension of the conditions for revolutionary practice.

Contra MacIntyre, Rose does not categorically reject Marxism but sees the need to probe Marx's thought and its relation to Hegel to establish a critical theory that can offer emancipatory potential. Rose's demonstration of the depth of Hegel's thought shouldn't be seen as an 'abstract' and vague political gesture, but instead a serious investigation of his critique of the dualism of modern thought. She acts to reinstate Hegel when so much contemporary Marxist thought ignores Marx's warning and treats Hegel as 'a dead dog'.²¹⁵ MacIntyre's efforts to point to the prevalence of similar dualism and in this way must be understood as sharing a similarly radical project. For MacIntyre and for Rose, to see the world radically is to see the need to understand and overcome dualism. For philosophy to become worldly, reason must make its appearance in thought and in action. Without this unity, thought and action remain empty postulations. Rose sharpens this point: 'Reason, the critical criterion is for ever without ground'.²¹⁶ From MacIntyre's virtue to Rose's absolute and the limitations of their interpretations of Marx, the necessary task for a reconstruction of Marx's philosophical inheritance is a critical sublation of Aristotle and Hegel in the concept of capital. The next chapter details this beginning.

²¹⁵ *Cap* 1, 102.

²¹⁶ Rose, *Love's Work*, 128.

| *Part II*

| 3. *Shapes of Ethical Life: Ancient & Modern*

The conceptions of ethical life advanced by MacIntyre and Rose are founded in the traditions of rational inquiry that originate in Aristotle and Hegel and then branch out in different directions. As has already been intimated, however, I take the view that Aristotle, Hegel and Marx should not be seen as belonging to rival traditions,¹ but as thinkers that compliment and conceptually reinforce one another by *sharing* a tradition of rational social theory. Against convention, I discuss these thinkers as part of a shared tradition, in a similar manner to what MacIntyre calls ‘tradition-constituted enquiry’.² At the centre of this shared tradition is the conceptualisation of ethical life. According to this view, Hegel and Marx’s social theories both respond to Aristotle’s framing of ethics as ‘what constitutes a good life, and how it is to be attained’.³ The central purpose of this chapter is to trace the critical incorporation of Aristotelian insights into Hegel’s speculative philosophy.

The ethical tradition I seek to outline in this chapter is one in which Aristotle is absorbed or critically integrated into Hegel. This intellectual and conceptual relationship sets the scene for understanding Marx’s social and political thought. In his social ontology and value theory, Marx’s concept of sociality upholds and develops the rationality of these particular traditions, expressing a concept of ethical life which shares similar motivations to Aristotle and Hegel. To argue in this way is to suggest that Aristotle and Hegel are preserved moments in Marx’s social thought.

However, far from seeking to dissolve the insights of Aristotle and Hegel into Marx, my argument presents his critique of modernity as their fullest realisation. As independent moments, Aristotle and Hegel are unable to fully grasp modernity. In Aristotle, human will remains unthought, since for him some unfreedom is natural.⁴ In Hegel, it is the domination of capital that remains unthought, since for him civil society is a necessary condition of freedom. Marx overcomes these limitations, obtaining from both thinkers

¹ Although rival traditions do take their name from these thinkers.

² MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 8-9. I agree with Nicholas’ use of this approach which he combines with insights from the Frankfurt School. He calls this ‘substantive reason’, see *Reason, Tradition and the Good*, 7-8, 118, 122, *passim*.

³ EE 1214a13.

⁴ See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

the resources needed to undertake a critique of modernity from the standpoint of ethical life.

By introducing Aristotle's presence, the relationship between Hegel and Marx is made more interesting, not by the common narrative typographies of progression – 'Marx the Young Hegelian', 'Marx the Revolutionary', 'Marx the Economist' – but by an inquiry into the intertwining influences that are bound up conceptually in Marx's social thought. This conceptual rather than linear genealogy adds more depth to an already well discussed relationship. What is often missed in treatments of the Hegel-Marx relation is how both their attempts to understand modernity is impacted by the presence of Aristotle. In the construction of their immanent modes of critique, Hegel and Marx reach back to Aristotle's teleological conception of ethics. Aristotle's mode of thinking of the relation between politics and ethics is enhanced and continued in Hegel and Marx. Yet neither Marx nor Hegel's engagement with Aristotle is an ahistorical 'return'. On the contrary, it is an integration of his conceptual thought in relation to the attempt to comprehend the present and its contradictions. For Hegel and Marx, Aristotle's relevance lies in the thinking of political and ethical inquiry as socially constituted. This thread allows a normative conception of ethics and refuses the idea of morality as confined to the private world of the modern individual.

The shared mode of thinking about ethical life common to Aristotle, Hegel and Marx, conceives of ethics as part of a larger architectonic. The good is not located in individual will but in a richer conception of ethics which realises the good in socially ordered reasoning. The contours of this shared mode of ethical reasoning have their conceptual genesis in the complex relation between Hegel and Aristotle. I argue that Aristotle's metaphysics are dialectically incorporated into Hegel's social thought, finding their final form in his concept of absolute ethical life.⁵ Undertaking a genealogy of these dialectical concepts, allows us to obtain a clearer basis for a discussion of Marx's confrontation with individualist ontologies (which is the focus of the following chapter). Marx's social ontology mobilises a concept of essence developed from Aristotle and Hegel. Here

⁵ Recent Anglo-American scholarship has focused on Aristotle's presence in Hegel's social thought, as well as his system as a whole. See Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism*; James Kreines, *Reason in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019).

essence denotes the nature and function of social forms and relations in their totality. Marx's emphasis on the social totality directly follows Hegel.

Hegel's thought concerns the concrete totality, which he calls the idea or *the absolute*. This totality is derived systemically, through the unfolding of its determinations, which unfolds itself in itself as a whole, through its own internal movement. Absolute thought is Hegel's attempt to overcome Kant's antimony between theoretical and practical reason. His claim is that there is an internal relation between these forms of reasoning and in this way, Hegel's absolute is not a metaphysical extra but what makes his theoretical and social thought coherent. Hegel's absolute unifies theoretical reason (the finite and infinite) and practical reason (morality and legality) in *ethical life*. The experience of consciousness moving through its own contradictions and concretisation expresses the possibility of self-consciousness to become realised and free in ethical life. The shape of ethical life, for Hegel, is the living identity of individuality, particularity and universality. In this way, Hegel's *Logic* and his *realphilosophie*, his political writings, are both motivated by the concept of ethical life. According to Rose,

The *Logic* presupposes that the opposition between a finite consciousness and its objects has been overcome. The experience of philosophical consciousness in the *Logic* is to *rediscover* the unity of theoretical and moral reason and natural, finite consciousness through the contradictions of the history of philosophy. The *Logic* culminates in the notion of *absolute Sittlichkeit* [ethical life] which is reached in the two sections of the penultimate chapter, 'The Idea of the True', and 'The Idea of the Good'.⁶

If Hegel's *Logic* navigates the contradictions between theoretical and practical reason in the history of philosophy, his political writings chart the internal logic of modern social forms. The *Logic* in its last (and authoritative) book is concerned to articulate the syllogistic structure of objectivity, i.e. that individuals are determined by their own immanent universals, or substance-kinds. The *Logic* ends with an Aristotelian account of concrete universality a condition of the coherent thinkability of *anything at all*. The *realphilosophie* then attempts to present concrete universality as is proper for modern social life, which entails at its opening a critique of individuality as such, as incapable of grounding on its own norms for collective life.⁷ Hegel's political thought provides the

⁶ *HSC*, 50. See, *SL*, 12:231-5.

⁷ Recent accounts of Hegel's concept of ethical life bring out the normative dimensions of this concept. For Pippin, 'conceptual or normative content can be understood only by understanding actual historical

social determinations necessary for ethical life to be actual *and* to be thought in the world.

The synthesis advanced in his *realphilosophie*, stretching from Hegel's early writings on natural law to the mature *The Philosophy of Right*, is the incorporation a critique of the modern antinomies of social relations, especially those found in civil society, and the conception of the good life found in Aristotle. Aristotle informs the metaphysical components of Hegel's speculative logic, particularly in the *Logic* where the categories of thought-forms progress by the inner development, negation and sublation of their being and becoming. Hegel's philosophy aims to overcome the Kantian antimony between theoretical and practical reasoning. In Hegel's systematic philosophy, it is the investigation of thought itself (understood as absolute knowledge) that informs the objective realm of human affairs in the categories of 'ethical life'. Partially, Hegel's debt to Aristotle is demonstrated in his response to Kant's moral philosophy, where Hegel conceives of the content of ethical life as one that allows rational self-understanding mediated socially between the collective good and the subjective will. His critique of Kant turns on the idea that an account of the rational and autonomous individual cannot be understood in narrowly formal terms, as the intention of following a moral law. For Hegel, as for Aristotle, ethics pertains to the realisation of happiness (*eudaimonia*) in the shared life of a rationally organised society.⁸ On his reckoning, individuality only becomes coherent in a concrete relation to the universal, where rationality is socially understood.

I argue that Hegel's thought centres on the concept of ethical life. This problematic requires an understanding of his departure point for assessing his adaptation of Aristotle and the further adaptation of Hegel by Marx. Hegel's philosophy is itself teleological, with progressively determinate shapes of self-consciousness developing and bearing upon world-spirit as reason. His 'teleology of consciousness', according to Raymond Plant, necessitates a 'process totally immanent within both natural and social

and social practices of claim-making and action justification', *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 236-7. See also, Mark Alznauer, *Hegel's Theory of Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 110-1, 178-183.

⁸ What 'rationally organised' means for Hegel is far more open than the final sections of *The Philosophy of Right* allow for. Marx's early critique of Hegel is right in the sense that the capitalist state cannot be rational, but this does not mean that Hegel endorses the reality of this domination as a form of rationality. Rather, the point of disagreement is the conditions which allow for rationality and freedom.

development'.⁹ In my view, Marx operates in this tradition of ethical inquiry, deepening the insights provided by Aristotle and Hegel with a conception of social relations derived from his social ontology and value-form theory. The conception of essence and teleology that is developed in Aristotle and Hegel is critically adopted in Marx's social thought and finds its expression in his speculative understanding of modern social forms. Marx's thinking of relation and form is derived from the interdependence of ethics and politics as elaborated by Aristotle and Hegel. Since Aristotle understands ethical life to be a component of political inquiry, ethics cannot be simply postulated as moral laws or principles but must be possessed and exercised as politics.¹⁰ Likewise Hegel's ethical life comprises of the rational ordering of society. Ethics and politics are sublated in the self-conscious shape of absolute *ethical life*. In following this tradition, Marx incorporates the integral relation between both spheres in his understanding of modern social forms. Marx's theoretical mapping of social forms offers an analysis of politics that sublates ethics within the specific nature of his social theory. Marx's political theory preserves this sense of ethics. Therefore, the concept of ethical life gives definition to this moment in Marx's thought and clarifies a crucial element of his immanent and normative social theory. The ethical dimension of Marx's critique of political economy takes shape from the tradition shared with Aristotle and Hegel.

Hegel's concept of ethical life involves an explicit and important critique of Kant's moral philosophy. This criticism hinges on the strong distinction between 'morality' (*Moralität*) in Kant's philosophy and 'absolute ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*). Hegel's normative orientation leads him to construe ethics in terms of collective forms of recognition shared between rational actors.¹¹ This conception of ethics constitutes a rejection of both Kant's characterisation of moral action as a categorical 'ought' and the empiricism of Hume's moral 'is'. In his critique of both dualist positions, which rest upon a division between 'is' and 'ought', Hegel's ethical theory provides a normative conception that looks beyond individual action to socially constituted rational activity. Marx's adoption of this understanding is embedded in the ethical dimension of his thought. The shapes of ethical

⁹ Raymond Plant, *Hegel* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 131.

¹⁰ *NE*, 1179b2-4.

¹¹ There is no need to agree with Alex Honneth's recent version of recognition. Honneth leaves open the institutions of contemporary society as spaces for freedom, see *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 72-80. Rose takes a different view, which sees today's world as one defined by the *misrecognition* that 'arises out of the contradiction of bourgeois private property', *HCS*, 78. Following Rose, recognition can be understood as the universality of ethical life. This view demands the institutions of contemporary society be fundamentally and qualitatively altered.

life found in Aristotle and Hegel provide a philosophical tradition within which Marx must be firmly located.

I construct a distinctive concept of ethical life from these thinkers. Ethics, in this view, concerns the conditions of social life which allow for rationality to be exercised in and through relations of transparent and mutual recognition. Ethics provides the conditions which allow for normative actions to be decided in such a way as to cultivate shared capabilities, commitments and potentials. The identity of freedom with a transparent sociality necessitates understanding the inter-relationship between ethics and politics. The concept of ethical life, as constructed from Aristotle, Hegel and Marx, provides the necessary resources for a thick normative account which locates politics and ethics as component parts of a larger architectonic.

The upshot of this analysis is to suggest that reason is exercised in terms of a critical self-consciousness; the being-and-becoming of actualisation of one's own historical conditions of existence. This process seeks the unity of the individual and the particular and with the universal. The interdependence of each becomes validated and expressed as a totality in self-conscious social life. This freedom expresses the unity of self in otherness, '*I* that is *We*, and *We* that is *I*'.¹² This shape of social life as rational self-understanding is then comprehensible as a world of our own making. The normative importance of this conception allows for ethics to be seen as that which pertains to the whole context of human life. Ethics is not relegated to a separate realm of private experience but located as part of the fabric of social life which is conditioned and exercised in conjunction with political action.

Part 1 of this chapter sets out the early Aristotelian and Hegelian influences and themes within Marx's initial intellectual development. This part sets the background for the detailed exposition of Hegel and Aristotle in the following sections of the chapter. In Part 2, I introduce Hegel's confrontation of modernity in the philosophical project of comprehending what is real and what is modern in thought. Part 3 investigates the basis of Hegel's critique of Kant and his recasting of Aristotle's metaphysics in the *Logic*. In Part 4, in an effort to relate the metaphysical and normative components, I provide an account of Hegel's ethical thought, drawing out the Aristotelian character of the holism

¹² *PbG*, ¶177/76.

which shapes his account of ethical life. Here I argue that the immanent and rational inquiry of ethical life must involve a critique of social relations. This inquiry finds its modern iteration in Hegel.

Part 1

Marx's thought is born from two conjunctures. First, the dual crisis of the French and Industrial revolutions that propelled Europe into the new epoch of capitalist social relations and forced thought to make its own revolution:¹³ the pressing task faced by philosophy to comprehend and confront modernity. Second, the particular character of the intellectual and social movements that emerged from these crises – the movement from the advance of Enlightenment to a critique of its rationality and its social foundations. In this way, Marx has clear origins, situated acutely between Hegel's philosophical modernism and the historical genesis and theoretical birth of the workers movement.¹⁴ However, with a historical perspective in mind, mapping his intellectual development requires careful excavation, since as Goldmann points out:

the influence of one thinker upon another does not date from the first reading, nor even from the first borrowing of a few expressions, but only from the time when the ideas of the first become obstacles or essential contributions to the thought of the second.¹⁵

Marx's engagement with Hegel's modernism provides a turning point, which appreciates and radicalises his thought as an expression of the world after the French Revolution. From Hegel, Marx inherits not just the methodological concerns of dialectical thought but with it, the problems of post-Kantian German Idealism. Most importantly, the relation between thought/being, essence/appearance and subject/object. This interpretation places Marx in dialogue with, and contributing to, a historical set of

¹³ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London: Abacus, 1977), 42-100.

¹⁴ Consider the recognition of this position in Marx's comment in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, "Thus, to the German philosophers of the Eighteenth Century, the demands of the first French Revolution were nothing more than the demands of 'Practical Reason' in general, and the utterance of the will of the revolutionary French bourgeoisie signified in their eyes the laws of pure Will, of Will as it was bound to be, of true human Will generally.", *MECW* 6, 510.

¹⁵ Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 103. In a similar view, Alfredo Ferrarin points out that the influence of one author on the next is not a simple matter of cause and effect, rather 'A given author cannot influence me unless I let him or her speak to me, unless I have made myself recipient to his or her message. But even if and when I do, whatever I assimilate is transformed within the preexisting framework of my thought.' *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13.

philosophical problems not yet resolved. In this way, Marx has a rightful place in contemporary debates about post-Kantian philosophy and advanced modernity.¹⁶

Marx's intellectual development is located specifically in the legacy of German Idealism.¹⁷ Recognition of the obstacles of the post-Kantian paradigm are evident in his 1837 letter to his father. This letter marks the relinquishment of his early career ambitions in law and poetry and his abandonment of the idealism that had accompanied his early romantic poetry.¹⁸ Here Marx is explicit about his conversion to Hegelianism,

While I was ill I got to know Hegel from beginning to end, together with most of his disciples... I became ever more firmly bound to the modern world philosophy from which I had thought to escape, but all rich chords were silenced and I was seized with a veritable fury of irony, as could easily happen after so much had been negated...I could not rest until I had acquired modernity and the outlook of contemporary science.¹⁹

His embrace of the modernity of Hegel's science (*Wissenschaft*) registers his life-long engagement with Hegel's philosophy, but also, significantly, a movement away from dualist idealist thought which he associates with the philosophy of Kant and Fichte.²⁰ Marx writes,

A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies was rent asunder, and new gods had to be installed. From the idealism which, by the way, I had compared and nourished with the idealism of Kant and Fichte, I arrived at the point of seeking the idea in reality itself. If previously the gods had dwelt above the earth, now they became its centre. I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to me. Once more I wanted to dive into the sea, but with the definite intention of establishing that the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body. My aim was no longer to practice tricks of swordsmanship, but to bring genuine pearls into the light of day.²¹

¹⁶ See McIvor, 'Marx's Philosophical Modernism: Post-Kantian Foundations of Historical Materialism' in *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, 36-54.

¹⁷ This point has much wider implications than just a biographical background but informs Marx's theoretical project as a whole.

¹⁸ See Michael Lazarus, 'Marx at 200: Reflections on His Life and Work', *Marxist Left Review*, 15 (2018): 123-6. Michael Heinrich makes a convincing argument that Marx does not abandon his poetry for the usually assumed reason of a lack of talent, but rather for philosophical reasons related to a Hegelian critique of Romanticism, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019), 184-96.

¹⁹ *MECW* 1, 19.

²⁰ In his later life Marx kept a portrait of Hegel. See Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, thanking him for this gift, 13 July 1867, *MECW* 42, 395.

²¹ *MECW* 1, 18.

Marx's association of the Hegelian position with the deduction of the idea *from* reality allows a political reflection on the tasks of critical thought that refuses dualistic conceptions. Rather than conditioned distinctly, the presence of the idea in reality itself binds philosophical reflection to social and political forms. This interpretation of Hegel pushes at an ambiguity between radical and conservative readings. In this view, the emphasis is on the social and political conditioning of thought. The right-Hegelians pushed on a different direction (most present in *The Philosophy of History*), that history had already reached rationality and as such freed thought to think itself.

The above passage points to an awareness of the political and philosophical implications of the contest between the Kantian and Hegelian positions. To locate the idea in reality, allows the concept to mediate between the 'ought' in the 'is'. This position rejects the rigid distinction he associates with Kantian and Fichtean antinomies.²² While Marx is writing at a point of relative immaturity, the insight that emerges from this letter is the importance of the Hegelian concept mediating between different thought-determinations. As Marx makes explicit, 'The concept is indeed the mediating link between form and content'.²³

Marx's engagement with Hegel's philosophy, in connection with the Young Hegelians, has often meant that his work before the mid-1840s has been seen to be Young Hegelian in character. Accordingly, it is common for biographical treatments of Marx to treat his 1841 doctoral thesis more or less as a Young Hegelian exercise.²⁴ These types of categorisations serve more as a narrative function rather than an illumination of the themes Marx is considering in his doctoral thesis within the broader post-Hegelian intellectual milieu. Contrary to what is often assumed, Marx was always critically independent of the Young Hegelians. Not only did the post-Hegelian schools fragment before his 1837 embrace of Hegel, Marx always maintained a distance from the Young

²² Patrick Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 9-10.

²³ *MECW* 1, 14.

²⁴ See the cursory treatment in Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 79. McLellan claims 'Marx was not a direct disciple of Hegel, his knowledge of Hegel's doctrines was always acquired through, or accompanied by, the commentaries of his disciples', *Marx Before Marxism* (London: Penguin, 1970), 75. Here McLellan directly conflates Marx's reading of Hegel with that of the Young Hegelians. It is misleading to present their understandings of Hegel as unanimous, especially considering Marx's claim that he read Hegel 'from beginning to end'. See the brief discussion in Sven-Eric Liedman, *A World to Win* (London: Verso, 2018), 68-74.

Hegelian critique of Hegel.²⁵ These differences are evident in Marx's thesis, 'The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature'.²⁶ Although Marx has sympathy for the Young Hegelian critique of religion,²⁷ his comments on the relationship of philosophy to its 'intellectual carriers' assesses the Young Hegelians (which he terms the 'liberal party') next to the Old Hegelians (termed as 'positive philosophy'). Marx is certainly favourable to the Young Hegelians, but he describes their responses to Hegel as 'duality' as part of a 'double trend, each side utterly opposed to each other'. The Young Hegelians adopt social critique to make the world philosophical, turning *out* to the world; whereas the Old Hegelians 'know that the inadequacy is immanent in philosophy' and turn philosophy inwards. Marx sees a need to relate the post-Hegelian schools as heirs to 'the particular historical moments' of their development.²⁸

For Marx, the corollaries between post-Aristotelian and post-Hegelian philosophy identify a turning point in the direction of philosophy. Marx sees the conjuncture in philosophy *after* Hegel in the same world historic terms as the period following Aristotle. Marx is cognisant, not just of the contested legacy of Hegel, but of the impossibility of positing Hegel's philosophy as a closed mode of thought. While he appreciates that the great German idealist 'has on the whole correctly defined the general aspects' of the history of Greek philosophy, Hegel had, on his view, failed to offer a comprehensive account of the detailed features of the systems of Greek thought and its relation to the history of Greek philosophy.²⁹ Marx appreciates the influence of Greek thought on Hegel himself, but finds the decline of the Greek systems of thought and Hegel's to be alike. According to Marx, Greek philosophy 'reached its zenith in Aristotle' but 'the death of the hero resembles the setting of the sun'.³⁰ To write after Hegel demands the

²⁵ See Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, trans. G.M Goshgarain (London: Verso, 2003), 236-239.

²⁶ McLellan claims Marx's choice this subject is typically Young Hegelian, *Marx Before Marxism*, 75-78.

²⁷ *MECW* 1, 103-5.

²⁸ *MECW* 1, 85-6.

²⁹ *MECW* 1, 29-30.

³⁰ *MECW* 1, 35.

situating thought in the reality of the historical present.³¹ However, the dissertation tasked the ancients with helping to problematise modern philosophy.³²

Studying the philosophy of nature in Democritus and Epicurus allows Marx to examine the ‘riddle’ posed by the manner in which both philosophers ‘teach exactly the same science, in exactly the same way’ but inconsistently ‘stand diametrically opposed’.³³ For Democritus the atom contains the objective and empirical expression of nature, whereas for Epicurus, atoms are expressions of self-consciousness which, *contra* Democritus, are active and dissolve in ‘conscious opposition to the universal’.³⁴ Marx is concerned how their theories of atomism relate to the antimonies between thought/reality, phenomenon/truth, form/content, change/necessity, appearance/essence.³⁵ These antimonies are enduring problems of post-Kantian philosophy and in looking at ancient discussions of nature, Marx is commenting on the ‘urge’ for philosophy to realise itself in the world. He writes,

the *practice* of philosophy is itself *theoretical*. It is the *critique* that measures the individual existence by the essence, the particular reality by the Idea. But this *immediate realisation* of philosophy is in its deepest essence afflicted with contradictions, and thus its essence takes form in the appearance and imprints its seal upon it.³⁶

To make philosophy practical, critique must seek to clarify the individual and particular through the universal as essence. Appearance must be integrated through an understanding of essence, which allows its contradictions to be exposed and put to critique. Marx’s concern that the distance between philosophy and politics, expressed in the Kantian dualism between practical and theoretical critique, is apparent in the contradictions with the essence/appearance relation. The antinomy of essence and appearance has direct correlation with the contradiction between theory and practice, which Marx voices in political terms as ‘critique’. His political reality, the consolidation of

³¹ There is an important parallel here with Hegel’s view that even if the philosophies of the ancients are alive in philosophy, their thought cannot be ‘revived’ in the sense ‘there can be no Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, or Epicureans to-day’, *LHP* 1, 46.

³² Roberto Finelli argues this was the ‘most profound reason’ for his dissertation choice, *A Failed Parricide*, trans. Peter D. Thomas and Nicola Iannelli Popham (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017), 20. Finelli’s discussion of the dissertation is unrivalled in the secondary literature, 14-78.

³³ *MECW* 1, 38.

³⁴ *MECW* 1, 73.

³⁵ *MECW* 1, 38, 43, 61, 64.

³⁶ *MECW* 1, 85.

the Prussian state in part exaggerated the existing crisis of German Idealism, now faced with the ruins of Hegel's system after his death. In this sense, there was a double crisis, the need for philosophical assessment of the politics of Prussia and the direction this philosophical assessment might go after the breakdown of Hegel's system. Marx's assessment of Greek atomism is an attempt to work out the relation of systematic thought to its post breakdown legacy. This concern is not abandoned with his turn to journalism in 1841 but expresses his view that political analysis was increasingly necessary.³⁷ This turn has attracted considerable biographic interest,³⁸ however my focus is how his early assessment of the breakdown of Hegel's philosophy utilised resources that would come to be important for Marx as he develops his own distinctive philosophy.

The early influence of Aristotle is of particular note. In his dissertation, Marx frequently follows Aristotle's commentary.³⁹ He draws extensively on Aristotle's work and produced an early annotated translation of *De Anima*.⁴⁰ Marx describes the Aristotelian teleological structure of 'birth, flowering and decline' as 'commonplace', as both an 'iron circle in which everything human is enclosed' and a 'very vague' notion, not sufficient in itself for understanding. Marx makes the comment, 'Decay itself is prefigured in the living; its shape should therefore be just as much grasped in its specific characteristic as the shape of life'.⁴¹ Marx is looking to push Aristotelian insights into the post-Hegelian context. In particular, Aristotelian teleology is applicable in the social world. His methodological comment suggests that forms requires specific content. Echoing the language of both

³⁷ See the articles collected in *MECW* 1, 109-375. Andrew Chitty demonstrates how Marx's early journalist work retains the influence of Hegel's concept of the state in terms of 'life' and 'life-processes'. In emphasising political action (freedom of the press, etc.), Marx's idea of the popular will 'expresses and demands the institutionalisation of the freedom, reason, and equality realised in the people's spirit'. Further, Chitty argues that the development of freedom as 'life-processes' in the *EPM* and *German Ideology* is underpinned by the Hegelian idea of freedom as provided in social and political intuitions. 'The Basis of the State in the Marx of 1842' in *The New Hegelians*, ed. Douglas Moggach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233, 237, 240-1.

³⁸ For example, Liedman, *A World to Win*, 78-88.

³⁹ For a classic statement of Marx's as a 'Classical scholar' see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 23-25. David McLellan also notes that Marx considered Aristotle to be a dialectical thinker, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (London: Paladin, 1976), 39.

⁴⁰ Marx cites in the dissertation and notes collected in *MECW* 1, *De Anima*, *On the Heavens*, *Generation of Animals*, *On Generation and Corruption*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *On Dreams and Rhetoric*. Hegel had also translated parts of *De Anima* in 1805, see Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 6. It is noteworthy that Hegel read Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* comparably early in Germany, see Manfred Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution*, trans. Walter Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9n10.

⁴¹ *MECW* 1, 35.

Hegel and Aristotle, Marx's discussion of the *shapes* of life denotes that forms or essences are always related to their content.

The young Marx's investigation of Aristotle and Hegel's natural philosophy indicates his concern to locate the relation between philosophy and reality in terms of the present shape of human life.⁴² In this way, there is evidence of strong points of continuation from this work to his mature social theory. This is not to derive programmatic Marxist slogans from his earliest comments,⁴³ but to offer a sense of his earliest influences and points of development as *essential contributions*.

Part 2

Hegel's philosophy demands a comprehension of the present in thought.⁴⁴ This philosophical task requires a historically situated standpoint. To Hegel, the history of philosophy itself yields a philosophy of history.⁴⁵ Hence his own departure point is distinctly modern: to think the consequences of the French Revolution. As he writes in the Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,

it is not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and of transition to a new period. Spirit has broken with the previous world of its life and ideas, and is on the point of submerging it in the past; it is at work on its own transformation. Indeed, spirit is never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth,—a qualitative leap,—and now the child is born, so the spirit that cultivates itself matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous **world**, whose instability is indicated only by isolated symptoms; the frivolity and boredom which infest the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, are the heralds of approaching change. This gradual crumbling that did not alter

⁴² Marx's notes on Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* are collected in *MECW* 1, 510-514.

⁴³ Franz Mehring makes such an exaggeration in discussing the following passage from Marx's 1835 school essay, 'Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession', 'But we cannot always attain the position to which we believe we are called; our relations in society have to some extent already begun to be established before we are in a position to determine them'. (*MECW* 1, 4). Mehring suggests this is the 'the first flash of an idea [which] shows itself like summer lighting in the mind of a lad, an idea whose development and completion was to be the immortal service of the man'. *Karl Marx*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), 5. David McLellan criticises this position in *Marx Before Marxism*, 55.

⁴⁴ *PR*, 22.

⁴⁵ *LHP* 1, 30, 6.

the physiognomy of the whole is interrupted by the sunrise which, like lightning, all of a sudden reveals the contour of the new world.⁴⁶

The self-awareness of this moment of transition, in which the old world is wrecked on the shore on the new, makes this reflection a profound recognition of modernity.⁴⁷ Hegel attempts to make coherent a philosophical comprehension of the present as ‘our own time’, to bring the ‘glorious dawn’ brought about by the ‘world-historical’ event of the French Revolution to an understanding of what constitutes human freedom.⁴⁸ Spirit (*Geist*) is the collective subject, society, as it struggles to become aware of itself.⁴⁹ The self-consciousness of spirit is its ‘self-sufficiency’, its awareness of its ‘own nature’ and its ‘activity of coming to itself, of producing itself, making itself actually what it is in itself potentially’.⁵⁰ In itself, spirit is freedom. As Stephen Houlgate explains:

Spirit, for Hegel, is not some disembodied cosmic consciousness, manipulating human activity from on high, but is a distinctive shape of human consciousness. It is not mere consciousness of objects, however, nor is it mere self-consciousness. It is, rather, consciousness that knows itself to be the embodiment of reason - reason that it understands also to be immanent within the world and so to be genuinely objective. Furthermore, spirit is self-conscious reason that relates to an other, whom it recognises also to be self-conscious reason and who recognises the first in turn as such reason. Spirit, therefore, takes the form of a community of reciprocal recognition...⁵¹

⁴⁶ *PbG*, ¶11/8.

⁴⁷ To some degree Marx accepts this paradigm, although sharpening as a central dynamic the political impact of the working class as an objective sociological phenomenon and a new form of subjectivity, specifically arising from the bourgeois revolutions. Marx differs with Hegel with respect to exact implications of the French Revolution, although there are clear parallels in their theories of history. This is especially evidence in Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* and Marx’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Their differences cannot be reduced to programmatic oppositions between a bourgeois/idealist and a proletariat/materialist standpoint but instead the ramifications of modern civil society. Marx operates within the tradition set out by Hegel, although he is always critical of the mystifications that arise from not thinking through the fullest critique of civil society, he accepts the character of Hegel’s modern standpoint, in terms of self-awareness. Marx’s concept of human freedom correlates and offers greater perspective to Hegel’s absolute ethical life. *CHDS*, 70, 80, 93.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola: Dover, 1956), *PH*, 446-7. See the more accurate translation of the final section of the *Philosophy of History*, ‘The New Age’ by H.B Nisbet in *PW*, 215. Of course, Hegel had a critique of the Revolution itself, especially the terror. He wrote of the instrumental terror of the guillotine as ‘the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or a mouthful of water’, *PbG*, ¶590/236-7.

⁴⁹ This view rejects the traditional reading of *Geist* as God, which would render Hegel as a straightforwardly religious thinker. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8-9, 14, 83, 88, 220. See also, Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 177; Hegel, 19-21. This secular reading has been recently advanced by Robert Brandom’s *Spirit of Trust* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2019), 469-499.

⁵⁰ G.W.F Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 20-1.

⁵¹ Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 78.

Spirit is the passage of consciousness through contradictory experience. By and through the relations of recognition, reason is realised in the world. In this way, spirit comes to be through the ethical interaction of self-conscious actors. By understanding the genesis of modern society historically and the particularity of the institutions of civil society Hegel situates the interaction of actors in a world defined by their social relationships.⁵² The ethical world is the teleological realisation of the universality of social life. Sublating subjective will, 'ethical life' objectively allows self-determination in the forms of inter-subjective recognition. Subjects understand their social world as one that allows freedom in institutions, values and norms of their own making. In this view, freedom is itself determined by human action, by the content of objective processes which take the form of subjective realisation, of consciousness realising itself, a dialectic of subject and object manifest in the totality of reason. But this rationality must be real, in the sense that the polity must meet an objective rationality. In this way, the idea of rationality should not be seen as an apologia for an existing reality and political paradigm. Rather, a rational social order is one that actualises the idea of rationality in its concept as ethical life.⁵³ Hegel considers the development of consciousness to be determined historically. In the modern world, this unfolding strives for its end in ethical life, the totality and universality of social life.

For Kant, reason is distinctly modern in the sense that it necessitates individual autonomy and self-determination.⁵⁴ Kant's stress on freedom in these terms articulated the quintessentially modern understanding of subjectivity. Hegel appreciates the advance of this form of reasoning in terms of the identification of the individual subject. However, at the same time, he draws attention to the internal limitations of this view. Hegel sublates the subject into a conception of modernity which allows the unity of individual and collective in the ethical fabric of just institutions. The subject realises their distinctive autonomy and self-determination in a social world in which they recognise

⁵² Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1975), 299. Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, constructed after the *PbG*, develops at a systematic level the relation and passage between subjective and objective spirit.

⁵³ Hegel himself warned against an equation of actuality with rationality: 'Who would not have enough good sense to see much around him that is indeed not as it ought to be?' *EL*, §6/34. Marx's youthful critique of Hegel is right to push at the most conservative aspects of the *Philosophy of Right* that look for the rational elements in constitutional governments. No *rational* state can exist if the state is one of domination. However, if Hegel is held against the logic of his own thought, there is no need to confine his politics to this conservatism.

⁵⁴ This Kantian approach to reason is emphasised by Pippin in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, 56, 65.

and are recognised by others who share their normative commitments to their collective freedom.

Hegel's distinctive twist to the modern theme of subjectivity is that rationality becomes self-conscious and is 'at home with itself' only through its social determinates.⁵⁵ In Hegel, the unfolding of these relations is the speculative task of the philosophy of right.⁵⁶ The concept of right is developed from abstract will to its fully rational shape in ethical life. Unlike the natural world, ethical life is 'reason as it actualises itself in the element of self-consciousness'.⁵⁷ The conscious nature of social intersubjectivity is rendered in Hegel's social theory by the determinations of modern life – family, legal and political institutions, social values and practices. These determinations are conditioned by the industrialising economic paradigm of the modern era. Hegel seeks to understand the ramifications of free trade, the division of labour and individual egotism. The conflict of individuals in civil society is mediated by the particularity of the community and unified in the universality of the state. The private realm of civil society is just one moment of the public realm which reaches its rational expression in the state.⁵⁸ In his political thought, Hegel charts the conceptual development of forms of subjectivity which culminate in ethical life but can be retrospectively understood in the 'immanent principle', the universal is made necessary by the concretisation of earlier particularities, in which the universal is always reflected.⁵⁹ Here the inconsistent or formal parts are developed in terms of their universality.

Further, this process does simply not promote reconciliation within the modern world. Hegel's immanent principle is critical. For Hegel, ethical life requires a concept of freedom which goes beyond a feature of constitutions. Freedom is inherent in the relations of right, socially instituted in rational association and community. This freedom must be universal – transparent and free from domination – for it to be actually rational. The radical nature of Hegel's modernism is his theorisation of the present as a fractured reality based in civil society.

⁵⁵ *PbG*, ¶26/14.

⁵⁶ *PR*, §1-2/25-8.

⁵⁷ *PR*, 12-3.

⁵⁸ *PR*, §289/329.

⁵⁹ *PR*, §249/270.

While rational freedom is the idea or image of the revolutionary age, this new world was born with defections and upheavals inherent in its very fabric. In an influential interpretation of Hegel's modernism in relation to the French Revolution, Joachim Ritter stresses the importance of the realisation of ethical life in the political realm.⁶⁰ He points to the central concern of Hegel's social thought as the 'political realisation of freedom', which is left unresolved by the Revolution and thus remains preserved in our present.⁶¹ With the Revolution, the possibilities of human freedom had now been opened. But, as Terry Pinkard notes, the institutions of the modern world did not allow people to feel 'at home' and therefore individuals 'experienced freedom as a possibility rather than as something already established'.⁶² For Hegel, 'the isolation of the individual from each other and the whole' is the fundamental problem of modern life reflected in the 'laws, its system of justice, its morality'.⁶³

These problems are first evident in the struggle within the Enlightenment for reason, now transformed and embedded in the logic of modern society.⁶⁴ Self-consciousness passes through the critique of religion to the demand of self-awareness, which now seeks its truth in a socially recognisable capacity. Kant's assessment of the present was not of an achieved and enlightened age, but 'an age of *enlightenment*' in which humans should use their 'own-understanding' to think and act, the conditions of possibility for self-awareness.⁶⁵ For Hegel however, self-awareness as 'I' must become reason, the unity of 'I' and 'Being' as spirit, conceiving of the shape of consciousness as changing shape through interaction with the world. Ethical life is the actualisation of the self-consciousness in an order of human making.⁶⁶ In this sense, the shapes of self-conscious

⁶⁰ Ritter argues 'there is no other philosophy that is a philosophy of revolution to such a degree and so profoundly, in its innermost drive, as that of Hegel', *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 43. For a critique of this position, see Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (London: Heinemann, 1974), 121-141 and Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel and the Freedom of the Moderns*, trans. Marcella and Jon Morris (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 234-8.

⁶¹ Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 47, 54.

⁶² Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 187.

⁶³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1953), 92-3.

⁶⁴ For the role of the struggle between self-consciousness and transcendental reason in the Enlightenment, see Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. John O'Neill (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 50-4. Lukács goes as far as to say, 'Hegel's overall philosophy is more vigorously and consistently oriented towards society and history than is that of the Enlightenment, which means moreover that the removal of the ambiguity between ontological being and social and moral "ought" is of the greatest importance', *The Ontology of Social Being, 1, Hegel*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin, 1978), 9.

⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment' in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 58-9.

⁶⁶ See *PbG*, ¶438-¶445/174-6.

knowledge won from the critique of religion and despotism are to become ‘proper actualities, and instead of shapes merely of consciousness, are shapes of a world’.⁶⁷ The passage of modernity through the Enlightenment and French Revolution signified that subjectivity confronts the objective realm not externally (as in pre-modern social forms) but through internal relations of intersubjective meaning that allow humans to become at home in their world through the institutions they create and control. Hegel is cognisant that this rationality must be actualised in a reality that has now been opened by modernity. The inseparability of revolution and modernity in Hegel’s thought presents the distinctiveness of his conception of ethical life. He preserves but overcomes modern subjectivism (as in Kant’s moral philosophy), in part, by mobilising the notion of collective justice, the ethical life of the ancient polis. The radical feature of Hegel’s modernism is that self-consciousness requires a relation between one’s own historical condition and the social other.

The necessary conditions for consciousness to think itself are to be found in the social world. Hegel’s concept of freedom is best comprehended as the theoretical and metaphysical possibilities for reason to become socially embedded in ethical life. Thus, Hegel’s account of ethical life requires an explanation of his speculative logic. The ethical and political structure of Hegel’s thought is comprehensible only as part of his metaphysical system. Hegel’s social thought is suffused with his metaphysics. For Hegel it is not enough to say with Anaxagoras, ‘*nous* rules the world’. An account of reason and its content must be given.⁶⁸ Thus, the modern problem of ethical life confronts the breakdown of the traditions of the old world in the philosophy of the present.⁶⁹ Hegel addresses this metaphysical crisis in his *Science of Logic*. The conceptual structure of absolute thought allows ethical life to be grasped as the actualisation of freedom. My account of Hegel’s metaphysics provides justification for his account of ethical life and demonstrates the thread between his speculative absolute and ethical life, between reason and its content.

Part 3

⁶⁷ *PhG*, ¶441/175.

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 14-18.

⁶⁹ Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 42.

Hegel's absolute is the result of his systematic metaphysics, and his normative social theory is inherently connected to his speculative system.⁷⁰ The normative function of Hegel's ethical thought is derived from his mobilisation of Aristotle in his metaphysics. As such, Hegel's concept of ethical life is best understood *within* his system and as such, requires a brief introduction of the aims of the *Logic*. To use Adorno's phrase, I emphasise the *Logic*'s 'basic Aristotelianism'.⁷¹ This Aristotelian influence is increasingly marked in Anglophone Hegel scholarship.⁷² In Hegel's recasting of Aristotle within his own system, he paints absolute thought as an overcoming of Kant's transcendentalism idealism.

The *Science of Logic* is motivated by two distinctive problems. First, Hegel wants to overcome the impasse of contemporary metaphysics; and second, to provide a philosophy which is self-justifying. Hegel's recognises the crisis of metaphysics found in Kant's transcendental idealism, which he sees as an inadequate response to Hume's empiricism. Hegel's 'self-justifying' conception of philosophy finds its truth in its 'self-thinking', the knowledge of universality which can think itself by its unification of subject and object which is 'verified' concretely by the actualisation of its content in reality.⁷³ Hegel's investigation into the determinations of thought itself is an effort to situate the present within a speculative logic that evaluates itself in and against the history of philosophy. Hegel is Janus-headed in this respect. He wants to assess the relation between the ancients and the moderns in terms of the present. As a means to transcend the division between theoretical philosophy as metaphysics and practical philosophy as political and ethical thought upheld in Kant's thought, Hegel gives significant attention to Aristotle's metaphysics. The Kantian context helps frames Aristotle's influence on Hegel.

The relationship between Hegel and Kant is a complex one. Hegel is certainly at times dismissive and overly polemical towards Kant, but clearly his system is constructed

⁷⁰ In what follows I will provide a very truncated discussion of complex questions in Hegel scholarship. In providing such a summary, I follow Rose's claim that 'the "absolute" is not an optional extra', *HCS*, 45. I contend that Hegel's normative philosophy is justified by his metaphysics. See also, Beiser, *Hegel*, 195. This view has been rejected in Allen W. Wood's influential account, which is premised on saving Hegel's social theory from his 'dead' speculative thought, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 135.

⁷² See note 3 above.

⁷³ *SL*, 12.236. See also, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V Miller, revised by M.J Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), §574/275-6.

firmly in response to the profound impact of Kant's demand for radical enlightenment and self-examination through reason.⁷⁴ Kant attempts to justify how we think about the world, to make the task of philosophy the provision of the conditions of possibility for knowledge of our experiences and self-understanding. In this way, Kant is responding to fundamental problems emerging within modern thought and being, how to be a modern subject who makes use of their reason.⁷⁵ Rather than classical and early modern epistemological justifications in *mimesis* (representation and duplication of concepts), Kant makes representation a function of conceptual judgement. Kant's appeal to reason was on the basis of a 'self-legislating' subject which could make claims that were critical in the sense they sought objective claims about nature and agency determined by a freedom 'self-conscious about its own possibility'.⁷⁶

More specifically, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* provided a decisive challenge to traditional, scholastic metaphysics. Kant dismisses the 'closed and completed' logic, long associated with Aristotle.⁷⁷ However, at the same time, he borrows from Aristotle the logical forms of judgment which Kant turns to a new use as categories, i.e. conceptual conditions of the possibility of objective experience. In seeking to provide the 'conditions of possibility' for knowledge, Kant set out a critical philosophy that posited reason as the means to determine the conditions for knowledge. Starting with the claim that scientific observation provides knowledge of the realm of experience, Kant constructed his philosophy on a critical method that rejected knowledge as either strictly empirically or conceptually grounded. We need empirical knowledge, which we can observe from objects and scientific inquiry; however, *a priori* knowledge (the forms of intuition and the categories) *logically* (not temporally) precedes empirical observation and provides the necessary conditions for this knowledge to be possible.

This conception of knowledge posited 'subjective conditions' as proof for 'objective validity'. According to Pippin, this position meant 'all knowledge could be said to be only

⁷⁴ See for instance, *LHP* 3, 409-10. For a recent account of some of the issues in the Kant-Hegel relation see, Sally Sedgwick, *Hegel's Critique of Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁵ Kant, 'What is Enlightenment', 57. He directs argument in *Critique of Pure Reason* about the possibilities for knowledge against two camps of early modern philosophy, Descartes and Leibniz on one hand, and Spinoza and Hume on the other.

⁷⁶ Pippin, *Modernism and a Philosophical Problem*, 47.

⁷⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), B viii. For a clarification of Aristotle on this point, see Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 309.

of objects as they are subject of these epistemic conditions of ours, or only of “phenomena”, and of “things as they are in themselves”, or things considered independently of these conditions.’ In marking ‘a death blow’ to classical and modern metaphysics, Kant ‘made possible’ a ‘genuine form of non-empirical knowledge about the forms of human cognition’.⁷⁸ However, the limitation presented in this position is a series of antinomies, that make the ‘thing-in-itself’ both the knowledge of its limits and the need to strive for its unconditioned possibilities.⁷⁹

For Hegel, Kant’s philosophy was a significant advance in thought. Kant’s philosophy was a critical philosophy in so far as it offered a criticism of knowledge and made the object of experience relatable to reason. The *Critique of Pure Reason* provided a philosophy of freedom because the knowing subject in some sense sets the terms of what is to count as an object. We are not *forced* by objects to take them up in a certain way; rather we recognise the *force of reason* as our own activity. Reason is answerable to reason alone, reason unpacks of itself its own conditions. The conceptual tools of reason now centrally concerned the possibilities of knowledge itself. Hegel notes in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, ‘the step taken by Kant is a great and important one – that is, the fact he has made knowledge the subject of his consideration’.⁸⁰

However, Hegel’s response to the Kantian legacy has had two major but divergent, interpretative paths in contemporary scholarship. The first is to suggest Hegel ‘reformed’ or ‘radicalised’ Kant’s project.⁸¹ The second is to follow through with Hegel’s critique of Kant and give it contemporary application.⁸² This second path requires the stronger claim that takes Hegel’s reply to Kant as a more exhaustive attempt to move beyond the antinomial limits of transcendental idealism. This avenue does not involve simply repeating Hegel’s (sometimes) caricature of Kant, but a recasting of their respective philosophies as distinct projects. In following this interpretative approach, the implications of Hegel’s normative philosophy are radicalised: his notion of freedom

⁷⁸ Pippin, *Modernism and a Philosophical Problem*, 49-53.

⁷⁹ Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 105, 162-5; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40-44.

⁸⁰ *LHP* 3, 428-9.

⁸¹ See *Ibid.*, 61. Pippin’s *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, complicates this picture by stressing Aristotle’s role in the *Logic*. By stressing Aristotle and Kant’s influence, this interpretation has considerable strength. However, Pippin softens the impact of Hegel’s critique of Kant. In my view, this approach has implications for Hegel’s normative philosophy which is predicated not of a difference of degree with Kant but of kind.

⁸² I take Rose’s argument to best represent this trend. See Chapter 2 above.

sublates the Kantian conception of morality by articulating the social conditions for the realisation of freedom. Distinctly, Hegel sublates politics and ethics into the shape of ethical life. This path brings Hegel's speculative thought in closer dialogue with Marx, since the emphasis changes from freedom as rational autonomy (radicalised Kantian), to freedom as the historical conditions for social recognition.⁸³ This line of inquiry leaves open the question of *what* exactly constitutes the necessary historical conditions. The composition of civil society and the state now become crucial to the nature of the normative claims required for recognition. Hegel conceptualises a form of subjectivity that is *intersubjective* in that it validates itself objectively in the norms and values of the social world. Freedom is realised in rational consciousness which unifies the self with others.

To flesh out what is at stake in terms of his ethical theory, Hegel's metaphysics articulate the twin task of his speculative thought. The unfreedom of the modern world is both the inability to grasp the concrete totality of modern thought and being conceptually, and the failure of conceptual thought to grasp the interdependence of epistemology with the social philosophy. The split in thought and being results in the gulf between theoretical and practical reason. To become enlightened about one's own historical conditions of existence, for Hegel, requires a concept of ethical life. This contextualises Hegel's critique of Kant's theoretical philosophy.

Hegel suggests that the 'complete transformation' of Kantian philosophy, however advantageous in reaching a conceptually 'higher standpoint' of philosophical awareness, Kant 'extirpated root and branch' traditional metaphysics. Hegel comments that the 'fact is that there no longer exists any interest either in the form or the content of metaphysics or in both together'.⁸⁴ Hegel sharpens this critique of Kant to point to the problems inherent in distinct theoretical and practical philosophies, which are further limited by self-acknowledged antinomies.⁸⁵ Hegel's response to this crisis was to offer a diagnosis of modern thought which responded to the barriers inherent in those antinomies. Fundamentally, Hegel contends that Kant cannot adequately understand the relation between thought and being. Kant's critical philosophy dissects the concepts of traditional metaphysics but fails to consider the content of these concepts and the relationship

⁸³ The implications of this view are developed below in Part 4.

⁸⁴ *SL*, 21:5.

⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A406/B433-A460/B488.

between these concepts. In this way, Hegel argues that Kant creates an ‘opposition between subjectivity and objectivity’. According to Hegel, for Kant this ‘remains internal to experience’, since

Objectivity here means the element of *universality* and *necessity*, i.e. the element of the thought-determinations themselves - the so-called *a priori*. But the Critical philosophy expands the opposition in such a way that experience *in its entirety*, i.e. both those elements together, belongs to *subjectivity* and nothing remains opposite it but the *thing-in-itself*.⁸⁶

Thinking, although claiming an objectivity, is forced into subjectivism. Kant considers reason to be unconditioned, but that which seeks the conditions of knowledge found in experience. In this way, Hegel argues that Kant falls back to an empirical grounding.⁸⁷

Hegel views this problem as the result of a methodological separation between the conceptual subject and object. His alternative is a speculative working through of the categories in which the empirical world can be adequately understood. As Alfredo Ferrarin points out,

What vitiates Kant’s criticism is that he takes the categories as given and does not consider them in themselves, as pure and unfolding in a systematic connection; instead, he applies them to given substrates as pure forms to contents coming from without... it has to be a theory of pure thought – unlike Kant’s subjective idealism, which had as its object finite thought and an empirical logic that derived categories from the forms of judgment.⁸⁸

Hegel’s speculative logic aims to confront the limitations of Kant’s subjectivist philosophy. The central problem Hegel identifies with Kant’s epistemology is that thought cannot go beyond experience and results in an ‘empty formalism’. Fundamental to Kant is the *a priori* nature of universality and necessity.

Kant’s opposition to Hume shapes this position. Contra Hume, Kant sees reason posited in the self-aware subject ‘I’, rather than in external empirical objects.⁸⁹ Hume’s empiricism ‘elevates the facts included under sensation, feeling, and perception into the

⁸⁶ *EL*, §41/83.

⁸⁷ *EL*, §45/89.

⁸⁸ Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 80.

⁸⁹ *LHP* 3, 427-8.

form of general ideas, propositions, or laws'.⁹⁰ Reality rests in the facts of experience and 'leaves thought no powers except abstraction and formal universality and identity'.⁹¹ Hume takes the concrete experiences of life as the basis for morality, since reason cannot motivate the actions of the will or adequately oppose the passions.⁹² In this move, Hume elevates the 'is' of experience to a philosophical standpoint.

For Hegel, both poles expressed by Kant and Hume present a side of the antinomy 'is/ought' and posit each moment as unsurpassable. This dualism denies a reasoning that can overcome this barrier. If reality is limited to the exactness and singularity of empirical facts, reality cannot be ordered categorically and is therefore unknowable. Accordingly, Kant's transcendental method falls into the opposite one-sidedness of Hume. Since Kant's 'criticism obviously but repeats the observation of Hume that the categories as a whole – ideas of universality and necessity – are entirely absent from sensation; and that the empirical fact both in form and contents differs from its intellectual formulation.'⁹³ Kant moves to the other side of Hume's 'is' and posits reason in the 'ought' of the categorical imperative. Hence Kant sees metaphysics as *ultimately* unknowable.⁹⁴ Hegel comments that 'Reason cannot acquire knowledge of any true content or subject matter and in regard to absolute truth must be directed to faith'.⁹⁵ Deeming both Kant and Hume as one-sided and static, he subjects both thinkers to a critique that makes clear the fundamental limitations of their understanding of the relation of thought to being.

For Hegel, this situation presents an impasse. If Kant's thought resulted in dualist and formalistic method, Hegel looked to define a philosophy in terms of the absolute, the unity of subject and object.⁹⁶ The *Logic*, which aims to set out the categories, determinations and processes needed to understand reality from the standpoint of the absolute, presents this task as *metaphysics*. Hegel writes:

Now whatever may have been accomplished for the form and the content of philosophy [*Wissenschaft*] in other directions, the science of logic which

⁹⁰ *EL*, §38/W61.

⁹¹ *EL*, §38/W62.

⁹² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 413.

⁹³ *EL*, §47/W75.

⁹⁴ Sedgwick, *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, 152.

⁹⁵ *SL*, 21:48.

⁹⁶ *EL*, §82/132-3.

constitutes metaphysics proper or purely speculative philosophy, has hitherto still been much neglected.⁹⁷

Hegel's *Logic* investigates the forms of being as expressed by thought, demonstrating that the aim of speculative thought is the metaphysical investigation of the forms of being expressed in thought. Speculative thought allows the essence of truth to be understood, '*Logic* thus coincides with *metaphysics*, i.e. the science of *things* captured in *thoughts* that have counted as expressing *the essentialities of things*.'⁹⁸ This ontological component of his logic has important implications for the critical component of speculative thought.⁹⁹ For Hegel, speculative thought provides a conceptually justified way to think about reality by charting thought in forms that develop, unfold and sublate by the power of negative determinations. Hegel's speculative logic is necessary for his understanding of the historical shape of being and becoming of spirit in the world. Stanley Rosen notes that for Hegel 'logic is ontological':

this is closely connected with the thesis that ontology is dialectical, that is, that the elements or atoms of the structure of intelligibility are interrelated intrinsically and not 'merely' in the process of cognition. Finally, it means for Hegel that history is not some random agency that lies outside our philosophical doctrines and exchanges them in an arbitrary and hence meaningless way. Instead, history is the human exhibition of the very conceptual structure that constitutes experience.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *SL*, 21:70.

⁹⁸ *EL*, §24/58. Pippin takes this passage to be centrally concerned with the relation between concept and object. Pippin gives the historical context of what *used* to be metaphysics in scholasticism and German rationalism (Leibniz/Wolff). As such, for Pippin, Hegel is following Kant in 'distancing himself from how metaphysics *had been* understood as identifying thoughts with the "essentialities" of things', *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, 42.

⁹⁹ Until recently, the scholarship seemed divided between a 'metaphysical' and 'non-metaphysical' interpretation. Examples of the former include, Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006), 115-143 and Beiser, *Hegel*, 53-79. The opposing, 'non-metaphysical Hegel' which was established in the Anglo-American scholarship with the appearance of the seminal article by Klaus Hartmann, 'Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View' in *Hegel*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972), 101-25. Robert. B. Pippin advanced a non-metaphysical reading in *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 175-200. However, Pippin's *Hegel's Realm of Shadows*, does much to move beyond this binary. He writes that 'Hegel most certainly was a "metaphysician"', but what *exactly* that metaphysical project is must be conceived in terms of the pure thinking of the object. Pippin brings in Aristotle to make this case: 'In knowing itself, what pure thought knows is the possible intelligibility, the knowability, of anything that is. But the intelligibility of anything is just what it is to be that thing, the answer to the "what is it" (*ti esti*) question definitive of metaphysics since Aristotle. So in knowing itself, thought knows, of all things, *what it is* to be anything. Again, as for Aristotle, the task of metaphysics is not to say of any particular thing what it is. It is to determine what must be *true* of anything at all, such that what it is in particular *can* be determined by the special sciences (what in Scholasticism were called the *transcendentia*). Or: it is to know what is necessarily pre- supposed in any such specification. (Of course the *Physics* and the *De Anima* are also philosophical sciences for Aristotle, but Hegel will have a Philosophy of Nature and a Philosophy of Spirit too.)' 15, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Stanley Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), 3. See also, Adorno, *Hegel*, 117.

Hegel's intention is to show how thought determinations are both objective and subjective aspects of being. The journey of consciousness traversed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* reaches the standpoint of absolute knowledge, or 'spirit that knows itself as spirit'.¹⁰¹ Here Hegel establishes that pure thought can think the intelligibility of being and with this now possible, *The Science of Logic* presupposes this form. The work of the *Logic* concerns the *content* of this intelligibility. Hegel gives an account of the passage of thought in three moments. The first moment is abstract, forms of understanding which are partial, relegated to fixed oppositions. The second is dialectical. This is the negative moment in thought, that supersedes and negates oppositions in relation. The third moment is speculative. This stage unifies the truth of the two earlier stages into a 'positive', an identical but distinct concept.¹⁰²

The *Logic* is 'subdivided' into the doctrines of 1) being, 2) essence and 3) concept. Hegel begins with pure being, which is opposed by the 'absolutely negative', nothing. The truth of the opposition of being and nothing *vanishes* in the movement into becoming.¹⁰³ Hegel considers becoming to be the first concrete and true determination of thought.¹⁰⁴ He references Aristotle and Heraclitus in this context, the latter, 'proposed the loftier, total concept of becoming and said: *being is no more than nothing*, or also, all *flows*, that is, all is *becoming*'.¹⁰⁵ Becoming has the determinations, being-for-self and being-for-other. Next, determinate being leads to the dialectic of finitude and infinity, then again to the 'one and many' of 'repulsion and attraction' which allows 'being for itself'. Each category gains determinations, only to be negated in the transition to another higher category which incorporates its truth.

In this way, Hegel transitions from a discussion of the oppositions quantity and quality to their immediate unity in measure. The second doctrine, essence, is the mediating self-relation of being. Essence is the moment of negation, which holds the truth of being within itself as 'immanent being'.¹⁰⁶ The immediate unity of measure is now mediated in the form of essence. At first sight, measure looks to be a law. This gives it its definition,

¹⁰¹ *PbG*, ¶808/321.

¹⁰² *EL*, §79-82/125-133.

¹⁰³ *SL*, 21:70.

¹⁰⁴ *EL*, §88/144.

¹⁰⁵ *SL*, 21:70. See also, *Metaph.* 986b.28–29, 985b7–8 and *LHP* 1, 293.

¹⁰⁶ *EL*, §112/W162.

so the essential character of a thing is its law or measure. It becomes apparent, however, that essence must appear.¹⁰⁷ Essence is nothing more than the *relation* of appearances, an internal and self-relation. Hegel uses the language of ‘shining’ and ‘reflection’ in this context, which helps elucidate the necessary association essence has with appearance.¹⁰⁸ In this view, an essence expresses an appearance, rather than appearance being seen as illusion. This movement introduces the conceptuality of life and thought in the doctrine of the concept, which affirms that life and thought are nothing but self-relation.

The doctrine of the concept is the realm of pure thought. The freedom and truth of substance now becomes ‘self-sufficient’ and bears its identity with itself and its parts.¹⁰⁹ This totality is concrete through the determined interaction of universality with particularity and individuality. The concept unites ‘being’ and ‘essence’ and expresses its truth in the unity of concept and objectivity, the absolute idea as identical ‘subject-object’.¹¹⁰ In Hegel’s words,

The concept is what is utterly *concrete* since the negative unity with itself (as being-determined-in-and-for-itself which is the individuality) itself makes up its relation to itself, the universality. To this extent, the moments of the concept cannot be detached from one another; the determinations of reflection *are supposed* to be grasped and to be valid each for itself, detached from the opposed determination. Since, however, their *identity* is *posited* in the concept, each of its moments can be immediately grasped only on the basis of and with the others.¹¹¹

The self-realisation of the absolute is the identity expressed by the universal. Put speculatively, thought now grasps reality. The project of the *Logic* is to show the possibilities of thought to think itself as pure thinking. In this sense, Hegel explicitly follows Aristotle’s purpose in the *Metaphysics* to understand the ‘what is’, the being of truth. For Pippin, the *Logic* aims at the intelligibility of thought, an answer to ‘the question definitive of metaphysics since Aristotle’, “‘what is it to be able to say what something is’”.¹¹² According to Pippin, Aristotle meets Kant in the *Logic* with the provision of ‘I think’.¹¹³ Kant’s unity of apperception, *is*, and what it is (self-relation) is the mark or measure of intelligibility as such. To *be* is to be intelligible, but thought (as

¹⁰⁷ Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ *EL*, §112/173.

¹⁰⁹ *EL*, §158/230-§160/233.

¹¹⁰ *EL*, §162/235-§163/237.

¹¹¹ *EL*, §164/238.

¹¹² Pippin, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, 266.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15. See also 35, 54, 59-63.

apperception) is the being of this intelligibility. However, Pippin in my view exaggerates the Kantian dimension of this intelligibility. Rather, Hegel wants to make a more radical claim that pertains to the absolute character of knowing relating to the reality of being qua being, not just the conditions possible for epistemological claims as such. Ferrarin is clearer in this respect, ‘Hegel wants to integrate Kant with Aristotle; or better, sublate both and all previous forms of metaphysics as one-sided, proposing a completion of metaphysics through a new and final *logic* of it’.¹¹⁴ What I want to emphasise, however, is that Hegel adopts Aristotle both to affirm the speculative in contradistinction to Kant’s dualism and to provide the necessary correlation to his *realphilosophie*. Hegel’s critique of Kant’s theoretical philosophy dovetails with his critique of Kant’s practical philosophy. Hegel frames the first in terms of subjective spirit and the second as objective spirit, the realm in which the ‘content and purpose of freedom’ now *develops* into objectivity, into the actuality of freedom.¹¹⁵

In this way, Hegel’s critique of dualism seeks to overcome the impasse in modern philosophy by integrating the insights of ancient thought. His philosophy acts as a ‘mirror’ of the history of philosophy, persevering past thought into richer and more concrete concepts.¹¹⁶ Hegel’s historicism integrates philosophical truth into the present by an architectonic philosophy of history.¹¹⁷ The truth of previous modes of thought is integrated into Hegel’s system. However, this explicitly precludes any expectation ‘to find the questions of our consciousness and the interest of the present world responded to by the ancients; such questions presuppose a certain development in thought. Therefore philosophy belongs to its own time...’¹¹⁸ Likewise, while it is very clear that from the opening of the *Logic* that the ancients cannot be adopted in simple opposition to modern thought,¹¹⁹ the malleability and purity of classical thought, offers a counterpoint to the

inevitable distractions caused by the magnitude and many-sidedness of contemporary affairs, even under the doubt whether the noisy clamour of current affairs and the deafening chatter of a conceit which prides itself on confining

¹¹⁴ Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 79.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §482R/215.

¹¹⁶ LHP 1, 41-2. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel’s debt to Aristotle is abundant. His assessment of other thinkers is treated authoritatively by Hegel.

¹¹⁷ The beginning of the *Logic* addresses the Pre-Socratic thought, in particular, Parmenides and Heraclitus.

¹¹⁸ LHP 1, 45.

¹¹⁹ SL, 21:18.

itself to such matters leave any room for participation in the passionless calm of a knowledge which is in the element of pure thought alone.¹²⁰

Plato presents for Hegel the most pure of ancient thinking. Rosen stresses that the ‘passionless calm’ of classical thought is represented in Plato’s dramatic form, in the openness and directness of the dialogue, thus ‘the ancient theoretical tranquillity is an essential ingredient in the *Aufhebung* or surpassing of the difference between the ancients and the moderns’.¹²¹ However, Plato’s theory of forms also advanced a concept of reason in which ‘universalities have been brought to light and made the subject of study on their own’. First ‘done by Plato, and after him by Aristotle especially; this step marks the beginning of our knowledge of them’.¹²²

Hegel’s *Logic* integrates Aristotle’s metaphysics in a very particular manner. He makes explicit a critical distance. Hegel quotes from the *Metaphysics* to suggest that for Aristotle, ‘Philosophical thinking in general is still concerned with concrete objects – God, nature, spirit; but logic is concerned only and solely with these thoughts as thoughts, in their complete abstraction’.¹²³ Hegel disputes the character of Aristotle’s distinction between form and content, since the concrete is divorced from thought.¹²⁴ Added to this, Hegel also attributes Kant’s presuppositions to still be within scholastic and Aristotelian logic, which he characterises as stolid and static, which in two thousand years ‘it has not lost any ground, but neither has it gained any’.¹²⁵ Although, initial impressions of these comments would suggest Hegel’s speculative logic is clearly at odds with Aristotle, Hegel is notably indebted to Aristotle.

Hegel seeks to incorporate Aristotle in a significant way into modern thought by sublating the ancient thinker’s ‘unsystematic philosophy within his own architectonic system’,¹²⁶ incorporating the ‘deep meaning’ of Aristotle’s metaphysics.¹²⁷ Hegel aims to ‘renew’ Aristotle, whose understanding of the idea not only helped understand the shape

¹²⁰ *SL*, 21:20.

¹²¹ Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, 51.

¹²² *SL*, 21:12.

¹²³ *SL*, 21:12.

¹²⁴ On this point, see Rosen, *The Idea of Hegel’s Science of Logic*, 46.

¹²⁵ *SL*, 21:35.

¹²⁶ Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy*, 77.

¹²⁷ *LHP* 2, 118. Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 4, 83. This commentary provides the most extensive and detailed comparison of the two thinkers to date.

of thought, but was an ‘advance of science itself’.¹²⁸ It is important to note that Hegel’s revival of Aristotle does not mistake his metaphysics with its application in scholastic logic; instead he sees the *Metaphysics* as a ‘profound’ elucidation of the speculative.¹²⁹ As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, ‘in a stunning and wholly unexpected resurrection, the whole dead weight of the scholastic elaboration of Aristotle’s logical compendia is miraculously translated and transmuted into substantive dialectical categories’.¹³⁰ Jameson notes that Hegel’s ‘transmogrification’ of Aristotelian logic takes the ‘dead forms’ of this thinking and revives it into modern conceptual thought, marking ‘his most intellectually original and audacious philosophical act’.¹³¹ The categories Hegel employs to understand reality are developed from the dynamic of Aristotle’s metaphysics which conceives of forms of being having their own distinctive movement.¹³² Hegel takes Aristotle’s *energeia* and mobilises it as *Wirklichkeit*. The Aristotelian dimension of this term is now expressed as ‘the unity of concept and reality, or true actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)’, the absolute idea.¹³³

In what follows, I will remark on the place of Aristotle in Hegel’s *Logic* in two different aspects. First, the conception of speculation and second, his syllogistic reasoning. Hegel considered Aristotle’s notion that ‘thought thinks itself’ expressed the speculative proposition.¹³⁴ Since Hegel considered his speculative philosophy to be realised in ethical life, cashing out the metaphysical relation between Hegel and Aristotle strengthens the tradition of ethics both thinkers advance.

Aristotle’s place in Hegel’s conceptual thought helps illuminate central problems within modern thought, especially in Kant’s philosophy. For instance, in Hegel’s assessment of Kant’s understanding of reflection, which he understands as subjectivist, there is a direct contrast between Kant’s modernist conception and Aristotle:

Now this kind of conceptual void may well oppose itself to the abstract determinations of reflection or to the categories of the previous metaphysics, for in one-sidedness it stands at the same level with them, though these are in fact on a higher level of thought; but it appears all the more lame and empty when compared with the profounder ideas of ancient philosophy concerning the

¹²⁸ *EL*, 21.

¹²⁹ Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 84.

¹³⁰ Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 20.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 39n24.

¹³² For an extreme version of this thesis, see Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 121-2.

¹³³ Pippin, *Realm of Shadows*, 94-5.

¹³⁴ *Metaph.* 1072b19.

concept of the soul or of thinking, as for instance the truly speculative ideas of Aristotle. If the Kantian philosophy subjected the categories of reflection to critical investigation, all the more should it have investigated the abstraction of the empty 'I' that he retained, the supposed idea of the thing-in-itself. The experience of the awkwardness complained of is itself the empirical fact in which the untruth of that abstraction finds expression.¹³⁵

Hegel's comparison here is interesting, especially since he credits him with the supreme category of philosophical truth, 'speculative'. Hegel sees thought itself as speculative, a contradictory and dynamic dialectical process that negates and preserves forms and shapes of thought in higher and more concrete determinations.¹³⁶

Further, speculative philosophy is the attempt to systemise knowledge and bring philosophy to the standpoint of the absolute, as the immanent and presuppositionless thinking of the dialectical whole which aims to reconcile thought and being.¹³⁷ This striving of thought for absolute truth, its seeking of objective self-awareness, can only be understood from the concrete position of totality. Hegel explains the standpoint of the absolute:

Free and genuine thought is *concrete* in itself, and as such it is an *idea*, and in its full universality *the idea*, or *the absolute*. The science of the latter is essentially a *system*, since the true insofar as it is *concrete* exists only through unfolding itself in itself, collecting and holding itself together in a unity, i.e. as a *totality*. Only by discerning and determining its distinctions can it be the necessity of them and the freedom of the whole.¹³⁸

From this view, empirical facts cannot solace thought because they do not in their contingency satisfy its demand for complete reasons, complete explainers. Empirical facts stand isolated and apart from the whole, but concrete thought needs to integrate and order the phenomenon of human experience into a total standpoint. The logic is the system of progressively more complete reasons.

¹³⁵ *SL*, 12.195. He makes a similar claim in *The Philosophy of Mind*, 'Aristotle's books on the soul, along with his essays on particular aspects and states of the soul, are for this reason still the most admirable, perhaps even the sole, work of speculative interest on this topic.', §378/4.

See also, *LHP* 2, 138.

¹³⁶ *EL*, §11/15.

¹³⁷ *SL*, 21.47.

¹³⁸ *EL*, §14/43-44.

This position allows an understanding of the discrete moments which mediate internally as parts of a greater whole. As Karel Kosík notes:

This interconnectedness and mediatedness of the parts and the whole also signifies that isolated facts are abstractions, artificially uprooted moments of a whole which become concrete and true only when set in the respective whole. Similarly, a whole whose moments have not been differentiated and determined is merely an abstract, empty whole.¹³⁹

Speculative thought insists that truth can only be known by adopting the standpoint of concrete totality. The expression of this standpoint is then developed logically by the exposition of the whole from the starting point of an abstract determination of the relations. Each stage of this dialectic introduces more concrete determinations which give content to the reconstruction of the totality. Thus the whole becomes knowable once the initial concept is re-examined with the knowledge of its final iteration.¹⁴⁰ Hegel visualises the shape of this movement as circular. The absolute is ‘revealed as the concrete and supreme truth of all being ... as the *end* of the development’ now knowing itself and ‘unfolding itself [*sich entschliessend*]’ from the standpoint of this position.¹⁴¹

The science of logic forms a circle, in which the last conceptual category justifies the first. Accordingly, thought is immanent, in which earlier thought-forms lose their one-sidedness, their simplicity, immediacy and abstract character when mediated and develop in content as they are advanced speculatively. Hegel’s *Logic* is the supreme effort to chart the conceptual unfolding of the absolute as scientific knowledge of the whole. This knowledge can only be grasped logically and it is this form of thinking that comprehends the world. He writes, that the absolute

must necessarily be in harmony with actuality and experience. In fact, this harmony may be viewed as at least an extrinsic means of testing the truth of a philosophy. Similarly it may be held the highest and final aim of philosophic science to bring about, through the ascertainment of this harmony, a reconciliation of the self-conscious reason with the reason which *is* in the world – in other worlds, with actuality.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Karel Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976), 22.

¹⁴⁰ Arthur adopts this line of argument to Marx’s method in *Capital*, see *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 26-7.

¹⁴¹ *SL*, 21.57.

¹⁴² *EL*, §6/W8.

The science of philosophy aims at the self-consciousness of actuality. His philosophy cannot be considered to stand above reality, but rather is an effort to sublimate the gap between the idea and reality. In this overcoming, reason becomes realised in the world as the self-consciousness. For this realisation to be actual, reason must fulfil the normative dimension of its content, transparent and mutual recognition. In this paragraph, Hegel refers to his famous chiasmus from *The Philosophy of Right*: ‘What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational’.¹⁴³ In coming to grasp rationality, the truth of being becomes known. The ‘truth’ of being as its rationality also at the same time furnishes a normative standard; what is *good* for the being in question. The rational is the actual, but not everything is actual.¹⁴⁴

The culmination of the *Logic* in absolute knowledge then clears the way for ‘the next book we are to read’. If we know the type of internal logic at play, as Pippin explains ‘we know to do that, that this is the philosophical work needed, and what it is to do that, by virtue of knowing “the absolute idea” in the *Science of Logic*’.¹⁴⁵ *The Philosophy of Right* maps the internal logic of ethical life, the modern form of life (family, civil society, state) which allows for the concept of ethical life to be grasped in its actuality.

Hegel’s transition to ‘the absolute idea’, the culminating section of the *Logic*, identifies philosophical truth ‘the good’, expressed in the identity of the concept with reality:

The *truth* of the good is, by this means, *posited* as the unity of the theoretical and practical idea, [the notion] that the good has been attained in and for itself- that the objective world is thus in and for itself the idea precisely as it [the idea] at the same time eternally posits itself as *purpose*¹⁴⁶ and through activity produces its actuality. This life, having come back to itself from the differentiation [*Differenz*] and finitude of knowing, and having become identical with the concept through the activity of the concept, is the *speculative or absolute idea*.¹⁴⁷

The absolute idea unites subject and object and, in this unity, thought loses its determinateness and becomes truly logical. The absolute unifies ‘the idea of life [with] the

¹⁴³ PR, 20; EL, §6/33.

¹⁴⁴ Many Marxists, starting with Engels, have seen this passage to be a justification of present and unequal actualities as articulated by the state, see MECW 26, 358. However, as Pippin points out, ‘There is no reason to think he means that any actual state has fully realised the being in and for itself of the concept state, and there are good reasons, as we shall see in a moment, to doubt that he thinks this at all’, *Realm of Shadows*, 311n14.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 311.

¹⁴⁶ Wallace renders this ‘End’, EL, §235/W291. Both ‘purpose’ and ‘end’ denote an Aristotelian meaning.

¹⁴⁷ EL, §235/W291, 299.

idea of knowing. At this culminating point of his argument, Hegel brings in Aristotle. He suggests ‘this is the *noisis noiseos* which Aristotle long ago termed the highest form of the idea’.¹⁴⁸ The quote is from the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle notes ‘Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks’.¹⁴⁹ This expression of the absolute grasps that thought is self-conscious when it thinks itself as thought which recognises its own objectivity. In another passage Aristotle expands:

thought in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same.¹⁵⁰

Hegel adopts this as an expression of the speculative proposition.¹⁵¹ Aristotle’s concept of totality understands organic wholes to define essences. A thing cannot be said to be what it is without its location in the whole. Aristotle’s thought rests upon his conception of the whole and the parts. Hegel comments that Aristotle’s philosophy ‘contains the profoundest speculative concept’. Although Aristotle attempted to inquire into a diverse range of investigation, Hegel considers it impossible to have a systematic philosophy in Aristotle’s time. Each part of his thought ‘merely ranged side by side’; however, for Hegel, ‘they still form a totality of truly speculative philosophy’. Hegel is critical of how the parts of the whole ‘are empirically selected and placed together in such a way that each part is independently recognised as a determinate conception, without being taken into the connecting movement of the science’.¹⁵² Hegel claims ‘with Aristotle we enter at once upon what is speculative’. This element is the speculative reasoning of his syllogisms. For Hegel, Aristotle carves the way to the speculative thought, asking ‘what is’ but confining this inquiry to relations of particular to individual and failing to rise to the absolute. Hegel deliberately radicalises Aristotle by relating this syllogistic logic to the determination of the universal.¹⁵³ Here universals exist in particulars. This move allows

¹⁴⁸ *EL*, §235/W292.

¹⁴⁹ *Metaph.* 1074b33.

¹⁵⁰ *Metaph.* 1072b17-21.

¹⁵¹ Adorno saw this paradigm as past, ‘While thought has forgotten how to think itself, it has at the same time become its own watchdog. Thinking no longer means anything more than checking at each moment whether one can indeed think’, *Minima Moralia*, §126/179.

¹⁵² *LHP* 2, 118. See also, *Pol.* 1253a20.

¹⁵³ *LHP* 2, 136. For Hegel comments on Aristotle’s syllogisms, see *EL*, §183/256-§187/260.

Hegel to draw from Aristotle the basic elements of the speculative idea, which he then adapts to his own end.

Hegel's logical syllogism has three 'moments': the universal ('as the free sameness with itself in its determinacy'), the particular ('the determinacy in which the universal remains the same as itself, unalloyed') and the individual ('as the reflection-in-itself of the determinacies of universality and particularity, the negative unity with itself that is the *determinate in for itself* and at the same time identical with itself or universal').¹⁵⁴ These triads structure Hegel's conceptual determinations, each category mediating and negating subsequent categories. The relationship of universality, particularity and individuality structure the transition from categories, expressing the moments and movement of reasoning at different stages of determination.¹⁵⁵

In the final sections of *Philosophy of Mind*, itself the final part of the three-part *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel summarises his own thought syllogistically. The first syllogism, which grounds the next two, is logic. The middle is the philosophy of nature (*realphilosophie*) and finally, the mind, philosophy itself. Mind, of course, meets with the logical and nature with logic. So here again, Hegel's system forms a circle. Finishing with the absolute, Hegel once again quotes Aristotle's passage from the *Metaphysics* that 'it must be itself that thought thinks'.¹⁵⁶ In repeating this quote, Hegel reaffirms the metaphysics of his logic and its inseparability from ethical life. Thought's self-relation allows for the identity of thought with its object and in doing so it grasps the unity of theoretical and practical reason. This standpoint allows for the concept of ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*, to unite 'the true' and 'the good'.

As Adorno notes, 'Hegel's logic is not only his metaphysics; it is also his politics'.¹⁵⁷ The next point of investigation is the speculative in Hegel's social thought, his *realphilosophie*.

¹⁵⁴ *EL*, §163/236.

¹⁵⁵ Marx's use of Hegel's syllogisms is most evident in *Gr.*, for example, 89, 202. For an important comparison see Hiroshi Uchida, *Marx's Grundrisse and Hegel's Logic*, ed. Terrell Carver (London: Routledge, 1988). See also, Tony Smith, 'Hegel's Theory of the Syllogism and Its Relevance for Marxism' in *Dialectical Social Theory and its Critics* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 7-21; Fred Moseley, 'The Universals and Particulars in Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*' in *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*, 115-140.

¹⁵⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §575-7/276; *Metaph.* 1074b33.

¹⁵⁷ Adorno, *Hegel*, 94.

This logic also shapes Hegel's thinking about social thought. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, he makes explicit the applicability of his syllogisms to his *realphilosophie*:

Like the solar system, the state, for instance, is, in the practical sphere, a system of three syllogisms. (1) The *individual* (the person) joins itself through its *particularity* (physical and spiritual needs, what becomes the civil society, once they have been further developed for themselves) with the *universal* (the society, justice, law, government). (2) The will, the activity of individuals, is the mediating factor which satisfies the needs in relation to society, the law, and so forth, just as it fulfils and realises the society, the law, and so forth. (3) But the universal (state, government, law) is the substantial middle [term] in which the individuals and their satisfaction have and acquire their fulfilled reality, mediation, and subsistence. Since the mediation joins each of the determinations with the other extreme, each joins itself precisely in this way together with itself; it produces itself and this production is its self-preservation. - It is only through the nature of this joining- together, through this triad of syllogisms with the same *terminis*, that a whole is truly understood in its organisation.¹⁵⁸

The mediations between the three syllogisms, between the individual and particular in terms of needs and individual activity, can only be satisfied in the unity and self-relation of universality. In its social composition, concrete totality, knows itself.

The categories developed in his *Logic* provide the internal logic of *Philosophy of Right*. In the movement from abstract will to ethical life, 'The *shape* which the concept assumes in its actualisation' is an expression of the absolute.¹⁵⁹ The concept of ethical life is made concrete through its development and shows itself to be speculative. Hegel's entire social thought is dependent on his metaphysics. Ethical life is understood in terms of the mediations of his syllogistic logic and social existence is understood in terms of the realisation (*actualitas*) of reason in history.¹⁶⁰ Speculative thought is at once categorical and normative. As Tony Smith notes,

categorical theories of this sort are by no means value free. When a structure from the realm of *realphilosophie* is interpreted in terms of a categorial structure taken from the *Logic*, this necessarily involves an evaluation of it.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *EL*, §198/273.

¹⁵⁹ *PR*, §1/25. Pippin quotes Hegel that 'Intellectual intuition is alone realised by and in ethical life', *Hegel's Idealism*, 276n34. It is worth noting, he references' Rose's discussion of 'absolute ethical life' from *HCS* in this context.

¹⁶⁰ Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Tony Smith, *The Logic of Marx's Capital* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 17.

From an understanding of Hegel's categorical approach, it now becomes possible to discuss his social theory, now stressing the Aristotelian themes in his ethical thought.

Part 4

Ethical life for Hegel is the standpoint of mutually shared recognition as self-consciousness, which becomes understood and directed by human action towards the good, realised as freedom. This concept is first present in his early *System of Ethical Life* and in his critique of empiricism and Kant in his *Natural Law* essay.¹⁶² The concept of ethical life crowns his mature 'systematic exposition' of political and social theory, *The Philosophy of Right*.¹⁶³ The essential feature of this conception is his sublation of Aristotelian ethics into an understanding of modern civil society. Hegel's concept of ethical life fuses human subjectivity with the need for collective understandings of practices, norms and values ordered rationally. Here if the life of civil society is to be ethical, it must be politically ordered.

Hegel critically draws upon political economy in his account of the sphere of civil society and its relation to ethical life. In understanding the gulf between subjective will and rational political collectivity in modern society, Hegel identifies civil society in terms defined by the antagonistic character of modern property relations. Hegel's conception of civil society and the corresponding system of needs locates his ethical theory in a political assessment of modern social relations. In this respect, Hegel's account of Kantian morality involves a social perspective that is critical of bourgeois property and the barriers it poses to the rational organisation of social life.

Unlike many contemporary understandings of moral philosophy, Hegel's concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) hinges on its distinction from morality (*Moralität*). For Hegel, morality represents a subjectivism – one that he associates with both empiricism and Kantianism. Hegel demonstrates the applicability of his critique of Kant's theoretical philosophy in his discussion of the individualism of his moral thought. Hegel suggests the dualism between 'is' and 'ought' in his theoretical philosophy has devastating

¹⁶² See *SEL*, 147-77.

¹⁶³ *PR*, 9.

consequences for his moral philosophy. With his concept of ethical life, Hegel incorporates Aristotle's concern for reasoning which cultivates shared forms of life. Ethical life allows for the good life, a sublation of morality and politics into the shape of collective forms of rule. Both Aristotle and Hegel understand ethics as part of an architectonic form of political and social reasoning.

The concept of ethical life which underpins Hegel's idea of freedom is developed through his critique of Kant's concept of morality (*Moralität*). Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* presents the core method of his moral thinking.¹⁶⁴ In this work, he begins by 'scrupulously' separating an empirical 'practical anthropology' and a rational moral philosophy.¹⁶⁵ Morality seeks its laws not in 'the nature of man nor in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but solely *a priori* in the concepts of pure reason'.¹⁶⁶ Kant advances a theory of morality based on the concept of the moral will. This 'subjective principle of action' forms the basis of practical reason.¹⁶⁷ He asks the question: 'what ought I do?'

Kant's formal answer to this question conceives moral action in accordance with duty, understood *a priori*. Thus duty is determined by reason and in this sense, prevents self-interest. Duty must be done for its own sake and out of 'reverence' for the law.¹⁶⁸ The will aims at the good, which it achieves 'not as a *means* to some further end, but *in itself*'.¹⁶⁹ In this way, duty forms the moral content of maxims. This sets up Kant's 'categorical imperative', the idea 'I ought never to act except in such a way *that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law*'.¹⁷⁰ This ought is formed by reason and acts independently of desire. The categorical imperative is present in every person, irrespective of their consciousness of it.

¹⁶⁴ As Adorno noted, 'Kant himself made it look as if the *Groundwork* were a kind of preparation for the critical standpoint, whereas the *Critique of Practical Reason* was the systematic execution, once that reflective critical standpoint had been achieved', Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 21. See also, *Groundwork*, 60. Adorno argues that the *Groundwork* cannot be seen as the entire basis of Kant's moral philosophy. This claim is legitimate, but for reasons of brevity, I will put this issue to one side.

¹⁶⁵ Kant, *Groundwork*, 56-7.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 58-9.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 97.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 67. He adds, 'every rational being... must in all his actions... always be viewed *at the same time as an end*', 105.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 74.

The universality of Kant's moral law lies in its applicability to 'all *rational beings as such* – not merely subject to contingent conditions and exceptions, but with *absolute necessity*'.¹⁷¹ Kant explicitly rejects a form of morality based on experience. With Hume in mind, Kant writes 'In actual fact it is absolutely impossible for experience to establish with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action in other respects right has rested solely on moral grounds and on the thought of one's duty'.¹⁷² Just as experience cannot ground morality, neither can 'the particularities of human nature'.¹⁷³ Feeling has little to do with morality. Instead, for Kant the moral will must come from *a priori* pure reason alone.

Kant clarifies this notion of rationality by examining the nature of an imperative in context with objective laws. This objectivity determines the nature of rational action and aims to bring 'contingent' factors into its principle. In this case, reason issues 'imperatives' which express an '*ought*' (*Sollen*).¹⁷⁴ For Kant, the ought determines what type of end is possible and what imperatives allow that end to be reached. He stresses this end is happiness. In this context, Kant clarifies that the 'categorical imperative' is demarcated from other imperatives by its indeterminateness. The categorical imperative is pure form, which allows reason to totally define morality without the imperative impacted by contingency.¹⁷⁵ Unlike an imperative that is a possibility when certain conditions are provided for, Kant provides justification for the categorical imperative in terms of its ability to conform to its own logic. He writes famously, "There is therefore only a single categorical imperative and it is this: "*Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law*". This formula provides the form for moral justification.¹⁷⁶ Moral actors ought to make choices with the self-assurance that their action would constitute a universal law. In this sense morality is not actual, but is 'an *ought* without an *is*'.¹⁷⁷ Kant codifies a method for thinking about morality as conforming to laws based on the ought of individual action. Each autonomous actor must adjudicate for themselves their moral decisions. However, the correct application of their reason will mean employing the same maxim. The categorical imperative brings

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷² Ibid., 80, 82, 93, 135.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 84, 121.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 97. For MacIntyre's critique of this justification, see my discussion in the previous chapter.

¹⁷⁷ Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 126.

these subjects together in a 'kingdom' of ends, which proposes an abstract equality between individuals premised on their autonomy of wills.¹⁷⁸ This understanding of rationality proposes that the autonomy of will is freedom. Kant writes, 'since morality is a law for us only as *rational beings*, it must be equally valid for all rational beings; and since it must be derived solely from the property of freedom, we have got to prove that freedom too is a property of the will of all rational beings'.¹⁷⁹ Kant finds in this will the freedom of self-determination.

Desire and impulse are cast away as 'burdens' to reason and the 'I ought' of action becomes the 'I will', grounding morality in reason alone.¹⁸⁰ However, Kant's conception of reason falters in his final suggestion that the *limit* of moral inquiry is that we do not know '*how freedom is possible*'. For Kant, 'Reason would overstep all its limits if it took upon itself to *explain how* pure reason can be practical'. The *Groundwork* finishes with the suggestion that the categorical imperative is both necessary but insufficient: it is 'incomprehensible' and limited.¹⁸¹

It is precisely this limit that Hegel subjects to critique. His essay on *Natural Law* establishes the main lines of criticism of Kant's moral philosophy, which are subsequently developed in his mature philosophy. In this essay, Hegel identifies the limitations of Kantian morality (*Moralität*) in its subjectivistic character. Kant's moral philosophy pertains to individual moral will which denies the object determinations socially supplied. Central to this view is that the *limited* concept of reason renders moral action and the condition for its possibility unknowable. Instead, Hegel conceives of philosophical truth in reference to the absolute. In this respect, Hegel mobilises his critique of Kant that implicitly relies on experience.¹⁸² He is unconvinced by Kant's critique of empiricism. Rather than deriving morality from experience, Kant seeks to

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 111-3.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 133-5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 141, 143, 148.

¹⁸² This argument parallels his approach in *EL*. Especially his comment on Kant, 'However, the *good* in which the ultimate purpose of the world is located is determined from the start only as *our* good, as the moral law of *our* practical reason. As a result, the unity does not extend beyond the agreement of the state of the world and of world events with our morality. Moreover, even with this limitation the ultimate purpose, the *good*, is an undetermined abstractum, as is what *duty* is supposed to be'. He adds, 'The Kantian philosophy opposes this empiricism with the principle of thought and that of freedom in general, and sides with the first empiricism without in the least stepping outside its [that first empiricism's] general principles. The world of perception and of the understanding reflecting on it continues to exist on one side of its [the Kantian philosophy's] dualism.' §60/105-6.

locate it in reason. According to Hegel both claims share the ‘same’ one-sided and atomistic starting point. His charge of Kant’s formalism is that in the posting of the *a priori* as unconditioned and contingent, Kant is forced to accept the empirical realm as a means of determining the relationship between the conditioned and condition. Hegel suggests this creates a loop, in which ‘formalism not only renounces all the advantages it has over what it calls empiricism; in addition, since the conditioned and the condition, as interconnected opposites, are posited as subsisting absolutely, formalism itself sinks totally into empirical necessity’.¹⁸³ In this way, the formal dualism between experience (intuition) and reason (concept) is left intact. By pointing out the defects of both approaches to morality, Hegel locates the space in which he will chart his understanding of ethical life. Hegel’s alternative is to go beyond the binary of particularity and universality. He sharpens the upshot of this antinomy in moral and political atomism:

we are left with the human being in the image of the bare state of nature, or the abstraction of the human being with his essential capacities, and we have only to glance at it to discover what is necessary. What is recognised as having a connection with the state must therefore also be separated out, because the image of the necessary cannot contain absolute unity, but only simple multiplicity [*Mannigfaltigkeit*], or atoms with the fewest possibility properties. Thus, whatever may come under the concept of a linking and ordering of these [atoms] as the weakest unity of which the principle of multiplicity [*Vielheit*] is capable, is excluded from this multiplicity as an adventurous and later accretion.¹⁸⁴

With Hobbes in mind, Hegel rejects the model of humans as abstracted entities as ‘mutually opposed and in absolute conflict with each other’. This is the realm of fragmentation. Rather, in his view the ethical realm is the ‘architectonic’ which locates the ‘the inner necessity’ of human relations in the ‘the absolute unity of the one and many’.¹⁸⁵ Hegel does not oppose the individual for the community, but in his view the ethical realm, that which allows humans to be at home in the world, must provide the conditions for individuals to actualise themselves in relation to others.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ *NL*, 109. See also, *PR*, §135/162. Sedgwick has a useful discussion of Hegel’s charge in *PR*, §135, *Hegel’s Critique of Kant*, 2-4.

¹⁸⁴ *NL*, 111.

¹⁸⁵ *NL*, 113-115, 119.

¹⁸⁶ *NL*, 105-7, 114-18. Hegel argues that the ‘natural’ is not ethical in and of itself, *Ibid*. See also, *PR*, §4A/36.

In a direct sense, Hegel's thesis hinges on Aristotelian insights. Hegel maintains that the moral law lacks the content that would give any rational action meaning if individual were to realise their aims and objectives. As Jonathan Lear explains, Kant

encourages the idea that in viewing the world objectively I reflectively detach myself from my present concerns, interests, and situation and conceive of myself simply as one agent among others. But if Hegel's Aristotelian criticism is correct, then if one actually succeeds in viewing the interests and concerns of all agents, including oneself, from a genuinely detached perspective, there will be no motivation left for acting in any particular way at all.¹⁸⁷

Following Lear, Hegel's critique of Kant must be understood in terms of his attempt to recover ethical reasoning as a means of attaining the good life in society. For Aristotle, it is society that allows the cultivation of ethical reasoning. In this context, ethical life is understood by individual actors as the rational practice which best allows for happiness, virtue and the good life.¹⁸⁸ If happiness is 'activity in accord with virtue' then 'the just person needs other people as partners and recipients of his actions'.¹⁸⁹ Ethical life must always correspond with the social circumstances which allow happiness to be met.

Hegel sharpens this view in his critique of Kant's moral philosophy. Hegel points to the problem that occurs when we try to determine what right and duty are. Kant opens up a contradiction between his concern for the abstract nature of the moral will and the *a priori* and the need to 'look to this absolute practical reason for a moral legislation – which would have to have content – because the essence of this reason consists in having no content at all'.¹⁹⁰ The result, in Hegel's view, is formalism. The determinacy is forced to supply content, which is then made into a moral law. Once it becomes a moral law, according to Kant, it must be universalised so as to guide action without contradiction. Hegel retorts, 'there is nothing which could not be made into a moral law in this way'. If premised on an arbitrary basis its supposed universality is. Hegel picks out Kant's famous 'deposit' argument to exemplify his point. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant puts the following argument:

¹⁸⁷ Lear, *Aristotle*, 156. In a footnote to this passage, he sites John Rawls and Thomas Nagel as proponents of this view.

¹⁸⁸ *NE* 1170a12.

¹⁸⁹ *NE* 1177a13-32.

¹⁹⁰ *NL*, 124.

The most common understanding can distinguish without instruction what form in a maxim makes it fit for a giving of universal law and what does not. I have, for example, made it my maxim to increase my wealth by every safe means. Now I have a deposit in my hands, the owner of which has died and left no record of it. This is, naturally, a case for my maxim. Now I want only to know whether that maxim could also hold as a universal practical law. I therefore apply the maxim to the present case and ask whether it could indeed take the form of a law, and consequently whether I could through my maxim at the same time give such a law as this: that everyone may deny a deposit which no one can prove has been made. I at once become aware that such a principle, as a law, would annihilate itself since it would bring it about that there would be no deposits at all. A practical law that I cognise as such must qualify for a giving of universal law: this is an identical proposition and therefore self-evident. Now, if I say that my will is subject to a practical law, I cannot cite my inclination (e.g., in the present case my avarice) as the determining ground of my will appropriate to a universal practical law; for this is so far from being qualified for a giving of universal law that in the form of a universal law it must instead destroy itself.¹⁹¹

Someone who subsequently dies has placed a deposit into my hands, but left no record of it. Kant is thus referring to a situation in which I can freely take the deposit (despite the wrongfulness of my action), because no-one can conclusively prove the deposit does not belong to me. Kant's argument lays down the procedure and criterion involved in evaluating if a maxim might be universalisable with consistency. If in taking the deposit I increase my wealth but deceive others, then a universalisable law on this action would make all deposits impossible.

Hegel makes the simple but powerful objection: 'But what contradiction is there in no deposits being made?'. If there are no deposits, then the prior determinations make little sense. Further, if property itself is questioned, Kant's proposition is 'tautological', it would affirm property with the statement "Property is property and nothing else besides". This does little more than affirm property:

if there is property, there? must be property. But if the opposite determinacy, i.e. the negation of property, is posited, the legislation of the same practical reason results in the tautology: non-property is non-property. If there is no property, anything which claims to be property must be annulled [*aufgehoben*]. But the interest [at stake] is precisely to prove that there must be property; we are solely concerned with what lies outside the competence of this practical legislation of pure reason, namely with deciding which of the opposing determinacies must be posited. But pure reason requires that this should have been done in advance,

¹⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5:28.

and that one of the opposing determinacies should already have been posited; only then can it enact its now superfluous legislation.¹⁹²

Hegel's charge is that on its own terms, the categorical imperative cannot allow *any* law to become a moral law.¹⁹³ Or, it can only do so on the basis of accepting as given (and thus as right) all the existing conditions of society; e.g. in the case referred to above, Kant does not question the underlying morality at work in the deposit-making society. The existence of capital (and of a society based around capital) flies under his moral radar. In pointing to the presupposed content determinations that seep into the form of Kant's moral thought, Hegel makes a remarkable step in modern social theory. First, he opposes the rigid imposition of form on social content. Law cannot be said to supply morality without reference to the totality of the social world.¹⁹⁴

Second, Hegel advances a view of morality as just one moment of a larger ethical and political sphere. Here morality relates to the 'relations between individuals' but closes itself off to the forms of social life that are necessary determinations for universality.¹⁹⁵ Morality itself is abstract, separate from the content that is filled by ethical life. For Hegel, freedom is realised in 'the moment of the negatively absolute or infinity...which must be identified in *absolute ethical life*'. The 'shape' of absolute ethical life is constituted in 'a *people*'.¹⁹⁶ Ethical life is given definition by its actualisation in a community, which Hegel sees as preserving the ethical ideal of the *polis*. Hegel's translation of *polis* as *Volk* to carries this meaning.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² NL, 125.

¹⁹³ There is a close resemblance here between Hegel and MacIntyre's critique of Kant as discussed in the last chapter. In her defence of Kant contra MacIntyre, Onora O'Neill points out his 'understanding and criticism of Kant is venerable enough; in many respects it dates back to Hegel.'¹⁹³ Onora O'Neill, 'Kant after Virtue', *Inquiry*, 26:4 (1983): 390.

¹⁹⁴ Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, 294. See also, HCS, 61. Goldmann defends Kant on this point, *Immanuel Kant*, 166-7. Although Goldmann does argue that Kant ultimately is unable to pass from the 'I to the *we*', meaning that he 'remained within the framework of bourgeois individualist thought', *Immanuel Kant*, 170.

¹⁹⁵ NL, 131.

¹⁹⁶ NL, 139-40. See also, 'the absolute *ethical life*; the single [agent] as member of a people is an ethical essence, whose essence is the living substance of the universal ethical life; he is this essence as singular, as an ideal form; the form of a being, only qua cancelled; the [real] being of ethical life in its living manifoldness is the *customs* of the people.' *SEL*, 242.

¹⁹⁷ Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 351.

Third, Hegel's reading of political economy is evidenced in this passage.¹⁹⁸ The concept of civil society is especially important for Hegel's social theory, namely that 'property itself is directly opposed to universality'. Civil society is the sphere of particularity, whereas ethical life demands a universality that is total and not ridden by conflict.¹⁹⁹ Hegel's concept of ethical life looks beyond the confines of subjective action and poses this investigation in the form of social life itself. In this pursuit, Hegel incorporates and informs his critique of morality from his understanding of political economy, which is further developed in the *Natural Law* essay.

For Hegel, the realm of civil society forms a 'nexus of relations' in which economic functions, especially property and labour, shape human needs and realities. Hegel considers the needs of humans within a social system defined by inequality and 'the process of acquisition' between 'jealous' and competing 'classes [*Stände*]'. In his view, the whole necessary for absolute ethical life, as 'genuine and compete justice and morality' (*Sittlichkeit*) is in conflict with the particularity of civil society which defines the existing reality. He maintains that 'This examination of the system of reality has shown that absolute ethical life must adopt a negative attitude towards this system... the absolute ethical realm must take on a perfectly organised shape [*Gestalt*], for relation is the abstraction of the aspect of shape.'²⁰⁰ There is a definite Aristotelian character to this discussion. Like Aristotle, Hegel's organic language metaphysically prioritises the whole over the parts. Ethical life must be understood in terms of the conditions which allow for the community to become concretely universal.²⁰¹ However, he transforms this ontology with a modern view of subjectivity.

Hegel demonstrates that the 'Shape of ethical life and its individuality' requires an account of the 'universal mutual dependence with regard to physical needs and the labour and accumulation [of resources]'.²⁰² He draws upon political economy, assessing the modern division of labour.²⁰³ However, Hegel views these relations as conflict-ridden and partial. Unlike Adam Smith's understanding of the division of labour as the

¹⁹⁸ Lukács' *The Young Hegel* remains a seminal discussion of these themes. Also noteworthy are Raymond Plant, 'Hegel and Political Economy' Part I and II, *New Left Review*, 1/103 (1977): 79-92 and 1/104 (1977): 103-113; Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution*, 107-156.

¹⁹⁹ *NL*, 127; *SEL*, 104-14.

²⁰⁰ *NL*, 141-6.

²⁰¹ Neuhauser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 128-33; Beiser, *Hegel*, 234.

²⁰² *NL*, 141.

²⁰³ *SEL*, 102-125. See also, Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 175-199.

realisation of human nature, Hegel views this form of interaction to be abstract. In this way, Hegel historicises this form of interaction.²⁰⁴

As articulated in his early political writings, Hegel draws a distinction between relative and absolute ethical life.²⁰⁵ The shapes of ethical life relate to the forms of identity in the social realm. First, experience is found in the individual, which is self-contained and limited. This is in turn negated by the immediate relation of individuals which come to see each other as particularities, means to their own ends. Hegel considers this to be ‘relative ethical life’, since experience is oppositional. Relative ethical life is inorganic since it relates to the life dominated by the economic realm. Hegel’s claim is that relative ethical life bases itself a particularity which reflects a self-interested subjectivity. Absolute ethical life, however, is ‘organic’ and relates to immanent essence of individuals.²⁰⁶ The importance of this distinction is that it allows Hegel to suggest the essence of individuals is not oppositional but socially constituted.

Further, Hegel analyses relative ethical life by the determinations of civil society, charting the unity of needs (subject), work and possession (object):

Thus, two classes [*Stände*] are formed in accordance with the absolute necessity of the ethical. One of these is the class of the free, the individual of absolute ethical life; its organs are the single individuals. From the point of view of its indifference, it is the absolute living spirit, and from the point of view of its objectivity, it is the living movement and divine self-enjoyment of this whole in the totality of the individuals who constitute its organs and members. But its formal or negative side must also be absolute – namely work, which is directed not towards the nullification of individual determinacies, but towards death, and whose product is again not something individual, but the being and preservation of the whole of the ethical organisation.²⁰⁷

The relation between individuals as mediated by economic relations is what Hegel understands as abstractly universal. The individual appears self-sufficient but really exists as part of a much larger relation. Hegel is distinctly modern in this respect. Directly following the paragraph above, he compares the first class to what Aristotle knows as ‘πολιτευειν, which means living with and for one’s people, leading a universal life wholly

²⁰⁴ Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, 76-82.

²⁰⁵ Rose sharpens the distinction between these concepts and applies them to Hegel’s thought as a whole. She makes sense of this concept in terms of the division of labour found in *SEL*. See *HCS*, 55-77, 169.

²⁰⁶ *NL*, 146.

²⁰⁷ *NL*, 147.

dedicated to the public interest, or philosophising'. Hegel references the passage in *The Politics* where Aristotle writes that 'the master need only know how to order that which the slave must know how to execute. Hence those who are in a position which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics'.²⁰⁸ Hegel strongly rejects Aristotle's defence of slavery.²⁰⁹ However, his reference to *The Politics* denotes the seriousness he afforded Aristotle's discussion of economic relations and the necessary link labour has to ethical life.

Hegel considers slaves, as an unfree class, next to a peasant class and to the modern earning class (*Klasse*). His aim to understand how the classes fit within the relations of work and property. Since the slave is someone else's property, the slave is not an abstract individual but a particular of 'domination and dependence'. Hegel brings in this point to suggest the modern 'system of property' conditions individuality as 'private individuals'.²¹⁰ Hegel considers this private life as that of an abstract freedom in which 'the individual is only free for himself as such, and enjoy citizen freedom alone – in the sense of that of a *bourgeois* and not that of a *citizen*'.²¹¹ The question of how the individual relates to the world needs to understand the movement from the former to the later.

In this way, Hegel seeks to reconcile the split between society and the individual that is endemic to modern life. Accordingly, for the Greeks life was immediately ethical, with practices and beliefs socially embedded as freedom. The Greeks 'made their world their home'.²¹² Their culture reflected this freedom as the 'spirit of ideally being-at-home-with-themselves in their physical, corporate, legal, moral and political existence'.²¹³ Greek life was ethical, but limited and *pre-modern* since subjectivity was only comprehended as part of nature. If the *polis* allowed ethical life to be known in terms of a just community, the

²⁰⁸ *Pol.* 1255b31-7. See also, *Metaph.* 981b13-982a3.

²⁰⁹ According to Lear, 'Hegel intended the master-slave dialectic as an implicit criticism of Aristotle's defence of slavery and the master class.', *Aristotle*, 64. For Ferrarin, 'the reason why we cannot go back to Aristotle cannot simply turn on the question of slavery, because slavery is itself the symptom of a more fundamental misconception for Hegel. Obviously, Hegel denies that there are slaves by nature, and makes all slave/master relation a historical stage of spirit's life. And that goes hand in hand with the notion of work, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 353.

²¹⁰ *NL*, 147-51.

²¹¹ *LHP* 2, 209; *NL*, 161.

²¹² *LHP* 1, 150.

²¹³ *LHP* 1, 151.

norms pertaining to the family and slavery were understood in terms of what is natural.²¹⁴ Subjectivity was limited since Greek life excluded some from the self-reflection of public life. Hegel makes this point in a critique of Aristotle's natural justification of slavery.²¹⁵ As Hegel points out, 'in Greece the few alone are free'.²¹⁶ Ethical life for the Greeks was 'bound up' with, but not reducible to, slavery: it was 'partly a matter of mere chance, a transient and limited flowering, and partly a hard servitude of the human and the humane'.²¹⁷

Despite this critique of Aristotle, Hegel incorporates his organic metaphysics into his own ethical thought. Hegel explicitly differentiates morality as the '*individual's ethical life to the real absolute ethical life*' in which the 'absolute ethical life is so essentially the ethical life of everyone that one cannot describe it as reflected, as such, in the individual'.²¹⁸ Hegel quotes approvingly from Aristotle,

The state [*Volk*] is more in accord with nature than is the individual; for if the individual, in isolation, is not self-sufficient, he must – like all [other] parts – constitute a *single* unit with the whole. But anyone who cannot belong to a community [*vernicht gemeinschaftlich sein kann*], or who requires nothing since he is self-sufficient, is not part of the state [*Volk*] and is therefore either an animal or a god.²¹⁹

Hegel adapts the passage for his own purposes. His translation of the Greek *koinonein* into *gemeinschaftlich* emphasises the community as a form of political association in which social life is determined by political life of the state.²²⁰ However, Hegel fundamentally shares Aristotle's view that humans are political beings, defined and made human by their political association. Without sociality, there can be no ethical reasoning.

²¹⁴ Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 139-143. See *PbG*, ¶451/177-8.

²¹⁵ For a discussion of his understanding of slavery in terms of action and production, see Adriel M. Trott, *Aristotle and the Nature of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 178-82.

²¹⁶ *LHP* 1, 153.

²¹⁷ Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 21.

²¹⁸ *NL*, 159.

²¹⁹ *NL*, 159-60.

²²⁰ For the translation of this passage and the impact of the translation on Hegel's meaning, see the editorial notes *NL*, 159-60n99. This move illustrates how Hegel's idea of the state is in an important way 'a successor concept to the ancient Greek "polis"'. Chitty, 'The Basis of the State in the Marx of 1842', 221, 223.

For Aristotle, the cultivation of the good is the flourishing of both political and ethical dimensions. This view is decisively expressed in the passage from *The Politics* which Hegel quotes. The full passage reads,

It is clear, then, that *the city both exists by nature and is prior in nature to the individual. For if an individual is not self-sufficient when separated, he will be in a similar state to that of the other parts in relation to the whole. And anyone who cannot live in a community with others, or who does not need to because of his self-sufficiency, is no part of a city, so that he is either a wild beast or a god.* Now, although the impulse toward this sort of community exists by nature in everyone, the person who first put one together was also the cause of very great goods. For just as when completed a human is the best of the animals, so when separated from law and judicial proceeding he is worst of all. For injustice is harshest when it possesses weapons, and a human grows up possessed of weapons for practical wisdom and virtue to use, which may be used for absolutely contrary purposes. That is why he is the most unrestrained and most savage of animals when he lacks virtue, as well as the worst as regards sex and food. But justice is something political. For justice is a political community's order, and justice is judgment of what is just.²²¹

Aristotle's organic state contains six vital components: 1) the state as a creation of nature; 2) the state as something prior to the individual;²²² 3) the idea that the individual who is isolated and not part of the whole cannot be human; 4) that such humans, being wholly self-sufficient, are either beasts or gods; 5) the organic state founds social interaction and sets the standard for virtue; and 6) without the state there is no virtue. Aristotle's conception locates the sociability of humans in the types of societal organisation that can provide the vehicle for ethical interaction in the very nature of this shared and organic existence. Not only are humans perfected by society, but also when outside of it (and thus unrestrained by virtue), humans are worse than any animal precisely because they possess the weapon of reason but cannot exercise it or cultivate the good. Their behaviour is not unintelligible, it is simply unrestrained.

Outside society, there can be no virtue. Society allows for humans the potential to understand the desires and needs by practical reasoning. The cultivation of ethical behaviour and intelligibility comes through the practices and self-cultivation of human actors. This ethical realm fosters human flourishing. Happiness is understood as a concrete whole, a quality of shared life rather than a passing state of feeling. Here

²²¹ *Pol.* 1253a25-40. Trans, C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2017). Emphasis added to point out differences between Hegel's German and Reeve's English translation. See *NL*, 159-60n99 for more on this comparison. The Jowett translation I have generally followed uses 'state' instead of city and 'society' rather than 'community'.

²²² For the 'naturalness' of the polis, see Trott, *Aristotle and the Nature of Community*, 42-82.

Aristotle's practical philosophy is underpinned by a teleological conception of the good, found and developed in the reasoning of human actors. Aristotle sees this in organic terms, in the development of forms according to their proper function (*ergon*). It is only when this form is allowed to develop and be realised that its nature can be said to be understandable.

Like Aristotle, Hegel's shape of ethical life is organic. He follows Aristotle in conceptualising the state as both organic and the realisation of human rationality.²²³ In this sense, his organism must be understood in the terms of his ontology in the *Logic*.²²⁴ His view of the state as an organic whole is dependent on his immanent and teleological metaphysics.²²⁵ Hegel follows Aristotle in the view that a life well lived is realised in the form of human association which allows for the good. However, unlike Aristotle, Hegel's ethical life incorporates modern notions of the will of the individual.²²⁶ In this way, Hegel's ethics sublates Aristotle and modern understandings of the good.²²⁷ In short,

the absolutely ethical has its proper organic body in individuals; and its movement and life [*Lebendigkeit*] in the common being and activity of everyone is absolutely identical in its universal and particular forms.²²⁸

The shape of ethical life, 'like all living things, is simply an identity of universal and particular, and it is therefore an individuality and a shape'.²²⁹ This syllogism summarises the concept of absolute ethical life, which, once differentiated from morality, demonstrates that the individual is just one moment in a more complex nexus of social relations. For the individual's will to be realised, rather than denying the whole, Hegel insists that it is preserved in the living shape of absolute ethical life. Hegel denies that moral philosophy (*Moralität*) can understand 'true reality' since it moves away from

²²³ He puts this explicitly, the 'state is an organism', *PR*, §269G/290. G.R.G Mure contrasts Hegel's Aristotelian notion of the organic state and his 'mighty struggle to reconcile form and content within the *ambitus* of rational thought' with 'Kant's abstract concept of reason', *The Philosophy of Hegel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 53.

²²⁴ Robert R. Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 295.

²²⁵ As Besier notes, 'True to his immanent teleology, Hegel understands norms and values essentially as the formal-final causes of things. The norm or law for a thing consists in its formal-final cause, which is both its purpose and essence. In Aristotle, the form or essence of a thing and its purpose or end are essentially one and the same, because it is the purpose or end of a thing to realise or develop its inner essence or nature. Hence we determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, according to whether it realizes this purpose or essence. The good or right is that which promotes the realization of this end; the bad or wrong is that which prevents its realisation', *Hegel*, 210-11.

²²⁶ *LHP* 2, 208.

²²⁷ Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, 344. See also, Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 316.

²²⁸ *NL*, 162.

²²⁹ *NL*, 172-3.

understanding the social world as an organic whole. Reason grasps the real and wants to actualise it in the world. At a more systematic level, Hegel develops the inquiry of the *Natural Law* essay with the role of reason in the *Philosophy of Right*.

The Philosophy of Right bears the subtitle ‘Natural Law and Political Science in Outline’.²³⁰ The Preface dares the intriguer to find ‘delight’ in reason, to recognise the role of reason in modern life.²³¹ Reason is seen as the redeemer of ethical life in the conflicts of modernity. Hegel’s aim is to depict reason as objective spirit in the institutions of the social world.²³² He wants to show how objective institutions mediate forms of social life. In this sense, the text deepens his criticism of subjectivism.²³³ He argues not only that the world is inherently rational, but that this rationality can be actualised in the organisation of the social world. Hegel’s attempt to systematise social theory into an objective philosophy culminates in ‘Ethical Life’, the sphere of the family, civil society and the state. He wants to conceptualise the political structure of the modern world. *The Philosophy of Right* establishes a view of politics and ethics as essential part of the same rational inquiry. His concept of ethical life is fundamentally an architectonic for the unity of political and social association in the open space of recognition and freedom.

The logical structure of *The Philosophy of Right* starts with the first sphere, ‘abstract right’, which then transitions into ‘morality’ before its transcendence into the sphere of ‘ethical life’. Hegel again makes a sharp distinction between the concepts of morality and ethics.²³⁴ The latter concept envelopes the abstract will of right and the subjective individualism of morality.²³⁵ Beginning with the most abstract category of modern society, the ‘idea of right’, Hegel immanently develops from this starting point, which again *returns* in its final and most concrete iteration as freedom.²³⁶ After the abstractness

²³⁰ For the significance of this subtitle in terms of Hegel’s attempt to overcome the antithesis ‘between morality and politics’, see Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution*, 163.

²³¹ PR, 22.

²³² Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, §483-7/217-9.

²³³ Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 118.

²³⁴ PR, §136/163, §137/164.

²³⁵ He writes, ‘Morality and ethics, which are usually regarded as roughly synonymous, are taken here in essentially distinct senses. Yet even representational thought [*Vorstellung*] seems to distinguish them; Kantian usage prefers the expression morality, as indeed the practical principles of Kant’s philosophy are confined throughout to this concept, even rendering the point of view of ethics impossible and in fact expressly infringing and destroying it. But even if morality and ethics were etymologically synonymous, this would not prevent them, since they are now different words, from being used for different concepts.’ PR, §33/63.

²³⁶ PR, §2/26, §4/35.

of abstract will, which is contained to the internal categories of personal property, contract and crime meets the ‘*subjective individuality [Eitzelheit]*’ of the sphere of morality. This sphere introduces the external aspects of moral responsibility, intention and duty, which mediate abstract right. According to Hegel, both moments are brought together in ethical life:

the *unity* and *truth* of these two abstract moments - the thought Idea of the good realised in the internally *reflected will* and in the *external world*; - so that freedom, as the *substance*, exists no less as *actuality* and *necessity* than as *subjective will*; - the Idea in its universal existence [*Existenz*] in and for itself; [the sphere of] *ethical life*.²³⁷

For Hegel, ethical life is the most concrete sphere of human individuality, action and collectively. Freedom and human good are essentially linked. Freedom cannot be understood as the positive freedom of action, nor absolute formal principles, but instead reflects a much stronger meaning that associates freedom with the actualised good of subjectivity expressed through a people and state. This substantive meaning of the good is considered as a teleological development in relation to human ends:

In so far as the determinations of happiness are present and given, they are not true determinations of freedom, which is not truly present for itself until it has adopted the good as an end in itself.²³⁸

The task of human freedom is to not accept the status quo as happiness but to determine freedom in the fulfillment of the good life. Like Hegel, Aristotle understands happiness as the end of human action.²³⁹ Hegel’s concept of ‘the good’ brings Aristotelian ethics to bear in his explicitly modern view of ‘*subjective freedom*, [which] is the pivotal and focal point in the difference between *antiquity* and the *modern age*’.²⁴⁰

The good unites subjectivity and morality, demonstrating that both moments necessitate a relation of universality and particularity. Contra Kant, Hegel articulates the particularity of human practices require a universalising reason that allows practices to be understood not in a pregiven way but in the goods that emerge from practices.²⁴¹ Aristotle argues that the virtues go beyond,

²³⁷ PR, §33/62.

²³⁸ PR, §123H/151.

²³⁹ NE, 1097b21-22. In a note Hegel relates Aristotle’s reason with the ‘true principles of ethical action’ PR, §140/170-1; NE, 1110b27.

²⁴⁰ PR, §124/151.

²⁴¹ Pinkard makes this point well, *Hegel*, 479.

universals alone but must also be acquainted with the particulars: it is bound up with action, and action concerns the particulars... As a result, one ought to have [knowledge of] both [universals and particulars], but more so of the latter. But here too there would be a certain architectonic [art or knowledge].²⁴²

Hegel follows Aristotle's reasoning in that ethical reasoning requires a dialectic between the universal and particular.

Despite this acceptance, Hegel moves distinctly away from Aristotle's distinction between production and activity.²⁴³ For Hegel, action and production are part of spirit, which includes the determinations of labour and consciousness. However, Hegel's moves to recondition Aristotle's conception of political and ethical life *within* a modern concept of labour and political economy.²⁴⁴ The effect of this move is to push the limits of political economy and its individualist and empiricist foundations. What is crucial for Hegel's conception of freedom is that ethical life is conceived in the political terms first set out by Aristotle, as a unified and shared life. Hegel's *telos* of self-consciousness allows this collectively to be rational and at home with the world, as an individual and as a citizen. According to the first paragraph of the Section of *The Philosophy of Right* titled 'Ethical Life':

Ethical life is the *Idea of freedom* as the living good which has its knowledge and volition in self-consciousness, and its actuality through self-conscious action. Similarly, it is in ethical being that self-consciousness has its motivating end and a foundation which has being in and for itself. Ethical life is accordingly the *concept of freedom which has become the existing [vorhandenen] world and the nature of self-consciousness*.²⁴⁵

²⁴² NE, 1141b15023.

²⁴³ NE, 1140b10. According to Ferrarin, 'in Hegel's theory of activity there is certainly nothing like Aristotle's contrast between *praxis* and *poiêsis*, action and production; activity is often used synonymously with *Hervorbringen*, *Erzeugen*, *Wirken* (different ways of emphasising production or efficient causality). We can say that the distinction is both about the end and about the beginning of the action; thus it is both Aristotelian and Kantian, and neither. Activity, in sum, has to do with directed processes initiated by an agent as opposed to mere change happening to a patient. Further, it is not distinctively human: human beings can be patients (say, subject to sudden meteorological change), and an animal can be the agent of, say, its growth, reproduction, etc.', *Hegel and Aristotle*, 16. See also Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy*, 10.

²⁴⁴ Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution*, 15, 21. He notes, 'What is remarkable about Hegel's method of work in this period is that his reconstruction of the ancient theory of the *polis* walks side by side with the these contemporary studies. Just as he reached back to Aristotle's *Politics* in his struggle with natural law theory, so he now used elements of classical economics as a foil for handling the political economic problems raised by the English', 111.

²⁴⁵ PR, §142/189.

This ‘motivating end’ denotes the metaphysical character of the speculative absolute, which in this context is a likely reference to Aristotle. In the *Metaphysics*, he writes of substance as ‘a mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality. And the object of desire and object of thought move in this way; they move without being moved’.²⁴⁶ A mover that does not move captures the process of the objective moment of spirit. This Aristotelian insight refers to the ‘kind of movement wherein the actuality of a potentiality is achieved in activity’.²⁴⁷ Here this being, substance, is in conjunction with self-consciousness, subject. Hegel’s reference plays upon the integration of metaphysics and ethics in the Greek world. For the Greeks, substance was embodied in political life, where the *polis* embodied substance.²⁴⁸ Hegel’s reference to substance is of an ‘ethical substance’, in which political and ethical life express objective relations made by subjects and the form of the universal.

By locating freedom in the living good, Hegel restores reason its legitimate place in the real action of human beings. Here he points to an overcoming of the dichotomy between thought and being, thought can inform action and shape it towards a higher and developing truth. Here he agrees with Aristotle, who writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, ‘thought by itself moves nothing; what moves us is goal-directed thought concerned with action’.²⁴⁹ Hegel comments, ‘Aristotle thus places virtue in knowledge, yet reason is not, as many believe, the principle of virtue purely in itself, for it is rather the rational impulse towards what is good; both desire and reason are thus necessary moments in virtue’.²⁵⁰

As Hegel sees it, Aristotle’s notion of the flourishing of the virtues requires the activity of reasoning. This reasoning necessitates that humans act in accordance with the forms of activity which would develop a shared conception of the virtues. This activity is embodied in the life of the community. Moral decisions are oughts ‘in accordance with correct reasoning’.²⁵¹ However, this ought is derived from reason as an abstract universal, but developed through the success and failure of the practice of virtues specific to social life. The cultivation and process of acting in accordance with reason is the actualisation

²⁴⁶ *Metaph.* 1072a23-5. This connection is pointed out by Allen W. Wood in the editorial notes to *PR*, 435.

²⁴⁷ Trott, *Aristotle and the Nature of Community*, 28.

²⁴⁸ See for instance, *PR*, §240G/264.

²⁴⁹ *NE*, 1139a37-8. See also Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 65.

²⁵⁰ *LHP* 2, 204. Hegel is critical of the principle of the mean which he views as insufficient to determine the good.

²⁵¹ *EE* 1231b32.

of potentials inherent in human goods. The upshot of this conception of ethics is that one might hold onto a conception of the socially ordered human good, but distance oneself from the objection of moral relativism. After Aristotle and Hegel, it is not *any* community that allows rational practice, but the *just community*. The determinations of such a community require a content that is historically given, so we can be with Aristotle and Hegel *and* with Marx, by suggesting that community cannot be a state of domination. For Marx, it cannot be a state at all. However, the strain of ethical thought established in Aristotle and then Hegel and continued in Marx locates the potentiality of rational life in the actualisation of the good in the socially determinate conditions of the political community. Rather than an ethical state, for Marx ethical life is conceived in the association of free social relations.

In this way, ethical life is a concrete universal, a unification of the individual with society.²⁵² This universal is mediated by the particular and individual in a process of increasing self-consciousness within the objective world. Hegel depicts this process as one of recognition. Starting with autonomy, the self seeks others and in this unity, the individual is surpassed in their relations, now mediated, with others. Rather than individual difference at odds and opposition with sociality, Hegel's concept of recognition ends with 'release' (*freigabe*), the opening of freedom. The individual is at home with the social world, which gives individuality its social shape.²⁵³ Assimilating and surpassing the Kantian idea of reason as self-autonomy, Hegel manifests a richer sense of individuality in the universal forms of social life possible in intersubjective forms of recognition. Here self-made institutions reconcile and harmonises the rift between the individual and the community. This act, the path of self-consciousness, is a historical task which develops immanently and teleologically:

Here we can only point out that spirit begins from its own infinite possibility, but *only* from the possibility (which contains its absolute content implicitly). This is the purpose and the goal which it attains only as the end result, and which is only then its actuality.

²⁵² Beiser, *Hegel*, 234–5.

²⁵³ Michael J. Thompson, 'Freedom and Universality: Hegel's Republication Concept of Modernity', *Crisis and Critique*, 4:1 (2017): 410; Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 80–4.

Spirit comes to be from the contradictions, the urge striving for completion within its form. This immanent movement conceives of the development, the-coming-to-be, of a higher dialectical category within the existing form.

In the same way, the possibility points (at least in thought) to that which is to be come actual: more precisely the Aristotelian concept of potency (*dynamis*) is also *potentia* for it is force and power. Thus the imperfect, as its own opposite within itself, is the contradiction which certainly exists, but which is, by the same token, negated (*aufgehoben*) and resolved. This is the drive, the internal impulse of spiritual life, the drive to break through its own shell of naturalness, sensuality, and self-estrangement, in order to arrive at the light of consciousness, its own selfhood.²⁵⁴

The essential claim for Hegel that ‘*nous* rules the world’ is that the struggle for self-conscious to realise itself is the actualisation of a potentiality inherent in the shared ethical life of the modern world. Here there is a harmony of desires (individually and collectively mediated) with reason in the practices of the virtues, that which allows desire to be rationally decided. The relation between political and ethics is underpinned by a conception of the coming-to-be of the good life. Hegel brings out Aristotle’s teleological conception of the human good in the light of the modern world.

What is clear from Hegel’s social thought is the impossibility of a rational world in a world in which ‘self-estrangement’ predominates. The immanent critique of modern social relations from the standpoint of ethical life ends in Hegel’s thought with the possibility of a much deeper critique. This is the path Marx takes. However, Hegel is acutely aware that property relations configure modern forms of life and forms of thinking. Hegel’s critique of abstract right and morality gestures towards the fundamental problem of private property relations in modern life. If not for Rose’s suggestion that this Hegel implies *alternative* property relations, the attempts to mitigate the effects of civil society in *The Philosophy of Right* are unconvincing.

More pertinent is Hegel’s insight that the organisation of the good life requires an account of an elaborate ‘system of needs’ in which, human needs are met and ‘satisfied’ in ‘the mutual condition’ of recognition. Hegel suggests, ‘This universality, as the *quality of being recognised* is the moment which makes isolated and abstract needs, means and modes

²⁵⁴ Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 60-1.

of satisfaction into *concrete*, i.e. *social* ones'.²⁵⁵ Freedom becomes actual in human ends as defined by reason and human needs in the organisation of the good life. Hegel's ethics theorises human action in terms of the shape of human freedom made possible by collective modes of recognition.

Conclusion

Hegel's often obscure writing has moments of brilliant clarity and poetic resonance. Two such moments reflect the need for reason in an account of ethical life. First, in the famous Preface to *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel claims the aim of philosophy is to 'recognise reason as the rose in the cross of the present'.²⁵⁶ The suffering of modernity is represented in the cross and reason as the rose, the hope and solace in this suffering. In a less well-known statement, in his discussion of Heraclitus, Hegel describes universality as 'the being of another for us'. Reason is not the expression of individual knowledge, but a shared intersubjective relation. In this way, 'Reason is this process with the objective: when we are not in connection with the whole, we only dream'.²⁵⁷ For Hegel, reason is mediated socially, its objectivity is realised through historical processes. Reason is not external to the world, but it develops its shape immanently from social life itself.

Kant's idea of freedom is grounded on a moral philosophy that requires individual action to motivate its law like universality. For Hegel, this morality can only be just one moment, the initial self-determination, which allows a transition to the concrete objective relations of ethical life. Here he steps well beyond Kant. His attempt to overcome Kant's dualisms plays out in two ways. First to understanding the manner in which modern society is fragmented, second to offer an account of the ways in which reason acts upon the world. He looks back to Aristotle's thinking about ethics as a relationship between the parts and the whole, justice as determined by the relation between the ruler and the ruled.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ PR, §192/229.

²⁵⁶ PR, 22.

²⁵⁷ LHP 1, 295.

²⁵⁸ EE 1138b12-13.

The whole is broken in modern society. If philosophy must ‘reconcile thought or the concept with reality’, then the reality of the present needs to be picked apart to allow for rationally directed action.²⁵⁹ In an early letter to Arnold Ruge, Marx writes

Reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form. Hence the critic can take his cue from every existing form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from this ideal and final goal implicit in the *actual* forms of existing reality he can deduce a true reality. Now as far as real life is concerned, it is precisely the *political* state which contains the postulates of reason in all its *modern* forms, even where it has not been the conscious repository of socialist requirements. But it does not stop there. It consistently assumes that reason has been realised and just as consistently it becomes embroiled at every point in a conflict between its ideal vocation and its actually existing premises.²⁶⁰

For Marx, reason has not only failed to be realised in the modern state, but this form is in itself a barrier to its actualisation. Marx is cognisant of the modernity of Hegel’s thought, but becomes increasingly conscious that to make coherent an account of the modern world which retains from Aristotle and Hegel a vision of ethical life, a much deeper critique of social relations is necessary.

Marx’s turn towards developing a critique of political economy notes his gradual self-awareness that it is within political economy and not the debates between the Young Hegelians that will allow the clearest standpoint for a critique of modern social life. For Marx to make this critique successful, he has to address the central problems of individuality and sociality. First, he makes a critique of the increasing reification of the individual in bourgeois political and economic thought, before turning to an account of the inner workings of these relations mediated through the real abstraction of the value-form. The problem of the individual sets up an ideology of independence and isolation posited within theories of social contract, foundational to the liberal tradition of modernity.

²⁵⁹ *LHP* 3, 545.

²⁶⁰ *EW*, 208.

| 4. *Robinsonades & Contractarians, Masters & Slaves*

The critique of political economy that Marx advances from the 1840s onwards is structured upon a core interpretive claim: in short, constrained by its own ideological limitations, political economy is unable to come to terms with the essential nature of capitalism and produces a standpoint that fetishises social relations. The following two chapters detail the specific character of Marx's critique of social relations, from its first development in his 1844 writings to its mature expression in his later texts. The present chapter investigates the origins of the ontological standpoint of political economy. Marx suggests this ontological position configures the fundamental composition of the categories of political economy and its ideological articulation. In his view, political economy *presupposes* capitalist social relations, producing an ontology grounded in an ahistorical conception of the individual. Marx considers these ideologues to be 'Robinsonades', satirising the frequent analogies by nineteenth century political economists.¹ This characterisation reflects Marx's understanding of political economy in terms of social theory and the historical development of political thought. Posited within the 'science' of political economy is a presupposed ontological position. Far from peripheral, this ontology furnishes a theory of human nature. The implications of Marx's critique of this position helps frame what is at stake in his social ontology. In taking issue with the naturalisation of capitalist relations, Marx's critique opens the way for his concept of ethical life to be fleshed out. There is an intrinsic connection between the concept of human nature found in political economy and bourgeois moral philosophy. On this basis, Marx's critique of political economy allows a reconstruction of his ethics.

This chapter traces the genealogy of the ontological standpoint of political economy. Contra 'Marxist' tropes that treat that ideology as fiction, a reflection of the 'base' to the 'superstructure'; I focus on a work of fiction, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, as a way of illuminating, at its formation, the ideological individualism of political economy. The strong link Marx ties between *Robinson Crusoe* and political economy helps us to understand the character of his critique of the ontology of political economy and its theory of 'natural man'. More generally, Marx's ironic comments on *Robinson Crusoe* help

¹ Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 181.

open the relationship between this theory of human nature and the Enlightenment more broadly.

After an account of the primary narrative of the book, I chart the relation of *Robinson Crusoe* to social contract theory and the foundational individualist standpoint found in Hobbes, Locke Rousseau. Defoe gives in essential form the ideological expression of a conception of human nature readily adopted by the standpoint of political economy. I contrast this with Hegel's theory of recognition. Part 2 examines Marx's direct comments on the text and the significance of *Robinson Crusoe* in his critique of political economy.

Part 1

(a) Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was a transformative moment in the formation of the bourgeois imaginary. This moment contains both myth and reality. The myth is the 'natural man' who is divorced from society, alone in the world, but the basis of the world. The individual knows the world as *their world*, defined through and by their experiences, perspectives and actions. The world is the theatre in which the individual acts out their own singular narratives, confronting the world as an external entity, to be feared manipulated, conquered and controlled. 'Man' acts in this way because it is deemed 'natural' to do so and this manner of action is posited as instinctive and inescapable. This 'natural man' is manufactured and mythologised as ideology, which is read back into history as an enduring truth. But this is important ideologically, precisely because this picture captures a reality in the present. The truth of 'natural man' is its *present truth*. In this sense, the myth of 'natural man' is a reality. Cultural expressions of bourgeois ideology, of which *Robinson Crusoe* is one of the earliest and most pristine, express a dialectical unity of myth and reality, of the appearance and essence of larger social phenomena. The rise of individualism in the seventeenth-century, as depicted in *Robinson Crusoe*, express real relations, real ways of thinking, embedded in an adventure fantasy. *Robinson Crusoe* depicts bourgeois society attempting to understand the relation between the individual and society but confines this relation to a reductive mythology. The novel expresses an emergent bourgeois ideology that, in Nicholas Lobkowicz's words, is

a picture or reflection of a 'wrong' world which, though adequately depicting reality, does not reveal its wrongness. The ideological reflection is both true and

false. It is true insofar as it depicts reality as it is; it is false insofar as it does not express the wrongness of this existing reality. Contrary to ideology, science has to depict reality as it is in such a way as at the same time to make its 'ontological wrongness' evident.²

From the ideology of the novel and the ideology of the 'science' of political economy, the movement in terms of social theory is the awareness of the ontological character of reality as reflected in thought. This is an important component of Marx's critique of *Robinson Crusoe*. The picture presented by *Robinson Crusoe* is the simultaneous abstraction of myth and reality impelled by the logic of a fragmentary society. The reality of *Robinson Crusoe* is the naturalisation of social relations divided by private property relations. The book gives an account of labour processes in which the individual's labouring activity – even when abstracted from the world – is still performed presupposing abstract labour. Production is carried out in an empty homogenous time. The book is an early example of the novel form,³ and one of the first English language novels; it appeared in 1719.⁴ It is also a significant exemplar of the nascent medium, itself formed initially as the literary expression of the bourgeois class.⁵ The values of the new economic order set the scene for the book's popularity. In MacIntyre's words, '*Robinson Crusoe* becomes the bible of a generation which includes both Rousseau and Adam Smith.'

The innovation of the novel, with its stress on individual experience and its value, is about to emerge as the dominant literary form. Social life becomes essentially an arena for the struggles and conflicts of individual wills'.⁶ The novel-form provided a vehicle for political myth making. The literary form of the novel reflected the emerging ideological transformations taking place within a society that increasingly valued self-awareness, personal reflection and individual identity. The birth of the novel marks an event for modern individualism. The novel recognised the individual as a distinct entity, uniquely

² Nicholas Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 261-2.

³ John Frow, 'Prefaces to the Novel: Robinson Crusoe and Novelistic Form', *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture*, 63: 2-3 (2016): 96-106.

⁴ Defoe had earlier been a writer of political pamphlets and was imprisoned on political charges in the period after the Glorious Revolution. He had fought in the English Revolution during the 1680s, was an active supporter of William of Orange and on multiple occasions, himself a failed capitalist, even spending time in debtor's prison. John Richetti, 'Introduction', Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (London: Penguin, 2001), vii-viii. For more on Defoe's politics see Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 22-40.

⁵ For the novel's place in the West, see Lucien Goldmann, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Henry Maas (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 90. Also, still unsurpassed is Georg Lukács' *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT, 1971).

⁶ MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 146.

expressing the emergence of the subject.⁷ Its structure began to document, according to Terry Eagleton, the ‘individual psychology’ of an ‘individual protagonist who moves through an unpredictably evolving, linear narrative’.⁸ This characteristic is evident *Robinson Crusoe*, which, ‘in the best Puritan tradition’,⁹ is presented through the prism of a journal in which the protagonist painstakingly chronicles his life and adventures. Famously, the novel centres on *his* island, where he is shipwrecked. Christopher Hill notes that the theme of ‘traditional Protestantism is accompanied by prudential business morality’.¹⁰ This is played out in the book’s narrative, which follows Robinson’s enterprising spirit.

In addition to the presence of narrative, Benedict Anderson argues the novel form produces ‘spectacular possibilities for the representation of simultaneous actions in homogeneous empty time’.¹¹ Anderson evokes Benjamin’s *On The Concept of History* to point to the manner in which cultural products become a means for apprehending the world in homogeneous time. Anderson’s discussion of the novel (and the newspaper) present these elements as the necessary technical means to reproduce the ‘imagined community’.¹² His concern is the genesis of nationalism,¹³ but his application of Benjamin’s concept of time allows for a more general understanding of the ‘imagined’ nature of modern capitalist forms of rule. Benjamin associates homogeneous empty time with modern thought: mechanical and conformist, robbed of contradiction and riddled with a ‘stubborn faith in progress’.¹⁴ Benjamin rejects time conceived in linear terms, events told and retold by ‘chroniclers’, which flatten time to the logic of the present, wrenching history away from its past. This empty time denies the present ‘the fullness of the past’, depicting history as a distant object that can be reshaped to any size.¹⁵ For Benjamin, ‘History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]’.¹⁶ Time is filled by historical

⁷ Hegel notes the emergence of individual person as subject, *PR*, §35/67-8.

⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1976), 25.

⁹ Christopher Hill, ‘Robinson Crusoe’, *History Workshop*, 10 (1980): 7. Eagleton notes his ‘typically puritan sense of the depravity of human nature’, *The English Novel*, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 194.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ For a discussion of Robinson as ‘the typical Englishman’ see Ian Watt, ‘*Robinson Crusoe* as a Myth’, *Essays in Criticism*, 1:2 (1951): 116-8.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, ‘Thesis on the Philosophy of History’ in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 258-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

content that which bears upon the present and challenges the temporal logic of ‘conformism’, which accommodates and ‘becomes a tool for the ruling class’.¹⁷ Defoe’s novel impels the kind of temporal logic that Benjamin’s notion of time seeks to dispute. Robinson’s account is told through a linear and calendar time that imparts the temporal dimension of capital onto the desert island, the return to nature is given in an empty time in empty space.¹⁸

Benjamin’s concept of time brings out an important aspect of Marx’s value theory. Specifically, capitalist production is determined by the exchangeability of quantities of labour-power measured by homogeneous empty time.¹⁹ Robinson’s temporal narration is given through the prism of the amount of time necessary to perform his labouring tasks. As the only survivor of the shipwreck, he provides a time-sheet account of each day as he gathers food, builds shelter and attempts to survive on ‘this dismal unfortunate island, which I call’d *The Island of Despair*’.²⁰

It was not without infinite labour that I fell’d this tree: I was twenty days hacking and hewing at it at the bottom. I was fourteen more getting the branches and limbs, and the vast spreading head of it cut off, which I hack’d and hew’d through with axe and hatchet, and inexpressible labour: After this it cost me a month to shape it, and dub it to a proportion, and to something like the bottom of a boat, that it might swim upright as it ought to do. It cost me near three months more to clear the in-side, and work it out so, as to make an exact boat of it: This I did indeed without fire, by mere mallet and chisel, and by the dint of hard labour...²¹

Robinson’s narrative starts not with the shipwreck, but the calendar year of his birth, 1632.²² From here Robinson recalls his father’s advice on ‘human happiness’, a ‘middle’ station between the ‘labour and the suffering of the mechanic part of mankind’ and the ‘pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind’.²³ Robinson’s ambition gets the better of him, and against his father’s wishes for him to pursue a career in law, he sets out to sea to chase fortune. Robinson trades in plantations and slaves until his trading ship comes into a storm. All aboard drown, save Robinson, who upon waking up

¹⁷ Ibid., 255.

¹⁸ See Alfred Sohn-Rethel for the relation between abstract time and space and value, *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 48-52.

¹⁹ This aspect of *Capital* is the focus of Tombazos’ *Time in Marx*, 17-41.

²⁰ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 57.

²¹ Ibid., 101.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Ibid., 6.

on the shore found ‘there should not be one soul sav’d but my self’.²⁴ Robinson’s first impulse is for survival, to get tools and instruments for his own immediate existence. He is very quick to declare the island barren and uninhabited and to focus his energies – his time and labour activity – to settlement of the island.²⁵ Finding himself in a place with ‘no society’, Robinson plants crops,²⁶ raises cattle,²⁷ declares the island his own personal kingdom,²⁸ and captures a slave he calls *Friday* who provides free labour.²⁹ Friday serves as an instrument of production for his master.³⁰ He is given a name that denotes a day of the working week and given the faith of His lord. The island is Robinson’s property and his to cultivate.

The colonialist foundation of early capitalist expansion, one aspect of a larger process Marx calls ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ accumulation, is given here in a pure form. Robinson as an individual acts out each part of the process, turning an ‘uninhabited’ island into the model of European settlement, where his production and ownership is given in capitalist terms – production and land is owned by him and he is able to subject Others work to his rule as forced dependents. As Marx notes, ‘primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology’, going on to add, ‘in the tender annals of political economy, the idyllic reigns from time immemorial’.³¹ Defoe’s story of the natural manner in which the lone human rises from destitute survivor to thriving capitalist is often considered idyllic – represented in truncated children’s editions and Hollywood films.³²

(b) Defoe’s narrative promotes a conception of the individual adapted from early modern political thought. Like Hobbes, who saw the state of nature as a negation of society (seen logically and not historically prior), Robinson’s shipwreck is described explicitly in the novel as a descent into the ‘State of Nature’.³³ Lawrence Krader compares

²⁴ Ibid., 38-9.

²⁵ Ibid., 43-5.

²⁶ Ibid., 108.

²⁷ Ibid., 116.

²⁸ Ibid., 80, 118. Eagleton observes that Robinson’s environment is anglicised, he ‘potters around his island as though he were someone in the Home Counties’, *The English Novel*, 37.

²⁹ Ibid., 163.

³⁰ The etymology of Friday relates to the Norse ‘Frigg’, meaning ‘wife’.

³¹ *Cap* 1, 873-4.

³² Remarkably unconscious of the possible charge of racism is the 1997 film *Robinson Crusoe* that spares no detail in retaining the worst aspects of Defoe’s racial prejudices; whereas some of the more sensitive children’s editions remove these unsavoury parts.

³³ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 94.

Hobbes' state of nature to Defoe's character, 'The fable of the man-beast in isolation in the state of nature is a figment of the imagination of the same sort as Robinson. Both Hobbes, the author of the first fiction, and Defoe, the author of the second, anticipated the fable of the selfmade man, the captain of industry who starts with nothing to become the hero in history'.³⁴ With Hobbes' state of nature we find the natural condition of humans to be warlike. Humans begin naturally in a singular state of being, a state of immediate base passions driven by fear and competitive self-interest.³⁵ Individuals have a relative equality of body and mind, which places them into direct competition for the satisfaction of desired ends. Competition is expressed and embodied as war and invasion, since humans invade for 'Gain', 'Safety' and 'Reputation'.³⁶ Hobbes writes,

From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that where an Invader hath no more to fear than another man's single power, if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient Seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life or liberty. And the Invader again is in the like danger of another.³⁷

For Hobbes, the natural condition of humans is atomistic, individualist and competitive. Hobbes posits a state of inherent human conflict, where continuous fear dominates 'the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.³⁸ Humans meet each other not in cooperation but in competition, and this is the point of departure for thinking about human nature.³⁹ It is because 'Gain', 'Safety' and 'Reputation' are in limited supply that humans must compete for them and that brings them into conflict. The ontology we

³⁴ Lawrence Krader, *Dialectic of Civil Society* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1976), 31-2.

³⁵ Hobbes' concept of political organisation was directed polemically against the Aristotelian schoolman understanding of society as a natural organic whole, see *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119. As I argue in Chapter 3 above, Aristotle sees the state as something that comes before the individual and the realm of virtue. The lack of individual incorporation in society, the absence of virtue, creates savagery, lust and gluttony. Cf. *Pol.* 1253a25-40. Hobbes responds directly to Aristotle, suggesting instead that this condition comes prior.

³⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 89. See also, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Men' in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135-6, 151-3.

³⁹ Hannah Arendt identifies Hobbes as the bourgeois moralist *par excellence*, unequalled in his ability to 'derive public good from private interest', where power 'is the accumulated control that permits the individual to fix prices and regulate supply and demand in such a way that they contribute to his own advantage', *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 139, 140-3.

find here is foundational to the individualisation of the modern age. The early chapters of *Leviathan* (I-IX) chart a ‘scientific materialism’ of human capacities (imagination, sense, reason, passion), which set forward an atomistic metaphysical system, in effect a construction to rationalise his conception of society. C.B. Macpherson’s seminal *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, argues that Hobbes’ atomistic materialism is inherently linked to his market materialism: ‘it is only a society as fragmented as a market society that can credibly be treated as a mechanical system of self-moving individuals’.⁴⁰

Hobbes’ thought actively reflects the transition to capitalism in England and the revolutionary consolidation of bourgeois class rule in the English Civil War.⁴¹ This historical process should be understood as a bourgeois revolution. By the transfer of state power from the feudal to the emergent capitalist class (aided by radical democratic participation), the capitalist mode of production was able to grow more fully and consolidate capitalist rule by unfettering the power of the market based on individual private property.⁴² Defoe himself understood the war in these terms.⁴³ Hobbes’ ‘commercial model’ links human labour to private property. Hobbes puts it plainly: ‘The *Value*, or WORTH of a man, is of all other things, his price, that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power’.⁴⁴ Marx acknowledges the role of labour in Hobbes’ thought, pointing to the above passage as an unconscious reference to labour-power.⁴⁵ Marx goes further, attributing to Hobbes the view that ‘labour is the source of all wealth, apart from those gifts of nature which are to be found already in a consumable state’.⁴⁶ Thus, the war of all against all is not just physical but commercial.⁴⁷ Adam Smith understood the commercial motivation of the acquiring man from this source: ‘Wealth, as Mr Hobbes says, is power’.⁴⁸ For Hobbes, the individual’s power comes internally from their labour.

⁴⁰ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 79.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, 53-70, *passim*.

⁴² Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution 1640* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955); *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961); *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking Press, 1972). Hill gives an account of the radical and democratic elements of the revolution – the Levellers and Diggers. For the concept of bourgeois revolution more broadly, see Neil Davidson’s *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012).

⁴³ Christopher Hill, *The English Revolution 1640*, 12.

⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 63. See also, Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 62.

⁴⁵ *Cap* 1, 274.

⁴⁶ *TSV*, 1, 365.

⁴⁷ Krader argues Hobbes ‘expressed a theory of value, of surplus value and of commodity exchange in production in connection with that of the civil society’, *Dialectic of Civil Society*, 63.

⁴⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Books I-III (London: Penguin, 1999), 134.

The commercial aspect of Hobbes' state of nature has been well discussed, despite often missing Marx's emphasis on the presence of a concept of labour.⁴⁹ Less frequently commented upon is the temporal element of Hobbes understanding of conflict. In the same section of Chapter XIII, he writes:

Hereby it is manifest that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man. For WAR consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known: and therefore the notion of *Time*, is to be considered in the nature of war; as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days together: so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.⁵⁰

In shaping his ontology of atomist individualism, Hobbes understands conflict to have a temporal component. Here the notion of time becomes the measure of social interaction. Time is like the weather, not descriptive of events but as a notion that links the singular together. Sheldon Wolin characterises this as 'living amidst a succession of fleeting moments, and because of the fears and anxieties aroused by life in the state of nature [man] became a time-haunted creature'.⁵¹ War is temporally understood. Even when humans are not engaged in aggression, fear keeps them always preparing for war. Ontologically, being is a war of all against all. In this way, Hobbes is able to equate nature and war, even though life in the state of nature is not constant fighting.

Defoe's character shares the same fear, inherent and temporal. He internalises war even in peacetime and isolation. After seeing that he is not as isolated as he thought, with some neighboring 'savages', Robinson lives for a year and a half in constant fear of conflict.

I spent my days now in great perplexity, and anxiety of mind, expecting that I should one day or other fall into the hands of these merciless creatures; and if I did at any time venture abroad, it was not without looking round me with the greatest care and caution imaginable; and now I found to my great comfort, how

⁴⁹ Macpherson's discussion is still excellent, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 46-70.

⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 88.

⁵¹ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 265.

happy it was that I provided for a tame flock or herd of goats; for I durst not upon any account fire my gun, especially near that side of the island where they usually came, lest I should alarm the savages; and if they had fled from me now, I was sure to have them come back again, with perhaps two or three hundred *canoes* with them, in a few days, and then I knew what to expect. However, I wore out a year and three months more, before I ever saw any more of the savages...⁵²

Much of Robinson's character can be found in the Hobbes' atomistic ontology. However, the additions Locke makes to the theorisation of the state of nature are in certain essential ways carried into Defoe's construction. The individualism of Hobbes is enhanced in Locke by the predominance of the concept of private property. Locke writes in *The Second Treatise of Government*:

The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are strictly his. So when he takes something from the state that nature has provided and left it in, he mixes his labour with it, thus joining to it something that is his own; and in that way he makes it his property.⁵³

When humans mix their labour with the natural world it becomes their private property, since 'As much land as a man tills, plants improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property'.⁵⁴ Once nature has been acted upon by human labour, value has been created, fused with the activity of humans and the character of the natural environment around them. For Locke, the state of nature is a freedom in which 'he be the absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to no one'. The individual, the property owner comes before society, and has only an 'interest' in entering society in so far as it aids the 'mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates, which I call by the general name, property'.⁵⁵ Society acts in this view as a regulator of property rights.

This Lockean theme plays out explicitly in *Robinson Crusoe*, where the concrete labour of the individual (or his slave) in his state of nature creates his own property. The protagonists' pride in the purposeful utility of his labour shows not a pride in the activity

⁵² Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 146.

⁵³ John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government* (London: J.M Dent, 1993), 128.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 178. This might appear like a wider use of the term property than a simple equation with capitalist private property, but as Macpherson points out, while Locke sometimes uses a broader notion of property, in Chapter 9, where this quotation is taken from, Locke 'is clearly using property in the usual sense of goods and lands (or a right in lands and goods)', Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 198.

itself but as the creation of his own property.⁵⁶ This is the logic that allows him to claim and defend the island as ‘a right of possession’ and to see that his hard work (felling trees, making boats, planting crops, herding, etc.) and improvement does not just ensure survival but property.⁵⁷ This property must be protected. As Ian Watt points out, Robinson ‘acts like a good Lockean – when others arrive on the island he forces them to accept his domination with written contracts acknowledging his absolute power (even when we have previously been told that he has run out of ink).’⁵⁸ In this way, Defoe explicitly adopts Locke’s social contract into the novel:

My Island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in Subjects; and it was a merry Reflection which I frequently made, How like a King I look’d. First of all, the whole Country was my own meer Property; so that I had an undoubted Right of Dominion. *Secondly*, My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Law-giver; they all owed their Lives to me, and were ready to lay down their Lives, *if there had been Occasion of it*, for me.⁵⁹

Once inhabited, Robinson’s island bears the shape of Locke’s social contract.⁶⁰ Private property is directly connected with performed labour and the individual is empirically shaped by the experience of labour.

Locke’s thought must be historically situated in terms of the development of capitalism. As a proponent of agricultural capitalism,⁶¹ Locke’s emphasis on private property is a crucial early articulation of the category of modern social relations that determines all others. Locke’s view of private property stemming from labour has been widely seen as a forerunner to the labour theory of value found in classical political economy. As Ronald L. Meek points out, ‘the Lockean theory of property rights contributed largely to the building up of the political atmosphere in which the Classical labour theory of value was eventually able to flourish.’⁶² This generalisation is found in Marx, who claims, ‘Locke’s view is all the more important because it was the classical expression of bourgeois

⁵⁶ Politically, Defoe and Locke both lined up against James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

⁵⁷ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 80.

⁵⁸ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 1957), 70.

⁵⁹ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 190.

⁶⁰ Following Locke on religious toleration, the sentence following the above quotation even stresses the right to religious freedom ‘throughout my Dominions’, see *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neil Wood, *A Triumph of Sedition* (New York: New York University Press, 1997),

⁶² Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value*, 125-6. See also, I.I. Rubin, *A History of Economic Thought*, trans. Donald Filtzer (London: Ink Links, 1979), 66.

society's ideas of right as against feudal society, and moreover his philosophy served as the basis for all the ideas of the whole of subsequent English political economy'.⁶³

However, Marx's reference to Locke in the opening paragraphs of *Capital*, Volume One, adds depth to this broader genealogy. In *Capital*, Marx starts with double opening of the category of value, the most abstract category of modern production and immediacy of the commodity. He writes of the commodity, the form of which embodies value, the 'usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value'. Marx quotes Locke from *Some Considerations on the Consequences of the Lowering of Interest*: 'The natural worth of anything consists in its fitness to supply the necessities, or serve the conveniences of human life', going on to add himself, 'English writers of the seventeenth century we still often find the word 'worth' used for use-value and 'value' for exchange-value. This is quite in accordance with the spirit of a language that likes to use a Teutonic word for the actual thing, and a Romance word for its reflection.'⁶⁴ Marx's comment here, while at first glance appears to be a simple remark about the etymology of economic terms, is rather a pointed remark that demonstrates the transitory nature of English political thought in this period. Marx sees the difference in Teutonic and Romantic words as one way in which language reflects social categories. In the observation that Locke understood the 'natural worth' of a commodity in terms of use-values, Marx provides a sense of the point of departure of the conceptual meaning of value. This period in English thought is the origin of the modern understanding of labour value, which develops in its most advanced form in Ricardo.⁶⁵ Marx subjects this process to an immanent critique. By tracing the conceptual origin of the real abstraction of value and charting its development, Marx allows for the understanding of its most concrete manifestation, through its conceptual mediations. Locke's ambiguous distinction between human worth and economic worth helps chart a distinctive turning point in the logic of modern thought. For the English writers, the identity of the words worth/use-value (Teutonic) and value/exchange-value (Romance)

⁶³ *TSV*, 1, 367.

⁶⁴ *Cap* 1, 126.

⁶⁵ Controversially, Macpherson argues that it is not Locke but Hobbes who best understands labour as a commodity in modern society, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 219-220. Etienne Balibar suggests Macpherson's reading of Locke, 'subordinates anthropology to positive law, rendering private property the exclusive *external condition* of personal freedom instead of seeing it as an expression of the property in one's own person that is essentially identical to freedom', *Identity and Difference*, trans. Warren Montag (London: Verso, 2013), 72.

evidence the beginning of the abstraction of ‘value’ over use-value.⁶⁶ The apparent human value of labour products is increasingly made unintelligible as the gulf between actuality and reflection is deepened. However, the natural worth of products of labour is clearly primary to Locke’s theory of property and Defoe’s adoption of this theory animates this point.

(c) Rousseau also takes up *Robinson Crusoe* directly. So pristine is Defoe’s novel for the character of the state of nature that in his educational treatise *Émile*, it is the only book that Rousseau’s character is permitted to read:

Since we must necessarily have books, there exists one which, to my way of thinking, furnishes the happiest treatise on natural education. This book shall be the first which my Émile will read; for a long time it will of itself constitute his whole library, and always hold a distinguished place in it. It shall be the text on which all our conversations on the natural sciences will serve merely as a commentary. During our progress it will serve as a test for the state of our judgment; and as long as our taste is not corrupted, the reading of it will always please us. What, then, is this wonderful book? It is Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No; it is Robinson Crusoe.

Rousseau continues,

Robinson Crusoe on his island, alone, deprived of the assistance of his fellows and of the instruments of all the arts, yet providing for his own subsistence and preservation, and procuring for himself a state of comparative comfort- here is an object interesting for every age, and one which may be made agreeable to children in a thousand ways.⁶⁷

The educational merit in the novel lies in its capacity to offer a comparison point, a return from society to nature – from ‘the condition of man as a social being’ to the isolated man.⁶⁸ By offering such a perspective for the observation of man’s natural needs, his natural condition is put in a simple and general form that can be learnt easily by children. Rousseau finds fault in Defoe’s narrative, but sees the merit of the book in its ideological standpoint of the individual. He writes: ‘The surest means of rising above prejudices, and of ordering our judgments in accordance with the true relations of things,

⁶⁶ See also Marx’s discussion in “Notes” on Adolph Wagner’ in *Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 245.

⁶⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. William H. Payne (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), 162-3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

is to put ourselves in the place of an isolated man, and to judge of everything as this man must judge of it, having regard to its proper utility'.⁶⁹

In Robinson's 'natural man' Rousseau finds a fully formed ideological model of education, so much so that he recommends that the book be interpreted practically and that 'I would have [Émile] think he is Robinson himself; and have him see himself dressed in skins, wearing a broad hat, a larger saber, and all the grotesque equipage of the character, even to the umbrella which he will never need'.⁷⁰ For Rousseau, *Robinson Crusoe* provides the standpoint in which the child can learn the necessary modes of thinking and can decide upon the various situations permitted from prism of Robinson's character. Rousseau's advice is that, 'Your greatest anxiety ought to be to divert the mind of your pupil from all the notions of social relations which are not within his comprehension'.⁷¹

Rousseau, despite his anti-Hobbesian concept of nature, applies this individualist ontology to understanding labour. What Rousseau means by 'social relations' is specifically linked to a notion of labour as a social practice. However, his insight is much clearer than the individualism of both Hobbes and Locke, since he sees collective labour production as both a product of modern industrial society and a necessity that takes on a modern character as a result. He writes:

The practice of the natural arts, for which a single man may suffice, leads to the cultivation of the industrial arts, which need the co-operation of several hands. The first may be practiced by recluses and savages; but the others can be developed only in society which they render necessary. As long as we know only physical needs, each man suffices for himself; but the introduction of the superfluous makes indispensable the division and distribution of labor; for, while a man working alone gains merely the subsistence of one man, a hundred men working in concert will gain enough for the subsistence of two hundred.⁷²

Rousseau's discussion here predates by fourteen years Adam Smith's 1776 *Wealth of Nations*, with its famous opening chapter 'Of the Division of Labour'.⁷³ With a direct connection to Defoe's novel, Rousseau posits that the individual producer is forced by

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁷² Ibid., 164-5.

⁷³ Famously, Smith reviewed Rousseau's 'Discourse on Inequality', see 'Letter to the Edinburgh Review' in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 242-256.

industrial society and the need of the ‘superfluous’ to adopt collective labour processes and the separation of those processes by ‘division and distribution’. Rousseau provides a hierarchy of these divisions: the ‘first and most respectable’ being ‘agriculture’ and ‘forge in the second rank, carpentering in the third’.⁷⁴ He then asks what Émile might think comparing this ‘subdivision’ with *Robinson Crusoe*:

What will he think as he sees that the arts [labour] are perfected only by subdivision and by multiplying to infinity their respective instruments? He will say to himself: “All these people are stupidly ingenious; one would think they are afraid that their arms and fingers may be good for something, seeing they invent so many instruments for dispensing with them. In order to practice a single art they have put a thousand others under contribution; a city is necessary for each work-man....”⁷⁵

Rousseau’s comparison between the labour of industrial society, savage, dangerous and divided, and that of *Robinson Crusoe*, singular and authentic, where he sees all work processes completed by the same instrument and individual, provides the educational value of an ideal picture of the state of nature. Rousseau’s use of *Robinson Crusoe* as a comparison point to the modern division of labour is perceptive. By presenting the novel as an ideological picture of natural man, it allows Rousseau to critique the emergent social relations of industrial society.⁷⁶ Rousseau’s individualist ontology limits the depth of his insight. As he writes in the *Discourse on Inequality*, “The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say *this is mine*, and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society’.⁷⁷ Civil society is a feature of socialisation defined by self-interest and is the source of alienation, corruption and turmoil.⁷⁸ The presence of this socialisation, in contrast to the isolation of the state of nature, is the source of civil unrest. As he writes in *The Social Contract*,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 168.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The relationship between Marx and Rousseau, clearly evident in his early writings (*OJQ*, 234), has now been a well-discussed aspect of the secondary literature. Both Lucio Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin* (London: NLB, 1972), 143-216 and Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*, 49-61 stress Rousseau’s influence, although from different philosophical positions. See also Marshall Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), Galvano della Volpe, *Rousseau and Marx*, trans. John Fraser (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), Andrew Levine, *The End of the State* (London: Verso, 1987) and Louis Althusser, *Politics and History*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2007), 110-160. David Leopold’s *The Young Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 262-271 offers a brief overview of the literature but argues that Rousseau’s impact in the young Marx has been overstated.

⁷⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Second Discourse’ in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161.

⁷⁸ Krader, *Dialectic of Civil Society*, 53. Mészáros draws attention to the context of Rousseau’s thought in pre-revolutionary France, as part of ‘a social crisis caused by a drastic transition from the antiquated feudal-

there can be no doubt that Adam was sovereign of the world, as Robinson Crusoe was of his island, as long as he was its only inhabitant; and this empire had the advantage that the monarch, safe on his throne had no rebellions, wars or conspirators to fear.⁷⁹

Rousseau is the first and clearest thinker to see the fable, however desirable for moral education, in Robinson's character.

(d) The presence of slavery in *Robinson Crusoe*, although only referred to above in passing, allows the critique of the contractarians and Hegel's ethics of recognition to be fully defined. This element of the book is best demonstrated in the bond between Robinson and his slave. Defoe vividly describes his capture, starting with his racialised features:

His hair was long and black, not curl'd like wool; his forehead very high, and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The color of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny... At last he lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and set my other foot upon his head, as he had done before; and after this, made all the signs to me of subjection, servitude and submission imaginable, to let me know how, he would serve me as long as he liv'd... I made him know his name should be *Friday*, which was the day I sav'd his life; I call'd him so for the memory of the time; I likewise taught him to say *Master*, and then let him know that was to be my name...⁸⁰

Given the name of a day in an island without calendar-time, Robinson's slave Friday is to him a 'living labour machine',⁸¹ since his labouring activity is forced, not sold as 'labour power'. Instead, his activity is represented as if it was a gift, freely given to his master. The presence of slavery in the contract thinkers helps show the lines of departure taken by Hegel. This path of development is charted well by Susan Buck-Morss. For her, Hobbes' understanding of slavery is 'secular', 'honest' and 'unconflicted'. It arises from the state of nature and is a part of warlike manner of humans. Locke, however, opposed 'slavery' 'as a metaphor for legal tyranny' but justified the practice of slavery, since

artisan mode of production to a new one', *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 49. Further, he details how Rousseau sees the alienation of humans from nature as: 1) destruction of original nature; 2) split between society and human species; 3) humans are dominated by institutions; 4) destruction of country life for the evils of town life and growing split between town and country; 5) growth of 'artificial needs' and 'useless desires', *Ibid.*, 53-5. Mészáros gives significant weight to Rousseau's 'abstract moral radicalism', which even with limitations in his understanding of inequality, 'Rousseau's eye for the manifold phenomena of alienation and dehumanisation is as sharp as no one else's before Marx', *Ibid.*, 55, 57.

⁷⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 184.

⁸⁰ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 162-3.

⁸¹ *Gr*, 465.

‘British liberty meant the protection of private property and slaves were private property’.⁸² It is now well understood that Locke’s liberalism was always rooted in the view that some humans are the natural property of others.⁸³ Rousseau’s discussion of slavery in *The Social Contract* questions Hobbes and Aristotle’s acceptance of natural inequality. For the latter, ‘some are born for slavery, others for domination’, but in Rousseau’s view, Aristotle ‘took the effect for the cause’.⁸⁴

However strong Rousseau is as a critic of inequality, Buck-Morss asserts he displays a reticence in his approach to the slavery of his day. He ‘declared all men equal and saw private property as the source of inequality, but he never put two and two together to discuss French slavery for economic profit as central to arguments of both equality and property’.⁸⁵ Buck-Morss charges the Enlightenment (as a whole) with failing to sufficiently oppose slavery. While Jonathan Israel also notes Rousseau’s hesitancy to support anti-slavery, Israel advances an intellectual history that focuses upon a ‘radical Enlightenment’.⁸⁶ This history establishes there were many strands of the Enlightenment, some of which strongly opposed slavery. Israel highlights the support of radical philosophers in the push for black emancipation during the French Revolution.⁸⁷ However, the upshot of Buck-Morss’ analysis is her contention that the contract thinkers were limited in their understanding of freedom, because slavery was either a core component of their thought (Hobbes and Locke) or remained relatively unquestioned (Rousseau). Buck-Morss points to the self-activity of slaves in breaking this paradigm and opening up the possibilities of universal freedom.⁸⁸ The example *par excellence* is the Haitian Revolution. In C.L.R. James’s words, ‘the only successful slave revolt in history’, this saw the transformation of slaves once ‘trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and

⁸² Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 26-8.

⁸³ For example, Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011), 3-4, 119.

⁸⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, 183.

⁸⁵ Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History*, 32.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 407.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 396-419.

⁸⁸ Buck-Morss’ central thesis is that the inspiration for Hegel’s master/slave dialectic comes directly from the Haitian Revolution. On the basis of the textual evidence she provides, I would hesitate to accept such a literal reading, however Buck-Morss’ intellectual history provides a sense of the social significance of the master/slave dialectic, especially against pre-Hegelian thought.

achievement'.⁸⁹ James' study,⁹⁰ demonstrates the broader dynamics of the revolutionary process awoken by the new dawn of the French Revolution. Prompted and given the universal language of the French Revolution, the Haitian Revolution pushed further, beyond the 'aristocracy of the skin'.⁹¹ This meant breaking with the French colony and declaring independence. The stress that James puts on the consciousness of the slaves allows a concept of class that is defined by self-aware practices.

Describing how the combined and uneven development of the French Revolution could give the Revolution in Haiti a power previously impossible,⁹² James refers to the revolutionary leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who appealed to the 'slogans of the revolution' and 'the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre, and Danton'. James argues that the role of the Haitian Revolution signified a major element in the 'destruction of European feudalism'. 'Liberty and equality' for the black Haitians meant going beyond the limits imagined by the French bourgeoisie.⁹³ This sentiment is expressed in the letter written by Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-François to the French General Assembly in July 1792:

Under the blows of your barbarous whip we have accumulated for you the treasures you enjoy in this colony; the human race has suffered to see with what barbarity you have treated men like yourself – yes men... We are black, it is true, but tell us gentlemen, you who are so judicious, what is the law that says that the black man must belong to and be the property of the white man?

Not only does the letter clearly ground the economic relation of slavery in French capitalism to original accumulation, it also notes the hypocrisy of the revolutionary laws that purposefully ignored slavery.⁹⁴ They continue:

For too long we have borne your chains without thinking of shaking them off, but any authority which is not founded on virtue and humanity, and which only tends to subject ones fellow man to slavery, must come to and end, and that end is yours. You, gentlemen who pretend to subject us to slavery – have you not

⁸⁹ C.L.R James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Random House, 1963), ix.

⁹⁰ For a detailed history of James' writing of *The Black Jacobins* and its place in Marxist and anti-colonial history, see Christian Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R James in Imperial Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 158-98.

⁹¹ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 120.

⁹² For the direct influence of Trotsky's notion of 'permanent revolution' on *Black Jacobins*, see Høgsbjerg, *C.L.R James in Imperial Britain*, 183-92. Also of interest, especially on the colonial question, Anthony Bogues, *Caliban's Freedom* (London: Pluto, 1997), 44-5.

⁹³ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 198. See also, Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 413.

⁹⁴ For a recent account of this history, see Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (London: Pluto, 2017).

sworn to uphold the French Constitution... Have you forgotten that you have formally vowed the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which says that men are born free, equal in their rights; that their natural rights include liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression?⁹⁵

This document shows the limits and contradictions of the Enlightenment universalism promoted by the victorious French bourgeois in 1789. While it promised universalism, the Declaration of Rights of Man was always limited to formal rights. The Haitian Revolution points to, in James' words, a 'failure of enlightenment'.⁹⁶ The events of the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution were foundational to the transition from the state of nature theorists to Hegel's concept of recognition.

(e) The contractarians took the individual as their departure point, only entering or forming society once a compact was made between individual actors and a sovereign. This approach to sociality is founded on an individualist ontology that abstracts individuals from the collective settings that give individuality meaning, since the definition of an individual presupposes some relation to others. Hegel decisively breaks with this approach with his concept of recognition. In this view, freedom is realised in and through intersubjective relations. As Williams notes, 'being at home with self in another, pursuing common causes and ends cooperatively with others – all these are elements and aspects of what the state is supposed to be'.⁹⁷ For Hegel, recognition allows the self and the other to be mutually united without the opposition between the individual and society. Such relations would preserve both moments in a higher form of sociality mediated by ethical life.⁹⁸ This is made clear in the *Philosophy of Right*, where he makes an explicit critique of Rousseau.⁹⁹ Jean Hyppolite described Rousseau's work as 'the most negative product of the century, yet it prepares the ground for a fresh

⁹⁵ Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Haitian Revolution*, ed. Nick Nesbitt (London: Verso, 2008), 6-8.

⁹⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins*, 288.

⁹⁷ Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 263.

⁹⁸ *PW*, 105-6. Leo Rauch summarises the point well: 'Thus, we are not dealing with a merely aggressive creature (as in Hobbes), nor with a naturally acquisitive creature (as in Locke), and certainly not with a primordially solitary creature (as in Rousseau). In and of themselves, none of these models would necessarily produce a humanised individual through combat. For Hegel, however, it is precisely that status of humanness that is at issue in the primal struggle. From this (in Hegel's view), all other social values and devices will follow', Leo Rauch and David Sherman, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-Consciousness* (New York: SUNY, 1999), 88.

⁹⁹ This should not denote a one-sided view of Rousseau. For the positive influence on Hegel, see Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55-81; Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, 275-80.

approach'.¹⁰⁰ Hegel shares Rousseau's concern for the subjective freedom of the individual but sees that this freedom must be understood within an objective and self-determining totality. Hegel writes:

The *right of individuals* to their *subjective determination to freedom* is fulfilled in so far as they belong to ethical actuality; for their *certainty* of their own freedom has its *truth* in such objectivity, and it is in the ethical realm that they *actually* possess *their own* essence and their *inner* universality (see §147).¹⁰¹

The individual can only fulfil their freedom in the ethical realm, the objective freedom substantiated by the sociality of its members. Hegel has a deeper conception of freedom than the individual's subjective desires and wants for their social world. Rather, for their social world to be free, its freedom is conditional on the realisation of their 'essence and their *inner* universality'. In this way, freedom is not relative but is realised in the truth of institutions which allow freedom to be rationality grasped. The institutions must be in themselves rational.¹⁰² In Frederick Neuhouser's formulation, Hegel's claim is 'that for social freedom to be fully realised, the institutions with which social members subjectively identify must also be objectively *worthy* of that identification, which is to say that they must meet the criteria Hegel sets out for *rational* social institutions'.¹⁰³

In this way, Hegel equates ethical education to the Pythagorean saying 'Make him the citizen of a state with good laws'. Political community allows the individual to become defined and fully rational in a collective setting guided by its own objective rationality. The Addition makes this point with the negative example of *Émile*:

Those pedagogical experiments in removing people from the ordinary life of the present and bringing them up in the country (cf. Rousseau's *Émile*) have been futile, because one cannot successfully isolate people from the laws of the world. Even if young people have to be educated in solitude, no one should imagine that the breath of the spiritual world will not eventually find its way into this solitude and that the power of the world spirit is too weak for it to gain control of such remote regions. The individual attains his right only by becoming the citizen of a good state.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Hyppolite, 'The Significance of the French Revolution in Hegel's *Phenomenology*' in *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, 66.

¹⁰¹ PR, §153/196.

¹⁰² PR, §258A/279.

¹⁰³ Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*, 114. In this respect, as Mark Alznauer argues 'Hegel needs to both identify the rational criteria according to which the modern social world is to be assessed and show that the modern world satisfies these criteria'. *Hegel's Theory of Responsibility*, 25.

¹⁰⁴ PR, §153/196.

The citizen living in a rational state with good laws is the only way that the education of the individual can be fulfilled. The individual is made rational through the collective. The absence of this type of polity, common to the ancient world and vanished in modern times, is the concern of both Rousseau and Hegel. However, while Rousseau resigns himself to the collective will acting back on the individual through a contract, Hegel sees this ontologically grounded in a historical and collective rationality. That Hegel has in mind *Émile* as a defective model for moral education, stemming from its concept of human nature depicted in the isolated individual, Hegel provides a deeper understanding of the collective character of his ethics of recognition. In this way, as Avineri notes, ‘while Rousseau was never able to bridge the gap between history and the Good Life... Hegel attempted to relate political philosophy to history’.¹⁰⁵ Ethical actuality is located in the universality that only a collective rationally can produce, as ‘the identification of the individual with the totality of his social life’.¹⁰⁶ This unity-in-difference between the individual and social life is a condition of modernity, fundamentally intertwined with the French Revolution as the birth of modernity. This places Hegel’s thought in context and supplies the dialectic of the ‘lord/bondsman dialectic’ in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with its sense of social subjectivity.

(f) Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is concerned with the unfolding of the shapes of consciousness to the standpoint of scientific, absolute knowledge. The master/slave dialectic (or more accurately that of the lord/bondsman) plays an important part in the *Phenomenology*, appearing as the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. This unfolding of recognition plays out in the relation between the bondsman to the lord. Recognition is when ‘self-consciousness exists in and for itself’ and ‘so it exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged’.¹⁰⁷ When ‘faced’ with another, consciousness finds itself in the other. First ‘it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self’.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, recognition takes place mutually; as one recognises oneself, they at the same time recognise the other and the other in them. The relation between self and other, how consciousness returns to itself

¹⁰⁵ Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, x.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ *PbG*, ¶178/111.

¹⁰⁸ *PbG*, ¶179/111.

and is superseded into a higher understanding of self, is played out in the dynamic between the lord and the bondsman. This scenario is a 'life-and-death struggle', since in 'the action of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other'.¹⁰⁹ Each side of the relation acts to subjugate the other and in risking their life, gain a truth of their own humanity – negating the early relation and rising to a higher truth. For Hegel, the risk of life allows for freedom, since 'it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won'.¹¹⁰ The lord/bondsman begin in immediate opposition,

Since to begin with they are unequal and opposed, and their reflection into a unity has not yet been achieved, they exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman.¹¹¹

Each one-sidedness of the relation is dependent on the objectification of the bondsman to the desire and domination of the lord. The lord lives through the bondsman, mediating his own self through the thinghood of the bondsman, a negative power that subjects the other to his power. The lord 'achieves his recognition through another consciousness...for what the bondman does is really the action of the lord. The latter's essential nature is to exist only for himself he is the sheer negative power for who the thing is nothing'.¹¹²

Hegel uses *Robinson Crusoe* to help understand this moment of the dialectic in his *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, the lecture notes prepared to aid Hegel's pupils when he was rector of the Gymnasium in Nuremberg, written during the same period as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (published 1807). In the section 'Relation between Master and Slave', he expands:

¹⁰⁹ As Beiser aptly notes, 'This struggle is not Hobbes's war of all against all. The self fights for recognition of itself as a rational being; and, unlike Hobbes's state of nature, it does not compete with others to satisfy its desires or to gain power to satisfy them. For Hegel, right arises from the recognition of a person's rational status; it is not simply the permission to act on my wants. In making the self ready to risk its life to gain its independence, Hegel is taking issue with Hobbes's own analysis of human nature, according to which the dominating drive in human beings is self-preservation. Against Hobbes, Hegel is saying that freedom is a much more vital end than self-preservation, which is proven by the mere fact that a person is willing to risk his life to attain it.', *Hegel*, 187.

¹¹⁰ *PbG*, ¶187/113-4.

¹¹¹ *PbG*, ¶189/115.

¹¹² *PbG*, ¶191/116. See also G.W.F Hegel, *The Berlin Phenomenology*, trans. M.J Petty (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1981), ¶435/87-91.

This purely negative freedom, which consists in the abstraction from natural existence, does not, however, correspond to the concept of Freedom, for this latter is self-sameness in otherness, that is, in part the beholding of oneself in another self and in part freedom not *from* existence but *in* existence, a freedom which itself has an existence. The one who serves lacks a self and has another self in place of his own; so that in the Master he has alienated and annulled himself as an individual Ego and now views another as his essential self. The Master, on the contrary, sees in the Servant the other Ego as annulled and his own individual will as preserved. (History of Robinson Crusoe and Friday.)¹¹³

Friday is converted to the Protestant faith and work ethic, as Robinson wills it. Robinson teaches Friday English, and given 'Time' instructs him in 'the Knowledge of the true God'.¹¹⁴ Robinson is pleased that Friday 'work'd very willingly, and very hard; but did it very cheerfully'. As in Hegel's dialectic, Robinson increasingly sees himself in Friday. The slave becomes an expression of Robinson, who expresses this in an egotistical self-love:

his simple unfeign'd Honesty, appear'd to me more and more every Day, and I began really to love the Creature; and on his Side, I believe he lov'd me more than it was possible for him ever to love any Thing before.¹¹⁵

Robinson's understanding of Friday's love, who is supposed to find his own meaning in his subjection, holds to the logic of the lord/bondsman relation. However, for Hegel the negation of the thinghood of the bondsman in the struggle for recognition expresses the import for self-consciousness in social freedom. Labour is fundamental here. This is the mediation that defines the unity. Hegel sees labour as 'formative activity' which shapes the thing and leads 'consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence'.¹¹⁶ The significance of the dialectic comes in this disruptive moment. Through this subjected labour, the bondsman, made to create the thing for their master, whose existence is predicated by their work, becomes aware that their being-for-themselves exists not in the master but in their own life. This is the struggle for recognition. 'Through this rediscovery of himself by himself', Hegel states, 'the bondsman realises that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own'.¹¹⁷ This process of consciousness via the mediation of labour allows the freedom of the bondsman when they come into

¹¹³ G.W.F Hegel, *The Philosophical Propaedeutic*, trans. A.V Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), §35/62.

¹¹⁴ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 170-1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 168.

¹¹⁶ *PbG*, ¶196/118.

¹¹⁷ *PbG*, ¶196/119.

conscious recognition of their self and means the death of the entire exploitive relation. Hegel sees this as the moment of truth.¹¹⁸

This relation is both material and ideal, the development of consciousness in and through productive activity, which generates conflicting needs. This dimension of recognition is put clearly in *System of Ethical Life*, where the

the link between the two is particularity in general, and, in practice, need. The master is in possession of a surplus, of what is physically necessary; the servant lacks it, and indeed in such a way that the surplus and the lack of it are not single [accidental] aspects but the indifference of necessary needs.¹¹⁹

Again, in the mature *Philosophy of Right*, in this dialectic the rationality of actors is seen to be socially constituted through the ‘struggle for recognition’.¹²⁰ The dialectic of self-consciousness as developed through the master/servant relation is ‘a deep structure in Hegel’s account of ethical life’. As Williams notes, ‘the threshold of the ethical is attained when the other ceases to be regarded as a nullity or a mere “thing”, and comes to count as a self-determining end in itself’.¹²¹

(g) The relevance of this dialectic for Marx’s thought is striking and has traditionally been seen as the basis of Marx’s concept of labour, especially in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.¹²² Leaving aside the considerable controversies surrounding this question, a brief comment is warranted. With some interpretive authority Christopher J. Arthur argues that Marx was not influenced by this passage since there is no direct reference in the 1844 writings,¹²³ his most detailed commentary on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹²⁴ Arthur

¹¹⁸ Jameson notes that the ‘Slave’s truth is thereby labour itself’, *The Hegel Variations*, 57.

¹¹⁹ *SEL*, 126.

¹²⁰ *PR*, §57/87.

¹²¹ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 2.

¹²² Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 115-20; Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 64-5. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 156. Pippin pushes against the influence of Kojève’s reading, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 10-20.

¹²³ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 72-85. Tony Burns offers a valuable assessment of recognition, which demonstrates an ‘implicit’ influence of the master/slave dialectic in the *Paris Manuscripts*, ‘The Idea of the “Struggle for Recognition” in the Ethical Thought of the Young Marx and its Relevance Today’ in *Constructing Marxist Ethics*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (Chicago: Haymarket, 2015), 56.

¹²⁴ *EPM*, 379-400. See also Peter Hudis’ translation of Marx’s notes on the ‘Absolute Knowledge’ chapter, in *Marx’s Concept of an Alternative to Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012), 216-21.

flatly rejects that Hegel's account of servitude has an impact on Marx.¹²⁵ However, missing from these treatments, is this significant passage from the *Grundrisse*:

The recognition [*Erkennung*] of the products as its own, and the judgment that its separation from the conditions of its realisation is improper - forcibly imposed - is an enormous [advance in] awareness [*Bewusstsein*], itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he *cannot be the property of another*, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.¹²⁶

This passage hinges on Hegel's notion of recognition and while Marx's own distinctive terminology features, it is undeniable that the coming-to-be of the slave's awareness is conceptually analogous to Hegel's. For Marx, the slave's self-consciousness, his assertion of personhood challenges the exploitive form of production which defines the labour relation. Further, Marx's explicit reference to Hegel's concept shows how the structure of recognition is carried into Marx's thought. He brings in Hegel's discussion in the context of a discussion of the relation between value and capital in terms of the dialectic between living and dead labour. As the self-positing of dead labour, capital alienates subjective living labour. Here

living labour appears as a mere means to realise objectified, dead labour, to penetrate it with an animating soul while losing its own soul to it - and having produced, as the end-product, alien wealth on one side and [, on the other,] the penury which is living labour capacity's sole possession.

Marx describes the process in which the objectivity of living labour 'in and by itself' becomes alienated 'as the mode of existence of an alien person' and posits an 'isolated and subjective labour capacity, wealth of and for the capitalist'. Value appears as an objective form distinct from use. In this way, the productive activity becomes alien to itself and the products of labour appear as a 'combination of alien material, alien instrument and alien labour - as alien property'. Production, in turn, becomes 'poorer by the life forces expended, but otherwise begins the drudgery anew, existing as a mere subjective labour capacity separated from the conditions of its life'.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 73.

¹²⁶ *Gr*, 463.

¹²⁷ *Gr*, 461-3.

While this process will be examined in of Chapters 5 and 6 below, it suffices to say at this point that Marx considers this relation to be a form of *misrecognition*. Capital and value are objectified forms mediated by an alienated productive process in which living activity is drained of its soul and deadened. Marx's analysis points out how basic conditions of human activity are determined by this relation. The necessity of recognition features explicitly, as the knowledge that value is realised 'forcibly' as domination. Consciousness [*Bewusstsein*] of the process of capital production allows for '*the knell to its doom*', since like the struggle for recognition with the slave, the worker becomes self-conscious that they '*cannot be the property of another*'.¹²⁸ This discussion helps reinforce the vital point that Marx, following Hegel, saw the overcoming of capital as located in the self-conscious activity that is given shape from the social relation of labour and capital. The imminent negativity of the worker threatens capital existentially. But the importance of this dialectic marks a larger thematic shift in political thought, one in which Marx is at one with Hegel. This is the shift from contract to recognition.

(h) Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation unifies the Robinsonade theme of the individual producer with the creation of the wage-labourer through the development of capitalism and its specific relations of production and ownership. The individual producer is born not of natural accident but by a colossal process of force and dispossession. Primitive accumulation is the 'historical movement' of capitalist development which separated pre-capitalist producers from their land and means of production and turned them in wage-labours and their land and means of production into capital.¹²⁹ This involved the clearing and 'forced expropriation' of vast amounts of common land in Europe, the enslavement of the Americas and African, the colonialism in India and the British Empire in China and elsewhere.¹³⁰ Slavery and state coercion are different 'moments' of primitive accumulation, where force is essential to the development and enforcement of the labour forms and process characteristic to capitalism.¹³¹ In Marx's distinctive formulation, 'the veiled slavery of the wage-labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal'. Marx ironically notes, quoting Virgil,

¹²⁸ *Gr*, 463.

¹²⁹ Karl Marx, 'A Letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*' in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, ed. Teodor Shanin (London: Verso, 2018), 135.

¹³⁰ *Cap* 1, 881, 915.

¹³¹ *Cap* 1, 915.

Tantae molis erant [so great was the effort] to unleash the ‘eternal natural laws’ of the capitalist mode of production, to complete the process of separation between the workers and the conditions of their labour, to transform, at one pole, the social means of production and subsistence into capital, and at the opposite pole, the mass of the population into wage-labourers, into the free ‘labouring poor’, that artificial product of modern history. If money, according to Augier, comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one-check,¹³² capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.

The existence of capitalism is as ‘natural’ as the processes that force it into being. Specifically, the creation of private property and individualised labour through primitive accumulation was the ‘antithesis to social collective property’. Private property is the corresponding form of ownership to the newly created wage labourer who gains their ‘free individuality’ through a fragmented production process. This mode of production ‘flourishes, unleashes the whole of its energy, attains its adequate classical form, only where the worker is the free proprietor of the conditions of his labour, and sets them in motion himself’. Marx notes that the concentration of the private means of production ‘excludes co-operation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the social control and regulation of the forces of nature, and the free development of the productive forces of society’.¹³³ The individualisation of the worker occurs in unfettering and negation of pre-capitalist social forms and the transformation of small scale property holdings into ‘socially concentrated’ but privately held means of production. Private property ‘rests on the exploitation of alien, but formally free labour’ of the individual worker.¹³⁴ The ‘new form’ of capitalist production is validated by its *socialisation* of the individualised worker.

Labour processes are social but performed as isolated labour acts, contingent on the division of labour and the quantifiable measurement of labour activity into labour-time. Labour is abstractly socialised as capital centralises and competes, accumulates and circulates. The contradiction between social labour processes performed by isolated workers creates an immanent dynamic in terms of class struggle. Marx argues that as capital becomes fully formed, ‘flourished alongside and under’ as a negating force.

¹³² *Cap* 1, 925-6. Marx uses a similar phrase in his discussion of British colonialism in the 1853 article, ‘The Future Results of British Rule in India’, noting ‘Has [colonialism] ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?’ *MECW* 12, 221.

¹³³ *Cap* 1, 927.

¹³⁴ *Cap* 1, 928.

Workers, in turn, are ‘united and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production’.

The contrast made here is between private property and a new form of ‘social property’.¹³⁵ Marx develops a view of capitalist development predicated by colonial expansion. In the opposition between the ‘capitalist regime’ and the colonial subject, there is a ‘struggle’ between ‘two diametrically opposed economic systems’. In a phrase reminiscent of the lord/bondsman dialectic, Marx notes ‘the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country’ is to be found ‘*in the colonies*’.¹³⁶ The struggle between coloniser and colonial subject reflects the dependence of the colonisers in their interests to expand the barriers of capital and push further development. The truth of domination can only be understood by an investigation of the corresponding, historically specific social relations. Primitive accumulation forces the ‘freedom’ of the wage-labourer in the most barbarous methods. Marx’s discussion establishes the role of slavery and violence in the creation of modern social relations and helps draw out the significance of different forms of labour present in *Robinson Crusoe*. When the text is interpreted an ideological expression of the naturalisation of social relations, this approach brings into the open the origin and foundation of these relations upon historically specific forms of domination. What Marx makes clear is that ‘The positing of the individual as a worker, in this nakedness, is itself a product of history’.¹³⁷ Hegel’s challenge to the paradigm established by social contract theory, contextualises the significance of Marx’s explicit use of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Part 2

(a) Marx’s comments on *Robinson Crusoe* have generally received little serious attention.¹³⁸ Many interpreters have left their analysis to a simple remark on the employment of the literary metaphor and then follow straight from there into an analysis of Marx’s critique

¹³⁵ *Cap* 1, 929-30.

¹³⁶ *Cap* 1, 932. Famously, Franz Fanon points to the limit of the master/slave dialectic in colonised countries, since even if the colonised demand recognition, the coloniser is inherently unwilling to give recognise, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 216-222.

¹³⁷ *Gr*, 472.

¹³⁸ A recent exception is Jessica Whyte, ‘The Fortunes of Natural Man: Robinson Crusoe, Political Economy, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, *Humanity*, 5:3 (2014): 301-321.

of political economy.¹³⁹ Even the most rigorous chronicler of Marx's literary references, S.S. Prawer, fails to note the significance of *Robinson Crusoe*. He writes, 'What Marx really attacks... is not *Robinson Crusoe* itself but the illusions fostered in certain readers by lesser imitations, or by unperceptive and prejudiced reading, or by wishful thinking. He is attacking the *myth* of *Robinson Crusoe*, not the book itself.'¹⁴⁰ But this view glosses over *Robinson Crusoe* as an expression of a symptomatic theoretical standpoint and in doing so, lessens the importance of the metaphor. Considering Marx's attitude as responsive only to the myth, and not the text itself, risks understating the representative role of the text in the development of early bourgeois models of thought. *Robinson Crusoe* transmitted, by way of popular narrative, the conception of the state of nature and the solitary individual was a much deeper to expression of the standpoint of bourgeois society. *Robinson Crusoe* is itself an expression of an emergent myth with an emergent logic. This view is insightfully noted by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who point to the importance of the narrative of the 'solo manufacturer' in 'bourgeois thinking'. Robinson's 'weakness' – the individual's separation from the collective – is his 'social strength'. Like Odysseus, Robinson is given up to the cruel fate of the sea. Once confined to his island, he is forced 'recklessly to pursue an atomistic interest' according to the 'principles of capitalist economy'.¹⁴¹ Adorno and Horkheimer point to the infusion of the myth into bourgeois consciousness. This consciousness has deep roots, naturalising the interests of the individual. As Alfred Sohn-Rethel points out, commodity exchange necessitates 'exclusive property' which promises the idea that 'Everybody could own the world as Robinson Crusoe does his island. We therefore state: that which constitutes the form of exchange-ability of commodities is the singleness of their existence.'¹⁴²

¹³⁹ For example, Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 408.

¹⁴⁰ S.S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 274. Prawer bases his reading on the seminal article by Ian Watt, 'Robinson Crusoe as a Myth'. Watt argues, 'Marx does not make the useful polemic point which Crusoe's fortunate acquisition of capital might have afforded him. Nor does he mention the extent to which his personality embodies the moral evils which he ascribed to capitalism. This is no doubt because he is using Crusoe only as an example of one particular theme, and not for any general purpose. For actually Crusoe exemplifies another aspect of Marx's thought; the process of alienation by which capitalism tends to convert man's relationships with his fellows, and even to his own personality, into commodities to be manipulated.' 112. This view undervalues the conceptual importance of Chapter 1 of *Capital*, which offers a critique of the central logic of capital – certainly a 'general purpose' and an explanation of the fetish character of commodity producing society. Robinson's place in this chapter cannot be abstracted from the chapter as a totality.

¹⁴¹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 60-1.

¹⁴² Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, 43.

For Marx, *Robinson Crusoe* expresses the individualist approach of modern modes of thinking.¹⁴³ This becomes clear in his repeated use of *Robinson Crusoe* in his drafting of *Capital* as a *critique of political economy*. Marx sees his critique as not just of the individual postulates of bourgeois economics but the entire theoretical standpoint. Marx's interest is to subject the standpoint to a critique that exposes both the inner working of political economy and the limitations and barriers of this standpoint. Marx's references to *Robinson Crusoe* suggest he saw this novel an ideological buttress for the standpoint of political economy.

(b) Marx's 1844 writings demonstrate his earliest critique of bourgeois economic thought, animated by his social ontology which remains central to his concept of labour. I outline the character of this development in Part 3 below. However at this point, I specifically examine the role of *Robinson Crusoe* in Marx's writing to foreground central issues in his conception of the categories of 'social' and 'value' and demarcate the lines of critique which are unfolded in his mature writings. *The Poverty of Philosophy* demonstrates the decisive emergence of his category of value and the use of Hegel for this enterprise.¹⁴⁴ A major turning point for his approach to understanding economic categories, is the critique he develops against Proudhon in terms of value theory.¹⁴⁵ The work offers a sharp polemic against Proudhon's 'ideological economics', which attempts to incorporate Ricardo into a critical philosophy.¹⁴⁶ Marx's Foreword sets the tone. In his determination to borrow from Hegel and from Ricardo, Proudhon does nothing more than vulgarise both – taking catchwords from political economy and speculative philosophy without being able to incorporate both insights into a single, unitary standpoint:

¹⁴³ This is also evidenced by Engels' usage, see his letter to Marx, 19 November 1869, *MECW* 43, 379 and Engels to Karl Kautsky, 30 September 1884, *MECW* 47, 194. In this letter, Engels notes Friday and Robinson's connection to the slave trade which makes him therefore a 'proper "bourgeois"'. The metaphor is also used through Engel's *Anti-Dühring*, although not in the final chapter of Section 2: Political Economy, which was written by Marx, *MECW* 25, 143-7, 153-4. Subsequently, Marxists have quite commonly taken this usage up. See for example, Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 36, 115; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 467-8.

¹⁴⁴ For this reason, Hudis argues that *Poverty of Philosophy* should be seen as the 'first draft' of *Capital*, citing Marx's comments that the work 'contains the seeds of the theory developed after twenty years' work in *Capital*, *Marx's Concept of an Alternative to Capitalism*, 94; *MECW* 24, 326. Patrick Murray notes this work, 'lays the foundations for a positive reappraisal of Hegel for Marx's later critique of political economy, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, 98.

¹⁴⁵ See Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ *MECW* 24, 327.

M. Proudhon has the misfortune of being peculiarly misunderstood in Europe. In France, he has the right to be a bad economist, because he is reputed to be a good German philosopher. In Germany, he has the right to be a bad philosopher, because he is reputed to be one of the ablest of French economists. Being both a German and an economist at the same time, we desire to protest against this double error.

The reader will understand that in this thankless task we have often had to abandon our criticism of M. Proudhon in order to criticise German philosophy, and at the same time to give some observations on political economy.¹⁴⁷

The first chapter of the *Poverty of Philosophy*, 'A Scientific Discovery', addresses Proudhon's discussion of the double nature of value as use and exchange value in the *Philosophy of Poverty*. Marx reconstructs Proudhon's position from his ontological presuppositions. First, Proudhon's starting point is the 'single individual' producer who, in seeking the use values they lack, work industrially in collaboration with others. At this point exchange appears. Marx writes:

In order to emerge from the condition in which everyone produces in isolation and to arrive at exchange, 'I turn to my collaborators in various functions,' says Mr. Proudhon. I myself, then, have collaborators, all with different functions. And yet, for all that, I and all the others, always according to M. Proudhon's supposition, have got no farther than the solitary and hardly social position of the Robinsons. The collaborators and the various functions, the division of labour and the exchange it implies, are already to hand.

Marx claims that Proudhon presupposes the division of labour and in doing so leaps ahistorically to exchange value; 'he has still to explain to us the "genesis" of this proposal, to tell us at last how this single individual, this Robinson, suddenly had the idea of making "to his collaborators" a proposal of the type known and how these collaborators accepted it without the slightest protest'.¹⁴⁸

Marx's point is that any conception of production, which like Proudhon, presupposes the individual, falls victim to a misunderstanding of exchange and exchange-value. Marx notes that exchange is a historical form. In the Middle Ages, the close link between production and consumption meant only a slim surplus was exchanged. However, as commerce became more widespread, industrial production now 'depended on exchange'. Finally,

¹⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955), 25.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 28-9.

there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything finally passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when every-thing, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.¹⁴⁹

Marx's description of value stresses that exchange objectifies and alienates not just the physical products of labour but subjects every human faculty to its overarching power. This is logic of our *time*. The values of the market become human values. Production saturates this sense of value and the quality of human life is dominated by its logic.

Marx's critique of Proudhon, although not yet carrying the distinction between labour and labour-power, evidences a probing search for the categories necessary for understanding capitalist social relations. Value is given the specific measure of time. Marx writes:

we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time's carcase. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day; but this equalising of labour is not by any means the work of M. Proudhon's eternal justice; it is purely and simply a fact of modern industry.¹⁵⁰

Labour-power is bought and sold in quantities, measured and equalised in time, which then takes the form of a commodity. To say it is equalised in time means it is not the varying and literal time of each individual worker, but that value is created from the socially measured labour-time. While he develops this concept significantly in *Capital*, at this point he understands a similar mechanism, that the average of labour-time is 'ascertained by competition'.¹⁵¹ In other words, the measure of value is not embodied in each product of labour, but rather is determined by exchange and appears in the form of money. But Marx makes an important point separating himself from Ricardo and Proudhon's method: 'After all, the determination of value by labour time – the formula M. Proudhon gives us as the regenerating formula of the future – is therefore merely the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 57.

scientific expression of the economic relations of present-day society'.¹⁵² While markets and money have long predated capitalism, Marx's discussion of value hinges on the manner in which this relation is specific to market societies with *generalised* commodity production.

The scientific expression offered by bourgeois political economy, and its socialist version (Proudhon), lack the breadth of historical vision. Marx makes this clear by reintroducing the Robinson metaphor, this time to parody Proudhon's notion of labour-wages, where each worker would be paid in labour-time. Marx gives the example of two workers, 'Peter' and 'Paul', trading labour hours to suggest that rather than overcome the problem of wage labour, Proudhon's utilisation of political economy offers less of a solution than a reformulation of 'economic relations such as we see in present-day society, minus the completion of labour'.¹⁵³ Workers may trade labour hours and avoid the competitive sale of a wage, but the fundamental social relations, where labour is quantified and alienated, remains as it is. Proudhon's ontological standpoint underpins this view and, as Marx quips, 'Paul and Peter would arrive at the position of Robinson'.¹⁵⁴ For Marx, the relation between capital and labour must be 'severed' before 'actual [human] agreement based upon the sum of productive forces and the sum of existing needs'.¹⁵⁵

(c) *Robinson Crusoe* features again, a decade later in the considerably more developed text, the *Grundrisse*, where the role of Robinson takes on a new importance. Marx begins the Introduction with the category of production, in a lengthy but significant passage, he writes:

Individuals producing in society – hence socially determined individual production – is, of course, the point of departure. The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, with whom Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades, which in no way express merely a reaction against over-sophistication and a return to a misunderstood natural life, as cultural historians imagine. As little as Rousseau's *contrat social*, which brings naturally independent, autonomous subjects into relation and connection by contract, rests on such naturalism. This is the semblance, the merely aesthetic semblance, of the Robinsonades, great and small. It is, rather, the anticipation of 'civil society', in preparation since the sixteenth

¹⁵² Ibid., 60.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

century and making giant strides towards maturity in the eighteenth. In this society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate. Smith and Ricardo still stand with both feet on the shoulders of the eighteenth-century prophets, in whose imaginations this eighteenth-century individual - the product on one side of the dissolution of the feudal forms of society, on the other side of the new forces of production developed since the sixteenth century - appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historic result but as history's point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature. This illusion has been common to each new epoch to this day.¹⁵⁶

This long passage contains a penetrating, if schematic, characterisation of the individualist ontology employed in political economy. Marx makes clear that production in capitalism is individualised but not in the way that political economy presupposes. Production occurs *within* society, so 'the individual and isolated hunter and fisherman' exemplified in *Robinson Crusoe* is the bourgeois individual projected by political economy back onto the past as nature. Rather than seeing production as a collective enterprise, free completion and bourgeois labour relations are read back onto history, packaging it anew for particular ideological purposes.¹⁵⁷ The bonds of society are repealed and made digestible for political economy, the individual becomes detached from their social ties and reduced to 'unimaginative' types. The individual now appears in 'dot-like isolation' [*Punkt-tualität*].¹⁵⁸

The adoption of the Robinson story *unimaginatively* becomes the 'Robinsonade' ideology advanced by the 'prophets' of early bourgeois thought.¹⁵⁹ Here Marx directly references Rousseau, but we should also consider the prophets in the tradition that precedes him, Locke, included.¹⁶⁰ Marx, along with Hegel, finds that Rousseau's model of social interaction is too limited to explain the concept of human sociality. Political economy takes its ideological presuppositions from this tradition of thought, and while it advances

¹⁵⁶ *Gr*, 83.

¹⁵⁷ Marx notes in a similar vein, 'the bourgeois form of labour is regarded by Ricardo as the eternal natural form of social labour. Ricardo's primitive fisherman and primitive hunter are from the outset owners of commodities who exchange their fish and game in proportion to the labour-time which is materialised in these exchange-values.' *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S.W Ryazanskaya (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 60:

¹⁵⁸ *Gr*, 485.

¹⁵⁹ As Whyte points out, Frédéric Bastiat and Henry Charles Carey are the contemporary targets of Marx's critique. The latter as the first to directly cite *Robinson Crusoe* in his economic writings, 'The Fortunes of Natural Man', 309.

¹⁶⁰ This reading is confirmed by Terrell Carver's careful analysis of the Introduction, *Texts on Method* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 92.

the understanding of social relations by probing the composition of the economic sphere, political economy leaves untouched the foundations of human nature found in the early tradition of bourgeois political thought. Marx makes clear that the ‘Robinsonade’ of bourgeois thought has a historical basis beyond the literary metaphor. Terrell Carver characterises the position well, noting that Marx

attacks the “cultural historians” for missing the point when they ascribe to the stories *à la Robinson Crusoe* (and to Rousseau’s social contract) only a literary significance. For Marx the “individuated individual” as seen in *Robinson Crusoe* and in actual human behaviour, is the product of specific socio-economic changes.¹⁶¹

The turning point here is in the conception of civil society, which in the thought of political economy is a vital category for the market – the meeting place of traders and sellers of commodities. The birth of civil society is decisively modern, including both the sublation of feudal society, smashed asunder by productive forces and the wholesale acceptance of these processes as idealised – ‘project[ed] into the past’. Marx’s historicism pivots his analysis. The political economists dissolve their purported historical approach by starting with the ‘result’ rather than a historical analysis that accords a distinctive analysis to each epoch. Marx directly attributes this to their concept of human nature – the Natural Individual – which, lacking historical determinates falls into the simple illusions of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Further, Marx points to an internal contradiction in this conception of universal self-interest. If each individual is said to pursue their own private interest, this must hold universally: each person must serve ‘the private interests of all, the general interest, without willing or knowing it’. This concept is necessarily abstract since it means that either there is a ‘totality of private interests’ or that each individual act to hinder the interest of others and ‘instead of a general affirmation, this war of all against all produces a general negation’.¹⁶² With this obvious reference to Hobbes, Marx accuses the social contract tradition of an abstract negation, an attempt to define the concept of individuality simply in opposition to the unthought concept of sociality. By rejecting the category all together, contract theorists suggest mutually contradictory ontologies – one

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁶² *Gr*, 156.

of shared private interest or self-interested hostility. Marx attempts to dissolve this antinomy:

The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest, which can be achieved only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society; hence it is bound to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of private persons; but its content, as well as the form and means of its realisation, is given by social conditions independent of all.¹⁶³

Marx's position here rejects the idealised and abstract notion of human nature carried in modern thought and seeks in analysis a concrete, historical and socially informed ontology.

(d) *Capital* confirms the ideological status that Marx's earlier reflections afford to the *Robinson Crusoe*. Through an immanent critique, Marx offers a view of a 'socialised' Robinson. The text features prominently in the pivotal opening chapter of Volume One and the sub-section, 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret'.¹⁶⁴ I reconstruct the opening sequence of *Capital* in Chapter 6 below. Therefore, in the remaining part of this chapter, I confine the discussion to Marx's reference to *Robinson Crusoe* to aid his critique of modern economic categories. The Fetishism section contains a condensed but lucid elaboration of the manner in which the relations between people are distorted into the 'fantastic form of relations between things'.¹⁶⁵ This takes place in the process of production for exchange, where useful articles of human use become profitable commodities which in turn mediate human relationships. Marx suggests that money, 'the finished form' of the commodity, 'conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly'.¹⁶⁶ Money provides a socially objective measure for abstract labour.

However, in Marx's view, the categories provided by bourgeois economics fail to understand the historically specific relationship between 'private labour and the collective

¹⁶³ *Gr*, 156.

¹⁶⁴ Marx added this section into subsequent editions of *Capital*, after it first appeared as an Appendix. This was the last section to be corrected before completion. See Marx to Engels, 16 August 1867, *MECW* 42, 402-5. His discussion of Robinson Crusoe, however, appeared in the original 1867 first chapter. See Karl Marx, 'The Commodity' in *Value*, trans. Albert Dragstedt (New York: New Park Publications, 1976), 35-6.

¹⁶⁵ *Cap* 1, 165.

¹⁶⁶ *Cap* 1, 168-9.

labour of society' that produces abstract labour. For Marx, 'The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we come to other forms of production'.¹⁶⁷ The secret, however, evaporates when subject to an immanent critique. Marx sets up the problem:

As political economists are fond of Robinson Crusoe stories, let us first look at Robinson on his island. Undemanding though he is by nature, he still has needs to satisfy, and must therefore perform useful labours of various kinds: he must make tools, knock together furniture, tame llamas, fish, hunt and so on. Of his prayers and the like, we take no account here, since our friend takes pleasure in them and sees them as recreation. Despite the diversity of his productive functions, he knows that they are only different forms of activity of one and the same Robinson, hence only different modes of human labour. Necessity itself compels him to divide his time with precision between his different functions. Whether one function occupies a greater space in his total activity than another depends on the magnitude of the difficulties to be overcome in attaining the useful effect aimed at. Our friend Robinson Crusoe learns this by experience, and having saved a watch, ledger, ink and pen from the shipwreck, he soon begins, like a good Englishman, to keep a set of books. His stock-book contains a catalogue of the useful objects he possesses, of the various operations necessary for their production, and finally of the labour-time that specific quantities of these products have on average cost him. All the relations between Robinson and these objects that form his self-created wealth are here so simple and transparent that even Mr Sedley Taylor¹⁶⁸ could understand them. And yet those relations contain all the essential determinants of value.¹⁶⁹

In identifying the determinants of value readily apparent in Robinson's account of labour-time, Marx is suggesting that political economy is fundamentally constrained by its individualist standpoint. Even if its practitioners adopt the myth, political economy is unable to grasp from the simple relation, the form of value.

Robinson's labour is concrete in the simplest way. To survive he must produce his own tools, fish and hunt for his own livelihood. There is no division of labour on his island, for each object produced totally by Robinson. He creates useful products but as Marx points out, brings with him the accounting methods of modern British industry. This act is reminiscent of Max Weber's discussion of the book-keeping as the decisive 'calculation' of capital, where the recording of money inputs, outputs, controls and

¹⁶⁷ *Cap* 1, 169.

¹⁶⁸ A second rate, although popular, contemporary Cambridge economist, see asterisk *Cap* 1, 170.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

balances, lead to a 'final balance sheet'. Book-keeping rationalises 'the capitalist enterprise' on mathematical and quantifiable lines.¹⁷⁰

Robinson rescues the instruments necessary to record the production and consumption of his labour as if producing commodities with exchange-values. So even with no exchange relation, his products are implicitly stamped by the categories of use and exchange value. Without the exchange and division of labour of modern industry, the products of Robinson's labour are directly apparent. His attitude to his labour is 'transparent' in the sense that what creates their use-value is labour-time, how much time he has expended on each individual task. But his basic need for survival is read through his account-like attitude to his labour-time. Robinson's account of the simple givenness of his activity understands his world empirically, marked by the shopkeeper mentality of the early British ideologues. His world is the one he has made through his own individual efforts, representing his ingenuity, cunning and the practical assessment of his possibilities to advance and benefit from the world in front of him. Marx's immanent critique shows that the determinations of value found in the Robinson story are unexamined and undeveloped by its storytellers.

Marx then suddenly 'transport[s]' the reader from Robinson's island 'bathed in light, to medieval Europe, shrouded in darkness. Here, instead of the independent man, we find everyone dependent – serfs and lords, vassals and suzerains, laymen and clerics.' This shift allows Marx to chart with historical detail the direct 'dominance and servitude' of feudal social relations.¹⁷¹ Here labour was given in 'immediate social form', in the tithes and taxes that serfs were expected to perform for their lords and hence plain to see:

The corvée can be measured by time just as well as the labour which produces commodities, but every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord is a specific quantity of his own personal labour-power. The tithe owed to the priest is more clearly apparent than his blessing. Whatever we may think, then, of the different roles in which men confront each other in such a society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labour.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and other Writings*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin, 2002), 360-3.

¹⁷¹ *Cap* 1, 173. For the nature of Western feudalism see Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977), 9-62.

¹⁷² *Cap* 1, 170.

Medieval labour relations, not mediated by the capitalist logic of a self-positing commodity form, but by rural life, meant an economy based on consumption. Here the social form of production is for subsistence performed in small and individually worked parcels of land by the family unit.¹⁷³ Products of labour can be understood by their social utility and comprehended by the direct knowledge of the character, if not the exact expenditure of activity embodied in these products.¹⁷⁴ However, the capitalist labour process, which reproduces commodities for exchange, alters the character of the commodity from a simple category to a complex thing quantified by socially averaged labour-time and subjected to a logic that distorts the real processes carried on in production. Production is individualised and while the processes acted upon are global and collective, each portion of labour-power is individualised and quantified. Time is measured in the form of money (a wage), which allows a quantifiable and hence exchangeable, equivalent with a socially recognisable value.

The real social importance of the money-form is expressed in extreme form when Robinson scavenges through the shipwreck and comes across, ‘thirty six Pounds value in money, some *European* coin, some *Brazil*, some Pieces of Eight, some gold, some silver’. His response demonstrates the unity of myth and reality in the novel:

I smil’d to my self at the sight of this money, O drug! said I aloud, what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me, no not the taking off of the ground, one of those knives is worth all this heap, I have no manner of use for thee, e’en remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth saving. However, upon second thoughts, I took it away, and wrapping all this in a piece of canvass, I began to think of making another raft, but while I was preparing this, I found the sky over-cast, and the wind began to rise, and in a quarter of an hour it blew a fresh gale from the shore...¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ See Jairus Banaji, ‘Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History’ in *Theory as History* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2010), 50-92; Kohachiro Takahashi, ‘A Contribution to the Discussion’ in *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. Rodney Hilton (London: Verso, 1978), 68-97.

¹⁷⁴ In pre-capitalist societies, ‘Wealth does not appear as the aim of production... Now, [under capitalism] wealth is on one side a thing, realised in things, material products, which a human being confronts as subject; on the other side, as value, wealth is merely command over alien labour not with the aim of ruling, but with the aim of private consumption etc. It appears in all forms in the shape of a thing, be it an object or be it a relation mediated through the object, which is external and accidental to the individual. Thus the old view, in which the human being appears as the aim of production, regardless of his limited national, religious, political character, seems to be very lofty when contrasted to the modern world, where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production.’ *Gr*, 487-8.

¹⁷⁵ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 47.

Robinson's delight in finding money appears at first sight bizarre. Robinson sees 'no manner of use' he cannot bear seeing them sink to the bottom. He later reflects on this money as 'nasty sorry useless stuff' and longs to trade it for some vegetable seeds or a bottle of ink, since the money had 'no manner of value to me, because of no use'.¹⁷⁶ When ink serves him a real purpose on the island (to record his narrative), the money can be nothing other than a revelation of Robinson's capitalist presuppositions. On an island without money, he must hoard it; however without society, Robinson's money represents nothing. But the fact he retains the money provides him with capital once he leaves the island and confirms the money's use.

The reality, to the reader of our world is that the money, island or not, still holds *social* significance.¹⁷⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer suggest the furthering of the 'new enterprise is evidence for the contention that the entrepreneur has always gone about his competitive business with more initial capital than his mere physical capacity'. Even Robinson's miraculous labour efforts are of little import when compared to the socially recognised treasures retrieved from the shipwreck. Adorno and Horkheimer connect this ideology with political economy's concept of risk, in which 'the possibilities for failure becomes the postulate of a moral excuse for profit'. Robinson's 'strange and surprising adventures'¹⁷⁸ only makes sense from the 'standpoint of developed exchange and its individuals'. Robinson's alienation, his isolation and disassociation, can only be comprehended from the perspective of the bourgeois social system. Robinson 'produces' his own totality, he 'realises totality only in complete isolation from all other men' and meets the world seeing only 'tools' and 'things'.¹⁷⁹ The individual is self-created, producing his world instrumentally and apart from society. Even alone on his island, Robinson cannot but think in terms conditioned by modern social relations and bourgeois presuppositions.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 103.

¹⁷⁷ The quantifiable character of value is expressed in money, which allows commodities to be comparable: 'As a value, the commodity is an equivalent; as an equivalent, all its natural properties are extinguished; it no longer takes up a special, qualitative relationship towards the other commodities; but is rather the general measure as well as the general representative, the general medium of exchange of all other commodities. As value, it is money. *Gr*, 141.

¹⁷⁸ The full title of the book is 'The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates', Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 62.

The 'natural man' of the myth presents the distorted concept of society operative in bourgeois ideology.¹⁸⁰ Relations are only reflected through the individual's own preservation, industry and utility. Marx's discussion of Robinson expresses the manner in which bourgeois ideology is individualist; promoting the isolated producer as a human ideal and masking the manner in which capitalist production *is* social, the generalised relation between people as mediated by things. This makes social production necessarily abstract and misrecognised. On his island, Robinson expresses both moments, promoting the former as a virtue of humanity and presupposing the latter.

(e) The transparency of Robinson's labour process provides a counterpoint to both the domination of pre-capitalist and capitalist labour processes. The pre-capitalist examples mediate the fiction of Robinson's isolation to the social possibilities of free labour.¹⁸¹ Marx is putting into historical perspective the variations of domination particular to different social forms and the collective forms of labour 'natural' to pre-capitalist production. In one of the few passages in *Capital* that broach a post-capitalist society, Marx follows his preceding discussion of isolated capitalist production and production for consumption in feudalism¹⁸² with his conception of society:

Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force. All the characteristics of Robinson's labour are repeated here, but with the difference that they are social instead of individual. All Robinson's products were exclusively the result of his own personal labour and they were therefore directly objects of utility for him personally. The total product of our imagined association is a social product.¹⁸³

This implies that, Robinson's drive for use-values is maintained and generalised once individualised and abstract production is replaced by truly social production. It could appear here that Marx implies that a post-capitalist society is simply an inversion of the capitalist production process. Yet there is more going on in this passage. What Marx finds most significant is the transparency of Robinson's labour. The immanent

¹⁸⁰ Whyte draws out this theme in connection to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where *Robinson Crusoe* featured as 'the heuristic device that enabled the delegates to conduct a philosophical debate over the nature of man', 'The Fortunes of Natural Man', 303.

¹⁸¹ Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 181-2.

¹⁸² In the 1867 version of Chapter 1, the discussion of Robinson is concentrated to three paragraphs, which is expanded in the significantly revised 1873 Second Edition, Karl Marx, 'The Commodity' in *Value*, 35-6.

¹⁸³ *Cap* 1, 171.

dimension of Marx's critique comes to the fore. The freedom of productive activity, which is posited in Robinson, can only become actually self-aware when is constituted socially.

This self-consciousness Marx finds to be a crucial element of rational production. Labour power is now performed in collective 'full self-awareness'. Not only does Marx deem the negation of capital in terms of the collective institutions of free associated rule, but his stress on the social character of the labour process is directly contrasted with Robinson's individual labour. Marx cannot however be taken to dissolve the modern individual into a return to pre-capitalist communalism founded 'on the immaturity of man as an individual', but a recognition that humans are individualised and reified through modern productive processes that prevent sociality from actually being comprehended in terms of individuals.¹⁸⁴ Marx does not deny individuality or deem it simply as ideology, but locates individualisation as an ontological dimension of capitalist production itself. Individualism is produced and reproduced through the commodity, which is validated by private property ownership and exchange. The social and individual moments of the labour process are assessed by Marx in historically specific terms as antinomies of capitalist production, which require negation. However, individuality is sublated into a realised sociality through the freedom and self-awareness of 'social labour' rationally organised. The single, isolated individual and the abstract sociality of production are both moments historically determined by capital but sublated when recognised and made self-consciousness in concrete and transparent social relations.

My interpretation of the Robinson passage runs against MacIntyre's critique in *AV*. MacIntyre argues based on upon this passage, that Marx secretes a 'radical individualism' by presenting the free individual as a socialised Robinson, but without making clear 'on what basis he enters his free association'. Accordingly, this 'lacuna' becomes the association of 'abstract moral principle and utility'.¹⁸⁵ Holding this position becomes ideological, unconsciously mimicking Marx's critique of Robinson. Contra MacIntyre, Marx's conception of free association *repeats* Robinson not to relativise for his own ontology, but satirically invert the ideological use of Robinson by political economy. In the original version of the chapter, Marx notes the 'essential difference' in the contrast

¹⁸⁴ *Cap* 1, 173.

¹⁸⁵ *AV*, 261.

between Robinson and free association, that production ‘remains social’. Marx does not give an abstract claim for a future plan for the division of the results of production (distribution). Rather, his claim is that planning is itself a historically specific question that depends on the correlation between ‘the correct proportion of the various labour-functions to the various needs’.¹⁸⁶ Marx’s conceptualisation of shared association in terms of transparency and self-consciousness is inherently related to the rational self-control of labour processes by social actors. This position is more than an abstract moral principle precisely because the ontological conception of sociality is found in rational processes of productive activity. A ‘socialist’ Robinson represents concrete labour but also the association found in that concrete freedom. The development of Marx’s category of sociality from the 1844 texts to his late writings reflects his extended attention to the antinomy of the social and the individual, as relations mediated by labour. The conceptual unfolding of the social ontology outlined in his 1844 texts is systematised though the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

¹⁸⁶ Marx, ‘The Commodity’, 36.

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Part III

| 5. *Being & Flourishing*

The character of Marx's social ontology hinges on an understanding of the alienation of human activity under the capitalist mode of production. Productive activity mediates humans and nature, developing one and the other in a mutual process of interaction. This life activity strives for its own rational self-understanding and universality. Humans make themselves and the social world. In this way, productive activity is always expressed in a historical form. In our social world, in which the relation of capital and wage-labour structures private property and productive activity, this form of being is alienated.¹ A complex set of relations determine alienated labour as a historically specific form of productive activity. Being is socially conditioned and mediated by the specifically human dimension of productive activity. Humans produce rationally and in concert with others. This practice creates and transforms their being, offering both the cruelty of domination and the potential for human becoming. For Marx, the being-and-becoming of human activity is both the self-realisation of a human essence, historically formed; and the ethical becoming of human society, rational and universal. Marx inherits from Hegel the view that freedom is the human essence.² Not only is this freedom historical but it requires self-awareness. For Marx, this freedom is further constituted by the rational control of human activity. If so, alienation is a barrier to human freedom. The relation between alienation and freedom denotes a vital aspect of Marx's concept of ethical life, in which in overcoming the former, the latter is realised.

To assess the merit of Marx's social ontology, it is necessary to trace the line of this conceptualisation from its first nascent expression to its fully formed shape, since as Aristotle suggests, those 'who considers things in their first growth and origin, whether of a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them'.³ The intellectual lineage of Marx's concept of human sociality is the subject of this chapter and the next. The first part of this inquiry is to chart the beginnings and construction of Marx's Aristotelian influenced social ontology by placing his 1844 writings under specific focus. In the

¹ According to the formulation in the *Communist Manifesto*, 'Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage-labour', *MECW* 6, 499.

² Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 20-2. For MacIntyre's discussion of this point, see 'Freedom and Revolution' in *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement with Marxism*, 124. For a discussion of Marx's inheritance of Hegel's view, see Andrew Chitty, 'Species-Being and Capital' in *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Chitty and Martin McIvor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123-6.

³ *Pol.* 1252a24.

notebooks written in Paris during 1844, he specifically locates his ontological conception of sociality in the concept of alienated labour. In the central work of this period, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (*EPM*) Marx provides his fullest elaboration of ‘species-being’ and human flourishing. To flourish, for Marx, is to realise both human faculties and the conditions of freedom. This social ontology gives initial shape to the ethical character of his social theory. Marx’s conception of unalienated labour as human flourishing develops an Aristotelian strain of thinking about human nature in which a latent human potential is formed and realised in society.⁴ It follows that Marx’s ontology is not pre-political or transhistorical. On the contrary, since it is derived from society, his concept of labour is always historical. This historical prism provides evaluative power since it allows Marx to immanently critique the present form of alienation. The normative impact of human potency remains present in Marx’s concept of labour beyond the 1844 works, which preserve an understanding of ethical life as the flourishing of human sociality, human being-and-becoming.

Before examining the significance of the *EPM*, I will sketch the origins of this position in the period between his 1843 writings and his 1844 notebooks with some consideration of the development of his concept of labour. While the *EPM* are certainly well discussed, *Comments on James Mill* (*CJM*), an earlier piece from 1844, has been largely ignored. The translations of the 1844 ‘philosophical’ texts appeared notably late in the English-speaking world.⁵ This has significantly affected the reception of these texts, and when reviewing the literature an uneven effect emerges. The vast bulk of attention has been directed to the *EPM*, almost to the detriment of *CJM*. However, *CJM* provides a critical vantage point for Marx’s move towards the critique of political economy and contains his earliest thoughts on the fetishised character of value.

The 1844 works show the initial synthesis of the advances of British political economy with the radical character of the French working-class movement, bound together by the brilliance of speculative thought.⁶ The 1844 texts first tease out the ideas that culminate

⁴ For the role of Aristotle’s metaphysics, Meikle’s *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx* is still unsurpassed.

⁵ For example, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* first appeared in a full translation in 1956, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1956) and *Comments on James Mill* not until 1971, translated by David McLellan, *Early Texts* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 188-203. In this chapter I rely upon the Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton translation in *EW*, 259-78.

⁶ I put to the side the important question of Marx’s critique of Hegel’s dialectic in his 1844 writings. My aim here is to elucidate the Aristotelian strain in these texts and discussion of Hegel’s concept of labour

in *Capital*. Marx's later works must be understood as a deeper and more expansive development of the efforts begun so definitely in 1844. As will be made clear in subsequent chapters, the central theme of the work, the estrangement of human labour and the conditions of this estrangement as embodied in the wage-labour/capital relation, are carried and furthered in the first chapter of *Capital*, Volume One, in his discussion of the fetish quality of the commodity and the form of value. Marx's 1844 writings give decisive shape to his concept of essence, an important aspect of his concept of value. Last, I'll briefly address Arendt's critique of Marx. In her probing assessment of Marx's social ontology, Arendt argues labour is glorified, reducing politics to the necessity of life and erroneously folding ethics into the fact of labour. I contend that Arendt's distinction between 'labour', 'work' and 'action' fails to capture the richness of Marx's concept of labour. For Marx, productive activity provides the condition of existence for creative and shared human action and allows for rationality to come to fruition. In this way, Arendt's concern for the political realm can be better accommodated in reference to Marx, rather than what a polemical opposition might suggest. Both Arendt and Marx share the need for politics to be located in the shared interaction between social actors.

Part 1

In *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, István Mészáros' path-breaking discussion of the *EPM*, only one reference is made to *CJM*, and only then in parenthesis and in passing. Mészáros mentions the text only to suggest its relative immaturity compared to the *EPM*.⁷ His approach is emblematic of a more general neglect of *CJM*. While I do not dispute the claim that the *EPM* are more theoretically coherent than *CJM*, I contend that *CJM* offers added insight into the formation of Marx's social thought, evidencing the link between his first engagement with political economy and the ethical dimension of this critique. This text not only confirms the themes of the longer *EPM* but also, and more importantly, demonstrates a distinct sense of the unity of his emergent conception of ethics and the development of his approach to bourgeois economic theory. In *CJM*, Marx's critique of political economy is framed as an immanent critique of the standpoint

would have been an unnecessary divergence from this theme. Suffice to say, I follow Ian Fraser (as well as Tony Smith, Robert Fine and Peter Hudis) in thinking that Marx was unfair to Hegel during this period. See Ian Fraser, *Hegel and Marx* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 34-41.

⁷ Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 97.

of the bourgeois thought *from* the standpoint of labour. Through an analysis of the role of money and credit, and in a very preliminary discussion of value, Marx exposes the mystification of political economy and therefore the deceptiveness of Mill's account of human nature. Additionally, it is in this text that Marx provides a very early conception of human flourishing beyond capital.

CJM furthers and consolidates the theoretical steps made in his two early criticisms of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and his article, *On the Jewish Question*. In these 1843 texts, written just months earlier than the 1844 notebooks, Marx comes to the view that the capitalist state is an alienated social form which enforces a split between public and private life. The citizen of the state and the private individual of civil society are held apart by the modern state. Marx finds that the modern state does not embody reason, but the partial and conflict-ridden world of bourgeois particularly. The universality which the bourgeois class claimed on its ascent to power was not only false, but hidden by its ideological verbiage. This is most present in the claims of 'rights of man', which presents as universal political freedom, but 'are quite simply the rights of the *member of civil society*'.⁸

While Marx frames this discussion in the context of the Left-Hegelian preoccupation with religion, he consistently argues that is it not enough to achieve political emancipation from the state, suggesting this argument remains fixed within the antinomy between the state and civil society. Marx suggests only *human emancipation* will suffice. In a significant passage from *On the Jewish Question*, he writes:

Political emancipation is the reduction of man on the one hand to the member of civil society, the *egoistic, independent* individual, and on the other to the *citizen*, the moral person. Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognised and organised his *own forces* as *social forces* so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed.⁹

The split between the political sphere, citizen life, and the private sphere, the life of egotism and money is his main concern here. Narrow political emancipation cannot overcome this contradiction but, in Marx's view, confirms it. Although Marx does not

⁸ *OJQ*, 229.

⁹ *OJQ*, 234.

dismiss the worth of political emancipation, he regards it as limited by its own centrally contained vision – remaining confined within the antinomy between the private and public spheres unique to capitalism.¹⁰ Moreover, humans need to ‘recognise’ being beyond its immediate political sphere and into its more expansive *social* dimension. This view of human emancipation allows for social freedom to be conceived universally. As Andrew Chitty points out, humans must ‘relate to each other as universal and free beings, as they do as citizens of the modern state, but they will do so in their everyday lives’.¹¹ Marx calls the social being, ‘*species-being*’ (*gattungswesen*). This term, first used in *OJQ*, is a key notion for Marx in his 1844 writings. More accurately translated as ‘species-essence’, but also commonly rendered ‘species-life’, *gattungswesen* is linked closely with Marx’s discussion of essence (*wesen*).¹² Commentators have often understood ‘human essence’ simply as an abstract, ahistorical ‘human nature’, but in actuality the concept relates to the dialectic between productive activity and historical social forms.¹³ This misunderstanding has its own history. For example, in the first English translation of *OJQ*, the term is rendered ‘generic being’. The literal translation of *gattung* as generic, rather than species, has a dramatic, grievous, impact on the meaning of the concept. Compare:

The individual emancipates himself politically from religion by banishing it from public right into private right. It is no longer the spirit of the State, where the individual – although in a limited manner, under a particular form and in a special sphere – behaves as a generic being, in conjunction with other individuals; it has become the spirit of bourgeois society, of the sphere of egoism, of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [the war of all against all]. It is no longer the essence of community, but the essence of social distinction.¹⁴

The revised translation replaces ‘individual’ for ‘man’, ‘bourgeois society’ for ‘civil society’ and ‘*difference*’ with ‘social distinction’. More correctly the passage reads:

¹⁰ See also Hudis, *Marx’s Concept of an Alternative to Capitalism*, 52.

¹¹ Chitty, ‘Species-Being and Capital’, 129. On the same page, Chitty outlines the close parallel between Hegel’s idea of ‘species’ as concrete universality and Marx’s term ‘species-being’. See for instance, *SL*, 12:80.

¹² As noted by the translators of *EW*, 430-1; Wood, *Karl Marx*, 18.

¹³ See for example, Fredy Perlman, ‘Commodity Fetishism’ in I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, trans. Miloš Samardžija & Fredy Perlman (Québec: Black Rose Books, 1973), xx.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Selected Essays*, trans. H.J. Stenning (London: Leonard Parsons, 1926), 58-9. I thank Stuart Macintyre for kindly allowing me access to his personal copy of ‘Marxism in Britain 1917-33’, University of Cambridge, PhD thesis, 1975, 337-346. Macintyre provides the earliest publication dates for the British editions of Marx’s work, including Stenning’s first translations of *OJQ*, ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Introduction’, ‘Critical Notes on the Article “The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian”’ and excerpts from *The Holy Family*. See also, Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 91.

Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by banishing it from the province of public law to that of private law. It is no longer the spirit of the *state* where man behaves - although in a limited way, in a particular form and a particular sphere - as a species-being, in community with other men. It has become the spirit of *civil society*, the sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*. It is no longer the essence of *community* but the essence of *difference*.¹⁵

By rendering Marx's term for humanity as 'individual', the first translation implies a stronger division between individual/community than is evident in the latter passage. According to the first, the individual only *behaves* as 'generic being', so the relationship remains counterposed. Marx's claim that the egotism of 'civil society' (the private sphere) becomes predominant is lost when the Hegelian inflection is flattened to 'bourgeois society'. The nuance of the point comes out in the latter translation, where species-being specifies the impact of bourgeois political forms on the community and individuality of human beings. As 'generic-being' rather than 'species-being', the concept is debased, losing ontological significance for a transhistorical gloss. For Marx, '*species-being*' is being with oneself in and with the community. His explicit opposition to Hobbes is directly evident in this formulation.

Further, the concept of 'species-being' is a way of thinking about human emancipation. A comprehensive social transformation would negate the split between the political and economic and allow a fully unified social existence. However, *OJQ*, specific reference to this process is absent. The flurry of writings between 1843 and 1844 reveal a rapid sharpening of his political outlook. In this way, his political development dovetails with his philosophical concerns. This development involved both continuity and departure from his previous views. As the famous explanatory schema goes, three phenomena had a significant impact on this transformation: first his further exploration of German philosophy; second his interaction with the French working class movement in Paris – then more developed than in Germany – and finally his study of British political economy.¹⁶ Passage by passage, *CJM* provides evidence that his concerns are shifting from the criticism of religion (still current for the dwindling and conservatising Left

¹⁵ *OJQ*, 221.

¹⁶ As Arthur points out, Engels was the first to describe this triangulation: 'did we not assign to the Germans the sphere of theory, to the French that of politics, and to the English that of civil society?', *MECW* 6, 3; Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 10. Gramsci puts it more simply as 'Hegel plus David Ricardo', *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 400. I would tentatively add Greek ethics (read with German Idealism) to this nexus.

Hegelians) to the criticism of political economy. However, Marx's 1843 understanding of political estrangement and domination, as Chitty argues, 'provides the template for the conception of capital that he forms in 1844, when he first engages with political economy'.¹⁷ The philosophical significance of this point of departure for Marx's thought bears directly on how to interpret his mature work and place of ethics in his concept of labour.

Before offering an analysis, a few preliminary remarks about the difficulties in reading this fragmentary text need to be made. *CJM* consists of Marx's notes when reading the French translation of James Mill's 1823 *Elements of Political Economy*.¹⁸ The text is taken from the fourth and fifth of the nine notebooks that Marx made while in Paris throughout 1844. In the notebooks Marx copied out excerpts from the works of various political economists (Smith, Ricardo, Say etc.) followed by his own summaries and commentary. In the published translations, most of the 84 passages of quotations have been removed, so the text appears like an essay but in fact the text is more fragmentary, comprising Marx's notes spliced together. The observer must be careful to not treat this work as 'complete' but rather as Marx's reflections and self-clarification at a pivotal theoretical point. Most notably, the early critique of political economy is framed in normative terms. Not only does political economy seek to justify wage labour by naturalising its essential determinations, it fails to provide an account of alienation. This concept captures both the operation of economic relations and the normative impact on human actors. The text offers Marx's first analysis of economics and alienation, dovetailing with the second manuscript of the *EPM*, which concerns the relationship of private property to capital.¹⁹

CJM begins with Marx's charge that Mill's economic laws are 'one-sided' and 'abstract' theorisations that distort the actual functioning of economic life. Mill, along with Ricardo, hangs his analysis of supply and demand, and the relation of material production to exchange value, on the central role of money. Primacy is given to the notion that money is the *medium* of exchange. Private property reflects the obvious

¹⁷ Chitty, 'Species-Being and Capital', 131.

¹⁸ *MECW* 3, 596n48.

¹⁹ Following recent scholarship, I'm inclined to place the composition before, or at the initial stages of his composition of the *EPM*. Hudis, *Marx's Concept of an Alternative to Capitalism*, 58-9; Scott Meikle, 'Marx, The European Tradition, and the Philosophical Radicals' in *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, 62; Marcello Musto, *Another Marx* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 34-45.

relation to money, as the result of sale and purchase. Money is Mill's starting point for the understanding of the nature of the economy.

Marx faults this analysis since it places money as the central determinant of meaning between humans and the products of their activity, creative human labour. Money becomes, 'The *relation* between things, human dealings with them, become the operations of a being beyond and above man'.²⁰ Contra Mill, Marx suggests that the money-to-production relation ought to be argued in the inverse. Marx transforms Mill's claim, writing 'The reversal of the original relationship is necessary. Hence this *mediator* is the lost, estranged *essence* of private property, private property *alienated* and external to itself; it is the *alienated mediation* of human production with human production, the *alienated* species-activity of man'.²¹ Where political economy posits money as the embodiment, the essence, of private property, Marx suggests that the real mediator is human productive activity; that is 'estranged' and made 'external' by private property. Through private property, humans are separated from their productive activity, which in turn becomes mediated by money. At the outset, Marx describes the alienating loss of labour as the *real* mediation of production, which becomes secondary to the analysis of money and private property in political economy. He claims this situation is 'dehumanised' and describes the human as a slave to money.²²

CJM builds on the conception of money as an alienated form of interaction present in *OJQ*. Here, Marx writes, 'Money is the universal and self-constituted *value* of all things. It has therefore deprived the entire world – both the world of man and of nature – of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of human work and existence; this alien essence dominates them and they worship it.' ²³ The same language, the religious character of this resulting alienation, appears in the early parts of *CJM*, however his discussion progresses from the 1843 text and offers the first flash of his nascent form of critique. Marx proceeds to investigate the central categories of political economy, pushing that the contradiction between money and 'value'. The resemblance to be noted in Marx's use of 'value' at this point, is that value is seen as the form of social wealth pertaining to capitalism and at the same time the central category of political economy.

²⁰ *CJM*, 260.

²¹ *CJM*, 261.

²² *CJM*, 260.

²³ *OJQ*, 239.

Mill posits money rather than productive activity as the basis of value. Marx's insights result from an ontological view that value is a historically determined category. 'Why', Marx asks,

must private property finish up in money? Because as a social animal man must finish up in exchange and exchange - given the premise of private property - must finish up in *value*. For the mediating movement of man engaged in exchange is not a social, human movement, it is no *human relationship*: it is the *abstract relation* of private property to private property, and this abstract relation is the *value* which acquires a real existence as value only in the form of *money*. Since in the process of exchange men do not relate to each other as men, *things* lose the meaning of personal, human property. The social relationship of private property to private property is already one in which private property is estranged from itself. Hence, money, the existence-for-itself of this relationship, represents the alienation of private property, an abstraction from its *specific* personal nature.²⁴

Marx notes that 'exchange' in and of itself is an expected form of social interaction and is not identical to the exchange principle formed by private property.²⁵ The exchange principle is expressed in private property as a relation of self-estrangement. The relations between humans as mediated by exchange lead not to direct social interaction, but abstract relations in which private property exists for private property. Relations between private property and humans are not transparent and this estrangement is reflected in money and value.

Marx evaluates 'value' in terms of its relation to the exchange principle, but he holds onto a positive association of 'use-values' in terms of simple exchange, in which one useful object is traded for another. The use is reflective of their value as artefacts of human activity embedded with meaning as human creations, which in turn correspond with the needs or desires of the producers and the social fabric in which those products were made. At stake, is view of production which corresponds to the norms and values of a social world in which human artefacts embody human meaning.

However, private property alters this use relation. Private property abandons the transparent connection between value and use, and instead adopts a functionalism determined *entirely by exchange*. To Marx this means that the results of productive activity

²⁴ *CJM*, 261.

²⁵ This point is not to confuse Marx's distinction between exchange and private property as denoting a 'neo-Smithian' influence but to note the transformation of exchange to the essence of private property. For this critique of Marx, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origins of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2002), 35-7.

do not embody a human relation but instead form an *abstract relation* to private property, in effect emptying the human content. Money comes to represent this relationship. Marx writes ‘the *real* value of things is their exchange value’.²⁶ Marx comes to fully explain this process in *Capital*, but in *CJM* the embryo of Marx’s later distinction between use and exchange value is present.²⁷ This distinction has key explanatory power in both texts, although in *Capital* the unity in contradiction between use and exchange value are theorised within the value-form at a much higher level of abstraction. However, Marx’s discussion in *CJM* of money and value in terms of their human impact evidences that the relation between forms of human interaction are conceived from their first theorisation, not merely as economic processes, but in terms of the relation between human activity and sociality. Marx comes to see that economic processes are not merely apparent, but their abstractions are continually reproduced by the abstractions of the exchange relation. Marx’s perspective centres a normative characterisation of human interaction and activity on his analysis of the negative impact of private property and exchange on social life. Modern life subjects all modes of interaction to the compulsion of the exchange of private property. In this analysis, Marx contrasts this abstract relation to a conception of sociality in which human activity is rationally understood as human, species activity.

The normative claim in *CJM* has strong correspondence with the Aristotelian tradition. Scott Meikle, in particular, connects Marx directly to this tradition, suggesting that his rejection of the market is informed by an appreciation of unity of life *before* the conflicts of modern society.²⁸ Private property destroys the basis of communal understandings, where human life is imbedded with an ethical intelligibility by nature of the unity of social life (however hierarchical).²⁹ Especially, in contrast to the *polis*, Marx deems the conflicts of modernity as fragmented, unable to comprehend what a collective approach to the ‘good-life’ might resemble. Instead, for the logic of commodity exchange, the good life is indistinguishable from the life of profit. For Marx, this logic is at odds with human needs and desires.

²⁶ *CJM*, 262.

²⁷ Scott Meikle makes the point explicitly, ‘These insights become the moving principle of Marx’s life work, and in *Capital* he sets out to expose just how this law-governed alien power, which we have produced out of our own life activity, dominates us, controls our activity, and perverts our communities’, ‘Marx and the Philosophical Radicals’, 70.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See especially, Horst Mewes, ‘On the Concept of Politics in the Early Work of Karl Marx’, *Social Research*, 43:2 (1976): 276-294.

In *CJM* there is a clear sense of the way in which private property has altered the manner and character of human interaction in a distinct way from previous social forms. Similarly, in a particularly emotive section of the *EPM*, the debasing effect of the wage-labour/capital relation, is depicted through the role of money, which Marx refers to as ‘the chemical power of society’. Accordingly, money bonds all aspects of society together and plays a dual role, acting as the separation between humans and the agent that cements them together.³⁰ Money itself embodies the contradiction, the reality, that humans are bound to money – it cannot be bypassed *but at the same time* it embodies the relationship of domination and servitude that is found between the relationship of the worker to the capitalist. This relationship is specific to capital, as becomes evident when it is contrasted with other social forms.³¹ Further, the comparison between modern and pre-modern societies in *CJM* reveals the other dimension of the dialectic of freedom and domination. Society based on private property marks a qualified shift in the way that humans relate to each other. Likewise, domination shifts from taking a human form to being mediated by things.³² Marx writes, ‘the rule of the person over the person now becomes the universal rule of the *thing* over the *person*, the product over the producer’.³³ Every human relation, even that of servitude and domination is transformed by the relation of exchange.

In *CJM* Marx applies his analysis to more complex forms of capitalist financial systems like banking and credit. He takes the opportunity to critique the positive adoption by the utopian socialists of credit and paper money as ‘progressive’.³⁴ Rather, Marx sees credit as the ultimate embodiment of the estrangement of human life through money. Credit no longer needs to exist in its physical form as coin to exert power over ‘human flesh and human hearts’. Human ‘morality’, ‘social worth and status’ are now mediated by money in the form of credit. The type of language used here is significant. Marx maintains that human relationships – ethical interaction – are now subverted to a supersensible logic.

³⁰ *EPM*, 377.

³¹ The contrast between the unity of the *polis* and modern life is not a nostalgic call for its return, but a sense of the possibilities for a unity between ethical and political life beyond contemporary realities. Marx’s comments on the grandeur of Greek art are instructive here, this ‘unattainable model’ had been and gone, ‘a man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish’. To recognise the (partial) brilliance of the past, is to also be aware that the ‘social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return’. To take an image from the past and hold it against the present, proves the transience of modern exchange. *Gr*, 111.

³² Hudis, *Marx’s Concept to an Alternative to Capitalism*, 57.

³³ *CJM*, 270.

³⁴ Korsch, *Karl Marx*, 93n2.

Money becomes the ‘*moral* existence, the *social* existence, the very heart of man, and because under the appearance of mutual *trust* between men it is really the greatest *distrust* and a total estrangement’.³⁵ Marx is describing the form *misrecognition* that arises out of the abstract but universal relation of money. Humans now relate primarily through a ‘trust’ which is predicated on competition and self-gain.

Marx further tells us of the ‘counterfeiting of humans’, the ‘mistrust’ of political economy that ‘shows its true colours’.³⁶ For him it is clear that exchange based on private property is counter to actually *social* interaction, in which exchange is reciprocal and normatively conditioned. This view is put clearly in his opposition between an estranged ‘community’ and a human community. The former is conditioned by the false trust of money in which ‘man does not recognise himself as man’.³⁷ The latter *recognises* species-activity in and through the free community. He writes:

Exchange, both of human activity within production itself and of *human products* against one another, is equivalent to *species-activity* and species-spirit, the real, conscious and true mode of existence of which is *social* activity and *social* enjoyment. Since *human* nature is the *true community* of human beings, by manifesting their *nature* humans *create*, produce, the *human community*, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. Hence this *true community* does not come into being through reflection, it appears owing to the *need* and *egoism* of individuals, i.e., it is produced directly by their life activity itself.³⁸

In ontological terms, Marx deems the human activity of production, as social. Society, or what he calls ‘human community’, is determined by productive activity, *creative human labour*. This social existence not only provides the condition for community but also fulfils the needs of humankind. However, society is denied by the alienation of labour. Where individuals express themselves in productive activity, they do so *only* in society – the social being defines ‘the essence of every individual’. However, ‘true community’ is disfigured, caricatured, by the inversion of the social nature of production. Alienated labour means that activity becomes a ‘torment’ where ‘wealth appears as poverty’ and

³⁵ *CJM*, 263.

³⁶ *CJM*, 264–5.

³⁷ *CJM*, 265.

³⁸ *MECW* 3, 216–7; *CJM*, 265.

isolates the collective character of labour, subverting it into an individual competitive experience. Marx writes:

their separation from other men appears to be his true existence, his life appears as the sacrifice of his life, the realisation of his essence appears as the de-realisation of his life, their production is the production of nothing, his power over objects appears as the power of objects over them.³⁹

In ethical terms, the significance of the problem of alienation is its fundamental limitation of human life to the conditions of unfree activity. Life activity becomes a form of interaction which is separated from human control, rather than the activity which realises the human good. In this way, the barrier to the good life is the very activity which would give it definition and animate its freedom. Marx's social ontology frames this conceptual view.

To do this Marx contrasts the standpoint of labour with the standpoint of capital. The later, he claims, also understands a form of association, predicated on the logic of 'exchange and trade'. At a fundamental level, Adam Smith's commercial society takes the philosophical standpoint of the individual merchant. He constructs a model of history in which the culmination of development has been the unfitting of this nature in commercial society. The Smithian conception of social relations is that of eternally competing private property.⁴⁰ Conversely, Marx's critical standpoint of labour understands this relation as a contradiction between activity and alienated labour.⁴¹ Further, Marx's standpoint of labour allows the historical specificity of social forms to be understood as a series of contractionary (alienated) experiences.

For Marx private property represents a finite historical juncture where exchange value has decisively transformed the simple circuit of use values that characterised pre-capitalist economic forms. Smith, on the other hand, creates a version of human nature to support his economic analysis; thus the standpoint of capital starts from ideality and while he claims 'science', in the last analysis Smith presents a mystified theoretical model. Political economy, unable to differentiate, takes alienated labour simply as labour. Alienated labour is naturalised and presented as a perpetual and a fixed necessity of

³⁹ *CJM*, 265.

⁴⁰ *CJM*, 265.

⁴¹ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 41.

commercial society. However, seeing productive activity under capitalism as alienated labour allows Marx to see past the world of the merchant and the market. In his discussion of the text, Honneth picks up on the sardonic element of *CJM*,

In capitalist society, individuals relate to each other only indirectly by exchanging their products on an anonymous market with the aid of money. To the extent that they pay attention to other market participants at all, they see only the abstract qualities of the others' business acumen and self-interest, not their concrete needs and individuality. Marx states that in this society, making an ironic allusion to Adam Smith, each member is only a 'merchant' for the other. Here the recognition that members owe each other as members of an integrated community merely consists in the mutual affirmation of their respective right to 'plunder' each other. The members of this society do not supplement each other in their 'social relationship' through their respective individual acts; rather, they perform these acts merely 'with the intention of plundering', as Marx puts it bluntly.⁴²

Political economy paints human interactions in terms of bourgeois values, which reduces these interactions to the mimicry of exchange. Capitalist society equates these interactions as human ones, and through the historical form of domination, the mimicry of exchange becomes all too real. In this way, alienated relations are the actual relations between humans. However, Marx's discussion of society in *CJM* is normative. He envisions a form of society beyond capital. He remarks ironically that 'Economics provides the correct answer: from *necessity*, from *need*'.⁴³ Where the needs of capital are embodied in its egotism, Marx's 'true community' is premised on need having a universal and human function.⁴⁴

For humans to realise their 'species-being', the social control of productive activity is a necessary condition for human activity to be qualitatively free. The alienation of labour, inherent to exchange society not only estranges the relation between the product and the producer, the producer and the capitalist, but also between fellow producers and society at large. *CJM* places considerable emphasis on the social dimension of alienation. For example, Marx writes, 'our production is not human production for man as man, i.e. it is not *social* production'. He sees this in ethical terms as a violation of 'human nature'.⁴⁵ In denying social production, species-activity is denied. In rejecting this state of affairs, Marx probes at an alternative. This conception underlines the notion of flourishing

⁴² Honneth, *The Idea of Socialism*, 16.

⁴³ *CJM*, 267.

⁴⁴ Fraser, *Hegel and Marx*, 145.

⁴⁵ *CJM*, 274-5.

within his social ontology. Marx writes ‘Let us suppose that we had produced as human beings’.⁴⁶ Here, he envisions, 1) humans would enjoy,

the *expression* of my own individual *life* during my activity and also, in contemplating the object, I would experience an individual pleasure, I would experience my personality as an *objective sensuously perceptible* power *beyond all shadow of doubt*. (2) In your use or enjoyment of my product I would have the *immediate* satisfaction and knowledge that in my labour I had gratified a *human* need, i.e. that I had objectified *human nature* and hence had procured an object corresponding to the needs of another *human being*. (3) I would have acted for you as the *mediator* between you and the species... (4) In the individual expression of my own life I would have brought about the immediate expression of your life, and so in *my* individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my authentic nature, my *human, communal* nature.⁴⁷

Marx’s understanding of the flourishing nature of creative human activity is then embodied very significantly in the next line, ‘Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature’.⁴⁸ Rather than the form of domination that we see in ordinary life, labour free from the estrangement of generalised commodity production would allow relationality based on ‘species-being’, freeing production to be maintained on human need and not private profit.

This flourishing society is Marx’s ‘good-life’, where practices allow for transparent human creativity and interaction. This position offers a positive vision of the possibilities and capabilities of a different form of societal organisation, based on a negative critique of labour relations. The critique takes its starting point from the control of labour when autonomy is denied and restricted under historically specific forms of domination. The vision found in Marx’s first encounter with political economy, especially his critique of its mystification, provides in a preliminary manner, the pilot light for his later thought. Marx grasps the political, the economic and the ethical as a single line of inquiry. Where the 1843 writings had looked to explain the political alienation found within the split between private and public life, the 1844 work begins to probe into the basis of this split in productive activity. In this way, Marx sets out to enquire into the foundation of modern social relations. The *EPM* is the most well-known iteration of his social ontology of labour.

⁴⁶ *CJM*, 277. Peter Hudis draws attention to this significance of this passage, *Marx’s Concept to an Alternative to Capitalism*, 58.

⁴⁷ *CJM*, 277-8.

⁴⁸ *MECW* 3, 227.

Part 2

The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* were never intended for publication. Discovered in the late 1920s in Moscow and deciphered word by word through mice-ridden pages,⁴⁹ this work has become primary in any assessment of Marx's social philosophy. What is established in this work is the status and essential quality productive activity plays in social being-and-becoming. The mediations of labouring activity are comprehended for the first time in this text as transformative for human social life. In confronting the alienated nature of labour in capitalist society, Marx conceives of social being in modern society as constituted by productive activity. By locating a critique of social relations in the specific form of estrangement in the relationship between wage labour and capital, Marx's investigation of private property relations locates alienation not in property as such but productive relations. Private property relations are the expression of a historical dynamic of private production. The *EPM* provide the architecture for the specific import that productive activity holds for Marx's social ontology.

This claim has been contested in recent discussions of the role of labour in Marx's social theory. Moishe Postone especially has criticised what he calls 'Traditional Marxism' for holding a transhistorical notion of labour, which, by missing the historical specificity of Marx's notion of the capitalist form of labour, 'hypostatizes' alienated labour as the standpoint of critique.⁵⁰ Postone associates the social ontology of labour with a transhistorical conception. Accordingly, critique that is taken from the standpoint of labour accepts the presuppositions of political economy, rather an immanent critique of the labour relation itself. Despite the force of Postone's presentation and the merit of his value-form theory interpretation of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, his counterposing of the mature texts with the *EPM* is problematic. Postone holds that the themes of the early work, especially 'the relations between people and nature, women and men, work and play', remain central to the mature texts, 'yet are transformed by his analysis of the historically specific character of labour in capitalism'.⁵¹ For Postone, Marx's early

⁴⁹ Interestingly, in 1930 Lukács worked with the Bolshevik philologist David Ryazanov at the Marx-Lenin Institute on the newly found *EPM*. Lukács, 'Lukács on His Life and Work', 56-7.

⁵⁰ Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 62.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31n41.

understanding of alienation is ‘modified’ and theoretically ‘grounded’ by the mature texts.⁵² Notably, Postone’s important and lengthy value-form interpretation of the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* neglects a suitable discussion of the *EPM* and its critical literature.⁵³ This absence undercuts his assertion that the *EPM* advance a transhistorical concept of labour.

However, Arthur’s detailed account of the *EPM* demonstrates that Marx’s social ontology is historical. He does this by a clarification of Marx’s early terminology, which he defines next to Marx’s usage in *Capital*. Drawing on Mészáros, Arthur points to a two-level mediation in Marx’s concept of labour. The ‘first-order’ is where productive activity mediates the relationship between humans and nature and is ‘ontologically fundamental to the whole social and historical development of mankind’.⁵⁴ This is similar to how ‘labour’ is understood in *Capital*. Arthur clarifies the use of ‘labour’ in the *EPM*, noting that ‘Marx restricts the term to *productive activity carried on under the rule of private property*’.⁵⁵ This relates to the ‘second-order’ mediations in *EPM* in which productive activity is subsumed ‘through the division of labour, private property, exchange, wages, in sum a system of estrangement in which productive activity loses itself and falls under the sway of an alien power’. The second-order mediations, in turn, *mediate* the first-order ‘but do not substitute itself for the first’.⁵⁶ By distinguishing between ‘productive activity’ and ‘labour’, Arthur demonstrates that while Marx’s terminological ambiguity is clarified from *EPM* to *Capital*, the concept remains consistent.⁵⁷

Moreover, Marx’s social ontology is a ‘critical adopted standpoint of labour’ which ‘grasps the contradictions of private property as alienated labour’s contradiction with itself’.⁵⁸ Contra Postone, the concept of alienation is not negated by the latter work but *integrated* in the mature texts through the further development of the concept of labour. *EPM* should not be opposed to *Capital* but seen as an *anticipation of it*. To read these texts in opposition is to erroneously separate Marx’s social ontology from its historical character, in a manner at odds with the totality of Marx’s thought.

⁵² Ibid., 160n96.

⁵³ Postone cites Ollman’s *Alienation on Capital* but does not comment on his reading of the *EPM*, 159n94.

⁵⁴ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 11. See also, Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*, 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁷ A similar discussion can be found in György Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology* (Sydney: modern-Verlag, 1988), 15, n12.

⁵⁸ Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 25.

The *EPM* reveals Marx at a critical juncture. The text represents a qualitative movement in his thought. Marx identifies central structural relation in the determination of wage-labour and capital. This critical insight provides Marx with his enduring understanding of this relation as abstract and alienated. This theorisation is bound up with Marx's social ontology. His characterisation of the estranged character of labour in capitalist society and his critique of the political economy of Ricardo, Smith, Say and Mill, rest upon the notion of 'species-essence'. Human essence is historicised and made concrete in the *EPM* by interaction of productive activity with the being and becoming of human potential. 'Species-being' conceptually embodies Marx's fundamental ontological commitment to the view that humans are socially formed. Marx's borrows the phrase from Feuerbach, yet the origins of the term have a definite genesis in Aristotle.

Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* uses the term 'species' (*gattungs*) to contend that humans accomplish themselves in and through their species.⁵⁹ Feuerbach posits consciousness as the species differentiation between humans and other animals.⁶⁰ Basic to this view, which Marx shares, is that humans are naturally social creatures. At the level of first order mediation, productive activity shapes nature and humans. In this dynamic sense, humans fashion nature and are at the same time natural. However, as Marx W. Wartofsky points out, 'As concrete and "natural" as Feuerbach's conception of man is, it lacks, as Marx saw, the historical, social, and developmental categories that would concretise the notion of "species-being"'.⁶¹

Despite the difficult question of Feuerbach's influence, I want to emphasis the Aristotelian character of 'species-being'.⁶² 'Species-being' correlates closely to Aristotle's 'political animal' (ζῷον πολιτικόν, *zoon politikon*). According to the ontology Aristotle sets up in the first book of the *Politics*, humans are by nature political animals.⁶³ Sociality

⁵⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 1-12. David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1969), 104.

⁶⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Fiery Brook*, trans. Zawar Hanfi (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972), 98-9.

⁶¹ Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 24.

⁶² Feuerbach's influence on Marx has been a major focus of the discussion of *EPM*. There is some justification for viewing Marx's relationship with Feuerbach as fleeting and highly pragmatic. See Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, 96-114. See also the excellent critique of Feuerbach's materialism and its legacy in Marxism by Finelli, *A Failed Parricide*, 137-199.

⁶³ I discuss this conception in more depth in Chapter 3 and Marx's usage of *zoon politikon* in Chapter 6.

determines individuals, who are formed *only* in relation to society.⁶⁴ Those who remain outside of society are either beasts or gods and in separating himself from the collective, the tyrant becomes a wolf. Aristotle charts the origins of the *polis* from the household, to several villages to ‘a single complete community... coming into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of the good life’.⁶⁵ The *polis* is the fully developed form of society since ‘the nature of a thing is its end’ and the *zoon politikón* is the highest, final form of *koinonía*, political association. The ‘polis-being’ is the natural development of the association of the household and the village. Political society, *politikón*, finds its end in political community.⁶⁶ The function of living the good-life, of political and ethical life, is the *telos* of human life. This flourishing can only be realised through human practices which pertain to the good and lived through the institutions which embody these goods as virtues. For Aristotle, the good-life could not be conceived without the *polis*, the good-life necessitates the good-society. Marx adopts this ontological viewpoint in the *EPM*, writing,

The individual *is* the *social being*. His vital expression – even when it does not appear in the direct form of a *communal* expression, conceived in association with other men – is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man’s individual and species-life are not two *distinct things*.⁶⁷

Marx’s understanding of the realisation of human life in association follows Aristotle’s conception of sociality. For Marx, association carries the ontological importance of human sociality and its teleological realisation in the *type* of association organised. The shared association, which Marx envisions as communism, has ‘society as its goal’ but can only eventuate from the actualisation of this potential.⁶⁸

Marx accepts but *inverts* Aristotle’s understanding of the relation between actuality and potentiality. This relation is crucial because it involves for Aristotle, the movement of human activity as both rational (involving *logos*) and teleological. Marx accepts the teleological conception of form development and the rationality of the activity which must be involved in its coming-to-be, but reverses the relation between actuality and

⁶⁴ *Pol.* 1253a1.

⁶⁵ *Pol.* 1253b28-33.

⁶⁶ *Pol.* 1253a19-27.

⁶⁷ *EPM*, 350.

⁶⁸ *EPM*, 365.

potentiality. As Arron Jaffe has argued, this move historicises the relation, adding ‘the social-historical element needed to develop normative critique’.⁶⁹

For Aristotle, the development of an essence or form is the actualisation of its potential. In this sense, ‘actuality is prior to potentiality’ both in its form and temporality. Aristotle offers the formula: ‘for that which is in the primary sense potential is potential because it is possible for it to become actual’. As it applies to species, ‘the actual member of the species is prior to the potential member of the same species, though the individual is potential before it is actual’.⁷⁰ In this view, a child actualises their potential as she grows and become a mature human, which for Aristotle, involves learning to reason and exercise *logos* as rational animals, the capacity to reason and organise one’s life. The distinctive human function, the *action* which allows the good to be acquired, is reason.⁷¹ Thus, the relation between actuality and potentiality is ‘both the principle of movement and the form or end’.⁷² This view has ramifications for his view of the *polis*, as Trott points out,

Like a human being, whose form is *logos* and whose end is living according to *logos*, the *polis* manifests itself in the activity that is definitive of it, deliberation about what counts as living well. Like a human being, the *logos* that is the source of the *polis* is also the *telos* of it. For both human beings and *poleis*, the source of the coming-into-being is also that which unifies and activates them to be at work in the activity that makes them what they are.⁷³

This coming-to-be is the actualisation of both forms simultaneously, the fulfilment of their *telos* through activity. As Trott makes clear, the *polis* ‘is not imposed, but formed from the activity of its members for the end of living well’.⁷⁴ The interrelation between human reason and political community is formed by self-activity.

Marx retains this concept of coming-to-be through human self-activity, but through his concept of labour transforms the relation in a specific manner. Species-being is not an actuality but a potentiality. Productive activity is alienated in its historical articulation, its

⁶⁹ Aaron Jaffe, ‘From Aristotle to Marx: A Critical Philosophical Anthropology’, *Science and Society*, 80:1 (2016): 59.

⁷⁰ *Metaph.* 1049b4-20.

⁷¹ *NE*, 1097a21-1098a-8.

⁷² Trott, *Aristotle and the Nature of Community*, 36.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

actuality, but if the capacity for creative labour is developed according to the possibilities inherent in the human essence, then the flourishing Marx associates with the human essence could be realised. In this way, the conception of actuality/potentiality in Marx is structurally identical to MacIntyre's teleological ethics. 'Telos is *potentiality* in MacIntyre's claim that ethics is the 'science' of human understanding as they transition from as-they-happen-to-be to as-they-could-be if they realised their essence.⁷⁵

Marx retains from Aristotle the importance of reason in activity. However, Marx's concept of labour understands productive activity as conscious and rational. He writes,

It is therefore in his fashioning of the objective that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. Such production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labour is therefore the *objectification of the species-[being] of man*: for man reproduces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created.⁷⁶

What is clear here is that Marx's social ontology does not elevate labour as such, but a form of activity that is rational. Productive activity is ontologically significant precisely because it allows conscious and rational reflection.⁷⁷ However, the concept of labour explicitly differentiates Marx's concept of 'species-being' from Aristotle.⁷⁸ For Aristotle, there is a sharp distinction between production and creative activity, since 'production has its end in something other than itself, but action does not, since its end is active well itself'.⁷⁹ Aristotle allows for creative action, *technē*, which concerns production but necessarily has involved the coming-to-be of a reasoning that makes this action skilful.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *AV*, 52-3.

⁷⁶ *EPM*, 329.

⁷⁷ Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, 41-6. This view has important correlations with Hegel. In his view, the consciousness of humans, the self-knowledge of activity, 'is what separates humans from non-human animals: as the animal is; he becomes conscious of them, recognises them, and lifts them, as, for instance, the process of digestion, into self-conscious science. In this way man breaks the barrier of his implicit and immediate character, so that precisely because he knows that he is an animal, he ceases to be an animal and attains knowledge of himself as spirit', G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol.1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 80.

⁷⁸ The concept of labour also separates Marx from Feuerbach who understood species-being in relation to species-consciousness and to religion. In the *EPM*, Marx sees productive activity as key to both reproducing and transforming species-being. Productive activity is *conscious* and creative. On the connection between Feuerbach, history and the subject, see Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011), 4-7.

⁷⁹ *NE*, 1140b6-8. Kenny translates 'activity' as 'doing' and 'production' as 'making', *EE* 1140a10.

⁸⁰ *NE*, 1140a6-7.

Aristotle views production as such as external to the coming-to-be of rationality. Thus, production, unlike action is not a good in-itself, but the necessity of *bios*.⁸¹

For Marx, however, productive activity is species-activity. But the form of this activity is hindered from its rational end by the estrangement of the wage-labour/capital relation. Marx's concept of alienation identifies the condition in which the proletariat is dehumanised and dominated by the production process. Creative productive activity, that which defines human beings, is inverted into an alien power. If the world has been made by humans, they find themselves in a world out of their control. Productive activity becomes its opposite, alienated labour, and is held over them. Forced to sell their ability to labour, Marx characterises this process in four interlocked ways.

First, people are alienated from the products of their labour, which instead of being valued by their use are subsumed by the processes of exchange and dominate their producer becoming *objectified and fetishised*. Second, the process of labour itself is completely out of the control of the producer, so that the process *again* becomes objectified and a process of domination rather than creation. The third and fourth conditions of alienation relate to collective-being. On one hand, people are separated person to person; for example workers produce socially but live individually. On the other hand, humans are separated from their greater social existence, from society at large.⁸² On this point, Marx writes:

In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labour therefore tears away from him his *species-life*, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.⁸³

In this view the alienation of labour is predicated on the distancing of humans from their species-being. Marx's theory of alienation can only be adequately understood if the interconnected notion of human essence is given conceptual definition. 'Species-being' is in itself a conception of human essence. It pays to draw this point out to see how it informs his concept of human nature. What is vital to this understanding is the historical dimension that Marx subjects the concept to. Marx does not conceive of 'species-being'

⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 12.

⁸² *EPM*, 326-30.

⁸³ *EPM*, 329.

in an abstract way, but as result of the formation from a series of mediations that condition reality. Human nature cannot be understood as an ahistorical, unchanging aspect of humanity but instead must be comprehended in historical terms. For Marx, productive activity is ontologically transformative but this essence is always expressed in historical and social forms. He says this emphatically in the *Theses on Feuerbach*: ‘the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.’⁸⁴ This remark does not deny human essence, *contra* Althusser, but simply insists that it be seen in historical and social terms.⁸⁵ In Marx’s view, the essence of human beings, productive activity, moulds and is moulded by historical processes and forms, which give shape to this activity.⁸⁶ Marx’s understanding of essence is not just the particular characteristics of alienation, but the denial of human potential and universality. In the *EPM* he refers to the human essence as ‘the alienated capacity of mankind’.⁸⁷ If human capacities are alienated, an overcoming of the wage-labour-capital relation would allow for the self-realisation of human potentiality. A fuller sense of humans-as-they-could-be in which productive activity is not found in its alienated form but is socially comprehended, rationally and collectively controlled. This realisation is bound up in the historically constituted transformation of labour relations, the negation of alienated labour for human possibilities. The narrow confines of the division of labour express alienated labour relations. Marx draws attention to the unsocial nature of capitalist production,

The *division of labour* and *exchange* are the two *phenomena* on whose account the political economist brags about the social nature of his science, while in the same breath he unconsciously expresses the contradiction which underlies his science – the establishment of society through unsocial, particular interests.⁸⁸

The division of labour, even in *precis*, assumes a complex breakdown of labouring tasks that must be posed in terms of production in general. However, when commodity exchange is presupposed by political economy, the division of labour is projected back onto the past and assumed to possess an eternal character. Political economy thus takes capitalist professions to be reflections of the particular and perpetual interests of exchange. In a famous passage from *The German Ideology*, Marx satirises this assumption

⁸⁴ *EW*, 432.

⁸⁵ Althusser, *For Marx*, 227–31. See also, Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, 351–361.

⁸⁶ Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, 59.

⁸⁷ *EPM*, 377.

⁸⁸ *EPM*, 374.

the division of labour offers us the first example of the fact that, as long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.⁸⁹

Marx envisions a form of society where individualised production and the atomised division of labour are replaced by a higher form of social organisation. Narrow and confined private professions can be replaced by socially understood association, which allows the furthering of human capacity and potential to be a collectively enacted process which enriches the individual through their sociality. This passage demonstrates the unfolding of humanity through the free control of productive activity. This idea of freedom is expressed through the *practice* of rational control. The pleasure found in these practices bears strong resemblance to Aristotle's discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* of the 'common life':

Whatever someone [regards as] his being, or the end for which he chooses to be alive, that is the activity he wishes to pursue in his friend's company. Hence some friends drink together, others play dice, while others do gymnastic and go hunting, or do philosophy. They spend their days together on whichever pursuit in life they like most; for since they want to live with their friends, they share the actions in which they find their common life.⁹⁰

Comparing these two quotations, William James Booth notes that Marx's passage puts him in important respects closer to the liberal notion of freedom as *from constraint* rather than with Aristotle's 'perfectionist idea of a hierarchy of ways of living'. The liberal emphasis on individual motivation is especially evident in this quotation.⁹¹ However, this

⁸⁹Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* in *MECW* 5, 47.

⁹⁰ *NE* 1172a1-9.

⁹¹ William James Booth, *Households* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 260-1.

interpretation fails to consider the Marx's much wider conception of shared cultivation. For instance:

Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community. In the previous substitutes for the community, in the state, etc., personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed under the conditions of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class. The illusory community in which individuals have up till now combined always took on an independent existence in relation to them, and since it was the combination of one class over against another, it was at the same time for the oppressed class not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well. In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.⁹²

Critics have been highly dismissive of Marx's claim. Jon Elster's discussion typifies the common objection of utopianism. Citing Marx's fishing and hunting quotation, he writes 'The idea that the individual can *fully* bring to actuality *all* the powers and abilities he possesses is one of the more utopian elements in Marx's thoughts, and certainly not one that I am going to defend'.⁹³ Rather, as Elster objects, 'If I want to write poetry but also have the potential to become a doctor or an engineer, there could be no justification for society to force me – e.g. by means of an ability tax – to choose one of the later options'.⁹⁴ Elster assumes that the individual and society stand apart ontologically and freedom of realisation could only be meaningful if developed by the individual's pursuit of their own self-interest. He leaves aside the impact of modern divisions of labour that can be seen to reduce labour processes that are essentially social into atomised and distorted shapes.⁹⁵ 'Professions' are simply an expression of this division, so when Marx writes, 'In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities', his point is that a post-capitalist society could allow for a freedom of productive capacities that defy the narrow labels of capitalist professionalisation.⁹⁶ Marx's rather ironical comments about hunting and fishing serve merely as examples for a much more important point which regards communism as a form of society which 'regulates' productive activity in such a way as to allow this activity to be free. What activity one pursues is not financially incentivised or professionalised in

⁹² *MECW* 5, 78.

⁹³ Jon Elster, 'Self-Realisation in Work and Politics: The Marxist Conception of the Good Life', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 3:2 (1986): 101.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ This point relates to the discussion of *Capital* in the following chapter. See for example *Cap* 1, 135, 159.

⁹⁶ *MECW* 5, 394.

terms of competitive self-pursuit, but understood in terms of the wider norms and values required for social life to be well lived.

Less inimical commentators have drawn attention to the charge of ‘perfectionism’. According to this objection, the ‘perfectionist’ characterisation of human nature posits, uncritically, humans as inherently good moral agents. According to this view, ‘species-being’ is an overly immaculate, pristine moral category that offers little insight into the nature of post-capitalist ethical behaviour.⁹⁷ David Leopold adopts the ‘perfectionist’ label, but gets much more to the nub of the issue. He observes:

The perfectionist thread of the early writings can be fleshed out by considering Marx’s account of the conditions for human flourishing. This requires a society which satisfies not only the basic physical needs of the individual (for sustenance, warmth and shelter, certain climatic conditions, physical exercise, basic hygiene, procreation and sexual activity) but also the less basic social needs of the individual, both those that are not typically thought of as a distinctive part of Marx’s account (for recreation, culture, intellectual stimulation, artistic expression, emotional satisfaction, and aesthetic pleasure) and those that are typically thought of in this way (for fulfilling work and meaningful community). I have denied that this account of human flourishing is (necessarily) complete, one-sided, or hopelessly extravagant.⁹⁸

As a starting point, the form of society allows for sounder basis for understanding the needs of the individual. In this sense, the needs of the individual are contingent on a societal form which allows for needs to be unfolded as expressions of human capabilities, rather than conditions for mere survival. Leopold’s characterisation of the centrality of human flourishing in the *EPM* is one of the most cogent in the secondary literature. However, Marx’s position does not necessitate the ‘perfectionist’ label that Leopold awards it. Rather, the *EPM* suggests directly against this characterisation:

Man is directly a *natural being*. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand equipped with *natural powers*, with *vital powers*, he is an *active* natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as *drives*. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his drives exist outside him as *objects* independent of him; but these objects are objects of his *need*, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation

⁹⁷ See for a recent example, Christoph Henning, ‘Political Economy with Perfectionist Premises: Three Types of Criticism in Marx’ in *Constructing Marxist Ethics*, ed. Thompson, 283-287.

⁹⁸ Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, 277-8.

of his essential powers.⁹⁹

This passage offers a fuller, two-sided view of being. With human existence comes the *power* for self-activity, for the potential to flourish as ‘species-beings’. Yet at the same time, Marx is unequivocal: to be human is to suffer. Human life will always be the stage of drama and tragedy. To discover what is valuable in human life requires learning what it means to fail. For human reasoning to flourish and allow for mutual recognition between humans, what is required is that this reasoning allows for the development of self-knowledge. This task necessitates the type of evaluative judgements which can only be made if there is something to be learnt about how our actions might affect ourselves and our social relationships. Reasoning is acquired by practices which allow for the good to be learnt, but many times we need to learn by our failure to reach this end. Suffering and failure allow for freedom to be meaningful precisely since this freedom is contingent on protecting and expanding the means for the good to be cultivated.¹⁰⁰

For Marx, however, alienated social relations are controlled by an alien logic rather than transparent human relations, which structurally conditions how humans reason. It is clear from this quotation, that rather an account of an idealised or ‘perfect’ human nature just waiting to be found, human flourishing is the unfolding of human capabilities. These passages contain Marx’s hope for a form of society that allows a reconciling of humanity, rather than the fractures of contemporary existence.¹⁰¹ The claim is not utopian to think that the creative capacity of behaviour could be enhanced in a profound manner if the social basis for its fragmentation was transcended.¹⁰²

This argument links to another aspect of Marx’s conception of alienation, the theory of needs. As human capabilities are limited and denied, so too is the ‘the denial of life and of all human needs’, where the capabilities and drives of existence are internalised and alienated. This is the objectification of social life by capital. Marx paints this vividly:

The less you eat, drink, buy books, go to the theatre, go dancing, go drinking, think, love, theorise, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save* and the greater will become that treasure which neither moths nor maggots can consume - your *capital*.

⁹⁹ *EPM*, 389-90; also 351.

¹⁰⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 81-98.

¹⁰¹ Hudis, *Marx’s Concept to an Alternative to Capitalism*, 91.

¹⁰² ‘Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society’, ‘Manifesto of Communist Party’, *MECW* 6, 496.

The less you *are*, the less you give expression to your life, the more you *have*, the greater is your *alienated* life and the more you store up of your estranged life.¹⁰³

The abstract quality of capital becomes the generalised determination of needs. In other words, the need of capital becomes the shaping factor for all life. This need not only impacts the most basic needs of food, shelter etc. but productive activity, which now 'leads to new needs; and this creation of new needs is the first historical act'.¹⁰⁴

It is worth noting here that to Marx natural needs appear, as Ian Fraser notes, 'in divergent forms of satisfaction'.¹⁰⁵ Different historical forms shape what needs and desires are apparent. In the *EPM*, the specific character of capitalist production restricts and deforms the needs of human beings to the needs of the market. These needs operate irrespective of human ends and when social production should have its ends in society itself, capital production has an end external to its human producers. Agnes Heller sees this an inversion of means/ends, when the 'end of production is the valorisation of capital and the satisfaction of needs (on the market) is only a means towards this end'.¹⁰⁶ In modern society there is now a tension between socially necessary needs as *defined by capital* and those needs which are actually denied and potentially developed. This situates Marx's conception of needs in reference to a higher form of sociality which produces in a rationally ordered way and in which humans can be '*universal* and therefore free being[s]'.¹⁰⁷

Invariably complicated in the outlining of needs is the broader problem of Marx's view of human nature. While some accounts have focused on the historical character,¹⁰⁸ others have made explicit a transhistorical foundation.¹⁰⁹ At risk is either a type of historical determinism or a preoccupation with eternal notions of justice. I think Marx's view is much more complex than is usually assumed. For this reason, there is more conceptual clarity in the notion of 'human essence'. This comprehends human essence as a

¹⁰³ *EPM*, 361.

¹⁰⁴ *MECW* 6, 42.

¹⁰⁵ Fraser, *Hegel and Marx*, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), 49.

¹⁰⁷ *EPM*, 327.

¹⁰⁸ Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁰⁹ Karsten J. Struhl, 'Marx and Human Nature: The Historical, the Trans-Historical, and Human Flourishing', *Science & Society*, 80:1 (2016): 78-104. Struhl's article is a 'trans-historical' response to Sayers.

composite and historically specific set of relations which understand human beings as specifically labouring beings who perform that activity consciously:

Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity. Only because of that is he a species-being. Or rather, he is a conscious being, i.e. his own life is an object for him, only because he is a species-being. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his *being* [*Wesen*], a mere means for his *existence*.¹¹⁰

The significance of this quotation is twofold. First, Marx makes clear a distinction between humans and other animals based on the conscious role of activity which is developed and unfolded through this activity. Humans not only produce for our immediate needs but do so in a collective setting with consciousness that takes on a social dimension. For Marx, ‘man produces universally... man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need.’¹¹¹ The second point to be made here is the universality of species-being, which is a unity of consciousness and activity. Will and activity are fused together to self-transform processes of labour from immediate tasks to a universalised level that stretches and incorporates into that activity self-transformation and flourishing. Kostas Axelos describes this as a process of ‘universal reconciliation’, where the contradictions inherent in capitalism are superseded and not simply seen as the ‘reconquest of a lost state’.¹¹² This explanation helps direct a concept of human nature away from an ahistorical state of nature and towards a concrete historical understanding. Axelos retains an understanding of human essence, writing ‘In the course of history man has reached only an imperfect self-realisation, since his realisations have been his reification. Nevertheless, man at the same time created the conditions for transcending alienation. Man can, then, (re)gain his essence, “regain” meaning: gain by discovering what constituted the hidden sense of his being and becoming, of his human nature and his natural social essence.’¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *EPM*, 328.

¹¹¹ *EPM*, 329. This line of argument is put convincingly by Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, 28.

¹¹² Kostas Axelos, *Alienation, Praxis, and Technē in the Thought of Karl Marx*, trans. Ronald Bruzina (Austin: University of Texas Press), 220.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 220-1.

In this analysis, Marx's understanding of human essence as productive activity is seen in both the concrete form labour takes *and* the potential within that form for flourishing. This potentiality is the teleological expression of realised activity. If actualised, the ability for an appreciation of the creative aspects of productive activity hitherto restricted from the proletariat becomes possible. This realisation would be a manifestation of the essential forces of socialised being. This teleology cannot be seen as a predetermined course, but rather in a modified Aristotelian sense, as the actualisation of a potential. This latent potential is only realisable as the result of human action. For Marx, the rationality of the proletariat allows for its self-consciousness, the moment of objectively and subjectivity fused in *praxis*. The recognition of reality meets its rational alteration. This conception of *praxis* can only be understood with the impetus placed upon the emancipatory potential of human activity as mediated by productive capacities become conscious.

Where the bourgeoisie proclaimed 'freedom, equality and fraternity' only to replace the Old Regime with a new one predicated on a different form of domination and control of labour, Marx sees the proletariat having a universal character and interest for human emancipation.¹¹⁴ The nature of this emancipation is predicated on the self-activity of the proletariat to realise this potential. The potentials latent in labour are realisable only as the result of human action. Marx's view is that the proletariat has an ability via its own self-consciousness to understand reality objectively and in this moment act upon it. This conception of *praxis* can only be understood with an appreciation impetus placed upon the emancipatory potential of labour when realised.

Part 3

The most challenging objection to Marx's social ontology, in my view, is raised by Hannah Arendt.¹¹⁵ *The Human Condition* began in part as a series of lectures titled 'Karl

¹¹⁴ For example, 'And the abolition of this state of things is called by the bourgeois abolition of individuality and freedom! And rightly so. The abolition of bourgeois individuality, bourgeois independence, and bourgeois freedom is undoubtedly aimed at.' *MECW* 6, 498-9.

¹¹⁵ Debates in recent political theory concerning Marx's social ontology have been conducted in a dramatically less sophisticated manner. See for example, Susan Buck-Morss, 'A Communist Ethics' in *The Idea of Communism*, 59-75.

Marx and the 'Tradition of Political Thought'.¹¹⁶ The expansive terrain of political thought judiciously traversed through the course of the book centres on a critique of the tradition that is born with the trial of Socrates and ends with Marx.¹¹⁷ Her opening argument takes up the changed political significance of the public and private realms from the political life of *polis* to the 'the mass society of today'.¹¹⁸ Her discussion is comparable in a central respect to *OJQ*.¹¹⁹ For Arendt, as with Marx, the tension between the two realms structure their conception of politics, its historicity and its modern contradictions. Arendt pushes at the space opened by Rousseau, Hegel and Marx. However, much of her thesis is a reply to Marx. Arendt points out that the concept of lived freedom changes from the Greek (the political realm) to Marx (the social).¹²⁰ The 'social' blurs the line drawn between private and public and brings about a crisis for the modern individual. In 'his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether', according to Arendt, this individual is damaged by a 'mass society', which necessarily 'excludes' political action and forces 'his' private life to be the space for disagreement and difference.¹²¹ For Arendt,

In the modern world, the social and political realms are much less distinct. That politics is nothing but a function of society, that action, speech and thought are primary superstructures upon social interests, is not a discovery of Karl Marx but on the contrary is among the axiomatic assumptions Marx accepted uncritically from the political economics of the modern age.¹²²

Arendt's argument is a directed critique of Marx's social ontology. She draws a strong distinction between 'labour', 'work' and 'action'. Her argument is phenomenological, drawing on the changing linguistic usages, reflected in political theory and culture, in

¹¹⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 327. As Charles Barbour points out, Arendt's interest in Marx precedes the New Left humanist interpretations. He notes both the width of her engagement in Marx's texts, in the context of McCarthyism and the blind spot in her account of Marx's critique of the Young Hegelian's republicans which speaks to some of her concerns. Marx's relation to the Young Hegelians has been a constant feature of Marx studies since the late 1960s, 'The Republican and the Communist: Arendt Reading Marx (Reading Arendt)' in *(Mis)readings of Marx in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Jernej Habjan and Jessica Whyte (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 54, 60-4.

¹¹⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Her positive endorsement of Marx's recognition that 'the incompatibility between classical political thought and modern political conditions lay in the accomplished fact of the French and Industrial Revolutions' seems to have *OJQ* in mind. Especially her comment, 'He knew that the equality question was only superficially posed in the idealistic assertions of the equality of man, the inborn dignity of every human being, and only superficially answered by giving labourers the right to vote.' Hannah Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age' in *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin, 2006), 31.

¹²⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 31.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 33.

which it is ‘a simple fact that every European language ancient and modern, contains two etymologically unrelated words, for what we have come to think of as the same activity’.¹²³ For Arendt, the synonymous use of ‘labour’ and ‘work’, fully expressed in Marx’s inheritance from political economy, is in actuality ‘the glorification of labour’.¹²⁴ Labour, the act of the *animal laborans* is ‘enslaved by necessity’. Labour is toil and suffering, the bondage of natural life. Work, however, is creative and formative. With work, man is the maker (*homo faber*), of the ‘unnaturalness of human existence’, of the “artificial” world of things’. The third category, action, is Arendt’s governing concept. Action allows for political life without the mediations of ‘things or matter’.¹²⁵

For Arendt, ‘While dire necessity made labour indispensable to sustain life, excellence would have the last thing to expect for it’.¹²⁶ This expectation is precisely the problem with Marx’s social ontology, which elevates production to an idealised social standpoint, but really the ‘sole purpose would be the entertaining of the life process – and this is the unfortunately quite unutopian ideal that guides Marx’s theories’. A footnote to this sentence, adds the suggestion that for Marx social humanity (*vergesellschafteter Mensch* and *gesellschaftliche Menschheit*) and species-being paint an ideal society as ‘a state of affairs in where all human activities derive as naturally from human “nature” as the secretion of wax by bees for making the honeycomb; to live and to labour for life will have become one and the same’.¹²⁷

Arendt’s critique of Marx is not just that he elevates labour to such a high conceptual position but as ‘socialised man’, with his concept of labour he also elevated the political economists’ reduction of politics into the egoism of interests.¹²⁸ She writes:

Behind Marx’s theory of interests stands the conviction that the only legitimate gratification of an interest lies in labour. Supporting this conviction and fundamental to all his writing is a new definition of man, which sees man’s essential humanity not in his rationality (*animal rationale*), or in his production of objects (*homo faber*), or in his having been made in the likeness of God (*creatura Dei*), but rather in labour, which tradition had unanimously rejected as incompatible with a full and free human existence. Marx was the first to define

¹²³ Ibid., 79-80.

¹²⁴ This phrase appears throughout the book, see *ibid.*, 4, 84, 85, 92, 103, 129, 316, 318.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 316, 321.

man as an *animal laborans*, as a labouring creature. He subsumes under this definition everything tradition passed down as the distinguishing marks of humanity: labour as the principle of rationality and its laws, which in the development of productive forces determine history, make history comprehensible to reason. Labour is the principle of productivity; it produces the truly human world on earth.¹²⁹

Arendt stresses Marx's place *within*, but as a challenge to, the Western tradition of political theory. She understands his economic thought as based upon his 'reliance on Aristotelian philosophy'.¹³⁰ Marx takes the productivity of the political economists and further naturalises labour by way of an Aristotelian naturalism. The deficiency in his concept of labour is its veneration of society and labour over politics and action. Her interpretation is perceptive, not only in emphasising the Aristotelian aspect of Marx's social ontology but also in the recognition that this ontology decisively shapes his concept of society. Further, in pointing out the separate domains in Marx's social ontology between the realm of freedom and the realm of necessity, Arendt pushes at a central aspect of his concept of freedom.¹³¹ She argues that Marx's social ontology results in folding the latter into the former.

However, Marx's concept of labour is richer than Arendt allows.¹³² At one level, Arendt's distinction between labour, work and action deliberately runs against the 'process' character of Marx's dialectical thinking.¹³³ Her problem with Marx's concept of labour is that an inadequate conception of human life is posited by reducing activity to the physical metabolism with nature. By maintaining distinctions between labour, work and action, Arendt aims to identify the human qualities that separate the life activities of each category. If in Marx, labour is the necessity of life then the biological life process is falsely upheld as *freedom* rather than the best of human life, political action.

¹²⁹ Arendt, 'From Hegel to Marx', *Promise of Politics*, 79.

¹³⁰ Ibid. For Marx's reading of Aristotle, see also, 'Tradition and the Modern Age', 22 and *The Human Condition*, 254.

¹³¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 104-5.

¹³² This aspect of *The Human Condition* has been subject to widespread criticism. Many commenters note the bleed between 'labour', 'work' and 'action', see Jennifer Ring, 'On Needing Both Marx and Arendt: Alienation and the Flight from Inwardness', *Political Theory*, 17:3 (1989): 439.

¹³³ This point is argued polemically by Christopher Holman, 'Dialectics and Distinction: Reconsidering Hannah Arendt's Critique of Marx', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 10:3 (2011): 340-8.

Arendt agrees with Marx that surplus value provides for social reproduction.¹³⁴ However, her move is an attempt to dislocate political theory from the necessity of labour. In this specific move, Arendt's exposition allows key aspects of Marx's concept of labour to be clarified. Her interpretation points to tensions in Marx and my current concern is not to resolve these problems but to draw out the political consequences. What is at stake in this critique is if Marx's concept of labour is *sufficient* for the human activity of politics. There is reason to be cautious when considering Arendt's interpretation. Arendt criticises what she sees as the contradiction between Marx's desire to 'abolish labour' in the realm of freedom and idea of labour as human essence. She asks:

If labour is the most human and most productive of man's activities, what will happen when, after the revolution, 'labour is abolished' in the 'realm of freedom', when man has succeeded in emancipating himself from it? What productive and what essentially human activity will be left?¹³⁵

There is some reason to doubt this is a contradiction. Marx makes his own distinction in the early writings between labour as alienated activity and productive activity as an ontological life activity. In his later writings, the categories are clarified as labour-power and labour, with the further distinction between abstract and concrete labour. Her criticism of Marx's concept of labour only holds if these distinctions are overlooked. Most significantly, the key interpretive distinction between alienated labour and free labour.¹³⁶ To *abolish* labour is not to rob humans of our essential powers, but to end the objectification of subjective activity.¹³⁷

However, the salient point that arises from Arendt's question is how Marx seeks to overcome the gulf between the realm of necessity and freedom. Freedom cannot be located in the distribution of the products of labour, but the overcoming of the division of labour, the division between mental and manual labour – the form of wage-labour itself.¹³⁸ For Marx, productive activity allows for humans to become free *through our activity* rather than in its subservience.¹³⁹ Rather than reducing labour to nature, Marx envisions a type of political association which allows for sociality to be expressed first and foremost

¹³⁴ Phillip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 35.

¹³⁵ Arendt, 'Tradition and the Modern Age', 23-4.

¹³⁶ Finn Bowring, 'Arendt After Marx: Rethinking the Dualism of Nature and World', *Rethinking Marxism*, 26:2 (2014): 279.

¹³⁷ Ring, 'On Needing Both Marx and Arendt', 436-7.

¹³⁸ Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', *MECW* 24, 87.

¹³⁹ Marx, "Notes" on Adolph Wagner', 235.

in the public realm. Marx's politics allow for the distinction between necessity and freedom to be overcome by a type of collective activity that breaks from the domination of capital. Life activity is transformed from alienation to freedom. This activity cannot be said to be a confirmation of the labour process, but its interruption and its reorganisation according to shared decision making. Even when Marx is describing the production of relative surplus value, the struggle between the worker and the machine illuminates the drive for action *against economic necessity*.¹⁴⁰

In certain respects, the similarities between Marx and Arendt in terms of political action help illuminate the radical democratic commitment of both thinkers. Marx's discussion of the communist workmen in the *EPM* allows for a sense of this motivation. By 'gather together' and discussing their 'immediate aim... they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means has become an end'.¹⁴¹ The 'society' that Marx deems to have emerged when the workers come together to discuss things is very similar, phenomenologically speaking, to what Arendt calls action. His suggestion that in these moments the means (getting together in order to strategise about improving their lot) becomes the end (getting together as a pleasure and joy in its own right) coincides importantly with Arendt. In *On Revolution*, she discusses the American revolutionaries in remarkably similar terms to Marx:

To them, power came into being when and where people would get together and bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges; only such power which rested on reciprocity and mutuality, was real power and legitimate, whereas the so-called power of kings or princes or aristocrats, because it did not spring from mutuality but, at best, rested only on consent, was spurious and usurped... This confidence moreover, arose not from a common ideology but from mutual promises and as such became the basis for 'associations' - the gathering-together of people for a specified political purpose.¹⁴²

While gathering together to decide on the shape of the constitution, the revolutionaries discover that the gathering itself, regardless of what it achieves, is the real experience of public happiness. Further, Arendt finds the promise of politics in worker's councils, exemplified in the council movement in Hungary 1956. Arendt celebrates the action of the worker's councils, which gain their power in the immediacy of speech, but the

¹⁴⁰ *Cap* 1, 553-61.

¹⁴¹ *EPM*, 365.

¹⁴² Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 181-2.

workers express little self-awareness.¹⁴³ Further ambiguities arise when it comes to describing the modern labour movement in terms of action. Arendt's clear divisions between labour, work and action break down.¹⁴⁴ In this way, Arendt is closer to Marx than might at first sight appear compelled by the expression of action in shared political association.

For Marx, the dynamic character of human activity, and its expression in social forms, does not reduce politics to labour but aims to make activity transparent and rational. Despite her critique of Marx, Arendt's interpretation allows the radical democratic aspects of his concept of labour to be understood in terms of action.

Conclusion

Marx conceives of ontology in terms of the historically and socially determinate mediations of productive activity. The contradiction between the capitalist and the worker (unity-in-difference) expresses a relation which is mediated by labour. Marx explains this dialectic as 'hostile reciprocal opposition'.

The relation of *private property* is labour, capital and the connections between these two. The movement through which these parts [*Glieder*] have to pass is:

First – *Immediate or mediated unity of the two*.

Capital and labour at first still united; later separated and estranged, but reciprocally developing and furthering each other as *positive* conditions.

Second – Opposition of the two. They mutually exclude each other; the worker sees in the capitalist his own non-existence, and vice-versa; each attempts to wrench from the other his existence.

Third – Opposition of each to itself. Capital = stored-up labour = labour. As such it divides into *itself* (capital) and its *interest*; this latter divides into *interest and profit*. Complete sacrifice of the capitalist. He sinks into the working class, just as the worker – but only by way of exception – becomes a capitalist. Labour as a moment of capital, its *costs*. I.e. wages a sacrifice of capital. Labour divides into *labour itself* and *wages of labour*. The worker himself a capital, a commodity.

Hostile reciprocal opposition.¹⁴⁵

The EPM provides his first definition of capital, which he glosses at this point as '*stored-up labour*'.¹⁴⁶ As the value-form is developed from 1847 onwards,¹⁴⁷ the distinction

¹⁴³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 216-7; *On Revolution*, 266-7. See Ring, 'On Needing Both Marx and Arendt', 441.

¹⁴⁴ Barbour, 'The Republican and the Communist', 58-9.

¹⁴⁵ EPM, 341.

¹⁴⁶ EPM, 295.

between ‘living labour’ and ‘dead labour’ helps elucidate the twofold character of abstract and concrete labour within the systematic logic of capital as a social form. Marx develops an understanding of value, in which wealth is not merely the movement of private property but is then articulated more determinately as ‘the movement of the value of capital’.¹⁴⁸ However, his understanding of capital in this passage provides the first articulation of a crucial aspect of this latter conception. The movement between capital and labour is shown to demonstrate a self-relation in which capital is subject.¹⁴⁹ Labour is a moment of capital shown to unfold through the movement of contradictory and alienated relations. The domination of capital is a *human* domination, which masks subjectivity and inverts consciousness into objectified relations. Marx argues, the ‘form of capital’ manifests

its domination both over the working class and over the property owners themselves, inasmuch as the laws of the movement of capital are either ruining or raising them. In this way the medieval saying *nulle terre sans seigneur* [no land without a master] gives way to the modern saying *L’argent n’a pas de maître* [money knows no master], which is an expression of the complete domination of dead matter over men.¹⁵⁰

In Marx’s conception of capital, living labour is extracted and transformed into dead labour. This ontology is shaped on one hand by the function and ends of a labour process that valorises human labour-power, and on the other, the efforts made in the class struggle to make that labour-power a capacity within rational human control. The dual character of living/dead labour in capital points to an important political dimension of Marx’s ontology. For Antonio Negri, the political upshot of Marx’s ontology is twofold:

The first is represented by the development of labour-power in its radical productive capacity, in its full and bodily abstraction, which determines the evolution of capital and imposes upon it a progressive character; this is an ontology that takes the figure of a *deposit* of dead labour, a common that is fixed, stratified, organised as existing wealth and the command over it. But this

¹⁴⁷ See my discussion of the *Poverty of Philosophy* in Chapter 4 above.

¹⁴⁸ Hans-Georg Backhaus, ‘Between Philosophy and Science: Marxian Social Economy as Critical Theory’ in *Open Marxism*, Vol. 1, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto, 1992), 77.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 71. Backhaus argues the *EPM* ‘constitute the *beginning*’ of Marx’s value theory, in which he ‘specifies value as the value of capital... its subject-character’, 80. Two important points must be noted about the use of ‘value’ and ‘value-form’ in the passage from the *EPM* to the mature texts. First Marx modifies ‘private property’ to ‘value’. Second he makes a conceptual distinction between value and the value form.

¹⁵⁰ *EPM*, 319.

ontology has a second face, the one represented by living labour, class struggle, a continuous drive to break capitalist development, which takes the guise of *virtuality* and the power of liberation from work. This relation implies two opposing teleologies: the one that corresponds to the ontology/deposit of dead labour and the one that corresponds to the ontology/power of class struggle. The common presents itself in two forms: as deposit and telos, as deposit of dead labour and as telos of living labour.¹⁵¹

Class struggle is the goal-directed activity that expresses the ontology of labouring activity – the unity of dead and living labour within the form of labour.

Further, the concept of labour structures Marx's concept of society. The 'end' of labour, the realisation and flourishing of self-made activity, allows the human actor to gain control of their human capacities – rational and productive – and the coming-to-be of a sociality that allows this control to be shared. Marx contrasts two different views of society in *The Communist Manifesto*:

In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer.¹⁵²

In the former, living labour is a means to the ends of capital accumulation, but to the latter, living labour is a means to human ends, which in turn cultivate in a reciprocal relation the human activity and the actor. Therefore, for Marx, communism is a society which 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.¹⁵³

Marx's concept of labour allows an understanding of the reconciliation and collective self-realisation of human capacities in human sociality. Now I turn to Marx's mature writings where he critically deepens his critique of the standpoint of political economy, developing the social ontology of the 1844 works and the speculative logic of the value form.

¹⁵¹ Antonio Negri, 'Marxian Ontology, Today', trans. Alberto Toscano in *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image*, ed. Peter Osborne et al (London: CRMEP Books, 2019), 101.

¹⁵² *MECW* 6, 499.

¹⁵³ *MECW* 6, 506.

| 6. *Form & Fetishism*

Marx's *Capital* is the culmination of his social thought. This chapter reconstructs the concept of sociality in his mature texts through an examination of his value-form theory.¹ Marx's analysis of the form-determinations specific to value, *the commodity* (things we use and trade), *money* (equivalents of trade) and *capital* (the social relationship between things), substantiates his critical theory of modern society. After outlining my interpretative approach in Part 1, I trace the presence of Aristotle and Hegel in the opening concepts of *Capital* in Part 2. The sociality of the production process is the focus of Part 3. Reconstructing Marx's understanding of sociality allows for his concept of ethical life to be given distinct shape. While I focus on *Capital*, Volume One, I draw on a range of his later texts to illuminate Marx's critique of political economy.

Marx's account of sociality provides a way to think about ethical life in which reasoning is fully realised in shared human activity and association. Ethical life is the recognition of sociality. The analysis of the value-form allows a comprehension of modernity that examines how the social and asocial are bound up in the capital relation and at the same time immanently points to a 'truly social' standpoint which transcends capital. This conception is of an abstract sociality: 'abstract' meaning a position removed (in thought and in being) from the totality.² Abstract sociality is a totality of both abstract thought

¹ Mainstream economic theorists have long maintained that Marx accepts and modifies what classical political economy called 'the labour theory of value' in following Smith's effort to provide an account of economic value from the amount of labour needed for the production of commodities. I reject this view, instead arguing Marx transforms the categories 'value', 'labour', 'commodity', 'money' and 'capital', overcoming the ahistorical conception of wealth creation advanced by political economy and developing 'critical categories' for understanding what is specific about capitalist social relations. See Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 56.

² Hegel's point that the abstract is that dislocated from the whole, rather than something thought finds intangible, is held by Marx: 'There is nothing said more commonly than that the concept is something *abstract*. This is correct in part insofar as its element is thinking generally and not the empirically concrete sphere of the senses, in part insofar as it is not yet the *idea*. In this respect, the subjective concept is still *formal* [*formell*], yet not at all as if it should respectively have or acquire some other content than itself. As the absolute form itself, the concept is every *determinacy*, but as it is in its truth. Thus, although the concept is at the same time abstract, it is what is concrete [*das Konkrete*] and, indeed, the absolutely concrete [*das schkechthin Konkrete*], the subject as such. The absolutely concrete [*das Absolut-Konkrete*] is the spirit (see the note to §159),- the concept insofar as it *concretely exists* as concept, differentiating itself from its objectivity which, despite the differentiating, remains the concept's *own* objectivity. Everything else concrete, as rich as it may be, is not so inwardly identical with itself and, for that reason, in itself not as concrete, least of all what one commonly understands by the concrete, a manifold externally held together. What are also called concepts and, to be sure, determinate concepts, e.g. human being, house, animal, and so forth, are simple determinations and abstract representations, -abstractions that, taking only the factor of universality from the concept while omitting the particularity and individuality, are thus not developed in themselves and accordingly abstract precisely from the concept.' *EL*, §164/239.

and abstract labour, activity alienated and fetishised under the form of value. The social forms of the modern world are defined by these abstractions, making unintelligible both the relations inherent in the collectively of the activity and the self-awareness of a social world of our making. Humans cannot be at home in a world mystified by the value form. Marx's understanding of abstract sociality is of the *misrecognition* of social relations. Against the abstract, alienated person, Marx conceives a sociality beyond capital in terms of 'the social individual', a concept of human sociality in which 'subjects' are 'individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships'.³ However, he does not posit this concept in external opposition to capitalism, but develops this concept from his analysis of the collective process of labour in capital production. The (abstract) sociality of value is a theorisation of (mis)recognition. In this respect, Marx's mature social theory allows for a conceptuality of the conditions of modern life. Without this understanding, any theory of social interaction lacks an account of its defining objective features. It is not enough to gloss modernity as capitalist; the concept of capital must be grasped for any notion of social reality and subjectivity – moral or political – to be adequately conceived.

Marx's concept of value must be understood in terms of his social ontology, in which the form of value expresses the socialisation of relations shaped by the domination of capital, given in terms of the essence, substance and magnitude of value. This chapter gives specific attention to the opening of *Capital* and the contribution of value-form theory to a conception of ethical life. I argue that Marx's speculative unfolding of the categories, commodity, money, capital, provides a conceptualisation of the social as ontologically expressed in relations as determined by the form of value. This unfolding is historically specific to capital, as the social relations of modern life. The analysis of objective social relations provides Marx with an immanent point of departure for a normative conception of social life that supersedes capital. Marx's examination of the commodity and the form of value is the culmination of his social theory.⁴ His speculative beginning allows social reality to be grasped as immanent, unfolding from itself through its forms of being and social subjectivity to be located in the objective realm.

³ *Gr*, 712.

⁴ In my view, the understanding of value is Marx's his most enduring contribution to social theory. The theory of reification in Lukács' and early Critical Theory (especially in Benjamin and Adorno) has its conceptual origin in Marx's discussion of commodity fetishism. However, as I alluded to in Chapter 1 the theory of reification involves a problematic generalisation of Marx's concept. I examine this problem in depth in Lazarus, 'The Legacy of Reification: Gillian Rose and the Value-Form Theory Challenge to Georg Lukács', *Theses Eleven*, forthcoming.

Part 1

Following Aristotle and Hegel, Marx's speculative critical theory points to a conception of ethical life. *Capital* depicts the objective processes that hinder human freedom and potential – the living abstractions of time and labour, of dead labour over living labour. Human life is ruled by these abstractions, which are embodied in the capital relation. His famous description of capital captures this ethical dimension, 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks'.⁵ Capital can only exist in a form that dominates human life, inverting the activity of humans into abstract and distorted modes of existence. Living labour is fire-like, providing the 'vital energy' which makes possible the realisation of human use-values.⁶ As dead labour, the fire of living labour is turned into the opposite, *as use values for another*.⁷ If capital is 'vampire-like', not only is the very content of human labouring activity separated from human actors but the good life is made impossible in a social system defined by its logic of endless accumulation.

By investigating the abstractions of social life, Marx's mature writings aim to subject capital and its standpoint, as expressed in political economy, to an immanent critique.⁸

The exact development of the concept of capital [is] necessary, since it [is] the fundamental concept of modern economics, just as capital itself, whose abstract, reflected image [is] its concept [*dessen abstraktes Gegenbild sein Begriff*], [is] the foundation of bourgeois society. The sharp formulation of the basic presuppositions of the relation must bring out all the contradictions of bourgeois production, as well as the boundary where it drives beyond itself.⁹

This approach pushes the internal dynamics of the dominant mode of thinking about reality by examining these categories in their own terms and assessing them in an effort to test and move beyond their limits. The presence of Aristotle and Hegel in *Capital* signify at an immediate level both Marx's interest in drawing on the history of philosophy to understand the genesis and distinctiveness of capital as a social form and a synthesis of

⁵ *Cap* 1, 342.

⁶ *Cap* 1, 289.

⁷ *Gr*, 462.

⁸ Marx wrote to Lassalle, 'The work I am presently concerned with is a *Critique of Economic Categories* or, IF YOU LIKE, a critical exposé of the system of the bourgeois economy. It is at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system', 22 February 1858, *MECW* 40, 270.

⁹ *Gr*, 331.

his own theoretical determinations from the Greeks to the Scottish Enlightenment and German Idealism.

Aristotle appears early in Volume One. In the first chapter, in his crucial discussion of the commodity, Marx credits Aristotle as ‘the first to analyse the value-form’.¹⁰ Marx draws on Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* to conceptualise the variance between exchange relations ancient and modern – the inversions which render social life a separate and subordinate sphere of existence – where humans are now slaves to capital.¹¹ Aristotle’s presence in *Capital* helps illustrate Marx’s critique of the quantitative rationality of Enlightenment thought. The influence of Aristotle signifies the *value* of ethics in Marx’s later thought. His mature writings deepen the Aristotelian social ontology of the early texts by elaborating an ontology in which the social forms of value are shaped by capital. Here the relation of labour to capital, the crux of alienation in 1844, is strengthened by the conceptualisation of value and the social forms of wage labour as abstract, alienated labour and formed by the infinite character of capital.¹² These forms of being are specific to the modern world and to be comprehended must be understood as real abstractions, categories that pertain to social processes and relations. Marx’s concept of abstract labour poses, in a more concrete and speculative manner, his early problem of alienation.

I contend that there is strong connection between Marx’s early and late social thought, specifically that the concept of human essence is maintained from the *Economic and*

¹⁰ *Cap* 1, 151.

¹¹ Marx does not simply equate slavery and wage labour but he does understand the latter as a pervasive form of domination and often describes the condition of the worker in terms of slavery. For instance, ‘As privates of the industrial army they [labourers] are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful and the more embittering it is.’ ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, *MECW* 6, 491. He regularly contrasts slavery and wage labour as historical, not natural forms of labour. In reference to Aristotle’s argument (*Pol.* 1254a10-15; 1255b19-41), Marx notes, the worker is no more a slave by nature than ‘spindles and cotton are *capital* by nature just because they are consumed nowadays by the *wage-labourer* in the labour process’ *RIPP*, 997. See also, *Cap* 1, 175n35. Again in *Cap* 3, ‘the capitalist mode of production is distinguished from the mode of production founded on slavery by the fact that the value or price of labour-power is expressed as the value or price of labour itself, i.e. as wages’, 121.

¹² Moishe Postone’s ‘reinterpretation’ of Marx’s late critical theory both advanced a value-form reading of *Capital* but at the same time disavows an ontological interpretation of Marx. I will examine why holding the first position is consistent with holding the second below.

Philosophical Manuscripts to *Capital* in Marx's understanding of alienation.¹³ Marx's social ontology of labour develops from his outlining of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to incorporate the valorisation of abstract labour as capital in the mature texts. As an expression of alienated labour, understood in a more determinate way, abstract labour is both the precondition of capital and the result of capitalist production. Marx's later social ontology examines the *forms* of value as expressions of alienated modes of being. The concept of alienation is deepened by the mature discussion of abstract labour. The latter confirms Marx's critique of modernity's unfreedom by revealing the way economic categories and abstractions are held over the conditions of being – 'individuals are ruled by abstractions' – and human activity is limited to its capitalist form of private property and commodity production.¹⁴ Modern social relations are presented as a unity of the social (exchange, production, circulation, reproduction) and the asocial (fetishised, abstract, alienated). I term this unity-in-difference abstract sociality. In its simplest determinations, Marx notes the inversion between use/exchange and quality/quantity in the production of commodity. These inversions render social life abstract, detached from the sensuousness latent in the free control of human activity.¹⁵ However, these abstractions can only be understood from the standpoint of the social whole.

Marx's understanding of capital is carried out in terms of the dialectics of *sociality*. Capital is not a thing, but a relation *which must be comprehended socially*. Reconstructing this concept of sociality requires an engagement with its development in his mature texts, crucially but not limited to its iteration in *Capital*. The *Grundrisse* substantiates the critique of political economy found in *Capital*. In this way, *Capital* is best understood as part of a larger theoretical project in which the drafts, most notably the *Grundrisse*, play a significant

¹³ This argument is at odds with Michael Heinrich's influential interpretation of Marx's value-form theory, who claims (following Althusser's demarcation) after the *German Ideology*, 'the concept of a human species-being or essence no longer surfaces in Marx's work, and he only rarely and vaguely speaks of alienation', *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 21-2. On this basis, Heinrich goes on to assert that Marx's thought is constructed 'without recourse to morality', yet in the same breath concludes Marx advocates for 'a good and secure life, which can only be realised by transcending capitalism', 35-6. Heinrich demonstrates a common but contradictory view, that Marx can on one hand reject morality but on the other affirm a vision of the good life. This widespread view confuses the ethical importance of the conceptualisation of the good life and mobilises a narrow notion of moral thought.

¹⁴ *Gr*, 164.

¹⁵ Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach', *MECW* 5, 6.

part.¹⁶ The *Grundrisse* shines a distinctive light on Marx's social thought, with the prominence of the concept of alienation throughout the text and his notion of the 'social individual'.¹⁷ It details how the concept of capital and the nature of social being are essentially interrelated. For Marx, the relation of the individual to the community can only be adequately understood only by way of an assessment of capital. In this way, an assessment of modern social relations informs an ethical view of the necessary conditions for a just society.¹⁸ The project of *Capital* was continuously modified and ultimately left unfinished.¹⁹ Its incompleteness makes doubtful the view that Marx's philosophy constitutes a system.²⁰ However, the speculative reading outlined in this chapter takes an approach to *Capital* that interprets the movement of categories through

¹⁶ The first volume of *Capital*, one of his only supposed 'finished' texts, endured a long process of revision. The expansive project first initiated in the 1840s was developed in a long process of various drafts and notebooks from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *Grundrisse* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* through to the manuscripts of 1861-63, later released in part; edited by Engels into *Capital* Volumes 2 and 3 and *Theories of Surplus Value* edited by Karl Kautsky. For the drafting process see Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's Capital*, trans. Pete Burgess (London: Pluto, 1977), 10-55. There is now detailed scholarship emerging from Marx's unpublished or recently published manuscripts. Enrique Dussel's *Towards an Unknown Marx*, trans. Yolanda Angulo and ed. Fred Moseley (London: Routledge, 2001) assesses the 1861-63 writings and Lucia Pradella's *Globalisation and Critique of Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2015) relates the notebooks of 1843-8, 1850-3 and 1861-63 to the development of *Capital*. The draft of Volume 3 of *Capital* has been recently published, see Karl Marx, *Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*, trans. Ben Fowkes and ed. Fred Mosely (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017). From its continuation in 1998, the critical edition of Marx's work (MEGA 2) decisively recasts how Marx is read with the full publication of his drafts and notebooks. See Marcello Musto, *Another Marx*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1-4.

¹⁷ The landmark text here is Carol C. Gould's *Marx's Social Ontology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), see especially 101-128.

¹⁸ According to McLellan, 'For, as Marx himself proclaimed as early as 1844, economics and ethics were inextricably linked. The *Grundrisse* shows us this is as true of his later writings as it is of the earlier work', *Karl Marx*, 299.

¹⁹ The first volume of *Capital* is the most complete text from this project, the only volume prepared for publication, although it was altered significantly in subsequent editions and editorial changes. Marx made considerable alterations to Chapter One in preparing the Second Edition in 1873 and further changes to the French edition in 1875. *Cap* 1, 94, 105. Engels' decision to choose the Second Edition as the definitive text (used for Third and Fourth Editions he published in 1883 and 1890) has meant Marx's later adjustments have been largely ignored from the English translations. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 171-180. See also Kevin B. Anderson, 'The "Unknown Marx's *Capital*, Volume One: The French Edition of 1872-75, 100 Years Later', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 15:4 (1983): 71-80. While the project of *Capital* is the most systematic of his intellectual endeavours, the supposed authority of the text and any detailed analysis must be sensitive to the changes that *Capital* underwent by Marx's own hand, as well as the hands of his editors and translators. Nonetheless, *Capital* should be seen as the most complete statement of Marx's theoretical project even if the work and his project remains unfinished. For example, Volume Three breaks off mid-sentence, 1000 odd pages in, just as Marx is about to give his definition of class. Volume Three ends with a two-page fragment, Chapter 52 'Classes', where Marx ventures, 'The question to be answered next is: "What makes a class?"' a few sentences before the manuscript ends, *Cap* 3, 1025. Lukács makes this point in connection with the theory and practice of the working-class movement, *History and Class Consciousness*, 46.

²⁰ Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 18.

a systematic progression of real abstractions, in a manner closely related to Hegel's *Logic*.²¹

Hegel's shadow is cast across *Capital*. In Marx's words, the chapter on value is 'coquetted with the mode of expression peculiar to him'.²² This chapter has been seen as his most obvious debt to Hegel.²³ This debt is commonly seen strictly in methodological terms, as the mode of abstraction which allows for his particular form of 'scientific' analysis.²⁴ However, these claims only go half way in expressing the full importance of Hegel's *Logic* to *Capital*, which not only provides a mode of abstraction but helps inform the content of Marx's critique of dualism, in his attempt to unify form/content, fact/value in a critical theory of modern society. The forms Marx examines always concern social content and the empirical weight of his critique of political economy is always immanent. Marx shares with Hegel the aim of comprehending reality in thought, a task that means concrete reality is not pregiven but has to be conceptually ordered. Marx does not so much appropriate Hegel's method (with a materialist twist); rather, he critically adopts a

²¹ Arthur charts the history of this approach in *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 1-17. Arthur's thesis is that there is homology between the categories of the *Logic* (Being, Essence and Notion) which correspond to the dialectic of value (Commodity, Money and Capital), 79-110. In Smith's view, a 'one-to-one' mapping is unlikely since it contravenes both Hegel's rejection of the direct application of the categories of the *Logic* directly to social philosophy. Smith instead stresses the impact of *Science of Logic*, Book Two, The Doctrine of Essence on the dialectic of value, *The Logic of Marx's Capital*, 44-5, 51-4. Arthur suggests his difference with 'Tony Smith is 'at the level of ontology', *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 7. However, the discussion has progressed to some degree, with Smith mobilising a view that Marx 'was correct to think that Hegelian categories illuminate the social ontology of capitalism', 'Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism' in *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*, 29. Smith's *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism* puts this position in depth, 73-130.

²² *Cap* 1, 89.

²³ Cornelius Castoriadis fittingly describes the first chapter as 'Hegelian through and through', going so far as to suggest there is 'something very much more than a "coquetting" on Marx's part with Hegelian philosophical terminology; for the *words* in question are more than words, they correspond to philosophically laden concepts, which Marx uses in all their weight'. Castoriadis points to the example of *Wertform* (form of value), which distinguishes 'value as such' as 'Substance/Essence' and 'its Form, the Form of that Substance/Essence, the Form of Value', 'Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Ourselves' in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 265, 331. It should be noted that Marx's expression is more markedly Hegelian in the *Grundrisse* and in the Appendix to the first edition of *Capital*, 'The Value Form' in Karl Marx, *Value*, trans. Albert Dragstedt (New York: New Park Publications, 1976), 47-70.

²⁴ A foremost controversy in the discussion of Marx's mature writing is the problem of method. Marx rarely wrote directly on method and commentators have been at pains to comprehend the specificities of his methodological approach. Subsequent attempts at reconstructing Marx's method are some of the most fertile aspects of Marx studies. However, Marx's attitude towards method is closely aligned to Hegel's refusal to separate method from content. Marx's methodological approach arises from a detailed study of the content of his analysis. An assessment of the relationship between Marx's texts directly concerns which concepts are deemed operative in the mature texts. For a recent collection that address these issues, see Moseley and Smith, ed., *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*. See also, Fred Moseley, ed., *Marx's Method in Capital* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993).

speculative mode of thought which parallels Hegel's effort to go beyond pregiven realities.²⁵

Marx immanently unfolds the central conceptual categories in his theory of value: commodity, money, capital. He shows how the derivations of each social form provide the necessary determinations for the conceptual movement from one category to the next. Each social form is a unity in difference containing two sides, a positive and negative, the latter acting as a contradictory force, 'constantly striving to overcome' itself and establish a new relation that preserves its truth in a more concrete form.²⁶ Simple categories like use and exchange value (simple unity) are given further content, from which Marx derives a transition into a more concrete, but contradictory form (difference) and further to the fully distinguished incorporation of both previous forms as a unity in difference. Marx's early discussion of the elementary, expanded and general form of value evidence this conceptual ordering.²⁷

In his dialectic, Marx provides a speculative theorisation of the objective character of social being as mediated by the intersubjectivity of creative activity. Social relations express both the activity of human actors and the objectification of this activity into stratified and fettered relations which mask and limit social subjectivity. Marx's

²⁵ Marx's famous but cryptic comment in the Preface states 'My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it... With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.' This claim should not be read as a disavowal of Hegel, especially considering his comments of the opposite nature directly before this passage, which contextualise the intellectual currents Marx is situated within and responding to: those 'ill-humoured, arrogant and mediocre epigones who now talk large in educated German circles began to take pleasure in treating Hegel in the same way as the good Moses Mendelssohn treated Spinoza in Lessing's time, namely as a "dead dog"; I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even, here and there in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the mode of expression peculiar to him'. *Cap* 1, 102-3. See also, Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 6 March 1868, *MECW* 42, 544. It is worth noting that both the 'dead dog' and 'rational kernel' metaphors refer back to Hegel's own usage, see Preface, *EL*, 14 and Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 32-3. Marx frequently evokes a contrast between his own rational dialectical method and Hegel's mystical method. See for instance, Marx to Ferdinand Lassalle, 31 May 1858, *MECW* 40, 316 and Marx to Joseph Dietzgen, 9 May 1868, *MECW* 43, 31. This expresses Marx's ongoing view that Hegel superimposed logical categories upon reality. However, this attitude is complicated by his approving reflections about the influence of the *Logic* on his drafting of the *Grundrisse*, Marx to Engels 16 January 1858, *MECW* 40, 249. In my view, Marx's remarks on his relationship to Hegel are not especially reliable. Marx is not only prone to stark contrasts and polemically sharp statements (sometimes in regard to Lassalle or Proudhon's poor readings of Hegel), but generations of commentators have taken Marx at his word, which is less reliable than a reconstruction of the transition of categories in *Capital*. In this sense, Althusser's discussion of Marx's comments in the Preface of *Capital* is right to present inherent problems in the possibility of a simple inversion of the dialectic and to stress its metaphorical character. Nevertheless, I disagree with Althusser's conclusion that this presents a 'structural difference' between Marx's usage of Hegel's terminology, *For Marx*, 88-94.

²⁶ *RIPP*, 1037.

²⁷ Smith, *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic*, 94.

theorisation of value understands social forms as modes of being. Like Hegel, his logical unfolding of categories is also an ontology. By investigating the social forms specific to capitalism, Marx conceives of capital as a process and as a social relation. For Marx, capital is self-expanding value, which valorises itself through the exchange relation. The concept of capital demonstrates a further aspect of the role of social ontology in Marx's thought, the ontology of social forms. Capital's self-expansion is seen in term of the social ontology of modernity.

Marx's mature texts outline a view of human sociality through the 'asocial' character of a commodity producing society.²⁸ Commodity production, itself predicated on the sociality of a system with universalised relations, is necessarily *particular*. Abstract labour expresses this particularity in relation to the universal, value. As an individual, with only the particularity of their labour-power to sell, the relation between humans and their social system is mediated by an abstract form of activity. Social relations founded on these abstract forms of interaction reflect an inherent asociality *within* a social form with a universalising logic. That this logic is premised on abstract labour prevents its concrete universality from being realised. This contradiction can only be overcome with the overcoming of value and the necessary recognition of human sociality.

Not only does Marx's concept of labour become fully developed in his mature work, but the ethical nature of his critique can be discerned in it. Here labour is seen to have a 'dual character': commodity-producing labour expresses both the moment of concrete labouring activity and the abstract homogenous labour-time exchanged by the seller of labour-power (worker) with the buyer of labour-power (capitalist). Marx's distinction between productive activity and wage labour allows the specific character of capitalist production to be understood as predicated upon an objectified and alienated form of labour. The implications of this analysis dramatically impact the way Marx's social thought is interpreted.²⁹

When abstract labour is taken to be a central concept in his mature social theory, the normative content of his critique of capitalism can be more fully defined. Capital is

²⁸ Smith makes this point well, adopting from Kant the term 'dissociated sociality', *ibid.*, 75-7, 'Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism', 29; *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 81.

²⁹ The importance of this aspect of Marx's value theory is first pointed out in depth by Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, see especially, 131-58.

understood as a relation that self-valorises, transforming living labour into abstract and socially averaged quantities of time (socially necessary labour-time). Marx develops a concept of capital that comprehends this relation as the dominating relation of modern social forms. The fetishised character of commodities, money and capital dominate and define everyday life. However central Marx's account of abstract labour is to his concept of capital, he starts his analysis instead with the abstraction of value, since

To develop the concept of capital it is necessary to begin not with labour but with value, and, precisely, with exchange value in an already developed movement of circulation. It is just as impossible to make the transition directly from labour to capital as it is to go from the different human races directly to the banker, or from nature to the steam engine.³⁰

To arrive at a concrete conception of capital, a categorical ordering of the prior social forms specific to the object of investigation is required for the necessary transitions to hold. Although labour 'seems a quite simple category', it is a modern abstraction. Marx notes:

This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.³¹

Marx's concept of capital furnishes his social thought with a way to comprehend modern sociality as inherently asocial, fetishised and abstract. The concept of capital makes explicit the historicity of labour relations and questions their existence.

Marx not only condemns capitalism in terms of its alienated and abstract forms of activity, but suggests that the negation of these forms allows for new modes of social interaction based upon socially comprehended and rational forms of association. For Marx, this is a concrete realisation of human potentiality, the realm of freedom. Marx conceives of the human in terms of the 'social individual', where the egotism and dualism of capitalist social relations is not simply replaced by an indeterminate collective, but individuality is recognised *socially*. If capitalism is defined by abstract social relations hidden behind the backs of producers, a social world beyond capital could allow relations

³⁰ *Gr*, 259.

³¹ *Gr*, 103-4.

between people to become actually social in terms of rational self-comprehension. This potential arises from the social aspects of labour processes, made apparent with capitalism, but only in an abstract alienated form. The realisation of an actually social form of labour requires the negation of capital and its associated forms of labour. Marx sees human potential restricted by the exploitative social relations of capitalist society. This analysis is based in the value-form and the manner in which capitalism reduces human life to the fetish of exchange. At the same time, the labour process takes a collective form and capital lays the basis for its own overcoming.

Marx's social philosophy revolves around the movement of capital and the relational ontology of social forms. Hegel's *Logic* helps think about the beginning level of Marx's critique of political economy. The question of beginnings allows the genesis and structure of Marx's conceptual thought to be seen. After considering Hegel's place in the opening, I proceed through Marx's opening, pausing to elaborate on Aristotle's role in the systemic ordering of concepts. With this systemic logic, Marx employs Aristotle's ethical thought to his immanent critique of modern sociality. Through a close reading of *Capital*, it becomes clear that in grasping the logic of social forms, Marx wants to show how capital cannot allow an ethical life. For Marx, capital produces and reproduces the *wrong life* but in understanding it, the possibilities for its overcoming are immanent. Marx wants to identify the barriers to mutual recognition as they exist within the social forms which define the modern world.

Part 2

Hegel's *Science of Logic* starts with the question 'With What Must the Science Begin?'. This work concerns the form and content of philosophy itself as scientific truth, self-knowledge of subject and object in consciousness.³² Hegel's concern is to locate a speculative beginning which allows thought to proceed, not from a dogmatic and presupposed starting point, but conceptually from the most basic abstraction pertaining

³² Beiser claims Hegel's inquiry asks 'the fundamental question behind all metaphysics: What is reality itself?' *Hegel*, 60.

to its object to increasingly concrete forms derived logically through the transition of one to the next.³³

Hegel warns against modes of thought which dogmatically assume their content from the beginning, having little regard for method, relying on assertion, faith or intuition ‘shot from a pistol’.³⁴ Instead, for thought to have any claim to ‘authentic knowledge... which is the pure concept of science itself, it has to work its way through a long course’. Here the becoming of speculative thought is known through the content and shape of thought through its emergence.³⁵ Method and content are united in this process, which demands that the beginning be logical.³⁶ The method then becomes possible only at the end, after it is appearance can be grasped as a sequence of experiences. Method is then justified.

The object of inquiry, absolute truth, begins with the *abstract* immediacy of being. Only from an abstract undetermined beginning can the shapes of being, essence and concept be traced to their full truth in absolute knowledge. For Hegel, the absolute idea becomes known at the end of this process of development, providing justification for the analysis through its exposition. Famously, thought returns within itself to its beginning: “Essential to science is not so much that a pure immediacy should be the beginning, but that the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first.”³⁷ For the further determinations to validate the beginning, these derivations must transition from one form to the next, subsuming the previous content in the transition. Thought progresses logically through the form-determinations that pertain to the object of philosophical truth.³⁸ Hegel writes,

Thus, the beginning of philosophy is the ever present and self-preserving foundation of all subsequent developments, remaining everywhere immanent in its further determinations.

³³ Pippin suggests Hegel actually presupposes “thought as such” and the investigation of “thinking as such”, *Hegel’s Realm of Shadows*, 184-5. See also, *SL*, 21.56.

³⁴ *SL*, 21.53.

³⁵ *PbG*, ¶14/9.

³⁶ *SL*, 21.54.

³⁷ *SL*, 21.57. Also, “The true is the whole. But the whole is only the essence completing itself through its development. Of the absolute it must be said that it is essentially *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it is in truth; and precisely in this consists its nature: to be actual, subject, or becoming-its-own-self. Though it may seem contradictory that the absolute is to be conceived essentially as result, a brief consideration clears up this semblance of contradiction. The beginning, the principle, or the absolute, as it is initially and immediately expressed, is only the universal.” *PbG*, ¶21/11.

³⁸ *EL*, §1/28.

In this advance the beginning thus loses the one-sidedness that it has when determined simply as something immediate and abstract; it becomes mediated, and the line of scientific forward movement consequently turns *into a circle*. – It also follows that what constitutes the beginning, because it is something still undeveloped and empty of content, is not yet truly known at that beginning, and that only science, and science fully developed, is the completed cognition of it, replete with content and finally truly grounded.³⁹

This mode of thinking is specific to the subject matter under investigation, which for Hegel is the activity of pure thought. The movement and mediation of thought reflects its increasing concreteness as it sublates itself in its becoming. In this way, speculative thought proceeds from an abstract beginning through the negativity of conceptual mediation and negation to universality. Hegel describes this process in terms of the movement of the analytic (passive thought, ‘which takes up its object’) and the synthetic (the negative, which ‘demonstrates itself to be the activity of the concept itself’).

The moments of the speculative method are (a) the *beginning*, which is being or the immediate; for itself for the simple reason that it is the beginning. From the vantage point of the speculative idea, however, it is the speculative idea’s *self-determining* which, as the absolute negativity or movement of the concept, *judges* and posits itself as the negative of itself. *Being*, which from the vantage point of the beginning as such appears as abstract affirmation, is thus instead the *negation*, *positedness*, being-mediated in general and being *pre-supposed*. But as the negation of the *concept* that is simply identical with itself in its otherness and is the certainty of itself, it is the concept not yet posited as concept or, in other words, it is the concept *in itself*. – For that reason, as the still undetermined concept, i.e. the concept determined only in itself for immediately, this being is just as much the *universal*.

The beginning is taken in the sense of immediate being from intuition and perception – the beginning of the *analytic* method of finite knowing; in the sense of the universality, it is the beginning of the synthetic method of such knowing. Since, however, the logical [dimension] is immediately something universal as much as something that is [*Seiendes*], just as much something presupposed by the concept as it is immediate, its beginning is as much synthetic as it is analytic.⁴⁰

Hegel’s beginning provides conceptual thinking with a distinct advantage over empiricism as the conceptual basis of political economy in a way that prefigures Marx’s approach.⁴¹ In Hegel’s view, empiricism starts unconsciously with concepts already laden with content and with false concreteness is unable to progress logically. As a result, empiricism claims to explain reality from the immediacy of its knowledge claim; however,

³⁹ *SL*, 21.58. See also *LHP* 1, 27.

⁴⁰ *EL*, §238/301.

⁴¹ *EL*, §7/6-8.

the conceptual starting point presupposes too much for the progression of concepts to be carried out in thought. Empiricism is predicated upon the *false abstraction* of a presupposed beginning without conscious justification of this beginning. Further, conceptual mediation, the content of concepts (economy, population, etc.), is given false concreteness. Hegel does not dismiss the necessity of empirical knowledge for modern thought but insists it should be logically ordered.⁴² Hegel's beginning is critically adopted by Marx. While the former is insistent on the presuppositionless concept of being, Marx's object of inquiry is the concept of capital. This does not prevent him from a logical derivation of concepts, as I outline next, but it does stipulate the object of his investigation. However, whereas Hegel's critique is focused on the dualisms of the Enlightenment expressed in the categories of pure thought, Marx focuses his critique of Enlightenment dualism in the thought of political economy.⁴³

Marx's beginning is also 'difficult'.⁴⁴ His object of inquiry is not thought itself, but the categories of social being specific to the social forms of capitalist modernity. For Marx, the existence of wealth in the modern world must be understood immanently. Marx's *critique of political economy* takes the basic concepts as he finds them in political economy and internally probes these concepts, historically situating them at a higher, integrated and more complex level.⁴⁵ This method can be seen in the concepts Marx borrows from other thinkers but radically develops to a point in which the content of those concepts is filled with a substantially different meaning. This approach both immanently develops and appropriates the history of political thought, rejecting the naturalisation of capital by the political economists of the Scottish Enlightenment – especially Smith and Ricardo.⁴⁶ Marx's engagement with Hegel and Aristotle are significant historicising elements in his thinking of capital. Marx opens *Capital* with the claim that

The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity.⁴⁷

⁴² See *LPH* 3, 176.

⁴³ In a letter to Engels, Marx contrasted taking 'a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation' and the pseudo-Hegelian approach of applying 'an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system', 1 February 1858, *MECW* 40, 261.

⁴⁴ *Cap* 1, 89. Hegel also warns his readers of the 'difficulty' of beginnings, *SL*, 21:51.

⁴⁵ Marx publicly described *Capital* as the 'first attempt at applying the dialectical method to political economy', Marx to Engels, 7 November 1867, *MECW* 42, 463.

⁴⁶ Postone has a useful discussion of this point, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 273.

⁴⁷ *Cap* 1, 125.

If capitalist wealth confronts us as a vast array of commodities, Marx specifies that the appearance of the commodity, as it appears in its ‘its elementary form’, is his object of investigation. From this first sentence, Marx is concerned with identifying what is specific about capitalism. Taking the commodity as the most *general* social category of capitalism allows him to ask *what* it is about commodity production that leads to the creation of these appearances.⁴⁸ By starting with the commodity, Marx is not suggesting that the commodity comes first in capitalist society *historically* but that it is *logically* prior.⁴⁹ The most basic unit of a commodity producing society (a mode of production predicated on commodity manufacture and exchange) is value. Beginning with the commodity, Marx can project how it becomes a ‘citizen’ of the world expressing the formal freedom of bourgeois society.⁵⁰ However, Marx does not assume that value is a pregiven natural category. Rather, he argues that value is a historically specific category.⁵¹ The opening of

⁴⁸ In this way, from the first line of *Capital*, Marx is doing something very different from ‘economics’ or ‘history’ conventionally defined. He approaches ‘economy theory’ as a specific moment in social philosophy conceived more broadly, which attempts to understand society through determinate categories that relate to objective social forms. For Marx, the appearance of the commodity is located in an essence. This does not negate the reality of the commodity, but rather follows Hegel in claiming that appearances, are relationally bound to essences, a moment of expression and both appearances and essences are vital aspects of social reality that cannot be held apart, as if ‘appearance’ is something that comes out of thin air. *EL*, §132/188/199.

⁴⁹ The controversy about Marx’s beginning goes back to Engels, who establishes the ‘logical-historical’ reading of *Capital*, in which starting with ‘simple commodity production’ Marx proceeds historically. ‘Even after the determination of the method, the critique of political economy could still be arranged in two ways—historically or logically. Since in the course of history, as in its literary reflection, development proceeds by and large from the simplest to the more complex relations, the historical development of political economy constituted a natural clue, which the critique could take as a point of departure, and then the economic categories would appear on the whole in the same order as in the logical development. This form seems to have the advantage of greater lucidity, for it traces the *actual* development, but in fact it would thus become, at most, more popular...The logical method of approach was therefore the only suitable one. This, however, is indeed nothing but the historical method, only stripped of the historical form and of interfering contingencies. The point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought, and its further progress will be simply the reflection, in abstract and theoretically consistent form, of the course of history, a corrected reflection, but corrected in accordance with laws provided by the actual course of history, since each moment can be examined at the stage of development where it reaches its full maturity, its classical form.’ Frederick Engels, ‘Review: Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*’, *MECW* 16, 475.

⁵⁰ *Cap* 1, 155.

⁵¹ Meek’s popular interpretation follows Engel’s historical method, ‘to analyse capitalism...the best way of doing this was to imagine capitalism suddenly impinging upon a sort of generalised pre-capitalist society... What one ought to do, in other words, was to begin by postulating a society in which, although commodity production and free competition were assumed to reign more or less supreme, the labourers still owned the whole produce of their labour. Having investigated the simple laws which would govern production, exchange and distribution in a society of this type, one ought then to imagine capitalism suddenly impinging upon this society... In adopting this kind of approach, Marx was of course – following-and-developing further – a long and respectable tradition which had been established by Smith and Ricardo. Marx’s postulation of an abstract pre-capitalist society based on what he called ‘simple’ commodity production was not essentially different in aim from Adam Smith’s postulation of an ‘early and rude’ society inhabited by deer and beaver hunters... Thus Marx’s theory of value can conveniently be

Capital references the first sentence of his own 1859 work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: “The wealth of bourgeois society, at first sight, presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities, its unit being a single commodity. Every commodity, however, has a twofold aspect—*use value* and *exchange value*.”⁵²

Aristotle enters into Marx’s value theory from the very beginning. To give an account of value, Marx insists that the character of the simple determinations ‘use’ and ‘exchange’ must be first examined.⁵³ His footnote to the above passage,⁵⁴ in the Greek original, is from Book 1 of *The Politics*,

Every article or property has a double use... one is the proper, and the other the improper use of it. For example, a shoe is used for wear, and is offered for exchange; both are uses of the shoe. He who gives a shoe in exchange for money or food to him who wants one, does indeed use the shoe as a shoe, but this is not its proper or primary purpose, for a shoe is not expressly made for exchange purposes. The same may be said of all articles of property...⁵⁵

The contrast Aristotle draws between the use and exchange of property forms part of his discussion of ‘wealth-getting’, in which he makes a distinction between the kind of barter that allows the household to be sustained through use of the article and the hoarding of coin without limit.⁵⁶ Use is the *ergon*, the proper function of the article pertaining to its nature. If a thing performs its *ergon*, Aristotle considers this end a virtue, its proper definition and ‘best state’.⁵⁷ Here exchange is also a use in its ability to meet needs, but the primary function of the article is the nature of its usefulness. Exchange is subsidiary.

Since Marx’s task is to grasp the form of value, Aristotle’s presence in this opening is to highlight the capitalist nature of the specifically distinction between use and exchange

considered under the three headings of Pre-capitalist Society, Early Capitalism, and Developed Capitalism.’ *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value*, 303-5. In this way, the so called ‘historical’ reading ahistorically posits value.

⁵² *MECW* 29, 269. See also, *Gr*, 881.

⁵³ In the *Grundrisse*, Marx rejects the false concretion of political economy which starts with ‘the real and the concrete’, i.e. population, wages etc. *Gr*, 100. Accordingly, this is a false abstraction which presupposes too much. However, in the *Contribution* and in *Capital* Marx advances from the starting point he offers in the *Grundrisse* of ‘material production’ (83), by beginning with value as the logical form specific to capital.

⁵⁴ Marx uses the same quotation in his discussion of exchange at the beginning of Chapter 2, in the simple opposition of use and exchange between buyer and sellers of commodities, *Cap* 1, 179.

⁵⁵ *Pol.* 1257a6-15; *MECW* 29, 269. Translation has been modified from the Everson edition and from T.A. Sinclair’s translation (London: Penguin, 1962), 41.

⁵⁶ *Pol.* 1257b32-35; 1258a15-19.

⁵⁷ *EE* 1219a3-13.

inherent in value. Marx's concern is that this same distinction takes a distinctively modern inversion, where the *ergon* of the thing under the commodity-form is exchange. For this reason, the opening dialectic of *Capital* is the 'doublet-form' use-value and value.⁵⁸ Accordingly, 'The historical broadening and deepening of the phenomenon of exchange develops the opposition between use-value and value which is latent in the nature of the commodity'.⁵⁹ The deepening of exchange denotes the historical process in which commodity exchange becomes universalised and wage-labour becomes capital posting.⁶⁰ In this way, the commodity Marx investigates is not simply an object for exchange, but a category that is dependent on the historically specific form of social relations in a value producing society.⁶¹

The opening of *Capital* unfolds the conceptual coming-to-be of capital. Here capital appears in its 'elementary forms', the commodity and money.⁶² Marx's beginning grasps the most general form of capital, the commodity, and from its duality moves to more concrete expressions of value, money and then to capital. This derivation is conducted without the level of concretisation that occurs as the volumes continue (wages, rent, etc.). These determinations are expositions of the fetish forms outlined in Volume One. Only from an abstraction that comprehends the most basic character of a form is it possible to logically add determinations. *Capital* identifies that his investigation will 'first of all' begin with the commodity.⁶³ This beginning expresses the movement between two dialectical moments, two points of departure. The movement 'from the abstract to the concrete', is not 'abstract' as an intangible factor of thought but a *real abstraction*.⁶⁴ From grasping the most basic unit of value, the commodity, it is then possible to add more complex determinations through a logical derivation of categories.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ The 1867 appendix, 'The Form of Value' was later incorporated by Marx into Chapter One proper, see Marx, 'The Form of Value', 49. For an outline of the structure of the appendix, see Marx to Engels 27 June 1867, *MECW* 42, 392-3.

⁵⁹ *Cap* 1, 181.

⁶⁰ See Banaji, 'Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History', 92-101.

⁶¹ Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, 139.

⁶² *RIPP*, 975.

⁶³ *Cap* 1, 125.

⁶⁴ *Gr*, 100.

⁶⁵ Engels suggested to Marx that the appendix on value (then planned to be attached as an appendix to the first edition of *Capital*) should be simplified, quipping that it bears the 'marks of your carbuncles' (Marx's medical condition). Accordingly, this section should be made more accessible 'as your philistine really is not accustomed to this kind of abstract thinking and will certainly not torment himself for the sake of the form of value. At most, you could provide rather more extensive historical evidence for the conclusions you have here reached dialectically, you could, so to speak, apply the test of history'. Engels recommended that Marx follow the paragraph structure of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic*, with 'each dialectical transition

The double starting point is between 1) the concrete and immediacy of the individual commodity; and 2) the abstract, the form of value. The commodity gives an abstract and simple starting point between the use-value of commodities and value is the universal relation of abstract human labour. Jarius Banaji notes:

the individual commodity forms the *analytic* point of departure. From this, however, we do not pass over directly to the concept of capital. By analysing the commodity, drawing out its determinations, we arrive at the concept of *value* as the abstract-reified form of social labour. This as the ground of all further conceptual determinations (money, capital) forms the *synthetic* point of departure of *Capital*.⁶⁶

The double starting point allows Marx to begin with the real abstraction of the commodity and then to proceed from this determination to value and its substance, abstract labour. Marx summarises the rationale of an abstract point of departure, which also considers the concreteness of the individual commodity:

We begin with the commodity, with this specific social form of the product – for it is the foundation and premise of capitalist production. We take the individual product in our hand and analyse the formal determinants that it contains as a commodity and which stamp it as a commodity.⁶⁷

At this point Marx should not be mistaken as making the empiricist claim that capitalism can be understood from simply holding the products of capitalist production. Instead, analysis of the conceptual determination specific to the social forms particular to capital must proceed from abstracting from the most basic form of immediacy. The commodity

emphasised by means of a special heading and, as far as possible, all the excurses or merely illustrative material printed in special type. The thing would have looked somewhat like a school text-book, but a very large class of readers would have found it considerably easier to understand. The *populus*, even the scholars, just are no longer at all accustomed to this way of thinking, and one has to make it as easy for them as one possibly can'. Although Engels acknowledges the dialectical structure of *Capital*'s categorical structure, his recourse to historical illustration marks a significant difference between his and Marx's own mode of presentation. Engels to Marx 16 June, 1867, *MECW* 42, 381-2. In his reply, Marx follows Engel's advice by moving the section on value to the appendix (later incorporated back into Chapter One) and by adding section headings but maintains value 'is crucial for the whole book' refusing Engel's advice on this point. He also retorts, 'I hope the bourgeoisie will remember my carbuncles until their dying day', 22 June 1867, *MECW* 42, 383.

⁶⁶ Banaji's emphasis on the 'abstract-reified form of social labour' makes clear that the concept of alienation is present at the very start of *Capital*. 'From the Commodity to Capital: Hegel's Dialectic in Marx's *Capital*' in *Value*, ed. Diane Elson (London: Verso, 2015), 27-40.

⁶⁷ *RIPP*, 1058.

furnishes this point of departure since it expresses two moments of value, use and exchange.

The ‘external object’ of the commodity is its qualifiable *use*, the ability to satisfy human needs, whether they be of the ‘stomach’ or ‘the imagination’.⁶⁸ Marx considers the nature of what these needs might be ‘irrelevant’ at this point. His focus is the socially recognisable features of use-values.⁶⁹ Marx is not describing the use of any particular article but of the *use-value of a commodity* within its form. Thus the seemingly less concrete category of ‘use’ can only be grasped as a ‘*historically specific*’ feature of commodity production.⁷⁰ Use-values are heterogeneous but all useful things possess, in addition to the qualifiable utility of the object, specific quantities – the need for two shoes, one house etc. Use-value relates to needs, it cannot ‘dangle in mid-air’.⁷¹ In this way, use-value is carried in the material character of the commodity. Use-value expresses these two poles, quality and quantity but requires a ‘social *measurement* for the *quantity* of useful things’ since possible uses will vary.⁷² Thus a commodity must be useful to be a commodity, but not all useful things are commodities (for example, grass, a paper weight etc.). The use-value of a commodity is made good when it is consumed, or utilised – but when quantified, use-values make their appearance as exchangeable objects. Marx makes the point:

Exchange-value appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind. This relation changes constantly with time and place. Hence exchange-value appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value, i.e. an exchange-value that is inseparably connected with the commodity, inherent in it, seems a contradiction in terms.⁷³

This is not an ‘accidental’ process, as Marx goes into detail to explain. If two commodities, shoes and houses, are to be exchanged they must be measured quantifiably. When the two are put next to each other, their exchangeability is measured in quantities – for example ‘1 thousand beds = 1 house’ – which identifies something in common of

⁶⁸ *Cap* 1, 125.

⁶⁹ Marx, ‘The Commodity’, in *Value*, 7.

⁷⁰ Marx, “Notes” on Adolph Wagner, 242.

⁷¹ *Cap* 1, 126.

⁷² Marx, ‘The Commodity’, in *Value*, 7.

⁷³ *Cap* 1, 126.

‘identical magnitude’ to both things, but irreducible to either. This is ‘reducible’ to a ‘third thing’.⁷⁴ At this point of the exposition, Marx introduces labour.⁷⁵

If then we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour. But even the product of labour has already been transformed in our hands. If we make abstraction from its use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value. It is no longer a table, a house, a piece of yarn or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. Nor is it any longer the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason or the spinner, or of any other particular kind of productive labour. With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract.⁷⁶

The productive activity of concrete labouring is negated into abstract labour. This form is dualistic, a unity-in-difference between concrete and abstract labour. Commodity-producing labour becomes abstract labour, measured in terms of ‘congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour’ as the socially average time to perform certain forms of productive activity. The use-value of a commodity exists precisely because ‘abstract human labour’ has been objectified into its production. The measure of this abstract quantity is labour-time. There is already in these passages a sense of the separation of the worker from the product of their labour – where the sensuous, human characteristics – of the commodity are lost for something reducible – the common factor in the exchange of these commodities is their socially recognised ‘value’.⁷⁷

Marx’s conception of value specifies the *social relation* between humans that material products of labour mediate. This is at odds with understandings of value as the immediate utility or exchangeability of the material property of a particular commodity. In this sense, a product of labour can be held but not value.

We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value. However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions

⁷⁴ *Cap* 1, 127.

⁷⁵ Arthur argues that Marx brings in labour too early, risking ‘the appearance of model-building’, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 85. Considering abstract labour is implicit from the introduction of the commodity, this objection seems to ask more questions than it answers regarding the opening structure.

⁷⁶ *Cap* 1, 128.

⁷⁷ *Cap* 1, 128.

of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social.⁷⁸

Value as a social relation expresses its ‘form of appearance’ as exchange-value, which becomes the socially measurable substance of human labour.⁷⁹ Marx suggests that commodities are given social weight by the amount of human labour objectified in their production.

With the examples of linen and the coat, Marx demonstrates how the products of objectified labour by the weaver and tailor are given value in and through this relation. Traced from its most simple relation, the form of value expresses two poles – the relative and equivalent forms of value. Through developing this example, Marx is picking apart the ‘mystery’ of the form of value. He shows how the objectified labour in both linen and coats ‘can *only* be expressed relatively’, i.e. in ‘another commodity’.⁸⁰ Thus, the linen when related to the coat, as 20 yards = 1 coat, expresses a value. At the same time, the linen expresses its use-value in the coat, it gains a value quite ‘distinct’ from its ‘physical form’ and becomes ‘abstract’, i.e. measurable as something quantifiable and exchangeable for the creation of coats.⁸¹ Marx understands the expressions of value in coats and linen *purely* in terms of social relations.⁸² Human labour has been objectified and accumulated in the coat, which bears its value.⁸³

While human labour provides the substance of value, the commodity embodies the dual character of labour. The linen had to be woven by concrete labouring, but for it to express value this activity has to be made its opposite – something that is abstract, measurable when compared with other commodities – i.e. socially measured.⁸⁴ Private labour hired for the production of the commodity can therefore only be understood as a social form, when commodities are no longer seen individually but take on a new life as citizens of the world.

⁷⁸ *Cap* 1., 138-9.

⁷⁹ Marx, “‘Notes’ on Adolph Wagner”, 230; Marx to Kugelmann, 11 July 1868, *MECW* 32, 69.

⁸⁰ *Cap* 1, 139-40.

⁸¹ *Cap* 1, 147.

⁸² *Cap* 1, 149.

⁸³ *Cap* 1, 143.

⁸⁴ See *TSV* 1, 156.

To make this move successful, Marx's critique of the concept of value in political economy is fundamental. Smith's labour theory of value was a means to account for the price of the commodity by starting with the amount of labour expended on its production.⁸⁵ For example, a woollen coat requires not just a detailed division of labour in its production,⁸⁶ but a great variety of different labours to locate the materials, bring them together and a variety of labours in the means of production themselves. Smith theorises the division of the technical aspects of the labour process to promote the productive efficiency allowed with the freedom of trade and the 'invisible hand' of market forces. The central problem he is trying to address is the technical division of production, which is becoming increasingly specialised with the early manufactory. However, in Smith's conception the division of labour that comes with commodity production is a constant feature of human interaction. This distinctive theory of human nature present in Smith's economic theory is predicated on the notion of humans as isolated producers of commodities. Smith gives priority to economic factors in the market, beyond casual explanations codifying 'economic science'. However, he bases his explanatory model of economic behaviour on the premise of human motivation as egoistical and driven by distinct and predetermined economic interests. Competition for Smith is overdetermining. In this sense, commercial society is natural since it finally allows humans to trade at will.⁸⁷ Heavily indebted to Hume's empiricism, Smith developed an explicit moral philosophy based on the individual.⁸⁸ This is enhanced and furthered with his establishment of economic science in the *Wealth of Nations*. Despite Smith's motivation to chart the tendencies and dynamics of the capitalist economy, he understood these dynamics to be perpetual aspects of human nature, unfettered in modern 'commercial society'. According to Smith, the individual trader needs society only as a means to enhance their individual commercial interests. He locates the division of labouring tasks for self-interested purposes as a feature of the earliest types of societies. Smith's analysis superimposes the logic of commodity producing society onto all history and provides for a human nature that is by definition commercial and egotistical.⁸⁹ According to Smith, 'by truck, by barter, and by purchase' trade is premised

⁸⁵ See Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 59; TSV 3, 74.

⁸⁶ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 116.

⁸⁷ Cap 1, 470-5; Rubin, *A History of Economic Thought*, 169.

⁸⁸ See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Penguin, 2009), 258-279. Smith's discussion of Aristotle takes issue with his conception of virtue, 322-3. For an excellent discussion of the influence of Hume on Smith's thought, see Rubin, *A History of Economic Thought*, 167-77.

⁸⁹ Cap 1, 468; Rubin, *A History of Economic Thought*, 170.

on mutually needed goods. Smith goes so far to claim that in hunter and agrarian societies, those who made bows and arrows and thus demonstrated a greater capacity for the task used their industry to trade with others in their 'own interest', becoming 'a sort of armourer', i.e. a specialised profession.⁹⁰ Since value comes from labour production, Smith gives significant attention to the material and technical division of labour but insists that the division of labour in capitalist production can be read back to all forms of society. In this sense, Smith confuses the technical and social division of labour.⁹¹

Alternatively, Marx points out in early communal societies there *is* a social division of labour but no commodity production. By contrast, in modern commodity-producing societies 'labour is systematically divided in every factory, but the workers do not bring about this division by exchanging their individual products. Only the products of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation, can confront each other as commodities.'⁹² This division is needed for commodity production to occur. Marx writes:

Men made clothes for thousands of years, under the compulsion of the need for clothing, without a single man ever becoming a tailor. But the existence of coats, of linen, of every element of material wealth not provided in advance by nature, had always to be mediated through a specific productive activity appropriate to its purpose, a productive activity that assimilated particular natural materials to particular human requirements.⁹³

Ricardo begins his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* with a critique of Adam Smith's discussion of value, finding that Smith fails to *consistently* find a measure of value in the 'quantity of labour necessary to produce' a particular object. According to Ricardo, 'sometimes [Smith] speaks of food grain, at other times of labour as a standard measure' of value. Ricardo's aim is to provide a precise explanation of 'value' in the labour contained in commodities.⁹⁴ If two capitalists employ the 'same quantity of labour' per year for commodity production, the commodities will be of a different value

on account of the different quantities of fixed capital, or accumulated labour, employed by each respectively. The cloth and cotton goods are of the same value, because they are the produce of equal quantities of labour, and equal

⁹⁰ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Books I-III, 119.

⁹¹ Rubin, *History of Economic Thought*, 179.

⁹² *Cap* 1, 132.

⁹³ *Cap* 1, 133.

⁹⁴ David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London: Penguin, 1971), 55-7.

quantities of fixed capital; but corn is not of the same value as these commodities, because it is produced, as far as regards fixed capital, under different circumstances.⁹⁵

Ricardo refines the labour theory of value by locating value in the amount of labour-time contained in the commodity.⁹⁶ This innovation to the theory of labour value, although hugely significant, is typically seen to be Marx's position.⁹⁷ This view, at first sight, is supported by Ricardo's starting point – the division between 'use' and 'exchange' value as abstractions measured by labour-time. *Capital* starts with the same abstraction.

However, Marx differentiates himself explicitly from political economy in the opening of *Capital* in his claim that the commodity is the expression of value *as the 'elementary form'* of capitalist wealth. When Marx introduces labour in the form of abstract labour, he also makes clear this can only be measured as *socially necessary labour-time*; that is, the labour-time objectified into the commodity can only be understood in a society in which commodity production is the generalised mode of production.⁹⁸ Rather than representing a social need, the commodity expresses a social relation. In capitalism this is expressed as a reified relation of domination. Marx argues:

The real value of a commodity, however, is not its individual, but its social value; that is to say, its value is not measured by the labour power that the article costs the producer in each individual case, but by the labour-time socially required for its production.⁹⁹

Marx comprehends labour under capital as *historically specific to this social form of production*. By analysing value as a *social form*, Marx is doing something quite different from Ricardo, who sees value as performed labour. Marx instead understands *value as a social relation*.¹⁰⁰ He puts this clearly,

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it

⁹⁵ Ibid., 75-6.

⁹⁶ See 'Economic Manuscript of 1861-3', *MECW* 31, 389-399.

⁹⁷ See for example, Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value*, 303-5.

⁹⁸ Marx, "Notes" on Adolph Wagner', 231.

⁹⁹ *Cap* 1, 434. See also Rubin's comment, 'value does not characterise things, but human relations in which things are produced', *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, 69.

¹⁰⁰ This limits political economy to the view that only labour, and not capital, is productive, which according to Marx, means 'they do not conceive capital in its *specific character as form*, as a *relation of production* reflected into itself, but think only about its material substance, raw material etc. But these material elements do not make capital into capital.' *Gr*, 309.

has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product.¹⁰¹

Despite the depth of Ricardo's thought, he represents the limitations of political economy as a whole, unable to think the difference between labour and labour-power. He notes: 'it does not occur to the economists that a purely quantitative distinction between the kinds of labour presupposes their qualitative unity or equality, and therefore their reduction to abstract human labour'.¹⁰² Political economy established that labour-time creates value but this insight was abstracted from the social relations in which this form of labour arises.¹⁰³ In this way, value is naturalised creating a dualism between the isolated worker and the social processes of production.¹⁰⁴ A further dualism arises from this ideological standpoint, the unexplainable gulf between quality and quantity.¹⁰⁵ Marx attempts to reach beyond such dualism to demonstrate how the essence of value is in the form of labour expressed in capital. The appearance of value is self-positing, given actuality through its various shapes, starting with the commodity.¹⁰⁶

Traced from its most simple relation, the form of value expresses two poles – the relative and equivalent forms of value. Marx makes clear that the 'whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this simple form. Our real difficulty, therefore, is to analyse it.'¹⁰⁷ The linen is the commodity which expresses itself *relatively* in the coat, when it takes value in the coat as another other commodity. But at the same time, the relative form of value 'presupposes' the equivalent form, where another commodity provides the material for

¹⁰¹ *Cap* 1, 173-4. 'The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character. If then we make the mistake of treating it as the eternal natural form of social production, we necessarily overlook the specificity of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form together with its further developments, the money form, the capital form, etc.' *Cap* 1, 174n34.

¹⁰² *Cap* 1, 174.

¹⁰³ Simon Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 67-8.

¹⁰⁴ 'Each individual's production is dependent on the production of all others; and the transformation of his product into the necessities of his own life is [similarly] dependent on the consumption of all others. Prices are old; exchange also; but the increasing determination of the former by costs of production, as well as the increasing dominance of the latter over all relations of production, only develop fully, and continue to develop ever more completely, in bourgeois society, the society of free competition. What Adam Smith, in the true eighteenth-century manner, puts in the prehistoric period, the period preceding history, is rather a product of history. This reciprocal dependence is expressed in the constant necessity for exchange, and in exchange value as the all-sided mediation.' *Gr*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ *Cap* 1, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur makes the connection between this aspect of value and Hegel's understanding of the essence and appearance of absolute spirit, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 95.

¹⁰⁷ *Cap* 1, 139.

the value to be expressed relatively.¹⁰⁸ Both forms ‘are inseparable moments of the *same value-expression*: moments which belong to one another, and determine each other reciprocally’.¹⁰⁹ For 1) 20 yards of linen to be worth a coat, 2) this coat is also worth 20 yards of linen. These equations represent dialectically opposed poles, 1) the relative form of value where the linen finds its value in the coat; and 2) where the coat finds its value in the commodities expressed in its equivalent form. The place of the commodity in the value form determines the expression of their value.

Marx suggests this relation equalises the commodities to values, which share ‘*the same substance, having a like essence*’. It’s ‘value-being’ is given shape when it takes form in another commodity.¹¹⁰ Marx introduces human labour at this point. The problem of equating different kinds of labour (tailoring with weaving) needs to account for the characteristic that is equal to both.¹¹¹ Marx claims this is abstract human labour ‘because *abstraction* is made from the determinate, useful, concrete character of the labour contained in it – *labour power*, because in this case labour counts only as *expenditure of labour-power* in general’.¹¹²

Commodity production reduces the difference of the specific character of the labour in tailoring and the weaving to the abstract quality of ‘being human labour in general’. Marx makes two crucial points here: first, that only human labour in a particular ‘fluid state’, as labour-power, creates value; and, second, that ‘labour is not itself value’. Labour only becomes value when it is objectified [*Gegenständlichkeit*]; that is, when it is turned into its coagulated and thingified state.¹¹³ The materialisation of labour time forces the motion of labour process into a fixed ratio and result of a quantifiable measure.¹¹⁴ Marx argues that labour-power becomes ‘different’ and ‘yet common’ to all commodities. Labour-power becomes the generic measure for commodities. The concrete labour performed to create one commodity is then expressed in the physical form of another commodity, providing a certain magnitude of value. The individual relation of value between different commodities observable at the most general level of abstraction allows Marx to proceed step by step through comparison of the ‘value-being’ of the commodity. The quantity of

¹⁰⁸ *Cap* 1, 140.

¹⁰⁹ Marx, ‘The Form of Value’, 50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹¹ *Cap* 1, 142.

¹¹² Marx, ‘The Form of Value’, 52.

¹¹³ *Cap* 1, 142.

¹¹⁴ *Gr*, 143.

time needed to produce linen or coats might vary, but both commodities are shaped by their relation to each other as values.

This process is predicated on an inversion of labour activity in which labour-power is only realised when it is manifest in the commodity. The expended activity that has been performed in its production is realised as value. In this process, ‘the sensibly-concrete counts only as appearance-form of the abstract-universal’.¹¹⁵ Concrete qualifiable labour becomes abstract quantifiable labour. This stage, the relative-form, is given more determinations by examining abstract labour as the universal social form of production. The contradiction of abstract and concrete labour is expanded by placing it within its larger social context. Marx calls this social form – the dialectic between the relative and equivalent poles – the ‘value-form’, the ‘natural form of the commodity’.¹¹⁶

Marx suggests this social relation is made all the more mysterious since the equivalent form is constituted by the process in which ‘private-labour becomes the form of its opposite, becomes labour in an immediately social form’.¹¹⁷ It is connected by a ‘*system of social needs*’ in which the exchange of values mediates. According to Marx, ‘The product of private-labour therefore has a *social form only* insofar as it has *value-form* and therefore has the form of its exchangeability with another commodity, or *counts for another commodity as its value-form*’.¹¹⁸ If the value-form is comprised of private-labour congealed into commodities, which are related to each other first as opposite poles in unity (unity-in-difference), the next question that arises is their place in a social system. The question of trade arises from this dialectic. The determination of exchange and the category of the money-form is now possible.

At this point in Chapter One, Marx turns to Aristotle. He suggests that the peculiarities of the equivalent form

¹¹⁵ Marx, ‘The Form of Value’, 57.

¹¹⁶ *Cap* 1, 148.

¹¹⁷ Marx, ‘The Form of Value’, 57.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* In the ‘The Form of Value’, this point is where Marx first introduces money. However, since he incorporates this material into the first chapter which, money appears earlier with the first mention of exchangeability, *Cap* 1, 149. See also, Marx, ‘The Commodity’ in *Value*, 22.

will become still clearer if we go back to the great investigator who was the first to analyse the value-form, like so many other forms of thought, society and nature. I mean Aristotle.¹¹⁹

Marx's reasoning (for what might be otherwise seen as a literary divergence) is how the problem of value and exchange is conceptualised within the simple form of value, the basic contradiction within this form between use-value and value and the necessary inversion of private and social labour within this relation. The deficiency in political economy, which understands value as quantitative measure, results in the one-sided equation of value with exchange value.¹²⁰ Related to this inquiry is the modern inversion of quantity and quality in the expression of value, as it expresses itself in *the money-form*. Marx contrasts the ancients with this modern dualism:

Political economy, which first emerged as an independent science during the period of manufacture, is only able to view the social division of labour in terms of the division found in manufacture, i.e. as a means of producing more commodities with a given quantity of labour, and consequently of cheapening commodities and accelerating the accumulation of capital. In most striking contrast with this accentuation of quantity and exchange-value is the attitude of the writers of classical antiquity, who are exclusively concerned with quality and use-value.¹²¹

This later comment clarifies Aristotle's presence in Chapter One. The distinction between quality/quantity and use/exchange underlies much of the analysis of the commodity and Aristotle adumbrates the problems of this dualism for Marx.¹²² At the same time, the social form of labour can be demonstrated as a historically specific activity which is inverted private labour. Aristotle discusses the problem of exchange in terms of use-values and qualities, since 'in the category of quality there is justice'.¹²³ For Aristotle, trade is an action that falls within the concerns of justice. The subject of Book 5 is justice. The phenomenon Aristotle is investigating is reciprocity, the question of fairness

¹¹⁹ *Cap* 1, 151. In 'The Form of Value', Marx suggests Aristotle analysed the value-form 'more felicitously than his modern followers', 57.

¹²⁰ Marx, "Notes" on Adolph Wagner, 242.

¹²¹ *Cap* 1, 486. The division of labour in Plato's *Republic* and the 'many-sidedness of the needs of individuals' compared to 'the one-sidedness of their capabilities' limits Plato's understanding of Athenian society, see *Cap* 1, 486-7.

¹²² Arthur notes Hegel's influence on this point (but does not mention Aristotle), *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 187.

¹²³ *EE* 1217b30-1.

in exchange.¹²⁴ To ascertain how Aristotle's discussion of fairness and exchange prefigures Marx's analysis of the value form, the discussion in *Nicomachean Ethics* requires some attention. Marx presents the argument from *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.5, that if 5 beds = 1 house, this effectively means that 5 beds = a certain amount of money.¹²⁵ This equation relates simple exchange to its more developed expression in some other commodity.

First, Aristotle questions if exchange is proportionate or equal in 'communities for exchange'.¹²⁶ He holds that 'a city is maintained by proportionate reciprocity'.¹²⁷ Aristotle then gives the examples of: a) builder; b) shoemaker; c) house; and d) shoe. If the builder exchanges shoes from the shoemaker in return for a house, then 'first of all proportionate equality is found, and next, reciprocity is also achieved, the proportionate return will be reached'.¹²⁸ Objects of production are compared in terms of quantity and quality. However, if the products are not seen as equal, the trade would not hold and since the qualities of each product may well be different, an equaliser must be found.¹²⁹ This principle applies for producers, too, since 'no community [for exchange] is formed from two doctors. It is formed from a doctor and a farmer, and in general, from people who are different and unequal and who must be equalised'.¹³⁰ The relation of trade requires disparity of kind. What Aristotle is outlining here is the circuit C-C, the trade of one object of use for another.

¹²⁴ There is a general recognition that Aristotle's discussion of justice and commercial exchange anticipates Marx's value theory. See Anthony Kenny, Introduction to *EE*, xxvi and 165n. Notwithstanding these generally vague references, most commentators see this section as confused and unworthy of serious consideration. Further, in Kenny's case, he thinks this discussion possibly 'makes Aristotle an early advocate for the free market economy', *ibid.* The central argument of Scott Meikle's *Aristotle's Economic Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) is a critique of this kind of Anglophone scholarship that paints Aristotle in this light. He writes, 'The effect of the economic view is that market economy as a whole is represented as the unavoidable, or the most efficient means to the natural ends of living. On an Aristotelian view, this is an intellectual confusion with practical consequences because it involves a confusion of ends', 60. Further, Meikle's detailed treatment of *NE* 5.5 demonstrates the importance of this discussion to both Aristotle and Marx's metaphysics.

¹²⁵ *Cap* 1, 151; *NE* 1133b25.

¹²⁶ *NE* 1132b32. The *NE* shares 5, 6 and 7 with *EE* Books 4, 5 and 6. Where Irwin translates 'communities for exchange', Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collin put it as 'communities concerned with exchange' and C.D.C. Reeve as 'communities based on exchange', Kenny renders this passage as 'commercial association'. This translation gives Aristotle's meaning an unwarranted and modern implication, departing from the meaning of the Book, *EE* 1132b32. I would also add that Ross' standard translation as 'association of exchange' is also unclear. For a critique of Ross' translation, see Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 29-36, 50-1, *passim*.

¹²⁷ *NE* 1132b35.

¹²⁸ *NE* 1133a9-14.

¹²⁹ *NE* 1133b6-10

¹³⁰ *NE* 1133a15-19.

Next, 'if things are to be exchanged, they must be somehow capable of comparison'.¹³¹ It follows that currency is needed as a middle term, 'intermediate, since it measures everything'. Without legally recognised tender, there would be 'no exchange and no community'.¹³² Here currency acts as a medium to circulate goods. This measure fluctuates adding a difficulty to exchange.¹³³ However, Aristotle claims 'in reality, this measure is need' and currency is only a reflection of need. He writes:

currency has become a sort of pledge of need, by convention; in fact it has a name (*nomisma*)¹³⁴ because it is not by nature, but by the current law (*nomos*), and it is within our power to alter it and to make it useless.¹³⁵

Currency is not an end in itself, and thus not 'natural', but exists only as a means to make equal things of needs, qualities. For Aristotle, the good is what has a nature. All natures have a telos, an end in itself. For this reason, there is a metaphysical distinction between quality and quantity in use-value and exchange-value. The problem that Aristotle is trying to pinpoint is what is the characteristic shared by human artefacts that can be held equal in exchange. This creates a tension since the end of exchange, in its own terms, is not need, but only further exchange. Aristotle takes the exchange of beds and houses as an example of the kind of quantities that hold value in exchange.¹³⁶ Marx identifies this move as having an importance:

[Aristotle] further sees that the value-relation which provides the framework for this expression of value itself requires that the house should be qualitatively equated with the bed, and that these things, being distinct to the senses, could not be compared with each other as commensurable magnitudes if they lacked this essential identity. 'There can be no exchange,' he says, 'without equality, and no equality without commensurability'; Here, however, he falters, and abandons the further analysis of the form of value. 'It is, however, in reality, impossible that such unlike things can be commensurable,' i.e. qualitatively equal. This form of equation can only be something foreign to the true nature of the things, it is

¹³¹ *EE* 1133a-19-20.

¹³² *NE* 1133a25.

¹³³ This is clear again in *EE* 1243a27-32, 'one party claims the value of money at the time of lending, and the other the value at the time of repayment'; and, 1243b30-2: 'we must measure by a single standard, but a ratio rather than a number. We must measure by a proportion, in the way that a civic partnership is measured. How can a cobbler do business with a farmer, unless their products are equalised by proportion? In cases where exchanges are not of like for like, measurements must be by proportion'.

¹³⁴ Aristotle uses the word *nomisma*, which translates more accurately as legal currency, rather than the word for money, *chremata*.

¹³⁵ *NE* 1133a30-2.

¹³⁶ Meikle, *Aristotle's Economic Thought*, 14-15.

therefore only ‘a makeshift for practical purposes’. Aristotle therefore himself tells us what prevented any further analysis: the lack of a concept of value.¹³⁷

This passage points out the objective contradiction in Aristotle’s thought. Aristotle realises the expression of value rests upon the house’s qualitative equation with the bed, but without a measurable essence this equality would be incoherent. However, he is unable to see how the ‘common substance’ that represents the value expression between the bed and the house is equalised.

For Marx, Aristotle’s limitation is not in his particular line of inquiry, which stops short at the most crucial moment, but the universal restriction of his age. Aristotle did not understand freedom as the essence of being – in Hegel’s words, that ‘man is in and for himself free’.¹³⁸ Consequently, Aristotle could not see the abstract equivalence of human labour premised in this freedom. The Athenian polis was dependent on slavery for surplus extraction, hence founded on human inequality.¹³⁹ In this context, Aristotle ‘considered the *slave economy* as *non-transitory*’.¹⁴⁰ Here the ‘secret expression of value; namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labour because and in so far as they are human labour in general, could not be deciphered’. This formal equality necessitates a society based on commodity exchange, the leveller of all persons to buyer, sellers and ‘possessors’ of commodities.¹⁴¹ Marx continues,

Aristotle’s genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities. Only the historical limitation inherent in the society in which he lived prevented him from finding out what ‘in reality’ this relation of equality consisted of.¹⁴²

Accordingly, it would be impossible for Aristotle to come to a theory of value *before* the historical emergence of capital, for which value is an expression.¹⁴³ However, the

¹³⁷ *Cap* 1, 151.

¹³⁸ *LHP* 1, 49. See also, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 20-1.

¹³⁹ This conception is defended in Michael Lazarus, ‘Marx’s Concept of Class and the Athenian Polis’, *Eras*, 18:1 (2016): 21-37.

¹⁴⁰ Marx, “Notes” on Adolph Wagner’, 232.

¹⁴¹ *Cap* 1, 179.

¹⁴² *Cap* 1, 151-2. The 1867 version of this passage has ‘identity-relationship’ instead of ‘relation of equality’, ‘The Form of Value’, 58.

¹⁴³ *Cap* 1, 153-4. Castoriadis argues this conclusion is a non-sequitur. How can Marx praise Aristotle’s foresight but then claim its historical impossibility? Castoriadis argues that Marx’s incoherence is derived from his inability to resolve the tension between Aristotle’s *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (law) and results in a metaphysical antinomy. Castoriadis is especially critical of Marx’s concept of value as the substance of abstract labour but mistakenly conceives of Marx’s critique as one of *distribution* rather than production.

understanding of the identity of relations in the objects of production and the need for an independent expression of equality points to an important truth of the simple form of value. Aristotle was the first to philosophically probe at the abstract characteristic shared by both the house and the bed, demonstrating the complexity of this mysterious relation.¹⁴⁴ Aristotle points out the problem of justice in exchange in terms of the form and sociality of reciprocal relations.

In this way, Aristotle's *faltering*, his claim of impossibility for qualitative equality, *opens* the question that Marx charges political economy with failing to answer. Aristotle establishes an analysis of the relation between quality and quantity as conditioned by exchange. That Aristotle points to a fundamental contradiction between the ends of exchange and the ends of human needs suggests that an account of the social world in terms of quantities alone is insufficient to comprehend the relations between human actors and the social forms of existence that mediate experience in the social world. The end in itself of exchange begets no end internal to its function, but only its further expansion. In this way, the quantities of human products take on an importance that removes them from the qualitative requirement to fulfil human needs. With exchange, value 'obtains a separate existence, in isolation from the product'.¹⁴⁵ The inversion of quantity for quality is tied to the inversion of use-value and value. Marx's delineation of *Nicomachean Ethics* demonstrates how the problem first set out by Aristotle helps understand value as a human relation pertaining to justice. Marx shows that the reduction of human life activity to the value form turns labour into one-sided source of abstract activity, rather than the many-sided needs of the human producer. In this way, the metaphysics of the

While he notes the Aristotelian problematic Marx is drawing on, Castoriadis does little to prove Marx's concept of substance is transhistorical which weakens his core claim. 'Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Ourselves', 260-339. See Agnes Heller's reply, 'With Castoriadis to Aristotle; From Aristotle to Kant; From Kant to Us', *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales*, 27:86 (1989): 161-171. Heller compares Castoriadis to MacIntyre suggesting 'The modern person can conjure up Aristotle as either a hostile or a kindred spirit in relation to modernity. Castoriadis, similar to Arendt, chose the second path, MacIntyre the first.' 162. It appears to me that the reverse of this situation is true. Castoriadis locates the Aristotelian inheritance in Marx's aporia, whereas MacIntyre sees Aristotle's ethics as a *cure* for the conflicts of modernity.

¹⁴⁴ E.V Ilyenkov compares Aristotle to contemporary modes of abstraction, claiming that he 'is not interested merely in the proximate genus in which both [the house and shoes] may be included, if one so desires, but in the real genus of which he has a much more meaningful conception than that for which the school tradition in logic has made him responsible.' *The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2008), 94-7.

¹⁴⁵ *Gr*, 145.

commodity is a critical adaptation of Aristotle's ethical thought.¹⁴⁶ If Aristotle's metaphysics are situated in the world of use-values, Marx's investigation points to the domination of exchange value. What is significant in his adaption of Aristotle is that Marx shows the historical possibilities of comprehending social relations in the modern world.¹⁴⁷ In locating reciprocity in exchange as part of his ethical theory, Aristotle established a line of inquiry that Marx explicitly takes up. Not only do just relations require that the ends of particular forms of activity allow for human goods, but Aristotle's early examination of value shows that the intelligibility of reciprocity allows for the intelligibility of human reasoning. In introducing the problem of value as part of his political and ethical theory, Aristotle establishes that human practices must cultivate ethical reasoning. Likewise, Marx upholds this view. There can be no ethical life in a world defined by the unintelligibility of value.

Once the simple form of value is present as a whole, where the commodity-form expresses the double relation in which the concrete and abstract character of human labour manifest in the value relation of two commodities, the transition is now possible to the 'expanded form of value'.¹⁴⁸ This form allows many commodities, beyond the coat and the linen, with further determination of 'innumerable other members of the world of commodities'.¹⁴⁹ This transition parallels Hegel's introduction of the category 'quantity' from 'number' in the *Science of Logic*. After being-for-self is shown to a simple unity with being-for-one, this oneness is forced to confront other ones, repulsing and sublating the other ones in mutual attraction. This concept becomes 'a state of equilibrium; and quality, driven to a head in being-for-itself, passes over into quantity'.¹⁵⁰ The one meets 'many ones' in its state of repulsion and in a process of becoming, forms a unity of the one and many in attraction'.¹⁵¹ This allows Hegel to make the transition:

¹⁴⁶ Aristotle's place in *Capital* has been stressed by contemporary Aristotelians to help bring his metaphysics into the modern world. As Meikle argues, in the most comprehensive account of the problem of value in Aristotle's thought, 'Aristotle's metaphysics was a metaphysics of the solid world of use-value, and because of that he was able to frame the problem of exchange value. But he was unable to solve it for the same reason. On his metaphysics, the concepts needed for the solution are conceptual impossibilities.' 190.

¹⁴⁷ MacIntyre confirms this view, 'When [Marx] moves beyond Aristotle, in order to understand the distinctive economic forms and development of the modern world, he still employs key concepts as Aristotle used them: essence, potentiality, goal directedness', *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 94.

¹⁴⁸ Marx to Engels 27 June 1867, *MECW* 42, 393.

¹⁴⁹ *Cap* 1, 155.

¹⁵⁰ *SL*, 21.145.

¹⁵¹ *SL*, 21.156.

Quantity is sublated being-for-itself. The repelling one that behaved only negatively towards the excluded one, now that it has gone over in connection with it, behaves towards the other as identical to itself and has therefore lost its determination; being-for-itself has passed over into attraction. The absolute obduracy of the one has melted away into this unity which, however, as containing the one, is at the same time determined by the repulsion residing in it; as unity of the self-externality, it is unity with itself. Attraction is in this way the moment of continuity in quantity.¹⁵²

Measure allows the being of two commodities to be found in each other and for this form to be considered at a more determinate level.

The problem of an equivalent measure for value is developed in greater depth by Marx's analysis of the category of money. The money-form, or what he calls 'the universal equivalent' gives social validity to the social process of commodity exchange.¹⁵³ Money expresses the social connection between individuals as producers and sellers. With money, the 'social bond' between individuals is legitimised in the 'reciprocal' equalisation of exchange value. If one side of the 'isolated' production of individual exchange values is received back to the worker in the form of money (as wages), then the other side of this relation is 'exercised' in the ownership of exchange value as money, here the 'individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket'.¹⁵⁴ Money provides the basis of trust within social relationships. However, these relationships are misrecognised, since money (as appearance) expresses universal social meaning rather than labour relations (the actual essence of social relations).

Further, money takes a social role expressing the form of appearance of value. In this way, money has a historically specific form in capitalism.¹⁵⁵ Like the commodity, Marx understands money to be a more concrete expression of value.¹⁵⁶ He carefully demarcates the difference between pre-capitalist forms of currency, which act a medium for the

¹⁵² *SL*, 21.176.

¹⁵³ *Cap* 1, 162.

¹⁵⁴ *Gr*, 157.

¹⁵⁵ 'In antiquity, one could buy labour, a slave, directly; but the slave could not buy money with his labour. The increase of money could make slaves more expensive, but could not make their labour more productive.' *Gr*, 224.

¹⁵⁶ Money *expresses* value, making value exchange possible. Marx writes, 'Because price is not equal to value, therefore the value-determining element – labour time – cannot be the element in which prices are expressed, because labour time would then have to express itself simultaneously as the determining and the non-determining element, as the equivalent and non-equivalent of itself. Because labour time as the measure of value exists only as an ideal, it cannot serve as the matter of price comparisons... at the same time it becomes clear how and why the value relation obtains a separate material existence in the form of money.' *Gr*, 140.

exchange of goods at a local level and the form money takes in bourgeois society as an equivalent form of value in the generalised exchange and circulation of commodities, which act to accumulate.¹⁵⁷ While gold and precious metals have often been linked to money, to also provide a use-value, to stabilise economies, money as a social relation is given social weight as a ‘symbol’,¹⁵⁸ it ‘presupposes general recognition’.¹⁵⁹ Money acts as the ‘material representative of *universal* wealth’.¹⁶⁰ Marx refers to the paper currency of the French Revolution,¹⁶¹ which provided a form of money not necessarily tied to the material value of the commodity money. Marx understands the money form as fluid, but its being-and-becoming is its form as the expression of value.

The money-form makes it possible to grasp the fetishistic character of the commodity, the duality of value and the substance of value as human labour.¹⁶² Money acts as both a measure of value and a ‘standard of price’, relatable to the trade of commodities as abstract quantities.¹⁶³ Price gives a ‘money-name’ to the ratio between different commodities, but does not express the value of the commodity, only its appearance, exchange value. Money, through exchange, validates the entire social system.¹⁶⁴ The abstract nature of commodity production gives an abstract expression to the way that human relations appear, where things mediate human relations, naturalising and fetishising human consciousness. Money serves as a ‘social property’ precisely because the alienated relationship of individuals to isolated production creates a fetishism of things. Money embodies ‘the objectification [*Versachlichung*] of the social bond’, reproducing the exchange fetish in such a way as to instil a faith in the social operation of

¹⁵⁷ ‘The properties of money as (1) measure of commodity exchange; (2) medium of exchange ; (3) representative of commodities (hence object of contracts) ; (4) general commodity alongside the particular commodities, all simply follow from its character as exchange value separated from commodities themselves and objectified.’ *Gr*, 146. Further, capital is the unity of the production process and circulation, *Gr*, 320. Aristotle refers to money as a common measure for exchange in *NE* 1163b34-7.

¹⁵⁸ *Cap* 1, 185, 224; *Gr*, 170.

¹⁵⁹ *Gr*, 144.

¹⁶⁰ Karl Marx, ‘The Original Text of the Second and the Beginning of the Third Chapter of *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*’, *MECW* 29, 438. This draft is better known as the *Urtext*. Murray notes: ‘A comparison of the relevant sections of the *Grundrisse* and of the *Urtext* of *Toward the Critique of Political Economy* to the actual published text of the latter indicates the extent to which he censored many of the more interesting (and more Hegelian) methodological features of his own rough drafts.’, *Marx’s Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, 109.

¹⁶¹ *Cap* 1, 183.

¹⁶² *Gr*, 149.

¹⁶³ *Cap* 1, 192.

¹⁶⁴ As Michael A. Lebowitz notes, ‘exchange is the ‘truth’ of the commodity, the ‘truth’ of use-value and value, etc. It is the Becoming of the commodity as a thing-in-and-for-itself, as that which becomes by passing through its opposite (the equivalent) which is itself, its own form.’, ‘Explorations in the Logic of *Capital*’ in *Following Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), 91.

money in a way that far exceeds the recognition of human action. The exchange of money reflects the alienation of human labour and the fetishism money takes in a kind of 'faith'. Money is the 'dead pledge of society' – here Marx once again quotes from *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.5.¹⁶⁵ Humans confront each other at the market and money takes on a universal significance. The market allows for the reproduction of this form of abstract sociality through the quantifiable indicator of the individual control.

Money is 'impersonal' property. I can carry it around with me in my pocket as the universal social power and the universal social nexus, the social substance. Money puts social power as a thing into the hands of the private person, who as such uses this power.¹⁶⁶

As money, *social* power is expressed as an impersonal force commanded by individuals. This power acts to prevent the forms of interaction that would allow normative questions to be asked about how humans *should* interact with each other for collective goods. The idea of money as the 'dead pledge of society' helps to illuminate what is (ethically) absent from capitalist society: namely, sensuous, living and transparent relationships between concrete and rational actors. Money becomes the motivating force of interaction, reducing the meaning of many forms of human activity to its acquisition.

With the development of the commodity-form in Chapter One and Marx's introduction of the money-form from the 'germ of the commodity-form',¹⁶⁷ the concept of commodity fetishism is given new definition. Marx sharpens his discussion of the commodity to emphasise the fetish phantasmagoria that arises from its relation:

A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour. It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain

¹⁶⁵ *Gr*, 160.

¹⁶⁶ *Urtext*, *MECW* 29, 430.

¹⁶⁷ *Cap* 1, 163. 'After money is posited as a commodity in reality, the commodity is posited as money in the mind', *Gr*, 191.

grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.¹⁶⁸

Marx's analysis of the essence and appearance of the commodity demonstrates that the commodity-producing labour inverts needs for values and transparency for mystification.¹⁶⁹ This labour form is an abstract sociality, a social form based on abstract relations of activity.¹⁷⁰ If the production of use-values for human needs is visible and easily capable of fulfilment, labouring activity appears direct and apparent. However, the inversion that mystifies products of human activities lies in the very production of those objects, which take the form of commodities. This changes the nature of human products into indirect and distorted relations between humans and the products of their activity. The commodity takes on a life of its own, precisely because of the character of production. In this way, the mystification of the commodity arises from form of labour specific to value.

Marx understands productive activity as a distinctly 'organic' human function: 'whatever may be its nature or its form, [labour] is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles and sense organs'.¹⁷¹ This ontological quality of labour as activity becomes *quantified* in a very specific manner under the value form as labour-time. Labour activity is equalised as value, made measurable and comparable in a socially recognisable manner as 'socially necessary labour-time'. Marx is clear that as human activity, labour always takes a social form.¹⁷² Thus Marx's ontological understanding of labour is *not* transhistorical since it cannot be understood without its expression in a social form.¹⁷³ However, as activity it reflects an ontology that is socially conceived. Attempts to rip that labour activity from its social expression would be as ahistorical as the political economists' Robinson Crusoe.

¹⁶⁸ *Cap* 1, 163-4.

¹⁶⁹ 'In the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this.' *Cap* 1, 165.

¹⁷⁰ Also, 'The social character of activity, as well as the social form of the product, and the share of individuals in production here appear as something alien and objective, confronting the individuals, not as their relation to one another, but as their subordination to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals. The general exchange of activities and products, which has become a vital condition for each individual – their mutual interconnection – here appears as something alien to them, autonomous, as a thing.' *Gr*, 157.

¹⁷¹ The 1867 version makes more explicit the organicism: labour activity is 'a specifically *human* organism as distinguished from *other* organisms, and that every such function, whatever its content and its form, is essentially *expenditure of human* brain, nerve, muscle, organ of perception, etc.' 'The Commodity', 34.

¹⁷² *Cap* 1, 164.

¹⁷³ See Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, 136.

That is why the form of value is so important for Marx's concept of social being. If the quality of labour activity becomes objectified as value and quantified as labour-time, 'the relationship between the producers, within which the social characteristics of their labours are manifested, take on the form of a social relation between the products of labour'.¹⁷⁴ Not only does an inversion occur between the product and the producer, but Marx also notes the commodity takes the character of an abstract relation between producers within production.

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic *form* of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.¹⁷⁵

Transformed into a commodity defined by value, the use of such objects is negated by their exchange relation. The commodity form contains within it a fetishistic content.

Things made by humans in the form of the commodity become something supersensual, abstracted from human self-understanding. The things produced by humans take on a singular social importance, mediating the relations between humans through the production and then exchange of commodities. Relations between humans are not direct or visible but dominated and distorted by commodities and their form, which condition how people see themselves and the social world. The social relation between things is located in the historically specific form of abstract labour tied to commodity

¹⁷⁴ *Cap* 1, 164.

¹⁷⁵ *Cap* 1, 164-5.

production.¹⁷⁶ Money as equivalent form of value embodies the misrecognition of social actors, since it reflects a relation of value rather than a form of transparent interaction.

When labouring activity itself becomes the universal commodity and humans receive remuneration for time spent working in the form of the commodity money, relations between people are transmitted through abstract relations. This form of labour relations is inherently fetishistic:

Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic.¹⁷⁷

Transformed into a commodity defined by value, the use of such objects is negated by their exchange relation which determines the form. Value expresses its essence in its exchange. Adorno summarises this movement, as when ‘the social relation appears in the form of the exchange principle, as if it were the thing in itself’.¹⁷⁸

Human labour is objectified into commodities and appears as a feature of two separate processes – production and exchange. The separation of these two processes obscures their inner unity in the commodity form. Therefore the fetishism of production is in unity with the exchange of commodities.¹⁷⁹ In this way, Marx brings in the content from his discussion of money and simple circulation.

The commodity arises and expresses itself with the realm of exchange and this mode of being shapes a specific form of domination where people confront each other as owners and sellers of commodities, which crystallise as money. Human labour is divided socially and atomised into individuals who are dominated by abstract processes carried out behind their backs and in separation from other humans. Social relations, as vast

¹⁷⁶ ‘The general value-form, in which all the products of labour are presented as mere congealed quantities of undifferentiated human labour, shows by its very structure that it is the social expression of the world of commodities. In this way it is made plain that within this world the general human character of labour forms its specific social character.’ *Cap* 1, 160.

¹⁷⁷ *Cap* 1, 167.

¹⁷⁸ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2019), 54.

¹⁷⁹ This view of the inseparability but distinction between the commodity and commodity fetishism makes impossible the viability of a base/superstructure model for understanding Marx’s social theory. Not only does this model rely upon a dualistic and causal determinism, but if the commodity and its fetish come from the same moment, base/superstructure is inadequate in grasping the beginning of Marx’s understanding of capital.

processes of production, are essentially made asocial, which denies the possibilities of social production on a freely associated basis.

Things are in themselves external to man, and therefore alienable. In order that this alienation may be reciprocal, it is only necessary for men to agree tacitly to treat each other as the private owners of those alienable things, and, precisely for that reason, as persons who are independent of each other.¹⁸⁰

Removed from their own products and from production itself, the only form of interaction which is socially validated is the market. Here people relate to each other in a purely atomistic way and money takes on its true and ‘magical’ importance as mediator.¹⁸¹ In this social world, humans ‘relate to each other as *abstract social persons*, merely representing exchange value as such before each other’.¹⁸²

The objectification of production conceals the domination of the subject into commodity and exchange relations. Money provides a ‘material shape’ for the domination of the producers, dislocating their ‘control and their conscious individual action’. As commodities and money, objects come to dominate subjects.¹⁸³ This process, however, can only be fully comprehended by moving to the concept of capital.¹⁸⁴

Marx’s concept of capital comes after he develops the form of the commodity and money.¹⁸⁵ The discussion of money dialectically transitions into the concept of capital.¹⁸⁶ Capital is the process between things. As a process, capital moves from money to commodity and back to money. However, this movement *self-expands*, accumulates in surplus-value, circulating and articulating as profit. The reason capital moves from money to commodity is not to satisfy the capitalist’s desire for a use-value so much as to

¹⁸⁰ *Cap* 1, 182.

¹⁸¹ *Cap* 1, 187.

¹⁸² *Urtext*, *MECW* 29, 430. My emphasis.

¹⁸³ *Cap* 1, 187.

¹⁸⁴ While the discussion of the fetish character of the commodity and money in Marx’s thought is well known, the philosophical implications for social theory is impossible without his concept of capital.

¹⁸⁵ As Marx writes, ‘thus capital does not originally realise itself – precisely because the appropriation of alien labour [*fremde Arbeit*] is not itself included in its concept. Capital appears only afterwards, after already having been presupposed as capital – a vicious circle – *as command over alien labour*. Thus, according to A. Smith, labour should actually have its own product for wages, wages should be = to the product, hence labour should not be wage labour and capital not capital. Therefore, in order to introduce profit and rent as original elements of the cost of production, i.e. in order to get a surplus value out of the capitalist production process, he *presupposes* [emphasis M.L.] them, in the clumsiest fashion’. *Gr*, 330.

¹⁸⁶ For a defence of transition as dialectical (rather than assumed) and a critical discussion of the literature, see Søren Mau, ‘The Transition to Capital in Marx’s Critique of Political Economy’, *Historical Materialism*, 26:1 (2018): 68-102.

return to the capitalist the initial capital *plus* accumulated capital.¹⁸⁷ In Marx's view, capital itself is a form of value which consists in the form of social labour specific to commodity production. Capital *realises* itself as value by the production and circulation process, in 'the moments of its metamorphosis'. In its change from one form to the next, capital appears as money and then as a commodity, 'then again as exchange value, then again as use value'. According to Marx, each part of this process is 'the transition to the other. Capital is thus posited as value-in-process, which is capital in every moment'.¹⁸⁸ Capital is the self-expansion of value, expressing itself in the forms of commodities and money in this process.

The circulation of commodities through successive stages changes commodities into money and money into commodities, antithetical processes that create a circuit predicated on the sale and purchase of abstract labour expressed in its various forms. The sale of C for M and M for C hides the real relation of alienated labour and makes the products of human beings secondary to the sale and purchase of things.¹⁸⁹ Social power is found in the money-commodity and its power to expand gives priority to non-stop accumulation.¹⁹⁰

The generalised circulation of commodities allows capital to develop.¹⁹¹ The cycle, M-C-M' expresses the need for capital to self-expand, to valorise itself as a social relation. The simple circuit C-M-C, based on the 'satisfaction of needs' as expressed by Aristotle, is inverted as 'the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself', where valorisation is a 'constantly renewed movement'.¹⁹² No longer do we sell in order to buy, but we buy in order to sell. The M-C-M' circuit points to continual self-expansion. In this circuit, money is transformed from a simple mediator of exchange to a form of capital.

Marx's category of capital distinctively demarcates wealth from the physical embodiment of money and commodities, to capital as the *telos* of value as a relation which, once universal defines and justifies the earlier categories of analysis. Unlike wealth in the simple form of money or commodities, capital must expand to increase its value. Since

¹⁸⁷ Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology*, 78.

¹⁸⁸ *Gr*, 536.

¹⁸⁹ *Cap* 1, 200-9.

¹⁹⁰ *Cap* 1, 230-1.

¹⁹¹ *Cap* 1, 247-8.

¹⁹² *Cap* 1, 253.

its motion, the shape it takes in various other forms is crucial to its nature. Capital's end is simply *more* capital. Thus value's being-and-becoming is capital, but capital itself has no end other than itself. After outlining the general formula for capital, Marx writes, 'The movement of capital is therefore limitless.'¹⁹³ This key claim for Marx's unique understanding of modernity has both an Aristotelian and Hegelian dimension. Marx's footnote to this quotation adds:¹⁹⁴

Aristotle contrasts economics with 'chrematistics'. He starts with economics. So far as it is the art of acquisition, it is limited to procuring the articles necessary to existence and useful either to a household or the state. 'True wealth (ο αληθινος πλουτος) consists of such use-values; for the amount of property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited. There is, however, a second mode of acquiring things, to which we may by preference and with correctness give the name of chrematistics, and in this case there appear to be no limits to riches and property. Trade (εκαπελικε is literally retail trade, and Aristotle chooses this form because use-values predominate in it) does not in its nature belong to chrematistics, for here the exchange only has reference to what is necessary for (the buyer or the seller) themselves.' Therefore, as he goes on to show, the original form of trade was barter, but with the extension of the latter there arose the necessity for money. With the discovery of money, barter of necessity developed into καπελικε, into trading in commodities, and this again, in contradiction with its original tendency, grew into chrematistics, the art of making money. Now chrematistics can be distinguished from economics in that 'for chrematistics, circulation is the source of riches ποιητικε χρηματων ... δια χρηματων διαβολεσ. And it appears to revolve around money, for money is the beginning and the end of this kind of exchange (το νομισμα στοιχειον τεσ αλλαγες εστιν). Therefore also riches, such as chrematistics strives for, are unlimited. Just as every art which is not a means to an end, but an end in itself, has no limit to its aims, because it seeks constantly to approach nearer and nearer to that end, while those arts which pursue means to an end are not boundless, since the goal itself imposes a limit on them, so with chrematistics there are no bounds to its aims, these aims being absolute wealth. Economics, unlike chrematistics, has a limit ... for the object of the former is something different from money, of the latter the augmentation of money . . . By confusing these two forms, which overlap each other, some people have been led

¹⁹³ *Cap* 1, 253.

¹⁹⁴ Ben Fowkes, the translator of the 1976 *New Left Review* edition of *Cap* 1, compares Marx's own translation of the Greek to the standard English edition of *The Politics* by Jowett, to suggest Marx's choice of 'circulation' over 'gaining wealth through exchange', 'economics' over 'the art of household management' and 'chrematistics' over 'the art of getting wealth' is reflective of the argument he wants to make, rather than an accurate translation, 254n. Arthur dismisses this interpretation, suggesting Marx did not superimpose his own meaning but offered a 'transliteration' of the Greek words keeping with Aristotle's meaning, in marked distinction from contemporary German translations. Arthur's point confirms the sharpness of Marx's reading of Aristotle, where his translation brings out meaning for his critical discussion, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 151n23.

to look upon the preservation and increase of money *ad infinitum* as the final goal of economics' (Aristotle, *De Republica*, ed. Bekker, lib. I, c. 8, 9, *passim*).¹⁹⁵

Marx's lengthy footnote is remarkable for two main reasons. First, through an engagement with Book 1 of *The Politics*, Marx is explicit that chrematistics (as money wealth) is a distinct form of wealth to be negatively contrasted with 'economics'. The latter is the inquiry into finite uses – relevant to the *polis* or the household – as *value in use*. Aristotle's example of 'retail trade' appears simple, as the use exchange between buyers and sellers, developing from barter to currency. Alternatively, chrematistics is 'the art of wealth-getting' predicated on the 'notion that riches and property have no limit'.¹⁹⁶ This art is an end in itself, severed from the use of goods (as their own end). Without limits, chrematistics seeks 'absolute wealth'. Marx turns to Aristotle to point out the novelty of the modern view of wealth accumulation as a natural part of production. Rather, Aristotle finds that chrematistics (however primitive) cannot be an end in itself since its function dislocates the connection between needs and trade. Secondly, through Aristotle, Marx is making the point that the question of wealth creation is an ethical one. By examining how wealth creation is essential to the logic of the social world, Marx provides a normative claim that capital is a fundamental barrier to ethical life. The domination of capital makes abstract the forms of interaction which would allow social relationships to be socially understood and meaningfully preserved in shared forms of association.

Marx also explicitly is endorsing Aristotle's teleological conception of ethics and affirming that capital is *incompatible* with this view.¹⁹⁷ In the next chapter Marx makes this even clearer, quoting from the same sections of *The Politics* but adding that, chrematistics 'is not based on Nature, but on mutual cheating'.¹⁹⁸

Considering the role of Aristotle at vital points of Marx's value theory, shows that traditional readings that have rejected the ethical argument in *Capital* have serious failings. Not only does Marx draw favourably from Aristotle to further historicise his own concepts, but he points out repeatedly that the investigation of value allows for an understanding human activity as relations mediated by living and dead labour. This

¹⁹⁵ *Cap* 1, 253-4n6. See also, *Pol.* 1256a1-1258b10.

¹⁹⁶ *Pol.* 1256b40.

¹⁹⁷ This is confirmed in the *Urtext*, 'Aristotle regards the form of circulation $C-M-C$, in which money functions only as measure and coin—a movement which he calls economic—as natural and reasonable, and brands the form $M-C-M$, the chrematistic one, as unnatural and inappropriate.' *MECW* 29, 488.

¹⁹⁸ *Cap* 1, 267.

process is the objectification of life to the domination of limitless accumulation. What is expressed in this process is a relation of misrecognition. Value acts to hinder humans from recognising each other as rational and transparent social actors in a world of their own making. Humans cannot be home in a world defined by value, but the necessary struggle over the very existence of value suggests not just an ethical rejection of capital but a normative sense of the forms of activity that must be mutually recognised. Ethical life allows sociality to be understood as part of a social fabric which allows for a many-sided existence made conscious through a social world we are at home in.

Moreover, Marx's claim that capital is limitlessness looks not only to Aristotle but to Hegel. For Hegel, the movement of consciousness unfolds by the negativity of the subject. The absolute is not just substance but equally subject, an advance from the ancient view that put substance over subject. Instead, according to Hegel,

The living substance is, moreover, Being which is in truth *subject*, or, what comes to the same thing, Being which is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of self-positing, or is the mediation of becoming-other-to-itself with itself. As subject, substance is pure *simple negativity*, and for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; or the opposing duplication, which is again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its opposition: it is only this self-restoring equality, or reflection into itself in otherness – not an *original* unity as such, or *immediate* unity as such – that is the true. The true is the becoming of itself, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, and has its end as its beginning, and is only actual through implementation and its end.¹⁹⁹

The subject, as being, comes to know itself as part of reality, as a determination of the absolute as substance. Hegel conceives of the movement of the subject as self-mediated, finding itself in other forms but returning and negating into knowledge of itself. Hegel is not insisting on a form of pure subjectivity, but a view of the relation between the speculative absolute and the unfolding of its determinations by the force of their internal logics.

For Marx, value acts in a similar way. First, in the fetishism of the commodity and money forms, in which social relations appear in the form of exchange as things. Consciousness of the social system is located in the social forms that pertain to value. Secondly, in the sense that abstract labour is the substance of value. Capital's self-movement and

¹⁹⁹ *PbG*, ¶18/11. 'Substance' is often taken here to be Spinozist, however Hegel is clear that the 'unity' of the subjective spirit is 'not the substance of Spinoza, but the apprehending substance is self-consciousness which makes itself eternal and relates to universality'. *LHP* 1, 73.

accumulation is the being-and-becoming of the valorisation of abstract labour-time. The substance (abstract labour) becomes subject (value). Capital's process of self-valorisation can be considered the absolute, since the 'dominant subject' of modern social relations is value. Marx makes the claim:

In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorises itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorisation is therefore self-valorisation [*Selbstverwertung*]. By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It brings forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs. As the dominant subject [*ilbergreifendes Subjekt*] of this process, in which it alternately assumes and loses the form of money and the form of commodities, but preserves and expands itself through all these changes, value requires above all an independent form by means of which its identity with itself may be asserted.²⁰⁰

Capital seeks to perpetually increase its value, continually mystifying the human activity secreted as the substance of its form. The 'golden egg', abstract labour, is made to yield constant returns as surplus-value and the worker's life activity is excluded from universality. Capital can only be particular, driven into internal competition and fragmented as many capitals.²⁰¹ Value is socially understood only in its mystified, *misrecognised*, form. In this insight, not only does Marx suggest that the substance of value is comprised of abstract and alienated activity, but that value is held separate from its human essence. Value has no human end, only the self-preservation of its particular abstract form of domination.

In the above passage, value is seen to define its own movement speculatively, through its validation of the social forms that gives it content.²⁰² According to Marx's understanding that 'value is subject', value acts as a *self-moving substance* determining the 'mere forms' of value in the commodity and money.²⁰³ The implications of this view are profound, since Marx replicates Hegel's speculative proposition that 'subject is substance'.

²⁰⁰ *Cap* 1, 255.

²⁰¹ *Gr*, 590.

²⁰² This passage is crucial for the value form interpretation of Marx. See Postone, *Time, Labour, Social Domination*, 71-75; Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, 216; Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 137-152; Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 110-12.

²⁰³ *Cap* 1, 256.

Postone notes that Marx ‘explicitly characterises capital as the self-moving substance which is subject’.²⁰⁴ Likewise, Rose’s comment that Marx’s critique of political economy demonstrates how ‘substance is ((mis)-represented as) subject’ can be pushed in this context to account for the concept of capital.²⁰⁵ Capital’s movement and self-expansion conceptually mirrors Hegel’s understanding of the absolute as the infinite. Capital is depicted as *the absolute* of modern social relations, where the self-expansion of capital through its own valorisation outlines a circular movement of social form. Capital ‘is not a simple relation, but a *process*, in whose various moments it is always capital’.²⁰⁶ Capital seeks to overcome every barrier, every limit, every border in its motivation to accumulate. In the modern world, capital becomes absolute. Self-moving, capital dominates social life being. Its being is also its nothingness. Comprising of nothing but relation, capital objectifies life activity into alienated, abstract modes of being.²⁰⁷

The upshot of this analysis is that it makes clear the speculative character of Marx’s comprehension of capital. The self-movement of value as the substance of abstract labour and capital as value in-process motivates both the subjectivity of capital and the objectivity of alienated labour. By making explicit the valorisation process, this speculative logic binds the theory of fetishism to the objectivity of social forms that take on the logic of capital. This process reflects the contradictions inherent in these social forms which appear mystified. The fetishisation of the commodity and money is derived from understanding that value is a process which is comprised of the abstract and alienated character of commodity production. As a form of *misrecognition*, capital upholds a unity of substance and subject in which the experience of social actors is fetishised and the sociality of relations is abstract.

This barrier is inherent in the form of capital itself. In a direct sense, capital is pure *form*. The content of this relation is pure form. Tony Smith suggests capital should be seen ‘a ‘pseudo-subject’, since

²⁰⁴ Postone, *Time, Labour, Social Domination*, 75. Christopher J. Arthur’s critique of Postone retains this point but makes some useful objections to a slippage between ‘value’ and ‘capital’, see ‘Subject and Counter-Subject’, *Historical Materialism*, 12:3 (2004): 93-102.

²⁰⁵ *HCS*, 232.

²⁰⁶ *Gr*, 258.

²⁰⁷ Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, 156.

Capital is Everything, an Absolute Subject subsuming every nook and cranny of social life to the imperatives of commodification, monetarisation, and valorisation. But capital is equally Nothing in and of itself, a mere Pseudo-subject, a parasite, a ghost, a 'vampire', whose self-valorisation turns out to be nothing but a forced appropriation of the creative powers of living labour (and the powers of science, machinery, nature, pre-capitalist cultural achievements, and so on, that living labour mobilises). In one sense these capacities are capacities of capital. But in another sense capital, as pure form, has *no* capacities on its own. Once created and mobilised, the capacities of living labour remain capacities of living labour, even after they have been incorporated within capital circuits as moments of capital's self-valorisation.²⁰⁸

This conception of capital as both an absolute subject and a pseudo-subject reflects the contradictory form of experience resulting from the value form. Living labour is itself contradictory, expressing the concrete side of an alienated form of activity. However, the centrality of this dynamic allows for a sophisticated view of necessary illusion that arises from abstract social relations. Marx's critique of political economy develops the conceptual categories that allow for capital to be understood speculatively, through the unfolding of the social forms specific to value. *Beginning* with the commodity and in its procession to capital, the speculative path of his object of investigation is given definition. Capital is unfolded from the commodity-form and the dualism of abstract and concrete labour is grasped in its historically shape as a form of domination.

Marx's concept of capital poses an ongoing question for social theory, since any concept of subjectivity must address this relation. Not only does human subjectivity and the subjectivity of capital spring from the same relation, but Marx's understanding of capital provides not only for economic analysis but an understanding of the forms of social life specific to the modern world. Marx goes beyond utopian opponents of capitalism by both providing a moral objection to its symptoms and a systematic view of the dynamics of its constitutive forms. In this analysis, Marx shows how value is composed and necessarily misrecognised in abstract sociality. Abstract labour mediates all relationships and through the fetish of commodities and money, human consciousness is determined by exchange. Marx conceives of recognition as the universality of social life in which the substance of human life activity is free and the constitution of social life is rationally decided by just intuitions and shared association.

²⁰⁸ Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 129.

Part 3

The categories of value – commodities, money and capital – provide the architectonic for the later increasingly concrete conceptual developments in Marx's social theory. After treating the commodity, exchange and money in Part One and the transformation of money into capital in Part Two, Part Three of *Capital*, Volume One examines the production process. As such, capital in production is the next conceptual form examined by Marx. A key concern to Marx's idea of sociality is how capital in production shapes human interaction. The production process illustrates how labour is valorised and in the form of labour-power becomes capital-positing. The purpose of the discussion in this chapter, however, is how the labour-process and human co-operation inform Marx's thinking of the social individual in close reference to Aristotle's social ontology. Aristotle's presence in *Capital* also helps inform the understanding of domination *within* the labour-process.

The labour process bridges the 'potentiality' presented by the seller of labour-power to the 'actuality' of the worker in the activity of labouring. Marx starts with the standpoint of the worker whose purposeful activity mediates between nature and the instruments of production and is then objectified in the product of labour. This form of interaction is presented indeterminately, a first-level ontology which is necessary for adding layers of complexity to the basic production process (such as advanced productive process, machinery etc). Marx begins by claiming the labour process is under the control of capital, in which the capitalist buys the use-value of such activity.

Before Marx analyses the specific process of capital producing activity, he makes a long remark about human labour:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. We are not dealing here with those first

instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level. An immense interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity from the situation when human labour had not yet cast off its first instinctive form. We presuppose labour in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic. A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work and the way in which it has to be accomplished, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as the free play of his own physical and mental powers, the closer his attention is forced to be.²⁰⁹

This passage points to a consistency in Marx's social ontology.²¹⁰ Labour is constitutive of a distinctly human capability in its conscious control. The example Marx gives of the animal labourer *without* the conscious labour of the mind, invites comparison with the concept of labour Marx developed elsewhere. Two passages are worth alluding to in this context. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx writes:

The practical creation of an *objective world*, the *fashioning* of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being, i.e. a being which treats the species as its own essential being or itself as a species-being. It is true that animals also produce. They build nests and dwellings, like the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc. But they produce only their own immediate needs or those of their young; they produce one-sidedly, while man produces universally; they produce only when immediate physical need compels them to do so, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need; they produce only themselves, while man reproduces the whole of nature; their products belong immediately to their physical bodies, while man freely confronts his own product. Animals produce only according to the standards and needs of the species to which they belong, while man is capable of producing according to the standards of every species and of applying to each object its inherent standard; hence man also produces in accordance with the laws of beauty.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Cap* 1, 283-3.

²¹⁰ Postone side-steps the problems this passage might have for his anti-ontological reading by failing to quote the full passage and then suggesting the appearance of an ontological position is due to ordering. See, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 279.

²¹¹ *EPM*, 328-9.

The human species-being produces universality with a consciousness in the labouring act itself. Humans separates themselves from bees because of their ability to go beyond immediate to more complex needs, which include the imagination and production *beyond* immediate needs in aesthetics. Again, in the *Grundrisse* he uses the equivalent language to describe the social relation of two producers in the labour process. This discussion, as in Chapter 7 of *Capital*, locates the use value of labour for the capitalist in the formal equality of the market,

The fact that this need on the part of one [the capitalist] can be satisfied by the product of the other [labourer], and vice versa, and that the one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other's need, this proves that each of them reaches beyond his own particular need etc., as a human being, and that they relate to one another as *human beings*; that their common species-being [*Gattungswesen*] is acknowledged by all. It does not happen elsewhere - that elephants produce for tigers, or animals for other animals. For example. A hive of bees comprises at bottom only one bee, and they all produce the same thing.²¹²

Marx's concept of labour remains remarkably similar, down to the examples used to illustrate the difference between the conscious labour of humans and activity of animals. The importance of this concept is that the nature of the production process and the resulting concept of surplus value requires a view of the social ontology of labour as productive activity that defines human *pave* animal being.

From the standpoint of labour, Marx's focus is on how the object of labour is mediated by human activity,²¹³ which fulfils human needs,²¹⁴ and is transformed by human control and agency.²¹⁵ Labour activity is a living force, a Promethean 'fire' which, through its 'energy', allows a process of transformation; it has the power to 'awaken' old materials and beyond rust and rot, from their death into new use-values.²¹⁶ This activity Marx describes as 'the functions appropriate to their concept'.²¹⁷ In this sense, the concept of labour views activity as ontologically constitutive. Marx does not posit this view as transhistorical but as *necessarily* 'simple and abstract'. Productive activity is *life activity*,

²¹² *Gr*, 243.

²¹³ *Cap* 1, 286.

²¹⁴ *Cap* 1, 287.

²¹⁵ *Cap* 1, 288.

²¹⁶ Of Heraclitus' 'metamorphosis of fire', Hegel writes that 'These are thus not still, dead starts, but are regarded as in Becoming, as being eternally productive', *LHP* 1, 289.

²¹⁷ *Cap* 1, 289.

‘common to all forms of society in which human beings live’.²¹⁸ Marx retains a concept of human essence here. However, this is not to misunderstand Marx’s motivation by insisting on a transhistorical concept of labour.²¹⁹ Rather, Marx locates his concept of human essence in a detailed analysis of social forms in which his social ontology informs further layers of analysis. This interpretation avoids claiming either that Marx never really meant these comments (that they present an inexplicable anomaly) or that they are marginal to his critique of political economy.²²⁰ Instead, *Capital* affirms the view that ‘the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.’²²¹ Social forms are historical expressions of the human essence. In his investigation of the essence of value, Marx highlights the abstract form of labour specific to capital. In Marx’s mature critical theory, abstract labour is a more determined notion of alienation.²²²

This intent is made clear by the next step in Marx’s argument. After investigating the standpoint of labour from its most simple ontological relation, he shifts to explain the perspective of capital, to investigate how abstract social labour is valorised in the production process.²²³ Here the capitalist appears as the buyer of the commodity of labour-power who purchases for use this capability and consumes it through the time purchased from the worker within the production process. Given that the capitalist puts humans to work with what they *already own* in the means of production, the ‘labour process is a process between things the capitalist has purchased, things which belong to him’.²²⁴ The use-value of labour-power is then objectified into commodities that bear value. The sale of this commodity and the profit of exchange motivate the whole

²¹⁸ *Cap* 1, 290.

²¹⁹ For example, Kohei Saito erroneously attempts to both draw from value-form theory and construct a transhistorical conception of labour, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 100-4.

²²⁰ Callinicos defends this last claim, suggesting ‘the problematic of alienation remains in *Capital* but no longer does it play the central explanatory role’. Callinicos argues that alienation is present, but the oppositions abstract/concrete labour etc. bear the ‘explanatory burden’, *Deciphering Capital*, 226-7. This view is at odds with the claim that abstract labour is equivalent to alienation, which then follows that alienation given much further explanatory power in his mature writings.

²²¹ Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, *EW*, 423.

²²² This conceptually ties alienation to the human essence. For Postone, Marx’s value theory discards any social ontology and theory of human essence. He associates this with a transhistorical position, see *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*, 38, 47, 61-3, *passim*. Postone’s analysis of the presuppositions of ‘Traditional Marxism’ has some power, as does his analysis of value and time. However, his concept of labour is limited without a social ontology. Postone struggles to explain the presence of ‘species capacities’ in *Capital* and glosses over Marx’s argument, suspending the concept of alienation without a sense of what it is being alienated from, see *ibid.*, 328.

²²³ ‘Let us now return to our would-be capitalist.’ *Cap* 1, 291.

²²⁴ *Cap* 1, 291-2.

process. In this discussion, Marx further concretises the initial dialectic of use-value and value, with the unity of the labour process and value expansion [*Wertbildungsprozess*].²²⁵ In this process, 'Productive capital becomes product, commodity, money, and is transformed back into the conditions of production. It remains capital in each of these forms, and it becomes capital only by realising itself as such.'²²⁶

The labour process allows value to be renewed through its valorisation. Labouring activity is specified and measured in labour-time and further quantified in the socially necessary time required for such acts.²²⁷ Labouring activity is continually directed from one object to another, a process in which

the worker's labour constantly undergoes a transformation, from the form of unrest [*Unruhe*] into that of being [*Sein*], from the form of motion [*Bewegung*] into that of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*].²²⁸

Living labour becomes dead and objectified 'into capital, value which can perform its own valorisation process, an animated monster which begins [in Goethe's words] to "work", "as though he had love in his guts!"'.²²⁹ The valorisation of new value is now possible precisely because the labour form as labour-power and labour-time is *abstract social labour*.²³⁰ This relationship is explicitly one of domination, in which time is emptied of its specific qualitative function and quantified to meet 'social necessity'.²³¹

The production process is further elaborated through its generalisation, through the form of labour specific to the capitalist mode of production: large scale, industrial production involving huge work places and many workers. This development allows further determinations to figure in Marx's understanding of capital.²³² Marx puts this collective form of labour under the heading 'co-operation' which reflects the simple and general character of social production.²³³

²²⁵ *Cap* 1, 293.

²²⁶ *Gr*, 724.

²²⁷ *Cap* 1, 316-332.

²²⁸ *Cap* 1, 296.

²²⁹ *Cap* 1, 302. I have modified the translation above following Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, trans. David Constantine (London: Penguin, 2005), 72.

²³⁰ See *Cap* 1, 308.

²³¹ *Cap* 1, 435. See Postone's excellent discussion, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, 190-200.

²³² *Cap* 1, 439.

²³³ Smith, *The Logic of Marx's Capital*, 126.

In Chapter One, Marx claims commodity production involves a dualism when ‘private labour takes the form of its opposite, namely labour in its directly social form’.²³⁴ This is elaborated in Chapter 13 as ‘Co-operation’. The historical and conceptual starting point for capitalist production is large numbers of workers ‘working together, at the same time, in one place’ under the command of a single capitalist.²³⁵ While this at first is only a matter of quantity, this method of production becomes generalised and the ‘labour objectified in value’ becomes a socially measurable amount of labour-power.²³⁶ A qualitative shift has occurred. Under capital, the labour process has become collective. Marx writes:

When numerous workers work together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in a different but connected process, this form of labour is called co-operation.²³⁷

In this way, isolated labour processes are brought together and unified. Marx sees the content of this form of labour as fully developed. Not only is there a revolutionised productive power, but the collective nature of production expresses the contradiction of the form of wage labour. The social process of production, however, is always mediated and fetishises the thingness of exchange. While still abstract, estranged labour that separates and denies a full realisation of human capacities, when exerted together, the workers’ abilities are fused and the ability of the individual worker is carried by the spirit and dynamism of collectivity. At this point of Marx’s argument, Aristotle enters:

This originates from the fact that man, if not as Aristotle thought, a political animal (ζῷον πολιτικόν), is at all events a social animal.

In the footnote Marx adds:

The real meaning of Aristotle’s definition is that man is by nature a citizen of a town (Stadtbürger). This is quite as characteristic of classical antiquity as Franklin’s definition of man as a tool-making animal is characteristic of Yankeedom.²³⁸

²³⁴ *Cap* 1, 151.

²³⁵ *Cap* 1, 439.

²³⁶ *Cap* 1, 440.

²³⁷ *Cap* 1, 443.

²³⁸ *Cap* 1, 444. Marx references Franklin’s definition of humans as ‘tool-making animals’ approvingly earlier, *Cap* 1, 286. Weber’s discussion of Franklin’s utilitarianism and the view of man as a money making animal ‘devoid of all eudemonistic’ motivations is interesting in this context; see *The Protestant Ethic and the ‘Spirit’ of Capitalism*, 9-13.

Here Marx seems to distance himself from the straightforward adoption of Aristotle's term (as used, for example, in the *Grundrisse*).²³⁹ However, in both contexts Marx stresses the notion of sociality over the political nature of humans. Marx objects to Aristotle's definition of the human as having just a *political* nature, as a polis-dweller, since the historical polis conditions the concept.²⁴⁰ Any move to project a concept of humanity on such a model would be another ahistorical Robinsonade. However, this quotation does not set Marx at odds with Aristotle as a whole; rather, he demonstrates the essential difference between Aristotle's social ontology and his own historicising notion of being, within the same tradition of ethical reasoning.

For Aristotle, the political animal comes after their relation to the household, a gregarious relationship of a 'special' kind, in which the household gives ground for the political being of the citizen.²⁴¹ However, Marx moves beyond the limitations of Aristotle's ontology. Sociality has a different content. Not only do humans live in political communities, but these political relationships must be understood by their social character. Marx follows Aristotle in seeing societal organisation as a manifestation of human nature,²⁴² but sees the form of labour as the defining feature of society. It is not just society in general that allows for a human *telos* but a rationally ordered society. In this way, Marx's social ontology is historically specific, incorporating a view of human capacity and ends with the historical shape of social relations. Here Marx's social animal denotes the historical shape of labour relations set within a specific mode of production.²⁴³ Sociality takes expression through the ontological form of being, as determined by definite modes of social interaction. In this way, the human essence is a reflection of history as actually, but also a reflection of the potentiality for a higher form of social interaction that is both rational and collective.

²³⁹ 'The human being is in the most literal sense a ζῷον πολιτικόν, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society', *Gr* 84. See my discussion in the previous chapter.

²⁴⁰ In interpreting this passage Luca Basso erroneously distances Marx from Aristotle, arguing 'What we have here is not so much a "trace" of Aristotle, as a bringing-into-relief of the process of individuation entailed within the capitalist process of co-operation among many individuals and the social potential arising from their labouring activity', *Marx and the Commons*, trans. David Broder (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 124.

²⁴¹ *EE* 1242a22-8.

²⁴² Scott Meikle, 'History of Philosophy: The Metaphysics of Substance in Marx', in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 305.

²⁴³ This meaning is evident in Marx's reference to Wagner's individualist 'non-herd animal; if it is man situated in any form of society', "Notes" on Adolph Wagner', 235.

Marx's discussion in Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 allows labour activity to be comprehended as a unity of ontologically constitutive historical processes. The productive power of social labour, Marx writes, 'arises from co-operation itself. When the worker co-operates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species'.²⁴⁴ If human potentiality is conceivable only with co-operation, Marx shows how this potential is inverted by the domination of capital. The capitalist defines the terrain for co-operation, purchasing the labour-power of each worker simultaneously under conditions established and imposed by the capitalist (however regulated). The mode of production as a totality is mediated by capitalists who control parts of the total capital and oversee component parts of the production process:

All directly social or communal labour on a large scale requires, to a greater or lesser degree, a directing authority, in order to secure the harmonious co-operation of the activities of individuals, and to perform the general functions that have their origin in the motion of the total productive organism, as distinguished from the motion of its separate organs. A single violin player is his own conductor: an orchestra requires a separate one. The work of directing, superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under capital's control becomes co-operative. As a specific function of capital, the directing function acquires its own special characteristics.²⁴⁵

Capitalism realises its fully developed form of existence with the abstract sociality of a form of social activity expressed in an asocial mode of production. The individual is forced into an abstract life reproduced in their daily activity. The isolation of this life is at odds with the social processes in which this action takes place, collective production. Marx is very clear that this form of domination creates an immanent dynamic of resistance by the workers, who are able to find their conditions of existence to be in fundamental contradiction to those of the capitalist. Hand in hand with the co-operative labour processes is the domination of the capitalist. Marx notes in Chapter 13 the specific differences with the direct domination of the labour process *before* capital with the lords of capital, who rely on the 'freedom' of the worker to sell their labour-power.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Cap* 1, 447.

²⁴⁵ *Cap* 1, 449.

²⁴⁶ *Cap* 1, 552-3.

Marx furthers this analysis in *Capital*, Volume 3, clarifying the role consumption of labour-power plays in the supervision of the labour process. Marx outlines this form of control, drawing from Aristotle. Here the supervision of the production process ‘necessarily arises where the direct production process takes the form of a socially combined process and does not appear simply as the isolated labour of separate producers’. Marx notes two modes of supervision. The first is where the supervisor acts like a ‘conductor of an orchestra’ convening the unity of ‘co-operation’ and ‘interconnection’ in a shared ‘governing will’ between producers.

The second mode is one of domination, where supervisors act as mediators of an opposition between the producer and the owner of the means of production. Accordingly, the ‘greater this opposition, the greater the role that this work of supervision plays’.²⁴⁷ Marx notes that the ‘high point’ of this opposition was slavery, in which the producer is *also* the means of production. To the ancients, slavery combined both aspects of supervision ‘as inseparably’ as the political economists who view capitalism as ‘the absolute’ mode of production and justify wage labour. The comparison is useful since the production process also involves the consumption of labour-power by the capitalist. Marx relates Aristotle’s discussion of the relationship between the master and the natural slave from *The Politics* 1.7 to the modern mastery of wage labour:

Aristotle: Ο γὰρ δεοπότης οὐκ ἐν τῷ κτάσθαι τοὺς δούλους, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ χρῆσθαι δούλοις. (‘For the master’ - the capitalist – ‘proves himself such not by obtaining slaves’ - ownership of capital, which gives him the power to buy labour – ‘but by employing slaves’ - using labourers, nowadays wage-labourers, in the production process.) ‘Ἐστὶ δ’ αὕτη ἡ ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲν μέγα ἔχουσα οὐδὲ σεμνόν’ (‘There is nothing great or sublime about this science’) ‘ἅ γὰρ τοῦ δούλου ἐπιτασθαι δεῖ ποιεῖν, ἐκείνου δὲ ταῦτα ἐπιτασθαι ἐπιτάττειν.’ (‘but whatever the slave is to perform, the master must be able to order.’) ‘Διὸ ὅσοις ἐξουσία μὴ αὐτοὺς κακοπαθεῖν, ἐπιτροπος λαμβάνει ταύτην τὴν, αὐτοὶ δὲ πολιτεύονται ἡφιλοσοφοῦσιν. (‘Whenever the masters are not compelled to plague themselves with supervision, the overseer assumes *this honour*, while the masters peruse public affairs or philosophy’).²⁴⁸

Marx mobilises Aristotle in this passage to suggest how his ‘blunt terms’ express a truth about economic and political domination, those which allow the ruling class the ‘function’ of domination. Economically, the consumption of labour-power ensures that

²⁴⁷ *Cap* 3, 507.

²⁴⁸ *Cap* 3, 509. See also, *Pol.* 1255a19-41. Marx’s creative use of the original can be consulted in reference to the Greek original in the Loeb edition, of Aristotle, *Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 26.

workers are kept busy, under strict direction and worked hard. The appeal to rise above these conditions, explains the desire for the upward mobility of the supervisor. Politically, this domination allows the ideological ‘servitude’ of the producers to be justified by the process of production and consumption, which ‘appear at the same time’ to be the worker. On this terrain, the gulf between owner of labour-power and the owner of the means of production is further justified by the extraction of surplus value (in the form of unpaid labour) in this process, which compensate the supervisor’s own wages. Supervision allows the exploitation of the worker. The parallel between the slave-master and the capitalist in terms of economic and political domination points to the pervasive enforcement of capitalist authority within the labour process. This authority is the necessary result of the control of labour-power. As Marx notes in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

the man who possesses no other property than his labour power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can work only with their permission, hence live only with their permission.²⁴⁹

The emphasis on permission in the disequilibrium between worker and capitalist underscores how the abstract domination of the logic is *personified* through the everyday operation of commodity production.

Marx’s examination of the labour process points to the instrumental rationality of capital, from its need to self-valorise and the human dimension of this process. Marx’s conceptualisation of abstract sociality is located in the relation between workers and capitalists, as mediated by the production of capital. Marx claims a necessary connection between the asociality of the production process and this specific form of domination. Just like estrangement and fetishism is held in the unity of use-value and value, the collectivity of the labour process is in unity with the domination of capital. Marx argues that the form and the content of this domination are reproduced in the historically specific form of labour. His notion of labour points to a potential hitherto unrealised. The significance of his critique of capital is the unity of fact and value in his immanent critique. For Marx, the overcoming of capital allows for the mutual recognition of the social forms which define our lives as ethical actors in ethical life.

²⁴⁹ MECW 24, 81.

Conclusion

Marx's mature work examines the being of value. Marx understands value as a social form, characterising historically specific productive relations rather than an ahistorical form of accumulated wealth.²⁵⁰ It is crucial to Marx's argument that commodities be seen as *products* of capital and that the creation of surplus-value arising from the capitalist production process *is comprehended as historically specific to capitalism*.²⁵¹ His ontology of social forms offers a critique of the split between form/content and fact/value in the limited and ahistorical thought of political economy. In a critical theory of society, Marx's historical critique investigates how abstract being and modes of life restrict human potentiality and render social life to the domination of the exploitative social relations of capital. This analysis is based in the value-form and the manner in which capitalism reduces human life to the fetish of exchange. At the same time, the labour process takes a collective form and capital lays the basis for its own overcoming. By looking at Aristotle's presence in *Capital*, the specifically ethical dimension of Marx's social theory is thrown into sharp relief. Marx is outlining with his systematic logic *why* abstract sociality necessarily limits the logic of human interaction to exchange. Exchange creates a universal relation of needs mediated by the logic of the market – a 'moral imperative [for] capital to produce as much surplus value as possible'.²⁵²

In Marx's view, the products of human labour are valued not for their inherent functions – the ability to fulfil a human need or enable a social good – but instead the products of labour are valued according to the amount of labour-power congealed into the commodity. The exchange relation distorts the expression of value from a concrete social relation to an abstract one. The commodity is fundamentally defined by exchange. It comes into being from simple forms of exchange and takes on its own life. When generalised, commodity exchange, becomes the logic of society. It expresses the 'natural' finished form – the truth – of capitalist social relations.²⁵³ Drawing explicitly on Aristotle and Hegel to develop the insight, Marx's claim that capital is limitlessness not only distinguishes his singular contribution to social theory, an understanding of capital as *the absolute* of modern social relation, but *confirms* a theory of ethical life. Reality is

²⁵⁰ Rubin, *History of Economic Thought*, 262.

²⁵¹ *Cap* 1, 948.

²⁵² *RIPP*, 1051.

²⁵³ *Cap* 1, 148. For a similar point, see Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, 159-60.

ethical, but reality cannot be rational if it is not known and transparent. In this understanding, Marx shows how the value form is a structural barrier to the self-consciousness of our life activity and our forms of association. Marx's concept of ethical life points to the necessity of the struggle over the existence of the value form as a life and death struggle for self-consciousness of the modes of being of modern life which prevent the development of shared and rational association.

| *Conclusion: The Song of the Weavers*

With the phrase ‘society as its goal’, Marx articulates his concept of ethical life. I have used this leitmotif to map the ethical contours of his understanding of society, sociality and social forms. Marx consciously situated his social theory directly in the present, since in bourgeois society

the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.¹

Capital denies real individuality while producing the isolation and estrangement of the individual. The current relation between past and present preserves the domination of past labour – as capital, dead labour which dominates the lives of the present. The present allows for concrete freedom, free control of productive activity, society in which individual was independent but socially transparent. Marx’s aversion to utopian schemes is apparent in any early remark on immanent critique:

Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e. from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them. This does not mean that we shall confront the world with new doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it! It means that we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world. We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign-slogans. Instead we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it *must* acquire whether it wishes or not.²

Ethical life requires being a part of the world and, at the same time, subjecting it to relentless criticism. This cannot be an abstract critique, removed and isolated, a critique that is external and otherworldly. Instead, *absolute* ethical life is an analysis of society and its overcoming. The concept of ethical life is a concrete totality beyond the dualism where morality and politics are separate components of action. If social being is made abstract by action separate from each sphere of human experience, then ethical life unifies social action in transparent and rational forms of interaction.

¹ *MECW* 6, 499.

² *EW*, 208-9.

Marx confronts explicitly modern problems, and in this confrontation he develops a philosophical understanding of the relation between society and the individual. Contained in Marx's concept of labour and his value-form theory there is a rich normative critique of the alienated and abstract sociality of modern life, which looks to their negation. His early sense of the *telos* of sociality is a reflection of the emergent subjectivity of the working class. For Marx, emancipation is the activity which transforms the particularity of the individual into the universality of the community. Through this activity, humans go beyond the *political* community to a higher form of association. In an 1844 article for *Vorwärts!*, Marx writes of this higher form as

The community from which *his own labour* separates him is *life* itself, physical and spiritual life, human morality, human activity, human enjoyment, *human nature*. *Human nature is the true community of men*. Just as the disastrous isolation from this nature is disproportionately more far-reaching, unbearable, terrible and contradictory than the isolation from the political community, so too the transcending of this isolation and even a partial reaction, a *rebellion* against it, is so much greater, just as the *man* is greater than the *citizen* and *human life* than *political life*. Hence, however limited an industrial revolt may be, it contains within itself a *universal* soul: and however universal a political revolt may be, its *colossal* form conceals a *narrow* split.³

The universality of life, the essence of morality, activity and nature is socially comprehended in the organisation of community. In this article, Marx speaks of a contemporary revolt by Silesian weavers as expressing the 'theoretical' and 'conscious' standpoint of labour. He asks the reader to 'Think first of the *Weaver's Song*, that intrepid battle-cry which does not even mention health, factory or district in which the proletariat at once proclaims its antagonism to the society of private property in the most decisive, aggressive, ruthless and forceful manner'.⁴ Heinrich Heine's poem, the *Weaver's Song*, repeats the refrain 'We weave; we weave' [*Wir weben, wir weben!*].⁵ This activity is what voices the consciousness of the work-worn figures. Translated by Engels and published by Marx in *Vorwärts!*,⁶ the *Weaver's Song* is a vivid document of the radicalisation of

³ Marx, 'Critical Notes on 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform' in *EW*, 418.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁵ Heinrich Heine, 'Die schlesischen Weber' in *Selected Verse*, trans. Peter Branscombe (London: Penguin, 1968), 148-9.

⁶ For the Marx-Heine connection, see Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, 26-32. Marx references Heine frequently in *The Holy Family* and *German Ideology*.

German thought in its deepening critique of private property relations.⁷ Heine's poetry was philosophical and radical, he advocated an 'explicitly revolutionary' interpretation of Hegel and 'forged a new kind of poetry – or, rather a poetics that informs both his prose and his verse, dialectical and critical down to its very form'.⁸ As Adorno suggests, 'In Heine commodity and exchange seized control of sound and tone, whose very nature had previously consisted in the negation of the hustle and bustle of daily life'.⁹ Adorno's comment brings to mind the tailoring and weaving of linen in the first chapter of *Capital*, Volume One.¹⁰

In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno points to just how the logic of the commodity has infested *life itself*, objectifying and mechanising.¹¹ He develops this analysis of domination from the first chapter of *Capital*:

Only when the process that begins with the metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity has permeated men through and through and objectified each of their impulses as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship, is it possible for life to reproduce itself under the prevailing relations of production. Its consummate organisation demands the coordination of people that are dead. The will to live finds itself dependent on the denial of the will to live: self-preservation annuls all life in subjectivity.¹²

For Adorno, the good life appears lost amidst a life determined by the domination of capital. As dead labour, capital *lives* by its objectification of human experience and reduction of social life to the logic of exchange; a life which appears as dead as the capital which hangs above our heads. With the title *Minima Moralia*, Adorno reverses Aristotle's *Magna Moralia* and ironically ventures that the philosophical pursuit of the good life must now concern the suffering of the present:

The melancholy science from which I make this offering to my friend relates to a region that from time immemorial was regarded as the true field of philosophy, but

⁷ A revolt of some thousands of weavers in June 1844 was prompted by the arrest of a weaver singing these words, see Michael Löwy, *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2005), 82n69.

⁸ Kouvélakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 46-7.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Heine the Wound' in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 82.

¹⁰ Not to mention the development of the working class as a 'class' with 'tailors here and weavers there' in E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working* (London: Penguin, 1980), 8.

¹¹ He references Heine to make this point in reference to Freud, see Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §37/61.

¹² *Ibid.*, §147/229, see also §146/226-7.

which, since the latter conversion into method, has lapsed into intellectual neglect, sententious whimsy and finally oblivion: the teaching of the good life?¹³

Adorno's analysis laments the impossibility of living a good life in the atomisation of the present social order. Market relationships render every person into an object, which means for Adorno: 'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly'.¹⁴ 'Life' has a Hegelian inflection, referring to ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), with the practices and institutions of social life as the mediators of human experience. Adorno's comment also conveys Hegel's strong distinction between ethics and morality.¹⁵ As J.M. Bernstein argues,

Like Aristotle, Adorno presupposes that ethical thought is a reflective articulation of ethical experience, which itself is structured through ethical practices. This assumes that the ethical possibilities open to an individual are delimited by the state of the ethical world this individual inhabits: wrong life (the state of the ethical world) cannot be lived rightly. And this, by itself, assumes that the provenance of the meaning and force of moral terms are the practices of the community deploying them, and that outside these practices, and the history they sediment and report, such terms lose their force.¹⁶

After Hegel's ethical life and Aristotle's teaching of the good life, Adorno's sardonic 'wrong life' points to the ongoing crisis of ethical life in our current social order. For Hegel, ethical life is a question of rational institutions. For Aristotle, the good life is already contextualised in the *polis* but needs to be realised. Yet for Adorno, the good life is not possible in our contemporary world and its existing institutions. Domination has *bleached* modern life and hope of the good life is perverted by the bad life. The abstraction of the labour-process is internalised and manifests itself into the instrumental rationality of commodity fetishism. As a result, 'Atomisation is advancing not only between men, but within each individual, between the spheres of life'.¹⁷ The individual becomes a 'mere reflection of property relations'.¹⁸ Adorno takes Marx's value-form theory to be a decisive prism from which to understand individual existence and action. The exchange relation 'that equally deforms men and things' is a historically specific

¹³ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 15. Adorno refers to this work as a book on 'the good – or rather the bad – life', *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 1.

¹⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §17/37-§18/39.

¹⁵ J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40, 58-70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §84/130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §99/153.

form of domination.¹⁹ Adorno resists the utopian urge. A just society cannot be envisioned by simply wishing it to be so.²⁰

For Adorno, as with Marx, the totality of life is ethical. Adorno's insights dovetail with Marx's concept of ethical life in terms of the impact of domination. However, this domination must be seen as transmutable and an immanent critique must retain a theory of emancipation. Even in our bad world, the possibilities for ethical reasoning remain potentialities when particularity moves to universality. Adorno's assessment of the condition of private existence risks denying that ethical action can break out of the private sphere of morality. The infection of unequal social relations into every aspect of the individual's life is brought out in great effect in Adorno's investigation. However, even if he details how devastating the 'severance of morality from politics' is in modern life, he loses sight of how ethical life might be generated against this paradigm.²¹ Modern domination is almost too total, reification too deep.²²

For Marx, the struggle for ethical life requires the action of rational actors against the domination which frames their lives. Ethical life is not a simple idealisation of a world yet to come but the unfolding of rationality through the collective and universalising action of reasoners. Adorno makes a similar point, 'An emancipated society... would not be a unitary state, but the realisation of universality in the reconciliation of differences'.²³ Further, what Marx finds appealing in Heine – emancipation and rationality in a society quite unlike our own – Adorno also notes:

there is no longer any homeland other than a world in which no one would be cast out anymore, the world of a genuinely emancipated humanity. The wound that is Heine will heal only in a society that has achieved reconciliation.²⁴

This normative conception of emancipation allows for society to be understood in terms of the just relations of social interaction, which not only shape economic relationships

¹⁹ Ibid., §146/228.

²⁰ Ibid., §58/95, §66/102-3.

²¹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, §116/180.

²² According to Rose, Adorno's understanding of domination is 'presented in a variety of ways, some of them apparently self-contradictory, such as "total reification", "total control", "the end of the individual"'. For Adorno is dramatising these ideas, presenting them *as if* they were absolutely and literally true, in order to undermine them more effectively', *The Melancholy Science*, 34. However, she is right to comment on the 'ethical impulse' of his thought, *Love's Work*, 58.

²³ Ibid., §66/103.

²⁴ Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, 85.

but all human experience. The *wound* of modern life requires the universality which unfolds from the struggles of rational actors. Marx's concept of ethical life looks for the reconciliation of 'life itself' in the community of human sociality.²⁵ His analysis of the modern world diagnoses the abstract relations which configure sociality. From this understanding, Marx's concept of ethical life makes clear why modern life is dominated by capital but necessarily demands its overcoming, the activity of rational actors mapping the path from particularity to ethical universality: to freedom without domination.

In my view, there are five distinct but interdependent dimensions in which Marx's mature thought is ethical and makes society its goal. The first is his concept of needs. Whereas capital transforms human needs to the needs of the exchange relation, Marx's account locates needs in social forms of freedom. Second is his account of social individuality, a form of sociality in production that allows for human flourishing. Third is his insistence upon the rational control of time, where free control of time allows a radical reduction of socially necessary labour time. Fourth is his view that shared control of production allows for human activity to be rationally understood, allowing for practical reasoning, where creative activity fosters reason in thought and in being. This rationality involves a transparency in the social relations that govern human life. The last is his conception of an emancipated society, where he expresses a concept of a just society, in which the good life is one of mutual recognition. The good life is the speculative telos, *ethical life*.

(a) Marx's concept of needs is integral to his critique of political economy. The expansion of value transformed the 'fixed and limited' needs of pre-capitalist exchange to the 'ceaseless' renewal of needs mediated by the market.²⁶ The contrast between the needs of the market and the alienation of needs for human ends feature prominently in Marx's value theory. He remarks, "The social division of labour makes the nature of his labour as one-sided as his needs are many-sided".²⁷ In the *Grundrisse* he contrasts this 'system of labours' with a 'system of needs'.²⁸ Marx conceives of needs at the level of necessity, but never opposes necessity to 'the manner in which they are satisfied' which is

²⁵ Marx expresses his standpoint in the tenth *Theses on Feuerbach* as 'human society, or social humanity', *EW*, 423.

²⁶ *Cap* 1, 228.

²⁷ *Cap* 1, 201.

²⁸ *Gr*, 528.

always historically conditioned.²⁹ In this sense, even the ‘necessary need’ to eat, is historically shaped in terms of custom, tradition etc. This historical totality allows for the creation of *new needs*, which expand

the discovery, creation and satisfaction of new needs arising from society itself; the cultivation of all the qualities of the social human being, production of the same in a form as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations – production of this being as the most total and universal possible social product, for, in order to take gratification in a many-sided way, he must be capable of many pleasures [*genussfähig*], hence cultured to a high degree – is likewise a condition of production founded on capital. This creation of new branches of production, i.e. of qualitatively new surplus time, is not merely the division of labour, but is rather the creation, separate from a given production, of labour with a new use value; the development of a constantly expanding and more comprehensive system of different kinds of labour, different kinds of production, to which a constantly expanding and constantly enriched system of needs corresponds.³⁰

The correspondence of needs with abstract labour relations reduces qualitative needs to the quantifiable dictates of capital and, in Heller’s words, ‘needs as ends are turned into needs as means and vice versa’.³¹ Needs are robbed of any universal social dimension since the use-value of the commodity is not its transparent human *ergon*, but its value. There is a normative dimension in this system of needs, where use values are shown again and again to be inverted by exchange and insofar as humans expand their needs, the market inverts the development of all-sided humans. Aristotle’s view that needs are inherently linked to flourishing is continued in Marx’s thought, with an increased richness in the historically conditioning of needs in social practice.

(b) Beyond capital, the *individual* is conceived by Marx as part of a concrete totality, as the *social individual*. This concept sublates the duality of actuality (individual) and potentiality (sociality) and their mediated unity-in-difference in abstract sociality. Marx writes:

when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity’s own nature? The absolute working out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this

²⁹ *Cap* 1, 275. See also, *Gr*, 325.

³⁰ *Gr*, 409.

³¹ Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*, 97.

totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined* yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?³²

For Marx, the universal being-and-becoming of the human being would allow the labour activity performed socially by individually isolated workers to be negated within the form of labour itself,³³ allowing for production to take place in 'its communal, social character'.³⁴ Marx's critique of political economy analyses the socially situated position of the worker who produces exchange-values independent of human need and is relegated to their individuality as a buyer and seller of commodities. Their own human power is just another thing for sale. Yet the social character of collective production provides the potential for a society based on the quality and transparency of social relations. To overcome the limitations of the abstract individual in their formal equality and the realities of a co-operative but alienated production process, Marx's notion of the social individual provides for the qualitative change for human sociality from the dialectics of the value form. Marx's social ontology binds activity to the *telos* of collective social being. Humans become interdependent in their social world as a concrete totality that overcomes the binaries of individuality and collectivity, and renders one-sided forms of social being obsolete, and social being itself, whole.

(c) Time, freedom and human potentially are closely related for Marx. Capital reduces the days of workers into component parts that correspond to the temporal elements of the production process. Marx suggests that the empty time of the labour process is a crucial site of the struggle over the working day, as workers contest the control of their labour power. From the standpoint of capital, socially necessary labour time measures efficiency and productivity driven in the increase of surplus value. Time measures domination.³⁵ From the standpoint of labour, however, socially necessary labour time could offer a measure of social need. With free time, the tasks of human life activity could appear

³² *Gr*, 488.

³³ 'the labour of the individual is from the very beginning posted as social labour', *Gr*, 171-2.

³⁴ *Gr*, 489.

³⁵ Under capital, as Adorno points out, 'free time is the unmediated continuation of labour as its shadow'. Free time is reified and empty, the correspondence to the working day which cannot help but take on its logic. However, in overcoming the capital-form, there is the possibility 'to help free time turn into freedom', 'Free Time', *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 173-5.

transparent and a realisation of potential as freedom. Free time gives a new meaning to the concept of labour, one at odds with its abstract sociality and allows labour to be directly social. Free time allows labour-power to become *techne*, self-conscious and mediated activity.³⁶ As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*:

On the basis of communal production, the determination of time remains, of course, essential. The less time the society requires to produce wheat, cattle etc., the more time it wins for other production, material or mental. Just as in the case of an individual, the multiplicity of its development, its enjoyment and its activity depends on economisation of time. Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself. Society likewise has to distribute its time in a purposeful way, in order to achieve a production adequate to its overall needs ; just as the individual has to distribute his time correctly in order to achieve knowledge in proper proportions or in order to satisfy the various demands on his activity. Thus, economy of time, along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of communal production. It becomes law, there, to an even higher degree. However, this is essentially different from a measurement of exchange values (labour or products) by labour time. The labour of individuals in the same branch of work, and the various kinds of work, are different from one another not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. What does a solely quantitative difference between things presuppose? The identity of their qualities. Hence, the quantitative measure of labours presupposes the equivalence, the identity of their quality.³⁷

The problem Marx is addressing here is the transformation of labour-time as the measure of abstract labour to free time, time that allows for the cultivation of shared aims and ends.³⁸ The possible reduction of socially necessary labour time parallels the minimisation of labour-time conceivable with advanced technology and machinery. As Marx pointed out, modern machinery and technology herald new levels of misery, forcing the elongation of the working day, sweeping away ‘every moral and natural restriction’ to the time a worker is expected to perform.³⁹ Machinery generalised and deepened the centrality of industrial capital to social relations, creating a working class and process increasingly automated.⁴⁰ Given the potential for this machinery to reduce labour-time, absurdly it ‘suffers a dialectical inversion and becomes the most unfailing means for turning the whole lifetime of the worker and his family into labour-time at

³⁶ See this point in Dussel, *Towards an Unknown Marx*, 75.

³⁷ *Gr*, 172-3.

³⁸ Hägglund, *This Life*, 260-9.

³⁹ *Cap* 1, 532.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism*, 292, 139-43.

capital's disposal for its own valorisation'.⁴¹ The machine becomes the very instrument to bind the working class to the dictates of empty homogeneous time. This modern actuality is a sad reversal of the potential for machinery to reduce socially necessary labour-time. Thus Marx writes of machinery: 'Only in the imagination of economics does it leap to the aid of the individual worker'.⁴² Rather, the process of production transforms the instruments of labour into 'a means of enslaving, exploiting and impoverishing the worker' and the 'social combination of labour processes appears as an organised suppression of his individual vitality, freedom and autonomy'.⁴³

Enlightenment notions of progress and maximised production privilege the development of dead labour, the domination of the past over present and over living labour. The relentless increase of technology over the development of the worker – 'the appropriation of living labour by capital' – demonstrates this alien force.⁴⁴ The specifically modern character of this idea appears in stark contrast to the ancients:

'If, dreamed Aristotle, the greatest thinker of antiquity, 'if every tool, when summoned, or even by intelligent anticipation, could do the work that befits it, just as the creations of Daedalus moved of themselves, or the tripods of Hephaestus went of their own accord to their sacred work, if the weavers' shuttles were to weave of themselves, then there would be no need either of apprentices for the master craftsmen, or of slaves for the lords.'⁴⁵

For Aristotle, slaves are natural instruments of their masters. In this passage quoted by Marx, Aristotle invokes an idea of machinery (as non-human instruments) to imagine the freedom humans might have if they could be free from production. Arendt takes the passage to point to the limitations of modern tools to free humans from labour. She notes, 'Man cannot be free if he does not know that he is subject to necessity, because his freedom is always won in his never wholly successful attempts to liberate himself from necessity'.⁴⁶ Marx also notes the dualism between freedom and necessity but sees freedom not in tension with necessity but as its condition of possibility. In *Capital*, Volume 3, Marx makes this clear:

⁴¹ *Cap* 1, 532.

⁴² *Gr*, 702.

⁴³ *Cap* 1, 638.

⁴⁴ *Gr*, 703.

⁴⁵ *Cap* 1, 532. See also, *Pol.* 1253b30-1254a18.

⁴⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 121-2.

The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis.⁴⁷

Marx's 'realm of freedom' does not just overcome Aristotle's division between production (*poiesis*) and action (*praxis*), it conceives of their relation as a dualism that can be sublated when human flourishing is constituted as essential to human life activity. When Marx considers this new form as potentiality (*δυνάμει*), he uses Aristotle's Greek.⁴⁸

(d) Marx's concept of needs, sociality and time requires the negation of the value-form. His theory of class struggle gives agency to the working class, the counter-subject to capital. In my view, Marx's theory of class struggle can be posed in terms of practical reasoning, where the practice and reason of human actors is expressed in the challenge to capital. According to Marx, workers become increasingly aware of their social world in their action against it. The struggle against capital, from the standpoint of labour, resonates with the logic of Aristotle to the extent that it locates 'truth in accordance with right desire'.⁴⁹ Marx's theory of class struggle is a form of reasoning that, like Aristotle, wants to bring reason and desire into harmony. Reason takes the form of shared and unveiled social activity and desire in the form of the satisfaction (and multiplication) of needs. Like Hegel, these needs must be mediated by institutions which allow rationality to be further fostered. In this way, a just and rational society *cannot exist* with the capital form in place. Marx's opposition goes further than an abstract negation of capital, but his immanent critique hinges on the contradictions present within capital. Marx's negative critique does not posit a view external to the world he is analysing but his conception of free association and social individuality develops as the end of collective forms of activity, free from alienation and fetishism. The concept of ethical life allows for the activity of reasoning in the development of human freedom.

Without this freedom, happiness cannot be rationally comprehended. Human activities are not comparable in terms of different qualifiable standards of happiness. Presently, banal acts that contribute nothing to the satisfaction of human goods are measured in the same way as profound ones that foster the cultivation of the virtues. No form of

⁴⁷ *Cap* 3, 959.

⁴⁸ *Gr*, 297.

⁴⁹ *EE* 1139a29-30.

rationality adjudicates the action of individuals. As a result, individual choice and action are motivated by the same quantifiable appearance of the social forms of value. Social action that might challenge or allow for the actualisation of the virtue of resistance is reduced to the empty processes of production. While resistance is socially embedded, the rationality of capital fetishises action by reducing it to the temporal logic of machines.⁵⁰ Domination, however, flattens these activities to the processes of daily routine ‘as a kind of substitute for happiness’.⁵¹ The abstractions of capital are held over social life, increasingly atomising and distorting social life. Aristotle claims, ‘For nothing incomplete is happy, as it does not make up the whole’.⁵² In a similar manner, Marx desires activity that allows the fulfilment of the good life as class activity, class-consciousness, as a form of practical reasoning in line with the concrete totality of human life.

(e) For Aristotle, the central question of ethics is ‘what constitutes a good life, and how it is to be attained’.⁵³ This problematic resonates throughout Marx’s critical theory. However, for Marx, the first question is enfolded in the second, since a directly social form of relations can only be ascertained from the immanent development of subjective modes of practice. The gulf between the objective sociality of production and the limited subjectivity of producers in asserting this sociality consciously must be overcome for a human flourishing that overcomes the antinomy of subject/object. If the value-form limits the activity of humans to the instrumental rationality of exchange, rather than the ends in themselves of flourishing, the attainment of the good life must be through the forms of sociality that allow rational association. Humans-as-they-could-be, under transformed conditions, demand not an abstract negation of capital, but the immanent realisation of sociality. Like Hegel, Marx’s effort to understand reality as a concrete totality denotes a concept of ethical life in which labour activity and time are mediated by the institutions of shared association. The good life allows for the pursuit of commonly agreed upon ends. Social actors can explore their many-sided existence transparently and in recognition with a society of their own creation. Ethical life is a life free from domination.

⁵⁰ See Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 225-241.

⁵¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto*, 54.

⁵² EE 1219b6.

⁵³ EE 1214a13.

Ultimately what MacIntyre finds wanting in Marx, an adequate social ontology and Rose, a speculative philosophy, cannot only be found in Marx but can be articulated to answer their concerns. For Marx, a society of associated producers allows rational actors to recognise each other in terms of their shared humanity. The normative commitment within such a view suggests that ethical life is central to Marx's thinking about a world beyond capital in which human action is conceived as self-consciousness. The three thinkers, Aristotle, Hegel and Marx, share a philosophical approach to action as a fundamental component of social theory. The character of this action as thinking, consciousness and production can be brought together and tracing the lines of continuity can help inform a concept of sociality. For all three foundational thinkers, the action of conscious thinking beings constitutes the fabric of human society. My work has attempted to find within these thinkers lines of continuation that can be retrieved and enhanced to contribute the resources for an understanding of ethical life that preserves in a theory of conscious human action, a critical social theory.

A concept of ethical life is not external to an immanent critique of social forms but informs its dynamic force. Rather than separating theoretical and practical criticism by an empiricist form of science and an external conception of justice, the immanent content of Marx's social theory is an ethical conception of the good life understood as the *telos* of shared human association. This end is embedded in social production and the control of time. The link between social relations and human good points to a just society. Politically conceived, a just society allows the totality of human activity to be as transparent as the needs constituting its rational association. If reality itself is ethical, in the sense that subjectivity mediates the objective world, a world defined by the actuality of capital must be understood with the potentiality to go beyond it. The real abstractions that hang over the heads of social being can be disrupted by the sociality of being, acting as a counter-subject to capital.

The contemporary political and economic conjuncture now means that Marx and Marxism appear more viable than a generation ago. However, if Marxism is to have a future as a critical theory of society, it must be through a renewal of Marx's project to subject the modern world to a critique sufficient for capital's immanent challenge. Ethical life allows this challenge to comprehend the world as one of the potentialities of human action, freedom and rationality, present and universal in living labour. To

comprehend the possibilities of emancipation, social theory must theorise the present, and in doing so, grasp ethical life.

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