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Thesis Title:

**Work, anthropology, and human determination in
the thought of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse**

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Candidate's Statement

I hereby declare that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any university or institution other than Macquarie University. I am the sole author of this thesis, and all reference to the work of others has been clearly indicated as such.

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Thesis Summary

Work, anthropology, and human determination in the thought of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse

This thesis will trace the evolution of the relationship between the concepts of work activity and human nature within a particular strand of German social philosophy, represented by Friedrich Schiller, Karl Marx, and Herbert Marcuse. By analysing the writings of these three key theorists, the thesis explores the value of the concept of work activity, defined as the human being's socially mediated interaction with the natural world, as a social-theoretical resource. In recent years this concept has been underutilised to the detriment of critical social theory, particularly in light of the specific socio-political issues that have emerged in the late capitalist era. Through the analysis of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse, a case is put forward for a renewal of critical social theory around such a conception of work. The guiding idea is that critical social theory stands in need of a philosophical anthropology which approaches the individual human subject as a unified and complete being, whose freedom may be conceived as activated, as well as circumscribed, by the human being's activity towards nature.

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A note on quotations

In the employment of both German and English quotations I have, wherever practicable, made alterations in an effort to minimise the occurrence of antiquated and/or gendered language and terminology.

In order to maintain conceptual clarity, I have occasionally altered key terms both in translations of the German and in works originally written in English (in the latter case, for instance, by introducing the term 'work' in the place of 'labour' or 'labor').

Where the original German text has been consulted, I have generally cited two editions: the English translation, followed by the German. In rare cases where a translation has been significantly altered, I have provided specific comments.

Introduction

The following analysis of the concept of work and human determination concerns the discipline known as philosophical anthropology. This discipline, which is distinct from the ethnologically-focused anthropology in Anglophone scholarship, has been described as the enquiry into “the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness”.¹ It can also be understood as the philosophical investigation of the particular preconditions of human existence that distinguishes these beings *qua* human beings.

In the following pages I will conduct an exploration of the philosophical anthropologies of Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979). Together these theorists represent a particular strand of philosophy that can be traced to the end of the eighteenth century, following the appearance of the Kantian critical philosophy. This theoretical strand utilises the relationship, mediated by human activity, between human society and nature in order to develop a materialist account of human determination and freedom. While Schiller himself does not embrace the concept of work activity in this endeavour (opting instead for the notion of play),² his philosophy of aesthetic education presents an anthropologically grounded relation between human beings and nature that

¹ Leo Kofler, quoted in Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, p.7. The German philosopher Odo Marquard states that “Anthropology is....that philosophy of humankind which becomes possible with the ‘turn to the life world’ and becomes fundamental with the ‘turn to nature’”. Quoted in Bundschuh, “The Theoretical Place of Utopia. Some Remarks on Herbert Marcuse’s Dual Philosophy”, p.152.

On the evolution of the discipline of anthropology, Matthew Bell argues that Casmann’s sixteenth-century definition as “the study of the interaction of mind and body”, of which psychology and somatology served as sub-disciplines, was relatively standard until the late eighteenth century (at the time when Kant became a major influence on the field). Bell argues that at this time the field of psychology really began to assert itself as an independent field, “eclipsing” the original discipline of anthropology to the point where the latter “allied itself with ethnology”. See Bell, *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and in Thought, 1700-1840*, p.12.

² In relation to this, Schiller should not ultimately be considered a materialist so much as a (transcendental) idealist.

anticipates the positive materialist (and work-based) philosophies of Marx and Marcuse. For this reason the three thinkers can be considered together as key representatives of a tradition of philosophical anthropology and critical social theory that is oriented towards a fuller realisation of human freedom.³

1. Philosophical anthropology

This study is partly inspired by a book by Axel Honneth and Hans Joas titled *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur* (1980). In it the authors demonstrate the important relationship between philosophical anthropology and critical social theory by focusing on the writings of various philosophers and social theorists. They consider the particular importance of an anthropologically oriented social theory to lie in the incorporation of the relationship between human beings and nature in social analysis.

Anthropology [should be understood] as a self-reflection of the social and cultural sciences on their biological foundations and of the normative content of their bodies of knowledge, considered in relation to determinate historical and political problems, and its viewpoint is that of a humanisation of nature. This is to be understood in three ways. First, the human being humanises nature; that is, it transforms nature into what is life-serving for it and thereby creates, in an interknitting of nature and the development of the human personality which requires more than exact clarification, the cultural shapings of its nature. Second, the human being humanises nature within itself in the course of the long civilising process that has been engaged in by the human species. Lastly, the human being itself is a humanisation of nature, being an upstart out of the animal kingdom; in the human being nature becomes humane.⁴

³ It is common in contemporary analyses of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse to present them as opponents of a social-theoretical work paradigm; i.e., as philosophers of an *end of work*. An example of this approach is Edward Granter, who dedicates a chapter each to Marx and Marcuse (as well as discussing Schiller as an influence on both Marx and Marcuse) in his book *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. This presentation is perhaps appropriate in the case of Schiller; however, it requires qualification with regard to Marx and Marcuse: that they are opposed to work *specifically as it exists in capitalist society*. As the following pages seek to demonstrate, neither are opposed to work as a general philosophical notion.

⁴ Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, pp.9-10.

The specific role of philosophical anthropology in elaborating the relationship between human beings and the natural world provides a crucial dimension in the analysis of social relations. As a major aspect of the task of society itself, human interaction with nature is innate to intersubjective social relations. As part of a unified process of subjective and social development, human interaction with nature contributes not only to human knowledge; it also contains its own inherent meaning and informs the creation and reproduction of socially relevant norms.⁵

Philosophical anthropology as it is known today is strongly associated with “the entire, specifically German history of idealist and post-idealist philosophy”.⁶ However, it has a heritage stretching back to the Ancient Greeks.⁷ While Kant is generally given credit for the widespread establishment of theoretical anthropology as it is known in both the German and Anglophone worlds, according to Honneth and Joas, “[t]he true starting point of the German anthropological tradition....is the Romantic reaction to the ethics and philosophy of history of the Enlightenment”.⁸

In a sense, the specific direction of German philosophical anthropology may be understood as being the result of a reaction against Kant’s general theoretical perspective. Up until the Weimar era, “[t]he lines of thought tending towards anthropology shared the intention of going beyond a rationalist and individualist limitation of the notion of the human being....a concept of the ‘whole person’ was another of philosophical anthropology’s major themes”.⁹

This turn away from rationalist and individualist conceptions of the human being, in favour of one in which the person reappears as a ‘whole’ or totality, will be explored in detail throughout this thesis. In this sense emphasis will be given to the

⁵ Conceived as the interaction between the human being as (individual) subject and (external) nature itself, this innately normative and socially relevant relation is external to conceptions such as Honneth’s purely intersubjective ‘recognition relations’. Work activity as ‘social production’ involves a determinate degree of ‘asocial interaction’, taking place exclusively between the individual subject and a material environment – interaction that provides a unique form of meaning and potentiality for human beings. While being external to social interaction *per se*, it is nevertheless necessary for social existence, and as such provides a unique and particular form of normativity that is directly relevant in a social theoretical context.

⁶ Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, p.42.

⁷ For instance, Frederick Beiser states, “According to Hamann, the first principle of philosophical anthropology has been already laid down by Aristotle in the *Politics*: “The human being is a political animal; only a beast or god can live outside the polis.” In Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p.140.

⁸ Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, p.42. Schiller is of course one of the leading figures of German Romanticism.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.43-4.

social-theoretical advantages of incorporating a philosophical anthropology that accounts for the fundamental *unity* of human nature and subjectivity.

In order for a philosophical anthropology to inform a practically oriented social theory, it needs to positively incorporate the *fundamental embodiment of the human being*, i.e., the intrinsic material constitution of human beings that is theoretically irreducible to any other characteristic. As normatively free beings who remain connected to nature via a shared and ineradicable material constitution, the notion of a corporeally situated, socially-integrated human subject is the most appropriate anthropological notion to inform a robust critical social theory.

Material embodiment is an ineradicable fact about the human species in general, and about the individual subject in particular. It contributes to the basic motivations of individuals in their social interaction, while serving more generally as an objective limitation to the nature of their vital capacities and needs (*Bedürfnisse*); particularly with regard to their active pursuit of a free and flourishing existence. Ultimately, human nature and determination (*Bestimmung*)¹⁰ inherently involves the presence of a living, breathing, and functioning human being that is *at the same time* delimited in the extent of its potential for practical freedom by the forces of nature. Both of these elements must be integrated into the anthropological assumptions of any acceptable social theory.

Similarly, an acceptable conception of human action must clearly specify how the individual human being becomes a complete and undivided unity while also existing in a dialectical relationship with the natural world. Such a conception must allow for the fundamental restrictions imposed on individuals by nature to be as inherent to their basic constitution as their need for freedom and autonomy. In the

¹⁰ The concept of *Bestimmung* is difficult to translate into English. Lesley Sharpe describes it as ‘both the purpose and destination of humanity’ (Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller. Drama, Thought and Politics*, p.158). Wilkinson and Willoughby translate ‘*menschliche Bestimmung*’ as ‘human destiny’ (e.g., Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letters X.1, XIV.2, pp. 62-3, 94-5). But in their translation of *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews use the word ‘vocation’ (Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p.298 [5:431]).

Helpful also in this context is John Abromeit’s brief comments on Marcuse’s use of the term: “Marcuse’s frequent use of the concept of *Bestimmung* is in line with [the Hegelian] tradition, insofar as he shares Hegel’s rejection of the possibility of fixing the meaning of concepts once and for all in a static ‘definition’” (John Abromeit, “Glossary” in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.177). I shall interpret Schiller’s employment of the term *Bestimmung* as similar in intent with regard to the notions of human nature and freedom. In employing the term, it is Schiller’s intention to demonstrate the intimate dialectical relationship between the concept of human nature as a ‘transcendental’ fact, and the notion of human potentiality or ‘destiny’ as manifest in the possibilities generated out of the contingent expression of human freedom.

analysis that follows, it will be argued that this is a crucial requirement for any theory of human action that is oriented towards a fuller realisation of freedom in a social world.

By emphasising the human being's material unity and necessary interaction with nature, the philosophical anthropologies reconstructed from the works of Schiller, Marx and Marcuse delineate the context for the conceptualisation of work advocated in this thesis. This conceptualisation draws out the normative implications of work activity as a characteristic feature of embodied, needful beings in conscious interaction with nature. It is a shared conviction of these three philosophers that the norms associated with work must be understood as an activity unique to a being that has been constituted in a certain way, i.e., unified, needful, 'determined' in relation to a material nature – and as a direct consequence of this determination, is *free* – or ought to be.

2. Perspectives on the notion of work

Such a conception of work is not commonly utilised when considering the theoretical foundations of social theory and theories of subjectivity. When work is mentioned, it is typically in the context of *collective* human processes and is attributed in itself no particular normative relevance. This is in part a legacy of the discipline of political economy, which presented the concept of work predominantly in terms of its role as the origin of society's material wealth.¹¹ It is also due to the enormous influence of social philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, who explicitly set out to develop a theory of human praxis according to Aristotle's distinction between moral and technical rationality, with the result that they explicitly deny the existence of any normative potential in work activity.¹²

In Judeo-Christian thought, work has not generally been conceived as a specific human good, though there are exceptions. Following from the myth of Adam and Eve,

¹¹ Of course, it is interesting (and ultimately not surprising) that the most prominent representative of classical political economy, with his "strong emphasis on labor as the ultimate source of economic wealth" (McNulty, "Adam Smith's Concept of Labor", p.347), that Adam Smith possessed a somewhat deeper understanding of work. For instance, even in his most influential economic text he acknowledges the tendency of the capitalist division of labour to produce people who are "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" – a sentiment that contains an undeniable moral judgment about such a system. In Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Book V, Ch.1, Article II), p.340.

¹² See Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, pp.13-4.

work for the individual is characteristically understood as an inescapable burden rather than as a medium through which an individual may generate and express their personal values and identity. The virtuous individual is in turn one who thrives *in spite* of the human being's fate of earthly toil.¹³ On the history of Western thought more broadly, James Bernard Murphy states that moral and political debate "has been strangely blind to the moral dimension of work", as evident when we look at theories of justice.¹⁴

Even in philosophical anthropology, the idea of a 'labouring' human subjectivity has been marginal. The dominance of conceptions of the modern human being as *homo oeconomicus* – the animal of consumption and fiscal fortitude – appears to have relegated the alternative conceptions of *homo laborans* and *homo faber* to the status of theoretical outcast. Positive philosophies of work thus exert a limited influence on contemporary philosophical debates regarding individual identity formation, human agency, and morality. As a result the potential contained within work for the attainment of human freedom is generally overlooked.

This state of affairs reveals certain prevailing assumptions with respect to human activity in general. Human activity tends to be conceived as 'productive' when directed towards the securing of the material needs and interests of human beings as a society. This emphasises the 'instrumental' or 'cost' component of human working activity, which in political economy is counterbalanced with the appropriate 'end' or 'benefit' of consumption.

¹³ Amongst the exceptions to this view there is St. Benedict, for whom the essence of a spiritual life was "prayer and work" in equal measure, mediated by reading and rest (see Benedetto da Norcia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, p.70; Ambrose G. Wathen, *Silence. The Meaning of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict*, p.8).

According to some sources, the Benedictines also espoused the motto "*Orare est laborare, laborare est orare*": "to pray is to work; to work is to pray" (see Phyllis Tickle (ed.), *The Divine Hours. A Manual for Prayer, Vol. 1*, p.x). In any event, the Benedictines viewed work less as evidence of Original Sin (i.e., as a source of bodily ailments and physical hardship) than as the employment of one's body towards the realisation of God's good works. Implicit in this normative conception of action is an acknowledgement of the overall unity of the human being in comparison to the modern Cartesian conception of a divided body and soul.

¹⁴ "Ever since Aristotle, we have had theories of justice in the distribution of goods (distributive justice) and theories of justice in the exchange of goods (commutative justice), but very little in the way of a theory of justice in the production of goods. In our time, liberal capitalism and Soviet communism have represented two very different conceptions of distributive and commutative justice....the issue between capitalism and communism has always been the justice (and efficacy) of two rival systems of exchange and distribution. What has never been at issue is the justice of the organization of production". In Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, pp.2-3.

While instrumentality remains an integral aspect of work, it should not blind theorists to the non-instrumental or intrinsic value that working activity can have. To ignore the latter dimension of work – to theoretically strip its notion of any intrinsic ethical-normative significance – reflects a narrow understanding of it, whatever the theoretical motivations behind the purely instrumental conception.

When organised in a certain manner, and as a major activity within the lives of individuals, work offers the subject a clear opportunity to fulfil one's basic social and creative needs. This reality was represented in pre-modern societies in the concept of the artisan, who exercised creativity in the fabrication of useful items for fellow citizens. Such a conception was considered for the most part irrelevant after the capitalist division of labour created the means for useful goods to be created and distributed in a more efficient but less creatively fulfilling manner.

So long as work is conceived narrowly as a purely instrumental 'productive action', its relevance to the qualitative needs of the *individual* human subject will remain hidden. While the individual's work contributes to collective productivity, even in modern societies it also provides a context in which individuals develop their personal identity, experience pleasure, and achieve a state of being that Aristotle referred to as *eudaimonia*, or 'human flourishing'.¹⁵ Work as 'social production' tends to be regarded merely as a means through which other 'higher' activities may also be pursued.¹⁶ For the most part, 'productive activity', as it relates *directly* to individual subject formation and development, remains contentious or obscure.

In order to bring to light the role of work in the shaping of individual identity, it is necessary to conceive of human beings as complete and unified beings, existing in a single objective environment in which social and material needs, demands, and potentialities are fundamentally intertwined.

* * *

¹⁵ *Eudaimonia* is often translated into English as 'happiness' or 'welfare', the common interpretation of the concept as used in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Here I follow James Bernard Murphy, who observes John Cooper's translation of *eudaimonia* as 'human flourishing', based upon his interpretation of the concept in Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*. See Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, p.5, n.12; John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle*, pp.91-6.

¹⁶ This is nominally the case at the social level as well. 'Productivity' is understood to fulfil the 'instrumental needs' of society. Through the accumulation of 'National wealth', the purpose of production is to provide the material basis through which 'higher purposes' can be pursued.

3. Philosophers of a 'work-focused' anthropology

In the broadest terms, an *anthropological* definition of work attempts to incorporate work, conceived as the human being's practical interaction with a material nature – i.e., the 'stuff' of existence – as a fundamental and irreducible aspect of human nature itself. In this conceptualisation, the notion of work plays a critical theoretical role in defining what it is to be human. Additional assumptions appear alongside this definition; for example, as beings capable of being free, human beings will always need to be engaged directly in activity of some kind that is specifically oriented towards practical-material outcomes. Even in a utopian society, where 'total automation is the optimum',¹⁷ human beings will need to engage in activity that secures and maintains an ongoing sustainable relationship with the material environment in which it is embedded. The idea that machines will one day take care of all of the needs that humans require as autonomous beings is not just an idea out of science fiction; according to a coherent philosophical anthropology of work, such an idea is inconsistent with the conception of an authentically autonomous and genuinely self-determining human being.

The theories of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse each present a concerted attempt to outline the origin and nature of the needs and capacities of the (social) individual as a complete and unified human being who is engaged in a permanent sensible-material relationship to the natural world. Each philosopher incorporates the concept of *Bedürfnis*.¹⁸ Both the creation and satisfaction of human needs and capacities

¹⁷ Paraphrasing Herbert Marcuse. In Part III we will see that Marcuse does not ultimately consider a complete and absolute departure from the sphere of work as consistent with a realistic conception of human self-determination and freedom.

¹⁸ Like the notion of *Bestimmung*, the concept of *Bedürfnis* provides a challenge to English translators. In the context of anthropology it is usually translated as 'need'. With regard to Schiller's writings, Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and Leonard A. Willoughby state that the concept does not apply exclusively to *physical* need; however, they offer the qualification that "it normally belongs to the realm of nature, as opposed to the realm of spirit" (see their "Glossary" in Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, p.327). In their translation of Schiller, for instance, they render the term as "physical exigency" (*ibid.*, p.105). In the context of Marx, George Márkus translates *Bedürfnis* as 'want', drawing on Marx's blurring of the divide between needs and abilities (see Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.64, n.30a; see also Ch. 3, p.88, n.16, below). One of the most important contributions to this concept with respect to Marx is Ágnes Heller's *Bedeutung und Funktion des Begriffs Bedürfnis im Denken vom Karl Marx* (1974), in which she connects the analysis in *Kapital* – specifically the notions of use value, labour-power, and surplus value – back to the concept of (*menschliche*) *Bedürfnis*.

Philosophically, the notion of *Bedürfnis* can be used to express the complex interrelation between human capacities, wants, and needs, and in doing so is a useful means of presenting the basic unity of the human being. In turn, the concept may contribute to a robust framework for an anthropological conception of work, as the unified human being's (material) interaction with a nature, directed at

(*Bedürfnisse*) are grounded in an anthropological theory in which the human being's sensible-material interaction with nature serves as the medium through which individuals as members of a *social community* may engage in a process of self-constitution and transformation. This interaction with nature is employed as a normative ideal regarding the formation of individual identity and social interaction. The ideal is then applied in a social-theoretical context to provide a diagnosis of contemporary society and to provide a practical guide for individual action.

Each of these ideals draws strongly on an anthropologically-situated 'fact' of human corporeality as the basis for a complete and unified conception of human nature and subjectivity.¹⁹ They therefore suggest in different (but related) ways that the human being's various vital attributes – its skills, physical and mental abilities, and moral orientation – are grounded in an intrinsic corporeal constitution such that the individual becomes a free and autonomous subject *not in the face of objective activity, but via direct participation in it*. Their various theoretical stances are consistent with a conception of the *moral subject* as intrinsically dependent on an active engagement with its natural (objective) surroundings *and* with its (intersubjective) social environment – the two core aspects of its corporeally situated essence – in the project of achieving a state of human flourishing.

Schiller opposes his ideal of play with a concept of alienating work reflecting the division of labour as it existed in eighteenth century society. However, his ideal of play draws on the inherent relationship between the human being and nature that in later theories becomes the basic framework for the normative conception of work. Both Marx and Marcuse follow Schiller in considering the human being's sensible-material relationship with nature as the direct source of human freedom; though unlike Schiller, they conceive it as the capacity to work. As corporeally-situated subjective activity, they consider work as an ineradicable reality containing moments of inherent hardship and effort. In this sense, the writings of Marx and Marcuse are ultimately consistent with the myth of a 'fallen humanity'. But, rather than serving as a means

creating and fulfilling its various vital needs. In doing so, the notion of *Bedürfnis* is simultaneously compatible with a conception of human determination and freedom.

¹⁹ Once again it should be pointed out that as a Kantian, Friedrich Schiller is not strictly a materialist. However, his anthropology marks an important turn *in the direction of* materialist conception of human subjective corporeality, particularly when compared to the critical philosophy of Kant, to which Schiller's philosophy is intimately connected. Further analysis on the philosophical relationship between Schiller and Kant will be given in Chapter One.

for caution, lament, or even despair, they appropriate the notion of human embodiment as the medium through which individual human beings *work* to assume their unique identities as representatives of a common human society, and species (*Gattung*). While remaining aware that the physicality of the human species renders its exemplars prone to physical damage, deterioration, and mortality, they also acknowledge that the subject has no alternative but to struggle towards a state of human flourishing, as an existential imperative within the bounds of the subject's basic anthropologically determined corporeality. Their divergence from the myth of fallen humanity arrives not merely via their conviction regarding the possibility of freedom in spite of the reality of human materiality; for Marx and Marcuse (and in fact for Schiller as well), human beings may achieve the highest levels of freedom and flourishing *on account of* their corporeal connection to nature.

Our materially-based capacity for sensuality delivers pain, struggle, and hardship – but it is also the wellspring of the capacity for pleasure; the experience of which is an undeniable aspect of human freedom and flourishing. In a manner resembling Nietzsche's account of human life, the exemplary subject remains compelled to embrace the reality of its own materiality as a source of suffering and mortality, while actively thriving in it as the underlying condition of its capacity to flourish, in the same instance as a unique individual and as an archetypal human being.

Whether or not this productive activity turns out *in practice* to be beneficial or detrimental to the individual's development, it is this activity that performs the task of mediating the intimate relationship between the subject's own inherent embodiment and the basic material that constitutes the objective environment in which the subject is embedded. At the same time, it also serves crucially as the medium through which social relations take place, as 'social activity' occurring between corporeally extant subjects.

4. Structure of the argument

The thesis is divided into three parts, with each taking one of these philosophers as its focus. I begin my analysis with Friedrich Schiller; firstly, to demonstrate the complex relationship between German idealism and the strand of philosophical anthropology and critical social theory represented by the philosophers in this analysis; secondly, to

demonstrate the superiority of the concept of work in normatively representing humankind's interaction with nature in a social-theoretical context, in relation to other forms of activity – in Schiller's case, the notion of 'play'.

In response to Kant, Schiller's 'transcendentally-grounded' anthropology emphasises the need to acknowledge the considerable role of the human senses in the composition of human nature, the development of morality, and in the constitution of individual character. For Schiller, sensibility connects the human being to the material world while also serving as the means through which the transcendental ideals of morality and beauty are concretely realised. Schiller's theory of aesthetic education served to influence future critics of the transcendental philosophy – most notably Hegel. While Schiller's chosen ideal is play rather than work, his theory places stress on the need for a philosophical anthropology to address the human subject with respect to embodied drives or 'instincts', coupled with the employment of an aspect of human subjectivity that directly concerns the subject's relationship to 'matter' (*Stoff*) in the process of subjective self-constitution. This framework paves the way for later thinkers to utilise the concrete relationship between the subject and the material environment; and subsequently, to consider work as the central concept of a theory of subjective constitution and development.

The analysis of Marx (in Part II) stresses the importance of his early writings in the development of his mature critique of capital.²⁰ I therefore take the view that the 'Hegelian reading' is the richest and most rewarding interpretation of historical materialism. Through this approach Marx's underlying philosophy of individual subject-formation, as well as the relationship between the individual and a greater human *Bestimmung* – both of which connect Marx to the tradition of German idealism – may be observed most clearly. According to this reading, Marx's entire theory is grounded in the notion that the relations of society's system of production dictate the fundamental conditions of human experience. Human freedom is in turn grounded in

²⁰ The 'Hegelian' strand of Marxian thought is considered to have achieved definitive expression in the writings of Lukács and Korsch, who in 1923 published separate and unrelated analyses of Marx, both of which called attention to the Hegelian nature of Marx's analysis of capital. This strand of Marxian critique predates the discovery and publication of Marx's *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, which so influenced the direction of thinkers like Marcuse. Marcuse himself would become one of the major representatives of this particular reading of Marx following his influential analysis of the 'Paris Manuskripte' soon after their first publication in 1932. According to Peter Lind, however, Marcuse's analysis was "highly selective": "Out of a total of 140 pages, Marcuse focuses on little more than a dozen". See Lind, *Marcuse and Freedom*, p.78.

the individual subject's capacity and need (*Bedürfnis*) to realise its freedom via a process of self-transformation, in which it also actively transforms nature, as well as its own interaction and relationship with it. A pathological system of production, such as that exhibited in the capitalist era, stifles this process, producing a pathological experience of reality. Society in turn becomes driven not according to the basic need for freedom, but by the destructive determination of capital itself. Freedom becomes contingent upon workers organising together, as a collective proletariat, against the representatives of capital, the bourgeoisie.

The inclusion of Marcuse (Part III) is based on his understanding that historical materialism retains a critical core of truth; however, historical events since Marx's time have rendered necessary a new theoretical approach that reconnects this core of truth with twentieth-century experience. Of the most prominent theorists associated with Frankfurt School Critical Theory, it was Marcuse who maintained the most sustained connection to historical materialism via a focus on the relationship between the division of labour and individual work activity. Through his various analyses, encompassing phenomenological ontology, Freudian metapsychology, and utopian theory, Marcuse sought to emphasise the intimate connection between human nature, individual subjectivity, and society's interaction with an external nature. This involves an elaboration of the connection between the instinctual needs of the human subject, grounded in an imperative towards sensual gratification, and its material interaction with nature. As we will see, his employment of utopian ideas remains consistent with Marx's own practically oriented goals, while sacrificing philosophical consistency in an attempt to demonstrate the ongoing need for revolutionary struggle against capitalism's alienating and destructive imperatives.

By way of conclusion, a brief discussion will illuminate current problems in contemporary critical social theory, which is struggling to offer innovative new approaches to practical human action (particularly in the era of global anthropocentric climate change). Arguably, contemporary social analysis is approaching a crisis of relevance similar to that experienced by historical materialism in the early twentieth century. As the current ecological state of affairs demonstrates, society's most pressing concerns involve the intimate relationship between human socioeconomic activity (human activity in general) and ecological change. Though clearly recognised

in the scholarship, the philosophical approaches to this problem are commonly informed by anthropological frameworks that fail to place sufficient emphasis on the material connection between nature itself and human beings as active, corporeally situated beings – i.e., social beings who pursue freedom within a material environment. In the following analysis of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse, the case will be made that the concept of work, as a robust theoretical representation of the human being's most basic interaction with the natural world, provides an invaluable and practically oriented resource for a comprehensive, materially based, social-theoretical analysis.

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Part I. Schiller

They had been brought up in a tradition that told them in one way or another that the life of the mind and the life of the senses were separate and, indeed, inimical; they had believed, without ever having really thought about it, that one had to be chosen at some expense of the other. That one could intensify the other had never occurred to them; and since the embodiment came before the recognition of the truth, it seemed a discovery that belonged to them alone.

—John Edward Williams,
Stoner, 1965

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Chapter 1.

Schiller's 'transcendental' anthropology and the concept of 'play'

In comparison to other theorists of his time, Friedrich Schiller has not been extensively studied in the Anglophone world, at least by philosophers. His Kantian orientation, combined with his focus on themes that Kant himself addressed, have meant that he is often slotted into the history of ideas as little more than a footnote to the voluminous Kantian *oeuvre*.¹ Overall, Schiller's philosophical legacy has been underappreciated.

Ultimately, the significance of Schiller's aesthetic theory with respect to the philosophical concept of work activity is located in his notion of play (*Spiel*), which he closely identified with his concept of human determination, or the *Bestimmung* of humankind.

In the eighteenth century, the question of human *Bestimmung*, the 'highest good' of humanity, was a standard theme in German philosophy.² Schiller's major philosophical essay, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (1795),³ is his major statement on the theme. His treatment involves an attempt to rectify problems that he identified within the Kantian philosophy regarding its intractable division between the sensible and the rational aspects of human nature.

Schiller's attempt at conceiving the human being as a unified subject, in which sensible and rational aspects are harmonised in and through embodied activity, provides the basis of his contribution to the philosophy of work. His innovation is to present a conception of the human being as unified on account of its need to engage in a form of activity that involves the subject's sensible relationship with external nature, while drawing on the subject's own distinctive inner resources. Although

¹ For recent accounts of Schiller's overall relationship with Kant and his philosophy, see Frederick Beiser, "Dispute with Kant", in Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher. A Re-Examination*, pp.169-90.

² See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher, A Re-Examination*, pp.19, 188.

³ From here on referred to as the *Ästhetische Briefe* in the text. In citations I refer to the title of the 1967 translation by Elizabeth Wilkinson and Leonard Willoughby.

Schiller conceived play rather than work as the exemplar of such activity, he nonetheless opened the way for a conception of the human being whose highest realisation would be mediated or ‘expressed’ by its embodied engagements with nature.⁴ Schiller introduces us to the idea that human self-realisation involves activity that brings the senses and the material world into union; however, it would be left to others to develop an account of how work can function as such an activity.

Schiller reaches his insight by way of a critique of Kant. In Schiller’s view, Kant’s concept of human nature as fundamentally divided between sensible and rational capacities could not provide the basis for an adequate conception of human agency; nor could it provide a suitable ideal or orientation point for human action. For Schiller, Kant’s conception of ‘the highest good’ of the human subject fails to incorporate the imperatives of human sensibility into an ideal that the subject can actively pursue as an expression of the *complete and unified* capacities of the human being.

While Schiller retains elements of Kant’s notion of the subject, he is ultimately concerned with providing a general conception of human determination to replace Kant’s accounts of the individual ‘highest good’ and the *Bestimmung* of humankind. Schiller’s most significant gesture is to apply socio-political significance to Kant’s notion of *play*, extending it from merely an interaction between the subject’s internal faculties to a form of practical interaction with the external world. Schiller claims that through engagement in play, individuals experience an inward harmonisation of their dual nature as sensible-rational beings, through which they come to understand themselves as essentially complete and unified. Furthermore, through this activity, human beings may attain *together*, via culture (*Kultur*), a condition of flourishing that more properly reflects an ideal of the ‘highest human good’, which according to Schiller could be perpetuated through an ethos of aesthetic education.

One might ask whether the aesthetic education that Schiller considered inherent in play is adequate to the goal of providing the subject with the means of attaining a state of unity, harmony and completion. As Schiller was aware, the embodied condition of the human being also makes it essential for humans to work

⁴ As we will see in Chapter 6 (Section 2.5, p.181), the *Ästhetische Briefe* would be utilised by Herbert Marcuse, who as a Marxian theorist addressed more explicitly the intimate connection between subjective embodiment, work activity, and natural necessity. Marcuse intended to “rescue the full content of Schiller’s notion [of play] from the benevolent aesthetic treatment to which the traditional interpretation has confined it”. In Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.135.

on nature in order to meet their basic corporeal needs. Schiller shared the traditional understanding of work as the human being's means of satisfying its basic material needs in a world of natural necessity. However, he could not see how the act of meeting those needs could itself help to bring about the unity, harmony and completion he understood as the human *Bestimmung*.

Ultimately, therefore, Schiller failed to see that the dualisms of Kantian philosophy could be reconciled not just by play or aesthetic education, but by embodied action in its 'productive' mode, i.e., in work. Indeed, as a means of securing the intrinsic relationship between the concept of play and his conception of human nature and freedom as 'complete', Schiller directly opposes his ideal of play to the concepts of external *compulsion* (*Nötigung*) and *necessity* (*Notwendigkeit*). This general opposition prevents *natural necessity* and any related *material need* (*Bedürfnis*) from exerting any normative influence upon Schiller's conception of human determination. As a result, his concept of human flourishing fails to incorporate the ongoing human struggle to secure basic material needs within the sphere of nature. Given the inescapability of these needs for an embodied subject, this is a major drawback in Schiller's account, which philosophers after him will seek to address by confronting the necessity bound to human material concerns head on.

In order to support this reading of Schiller, we will first provide a brief account of Schiller's diagnosis of modernity in the *Ästhetische Briefe*, and the philosophical anthropology that supports it (Section 1). As Schiller's position can really only be understood in the context of Kant's critical philosophy, Section 2 will be devoted to Schiller's critical appropriation of Kant, and in particular to how Schiller sought to correct an anthropological deficit in Kant's thought. In Section 3 we will elaborate on Schiller's own anthropology, with a focus on his distinctive idea of play. Finally, in Section 4 a critique of Schiller's concept of play will be offered, along with some reflections as to how the concept of work activity might more effectively address Schiller's insights regarding philosophical anthropology and the theory of human action.

1. Modernity, work, and subjectivity

1.1 Schiller's diagnosis of contemporary society

In a manner characteristic of German Idealism, the *Ästhetische Briefe* begins with an acknowledgement of the political problems facing contemporary society. Challenging a common Enlightenment argument, upon which the Kantian philosophy itself exerted an inadvertent influence,⁵ Schiller contends that the principal problem with modernity is not that reason has not yet been adequately utilised in the organisation of society, but that society exhibits evidence of an over-fixation with rationality.⁶ What is required is a more restrained and critical stance towards the employment of reason in the pursuit of human flourishing: "Reason has accomplished all that she can accomplish by discovering the [moral] law and establishing it. Its execution demands a resolute will and ardour of feeling".⁷ Schiller's idea is hence to cultivate a balance between the human senses and the faculty of reason.

This stance can be understood as Kantian in spirit. Just as the critical philosophy seeks to clarify the boundaries of the autonomous domain of reason, Schiller seeks to ensure that reason is employed practically in a manner that is consistent with, and not ultimately detrimental to, the multifarious interests of the *complete* human subject. The narrow emphasis on rationality within the culture of the Enlightenment has been to the detriment of the human being as a whole, Schiller argues; which is to say that the *Bestimmung* of humankind has been distorted. For Schiller, the correction of this distortion, which is characteristic of the problems of the modern age, requires that sensibility and rationality are cultivated together. Only in this way can the full interests of the unified sensible-rational human being be properly served.

For Schiller, the desire for this unification is expressed in the practical pursuit of beauty (*Schönheit*). However, this pursuit is stymied by the one-sided 'rational' organisation of society. Under the hegemony of 'reason and utility', the subject of modernity is exposed to a life consisting not of beauty, but of restriction and compulsion. Nowhere is this more evident than in the forced and regimented activity

⁵ George di Giovanni speaks of Karl Leonhard Reinhold's lamentation regarding "the sad misappropriation to which Kant had been subjected at the hands of the 'popular philosophers'." In di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors. The Vocation of Humankind, 1774-1800*, p.4.

⁶ This daring premise is one that underlies Marcuse's theory of Eros, as we will see in Chapter 6.

⁷ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letter VIII.3, p.49.

of work (*Arbeit*). For Schiller, modern work serves as a renunciation of freedom by restricting the human being's capacity for free and autonomous action to rationally-directed activities that force a confrontation with the various strictures of *necessity* (*Notwendigkeit*).

Like many of the prominent and cultured Germans of his time, Schiller's view of the modern age was shaped by a conception of an ideal of human flourishing taken from classical Greece, which for him was populated by people of broad and developed capacities, public involvement, and practical autonomy. A particularly emotive passage demonstrates Schiller's investment in this ideal.

[T]he Greek States, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the entire organism, now made way for an ingenious clock-work, in which....a mechanical kind of collective life ensued. State and Church, laws and customs, were now torn asunder; enjoyment was divorced from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, the human being itself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in its ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that it turns, it never develops the harmony of its being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon its own nature, becomes nothing more than the imprint of its occupation or of its specialised knowledge. But even that meagre, fragmentary participation, by which individual members of the State are still linked to the Whole, does not depend upon forms which they spontaneously prescribe for themselves (for how could one entrust to their freedom of action a mechanism so intricate and so fearful of light and enlightenment?); it is dictated to them with meticulous exactitude by means of a formulary which inhibits all freedom of thought. The dead letter takes the place of living understanding, and a good memory is a safer guide than imagination and feeling.

When the community makes his office the measure of the person; when in one of its citizens it prizes nothing but memory, in another a mere tabularizing intelligence, in a third only mechanical skill; when....indifferent to character, it insists exclusively on knowledge....can we wonder that the remaining aptitudes

of the psyche are neglected in order to give undivided attention to the one which will bring honour and profit?⁸

In this passage, Schiller expresses the importance not only of individual agency and freedom, but also of subjective *unity*, *wholeness*, and *harmony*. While refraining from an unchecked indulgence in nostalgia,⁹ Schiller observes that there was an unmatched freedom in the capacity of the archetypal Greek to move from individual to collective life, such that either the subject *or* society could operate as an organic whole, in accordance with their basic interests at each level.

Significantly, Schiller employs an imagery of 'biological wholeness' to express the ideal of Greek social existence. Society is described as an organism, within which its individual organs are autonomous in their distinctive operation, while also existing as part of a greater harmonised whole. As such they play a unique and essential role in a unified metabolic process of living and being. In contrast, modern society is represented as rigid and mechanical, in which individual parts are locked together in a functional unit, confined in an allocated space to perform isolated, specialised, and limited operations. The imagery here evokes the notions of restriction, fragmentation, and *compulsion* (*Nötigung*).

For Schiller, the individual's genuine experience of freedom is directed at "the harmony of his being". However, at the same time freedom is only possible when collective life exists as an *unforced unity*, not divided, controlled, and scattered; when the subject is not 'chained to a fragment of the Whole'; when participation is not 'dictated by means of a formulary'. It is this form of unforced unity that modern subjects lack.

Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and once the increasingly complex machinery of the State necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature

⁸ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Letter VI.8, pp.35-7.

⁹ "I do not underrate the advantages which the human race today, considered as a whole and weighed in the balance of intellect, can boast in the face of what is best in the ancient world". In Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter VI.4, pp.33.

was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at a variance.¹⁰

In Schiller, modern life at all levels is presented in terms of coercion and even violence: along with those of Rousseau, Schiller's individuals are in chains; collective institutions are 'torn asunder'; and the subject is caught between the 'noisy wheels' of a mechanical Leviathan. Above all the subject remains caught in an environment that restricts one's *conception of life* as an ongoing struggle to fend off the rigorous demands of fundamental natural and utilitarian-instrumental *need (Not)*.

Schiller considers modern work to be of no perceivable benefit to the individual subject. Whether consisting in physical or mental activity, it tends to be specialised and so it fails to adequately engage the subject's range of natural abilities. This specialisation prevents any kind of individual contentment, precluding the expansion of one's inner capacities and potential. Work is depicted as a kind of active monotony serving to deaden the subject's capacity and desire for innovation and thought, and to feed a sense of externally dictated compulsion. Activities are unnecessarily toilsome, particularly for the little reward they provide. They cut the worker off from the purpose of the task at hand; a purpose that, when identified, usually involves merely 'honour' and 'profit', which the worker will rarely claim for herself. Schiller also views work as inducing a feeling of physical restraint or imprisonment, precluding the subject from broader participation in cultural life.

For Schiller, this multitude of drawbacks serves to divide the subject from its inner capacities by forcing one skill to dominate others, while also permeating a general ethos of compulsion; all of which render work incapable of providing any sense of freedom or independence. In contrast to the ideal of an 'organic Whole', modernity has delivered a society built upon the fragmentation of life both within the individual subject itself, and within culture. In the organisation of work and society, the imperatives of a utilitarian rationality have been adopted at the expense of

¹⁰ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter VI.6, p.33. Schiller's wariness of the 'sharpening of divisions between the sciences' demonstrates an acute awareness of the deleterious effects to human knowledge, rendered by an Enlightenment project steered by the force of rationality alone. This idea was therefore already part of the conception of modernity among the German idealists and Romantics. As a sociological observation, this passage serves as a forerunner to Weber's systematised treatment of the fragmentation of knowledge and values in modernity, culminating in the notion of the 'iron cage' of rationalisation.

humanity's shared sensible-rational interests, leading to the fragmentation of the subject and the degradation of social existence.

Schiller's view of work shows the extent to which his own conception of freedom relies on the abandonment of activities that expose the subject to any form of *compulsion*. The problem with the division of labour is that its various forms of specialisation serve as a direct barrier to the free exploration and development of the human being's multifarious sensible and rational capacities. According to Schiller it is on account of both the internal and external forms of compulsion experienced by the subject that work endangers freedom.

1.2. The problem of *Not* and *Nötigung*

As can be seen through his depiction of work, Schiller generates a basic opposition between human freedom and a generalised concept of *compulsion* or *need*. The latter represents a hindrance to the human being's self-conception as a unified being, and to the practical harmonisation of its inner capacities. As a result, the opposition between freedom and necessity (*Notwendigkeit*) serves as the background to his ideal of human activity and *Bestimmung*. Both the natural imposition of physical need and the socially-imposed imperatives of modern industrial life serve as the antithesis of human determination.

Schiller reflects this dichotomy in his distinction between two forms of political institution: the *Naturstaat* or *Notstaat* ('state of need'),¹¹ and the *Staat der Freiheit* ('state of freedom').

Out of the long slumber of the senses [the subject] awakens to consciousness and knows itself to be a human being; it looks about, and finds itself—in the State [*Staat*]. The force of its needs threw it into this situation before it was as yet capable of exercising its freedom to choose it; compulsion [*die Not*] organised the State according to purely natural laws before the subject could do so according to the laws of Reason. But with this State of compulsion [*Notstaat*], born of what Nature destined the subject to be [*Natur-*

¹¹ Schiller distinguishes his conception of the 'natural' political state, or *Naturstaat*, from Rousseau's conception of the state of nature, or *Naturstand* ('condition of nature') which in any case is not a political institution. See Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter III.2, p.11.

bestimmung], and designed to this end alone, the subject neither could nor can rest content as a Moral Being [*moralische Person*].¹²

Schiller portrays the *Notstaat* as the human being's first political attempt to mediate the harsh effects of natural necessity. This primitive political state therefore is ultimately brought under the hegemony of natural laws rather than organised by the rational human imperative for freedom.

As with Kant, Schiller considers the human being's capacity for rational thought, its recourse to 'Reason', as the *means* of passing beyond the entrenched imperatives of the state of need and the modern division of labour; a division in which work is originally thrust upon the human being as an imperative to mediate the effects of natural necessity (and eventually accompanied by imperatives that prioritise surplus material satisfaction). For Schiller, it is the blind forces of external nature that set off the normative orientation of the *Notstaat*, which if left unchecked will promote raw utilitarian forms of life that culminate in modern decadence. It is *natural necessity* therefore that serves as the original barrier to human flourishing, and which leads Schiller to turn to an ideal of play, which opposes all forms of purely rational, utilitarian activity.

In conceiving of need, natural necessity, and the compulsions that arise from human material existence as barriers to genuine human flourishing, and hence as alien to the human *Bestimmung*, Schiller demonstrates a significant reliance on Kant. In order to critically examine Schiller's antidote to modernity's distortions of human determination, we must first look in more detail at the Kantian background to Schiller's thought. This will help to uncover the specific connection between Schiller's concept of play – and his broader philosophical anthropology – with the theoretical problems that the philosophy of work is ultimately positioned to address.

2. Schiller and Kant

2.1. Kant and Anthropology

In the view of Schiller and many of his contemporaries, the central underlying problem afflicting the Kantian philosophy is the rigidity of the dualism it creates between the subject's sensible and rational 'natures', which appear to be a consequence of the

¹² Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter III.2, p.11.

epistemological strictures set down in the critical philosophy. The dualism is most evident in the distinction that Kant introduces between the realms of ‘noumena’ – the reality of which must be presupposed by the intellect without possessing direct access to it; and ‘phenomena’, the objective reality of which human experience itself is comprised. This distinction plays a key role in Kant’s attempt to delimit the realm of objective human knowledge and in turn ‘save’ human freedom – a freedom which, for Kant, has a noumena-like, ‘intelligible character’ – from the determinism of natural science. The distinction arises in the context of the epistemological project outlined by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; however it has logical implications for philosophical anthropology. It is these implications, and in particular the difficulties they present for conceptualising the unity of the human being, which provide the main target of Schiller’s critique of Kant.

Before looking more closely at this problem it is worth noting that, as a popular and enthusiastic lecturer in the discipline for over two decades, Kant himself was by no means blind to the concerns of philosophical anthropology.¹³ One of his final major works was a textbook version of his lectures: the well-known *Anthropologie in Pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798).¹⁴ The question of Kant’s position on the discipline of philosophical anthropology is therefore a pertinent one.

A number of relatively recent contributions have been made in this area of Kantian scholarship.¹⁵ The current trend is to resist the claim that Kant believed a comprehensive philosophical anthropology was possible. According to Allen Wood, Kant’s anthropology is not a serious attempt to present a *philosophical* anthropology,

¹³ See Kuehn, *Kant. A Biography*, pp.204-5. Patrick Frierson gives a brief survey of Kant’s numerous anthropological writings in Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy*, p.1.

¹⁴ There is an enduring contention that this text is inferior to his other major works. Robert Louden speaks of the critic Benno Erdmann’s ‘senility thesis’ in an effort to explain this: “[the] claim (which others have extended to all of Kant’s last publications) that Kant’s 1798 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* represents only ‘the laborious compilation of a seventy-four-year-old man as he stood on the threshold of decrepitude’” (in Louden, *Kant’s Human Being. Essays on His Theory of the Human Being*, p.49). In spite of this apparent inferiority, the ‘textbook’, as Kant himself called it, was immensely influential in the field. See Jacobs and Kain, “Introduction”, in *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology*, p.4.

¹⁵ For instance, see Patrick Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant’s Moral Philosophy* (2003); Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain (eds.), *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology* (2003); Holly L. Wilson, *Kant’s Pragmatic Anthropology* (2006); Alix Cohen, *Kant and the Human Sciences. Biology, Anthropology and History* (2009); Robert B. Louden, *Kant’s Human Being. Essays on His Theory of the Human Being* (2011). This interest in Kant’s anthropology is certainly related to the first ever publication of Kant’s *Vorlesungen über Anthropologie* in 1997. The first English edition was published by Cambridge University Press in 2012, edited by Robert B. Louden and Allen W. Wood.

but rather, is merely a theoretical response to his “dissatisfaction with the ‘physiological’ approach to the subject taken by Ernst Platner”.¹⁶

Kant....thinks it is *impossible* to define what is peculiar to the human species. For, he says, this species is only one possible variant of rational nature, yet we are acquainted with no other variants with which to compare it and arrive at specific differentia....Whatever we say about human nature, its predispositions and its propensities, can have only a provisional character.¹⁷

In its intention to locate definitive knowledge of the *unchangeable preconditions* of the empirically extant human being, a philosophical anthropology would, presumably for Kant, reach beyond reason’s epistemological limits. It would therefore, presumably, appear to him as mere speculation, along with metaphysical arguments about God, immortality, and the human soul.

At best, the theoretical scope of a Kantian philosophical anthropology would seem to be effectively indefinable, stretched ambiguously across the central Kantian noumenal-phenomenal duality, generating a fatal ‘theoretical demarcation problem’.¹⁸

Though he had lectured in anthropology for decades, Kant only published his *Anthropologie* in 1798, two years after Schiller had completed his major philosophical analyses. Late in that same year, Schiller admitted in a letter to Goethe that he was “very desirous of seeing Kant’s anthropology”.

The pathological side of the human being, which [Kant] always turns to the outside and which may be in its place in anthropology, follows one in almost everything he writes and it is that which gives his practical philosophy such a

¹⁶ “According to a 1773 letter to Marcus Herz, Platner’s popular treatise on anthropology provoked Kant to institute an empirical study of human nature aimed at avoiding Platner’s ‘futile inquiries as to the manner in which bodily organs are connected with thought’”. In Wood, “Kant and the Problem of Human Nature”, in Jacobs and Kain (eds.), *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology*, p.40.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.47.

¹⁸ As Brian Jacobs and Patrick Kain state, Kant stressed that “his version of anthropology would have a *pragmatic* orientation....one might refer to Kant’s anthropology as a ‘philosophical anthropology’ were it not that such a phrase would strike Kant as an oxymoron, given his critical view that philosophy is an entirely rational and nonempirical enterprise, while anthropology is completely empirical.” In “Introduction” to Jacobs and Kain (eds.), *Essays on Kant’s Anthropology*, p.3. For a brief discussion of scholars who disagree with this assessment, see Alix Cohen, *Kant and the Human Sciences*, p.183, n.1. See also Holly L. Wilson’s summary of Volker Simmermacher’s position in Wilson, *Kant’s Pragmatic Anthropology*, p.149, n.39.

morose outlook. The fact that this cheerful and jovial spirit could not keep its wings completely clear of life's grime and has not even overcome certain gloomy youthful impressions is surprising and reprehensible. There is always something in Kant that reminds me of a monk, like Luther, who opened up his monastery but could never quite eradicate its traces.¹⁹

Schiller sensed in Kant an over-fixation with the 'nasty temptations' of the senses, as though Kant may very well have preferred that human beings were capable of shedding their unfortunate sensible existence for a life more deserving of the 'pure' moral-rational subject. To be fair, Kant understood the need for the subject to *conceive of itself* as a complete sensible-rational being. Even in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) – commonly cited as proof of Kant's reckless disregard for the practical relevance of human contingency – he states that "[t]he moral 'ought' is [the subject's] own necessary 'will' as a member of an intelligible world, and is thought by him as 'ought' only insofar as he regards himself at the same time *as a member of the world of sense*".²⁰ However, it is not unfair to say that, though Kant placed some stake in a conception of the human being as an objective unity, he never provided a systematic conception of it as such. Further comments in the *Grundlegung* concerning the antinomy between freedom and natural necessity appear to support the position that for Kant the unification of human subjectivity is impossible to demonstrate theoretically, but is however an aspect of the *assumption of freedom* that the subject must make in order to experience freedom in the first place.²¹

Schiller sensed that problematic dualisms are entrenched in the basic structure of the critical philosophy. As far as a complete conception of human freedom is concerned – and particularly when presented via a normative ideal of action – Schiller considered the problem to be essentially insurmountable for Kant.

¹⁹ Cited in Heuer, "Sensuous-Objective. Beauty in the Realm of Human Freedom. On the Language of Concepts in Schiller's Essay 'On Grace and Dignity'", in Curran and Fricker (eds.), *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity' in its Cultural Context*, p.76, n.38. There Heuer himself states: "It is....illogical to seek assurance from within Kant's thought for the purity of conviction at the sight of a person acting out of love by means of a moral judgment about appearances. In this case it would require the removal....of the transcendental separation of aesthetic and moral judgment. Despite his recognition of Kant's liberal spirit, Schiller sees a shadow there."

²⁰ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in Kant, *Practical Philosophy* (Mary J. Gregor, ed.), p.101 [4:455]. Italics added at the end of the quote.

²¹ See *ibid.*, pp.102-3 [4:455-6].

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2.2. Kantian freedom

Expressing one's freedom in Kantian practical philosophy involves the individual's *a priori* capacity (the *Willkür*) to choose the moral law over contingent imperatives, i.e., those arising out of the subject's sensibility, such as those directed at happiness. It is simply not an act of freedom to follow one's sensible inclinations – not only because those inclinations arise via natural causality, i.e., are not self-determined; but also because as a motive it is commonly at odds with one's duty. As such, a motive of action based on the mere achievement of happiness represents the action of a will (*Wille*) that falls short of freedom.

For Schiller, this framework dictates that while freedom *applies* to a sensible-rational subject – and in fact *belongs* to it by means of its inherent rationality – this freedom remains an abstract ideal; as such Kant *in principle* refrains from factoring the subject's sensible interests into its normative constitution. For Kant freedom *ought to* remain an austere ideal for a rational being that also possesses sensible inclinations and tendencies. The capacity to conceive it as such is, after all, the very definition of a morality grounded in reason.

But Kant's conception of freedom does appear to lead to some strange outcomes with regard to the individual's sensible and empirical existence. For instance, it is possible to describe the Kantian subject as free without consideration of its contingent circumstances. In this case a person is autonomous simply on the basis of its *a priori* capacity to choose duty over inclination, i.e., on the basis of *Willkür* alone. The effect is that contingent aspects of subjectivity become irrelevant to objective freedom and agency – a result which must compromise the usefulness of the concept of freedom itself from the point of view of the contingent, sensibly-interested individual. Similarly, Kantian freedom does not seem well suited to account for the role of a subject's own unique biological constitution with regard to its capacity for objective agency.

A second drawback of Kantian practical freedom is that it is an internal and essentially *solitary* capacity. While all rational subjects possess a *Willkür*, it is a potential of *inner thought*, and as such it is ultimately cut off from the influence of

external contingency – including that exerted by social circumstance. It is unclear therefore exactly how social and political action plays a role in the practical agency of individuals. The outlook is one in which the individual's moral worth is ultimately a matter between its own will and pure reason, much like the penitent's position regarding the Divine judgment of the soul.²²

We can see Schiller's theory as providing perhaps a more thoroughgoing secular and humanist conception of freedom than Kant by attempting to offer an account of the connection between abstract moral action and genuine objective action that expresses the complete nature and agency of the unified subject.

In an (in)famous footnote at the end of his nineteenth letter, Schiller explains his position most clearly. There he recognises that Kantian ethics requires a 'second order' of freedom (*eine Freiheit der zweiten Art*), separated from the abstract sphere of the Kantian *Willkür*, which he calls 'freedom of the first order' (*der ersten Art*).

To obviate any possible misunderstanding, I would observe that, wherever there is any mention of freedom here, I do not mean that freedom which necessarily appertains to the human being [*Menschen*] considered as *intelligent being* [*als Intelligenz betrachtet*], and which can neither be given unto it nor taken from it, but only that freedom which is founded upon its *mixed nature* [*gemischte Natur*]. By *acting rationally at all* the human being displays freedom of the first order; by *acting rationally within the limits of matter, and materially under the laws of reason*, it displays freedom of the second order. We might explain the latter quite simply as a natural possibility of the former.²³

²² Arguably it is Kant's intention to retain a rational moral framework that resembles the relationship between the individual and God. In so doing, he provides a correlation between reason and the 'spiritual' teachings of Christianity, and in so doing 'makes room for faith' without contradicting the autonomy of reason, while also leaving room for a relation between them. Hegel extended this correlation between God and reason in the notion of *absoluter Geist*, presenting the rationality of the dialectic as a reflection of the Trinity (*Dreieinigkeit*), along with the *Subjekt* and *Objekt* (in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*; but see also Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction. Reason in History*, p.51). As we will see, Hegel's equation of the doctrine of *Geist* with Christianity will be significant for Marx who, following Feuerbach, will attribute to this brand of philosophical 'speculation' an inadequate appreciation of material reality and of the corporeal aspect of work and human action.

²³ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIX.12, p.137n. Italics added. This footnote has commonly been regarded as an example of conceptual incoherence in Schiller. See Roehr, "Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller", p.129.

Schiller's second conception of freedom is derived via his "complete anthropological view", as distinct from Kant's "one-sided moral point of view [where] Reason is satisfied as long as her law obtains *unconditionally*".²⁴ As we have seen, his complete anthropological view involves the subject's 'mixed' sensible-rational nature and therefore represents freedom in a world that incorporates contingent factors including, of course, the subject's sensible inclinations.²⁵ While Schiller does not completely reject Kant's conception of pure practical freedom, he does see it as an incomplete account in the context of objective human action. For Schiller, one requires a *moral-aesthetic* concept of freedom in order to complete the theory of autonomy as it would apply to contingent human beings.²⁶

2.3. Human determination (*Bestimmung*) in Kant

As the *a priori* ideal at the core of the theory of practical reason, Kant's concept of freedom forms the basis of his account of the human *Bestimmung* – what he generally calls 'the highest good' (*summum bonum*, *höchstes Gut*).²⁷ Kant provides a succinct definition at the conclusion of the first critique: "Happiness....in exact proportion with

²⁴ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter IV.3, p.19. Italics added.

²⁵ On this point Wilkinson and Willoughby describe Schiller's objection to Kant's conception of moral life as "an ideal of human conduct which lies outside the realm of genuine possibility because it is, in the last analysis, incompatible with human nature in its phenomenal existence." In Wilkinson and Willoughby, "Introduction", in Schiller, *op. cit.*, p.xci.

²⁶ Zvi Tauber locates an inconsistency in Schiller's basic reasoning, which amounts to the claim that Schiller *acknowledges* Kant's fundamental distinction between the ethical and aesthetic realms, and therefore contradicts himself in his derivation of a 'second order of freedom' in the realm of the aesthetic. 'Freedom' after all is, Tauber essentially claims, an essentially *moral* concept with no applicability to aesthetic life.

Tauber's overtly Kantian critique leads to a rigidly analytical reading of Schiller's own argument, in which Schiller's interrelated transcendental and contingent perspectives on the nature of aesthetic education (i.e., as the innate human potential of *beauty*, and as objective activity in *Spiel*) are presented as 'incongruent'. This might seem the case, if one forgets that the heart of the *Ästhetische Briefe* is a normative account of the *unification of human nature*. In my assessment, Tauber attributes to Schiller *too comprehensive* a devotion to Kant, and attempts to trip him up with inconsistency on this account. See Tauber, "Aesthetic Education for Morality. Schiller and Kant", particularly pp.22-3, 36-40.

²⁷ It might be argued that Kant's theory distinguishes between a 'highest good' (*höchstes Gut*) of the individual subject and an ultimate '*Bestimmung* of humankind', directed at a 'kingdom of ends' (*Reich der Zwecke*). This being the case, a suitable qualification may be to state also that, in contrast to the 'highest good', *Bestimmung* applies to the individual subject itself merely as the *worthiness to attain* happiness in a sensible world conforming to the laws of reason. It is significant that in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* Kant follows his discussion of 'the highest good in the world' with a reference to the individual subject, within which he makes a distinction between the 'highest moral good', and the 'highest physical good' – the latter of which he refers to as 'happiness' (See Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Guyer and Matthews, eds., p.315 [5:450]).

In any case, for Kant the subject's sensible existence has no direct normative bearing on *freedom*, as pertaining to the concept of the highest good and the human *Bestimmung*; this was Schiller's major misgiving about Kant's critical philosophy itself.

the morality of the rational beings who are thereby rendered worthy of it, alone constitutes the supreme good [*höchste Gut*] of that world wherein, in accordance with the commands of a pure but practical reason, we are under obligation to place ourselves".²⁸

By making happiness conditional on morality in this way, the steadfast division between the human being's sensible and rational natures resurfaces in Kant, rendering their reconciliation a remote and abstract concern. In Schiller's view, human determination needs to represent not only what is best for the unified subject as an abstract, future ideal, but must also form the foundation for a *theory of action* that puts the concrete realisation of this good within reach of the subject's actual capabilities.

For Kant's moral subject, any action undertaken to achieve the highest good must be performed alongside the decision to *refuse one's sensible needs* in favour of moral action. Though this in itself would imply resignation to a life of sensible austerity, it is presumably in the subject's power to *hope* that the deterministic forces of nature will unfold in a way that ultimately leads to a personal achievement of happiness, and with it, the highest good.

In Schiller's eyes, this formulation is unacceptable. By his account, Kant is understood to have traded away the complete agency of the sensible-rational subject for a mere *rational* agency, the latter of which cannot realise a comprehensively objective human freedom on its own. For Schiller the source of the problem lies in the underlying dualist anthropology. According to him, Kant has offered an ideal of the human *Bestimmung* that reduces the human being's *Willkür* to a choice of virtue over inclination. To remain at the mercy of one's *contingent* inclinations is to deny the moral law in favour of the deterministic laws of nature that drive one's sensible inclinations, i.e., to cement one's subservience to natural necessity, and ultimately to remain unfree.

This issue is the crux of Schiller's criticism of the Kantian conception of the highest human good, and Schiller identifies two interrelated problems with it. On the one hand, as a result of an intractable division within its sensible-rational nature, the Kantian human being is prevented from acting in a manner that will satisfy its

²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.641 [A 814; B 842].

complete nature, and autonomously express itself as an objectively *unified being*. On the other hand, as an ideal, Kant's 'highest good' is premised upon the decision to *sacrifice* one's sensible, i.e., aesthetic, tendencies in favour of the moral law, i.e., *reason*.²⁹

Kant does attempt to address this dual problem in his aesthetic theory; however, his account ultimately does little to turn it into a theory of a *unified* subjective agency. The role he attributes to aesthetics is, somewhat paradoxically, merely to help orient subjects *away from* their sensible inclinations and towards observation of the moral law.

Beautiful arts and sciences, which by means of a universally communicable pleasure and an elegance and refinement make human beings, if not morally better, at least better mannered for society, very much reduce the tyranny of the sensible tendencies [*Sinnenhanges*], and prepare humans for the sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power.³⁰

Once again, pleasurable activities are in the service of a morality based in the 'sovereignty' of reason. While Kant allows that certain pleasurable activities may serve to guide a person *towards* virtue, they themselves play no role in *constituting* it. Hence, engaging in art or science is not in any way constitutive of a free existence; these activities merely present as part of a contingent (*a posteriori*) circumstance against which subjects are encouraged to surrender their sensible tendencies in favour of a rationally determined (*a priori*) duty.

Ultimately, Kant's theory of practical reason, upon which his theories of the highest good and normative human action are premised, offers the individual an ideal of action that allows them only to determine their own personal *worthiness* of sensible pleasures and other contingent benefits (i.e., material needs) that collective

²⁹ As we will see in Chapter 6, it is this tendency in modern thought to prioritise reason at the expense of sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) that Marcuse draws out as a core aspect of the problems inherent in capitalist modernity. Marcuse draws directly on Schiller's identification of the importance of sensibility in relation to rationality in *Eros and Civilization* (1955). Interestingly, in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) Marcuse argues that the Kantian philosophy itself possesses a latent appreciation of the sensible in its representation of the aesthetic form in art and its correlate in nature. In fact, he goes so far as to state that the "most advanced concepts of [Kant's] Third Critique have not yet been explored in their truly revolutionary significance". In Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, pp.66-7.

³⁰ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p.301 [5:434].

life provides. Schiller's problem with Kant's theory is that it cannot account for the normative significance of the subject's *involvement in the struggle to fulfil these needs*, nor can it account for the unique contribution that *the satisfaction of sensible needs* in general makes to human freedom and flourishing.³¹ The situation for Kant is a direct result of the re-emergence of the division between the faculties of sensibility and rationality within the essential nature of human beings.

In the thirteenth letter of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller includes a footnote that serves as a critique Kant's system *as the last word* on morality and a truly flourishing life.

Once you postulate a primary, and therefore necessary [*notwendigen*], antagonism between the two [natures of the human being], there is, of course, no other means of maintaining unity [*Einheit*] in the human being than by unconditionally *subordinating* the sensuous....to the rational....From this, however, only uniformity [*Einförmigkeit*] can result, never harmony [*Harmonie*], and the human being goes on forever being divided.

In the Transcendental method of philosophizing, where everything depends on clearing form of content, and obtaining Necessity [*Notwendige*] in its pure state, free of all admixture with the contingent, one easily falls into thinking of material things as nothing but an obstacle, and of imagining that our sensuous nature, just because it happens to be a hindrance in *this* operation, must of necessity be in conflict with reason. Such a way of thinking is, it is true, wholly alien to the *spirit* [*Geist*] of the Kantian system, but it may very well be found in the *letter* [*Buchstaben*] of it.³²

One could interpret this passage as suggesting that Schiller sees Kant's conceptions of freedom and human determination as reflecting the overly rationalistic ethos of modern society. However, there is also support in the passage for the claim that Schiller's respect for Kant endured in spite of the limitations of his account. While he disagrees with the conclusions Kant draws regarding a necessary conflict between

³¹ The framework Kant introduces here has an interesting outcome on the broader notion of need (*Bedürfnis*), which appears separated by his dual framework into spiritual-rational and contingent-sensible needs. In Part II we will see how Marx introduces a comprehensive notion of human need (*menschliche Bedürfnis*) in his presentation of a unified conception of human nature and communal life, made possible through the system of production.

³² Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIII.2, p.87n.

sensibility and reason, respect for the ‘spirit’ of the transcendental philosophy itself is manifestly retained.

Kant was aware that what is ‘morally good’ will by no means necessarily lead to favourable personal outcomes. He was also aware that the human *Bestimmung* must incorporate a concern for the subject’s sensible nature. But from Schiller’s perspective, the account fails in its presentation of normative action as a choice to fulfil only one of its two essential capacities; and with only one of these – rationality – contributing to the specific liberating potential of human determination.

This critique of Kant leads to a relocation of the subject’s normative capacity for action in an ideal that reflects a unified sensible-rational human nature, while retaining Kant’s anthropological claim about its dual character. What Schiller eliminates in his own normative anthropological account is not Kant’s notion of the human being itself, but the *fragmentation* of the subject’s capacity to actively pursue its interests as they objectively (i.e., contingently) arise for a truly complete and unified human being.

We can now leave the Kantian philosophy in order to examine Schiller’s own anthropological derivation of play, before turning to an analysis of the implications regarding a philosophical concept of work activity.

3. Schiller’s anthropology and the human *Bestimmung*

3.1. The play drive

Schiller’s philosophical anthropology is based on the concept of the ‘impulse’ or ‘drive’ (*Trieb*) – a notion which he is likely to have adopted from the work of his friend, the philosopher and eminent Kantian, Karl Leonhard Reinhold.³³

The first of these is the ‘form drive’ (*Formtrieb*), which corresponds to Kant’s faculty of rationality.³⁴ The form drive represents the human being’s rational

³³ It is commonly asserted that Schiller took the concept of *Trieb* from his friend Fichte (for instance, see Dahlstrom, *Philosophical Legacies*, p.95). But he is more likely to have borrowed it from another friend, Karl Leonhard Reinhold, whose book *Briefe über die kantische Philosophie* had been published in 1786, and made Reinhold himself, incidentally, the foremost popular authority on the Kantian philosophy, eclipsing even Kant himself (see Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p.228). In the text, Reinhold incorporates the notion of *Trieb* into his presentation of the critical philosophy. Sabine Roehr states that “Reinhold deeply influenced Schiller’s interpretation of the Kantian philosophy, a fact that has not gained enough attention up until now....[Schiller] follows Reinhold’s formulation in terms of material and form drive” (in Roehr, “Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller”, pp.121, 128).

³⁴ Or in the first critique, the faculty of understanding (*Verstand*).

capacities, the changelessness of abstract concepts, and the application of these to the external world. In its operation the form drive supplies the subject with an intelligibly structured world. Without the form drive a being would persist in mere biological terms, caught entirely within the determinism of natural necessity. It would be incapable of formulating abstract meaning, and perhaps even more importantly, any capacity for freedom.

Schiller's second fundamental drive is the 'sense drive' (*Sinntrieb*; also *Stofftrieb* or 'material drive'), which situates the human being in material reality; its goal is to "set him within the limits of time, and to turn him into matter", such that "there will be change for him, and time will have a content".³⁵ As a result, the sense drive is not merely directed at the reception of sense impressions. It also works to determine the basic conditions of the *objective embodiment* of the subject, and in turn, its capacity to interact with matter and nature. Without this drive a human being would persist merely as an intangible spirit of thought, with no way of interacting with a world of empirical events.

In spite of the appearance of diametrical opposition between sense and form drives, Schiller claims that "these two drives....between them, exhaust our conception of humanity".³⁶ Unlike with Kant, whose persistent division again resurfaces, the key to human flourishing for Schiller involves each of these aspects equally in a unified *harmonisation*.

It is at this point, in what may be regarded as the theoretical heart of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, that Schiller explains how these two fundamental drives may in fact harmonise to produce a third drive, the 'play drive' (*Spieltrieb*). Rather than describing the play drive as derivative of the other two drives, Schiller treats it as similarly *fundamental*, since it opposes each of the other basic drives with the same level of opposition that each of the other two drives direct at each other.³⁷ As such, it is "directed towards annulling time *within time*, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity".³⁸

³⁵ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XII.1, p.79.

³⁶ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIII.1, p.85.

³⁷ With a dialectical flourish, Schiller explains: "[The play-drive], precisely because the other two drives co-operate with it, would be opposed to each of them considered separately and could justifiably count as a new drive". In Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIV.3, pp.95-7.

³⁸ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIV.3, p.97.

In this harmonisation, the human being achieves “the perfect consummation of its existence.... *the Idea of its Human Nature*, hence something Infinite, to which in the course of time it can approximate ever so closely, but without ever being able to reach it”.³⁹ The play drive orients the subject towards a perfect form of harmony, even if the perfection itself is impossible to attain.

The human being, as we know, is neither exclusively matter nor exclusively mind. Beauty, as the consummation of its humanity, can therefore be neither exclusively life nor exclusively form....It is the object common to both drives, that is to say, the object of the play-drive. This term is fully justified by linguistic usage, *which is wont to designate as ‘play’ everything which is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without*. Since, in contemplation of the beautiful, the psyche finds itself in a happy medium between the realm of law and the sphere of physical need [*Bedürfnis*], it is, precisely because it is divided between the two, removed from the constraint [*Zwang*] of the one as of the other.⁴⁰

According to Schiller, in play activity all fetters of constraint (*Nötigung; Zwang*) are released from the human being, such that it is able to achieve a state of complete unification and freedom “in the contemplation of the beautiful”. The only constraints and imperatives consistent with freedom are in turn the ones that issue directly from the subject’s *sui generis* human impulses.

Opposing freedom in beauty to all manner of *Not* and *Nötigung*, Schiller is also concerned with dissociating it, in the form of play, from any kind of frivolity or *arbitrariness*. Hence he is careful to warn against conceiving of it as a “mere play” (*ein bloss Spiel*). While play opposes necessity in possessing no external or heteronomous purpose, it opposes arbitrariness in being directed by the subject’s own actively designated *rules*.

³⁹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIV.2, p.95.

⁴⁰ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.5, pp.103-5. Italics added where the original states: “*der alles das, was weder subjektiv noch objektiv zufällig ist und doch weder äusserlich noch innerlich nötig, mit dem Wort Spiel zu bezeichnen pflegt.*” I have also altered Wilkinson and Willoughby’s translation of *Bedürfnis* which they render as “physical exigency”.

In play's harmonisation of sense and form, spontaneously self-directing and yet rule-driven, it instils in human beings a condition that Schiller expresses as "*living form*: a concept serving to designate all the aesthetic qualities of phenomena and, in a word, what in the widest sense of the term we call *beauty*".⁴¹ 'Living form' (*lebende Gestalt*) is the aspect of beauty as it manifests in human experience, serving in objects and subjects as an image (*Schein*) of freedom within *objective life*; i.e., not 'Kantian' or 'first-order' freedom, but Schiller's 'second order' freedom: "Only when the human being's form lives in our feeling and its life takes on form in our understanding, does it become living form; and this will always be the case whenever we adjudge one beautiful".⁴²

As a practical-aesthetic form of action, play applies to the human being in its *dual nature*, as opposed to reason in Kant, which locates autonomous action in the subject's recourse to rationality alone. In its operation the play drive points directly towards a harmonised reciprocal relationship between the human being's rational and sensible capacities, and thus asserts in autonomous and objective human action an expression of the unity of human subjectivity itself.

The harmonisation of sense and form is the essence of beauty for Schiller; through it the human being's abilities to experience matter as form (abstraction and conceptualisation) and form as matter (objective expression of inner creativity) are mutually and harmoniously utilised. As the unification of the human capacities for rationality and sense, the concept of beauty must exist in the form of an objective human activity – in *play*. Hence, as an ideal that provides the subject with a contingent form of agency, play operates in Schiller's theory of human action as the analogue to Kant's *abstract* moral action, which only presents action as an objective but merely internal or 'conscious' choice, occurring in isolation from the contingent or sensible world. Neither the contingent execution of this moral choice, nor its outcome, is the point for Kant; these merely being the natural deterministic representation of the normative actions of the subject, in the world of phenomena.

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⁴¹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.2, p.101.

⁴² Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.3, p.101. This state of subjectivity is explored in depth in Schiller's essay *Über Anmut und Würde* ("On Grace and Dignity", 1793) through the concept of another classical German trope, *die schöne Seele*, or 'Beautiful Soul'.

3.2. *Menschliche Bestimmung as beauty*

The difference between Kant and Schiller regarding the *Bestimmung* of humankind has important implications. As part of a philosophical anthropology, it is appropriate to describe Schiller's conception of the human *Bestimmung* as beauty itself; while as a theory of human action, it is accurate to equate it with *play activity*, as the objective human *expression* of beauty which drives human subjectivity toward the creation of an aesthetic temperament internally within the self, and externally or culturally through realised creativity and artistic expression.

As such, play exists as the empirical expression of human determination or *Bestimmung*; its concept representing simultaneously the potential, method, and goal of human life in the broadest sense.

At this point the connection between Schiller's anthropological investigation and the political and cultural impasse of modernity appears in the foreground. Beauty, as the fulfilment of human nature itself, exists within the potentiality of each and every human subject, even if this potential is stifled by the actual conditions of modernity. At the same time, beauty is manifested in objective play activity, showing that it is not merely an abstract ideal, but an objective form of action. As Schiller himself states, his notion "will, I promise you, prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and the still more difficult art of living".⁴³

In this way play activity, regarded as the *Bestimmung* of humankind, may serve as the antidote to the modern condition. As Schiller states, "[i]n the eyes of a Reason which knows no limits, the Direction is at once the Destination, and the Way is completed from the moment it is trodden".⁴⁴ That Direction is *sense*; the Destination is *beauty*; and the Way is *play*.

As an ideal that is realised in objective human activity, and with reference to his presentation of the problem of modernity as an endemic social-political phenomenon,⁴⁵ Schiller intends play to operate as a general representation of

⁴³ Schiller, *op.cit.*, Letter XV.9, pp.107-9.

⁴⁴ "Vor einer Vernunft ohne Schranken ist die Richtung zugleich die Vollendung, und der Weg ist zurückgelegt, sobald er eingeschlagen ist." In Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter IX.6, pp.58-9.

⁴⁵ As Robert E. Norton states: The *Ästhetische Briefe* "amounts to an attempt to move from the exclusive concentration on the 'beautiful' individual to the level of the whole social sphere. Such a consideration of the social dimension of moral beauty had always been an essential element of the ideal, for morality can of course only make sense within the context of a larger civil order." In Norton, "Kant and Schiller. The Apotheosis of the Beautiful Soul", in Norton, *The Beautiful Soul. Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century*, p.244.

*individual and intersubjective (or social) harmony; or, unity and completeness “in the species as a whole [der ganzen Gattung] as well as in the individual human being”.*⁴⁶

This ideal of *Bestimmung* therefore represents the harmonisation of human life at two different yet interrelated levels of analysis. Firstly, since ‘every individual human being carries within it, potentially and prescriptively, the archetype of a human being’, the play ideal represents the harmonisation of the sensible-rational capacities of the individual subject.

Secondly, as an ideal realisable in a human activity existing within collective culture (*Kultur*), Schiller’s ideal operates to unify and harmonise society. On this point, Frederick Beiser has drawn attention to the influence of Fichte on the *Ästhetische Briefe*.⁴⁷ This influence can be seen in the notion of ‘reciprocity’, or *Wechselwirkung*, whose origin Schiller himself reveals as Fichte’s *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*.⁴⁸ The implementation of the concept of *Wechselwirkung* to represent the harmonisation process between sense and form drives is significant because it indicates that in addition to a critique of Kant, Schiller also intends to comment on Fichte’s theory of the role of culture in human affairs. He is therefore not only deriving a theory of subjectivity, but simultaneously a theory of society – both as complementary aspects of a theory of human nature.

As Fichte saw it, culture’s purpose is “to suppress and eradicate” the inclinations of human sensibility. While Schiller appropriated Fichte’s concept, it appears he was doing so to call attention to a serious error.

To watch over....and secure for each of these two drives its proper frontiers is the task of *culture [Kultur]*, which is, therefore, in duty bound to do justice to both drives equally: not simply to maintain the rational against the sensuous, but the sensuous against the rational too. Hence its business is twofold: *first*, to preserve the life of Sense against the encroachments of *Freedom*; and *second*, to secure the personality against the forces of Sensation.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XX.2, p.139.

⁴⁷ See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, pp.145-6.

⁴⁸ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIII.2, p.85n.

⁴⁹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIII.2, pp.85-7.

Through the concept of *Kultur*, beauty serves for Schiller as the ideal driving both individual and social harmonisation. Play is a *general* human impulse, and as such functions as the expression of *individual* human flourishing *and* as the process through which society, as the supreme project of the human species, pursues the creation of a harmonised cultural reality within which individuals may thrive.

As such, play is the primary activity in a culture of aesthetic education. Through it, individuals experience harmonisation in their inner subjective experience as well as in their external social relations. In so doing, collective play facilitates a resolution of the problems of modernity on two fronts. From the subject's perspective, the transformation of society occurs as a direct result of their *active* engagement, but may also be felt as a *passively experienced* transformation arising from the contribution of the other subjects engaged in the process with them.

There is, finally, a *third* sense in which play operates as a harmonising force. In the act of play the individual objectively influences the cultural world of aesthetic and artistic values; in doing so it contributes to the harmonisation of individual subjective inclination with a broader cultural ethos.

Via its basis in the sensible-rational foundations of human nature, Schiller's conception of human *Bestimmung* as beauty is therefore capable of representing the rich and multifarious needs of human beings as *a social unity* of sensible-rational beings, while also providing an ideal of *individual human action*, through which all of its interests may be directly pursued according to an essential and unified impulse.

4. Problems with Schiller's account

We have seen that Schiller's theory of play is grounded in the conception of a mixed nature of the human being. His account deals with the problematic division between rationality and sensibility that, in his view, prevented the Kantian philosophy from providing an adequate conception of the unity of human subject and a robust account of autonomous action.

While Schiller acknowledges the need for a theory of practical reason along Kantian lines, he believes that Kant's account ultimately fails as a theory of objective human action. In contrast, Schiller's theory offers a conception of human action that is grounded not merely in the subject's capacity for rational thought, but also in

contingently based sensible capacities. Schiller's inclusion of sensibility in the theory of human agency ensures that the unified subject is represented in its active pursuit of a free and flourishing life that involves ethical *and* aesthetic factors. He believes that while human beings must remain dutiful to inalienable (Kantian) ethical principles – in order to ensure that social life is safe and amenable to the freedom of individuals in general – they also require an outlet for creativity and expression in the world of phenomena, without which their freedom, along with their noumenal existence, counts for nothing. The normativity of this *aesthetic* dimension comes about for Schiller via the harmonised interplay (*Wechselwirkung*) of the transcendental and contingent aspects of human nature.

Schiller's theory therefore ensures that while ethical life remains influenced by the imperatives of Kant's moral law, this law itself applies to a subject that may actively strive for its own natural harmonisation, a process that incorporates imperatives extending well beyond the abstract freedom supplied by the moral law alone. The *objective unfolding* of actions represented in the theory of pure practical reason must give rise to a more complete and cohesive ideal of freedom – a *practical-aesthetic* freedom, applying not merely to the subject's abstract or noumenal will, but to its entire rational-sensible existence. This second-order ideal of freedom ensures that human beings are oriented in their *contingent action* as well as in their pure practical action.

On this account, Schiller's philosophical anthropology and his conception of the human *Bestimmung* represents a significant advance over Kant's theory. However, it is not without its own internal tensions and difficulties. I shall focus here on two inter-related problems. Firstly, there is a perceivable tension in Schiller's method, regarding the philosophical orientation that grounds his overall framework. Secondly, there are a set of issues related to Schiller's 'materialist' inclinations; specifically, the place of human embodiment in shaping Schiller's diagnosis of modernity and his proposed remedy for it.

4.1. Schiller as naturalist?

Schiller presents his account as a transcendental argument; that is, by means of a *priori* reflection on the conditions of given human experience. But the question can be

raised (in line with Kant's view as interpreted by Wood, Jacobs, and Kain) as to whether the philosophical anthropology he derives can be established this way. It might seem more plausible to construe Schiller's account as a *naturalistic* one, which moves emphasis over to what seem like particular 'traditional materialist' elements in Schiller's conception of the human.⁵⁰

Support for a 'naturalist' basis of Schiller's conception of the human *Bestimmung* might be found in his appeal to the concept of drive (*Trieb*).⁵¹ The concept of 'drive' or 'impulse' suggests a contingent and 'organic' origin which philosophically would place the human being unambiguously in the deterministic realm of nature.⁵² But such a reading is inconsistent with the concept of freedom to which Schiller is committed. For Schiller, as for Kant, freedom is tied to reason's capacity to separate itself from the deterministic realm of natural causality. While Schiller provides an anthropological *extension* of Kant's theory of pure practical reason, he relies just as heavily on a notion of transcendental freedom as Kant does.

If Schiller were to present the human form drive in *naturalist terms*, such as in a contingent or biological 'instinct', his subject's capacity for reason, i.e., its access to the laws that provide it with unconditional autonomy, would be grounded in the very

⁵⁰ Frederick Beiser argues that the 'Hegelian' and 'Marxist' reading of Schiller is based on "a metaphysical interpretation of Schiller's aesthetics", according to which "freedom in appearance means the sensible *manifestation, revelation, or embodiment* of a noumenal or supersensible reality, in this case freedom." According to Beiser, "[t]his reading commits the very fallacy that Schiller was eager to warn against: conflating a regulative with a constitutive principle" (see Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, pp.64-5). Related to this is Daniel O. Dahlstrom's contention that Schiller's comments about the "specialization and alienation plaguing modern humanity" call for future comparative analysis with "Social Darwinists, Marxists, and Heideggerians". In Dahlstrom, *Philosophical Legacies. Essays on the Thought of Kant, Hegel, and their Contemporaries*, p.98.

⁵¹ In favour of this argument is a study by Kenneth Dewhurst and Nigel Reeves stating that Schiller arrived at his concept of *Trieb* via his early psychological training in the *Karlschule* (Dewhurst and Reeves, *Friedrich Schiller. Medicine, Psychology and Literature*, pp.356-8). This supports the broader implication that Schiller's theory may distance itself from Kant by appealing to a *naturalistic* basis for human nature. Lesley Sharpe finds the claim of Dewhurst and Reeves appealing (see Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller. Drama, Thought and Politics*, p.157). Her overarching assessment is that "[c]oncern for harmony and balance in the psyche, a central issue in *Über Anmut und Würde*....and the *Ästhetische Briefe*, goes back to Schiller's *Karlschule* days, to his medical training" (p.120).

⁵² In Chapter 6 we will see that in *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse draws on the argument of the *Ästhetische Briefe* in the elaboration of an anthropology with (ultimately) naturalistic elements. In the same work that he discusses the importance of Schiller's play drive, Marcuse would openly embrace the Freudian naturalistic conception of 'instinctual energy' as a part of his own anthropology.

As Douglas Kellner notes, this Freudian notion has strong 'biologistic' theoretical origins and demonstrates Marcuse's conscious 'turn to *nature*' in his anthropological theory (see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.162). Marcuse may in fact have been more comfortable drawing on naturalist theory than Schiller; this is perhaps related to his employment of various 'abstract' forms of argumentation (as viewed by historical materialism), including elements of utopian thought.

laws from which reason is intended to liberate the subject. The absolute autonomy of the Kantian *Willkür* itself would be proven a mere *illusion* of autonomy that is ultimately traceable to the laws of natural causality.

While the claim of a naturalist basis is an interesting hypothesis, there is actually little evidence for it in Schiller's work itself.⁵³ In relation to this issue, Schiller offers what may be the most useful passage in the fifteenth letter.

[B]ecause we know how to specify the elements which when combined produce beauty, this does not mean that its genesis has as yet in any way been explained; for that would require us to understand *the actual manner of their combining*, and this, like all reciprocal action [*Wechselwirkung*] between finite and infinite, remains for ever inaccessible to our probing. Reason, on transcendental grounds, makes the following demand: Let there be a bond of union between the form-drive and material drive; that is to say, let there be a play-drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity [*Notwendigkeit*], passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete.⁵⁴

With this very Kantian comment, it is clear that Schiller acknowledges the limitations of transcendental philosophy in providing any account of the *origin* of the basic human drives. The task of philosophical anthropology, understood as a 'transcendental' inquiry, is rather to point out the logical necessity of the drives themselves, as conditions of the possibility of given human experience, as well as the nature of their cohesion within the contingent human being itself.⁵⁵ It is hard to see how this approach can be regarded as strongly 'materialist' or 'naturalist'.

⁵³ Frederick Beiser notes a lack of evidence of an appeal to naturalism in the *Ästhetische Briefe* (Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, p.28), although he is willing to consider the influence of Schiller's medical training with regard to other aspects of his account, such as the 'therapeutic' nature of an aesthetic education (p.148).

⁵⁴ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.4, pp.101-3. The reference to 'necessity' here refers only to *absolute* or *logical necessity*, which is not externally imposed but, as an aspect of the operation of reason, is *sui generis* with respect to human nature and subjectivity.

⁵⁵ At the same time, Schiller does state: "That freedom cannot be affected by anything whatsoever follows from our very notion of freedom. But that *freedom is itself* an effect of Nature [*eine Wirkung der N a t u r*] (this word taken in its widest sense) and not the work of humankind, that it can, therefore, also be furthered or thwarted by natural means, follows no less inevitably from what has been said" (in Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XX.1, p.139). On this Beiser argues that for Schiller, "freedom is not something *within* nature, because everything in nature is determined, but something that we *read into* nature. In other words, freedom in the sense of spontaneity is only an aesthetic fiction. Hence, in

* * *

4.2. Play, need, and necessity

We have already seen that Schiller opposes his concept of play, along with beauty, freedom, and the human *Bestimmung*, to any and all *external* forms of compulsion (*Nötigung*), need (*Not*; *Bedürfnis*) and necessity (*Notwendigkeit*) with respect to human beings. To recap: ‘play’ is “everything which is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without”.⁵⁶

It is in this basic formula that a major problem with Schiller’s theory arises. His opposition between freedom and necessity specifically includes the imperatives of *natural* necessity, including physical need. As an ideal of action, play is therefore opposed to the incorporation of any imperatives that arise for the subject as a *compulsion or imposition* involving any kind of *external need*.⁵⁷ This generates a problem for Schiller, who states: “Reason....makes the pronouncement: With Beauty the human being shall *only play*, and it is *with beauty only* that it will play....the human being only plays when it is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *it is only fully a human being when it plays*”.⁵⁸ If this is in fact the case, how do human beings respond to forms of external constraint that arise directly from nature?

As a norm of human action, Schiller’s ideal is specifically oriented away from any activities possessing an end that is not conducive to the creation and appreciation of beauty itself. In spite of the fact that Schiller acknowledges the “necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] *outside* of us [as] quite involuntary,” which leaves us “no option but to submit to any impact that is made on us”,⁵⁹ the practical effect of his ideal of

the eternal dilemma between freedom and determinism, Schiller opted more for determinism than freedom.” In Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, pp.237-8.

⁵⁶ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.5, pp.103-5.

⁵⁷ While Schiller also positions play against any ‘internal constraints’, it is worth noting that this should be taken to mean any *rational* decision on the part of the subject to resist its sensible urges (for the purpose of ‘duty’, for instance). To require a renunciation of internal constraint *per se* would be to encourage a conscious resistance against the ‘compulsions’ of the fundamental drives themselves which, as itself a form of constraint, is logically absurd. It also effectively destroys Schiller’s commitment to the existence of inherent human needs (*menschliche Bedürfnisse*) whose satisfaction ought to be pursued.

⁵⁸ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XV.8-9, p.107.

⁵⁹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIX.11, p.135.

objective action is that of a *renunciation* – not so much of *nature itself* as the human being's basic imperative to ensure its own survival *as a part of nature in general*.

It should be clear that in being presented as an innately embodied being, by means of the sense drive, Schiller's theoretical subject is not only afforded the power to utilise the *Stoff* of the natural world as a medium of personal expression, but is also *logically* subject, without qualification, to the manifold forces asserted against it by an independent natural necessity.

While Schiller conceives of the subject's personal awakening to being as the citizen of the *Notstaat*, he appears to ignore the complexity of the intractable quality of the relationship between *society itself* and wider nature, as well as the effect that this relationship has on the unity of human nature and individual subjectivity. While the subject is a citizen from birth, it is also a contingent or 'natural' being. This Schiller understands; however, he does not address the fact that as an objective expression of freedom, his own concept of play is in fact logically separated from the external imperatives of nature. For the human being – individual and society – this creates an inevitable opposition between the contingent-yet-unavoidable imposition of nature itself (*Notwendigkeit*) and the imperative of human determination in the form of freedom as 'play'.

The problem lies in Schiller's fundamental distinction between the subject's 'intrinsic' nature and nature in general. Even in its 'second order', freedom is expressed in the Kantian manner as the human capacity for resistance against the deterministic forces of natural necessity, with the result that the complex interrelationship between the subject's own 'internal' corporeal nature and the 'external' processes of nature in general – itself conceivable as a *Wechselwirkung* – is insufficiently addressed.

While Schiller's theory of action manages to incorporate the inherent normativity of the *inner* needs of the subject (i.e., the *need for beauty* as a harmonisation of the form and sense drives), his preoccupation with a theory that reflects these inner needs appears to have left him insufficiently concerned with the external imperatives which are binding on this subject, via sources that are external to its own essential constitution, but nevertheless arise *because of* this constitution. Unfortunately for the theory of beauty as play, sensible imperatives claim influence

over the human subject's capacity for freedom only on account of their role in harmonising the subject's own *inner constitution*.

As a result the specific normativity that Schiller retrieves from the inclusion of sensibility into his ideal of human action is problematically one-sided – it incorporates the internal and *sui generis* 'aesthetic' human imperatives arising out of the subject's sensibility; however, it fails to address the fact that the fulfilment of these imperatives – and ultimately all others – are dependent on an external environment that is inherently fraught with material obstacles, dangers, and contingencies. This environment therefore imposes its own fundamental demands on human beings to create and maintain safe and reliable material conditions (i.e., society), upon which a life of freedom inherently relies.⁶⁰

The contingent challenges imposed upon human corporeality at the hands of an unpredictable external nature are therefore insufficiently treated in Schiller's theory of human *Bestimmung*. Such an ideal must be able to reflect a procedure through which to mediate this relationship if it is to adequately represent the manifold of imperatives that empower and impact upon a *complete* and *contingently embodied* subjectivity. This method Schiller fails to provide.

The repercussions of this for Schiller's theory of action are numerous. While there are various aspects of social life that are not clearly amenable to a paradigm of play, there are three related insurmountable facts that arise for the subject via its contingent embodiment, which Schiller's play-based theory of action insufficiently addresses.

1. The human's innate biological fragility, i.e., a vulnerability to injury and disease, and an inevitably *mortal* existence;
2. The continuous human need for sustenance, shelter, etc. – i.e., basic needs related to *physical health*;
3. The human need for active mediation of *deterministic yet unpredictable forces* of the natural realm, to the extent that such forces bring into play the

⁶⁰ This blindness to the 'socially normative' relevance of external nature is a common problem among social theories in recent decades. This will be discussed briefly in the conclusion of this thesis, along with how a concept of work as 'human determination' may seek to overcome this problem.

predictable effects related to '1' (above), and the inhibition of activities devoted to '2'.

These three facts about human embodiment are of course interrelated. However, for the sake of analysis it is useful to distinguish them.

The first point is rather obvious; in fact Schiller himself partly acknowledges it as an aspect of that "quite involuntary necessity outside of us": "There is in Human Beings no other power than the will [*Wille*]; and its inner freedom can only be destroyed by that which destroys the Human Being itself, namely death [*Tod*] or anything that robs it of consciousness [*Bewusstsein*]"⁶¹ Yet Schiller's concept of human determination offers no means of demonstrating how play may help the subject to mediate this 'involuntary' form of necessity that, if ignored, will result in physical or even mortal harm to the subject.

One may argue that, as an inherent aspect of human corporeality, this concern may already be present in the concept of sensibility itself, and therefore a concern for contingent danger, etc., can be understood as already factored into the harmonisation process of the subject itself. However, 'play' often incorporates inherent risk in its incorporation of 'rules', as we see in so-called 'extreme sports' and other potentially dangerous and/or destructive activities. While for Schiller such pursuits would have been likely to conflict with his ideal of play as beauty, his formulation does not provide the subject with the ability to distinguish the difference between play as *aesthetic*, and play as *sheer experience*. After all, the subject may recognise the semblance of beauty as *inherent risk*.

In order to safely negotiate the numerous contingent hazards to subjective existence, one requires adherence to rules which are not *sui generis*. Being interested purely in rules that one may freely derive for oneself and apply to matter, a *playing* human being conceivably approaches any 'safety' restrictions as a confrontation with an external form of compulsion. Being an essentially utilitarian compulsion, i.e., mediation/avoidance for the sake of safety or survival, a compulsion towards safety would, like the compulsion of *work*, impinge on the subject's free and absolute pursuit

⁶¹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter XIX.10, p.135.

of *the beautiful*. The result is that Schiller's play ideal provides no clear distinction between a human *Bestimmung* and a basic *abuse of freedom*.

While Schiller is aware that no contingent activity can entirely represent a 'pure' pursuit of beauty in play, his concept of human determination offers the subject no guidelines regarding an acceptable level of due regard for the protection of one's own corporeally vulnerable existence in this pursuit. This is further complicated by the strong Kantian assertion that "the will [*Wille*] of the human being stands completely free between [moral] duty and inclination, and no physical compulsion [*physische Nötigung*] can, or should, encroach upon this sovereign right of the personality [*Person*]"⁶².

Indeed, the omission of a proviso regarding physical danger is cast into relief when we revisit his question-begging yet iconic proclamation that "the human being only plays when it is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and it is *only fully a human being when it plays*". Should the *sui generis* rules of play happen to involve activity that involves contingent risk to body or even *mind*, the subject may be encouraged to engage in undue risk in pursuit of the ideal of the beautiful.⁶³

Like the first, the second insurmountable fact about human existence may also be regarded as obvious: as a factor of their subjective embodiment, human beings require the ongoing satisfaction of inescapable material needs, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, etc. – needs which may not be forsworn by any mortal being. Even in a high technology society, a certain portion of the greater task of securing these basic needs for a community will involve direct participation by individual subjects themselves.

If we assume an idyllic or utopian perspective, it at least appears conceivable that well-established human activities that are directed at grounding intersubjective living – such as farming, food preparation, the construction of clothing, shelter, etc. – may in a harmonious society attain a 'playful' or 'creative' quality. Subjects could be seen therefore create the conditions for a reasonably safe and predictable cultural existence, grounded in the norm of play.

⁶² Schiller, *op. cit.*, Letter IV.1, p.17.

⁶³ Or, in a high-technology age, not merely individual subjects but even social groups or entire societies. It is not an option for human civilisation to embrace or even tolerate 'play' that may put it at risk of annihilation. At least one Cold-War era Hollywood film explored the theme of 'game-playing' with computers whose parameters did not exclude the initiation of global 'Mutually Assured Destruction'. This theme regarding technology will become especially relevant in Marcuse's writings.

Perhaps an external natural compulsion – directed, for instance, at the ongoing mediation of hunger, protection from the weather, etc. – may actually be understood as an inherent aspect of human sensibility. As such it may, through the harmonising play drive, manifest as a background condition of the ‘rules of play’ themselves. In this case, any subsequent *sui generis* rules of play might therefore be conditioned upon a ‘playful satisfaction’ of these needs, before other forms of play activity are undertaken.

There are numerous objections to this argument. One is that it places a heavy burden on the subjects’ capacity to turn menial tasks into activities that they can perceive as a pursuit of beauty. This is clear in light of the particularly unappealing sensible aspects of many tasks that are required for the ongoing continuation of social reproduction.

Another problem with this solution is that, in a complex society – where one alternative is the modern division of labour – the determination of a *minimum acceptable level* of ‘basic-needs activities’ for a given community, in addition to the extent to which this level is being practically met, would require a complex system of observation and calculation. As an unavoidably utilitarian exercise, such a system itself becomes difficult to equate with a culture of ‘play’.

The second fact about human corporeality also becomes more problematic when we consider it alongside the *third* fact, which involves – perhaps somewhat paradoxically – the *level of unpredictability* of the events that unfold by the influence of deterministic laws.

It remains the case that in spite of the predictive power of science, contingent reality always involves the occurrence of events that human beings are simply incapable of predicting. It is no coincidence that these events are commonly referred to, in work contexts and others, as ‘contingencies’. While it is perhaps *conceivable* that communities grounded in a culture of play may be able to observe the securing of any basic needs as play activity, it is difficult to see how this culture would be able to respond effectively to unforeseen events in the form of ecological change, disease, etc. If we allow that play may be implemented in the planning for such contingencies, it would still be difficult to conceive of a successful ‘emergency response’ to them arising out of a ‘playful’ method of action.

The same may be said of other emergencies, such as the occurrence of natural disasters, which may not only threaten society's attainment of basic material needs, but may also threaten the very survival of communities. The occurrences of fires, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc., require an *immediate action* of a kind that is difficult to interpret as anything other than a response to an *external compulsion* of the very kind that Schiller expressly opposes to his ideal of freedom as beauty.

While it may be argued – somewhat tentatively – that such events occur relatively infrequently, in the context of a human *Bestimmung* the magnitude of danger that these events pose to human life in general makes up for their irregularity. It therefore appears strange to postulate the purpose, vocation, or destiny of humanity as one of *play* in a reality in which an external compulsion in the form of a natural event, the mediation of which requires not play but a reliance on physical fortitude, natural instinct, and *hard work* – may at any time arise to threaten the survival of a community.⁶⁴

This third fact relates to a more abstract claim about Schiller's conception of human action. From the perspective of the individual subject, play may be understood as both internally and externally oriented. While it is clearly an operation occurring *internally* in harmonising the subject's basic dual constitution, it is externally directed in two ways. It is directed at others and so is external by being *intersubjective*; but it is also externally directed at objective matter and thus serves as the outlet for subjective expression and creativity.⁶⁵

When we look at play from the perspective of human *society*, however, play is merely internally-oriented. While as a cultural process play is intersubjective and therefore *internally* oriented, it is not concerned with mediating the relationship

⁶⁴ On the human response to external natural forces, an area of future research might be to explore what Schiller's concept of the sublime (*Erhabene*) has to offer. In *Über Anmut und Würde* (1793), Schiller associates the concept of grace with beauty, while he associates the concept of dignity with *the sublime*. In the context of an objective form of human action, perhaps the sublime may offer something of an 'analogue' to play activity, i.e., an activity ideal directed specifically at mediating physical need and the *compulsive* element of nature. On the concept itself Schiller states: "A sublime subject matter gives us in the first place a feeling of our dependency as natural beings, because in the second place it makes us aware of our independence that, as rational beings, we assert over nature, as much inside as outside ourselves" (Schiller, "On the Sublime. Towards the Further Developments of Some Kantian Ideas", in Schiller, *Essays*. Hinderer and Dahlstrom, eds., p.22.). Schiller's *two* essays on the concept of the sublime, *Vom Erhabenen* (1793) and *Über das Erhabene* (1801), along with *Über Anmut und Würde*, would be an essential basis for such an analysis.

⁶⁵ A process that Hegel (and later Marx, as we will see) will express in the concept of *Vergegenständlichung*, or 'objectification' (see p.58).

between society and an indifferent and essentially *external* natural world. The demands placed on collective human life by the intrinsic relationship between human embodiment and external nature always require active human responses with which the playful or ‘aesthetic’ attitude is simply incompatible.

In this sense, the problem that Schiller’s theory of human *Bestimmung* ultimately succumbs to is, strangely enough, similar to the problem that Kant himself faced as a result of the ultimate opposition he maintained between freedom and nature. In the end, the problem for both Kant and Schiller is that the naturally occurring impediments to the subject’s attainment of a flourishing life remain an unfortunate precondition of human nature itself, and are therefore simply impossible to eradicate on account of the subject’s own ineradicable sensibility.

These accumulated theoretical shortcomings, issuing from Schiller’s basic opposition between his ideal of beauty and forms of ‘external’ natural compulsion or need, suggest that a concept such as *work activity* is needed for the task Schiller sets for himself: namely, an account of human determination that can guide a diagnosis of the problems of modernity and suggest a path to recovery.

4.3. *Arbeit* as a solution

As a representation of the human being’s material interaction with nature, work logically accounts for the numerous *external* challenges that human beings face as contingent and embodied beings in a specifically social context.

In its purest conceptualisation, work concerns the mediation of external nature through a rationally determined form of activity that utilises the contingent capabilities of human beings, concentrated in their embodied existence. As a result a process of harmonisation can be understood to occur not exclusively within the constitution of human subjectivity itself, but between a *unified* human subjectivity and an *external* and objective natural environment.

As previous ideals of work have shown, such as in the artisan ideal,⁶⁶ the inner unification process that Schiller considered so important to the flourishing of the subject itself may be reconceptualised within the work paradigm as occurring through

⁶⁶ This ideal was based on the existence of ‘cottage industries’ that existed between the feudal and modern periods. This ideal is widely regarded to have contributed to Marx’s conception of work as the authentic human *Bestimmung* – particularly in the *Grundrisse*. See Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, pp.29-30.

the subject's own creative interaction with the *compulsive element* of the external material environment. The imperatives that spring from work activity may in this case be understood to cultivate the inner harmony of the human being itself, while simultaneously offering a means through which human life also mediates the forms of external compulsion that serve to challenge its continued existence and flourishing, such as the securing of basic needs, etc.

An external and deterministic reality always appears to the subject as abiding by laws of its own, which empirical analysis may of course assist in deciphering, but may never precisely reveal. Nature presents itself to human experience as external compulsion in part *because* of the limitations set by reason itself which, as Kantian theory tells us, may only ever present the operations of nature in imperfect facsimile. As a result the demands of nature inflict on human beings not only physical need but an uncertainty created out of the discrepancy between 'natural laws themselves' and their rational interpretation.

Work activity may then be theoretically understood as the attempt to mediate the unpredictable occurrences or contingencies emerging out of this discrepancy between knowledge and reality. This is in fact the very definition that Philippe Davezies adopts for the activity of work. If one interprets the organisation of human activity in terms of the *planning* of an ongoing mediation of natural compulsions, needs, and necessities, then work may be defined as "the activity men and women carry out in order to confront what is not provided for by the prescriptive work organisation".⁶⁷

While performing this crucial task, work may also be utilised in a theoretical conception of subjective harmony and freedom. We have seen that since the embodied nature of the subject is intrinsic to its humanity, there is a need for a complete conception of human *Bestimmung* to directly incorporate the mediation of natural compulsion.

One way of realising such a conception is to make freedom *dependent upon* an active engagement in this mediation. As a pure conception of human activity, work may incorporate this dependency, while simultaneously referring to a form of human flourishing, via the capacity for creativity within work itself, as the artisan model

⁶⁷ Davezies, quoted in Dejours, "From the Psychopathology to the Psychodynamics of Work", in Smith and Deranty (eds.), *New Philosophies of Labour*, p.221.

demonstrates. Hence, while its purpose is generally to ensure the continued survival of human beings, work also offers the human being a creative outlet through which to express its individuality and to assist in the project of fashioning a human world out of a nature that is unconcerned with the human *Bestimmung* – the human need to attain an objective state of *flourishing*.

Being concerned with the ongoing project of securing basic human needs and thus ensuring human survival, a work ideal also manages to provide human beings with an imperative that involves safety in its performance. Freedom perceived through the paradigm of work is therefore entirely consistent with the avoidance of potentially dangerous practices of a kind that Schiller's concept of play, as an activity concerned purely with an internally directed process of subjective harmonisation, simply cannot.

Finally, work can also be defined as a form of human activity that is specifically directed at the mediation of the unpredictability of the demands of persistent natural compulsions upon human life in general. As a result the third fact of human corporeality identified above, through which nature poses a challenge to the paradigm of play as the human *Bestimmung*, does not present as a challenge to a theory that presents work as an ideal of human action.

We can now turn to our first positive philosopher of work, Karl Marx, whose theory possesses a crucial connection to Schiller in two senses: firstly, by means of its conception of human nature whose unity is conceived as fundamentally connected to its sensible-material constitution; and secondly, in using this anthropological conception to conceive of a positive theory of human action with inherent social-theoretical implications.

Part II. Marx

Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine on the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

—Mary Shelley,
Frankenstein; or,
The Modern Prometheus, 1818.

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Chapter 2.

Marx's Philosophical Origins

As with Schiller, Karl Marx was concerned with providing a theoretical account of human freedom based on the objective activity of the complete and unified subject. But unlike Schiller, Marx focused on work or *production* as the distinctive activity that sparks the process of human determination (*menschliche Bestimmung*).

Amongst the plethora of theoretical tracts that deal with Marx's theory, there are numerous accounts of Marx's conceptions of human nature and work, and how these are related. The analysis in the following three chapters will be conducted in accordance with the overarching claim that for Marx, work is the specific characteristic that frees the human being from the constraints of natural determinism, and positions it as a historical and autonomously self-determining being.

However, contrary to the common conception of Marx, his 'historical' human being is by no means occupied with a purely working existence. Rather, work provides the human being with an unlimited capacity to transform itself across *all* of its varied life activities, while circumscribing the conditions of this transformation in accordance with the inherent materiality of human subjectivity and objective reality.

While Marx may have understood his own theory as a decisive break from the pitfalls of abstract speculation, he was certainly not the first theorist to consider his own work in this manner. Marx's theory is a continuation of a German philosophical tradition that is committed to a theoretical account of the nature of human freedom, which involves the constitution of the human being, the inherent role of society in this constitution, and humanity's relationship to reality itself. In this sense, Marx shares the spirit of the Kantian critical philosophy. But like Schiller, Marx based his analysis on a unified conception of human nature (*menschliche Wesen*), which is ultimately aimed at a critique of modern social conditions. His emphasis on work as the source of human agency is his method of providing a truly 'objective' account of freedom that reflects the inherent universality of human subjectivity as a dynamic and materially

grounded form of agency, premised on the human being's ability to transform both itself and nature.

Without a clear conception of Marx's philosophical heritage, a full appreciation of his project cannot be achieved. Much of the considerable scholarship on Marx ignores the German tradition,¹ which is a major reason for the preponderance of misleading and contradictory interpretations of his project. The intention here is to contribute to the Hegelian interpretation of Marx in relation to work, human nature, and freedom; one that I believe provides the richest and most convincing account of Marx's theoretical ambitions.²

Marx portrays freedom as a potential unlocked by the human being's work activity, defined as a socially organised and self-conscious material interaction with nature, a capacity unique to humankind. In the process of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*), the individual realises its own unique identity in its interaction with nature, while also partaking in the socially-mediated generation and satisfaction of needs (*Bedürfnisse*). In the context of history, the system of production serves to represent humankind in the project of collective social development. According to Marx, production is therefore the concrete foundation of human agency

¹ For example, analytical Marxism tends to ignore or even explicitly dismiss Marx's numerous references to Hegel and/or the dialectic. For instance, see Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, particularly pp.3-4, 37-48. One particular analysis even recommends that a proper conception of Marx's theory as 'scientific' requires "rebut[ting] the charges that Marx's research depends on suspect methodological ideas (e.g., Hegelian dialectical reasoning). Further, it is stated that "Marx sometimes overstates the philosophical significance of various elements of his system....his willingness to 'coquette' with a Hegelian manner of expression is an especially regrettable symptom of this difficulty" (Daniel Little, *The Scientific Marx*, pp.9, 92).

More broadly, the various forms of 'mechanistic Marxism' are highly reductive; many of them traceable to Engels' 'dialectics of nature'. Included here are the once highly influential structuralist writings of Louis Althusser.

² This view of Marx is of course not new. Valuable contributions still include Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923), Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Herbert Marcuse's review essay "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus" (1932), and the chapter on Marx in *Reason and Revolution* (1941). Other notable contributions include Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1971); Ágnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1974); George Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology. The Concept of 'Human Essence' in the Philosophy of Marx* (1978); Bertell Ollman, *Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (2nd Ed., 1986); Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature* (1998); David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx. German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (2007); Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation. Essays on Hegelian Themes* (2011).

Interestingly, David Leopold regards "the overwhelming consensus about the Hegelian character of [Marx's] early writings with a degree of scepticism" which, he believes, tends to overemphasise Marx's debt to Hegel at the expense of other important influences. He also dislikes the tendency in this interpretation to "treat Hegel as if he constituted the entirety (as opposed to a part) of the German philosophy" (Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.17). Leopold does have a point here, particularly in the context of the development of German philosophical thought from Kant and Schiller through to Marx. As my inclusion of Schiller demonstrates, Marx's thought has roots that extend further back than Hegel.

and potentiality (*Bestimmung*), serving as a theoretical foundation that reflects the concept of nature in the traditional natural sciences. It is therefore production itself that determines the constitution of human reality, including all forms of knowledge, values, and social relations, as well as the material constitution of the social environment. However, in objective terms it determines all of these features as a unified totality, from which any separation of particulars may be deemed theoretically useful, but will always only be a representation or abstraction of the objective process.

Following from this, Marx identifies capitalism as the latest manifestation of human historical development, in which the system of production exists as a highly developed division of labour that provides humankind with the capacity to generate and satisfy an ever-increasing multitude of needs and capacities at a rate never before seen. However, according to Marx the distinctive determination (*Bestimmung*) of capitalism is intrinsically pathological with respect to the human historical project, conceived as a collective goal to develop a society of individuals who may achieve their own freedom in the process of objectification that work represents. Instead, capitalism is a process in which human potentiality is commandeered by capital in its directing of production towards the accumulation of capital itself, via the production of commodities. Rather than being restricted only by the subject's own innate natural-material limitations, the universality contained in human production itself is restricted in being directed solely at activities that serve the end of capital itself.

In the same manner that Feuerbach understood Christianity as the displacement of human potentiality via an abstract deity, Marx understands capitalism as a coercive system that compels subjects to pursue, in favour of genuine freedom, a life of consumption alongside a regime of personally unfulfilling work. This perpetuates conditions of alienation (*Entfremdung; Entäusserung*) across society; effects that are distinctive to capitalism in both their scope and their effects on the individual.

Marx's theory is intended to redirect human action towards the collective appropriation of the system of production. Since the system of production itself is positioned as the driving force of human determination, Marx considers the worker as the paradigm of the individual subject in a liberated communist society, in which the universality of humankind is objectively manifest in a society whose process of

production secures the individual's capacity for personal development in the self-directed generation of new needs and capacities.

We will commence this chapter (Chapter 2) by providing a brief outline of Marx's immediate philosophical heritage, as personified by Hegel and Feuerbach (Section 1). Then we will look at Marx's critique of Feuerbach (Section 2), followed by an examination of the aspects of Hegel's theory that Marx subsequently retained, partly in response to Feuerbach (Section 3). Finally (in Section 4), a brief interpretation of Marx's epistemology will be offered, which sets up the foundation of his anthropological theory.

This will provide a suitable background for the account (in Chapter 3) of Marx's own theory of the human being, after which I will conduct an analysis (in Chapter 4) of his theory of the capitalist system of production and its effects on work and human determination.

1. The philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach

It is crucial in any study of Marx's project to bear in mind his commitment to the broad Enlightenment conviction – also present in Kant and Schiller – that the ultimate task of theory is to develop a conception of human freedom and autonomy directed specifically at modern society.³ His theoretical perspective was developed in the wake of German idealism, a period in which Hegelian philosophy was at the height of its influence.⁴ While Hegel's theory served as an instance of the kind of holistic 'system building' that German philosophy was known for, in Marx's view Hegel possessed a highly idealist perspective that saw genuine anthropological concerns recede somewhat into the background of theoretical analysis.⁵

³ Sean Sayers states that "Marxism involves a humanist critique of capitalism based on a moral ideal of self-realization" (in Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, p.9). However, he also correctly identifies the claim that Marx's theory is grounded in a 'universal' or 'trans-historical' conception of human nature as an inaccurate extension of Marxian humanism, associating this reading of Marx with Norman Geras, Martha Nussbaum, and Axel Honneth (*ibid.*, pp.155-9; Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, pp.78-9). Ultimately, in Marx's concern with providing a theory aimed at the task of realising individual and collective freedom, he ought to be considered a prominent exemplar of Enlightenment humanism.

⁴ David McLellan states that "[i]n the years following Hegel's death, his school was united and supreme in the German universities" (McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism*, p.20). In contrast, Warren Breckman states that "Hegelianism never enjoyed unchallenged dominion in German intellectual life, not even in Prussia" (Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory*, p.17).

⁵ 'Recede' in the sense that it is possible to make a theoretical distinction, as Marx does, between the Hegelian *Geist* and the objective human being. This is not necessarily a distinction that Hegel himself entertained.

Almost immediately in his theoretical writings, Marx demonstrated a commitment not only to an anthropological basis for social and political theory, but a materialist one. While this would have been nourished by a reading of the political economy of Adam Smith, the dominant cultural presence of Hegel and the framework of Absolute Idealism in Germany presented an imposing obstacle to Marx's materialist-theoretical commitments.⁶

Like Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe*, Hegel's philosophy may be understood as a direct attempt to overcome the problematic dualism presiding over the Kantian philosophy. But where Schiller challenged the Kantian dualism over its conception of a divided human nature, Hegel approaches the problem by targeting the opening claim of the critical philosophy – namely, the need to know the limits of reason prior to reason's implementation. For Hegel, Kant's distinction between an *a priori* critique of reason and reason's practical application to the objects of existence must yield to the insight that there can be no such thing as a 'critique of pure reason' that is not also a contingent application of human rationality in the objective world.

From this starting point, Hegel proceeds to give an account of reality itself as a unity that emerges out of humankind's historical engagement with the world; a process depicted as the realisation of 'spirit' (*Geist*) in a phenomenological account of the subject's cognitive interaction with reality. Here Hegel may be understood to be reorienting the Kantian philosophy by means of a historical-teleological framework involving human subjectivity and society in the process of the determination (*Bestimmung*) of *Geist*.

As a youth, Marx became involved with the Left Hegelian philosophers; and quickly saw Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Hegel as one of many that actually managed to target the idealist or 'speculative' nature of Hegel's grand theory without itself becoming immediately mired in the same theoretical trap.

As a materialist critique, Feuerbach's analysis involved the position that Hegel attributes to nature in relation to the material realm. Feuerbach acknowledges that as the accumulated presence of the objective world, nature is accorded an integral role in

⁶ Harry Braverman refers to "the pervasive influence of German speculative philosophy, of which Hegel was the culminating thinker, in giving to German scientific education a fundamental and theoretical cast" (Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p.110). This posed a distinct contrast to the dominance of empiricism in the Anglophone world. Hegel's speculative philosophy, as the dominating representation of post-Kantian thought, presented a formidable influence in Germany until the 1830s. See also Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Critical Social Theory*, p.17.

Hegel's system. However, the system reduces the (inherent) materiality of nature to merely an initial manifestation of *Geist*,⁷ which is made 'actual' in the form of the 'concept' (*Begriff*) attained in thought; in other words, in the subject's *rational* interaction with nature. In this interaction, nature in its material constitution is raised (in the process of *Aufhebung*) to the level of truth, which constitutes *Geist*'s capacity to know itself, rendering it 'absolute'.

The overarching determination, or *Bestimmung*, of Hegel's system is therefore considered in terms of humankind as *Geist*. It is through this fixation with the determination of *Geist* that Feuerbach bases his judgment of Hegel's system as a displacement of the human being as the proper subject of analysis, in favour of an abstraction that is analogous to God.⁸ As a result, Feuerbach perceives two interrelated problems with Hegel's conception. Firstly, Hegel's theory reduces meaningful human action to a mere *rational interaction* with the objective world which, echoing Schiller's critique of Kant, excludes human materiality from the conception of human agency and action. This is the outcome of failing to represent the unified capacities of the human subject through a more substantial conception of human nature.⁹

Secondly for Feuerbach, in recasting the goal of human action from the realisation of the human good to the striving toward Absolute *Geist*, Hegel transforms any account of human potentiality (*Bestimmung*) into a generalised 'speculative' teleology. Hence, Feuerbach identifies the Hegelian system with religion, simply

⁷ This reading is consistent with Hegel's own statements, e.g.: "Nature is *implicitly* a living whole; more closely considered, the movement through its series of stages consists of the Idea *positing* itself as what it is *implicitly*, i.e. the Idea passes *into itself* by proceeding out of its immediacy and externality, which is *death*. It does this primarily in order to take on *living* being, but also in order to transcend this determinateness, in which it is merely life, and to **bring itself forth into the existence of spirit**, which constitutes **the truth and ultimate purpose of nature, and the true actuality of the Idea.**" Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, Vol. 1, §251, p.216.

⁸ Again, it is fairly easy to find Hegel speaking in this manner: "God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is] to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in Him, to lead everything back to Him, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything only insofar as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with Him, lives by his radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God. Thus philosophy *is* theology, and [one's] occupation with philosophy—or rather *in* philosophy—is of itself [in] the service of God." Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, p.84.

Feuerbach himself states: "The personality of God is nothing else than the projected personality of the human being....On this process of projecting self outwards rests also the Hegelian speculative doctrine, according to which *the human being's* consciousness of God is the *self-consciousness* of God. God is thought, cognised by us." Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p.186.

⁹ "For Hegel *human nature, the human subject*, is equivalent to *self-consciousness*." Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.387.

because through it human life cannot be conceived as a process of true *self*-realisation so much as a submission to the determination of a projection of itself in an abstract plane of being; a plane that is perceived as somehow ‘higher’ than that of material existence. Thus, for Feuerbach, “Hegelian philosophy is the last magnificent attempt to restore Christianity”.¹⁰

Like Schiller, Feuerbach and Marx each believed that an adequate anthropology is required – in their case, for a theory that can overcome the Hegelian form of ‘speculation’. This involves a sensualist and materialist reconfiguration of Hegel’s system, to allow a “direct, crystal-clear, and undeceptive identification of the essence of humankind....*with* humankind”.¹¹

For both Feuerbach and Marx, part of the process of redirecting philosophy back towards a complete anthropological orientation is to dissociate it from the arcane theoretical rituals taking place in the stuffy chambers of scholars.¹² Only then will it be possible for theory to acquire meaning for people in general; affecting their actions, and thus serving the purpose of guiding the direction of human society as a totality. In other words, only in this way can theory become truly *practical*.¹³

While Marx was generally less eager than Feuerbach with regard to proving the identity of idealism itself with Hegel’s dialectic,¹⁴ he approved of Feuerbach’s materialist anthropology as a correction to Hegel’s idealism.¹⁵ In this account the realm of nature is not an alienated manifestation of some abstract ‘Idea’, but in fact

¹⁰ Feuerbach, “Principles of the Philosophy of the Future”, in Feuerbach, *The Fiery Brook. Selected Writings*, §21, p.206.

¹¹ Feuerbach, “Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy”, in *The Fiery Brook*, p.157.

¹² Hence Feuerbach’s statement in *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie* (1842): “The new and the only positive philosophy is the *negation of all scholastic philosophy*”. *Ibid.*, p.169.

¹³ Speaking of Feuerbach and Marx, Daniel Brudney states that “their attack on philosophy is an attack not so much on particular philosophical positions (although it is that, too) as on a particular ‘mode of being’. Their central targets are, variously, the claim that the best life for human beings is something spiritual and purely intellectual, something quite different from what Marx calls ‘sensuous activity’, by which he means a panoply of interactions with the material world (and, for him, usually the activity of wresting subsistence and more from obdurate nature); the claim that the road to the deepest truths is through abstract reflection disconnected from the everyday world of sensuous activity; and the entire disengaged and abstract way of relating to the world that Feuerbach and Marx think is characteristic of the philosophical outlook.” In Brudney, *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, p.7.

¹⁴ Except perhaps in the case of his first book with Engels, *Die Heilige Familie* (1844). See Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p.22.

¹⁵ By Marx’s reading, Hegel’s ‘objective logic’ is really *a priori*, meaning that “[t]he soul of [a material] object....is established and predestined prior to its body which is really just an illusion”. Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of State”, in *Early Writings*, p.70.

constitutes fundamental being, and as such serves as its own grounding.¹⁶ Within this natural realm, Feuerbach specifically identifies Hegel's *Geist* with "the *real* and *whole being of humankind*" – what he refers to in *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) as the 'generic being' (*Gattungswesen*) of humankind.¹⁷ At the same time, he places a seemingly paradoxical emphasis on humankind itself as "the *reality*, the *subject* of *reason*".¹⁸ In the *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843), Feuerbach explains this relation in the following way: "The new philosophy makes *humankind, together with nature* as the basis of humankind, the *exclusive, universal, and highest object* of philosophy; it makes *anthropology, together with physiology, the universal science*".¹⁹ Traces of this formulation can be found in Marx's account of the existence of nature as effectively irrelevant outside of any human context.²⁰

With this materialist reorientation of humankind as the proper "object of philosophy", Feuerbach provided Marx with a direction for his own theory. Not only is humankind placed clearly in the foreground of all theoretical analysis, but its essence is conceived as a unity which incorporates an inherent materiality. This provides Marx with the ability to attribute inherent normative significance to the process of working, and also renders humankind itself, by virtue of its embeddedness in nature, inherently susceptible to all of its contingent effects. Feuerbach himself places great emphasis on this aspect of human nature.

Only that being which *suffers from need* (*notleidend*) is the *necessary* (*notwendig*) being. Existence without need is superfluous existence. Whatever is absolutely free from needs has no need of existence. Whether it is or is not is indifferent [*eins*]*—indifferent to itself and indifferent to others. A being without need [Not] is a being without ground [Grund]. Only that which can suffer [leiden] deserves to exist. Only that being which abounds in pain [nur*

¹⁶ See Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, pp.24-5.

¹⁷ *Gattungswesen* is commonly translated as 'species-being', particularly with reference to Marx. I will discuss its presentation as 'generic being' in Chapter 3 (Section 1.1, p.83).

¹⁸ Feuerbach, "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future", in *The Fiery Brook*, §50, p.239.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §54, p.243.

²⁰ Lukács would interpret this position on Marx's part as a claim that nature is a "societal category" and is therefore from humanity's perspective objective only as a socially mediated phenomenon. Schmidt points out that this is true, but only with the qualification that for Marx society bears a reciprocal reliance on nature for its categorical and objective existence. See Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p.70; as well as the valuable appended essay, "On the Relation between History and Nature in Dialectical Materialism", pp.165-96.

das schmerzreiche Wesen] is the divine being. A being without suffering is a being without being. A being without suffering is nothing but a being without sensuousness, without matter.²¹

This passage bears comparison with Schiller's critique of the Kantian conception of human nature. While both philosophers are concerned with retrieving the embodied character of human subjectivity, Feuerbach places more emphasis than Schiller on the need to attribute to human beings a vulnerability to the forces of nature that as *corporeal life* all organic life shares. The corporeality of human beings generates in them an innate and direct dependence on nature for their ongoing survival and well-being – in other words, it instils in them their most fundamental *need*.

Initially for Marx, Feuerbach's materialist critique of Hegel appeared to ground theory immanently in the concrete processes between human beings and the objective world. However, this conviction did not last.²² Regardless of Feuerbach's position on the materiality of human nature, Marx observes that his theory remains ultimately incapable of representing the specific materiality of human agency, in much the same manner as we observed in Schiller's critique of Kant.

2. Marx's critique of Feuerbach

For Marx, Feuerbach ultimately demonstrates a lingering idealist conception of human action. Feuerbach argues against Hegel that it is the whole human being that *thinks*, "not the ego, not reason" ("*Der Mensch denkt, nicht das Ich, nicht die Vernunft*").²³ While Marx would have agreed with Feuerbach's claim here, as the theoretical *limit* of Feuerbach's position it reveals a resistance to the identification of human action with

²¹ Feuerbach, "Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy", in Feuerbach, *The Fiery Brook*, p.163.

²² In his account of Marx, István Mészáros argues that Marx's relationship to Feuerbach is not in fact that of a disciple who eventually rejected his mentor. Mészáros states that well before the jotting down of the (over-celebrated, in his opinion) *Thesen über Feuerbach* – which are commonly given as the evidence of a definitive turn away from Feuerbach – Marx engaged in correspondence with Feuerbach that demonstrates that he possessed a reading of Feuerbach's concepts of 'species' and 'society' (among others) that "could hardly be further removed from Feuerbach's [own] concepts....The distance was, as Feuerbach realized reading Marx's letter and the *Introduction [to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right]*, far too great to be bridged". Mészáros concludes that "[t]he point of contact between Marx and Feuerbach at the time of writing the *Manuscripts of 1844* was more terminological than anything else". In Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, pp.235-6.

²³ Feuerbach, "Principles of the Philosophy of the Future", in *The Fiery Brook. Selected Writings*, §50, p.239; Feuerbach, *Philosophie der Zukunft*, p.86.

truly concrete practice, i.e., material transformation of the natural world, as human action in its actualised form.

Marx's criticism of the level of abstraction in Feuerbach's anthropological theory is performed carefully. He recognises Feuerbach's acknowledgement of the sensuous relationship between human beings and a materially-constituted nature. However, Marx understands Feuerbach's conception of the human contribution to this relationship as one of passivity. As we have just seen, Feuerbach appears more concerned than Schiller in placing theoretical emphasis on the necessary suffering attached to human being. However, he fails to provide a conceptualisation of agency that allows the human being to actively mediate this relationship. Though he describes meaningful human action as 'practical' action, the human being's interaction with the material world is still conveyed, according to Marx, via a realm of thought and ideas. In Marx's eyes, Feuerbach escapes the confines of mere speculation by asserting the centrality of anthropology and its inherent material basis, only to fall back into speculation by persisting with the critique of religious belief within the 'practice' of theory – or rational thought – alone.

For Marx, Feuerbach's own theoretical practice therefore possessed a paradoxical nature, in which the problem that Feuerbach was trying to articulate with regard to Hegel and the practice of 'scholasticism' was reproduced. While Feuerbach had provided the theoretical insights that had awakened Marx to the importance of truly objective *praxis*, he was literally failing to make the important logical step away from the proverbial 'dusty chambers' of scholarship, and towards meaningful social action, i.e., political action.²⁴ This was clear in the very content of Feuerbach's writings, in which true material practice, i.e., production or any other representation of concrete activity, failed to feature as part of his conception of human action and determination.

By Marx's reading, where Feuerbach does conceive of practical activity outside the realm of scholarship, it appears merely as the operations that constitute civil society. This is the critique we find in the *Thesen über Feuerbach*. What Marx emphasises most explicitly there is that Feuerbach fails to conceive of practice as

²⁴ Hence Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach: "The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question." In Marx, "Appendix: A. Concerning Feuerbach" in Marx, *Early Writings*, p.422.

anything that is not already part of the existing social order, i.e., practical activity that does not ultimately fall under the sway of pre-established socioeconomic laws. For Marx this amounts to a basic misconception of the potentiality residing in the concrete activity of human beings as *working* beings, both as individuals and in the broader social context.

Following Marx's critique, we see that Feuerbach's failure to provide an adequate conception of practical human action also has an effect on his capacity to properly represent meaningful human activity as an *interaction* with the materiality of nature. While Feuerbach's critique of Hegel leads him to an anthropological conception that represents the human being as a material being, his inadequate conception of human practice – as work – leads to an ahistorical view of human life. For Marx, human practice is embedded in history, defined exclusively as the movement of human existence away from the natural deterministic conditions of its genesis. Far from being a movement away from the human being's inherent materiality, freedom in fact consists in human self-constitution through the practical development of new materially constituted needs (*Bedürfnisse*). This process is anthropologically *sui generis*, constituted by production as the historical development of new technologies, which produce these new needs as a result of the transformation of the material world into a distinctively human society. This dimension is entirely absent in Feuerbach.

Feuerbach's "conception" [*Auffassung*] of the sensuous [*sinnlichen*] world is confined on the one hand to mere contemplation [*Anschauung*] of it, and on the other to mere feeling [*Empfindung*]; he posits "the human being" instead of the "real historical human being". "The human being" is really "the German"....He does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society [*Produkt der Industrie und des Gesellschaftszustandes*]; and, indeed, (a product) in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing

its industry and its intercourse [*Verkehr*], and modifying its social system [*soziale Ordnung*] according to the changed needs [*Bedürfnissen*].²⁵

Through his anthropological reorientation of *Geist*, Feuerbach refocused the Hegelian philosophy back onto the natural-material human being. However, with an ahistorical anthropology, he inadvertently dispensed with Hegel's elaborate conception of humankind's situatedness in history. For Marx this is a crucial factor in a conception of human beings as truly objective beings; a robust conception of history, i.e., temporal change, is a key structural means through which theory overcomes the depiction of reality as essentially static, i.e., problematically 'abstract'. In his failure to retain a dynamic view of history, Feuerbach retreated back over the ground his anthropological reorientation had made beyond the Hegelian system. Marx's conclusion was that Feuerbach's conception of human nature as a material *Gattungswesen* was itself problematically abstract. It could only provide a theory of action that limited the human capacity for agency to the realm of mere contemplation, and a conception of human determination that unwittingly sentenced humankind to the objective, yet profoundly stultifying, confines of the established social order.²⁶ It therefore lacked the conceptual depth to bestow upon the human being an awareness of the magnitude of the potential for freedom residing in its own nature.

The basic correction Marx made with regard to Feuerbach involved the historicisation of the latter's anthropological materialism, which he accomplished by conceiving of the medium of human action specifically as work (*Arbeit*). As a concept of action modified from Hegel's conception in order to differentiate it from the idealist historical 'travail' of *Geist*, work for Marx represents not only the interaction between human beings and a concrete nature, but interaction between human beings themselves.

²⁵ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp.44-5. Translation altered slightly according to Marx and Engels, *Werke (MEW)* Vol. 3, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1978, pp.42-3.

²⁶ On Feuerbach's theory, Axel Honneth and Hans Joas state: "Feuerbach....remained at some distance from the political struggles of the day and continued his work in the areas of investigation in which his earlier intellectual development had taken place. The strongest theme of the evolution of his thought is the effort to free philosophy from the false opposition between rationality and emotionality through his concept of the human being, and from the false opposition between conceptual thought and intense sensuousness through his conceiving of the philosophy of the future as an anthropology" (Honneth and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, p.13). Feuerbach therefore never provided any detailed social analysis comparable to Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* or Marx's socioeconomic theory. Compared to Marx he remained firmly within the bounds of philosophical analysis.

3. Hegel on work, society, and human nature

Though Marx sided with Feuerbach against Hegel's absolute idealism, he retained – in addition to its focus on history – two other important aspects of Hegelian theory.²⁷ He realised that a detailed analysis of the process of social reproduction, such as that found in Hegel's *Philosophie des Rechts*, is crucial for any theory seeking a proper objective grounding. Secondly, and in spite of Hegel's overall idealist framework, Marx retained Hegel's basic account of the relationship between the subject and work. It is worth looking briefly at these two aspects of Hegel's theory. In contrast to Feuerbach's 'naïve materialism', Marx pursues a rigorous critique of Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*, and of his conception of the relationship between work and human flourishing.

3.1. Marx on Hegel's social theory

Unlike Feuerbach, who "posits '*the human being*' instead of '*the real historical human being*'", Hegel identifies social reality as an integral element of the historical process, as presented in Marx's detailed analyses of the *Rechtsphilosophie*. Marx concurs with Hegel's account of modern society's division into the realms of 'state' (*Staat*) and 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*); of the individual into the politically active citizen (*Untertan*) and the self-interested citizen (*Bürger*). He also agrees with Hegel's diagnosis of an antagonism between these spheres, manifesting in society as a conflict between the common good and self-interest: "Hegel proceeds from the assumption that '*civil society*' is *separate* from the '*political state*', that they are two fixed antitheses, two really different spheres. To be sure, this separation really does exist in the *modern state*".²⁸

However, Marx criticises Hegel for failing to understand the *inherent irreconcilability* of these spheres. In the *Philosophie des Rechts*, Hegel seems to believe that the underlying normative imperatives of the state and civil society – namely, collective and personal interest respectively – can be resolved institutionally.

²⁷ As Alfred Schmidt points out, by the 1860s Marx was of the opinion that Hegel's philosophy was superior to Feuerbach's (See Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p.199, n.11). This 'final judgment' would have had at least something to do with the great emphasis Hegel placed on the historical nature of human action.

²⁸ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State", in *Early Writings*, p.137.

He attributes the task of facilitating this resolution to the traditional institutions that he calls 'Estates' (*Stände*). In doing so, Marx argues that Hegel

makes the *Estates* [*ständische Element*] into the expression of the *separation* (of civil and political life), but simultaneously they are supposed to represent an identity – one which does not exist....The deeper truth is that Hegel experiences the separation of state from civil society as a *contradiction* [*Widerspruch*]. The mistake he makes is to rest content with the semblance [*Schein*] of a resolution which he declares to be the real thing.²⁹

Marx observes that, at the end of the analysis, Hegel endorses the modern state in its existing form.³⁰ For Marx, Hegel does not seem to understand that the direct antagonism that exists between the state and civil society is the result of a real internal contradiction; attempting to mediate such an artificial split in society and in individuals is to perpetuate a problematically abstract notion of the human being. In *Zur Judenfrage* (1843), Marx makes this point about state institutions in general: "It is the *sophistry of the political state* itself. The difference between the religious person and the citizen is the difference between the tradesperson and the citizen, between the day-labourer and the citizen, between the landowner and the citizen, between the *living individual* and the *citizen*".³¹

The problem with the modern state is that it cannot recognise the living individual and its true needs; it can only conceive of the abstract requirements of the state citizen, together with the accompanying right to pursue its arbitrary interests in the realm of civil society. The contradiction lying at the heart of the modern state is that its role is to enforce the rights of individuals in civil society – not, in fact, the realisation of any common good.

But the right of man to freedom [*Menschenrecht der Freiheit*] is not based on the association of individuals but rather on their separation. It is the right of

²⁹ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State", in *Early Writings*, pp.139-41; *MEW*, Vol. 1 (1981), pp.277-9.

³⁰ This is a more specific instance of the tendency of Hegel highlighted by Feuerbach that, in the words of Thomas Wartenberg, "Hegel's philosophy could not be the basis of a truly critical theory of society, for it was essentially and unalterably a form of the justification of the status quo." In Wartenberg, "Introduction", in Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, p.xii.

³¹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question", in *Early Writings*, pp.220-1.

this separation, the right of the *restricted* individual, restricted to itself...citizenship, the political community....reduced by the political emancipators to a mere *means* for the conservation of these so-called rights of man and that the citizen is therefore proclaimed the servant of egoistic man; that the sphere in which the individual subject behaves as a communal being [*Gemeinwesen*] is degraded to a level below the sphere in which it behaves as a partial being, and finally that it is the subject as *bourgeois*, i.e. as a member of civil society, and not the subject as citizen who is taken as the *real* and *authentic* human being.³²

For all of Marx's admiration of Hegel's theory of society, he believes Hegel's social theory presents the ideal of society as residing within the state's existing structure. As a result, the real human being and its interests are lost behind the image of the abstract 'citizen' and its *bourgeois* activity.

[Hegel's] account, therefore, does not proceed from the real person to the state, but from the state to the real person. Hence, instead of representing the state as the highest reality of the person, as the highest social reality of humankind, the highest reality of the state is said to be found in the empirical person, and *a single empirical* individual at that. Hegel's purpose is to narrate the life-history of abstract substance, of the Idea, and in such a history human activity etc. necessarily appears as the activity and product of something other than itself; he therefore represents the human essence as an imaginary detail instead of allowing it to function in terms of its *real human* existence. This leads him to convert the subjective into the objective and the objective into the subjective with the inevitable result that an *empirical person* is *uncritically* enthroned as the real truth of the Idea. For as Hegel's task is not to discover the truth of empirical existence but to discover the empirical existence of the truth, it is very easy to fasten on what lies nearest to hand and prove that it is an *actual* moment of the Idea.³³

According to Marx then, the society that Hegel reconstructs, under the rubric of 'the state', is an abstraction. Hegel confuses the concept of the historically-specific

³² *Ibid.*, pp.229-31; *MEW*, Vol. 1 (1981), pp.364-6.

³³ Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State", in his *Early Writings*, p.98.

manifestation of 'the citizen' as the universal concept of the human being. As a result the state appears uncritically as the foundation for a material environment that is conducive to human flourishing.

Marx believes that if one recognises this error of abstraction in one's social theory, then the inherent problem with modern society will be clear: the state in its existing form will not appear as the embodiment of the ideal of human freedom, but as its direct obstruction. For Marx, the appropriate correction can be made by focusing back on the human being in its objective activity.

3.2. Marx on Hegel's concept of work

Interestingly, Hegel provides a detailed account of the relationship between work and the human subject; a conception which in fact influenced Marx's theory immensely. Marx expresses his admiration of Hegel's conception in the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*.

The importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology*....lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of the human being as a process....that he therefore grasps the nature of work [*das Wesen der Arbeit*] and conceives objective human being – true, because real human being [*wahren, weil wirklichen Menschen*] – as the result of his own work [*Resultat seiner eigenen Arbeit*].³⁴

Marx also recognises Hegel's grasp of the integral role of the work process in constituting social relations, particularly as presented in the scholastically well-trodden 'master and slave' section of Hegel's *Phänomenologie*. Hegel's human beings are active beings with an inherently social existence; they face the outside world together and in the process are formed and shaped, and in turn transform the objective world. The individual is hence formed via a confrontation with nature that inherently involves a confrontation with others. Through this process (of *Anerkennung*: 'recognition'), subjects assume a relative position in society: both an active role in the division of labour, and a *social status* in civil society. In turn, the objective

³⁴ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, pp.385-6; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.574.

conditions of the individual's social existence, as well as its ingrained abilities to transform nature, are established. The account of this process of formation through the work of socially integrated individuals is, for both Marx and Hegel, the essence of the inherently social process of history: "since for socialist humankind the *whole of what is called world history* is nothing more than the creation of humankind through human labour, and the development of nature for humankind, it therefore has palpable and incontrovertible proof of its self-mediated *birth*, of its *process of emergence*".³⁵

However, Marx understands Hegel's idealism as a barrier to a complete theoretical appreciation of the inherent nature of work *qua* the process of human self-realisation. Here the difference between Marx and Hegel appears to lie in the ontological status they ascribe to the objective world conceived as *nature*. The interaction between humankind and an objective nature is the essence of work according to Marx, and is a crucial aspect of the human essence for this very reason. In contrast, for Hegel the objective realm itself is described as "the most abstract and poorest *truth*. All that [human sense] says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing (*Sache*)".³⁶ As a result, work in its objective manifestation is an abstraction of actual human self-constitution, which is only truly understood via the process of the realisation of humanity as *Geist*. For Marx it follows that Hegel does not fully theoretically appreciate the activity of work itself, as *objective* activity, to be the essence of human self-constitution itself. Instead, says Marx, Hegel understands this essence as an abstraction, as the subject's self-alienation.

[Hegel] sees *work* as the *essence*, the self-confirming essence, of the human being; he sees only the positive and not the negative side of work. Work is the human being's coming to be for itself within alienation or as alienated human being. The only work Hegel knows and recognises is *abstract mental* [*abstrakt geistige*] work....

[T]he self is only the *abstractly* conceived human being, human being produced by abstraction. The human being *is* self (*selbstisch*). Its eyes, its ears,

³⁵ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.357.

³⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.58.

etc., have the quality of self; each one of its essential powers has this *quality of self*. But therefore it is quite wrong to say that *self-consciousness* has eyes, ears, essential powers. *Self-consciousness* [*Selbstbewußtsein*] is rather a quality of human nature [*menschlichen Natur*], of the human eye, etc.; human nature is not a quality of *self-consciousness*....

For Hegel *human nature, the human being*, is equivalent to *self-consciousness*.³⁷

Marx thus interprets Hegel to be arguing that the objective realm in which the subject appears to itself purely by virtue of its interaction with the substance of nature is, in comparison to the movement of *Geist*, merely an undeveloped appearance of the real.

What is at stake in this dialogue between Marx and Hegel is the fundamental arena of human agency, the scope of genuinely *human* self-determination. The objective world is the answer that Marx provides, within which work, as socially mediated activity upon the concrete substance of nature, is revealed as the originating aspect of the essence of humankind. The philosophical purpose behind Marx's critique of the Hegelian system is to situate the essence of human agency definitively within Hegel's realm of objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) and in doing so demonstrate, as it were, its *true* objectivity (*Wirklichkeit*). This is a task that Feuerbach had already attempted, and it manifests itself in Marx's work through a set of specific epistemological assumptions, to which we will now turn.

4. Marx's epistemology and the centrality of 'production'

In order to improve on Hegel's philosophical system, Marx sets out to ground meaningful human action directly in the Hegelian realm of objectivity

³⁷ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.386-7; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), pp.574-5.

John Plamenatz offers an interesting critique of Marx's reading of Hegel with respect to Marx's statement that "[s]elf-consciousness is....a quality of human nature....; human nature is not a quality of *self-consciousness*". According to Plamenatz, this statement demonstrates that Marx fails to understand Hegel. For Hegel the 'true' realm of Spirit "is not related to finite self-conscious beings as a thing is to its properties; for these finite beings are (according to Hegel) just as much individuals, just as much subjects and agents, as is the Spirit in which they have their being" (Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, p.63). Thus it appears that Plamenatz reads Hegel as attributing the status of Spirit to human beings specifically *by virtue of* their objective being as individuals, i.e., as material beings who work upon objective nature.

(*Gegenständlichkeit*), i.e., as material activity. He goes about this by specifying the essence of meaningful human activity as work in all of its dimensions, rather than merely as its cognitive (*geistig*) component. This manoeuvre presents humanity's interaction with nature as inherent to the process of human freedom and self-realisation. The objective (i.e., material) appearance of things, which Hegel associates with nature, is therefore not merely an initial and unrealised state of *Geist*; rather it is the essence of (human) reality. Conceptually, therefore, Marx unites Hegel's realm of objectivity with his realm of human self-realisation as *Geist*.³⁸ As such it is in work that the human being is able to understand itself as a complete being, by virtue of the fact that the activity itself serves to demonstrate in all of its dimensions the unity of the individual's own subjectivity: "The solitary human being cannot operate upon nature without calling its own muscles into play under the control of its own brain. Just as head and hand belong together in the system of nature, so in the work process (*Arbeitsprozeß*) mental and physical work are united".³⁹ In this way, work serves the individual as an ongoing reminder of its own objective and organic unity. In a wider context it also indicates the unity of subject and society, and of humankind and nature: "Society is therefore the complete essential unity of the human being with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of the human being and the realized humanism of nature".⁴⁰

It is here that we may look at Marx's own epistemology – a full account of which is famously absent in his writings.⁴¹

³⁸ Although, as George Márkus argues, for Marx the human being assumes no particular *cosmic* significance (see Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.13) – a significance that is widely regarded as present in the Hegelian system.

In a seemingly contrary view, André Gorz employs Marx's own Feuerbachian charge of over-abstraction against him by claiming that he simply replaces Hegel's uncritical account of the state with a similarly abstract conception of the proletariat as the 'actual' expression of *Geist*: "[Marx's] philosophy of the proletariat is a religion. It acknowledges as much of reality as it finds reassuring. Its examination of facts always starts from the following premise: 'given that the proletariat is and must be revolutionary, let us examine those facts which lend support to its revolutionary will and those which frustrate it.'" In Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, pp.21-2.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.642; MEW, Vol. 23 (1962), p.531.

⁴⁰ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, pp.349-50.

⁴¹ It is largely by analysing Marx's discussions on method that this epistemology may be pieced together. One of Marx's most direct elaborations of his method is generally considered to appear in the unpublished introduction to *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, which is now commonly included as part of the *Grundrisse* (pp.83-111). For a detailed treatment of Marx's method, see Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic. Steps in Marx's Method* (2003); Lawrence Wilde, "Logic. Dialectic and Contradiction" in Carver (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, pp.275-95.

In addition to the importance placed on the depiction of reality as one grounded in the material substance of nature, Marx places equal emphasis on the fundamental *dynamism* of reality. Not only is the world a material world, but it is also one of constant change. In representing this dimension, Marx retains Hegel's focus on history as intrinsic to any theory that may be considered a sufficiently accurate representation of reality in its intrinsic dynamism. As an outcome of this premise, Marx's concepts cannot be thought of as 'absolute' representations of what something 'is' in any eternally unchanging sense. An appropriate analogy is the way that photographs refer to their captured subject. Concepts are 'moments' (*Momente*) in the existence of something that is continually moving, or transforming. Hence Marx's concepts are not straight 'representations' of static objective conditions, but instead operate as orienting markers that point to objective unities (i.e., 'objects') as dynamic 'processes'.⁴² It is this crucial aspect of his epistemology that, he claims, distinguishes his own theory as superior to previous ones.

According to Marx, the historical dimension incorporated into Hegel's technique of conceptual abstraction, which allows all of his theoretical constructions to accurately reflect the inherent dynamism of objective reality, makes it a suitable template for authentic theory. The virtues of the Hegelian theory fell flat for Marx on account of its failure to adequately situate its own foundation in the particularity of objective-material circumstances. While the Hegelian system captures the dynamics of the historical movement of reality, its foundation is still flawed on account of his presentation of materiality as a mere appearance of the 'reality' of *Geist*. For Marx this relegates Hegel's entire theoretical system to an impossible 'God's eye view' of actual human existence. While Marx may not have seen any benefit (as Feuerbach did) in identifying Hegelian philosophy with religion or 'speculation' itself, Hegel's system does appear as the paradigm example of Marx's general critique of theory as over-abstraction. In order to avoid this form of abstraction himself, Marx attempts to ground his theory in Hegel's realm of 'the objective'. In theoretical terms this serves to combine the materiality of both humankind and nature with the ideal – historical – essence of *Geist*.

⁴² As an activity of abstraction, even theory itself is a contingent process: "Marx's abstractions are not things but processes. These processes are also, of necessity, systemic Relations in which the main processes with which Marx deals are all implicated." In Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, p.68.

An adequate grounding for the study of the human being for Marx is the system of production itself – the concrete manifestation of human historical development. As the objective basis for human social existence, Marx considers the capitalist industrial complex – its system of production – to be the appropriate foundation for the analysis of historical-materialist circumstances.

Industry [Industrie] is the real historical relationship [Verhältnis] of nature, and hence of natural science, to the human being. If it is then conceived as the exoteric revelation [exoterische Enthüllung] of human essential powers [menschlichen Wesenskraft], the human essence of nature or the natural essence of humankind can also be understood. Hence natural science will lose its abstractly material, or rather idealist, orientation and become the basis of human science, just as it has already become – though in an estranged form [entfremdete Gestalt] – the basis of actual human life. The idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie. Nature as it comes into being in human history – in the act of creating human society – is the real nature of humankind; hence nature as it comes into being through industry, though in an estranged form, is true anthropological nature [wahre anthropologische Natur].⁴³

For this reason, Marx's materialism should therefore be clearly distinguished from an ahistorical 'naturalist' one. In the study of human reality, 'natural' laws make way for historical laws which predominantly involve the objective processes under which the social system of production operates. This of course involves the 'theoretical conversion' of many natural-scientific theories concerning processes that are generally considered independent of the influence of human hands (and minds). But in Marx's case this conversion takes place for the most part in order to account for the rise of a socially conditioned and therefore properly 'objective' perspective on these processes.⁴⁴ In the passage above, what is implied overall of course is that the abstract

⁴³ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.355; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.543.

⁴⁴ In other words, Marxian theory possesses no account of the actual non-existence of the natural world without human involvement. If anything, this is the type of claim that Marx considers Hegel's framework to imply. What Marx's theory does contend is that in order to scientifically understand reality as *human* reality, one needs to take into account the fundamental transformative effect of humankind's own production processes upon the manner in which reality – nature *and* society –

perspective of the natural sciences is not actually a 'true' conception of human reality; although it may produce pragmatically viable technical results and in this manner possesses actual value for industry and society in general. More importantly, since the natural sciences bracket the human being out of its abstractions as part of its theoretical method, it is impossible to utilise them in a manner such that one's conclusions will reflect (i.e., be in the service of) the specific interests of human beings. Instead the determination (*Bestimmung*) of the objective 'system' will appear as an external force and therefore as alien to actual human interests. In order to provide a human presence in these representations, it is integral to acknowledge the manner in which the human perspective on these objective processes affects human beings themselves. For Marx, nothing is more crucial to the representation of the determination that a theory takes as its 'subject' than the manner in which human beings interject their productive capacities into these processes, which involve the entirety of the economic configuration of society.

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.⁴⁵

For an adequately grounded theory – i.e., one that most accurately represents *human* reality – the manner in which theory grounds its representations is directly reliant on the reality itself as one in which human beings have consciously created for

presents itself to the human mind. Additionally, in my view Marx would be likely to consider theoretical or 'scientific' questions regarding the laws of a 'pure objective' – i.e., non-human – reality to be a useless (and possibly even an absurd) pursuit when not in the service of practical (i.e., human) purposes.

⁴⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.706.

themselves. In epistemological terms, therefore, Marx can be understood to relocate the Kantian basis of knowledge from human experience *per se* to the concrete system of production, in order to generate a theoretical standpoint that represents the actually existing and evolving basis of human determinability as the theory's own grounding.⁴⁶

Marx's most fundamental theoretical principle may therefore be regarded as the premise that ultimately, 'truth' is identifiable with the objects and relations contained in the immanence of human experience itself – an experience which is literally a product of the existing system of production. 'Truth' is therefore fundamentally conditioned by work. By tracing the origin of truth in this manner, Marx does not mean that all knowledge is created directly within the economic process. However, he does mean that all human knowledge is ultimately traceable to production itself and involves in more or less explicit form the productive activity of human beings.

Since work is always historically situated in a system of production, Marxian theory contains a historiological account of human knowledge. Hence, in the capitalist epoch, 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".⁴⁷ Not only is it theoretically problematic to apply the commodity relation to the analysis of previous economic systems, but one must also be aware that these processes would have made no sense to individuals in these epochs. In this context they therefore possess no 'universal' truth or reality.⁴⁸

This epistemology of course has important ramifications for Marx's conception of theory. For Marx, 'theory' is an interpretation of the truth, and is therefore by

⁴⁶ Implied of course in the passage above is also the fact that the existing economic system indicates not only the extent to which social knowledge has assumed control over the production process, but also the extent of human *self*-knowledge – capital itself being ultimately a *pathological* basis for genuine human determinability. But crucially for Marx, capital is also, paradoxically, the creative force behind the material conditions (i.e., bourgeois society) for the historical emergence of genuine (i.e., Marx's own) critical analysis. Such is the contradictory nature of a truly *dialectical* human reality for Marx.

⁴⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.169.

⁴⁸ Historical materialism can therefore be understood to contain epistemological conclusions resembling those of Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions, particularly in the context of George Márkus's conclusion that in the sphere of production "[t]he historically first production of an object is usually, as far as subjective skills are concerned [commonly] due to 'fortunate accidents', to such a conjunction of circumstances in which the object can be created by the help of extant imperfect capacities" (Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.9).

definition an abstraction from human experience. The relative strengths of any given theory depend both on the suitability of the perspective one takes on reality, and the precision with which the abstractions comprising it reflect objective conditions. But regardless of its epistemological accuracy, theory is always ultimately an objective outcome of society's system of production. *All* theory is an outcome of concrete human production, and in modernity its origin is ultimately the capitalist division of labour. Work, in other words, is the historically variable and also the ultimate origin of knowledge and truth.

However, it is also the origin of false knowledge. For Marx the overly abstract theory of political economy and his own theory of historical materialism are each outcomes of capitalist production.⁴⁹ In light of this it becomes important to prove the *value* of one's thinking, and in this way to demonstrate the accuracy of one's representation of reality. Hence, the second thesis on Feuerbach: "[i]n its practice the human being must prove the truth, with respect to the reality and power, and this-sidedness of its thinking".⁵⁰

In a sense Marx's grounding of human experience in society's system of production marks the extent of his theoretical humanism, in performing the task of refining the 'disinterested' perspective not only of political economy, but of the natural sciences. For the purpose of social analysis, the natural-scientific stance is problematic because of its basis in an abstract conception of the natural world, which fails to capture the particular dynamics that constitute human reality – not only in the observable conditions of this reality, but also in the particular perspective of theory, i.e., its critical self-awareness as historically situated, etc.⁵¹ The basis of Marx's theory

⁴⁹ And when society is structured according to this false knowledge, such as in the era of capitalism, a society that is fundamentally hostile to authentic human needs generates, somewhat paradoxically, the vital need for revolution – what George Márkus, following Ágnes Heller, refers to as 'radical needs': "These are the needs that the capitalist process of production and the social conflicts inherent in it necessarily invoke and evolve in the oppressed class of producers, i.e., in the proletariat, but which cannot be satisfied within the framework of the existing system of social relations" (Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.65, n.37). This idea of revolution as perhaps the most vital need (*Bedürfnis*) of the capitalist epoch is one that Marcuse draws on, particularly in his later writings – see Chapter 7.

⁵⁰ "In der Praxis muß der Mensch die Wahrheit, i.e. Wirklichkeit und Macht, Diesseitigkeit seines Denkens beweisen." In MEW, Vol. 3 (1978), p.5.

⁵¹ As George Márkus states, for Marx "[e]ven the 'biological', genetically fixed needs of human beings change their 'form and direction' in the course of history, so their concrete content cannot be adequately described in terms of natural sciences" (Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, pp.10-1).

Though of course, being abstract and unreflective does not automatically negate the value of the scientific perspective in its designated domain. Marx had a profound respect for the natural sciences, and in fact states that "[n]atural science will in time subsume the science of the human being just as the

is therefore a critical stance that recognises the structure of human or ‘social’ reality not simply as a function of natural processes but as the result of socioeconomic processes – of humankind’s own activity. While nature is always present on the horizon, its influence is mediated through human activity within the existing system of production. In the case of modern society, this system is of course the *capitalist* system.

In this discussion of Marx’s epistemology, I have attempted to emphasise two important aspects of historical materialism: firstly, its concern with historical change, inherited directly from Hegel and present in the dialectical method; secondly, the situating of society’s concrete system of production as an epistemological foundation. This framework enables Marx to direct his attention to the essence of humankind itself. Where work features as a potentiality through which humans may create and shape their existence, the manner in which work is made possible for individual human beings determines the extent to which freedom may become a reality for them.

Ultimately for Marx, theory’s highest aim is to clarify for real human beings the nature of their own existence as beings whose freedom depends on the individual’s own ability to define and shape itself according to its work – the activity that makes possible all of the capacities that give human beings their unique agency. As Marx himself states, “[t]he reform of consciousness consists entirely in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in explaining its own actions to it. Like Feuerbach’s critique of religion, our whole aim can only be to translate religious and political problems into their self-conscious human form”.⁵²

With the epistemological background to Marx’s theory set out, we can now look at Marx’s theory of human nature and the role that work plays in it.

science of the human being will subsume natural science: there will be *one* science” (Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.355; translation altered). Part of this process however would undoubtedly be to curb the extent of the ‘disinterested perspective’ of the sciences so that the tendencies within it that lead, for example, to the dilemma of Oppenheimer, or to an economic reliance on carbon-producing fossil fuels, etc., are seen for the disastrous human errors that they are.

⁵² Marx, “Letters from the Franco-German Yearbooks”, in *Early Writings*, p.209.

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Chapter 3.

Anthropology, work, and alienation

Marx's theory relies on numerous distinct representations of human nature, which makes it important to separate each of them out when looking at his overall anthropological theory. In this chapter we will look firstly at the three main Marxian conceptions of human nature (Section 1), which involves an essential distinction between 'generic-being' (*Gattungswesen*) and the 'human essence' (*menschlische Wesen*), as well as 'human nature' (*Menschennatur*) as the historically situated representation of the human being. Following this we will examine his separate conceptions of 'work' and 'production' (Sections 2 and 3, respectively). To conclude the chapter, we will look at the key diagnostic concept of alienation (Section 4), which Marx develops specifically, but ultimately regards as too broad to offer a critique of capitalism that isolates its distinctive pathological features.

Without a proper understanding of the manner in which these various conceptions interrelate, the nature of Marx's project as a theory of human determination will be only partially understood. The analysis in this chapter will therefore set the stage for the final analysis of Marx's theory of capitalist society in *Das Kapital* (Chapter 4).

1. Marx's anthropological categories

1.1. 'Generic-being' (*Gattungswesen*)¹

We have seen that Marx supported Feuerbach's anthropological orientation, adopting the latter's concept of *Gattungswesen* – the 'generic-being' or distinctive 'humanness' of humankind with respect to nature. Predominantly, this concept appears in Marx's early writings,² working as something of a 'natural-scientific' explanation for the

¹ This concept is generally known in English as 'species-being'. An explanation of the alternative translation is provided below.

² Along with the concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*; *Entäusserung*), much is made in the literature of the virtual disappearance of the term *Gattungswesen* from Marx's writings by the time of *Die deutsche*

uniqueness of humankind in relation to other forms of life. Philosophically, the category operates as a representation only of those distinguishing features of humankind, rather than humankind in its complete and unified form (which he tends to label *menschliche Wesen*: the 'human essence'). The category of generic-being therefore allows Marx to analyse human determination as the capacity to transcend the determinism of nature, which directs animal life. This process of course results in the human being becoming a historical being.

For Marx, generic-being represents the human being in its unique capacity to be self-determining through a self-conscious transformation of the natural-material environment. This capacity is the foundation of human freedom, and is synonymous with the capacity to work. In this process of transformation, human beings 'humanise' the material environment, and in doing so transform their existing needs (*Bedürfnisse*) and generate new ones; in this process, they fundamentally transform themselves.

The human being is a generic-being [*Gattungswesen*], not only because it practically and theoretically makes the genus [*Gattung*] – both its own and those of other things – its object [*Gegenstand*], but also....because it looks upon itself as the present, living genus, because it looks upon itself as a *universal* and therefore free being....

The whole character of a species [*species*], its generic-character [*Gattungscharakter*], resides in the species [*Art*] of its life activity [*Lebenstätigkeit*], and free conscious activity [*freie bewußte Tätigkeit*] constitutes the generic-character of the human being. Life itself appears only as a *means of life* [*Lebensmittel*].

Ideologie (1845) – which is also seen as the text in which 'historical materialism' makes its first appearance (see Philip J. Kain, *Schiller, Hegel, and Marx. State, Society, and the Aesthetic Ideal of Ancient Greece*, pp.155-6). This correlation is sometimes given as overwhelming evidence of a major 'theoretical break' in Marx's theory from 'philosophy' to 'science'. For instance, see Althusser, *For Marx*, pp.13, 33.

Oscar Hammen discusses a general shift in Marx and Engels' ideological strategy from 1845 onwards that may provide another explanation for the virtual absence of these categories in their later work. He argues that Marx and Engels consciously distanced themselves from Feuerbach after it became clear that Feuerbach was a favourite of "German reformers and socialists" who supported a peaceful transition to socialism. Therefore: "As advocates of revolution and class conflict, Marx and Engels had to deprecate the philosopher who once had commanded their unlimited praise" (Hammen, *The Red '48ers*, p.117). Their dropping of the Feuerbachian term '*Gattungswesen*' and other related concepts may therefore be understood as a politically motivated strategy, rather than as a drastic change in theoretical orientation.

Animals are immediately one with their life activity. They are not distinct from that activity; they *are* that activity. The human being [*Der Mensch*] makes its very life activity an object of its will and consciousness. It has conscious life activity [*bewußte Lebenstätigkeit*]. This is not a determination [*Bestimmtheit*] with which the human being directly merges. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes the human being from animal life activity. Only because of that is the human being a generic-being [*Gattungswesen*]. Or rather, it is a conscious being, i.e. its own life is an object for it, only because it is a generic-being.³

As one of its distinguishing features, generic-being incorporates the notion of self-consciousness. As Marx states, the nature of a life-form's 'life activity' – its material relationship with nature – is what constitutes it. Animals are 'immediately one' (*unmittelbar eins*) with their activity, and are on this basis confined to the determinability that nature imposes on them.

Being self-conscious means that in the engagement of their life activity humans are able to look upon this activity as their 'object', turning their attention to it with a view to transforming it. This ability, which is captured ideally in the concept of work (*Arbeit*), enables them to transcend the animal condition and circumvent the influence of natural determinism. As stated above, work similarly allows the generic-being to focus on the specific 'genus' of other objects with a view to transforming them in a way that dissociates them from the pure act of gratifying basic needs. In other words, generic-beings transform other objects not simply to accomplish set tasks, but to generate intrinsic meaning for themselves.

By engaging in this process the generic-being identifies its own activity as demonstrative of a unique and liberating form of determination (*Bestimmung*). As we will see, the specific 'universality' (*Universalität*) that this capacity bestows on the generic-being integrally involves the generation of activities other than work – some of which are considered of a higher nature than work (*höhere Tätigkeiten*), particularly higher than a work directed purely at the gratification of material needs.

It is not commonly specified that, in contrast to Marx's concept of 'human essence', the function of the category of generic-being is almost universally used by Marx as a conception of the human being that distinguishes it as unique in comparison

³ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, pp.327-8; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), pp.515-6.

to other forms of life. This is an important point because, in contrast to the ‘human essence’, it involves the incorporation of a certain natural-scientific context to his discussion of generic-being.

In his own analysis of Marx, George Márkus argues that the conventional English translation of *Gattungswesen* as ‘species-being’ conceals an added dimension intended by Marx in his employment of the term. In the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, Marx tends to discuss an animal (*Tier*) in terms of its ‘species’ (*Art*),⁴ which in the practice of conventional natural-scientific classification is subsumed in the zoological lexicon under the broader category of ‘genus’ (*Gattung*). In the term *Gattungswesen*, Marx means to express humankind as qualitatively different to other animals on the basis of its status as an entire ‘genus’ of its own, by virtue of its unique ability to engage in self-constituting activity. For Márkus the outcome Marx intends is that, rather than being subsumed under a presiding category of genus alongside other animal species, Marx places humankind in the unique position of “a being of the [category of] genus, a *generic* being – whom an ever increasing multitude of natural kinds and species belong to”.⁵ Hence, Marx’s own statement that “the human being is more universal than animals”.⁶

Presenting humankind as a generic-being may therefore be understood as an attempt to stress ‘in naturalist terms’ the extent of the human being’s power over its own essence, in the form of a capacity, as a ‘genus’, over the particular nature of its ‘speciesshood’ – its particular ‘natural’ characteristics.⁷ In this way the nature of human determination (*menschliche Bestimmung*) as ‘circumscribed yet general’ in its potential is given overt expression by Marx through the use of standard zoological classification.

For Marx, human self-constitution and the transformation of nature are complementary aspects of the same objective process: “in the fashioning of the

⁴ In the original German Marx also employs the English word ‘species’ in place of *Art* when referring to animal life. See *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), pp.516, 517, 558, 560.

⁵ See Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.4. Interestingly, in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) Marcuse generally refers to the human being as a ‘genus’ rather than as a ‘species’ (for instance, see *Eros and Civilization*, pp.31, 34, 55, 60, 78, 85, 103, 176; and particularly at the beginning of Chapter 7). Where he does employ the term ‘species’, it is in the context of other theorists, usually Freud. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), however, he has settled on the term ‘species’.

⁶ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.327.

⁷ Incidentally, Marx recognised the import of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* when it was first published in 1859 (cf. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.493, n.4), but he never considered the process of production as a simple continuation of natural evolution, in the manner of the so-called ‘Social Darwinists’. See Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, pp.45-6.

objective....the human being really proves itself to be a *generic-being*".⁸ In fact, not only does the generic-being have control over its own essential constitution, but it also possesses – at least theoretically – the potential to become involved in the control of nature *in general*. This is expressed in Marx's depiction of nature as the generic being's 'inorganic body'.

The universality of the human being [*Universalität des Menschen*] manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature [*die ganze Natur*] its *inorganic body* [*unorganischen Körper*], (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object and the tool of its life activity. Nature is humankind's *inorganic body* [*unorganische Leib*], that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body [*menschliche Körper*]. Humankind *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is its *body* [*Leib*], and it must maintain a process with it in order not to die. To say that the human being's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for humankind is a part of nature [*der Mensch ist ein Teil der Natur*].⁹

It is clear that the concept of the inorganic body positions 'the whole of nature' as a force that humankind may in principle assume under its power.¹⁰ Rather than offering this as some kind of normative objective, Marx is merely attempting to account for the inherent interrelationship between nature and humankind. While theoretically distinguishable, the two sides of material existence – nature and human society – are objectively co-dependent; in the sense at least that, even if human beings could be understood as having assumed universal technical control over natural processes, one could just as easily interpret this as nature's control over itself.¹¹

The process between humankind and nature is expressed in Marx's later writings in the concept of 'metabolism' [*Stoffwechsel*]. This concept is Marx's 'historical materialist' means of analysing the universal relationship between humankind and

⁸ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.329; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.517.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.328; pp.515-6.

¹⁰ See Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, pp.12-3. Ominously, this claim regarding humankind's theoretical capacity to control nature appears to be proving somewhat accurate, given the revelation that socioeconomic activity is likely to be directly involved in the acceleration of global climate change.

¹¹ In Chapter 7 (Section 3.2, p.201) we will see that in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse embraces this idea of an inherent relation between human nature and nature in general, to the point of conceiving of nature as a 'subject-object'.

nature contained in work,¹² i.e., from the perspective of history, rather than in more ‘naturalistic’ terms.¹³ At all levels of analysis, therefore, Marx maintains a clear emphasis on the deep dialectical relationship between humankind (society) and nature. The conception of the metabolism maintained by work clearly retains integral aspects of Marx’s ‘philosophical’ conception of this human-nature relation, recalling the passage in the *Ökonomische-philosophische Manuskripte* where he utilised Goethe’s metaphor in the image of the human being “inhaling and exhaling [*aus- und einatmende*] all the powers of nature”.¹⁴

Nevertheless, humankind’s escape from the unreflective natural condition, in the attainment of power over its interaction with nature, marks the beginning of human history.¹⁵ Marx’s concept of generic-being may therefore be used to provide a theoretical connection between the natural sciences and ‘human science’ – between ‘natural’ and human history. At the same time, the human being’s distinctive capacity and need (*Bedürfnis*)¹⁶ for self-conscious and socially organised interaction with nature may be offered in social analysis as the foundation for the normative claim that

¹² As Alfred Schmidt argues: “It was not for nothing that Marx repeatedly used the expression ‘metabolism’ when he had in mind the labour-process which takes place solely between humankind and nature, and that he applied this characterization equally to all forms of development”. In “On the Relationship between History and Nature in Dialectical Materialism”, appended to Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, p.169.

¹³ Interestingly, Ben Fowkes calls attention to the point that the term *Stoffwechsel* possesses a scientific (more specifically, ‘biological’) connotation of its own. However, he adds that this notion also “plays a considerable role in [Marx’s] analysis of [capital] circulation and the labour process” (Fowkes in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.198n). This being the case, it may be possible that the concept of *Stoffwechsel* possesses the additional function of expressing not only the relation (*Verhältnis*) inherent in work alone, but a wider relation between nature and the gamut of activities that comprise social existence in its entirety.

¹⁴ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.389; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.577.

¹⁵ That is, human history as opposed to natural history. Interestingly, in *Die deutsche Ideologie*, Marx and Engels state that the “creation of new needs [*Bedürfnisse*] is the first historical act” (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.48; *MEW*, Vol. 3 (1978), p.28). This is an expression of the integral notion that human development and freedom consists in universalising itself, which involves the ongoing (i.e., historical) and conscious creation and diversification of new needs.

¹⁶ As we noted in the Introduction (p. 8, n. 18), George Márkus translates Marx’s term *Bedürfnis* not as ‘need’ but as ‘want’ (see Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.64, n.30a). He argues that it “is very characteristic of Marx’s concept of the human being that he never drew a sharp dividing line between wants and abilities. The human being’s nature is a ‘totality of needs and drives’ [Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.245] and in this living unity of the real personality ‘passive’ wants and ‘active’ capacities reciprocally presuppose each other and mutually transform into each other” (Márkus, p.63, n.30). The ability to conceive of an innate relationship between needs, wants, and abilities is an integral feature of social theory informed by an anthropology that emphasises the inherent unity of human being itself. Again, it is one intention of the present thesis to present the notion of *Bedürfnis* as a theoretically robust way of reflecting the inherent unity of the contingent human being within a practical theory of human action, grounded in work.

capitalism impedes the human being's socially embedded capacity to produce the basic conditions of human flourishing at the level of the individual subject.

1.2. The human essence (*menschliche Wesen*)

It is worth repeating that the concept of 'generic-being' is not synonymous with the concept of 'human essence' (*menschliche Wesen*), though they represent the same being at different levels of abstraction. As such they serve different functions in Marx's anthropology. 'Generic-being' captures the distinguishing features of human beings with respect to other forms of life, and which generate the possibility for humans to extract themselves from the determinability of nature and become historical beings.¹⁷ In contrast, 'human essence' represents the complete and unified human being, as it appears in the fullness of history. At this level of abstraction, this includes those aspects of human life shared with organic life in general – for instance, its material embodiment. So, while the concept of generic-being may be understood as represented in the human essence, the reverse is not the case.

In situating the human being with reference to history itself, the notion of the human essence serves as a historical reflection of the generic-being as a *complete* being. It is in this context that Marx analyses in detail the components of human existence and their effects in socio-historical life. Where the concept of generic-being is included in 'scientific' discussions of the human being's distinction from other animals,¹⁸ the human essence is generally employed to capture the anthropological completeness and unity of human beings as a form of life across all societies and historical periods. Within this abstraction, 'universal' aspects or traits of humankind may be separated out and analysed as particular 'moments' (*Momente*) that are in fact inherent to the unity. In this sense the conception operates as an orienting tool rather than as a straight descriptive account.¹⁹ As distinct from generic-being, 'human essence' can conceptually capture the full dimension of needs and capacities that

¹⁷ Hence it may be permissible to state that in expressing only those features of the human being that make history possible, generic-being is an ahistorical or non-historical representation of the human essence, while the concept of human essence itself is 'trans-historical' – reflecting the human being *across* history.

¹⁸ Though of course Marx does occasionally refer to generic-being in the context of freedom and alienation. See Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, pp.327-9.

¹⁹ Here we may recall John Abromeit's comment, made in the context of Marcuse's early theory, on the dialectical employment of the concept of *Bestimmung* to avoid the use of static descriptions and definitions. (See p.4, n.10, above.)

constitute human life, as unspecific and potentially infinite, while at the same time being delimited by objective-material conditions and constraints.

As we have seen, without an adequate theoretical account of historical change, Marx considers a materialist theory to be problematically abstract. Objective reality is inherently dynamic, which means that any representation of human beings that is premised upon a timeless or ‘universally binding’ human nature is theoretically inadequate. For Marx the key distinguishing feature of the human essence is not reducible to a strict capacity or collection of capacities that may be considered as ‘unchanging’ or ‘eternally human’;²⁰ though it may be understood to incorporate specific traits conceivable in this way, for theoretical purposes.

Marx often uses unusual descriptions to express the dynamic and unfixed nature of his concepts, which may contribute to the distrust felt by analytically minded scholars. For instance, Marx states in the *Grundrisse* that work is not “an arbitrary abstraction, but rather an abstraction which *elapses* [*vergeht*] within the process [of production] itself”.²¹ In a similar fashion, and rather than being an ‘abstraction *inherent* in each single individual’ as with Feuerbach,²² the concept of the human essence is not a defined set of universal human qualities. Rather, it should be understood to ‘elapse’ within or to ‘pass by’ (*vergehen*) the concrete individual human being. In other words, it applies to them without restricting what they are to it alone, or attaching their potentiality exclusively to a fixed form of existence. A consequently high level of abstraction therefore prevents Marx from using this category to make any definitive judgments about the specific qualities of concrete human beings, who are essentially constituted out of unique and particular circumstances. When analysing Marx’s theory it is always important to remember that the traits or ‘moments’

²⁰ Thus the portrayal of Marx’s concept of human essence as a ‘universal’ and ‘historically unchanging’ set of traits is inaccurate. Such an account is famously given by Erich Fromm in *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961), and is also offered by David Leopold in his comprehensive book *The Young Karl Marx. German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (2007); and also Norman Geras in *Marx and Human Nature. Refutation of a Legend* (1983), a book that otherwise offers an effective critique of the Althusserian interpretation of Marx with respect to human nature.

²¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.303 (italics added). In this quote I have translated the original verb *vergehen* (which is not italicised in the original) as ‘elapse’ rather than using Martin Nicolaus’ (and Márkus’) choice of ‘take place’. In being said to ‘elapse’, Marx may nevertheless have intended to suggest a degree of ‘unreliability’ in the notion of *Arbeit*, a quality that renders it abstract when compared to the concept of *Produktion*. For the original passage, see MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.224.

²² From Marx, “Appendix: A. Concerning Feuerbach” in Marx, *Early Writings*, p.423. Italics added. The original reads: “Aber das menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum inwohnendes Abstraktum.” In MEW, Vol. 3 (1978), p.6.

contained in the human essence are too abstract to reflect what individual human beings objectively 'are'. As we will see, this perspective is more closely captured at the level of analysis represented in Marx's concept of 'human nature', where such highly abstract characteristics such as *Arbeit* are generally inapplicable.

As the abstract representation of the unity of the human being, human essence is often portrayed in the literature *qua* the capacity to work.²³ The relationship between the human essence and work is of course extremely close, appearing in some of Marx's discussions as though it may be summed up in this way. For instance, in the *Auszüge aus James Mill* (1844) he comments: "My work would be the *free expression* and hence the *enjoyment of life*....Moreover, in my work the *specific character* of my individuality would be affirmed because it would be my *individual life*".²⁴ There Marx also offers a description of work as experienced under "the framework of private property" as "the *alienation of life* since I work *in order to live*"; as such: "My work is *not life*".²⁵

Much is also made of the following passage from *Die deutsche Ideologie*, in which it seems Marx is poking fun at those who would consider the human essence to be constituted by human qualities other than 'production'.

Human beings can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* [*produzieren*] their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence humans are indirectly producing their material life [*materielles Leben*].

....As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production [*fällt also zusammen mit ihrer Produktion*], both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on [*hängt ab von*] the material conditions of production.

²³ And also as "the ability to produce according to a plan, that is, creative activity". In Wilde, "Logic. Dialectic and Contradiction", in Carver (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, p.280.

²⁴ Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*", in *Early Writings*, p.278; MEW, Vol. 40 (1968), p.463.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

This production only makes its appearance with the *increase of population*.
In its turn this presupposes the *intercourse* (*Verkehr*) of individuals with one another. The form of this intercourse is again determined by production.²⁶

In all likelihood, Marx did intend some facetiousness in his opening comment here; however, such a motive is not inconsistent with the notion that there are in fact other unique aspects of the human essence that are distinguishable from ‘production’. Marx could simply mean that separating animals by consciousness or religion, or other distinctively human aspects or traits is permissible, so long as one also identifies anthropogenesis specifically with the emergence of work as he defines it.

Ultimately, the reduction of the human essence to any particular capacity is not reflective of Marx’s own conception, simply because such a definition fails to represent the distinctive *universality* that grounds the human being’s unique and circumscribed, but ultimately (theoretically) unlimited, capacity for self-transformation. Even though work is indispensable to human life, action, and knowledge, it is clear enough that for Marx human beings are not reducible to the unqualified description of ‘working beings’. While work conditions human existence by connecting subjects to the ineradicable limits of basic materiality, it also provides them with the capacity to evade any limitation to one specific form of activity – even work itself. As a result, describing the human essence as the capacity to work theoretically strips them of the distinctive nature of the universality and potentiality that their capacity for work instils in them.

The crucial feature of human beings is therefore their capacity to radically self-constitute, which allows them even to transcend the realm of work itself. This is what Marx refers to when, associating work famously with the ‘realm of necessity’ (*Reich der Notwendigkeit*) in *Kapital*, Vol. 3, he speaks of “the true realm of freedom”, which “can only flourish with the realm of necessity as its basis”.²⁷ The whole point here is that human beings must be defined by more than work alone, even though work determines the specific limits of their unique capacity.

²⁶ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.37. Translation altered. See *MEW*, Vol. 3 (1978), p.21.

George Márkus argues that in *Die deutsche Ideologie* Marx and Engels still employed the terms *Arbeit* and *Produktion* interchangeably to represent a generalised human interaction with nature; a tendency that is hereafter dropped in favour of the distinction between ‘universal’ *Arbeit* and historically situated *Produktion*. See Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.62, n.12.

²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, p.959; *MEW*, Vol. 25 (1964), p.828.

This reading creates the possibility of interpreting Marx's concept of the human essence as possessing a collection of traits including work, the latter of which is the capacity that launches them off as beings whose essence, when viewed in the capitalist epoch, has already incorporated other 'essential' qualities that are more or less distinguishable from work and are (therefore) theoretically separable from it. As we have seen, Marx states explicitly that what individuals are 'depends on' (rather than 'is identical to') the conditions of their production.

Another indication that Marx possesses this view is found in his acknowledgement of the actual division in capitalist reality between 'work time' and 'leisure time'. In the capitalist era, it is possible (though uncommon) for human beings to express themselves in their work,²⁸ as well as in their 'free time' – which Marx discusses in the *Grundrisse*: "Free time [*Die freie Zeit*] – which is both leisure time [*Mußezeit*] and time for higher activity [*Zeit für höhere Tätigkeit*] – has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and it then enters into the direct production process as this different subject".²⁹ It can be reasonably assumed then that the human being's capacity for 'higher activity', defined here as distinct from 'work activity', forms for Marx an integral 'moment' elapsing within the human essence, though it 'coincides with production' in the sense that free time is made possible only as a result of actual productive forces. While the concept of free time relates here specifically to the capitalist form of production, the 'higher activity' that this aspect of life involves (which, as we have already seen, Marx famously describes as activity belonging to the 'realm of freedom') may be likened to forms of activity that pre-date capitalism; e.g., the leisure time of the feudal aristocracy, and also monastic religious activity. So, even though 'free time' specifically relates to the capitalist epoch, it possesses correlates in other historical periods, indicating that aspects of the activities associated with it may themselves be represented by unique 'moments' within the concept of human essence.

Marx never systemically defined the specific characteristics that the human essence might be understood to include in addition to work; however, it is possible to

²⁸ Though, the argument that modernity may be defined as a general condition in which work appears as a parody of self-expression also applies. This does not mean that work itself cannot still serve as the principal form of self-expression for certain individuals or groups. It also does not mean that 'production' in all of its manifestations does not have the most profound effect (of all human pursuits) on human subjective and intersubjective development.

²⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.712; *MEW*, Vol. 42 (1983), p.607.

draw some conclusions based on his writings. If work itself is not the sole arena through which individuals express themselves, it at least made these other forms of expression possible. But the human essence is intended to capture features of human beings that appear across human life in general, including outside the individual's participation in the economic process itself; i.e., in activities that we associate in the modern era with 'private life'. And, in order to adequately represent the human being in its complete unity, the human essence must also incorporate those aspects of human life that it shares with all other forms of life. Only in this way can the basic demands of nature (as natural necessity) that still serve to delimit human life (as it delimits all life) be factored into a complete and unified normative representation of human determination.

We have seen that Marx does refer to sociality (*Verkehr*) as an aspect of the increase in population which he describes as a precondition for production. *Sociality* therefore may perhaps even be understood as an element of the human essence that somehow *precedes* the appearance of particular, historically based, economic frameworks. This would appear a reasonable assumption, if we acknowledge sociality (*Verkehr*) as something that is perceivable in animal life; even in more basic life forms such as ants and bees. In such a form sociality *may* be understood to possess some kind of inherent connection not to work but to a broader concept of 'material life activity'.

The inclusion of sociality as an intrinsic aspect of the human essence that is also separable from work is supported in another statement in *Die deutsche Ideologie*. There Marx and Engels introduce an abstract notion of a general human "production of life" (*Produktion des Lebens*) which, they state, incorporates both 'work' (*Arbeit*) and 'procreation' (*Zeugung*). This 'production of life' exists as a "twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, and on the other as a social relation".³⁰ 'Production of life' may be used to show that for Marx, 'sociality' is an inherent aspect of the human essence, and not via any intrinsic relationship to 'work in general'. Production of life is a feature of all terrestrial life; however, for human beings, it brings together the uniquely human capacity for work, as well as incorporating (biological) procreation – two forms of activity which separately contain sociality as a key feature. Theoretically,

³⁰ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp.48-9.

sociality may therefore be considered, as an aspect of ‘production of life’, not strictly reducible to the sociality of work – at least in the context of a ‘human essence’.

In addition to sociality, other aspects of the human essence may include consciousness and language, both of which Marx and Engels describe at one point in *Die deutsche Ideologie* as human social products rather than as direct offshoots of work.³¹ It may also possess recognition as a clear separable characteristic, as indicated in the famous ‘Peter and Paul’ footnote in *Kapital*, Vol. 1.³²

Marx’s concept of human essence may therefore be thought of as a constellation of traits and capacities that feature in human life across two dimensions: firstly, across individuals throughout human society; and secondly, across all historically-specific forms of human life. Conceivably, one might incorporate any feature of human life, so long as it may be regarded as ‘universal’, and so long as one bears in mind that humans “first begin to distinguish themselves from animals when they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence”.

Ultimately, Marx’s notion of the human essence is not adequately presented without inclusion of its distinct universality (*Universalität*), which is only definitively captured with the inclusion of the assertion that, in order to be genuinely human, the individual subject needs to be able to recognise its own freely-embarked activity as *historical*.³³ In their overall activity, individual human beings need to be able to associate themselves with other human beings in a manner that links them in a common historical project, to which their contribution is recognised as influential.³⁴ The individual’s involvement in the system of production, as the determining factor of

³¹ “Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men”. Immediately after this passage, the following is crossed out in the original manuscript: “My relation to my surroundings is my consciousness” (in Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.49). Perhaps this final omission was considered too vague for Marx in its possible implication that consciousness arises *directly* from work as organised activity with one’s natural surroundings, i.e., in isolation from social interaction.

³² “As it neither enters the world in possession of a mirror, nor as a Fichtean philosopher who can say ‘I am I’, a human being first sees and recognizes itself in another human being. Peter only relates to himself as a human being through his relation to another human being, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness. With this, however, Paul also becomes from head to toe, in his physical form as Paul, the form of appearance of the human genus [*Genus Mensch*] for Peter”. In Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.144, n. 19; MEW, Vol. 23 (1962), p.68, n.18.

³³ See Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.39.

³⁴ “Human beings must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’”. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47; MEW, Vol. 3 (1968), p.28.

this project, is generally the manner in which the subject is oriented with respect to human determination at its most general, i.e., as socio-historical.

However, in order for the individual's activity to be genuinely universal, and in addition to an individual's work, human history cannot merely involve the development of the human system of production. It must also incorporate those 'higher' avenues of life that the system of production has made possible, and which prove the universality of the human essence to exist beyond merely the capacity to work. The individual therefore needs to be able to recognise that all of its concrete activity, its work, social interaction, consciousness, creative activity, etc., has the effect of bringing to life its inherent and distinctively human potential for freedom and self-determination, in order for its contribution to the historical determination of society to be considered complete.

1.3. Human nature (*Menschennatur*)

As noted earlier, Marx also possesses another perspective on human existence that he represents through the concept of 'human nature' (*Menschennatur*; *menschliche Natur*), which may be defined as a representation of the unity in which the human being's needs, wants, capacities, and other anthropological features may be presented in their immediate, empirically observable form. These are the features of human existence – the manifestation of its essential needs, etc. – that are specific to a particular historical epoch and system of production. The concept of human nature allows Marx to create a sense of the dynamism of human existence by accounting for the ways in which the general 'traits' of the human essence may change as a result of socio-historical development and the evolving system of production. Through the concept of human nature, these traits are presented in the form of the specific needs *and capacities* of the individual in a given historical epoch.

While it may be appropriate to criticise Marx for failing to systematically outline the distinction between 'the human essence' and 'human nature', the distinction is by no means merely implicit.³⁵ In the well-known footnote on Bentham in *Capital* Marx

³⁵ In fact, Marx describes the distinction clearly with reference to the concept of *Produktion* in the abandoned introduction to *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*. See Marx, "Introduction", in *Grundrisse*, pp.85-7.

refers directly to it;³⁶ and in the chapter on ‘labour and valorisation’, he gives an “abstract” definition of work (*Arbeit*) as the “universal condition” through which the human being “acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way.... simultaneously changes his own nature”.³⁷ For this statement to entirely make sense,³⁸ one needs to acknowledge the existence of two levels of ‘human nature’ here: a ‘human nature’ in which work as ‘abstract material activity’ (work as *Arbeit*) serves as a prominent moment (‘human essence’); and a ‘human nature’ as a historically specific unity influenced directly by a concrete system of production (*Produktion*).

Occasionally, Marx utilises the features of the human essence as ‘fixed universals’ through which to illustrate the manner in which human needs and capacities change, i.e., how human nature changes in the course of history. A demonstration of this may be found in his abandoned introduction to *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859),³⁹ in a passage concerning the difference in the manifestation of ‘universal’ human hunger (a ‘moment’ within the ‘human essence’) as an effect of the particular historical form of the production process.

Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail, and tooth. Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively.

³⁶ According to Marx, Bentham’s utilitarianism fails to “deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch. Bentham does not trouble himself with this. With the driest [sic] naïveté he assumes that the modern petit bourgeois....is the normal person. Whatever is useful to this peculiar kind of normal person, and to his world, is useful in and for itself. [Bentham] applies this yardstick to the past, the present and the future” (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.759, n.51). In this passage, Marx is criticising Bentham for failing to distinguish between (what Marx understands as) a historically specific ‘human nature’ and a (more abstract) ‘human essence’, the latter of which is ‘trans-historical’, i.e., may be applied theoretically to human beings ‘past, present, and future’. Failing to do so leaves Bentham presenting the historically situated *bourgeois* individual (complete with its ‘utilitarian’ morality) as the ‘ideal form’ of the human essence. With respect to work, this would be equivalent to the claim not only that the (utilitarian) capitalist division of labour has existed since anthropogenesis, but will always be the necessary form that human work should take.

³⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 290, 283.

³⁸ An alternative is of course to suggest that Marx wrote this statement in an uncharacteristic state of conceptual confusion. Bertell Ollman speaks at some length about the dialectical logic that Marx employs which, when understood, dispels any notion that he was ever anything but theoretically rigorous. Ollman also suggests that Marx’s specific reasoning is commonly a reason why many critics dismiss Marx as theoretically confused. See Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, particularly pp.5, 27, 50n, 70-2, 94-7, 132, 138-9, 150, 162, 168.

³⁹ See “Introduction” in Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp.81-111.

Production thus creates the consumer [*Die Produktion schafft also den Konsumenten*].⁴⁰

Here Marx is basically illustrating how a more highly developed economic system generally reflects a more culturally developed system of social mores that govern human behaviour, and as concrete processes make up the objective reality of ‘abstract human needs and capacities’.⁴¹ In this example, the appearance of cutlery for Marx demonstrates the evolution of the abstract need for sustenance, which renders cutlery a specific need for the modern individual. At the same time, the capacity to cook meat is both a need and capacity of its own, with restrictions and benefits in comparison to the eating habits of the human being in the earliest stage of history.

In his later theoretical writings Marx usually conducted his analysis at a level of abstraction in which human needs and capacities appear as features of human nature, rather than as aspects of the human essence. It is at this level that the operation of capitalism in human life may be examined at the highest level of critical detail. This enables him to focus on the specific (i.e., historically specific) features of capitalism, which do not appear at the more abstract level of ‘human essence’ and ‘generic-being’.

2. The universal concept of work (*Arbeit*)

All the same, Marx’s notion of human essence still plays a role in his later writings, not least as the representation of humankind in which the general notion of work (*Arbeit*) comes into focus. Marx defines work in a manner that avoids its reduction to a mere technical or instrumental activity. As we have seen, for Marx the fact that it serves as the foundation of human universality makes it inherently meaningful and value-forming with respect to individual subjects. In the context of contemporary social theory, it is important to note that the individual’s social connections and its connection with nature are united in work in a manner that renders the meaning

⁴⁰ “Introduction”, in Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.92; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.27.

⁴¹ Hence, Marx’s final line, ‘production thus creates the consumer’; a sentiment that, given the overt ‘culinary’ context, demands comparison to the (often misquoted) Feuerbachian platitude, “Humankind is what it eats” (“*Der Mensch ist, was er ißt*” (see Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 11, pp. 26-52).

It is perhaps revealing that Marx’s (surely conscious) rewording of Feuerbach’s expression, in terms not of basic biological imperative, but of capitalist economic necessity, reflects his conviction that human life is most accurately represented not as a function of ‘abstract need’, but as a direct offshoot of a historically situated system of economic relations.

generated through the activity reducible to neither of these connections when considered in theoretical isolation.

In the *Auszüge aus James Mill*, in which Marx offers a rare positive description of work, he accounts for the effect of work on individuals.

Let us suppose we had produced [*produziert*] as human beings. In that event each of us would have *doubly affirmed* himself and his neighbour in his production [*Produktion*]. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified [*vergegenständlicht*] the *specific character* of my *individuality* and for that reason I would have enjoyed my own individual *expression of life* [*individuelle Lebensäußerung*] during my activity and also, in contemplation of the object, I would experience an individual pleasure, I would experience my personality as an *objective, sensuously perceptible power* [*gegenständliche, sinnlich anschauliche....Macht*] *beyond all shadow of doubt*. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product [*In deinem Genuß oder deinem Gebrauch meines Produkts*] I would have the *immediate* satisfaction and knowledge that in my work [*Arbeit*] I had gratified a *human need* [*menschliches Bedürfnis*], i.e. that I had objectified the *human essence* [*das menschliche Wesen vergegenständlicht*] and hence had procured an object corresponding to the needs of another *human* being. (3) I would have acted for you as the *mediator* [*Mittler*] between you and the genus [*Gattung*], thus I would be acknowledged by you as the complement of your own being, as an essential part of yourself. I would thus know myself to be confirmed both in your thoughts and your love [*(Ich hätte) in deinem Denken wie in deiner Liebe....bestätigt zu wissen*]. (4) In my own individual expression of life I would have brought about the immediate expression of your life, and so in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realized* my authentic nature, my *human, communal being*.

Our productions would be as many mirrors from which our being would shine forth.⁴²

⁴² Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*", in *Early Writings*, pp.277-8. Translation altered. Original in *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), pp.462-3.

In relation to this passage it is worth keeping in mind that at this stage in his theoretical development, Marx did not distinguish between work and production in the manner that he does in *Das Kapital* and his later economic works; *Produktion* and *Arbeit* are therefore synonymous terms in the passage (see p.92, n.26, above).

Marx clearly looks at the direct relationship between the individual and nature not only as a subjective self-formative act, but as a direct social relation. Work is therefore generally considered as activity directed at other individuals. As well as providing the subject with the ability to objectify itself in its transformation of the materials of nature – thus serving to induce pleasure and the opportunity to develop and validate its own identity, power, and agency – work serves to affirm the subjectivity of the beneficiary of the activity. As the recipient of the outcome of another's work, the individual experiences pleasure as well as a sense of love and belonging. Both producer and recipient are able to recognise themselves as unique individuals, as well as being a valued member of a social whole. In the exchange a dialectical unity is generated between individual and collective, in which the one recognises the other as 'an essential part' of its own subjectivity. This process is intrinsic to the human essence and an integral part of the development of human consciousness, through the process that Hegel describes as 'recognition': "I would thus know myself to be *confirmed* both in your thoughts and your love". As a result work provides the subject with an intrinsic and all-encompassing connection to its own being in a manner that is absent in other forms of activity. In other words, work is the only activity that involves all of the following essential human needs and capacities: interacting with other human beings (sociality for its own sake); expressing one's existence and individuality in concrete form (objectification as a contributor to individual identity); transforming nature and thus apprehending the source of one's generic-being (membership to the human community); contributing to the positive determination of other individuals, and thus to the universality of humankind in general – that is, exercising genuine *human determination*.

While Marx's typical conception of work is the production of objects (which today may be understood as a drawback to his theory), he was aware that work can extend beyond the transformation of the materials of nature to other activities; for instance, in the distribution of products, and tasks that are described today as 'service' roles. This is a dialectical outcome of his view of the system of production in *Das*

Kapital as comprised not only of 'production' proper, i.e., manufacturing, but of distribution, exchange, and even consumption.⁴³

As an activity in which human beings are able to directly transform and reshape their natures, work is intrinsically meaningful to them, and as such is itself a fundamental human capacity and need. In the context of 'generic-being' it may be described as the singular characteristic separating human beings from animals; with respect to 'human essence' it is the capacity that sets human existence on its historical path. In turn it makes possible the other theoretically separable 'moments' of human life, such as sociality, consciousness, and language.

Here there resides a certain ambiguity in Marx's theory of work, concerning the question of what constitutes direct (personal) involvement in 'production proper' as a socially necessary process, and the nature of the individual's capacity and need (*Bedürfnis*) for involvement in it in order to engage in a free and flourishing life. As we have seen, in his early writings Marx speaks of work as a general activity in which all individuals need to engage in order to preserve their complete identity as a generic-being. Later this view appears less absolute, the focus being at times upon unfettered freedom in one's 'self-activity' (*Selbstbetätigung*), such as in the famous passage in *Die deutsche Ideologie* regarding 'hunting in the morning and fishing in the afternoon'.⁴⁴ Whether this hunting and fishing is considered work as a socially motivated act, i.e., as an act for others, or merely as a '*robinsonadisch*' activity is insufficiently clear, and in fact has been the focus of some analysis.⁴⁵

While the extent to which Marx's view on work in this respect remains uncertain, a sufficient understanding of his theory will put such ambiguities in an appropriate context. As we have seen, Marx's focus when it comes to the essential needs of human beings is the capacity to self-constitute as individual human beings, given the limitations placed upon them by basic materiality. In terms of the universal human

⁴³ "The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality [*Totalität*], distinctions within a unity [*Einheit*]. Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well. The process always returns to production to begin anew". Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.99; *MEW*, Vol. 42 (1983), p.34.

⁴⁴ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.53.

⁴⁵ "[In *Die deutsche Ideologie*] Marx says that, in a communist society, the distinction between labor and enjoyment will disappear....But the phrase 'the casting-off of all natural limitations' suggests further that communists will hunt and fish because they want to, *not* because people need food". In Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, p.309. (The passages he is comparing can be found in Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp.97, 235; *MEW*, Vol. 3 (1978), pp.67, 199.)

being – an abstraction that takes into account not the conditions of all extant human beings but of common aspects of individuals throughout history – work may be said to provide this freedom to the individual, along with the other separable elements of the human essence. However, for particular individuals (as opposed to the universal human being), work *may* fulfil these basic needs, but they *may* also be fulfilled in other ways, depending on the extent of the relevant society’s economic and cultural development, and configuration. In the latter case, the work of others would make the individual’s conditions of activity and flourishing possible. It is perhaps in this sense that Marx famously states in his late essay *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* (1875) that work needs to “become not only a means of life [*Mittel zum Leben*] but life’s prime want [*das erste Lebensbedürfnis*]”.⁴⁶ This late statement is said to conflict with the possible ‘Robinsonian’ flavour of the discussion of work in *Die deutsche Ideologie*; however, it is in this earlier text that Marx ventures the possibility that the distinction between work and enjoyment may disappear. In this case, it may be argued that the ‘bourgeois’ fixation common in the scholarship regarding ‘who gets to work and who gets to enjoy themselves’ can itself be understood to evaporate.⁴⁷

It is important to remember, however, that as an intrinsic aspect of the human essence, work, along with other conceivably unique human traits, is for Marx not *objectively* distinct. The *analytic* or abstract separability of human traits is for Marx simply a strategy for comprehending the intrinsic objective (dialectical) wholeness of concrete human existence. Any attempt to claim that as separate ‘activities’ they are in fact objectively distinguishable – particularly in a manner that diminishes or strips their inherent meaning and impact on individual subjects – is for Marx an exercise in over-abstraction. This separation is only acceptable in observance of the overarching premise that the objective process represented in the concept of work is in actuality united with other *theoretically separable* traits of human individuals in a dialectical relation (*Verhältnis*) that prevents any *concrete* distinction between work’s inherent normativity in human life and the normativity that can be inferred from other (empirically) observable human capacities.

⁴⁶ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p.18; MEW, Vol. 19 (1987), p.21.

⁴⁷ Of course, the obvious rejoinder to this argument is that the very notion that the question of ‘who works and who plays’ is capable of concrete resolution is itself a dangerous and extremely bourgeois notion.

Even in the case of ‘work’ and ‘spare time’ in capitalist society, the normativity contained in ‘leisure-time’ activities – for instance, the visual arts – owes its objective meaning and value to the metabolism between human beings and nature that, in the context of the human essence, is represented as ‘work’. This fact is indirectly observable in the fact that, for example, the artist’s creative materials, ‘tools’, etc., are ultimately the objective products of work, as the self-conscious and socially directed transformation of natural materials. The meaning generated in a visual artwork – for instance, the sense of serenity conveyed in a completed landscape painting – is, with respect to the human essence, fundamentally inseparable from the work activity that transformed the materials of nature into raw art materials (paints, brushes, canvas), which the artist subsequently utilises in her own work.

Given the specific nature of the determining power that Marx sees in work, the common misreading of his concept of human essence as simply ‘the capacity to work’ actually serves to underemphasise the magnitude of value and potential that he places in it. In identifying the human essence with the ‘capacity to work’, the critic can be seen to logically delimit Marx’s conception of human flourishing to a life of work. While clearly dismissing much of what Marx said regarding the human essence, it also serves the task of restricting the transcending potential of work to new types of work activity.⁴⁸ Rather than generating the possibility for a ‘realm of freedom’, Marx’s conception of work is misrepresented, and as such the power of work merely allows human beings only to develop more advanced forms of work within the realm of necessity.

In defining work as “the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence”,⁴⁹ Marx did not wish to represent human beings simply as ‘workers’. He did intend to state that work will always be the aspect of the human essence through which other forms of self-determination are made possible. In the capitalist era work has already made other forms of self-realisation possible, in creating the conditions in which human beings may engage in ‘higher’ activities that take place beyond the system of production. The levels of alienation that remain in society, even serving as part of these new forms of human activity, merely demonstrate for Marx that the

⁴⁸ We will see in Chapter 7 that the theme of work ‘transcendence’ is continued in Marcuse’s notion of a ‘new sensibility’, which involves the transformation of our comprehension of work and play activity to the point where their categorical opposition no longer possesses any practical relevance.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.290.

process of human social development is still taking place. Human freedom, in the form of an unfettered and universalising form of self-transformation and realisation, is still yet to be achieved.

3. (Concrete) production

As we have seen, the concept of 'production' also has an important place in Marx's mature theory, representing the process that determines the nature and content of concrete human reality, as well as the specific needs and capacities of individuals that are characteristic of a particular economic system (i.e., historical epoch). As such it is distinct from the concept of work as *Arbeit*, which as a 'universal' representation of productive activity, is too abstract to denote work as a concrete historically situated process.⁵⁰

Whenever we speak of production [*Produktion*], then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development – production by social individuals....

Production in general [*Produktion im allgemeinen*] is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still, this *general* category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations [*Bestimmungen*]. (Some) determinations will be shared by the most modern epoch and the most ancient. No production will be thinkable without them; however....elements which are not general and common must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity – which arises already from the identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature – their essential differences [will not be] forgotten.⁵¹

In the passage above, Marx distinguishes between 'production in general', i.e., what he usually terms 'work' or *Arbeit*; and 'production': the historically specific (and

⁵⁰ This is likely to be the principal reason for the gradual shift in focus between Marx's early to his late writings. Evidence that it was still evolving in the late 1850s can be found in the *Grundrisse*, which is a rough draft of *Das Kapital* and yet does not yet focus on the commodity as the distinctive point of departure in his critique of political economy.

⁵¹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.85; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), pp.20-1.

therefore ‘concrete’) form of work. The concept of production allows Marx to concentrate on the specific nature of capitalist work conditions, via its distinctive unit of output, the commodity. As a concept, ‘production’ therefore allows Marx to isolate the particular form of alienation in the modern period, as well as the particular form of determination (*Bestimmung*) that produces it.

Generally, as the concrete form of work activity in any particular era, one of the roles of the system of production is of course the creation of use-values out of nature’s raw materials, for the purpose of satisfying human needs (*Bedürfnisse*). Under capitalism this is no longer the principal aim of the production process; its purpose (*Bestimmung*) is rather to generate capital out of the activity of individual workers, which it accomplishes by compelling them to create commodities (*Waren*).⁵²

4. Marx’s concept of alienation (*Entfremdung; Entäusserung*)

We can now turn to Marx’s account of the general process in which individuals become disconnected from their own identity as (unique) human beings, through a disruption in their ability to conceive of their activity and its effects as inherently theirs. Marx called this process alienation (*Entfremdung; Entäusserung*),⁵³ and he generally considers it in the context of the individual’s engagement in the capitalist system of production.

Alienation is a category that Hegel employed as a step in the process of the historical development of *Geist*. Similarly for Marx, it may be understood in a greater teleological context to join in directing socio-historical progress.⁵⁴ However, this wider function of alienation is an aspect of a dialectical movement in which alienation itself is (at least theoretically) ultimately transcended in communist society, where

⁵² This process will be the focus of Chapter 4.

⁵³ Some scholars, such as Michael Quante, argue (as he did in discussion with me) that Marx’s use of the terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung* signify a conceptual distinction. I argue along with Sean Sayers and George Márkus that the important distinction Marx generally makes is that between ‘alienation’ (*Entfremdung; Entäusserung*) and ‘objectification’ (*Vergegenständlichung*). Where the first is a negative effect of work, the latter signifies the ideal process of the subject’s expression in its work. See Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, pp.ix, 17; Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, pp.67-8, n.54.

⁵⁴ In the *Grundrisse*, Marx speaks of the alienation (*Entfremdung*) of individuality as a precondition for the ‘universally developed individual’ (*universal entwickelten Individuen*), on the basis of the effects of an exchange economy via its role in creating the objective conditions of communism (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.162; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.95). In *Kapital*, he states: “the inversion of the subject into object and vice versa....which alone can form the material base of a free human society....cannot be avoided” (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.990). See also Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, pp.45, 49; Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, p.13.

individuals are brought in touch with their genuine identity and existence as historical beings. This of course may be restated as an overarching historical motivation of human society.

It follows that Marx never considered alienation to be unique to capitalism;⁵⁵ it affects individuals in previous historical periods as well, and in all of its manifestations (religious, political, economic, social)⁵⁶ is generally traceable to the material basis of society, i.e., the system of production: “[e]very self-alienation of the human being (*Selbstentfremdung des Menschen*) from itself and nature is manifested in the relation (*Verhältnis*) it sets up between other human beings and itself and nature”.⁵⁷

However, for Marx the capitalist era is unique in that conditions of alienation have come to dominate the conditions of production,⁵⁸ presenting as a loss of the individual’s ability to consciously conceive of its involvement in the system as *a consciously self-directed and self-realising activity*. As a consequence alienation comes to affect the individual in all of its other activities, to the point that social life itself can be understood to obstruct the individual’s ability to experience conditions of freedom and self-determination.

In the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, Marx states that the modern worker “regards the product of his work, his objectified work, as an *alien, hostile* and powerful object [*fremde, feindlich, mächtigen....Gegenstand*] which is independent of him”, after which the same worker realises that, instead of providing a means of exchanging ‘recognition and love’ with another individual, the product of his work has “another individual – alien, hostile, powerful and independent of him – as its master”.⁵⁹ This demonstrates two of Marx’s four key aspects of alienation: alienation of the worker from the product (i.e., object or outcome) of its work, and also

⁵⁵ See Sayers, *Marx and Alienation*, pp.25-6.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, p.78.

⁵⁷ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.331; MEW, Vol. 40 (1968), p.519. He also states of “*private property* or, to be more exact, of the economy [that] *material*, immediately *sensuous* private property is the material, sensuous expression of *estranged human* life [*entfremdete menschlichen Lebens*]....Religion, the family, the state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only *particular* modes of production [*besondere Weisen der Produktion*] and therefore come under its general law.” (*Ibid.*, pp.348-9; pp.536-7.)

⁵⁸ “Steuart....shows in great detail that the commodity as the elementary and primary unit of wealth and *alienation* [*Entäußerung*] as the predominant form of appropriation are characteristic only of the bourgeois period of production, and that accordingly work that creates exchange value is a specifically bourgeois feature.” In Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.58; MEW, Vol. 13 (1961), p.44. Italics added.

⁵⁹ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.331.

alienation from fellow individuals. Alienation of the worker from the product of its work principally involves its alienation from its subjective existence as a being with the capacity to personally effect change in the world, as manifest in the results of its labour. The subject's own identity and potentiality therefore appear as a foreign potentiality to it. Similarly, alienation from other individuals prevents the worker from attaining the crucial social acknowledgement and appreciation from others that is one of the inherent functions of work.

A third characteristic of the alienation of work for Marx is the worker's estrangement from its generic-being, i.e., its membership to the objective human genus, whose potential involves the capacity for a circumscribed, and yet potentially limitless, freedom of self-realisation and transformation. In conceiving of its work as determined for it, the worker is unable to understand its natural capacity to use the materials of nature, its 'inorganic body', to set forth its own determination (*Selbstbestimmung*). Instead work appears to dominate the individual as a power that forces it to work simply to secure its own basic conditions of survival, in a manner that generally makes work intrinsically unpleasant.⁶⁰

Fourthly, the modern worker is alienated in the fact that the activity itself is not considered by the worker to be its own:

It thus becomes wholly *accidental* and *unimportant* [*zufällig und unwesentlich*] whether the relationship between producer and product is governed by immediate enjoyment and personal needs [*unmittelbaren Genusses und des persönlichen Bedürfnisses*] and whether the *activity*, the act of working, involves the fulfilment of his personality [*Selbstgenuß seiner Persönlichkeit*], the realization of his natural talents and spiritual goals [*die Verwirklichung seiner Anlagen und geistigen Zwecke*].⁶¹

Overall, as a result of the capitalist system of production the all-encompassing and normalised state of alienation renders the crucial Hegelian process of 'objectification'

⁶⁰ As a contributing factor to bourgeois consciousness, this feature of alienation warrants a critical comparison with Weber's protestant ethic, in which "Work [*Arbeit*] must....be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling. But such an attitude is by no means a product of nature [*Eine solche Gesinnung aber ist nichts Naturgegebenes*]". In Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p.25; *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, p.84.

⁶¹ Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy", in *Early Writings*, p.269; MEW, Vol. 40 (1968), p.454.

powerless in its role of allowing modern individuals to harness work in a self-constituting manner.

So much does the realization of work appear as loss of reality that the worker loses his reality to the point of dying of starvation. So much does objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] appear as loss of the object that the worker is robbed of the objects he needs most not only for life but also for work. Work itself becomes an object which he can only obtain through an enormous effort and with spasmodic interruptions.⁶²

In Marx's mature theory the concept of alienation is for the most part presented in its distinctively capitalist formulation of abstract and objectified productive activity.⁶³ One point that the diverse scholarship on Marx appears to agree upon is that these mature writings are the most accomplished and valuable. However, in them Marx did not so much transform or correct his theory so much as refine and refocus it, so that the processes inherent to the capitalist system of production could be understood in their objective detail. Rather, with a grasp of the more general effects of capitalism's contribution to the alienation of human beings, Marx focused on the specifics of the capitalist process itself, in the form of the inherent contradiction present in the objective commodity. It is there that we will now direct our focus.

⁶² Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.324; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.512.

⁶³ David Leopold extracts from Marx's early writings four other effects of modern work conditions that may be linked to alienation, which are important in that they display the clear connection between the early and late Marx that is still questioned by scholars (in Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.232). The added effects he identifies are: overwork, in which the worker becomes preoccupied with work to the point where health and vital abilities are at stake; higher work specialisation or one-sided skill development; monotony of work tasks; and the neglect of mental skills which leads, in Marx's words, to "idiocy and cretinism" ("*Blödsinn, Kretinismus*"; Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, p.326; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968) p.513).

Chapter 4.

Capitalism as human determination

Marx was ultimately dissatisfied with his early critiques of capitalism because he considered their perspective to be too abstract for his ultimate purposes. While he had conducted valuable analyses on the human essence and the nature of alienation as a trans-historical phenomenon, the concept of alienation *per se* was not specific enough as a critical concept with respect to capitalism. The analysis turned out to be too broad to isolate the distinctive manner in which alienation unfolds under the historically specific *capitalist* conditions of production.¹

In order to solve this problem, Marx utilised the concept of the commodity as the specific entry-point of his analysis. But even with this ‘most immediate presence’ in modern life as the initial focus, the critique remains situated within the theory that Marx began in his original ‘philosophical’ critiques. *Das Kapital* is Marx’s definitive account of modern social reality, presenting capitalism as the latest manifestation of the historical unfolding of human determination. The analysis, therefore, remains entirely consistent with the defining statement of *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”.²

However, where Marx’s earlier analysis concentrated on the effects of capitalist society on the human being from the perspective of ‘work’ (*Arbeit*) and the ‘human

¹ This is reflected in Marx’s famous passage in the preface to *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1859) regarding Marx and Engels’ “abandonment” of the unpublished manuscript of *Die deutsche Ideologie* “to the gnawing criticism of the mice”. Some have connected this statement to one made a few lines earlier, where Marx admits his and Engels’ desire to “settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience”. The result is occasionally offered as evidence of Marx’s dismissal of all theory preceding 1846. However, Marx clearly argues here that his intention with these manuscripts was not correction, but “self-clarification” which, it is implied, was accomplished with that unpublished manuscript. (In Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.22.)

² Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.219. Quoting this line, George C. Comninel states: “Rather than being the story of economic progress, history [for Marx] is a record of the oppressive alienation of labour for the majority, over many centuries, and of their struggles against it. Yet the clarity of this conception is easily lost once one enters upon the muddled terrain of pre-determined modes of production, based upon the necessary development of productive forces, through the natural dynamic of division of labour”. In Comninel, “Critical Thinking and Class Analysis. Historical Materialism and Social Theory”, pp.44-5.

essence' (*menschliche Wesen*), in *Das Kapital* it focuses on these processes at the level of production (*Produktion*) and 'human nature' (*Menschennatur*). It is common for scholars to recognise this change in approach as a turn away from a holistic 'philosophical' method of analysing human beings to a more specialised analysis, in which the human being appears only in its socioeconomic dimension. However, this is highly misleading. It is always important to keep in mind that throughout his writings Marx aims to grasp what it is that fundamentally shapes human reality – and in this sense Marxian theory remains intrinsically philosophical. While Marx's mature theoretical orientation does involve the analysis of the distinct socioeconomic mechanism of capitalism, his whole point is that this system is a reflection of the basic constitution of human determination as history presents it in the capitalist epoch, i.e., in the unfolding of the socioeconomic reality.³ This is ultimately an analysis of concrete human existence in the epoch of *capitalist* determination, and of this determination's effect on society as a unity of concrete human beings. As such it constitutes a critique of the means by which the modern system of production redirects human activity *per se* towards the process of the accumulation of capital. In doing so it restricts human universality to the reproduction of the conditions of its own alienation. Caught up in the process are the very conditions upon which human beings rely in order to engage with each other in meaningful social interaction. The result, in other words, is that human beings become so enmeshed in the process of capital accumulation that any attempt at genuine social interaction (e.g. public deliberation, political engagement) is *always already* preconditioned by the basic material concerns forced upon them both in the process of working, and in the strategic attainment of basic commodity needs in the social sphere – which amounts to the securing of future wages.

This chapter will commence (in Section 1) with a look at the historical development of the capitalist system of production (and its distinctive form of alienation) established as a 'scientific' (*wissenschaftlich*) account on human existence. This will set up the discussion of Marx's analysis of commodity relations, abstract labour, and the process of valorisation (Sections 2 and 3). Following the examination of how the process of production reorients the lives of individuals toward the market as

³ As George Márkus puts it, "For Marx the 'human essence' lies precisely in the 'essence' or inner unity of the total social development of humanity" (Márkus, *Marxism and Anthropology*, p.41). In the capitalist epoch, this unity culminates in the concrete conditions of the system of production and the related social structure.

the core arena of social existence (Section 4), the final discussion (Section 5) will emphasise the pathological determination of capital itself as the current determination of human existence. For Marx this historical situation calls for the revolutionary activity of the proletariat to transform the system of production – humanity’s own material interaction with nature – according to imperatives that transform social existence from an environment of alienation to one of genuine human self-transformation, and in turn, human freedom.

1. Capitalist production

As we saw in the previous chapter, alienation for Marx is not exclusively a ‘capitalist’ pathology. It has been a feature of social existence throughout history. For instance, in the feudal era alienation manifested itself through the notion of divine right. Particular landed individuals were declared rulers, while the general population was relegated to serfdom. Here the false abstraction of genuine human determination – in the form of God – blinded individuals from the inherent human potentiality contained in work. Hence: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people”.⁴

While for Marx the source of alienation in previous eras was ultimately traceable to ownership of the means of production, i.e., property relations, work activity itself was still intrinsically bound to the individual’s immediate social relations. This allowed the distribution of tasks to reflect traditional social hierarchies, while products were produced specifically according to socially sanctioned needs. In other words, the structure of the production process was shaped around social life – its ‘social character’ (*gesellschaftliche Charakter*) was to a large extent a factor of organic social relations. Hence, production was oriented directly at the satisfaction of social needs; in other words, objects of production were produced according to their social use-value (*Gebrauchswert*).⁵

⁴ Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Introduction”, in *Early Writings*, p.244.

⁵ Or as Derek Sayer puts it, in pre-capitalist societies, there will “be no divergence between the natural form of labour and the form in which its social character is expressed.” In Derek Sayer, *Marx’s Method. Ideology, Science and Critique in Capital*, p.21.

Under the rural patriarchal system of production, when spinner and weaver lived under the same roof – the women of the family spinning and the men weaving, say for the requirements of the family – yarn and linen were *social* products, and spinning and weaving *social* labour [*gesellschaftliche Arbeiten*] within the framework of the family....The product of work bore the specific social imprint of the family relationship with its naturally evolved division of labour. Or let us take the services and dues in kind of the Middle Ages. It was the distinct work of the individual in its natural form [*Naturalform*], the particular features of its work....that formed the social ties at that time.⁶

Under these conditions, individuals would produce objects specifically for their use-values, in accordance with a social configuration within which work was embedded. One of the outcomes was that production generally provided no more than the things that people immediately needed. Basic resources were generally scarce, leading to social divisions and traditions of violence, while limited technological capability prevented not only the storing of use-values, but impeded the expansion of scientific knowledge and human self-understanding.

While this configuration of production did serve to stifle (though not completely quell) the free creation of new needs, there was an advantage to this integration of social life and the division of labour. An individual's social role could to some extent autonomously control his or her activity within the production process.⁷ This served to limit the extent of at least one kind of alienation experienced by the worker. As society developed, human beings began to obtain the conditions for a more harmonious society through the expansion of material wealth, ideas, and self-knowledge.

This process accelerated exponentially with the arrival of capitalism. However, capitalism is a totality of contradictions. In the capitalist era the sphere of production is not simply the *foundation* for social existence; it has come to dominate social life in its entirety – from production proper (the workplace); through a social sphere in the shape of the market; to a private realm organised around the consumption of commodities.

⁶ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.33; MEW, Vol. 13 (1961), pp.20-1.

⁷ Of course, in the case of feudal landowners, one's social role determined one's *relationship* to the production process, rather than their direct activity within it.

The capitalist epoch is also unique in that its system of production determines not only its own internal configuration (i.e. the division of labour), but it has also assumed direct control over the determination of an individual's social status. Under capitalism "the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make it the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate".⁸ In other words, individuals have been split off from traditional social frameworks, appearing now as "private individuals who work independently of each other".⁹

In his mature writings, Marx understands that in order for his critique of capitalism to avoid the pitfall of over-abstraction, his theoretical perspective must reflect as clearly as possible the current socioeconomic conditions generated by capitalism itself. With respect to alienation, Marx therefore needed to situate his analysis not with respect to the symptoms of alienation *per se*. He needed to focus on the distinct mechanism that drove the capitalist form of alienation – the process which explained the extension of alienation's generalised predominance and scope in this period. Of course, for Marx this assessment of the current state of alienation was clearly an empirically verifiable phenomenon.

From *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859) onwards, Marx considers his desired theoretical perspective achieved by commencing his analysis with the constitution of the commodity itself, as the dominating object of capitalist production. In capitalist society, Marx considers the commodity as the most common and also the most immediate object confronting the individual subject; a subject who – secondly – is (as we have just seen) attributed the status of 'private individual' by the system of production itself, thereby representing the basic 'atomic unit' of the capitalist production process. And in any case, as Marx and Engels state: "Individuals have always proceeded from themselves",¹⁰ meaning that the essence of social relations appears most immediately from the perspective of the social individual. In *Kapital* Marx takes the commodity as the basic means by which social reality unfolds for the individual. While other subjects also appear immediately to the subject in this manner,

⁸ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.83.

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.165.

¹⁰ The statement continues: "...but of course from themselves within their given historical conditions and relations, not from the 'pure' individual in the sense of the ideologists." In Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.87; MEW, Vol. 3 (1978), p.75.

Marx's whole theory rests on the claim that these individuals appear in capitalist reality *as* commodities. Part of Marx's analysis is to demonstrate the relevance of this viewpoint by showing that the commodity-form contains the key to the essential contradiction of capitalism – the embodiment of exchange-value within concrete use-values.

It is important to understand that for Marx an overt focus on the commodity as an 'economic' entity is, integrally, not a matter of theoretically bracketing the system of production from the totality of social life. Rather, this analysis, beginning with the commodity, is a means of comprehending the specific historical nature of the whole of human society in the modern period.

[F]or bourgeois society [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*], the commodity-form [*Warenform*] of the product of work [*Arbeitsprodukt*], or the value-form of the commodity [*Wertform der Ware*], is the economic cell-form [*ökonomische Zellenform*]. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy.¹¹

Rather than being merely a means of analysing the modern economy in isolation, Marx considers his focus on the economic category of the commodity to be the entry-point for analysing 'bourgeois society' in its distinctive entirety. The fact that the analysis is focused specifically on capitalism does not make it a purely economic or even a social analysis – on the contrary, the whole point is to demonstrate the inherent influence that the structure and organisation of *concrete life* has on social development and human action at its most general. According to Marx, to study the capitalist economy according to his method is to analyse society's internal structure as a dynamic and concrete totality that represents the 'human essence' in its historically situated reality.¹²

¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.90; *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1962), p.12.

¹² According to Jürgen Habermas, "in Marx's works a peculiar disproportion arises between the practice of inquiry and the limited philosophical self-understanding of this inquiry. In his empirical analyses Marx comprehends the history of the species under categories of material activity *and* the critical abolition of ideologies, of instrumental action *and* revolutionary practice, of labor *and* reflection at once. But Marx interprets what he does in the more restricted conception of the species' self-reflection through work alone. The materialist concept of synthesis is not conceived broadly enough in order to explicate the way in which Marx contributes to realizing the intention of a really radicalized critique of knowledge. In

When we consider bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole then the final result of the process of social production [*Resultat des gesellschaftlichen Produktionsprozesses*] always appears as the society itself [*die Gesellschaft selbst*], i.e. the human being itself in its social relations [*der Mensch selbst in seinen gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen*]. Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product etc., appears as merely a moment, a vanishing moment [*verschwindendes Moment*], in this movement. The direct production process itself here appears only as a moment. The conditions and objectifications of the process [*Bedingungen und Vergegenständlichungen des Prozesses*] are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are the individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships [*Individuen in Beziehungen aufeinander*], which they equally reproduce and produce anew. The constant process of their own movement, in which they renew themselves even as they renew the world of wealth [*Welt des Reichtums*] they create.¹³

For Marx, seeking to study the economy in theoretical isolation from social (i.e., human) reality *per se* is to engage in the abstract and myopic discipline of political economy.

2. The commodity and labour-power

From the opening lines of *Das Kapital* Marx makes clear the extent to which he considers economic reality to be an inherent aspect of human reality: “The wealth [*Reichtum*] of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’”.¹⁴ Marx does of course utilise the definition of ‘wealth’ in the manner expressed by Adam Smith, i.e., in the sense of (material)

fact, it even prevented Marx from understanding his own mode of procedure from this point of view” (in Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p.42). This argument can ultimately be traced back to epistemological concerns. Habermas’s charge regarding Marx’s ‘limited philosophical self-understanding’ can be countered by Marxian theory with the rejoinder that Habermas’s theory of communicative action possesses an insufficiently unified conception of human nature. Habermas’s theory, like Kant’s own ethical theory, rests on a fundamental division between a material (sensible) existence and a ‘symbolic’ communicative (practical) realm; the latter of which alone possesses meaningful (i.e., socially relevant) normative relevance with respect to a theory of human action and freedom.

¹³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.712; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), pp.607-8.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.90; MEW, Vol. 23 (1962), p.49. The quoted phrase is his own, from the opening sentence of *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1859).

utility; but ultimately he thinks that “real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals”.¹⁵

In bourgeois consciousness, this broader conception of wealth is lost under the image of purely material wealth. Hence what is also conveyed in the opening lines of *Kapital* is the sense of a fundamental pathology in which everything in society is considered first and foremost as economically exchangeable things, including individuals themselves. In historical terms, human existence is shown to have developed in such a way that, prior to any other influences, social interaction itself is given an indelible stamp by the market.

In spite of the implicit normative implications, Marx’s opening discussion of the commodity-form (*Warenform*) in *Das Kapital* is predominantly concerned with descriptive analysis. Commodities are objects produced for the purpose of exchange. Just like objects of production throughout history, commodities generally meet some need or other; they are ‘use-values’, but now these use-values serve a further purpose, the accumulation of profit. To make sense of this one must suppose that in addition to its use-value, a commodity possesses another quality that Marx terms its ‘value’ (*Wert*).¹⁶ Where the use-value of a particular type of object is always unique to that type of commodity, the commodity’s value allows these different use-values to be exchanged quantitatively, determining its ‘exchange-value’ (*Tauschwert*). Exchange of commodities as use-values is mediated by a special category of commodity known as money.

Along with Ricardo, Marx identifies the ‘value’ of a given commodity with the amount of labour (*Arbeit*) that has been expended in its production. Since this is the only quality shared by all objects of social production, it is therefore the only element that can operate as the measure against which a commodity may be quantitatively compared against the totality of commodities represented by the market.

Since identical commodities (*characteristically* as mass-produced items) possess an identical exchange-value on the market, the labour that defines a commodity’s

¹⁵ “....wirkliche Reichtum ist die entwickelte Produktivkraft aller Individuen.” Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.708; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.604.

¹⁶ “The product of work [*Arbeitsprodukt*] is an object of utility in all states of society; but it is only a historically determined epoch of development which presents work expended in the production of a useful article as an ‘objective’ property of that article, i.e., as its value (*Wert*). It is only then that the product of work becomes transformed into a commodity.” In Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp.153-4; MEW, Vol. 23 (1962), p.76.

value must be an average of the time taken by a worker to produce a single such commodity: the 'labour-time' (*Arbeitszeit*). The result is that a commodity's value is determined not by the concrete work taken to produce it, but via an abstraction representing the average time taken (*abstrakte Arbeit*) within the existing system of production.

The concept of abstract labour is Marx's 'mature' representation of the alienation of work itself. In order to be exchanged on the market, the concrete work undertaken to produce commodities is represented in this 'general form' for the specific purpose of generating an exchange value. Being embedded within the substance of every commodity, abstract labour is therefore the key to understanding the manner in which capitalism operates as a system of oppression and exploitation.¹⁷

Marx is clear that abstract labour exists as an *objective* abstraction;¹⁸ in his estimation its existence is objectively traceable: "The categories of bourgeois economics consist precisely of....forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e., commodity production".¹⁹ It is in this way that under the specific structure of capitalist production, "individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another".²⁰ The virtue of this conception is that it reflects the innate unity of human existence, combining an individual's material life (people and commodities), social relations (relations between people), and an individual's thought conceptions (ideas) within a single manifold, while also being able to extract specific aspects of this unity (as abstract concepts) for the purpose of theoretical clarity and analysis. The methodology responsible is the result of Marx's entire life's work, beginning with his earliest philosophical writings, of which his concept of human nature has always been a key background feature.

¹⁷ And hence arises the issue facing Marxian theory regarding the seeming outdatedness of its paradigm of commodity production, in a late capitalist era in which work predominantly consists in the form of 'services'.

¹⁸ "Marx labels these objective results of capitalist functioning 'real abstractions,' and it is chiefly real abstractions that incline the people who have contact with them to construct ideological abstractions". In Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, p.62.

¹⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.169.

²⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.164.

The way in which abstract labour comes to rule social action itself begins with the fact that the market is positioned at the centre of capitalist social existence.²¹ In order to satisfy their personal needs (*Bedürfnisse*) – which under capitalism is accomplished via a vast and constantly expanding multiplicity of commodities – all individuals are compelled to engage in the market. Accordingly every individual requires money in order to obtain these commodities. Once again, the market serves as the arena where individuals without money must turn; this time, in order to obtain income.

The individual's basic reliance on the market for its multifarious needs is what positions it as the basis of social relations in the modern era. It is the arena in which social classes are determined: the feature that distinguishes the bourgeois capitalist from the proletarian worker is that, while the capitalist possesses ownership of disposable (i.e., produced) commodities for the raising of income, the worker has nothing of value to convert into income except his or her capacity to work, which is itself treated as a commodity in the form of 'labour-power' (*Arbeitskraft*), or work output in a given unit of time.

The central mechanism of the capitalist production process is one in which the worker's labour is transformed into abstract labour, in the form of "congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour [*unterschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit*]" residing in the object of the commodity produced.²² In the sale of her labour-power, the worker has completely alienated herself from her own activity for a given period of time. In selling her capacity to work, she is unable to consider the product of her work activity as a reflection of her own self-determination.²³

The class of 'worker' of course characterises the overwhelming mass of individuals in capitalist society. In lieu of disposable commodities, the worker trades her labour-power to the capitalist, who purchases it in the issuing of 'wages'. The

²¹ As opposed to the social-theoretical conception of the 'public sphere', which for Marx would simply be an ideological construction – so long as the theoretical intention is to represent the basic reality of social existence as an arena in which individuals possess the 'right', and with this implying an objective *capacity*, to interact as social equals.

²² Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.128; *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1962), p.52.

²³ As a process of objectification, the capitalist worker has generated nothing but a thing (*Ding*; *Sache*) for the purpose of exchange. Further than being a mere reflection, the commodity produced is also a true 'objectification' of the subject, in being the creation of a thing that exists in order to be sold, and in a sense, 'owned'.

worker then engages in the manufacture of disposable commodities for the capitalist, for the purpose of reengaging in the market for her basic life-needs.

As a result of this process, the “whole system of capitalist production is based on the worker’s sale of his labour-power”.²⁴ Labour-power is a unique form of commodity which, converted into abstract labour, Marx considers the single origin of all economic value. As such, labour-power’s use-value consists in nothing but the generation of value for the purpose of market exchange.

Labour-power serves as capitalism’s reflection of the universalising potential of work as a capacity of the human essence, i.e., in its trans-historical formulation. In comparison to that ideal, in labour-power the extent of the restrictions imposed on the worker forced to sell it is clear. In the process of objectification through labour-power, the universal capacity of the individual to realise its own ‘universalising potential’ has been turned into the capacity to create more commodities for exchange on the market, purely for the purpose of accumulating more value for the capitalist.

3. Surplus-value and valorisation

The question still remains as to how the capitalist turns the abstract labour contained in commodities into capital itself. As a social actor in the market, the capitalist is concerned not with the production of commodities as use-values – or even in the interest of generating money for personal use. For Marx the capitalist’s social role is purely to convert the commodity of labour-power into abstract labour via the creation and exchange of commodities. This motivation is made possible via the existence of ‘surplus-value’ (*Mehrwert*).²⁵ Surplus-value, which in conventional terms takes the form of profit, is the key to the process of accumulation, in which capital is created in the redirecting of net value towards the creation of further value via the system of production.

In his chapter on work and valorisation (*Verwertung*),²⁶ Marx illustrates a basic example of yarn production, in which “the value of the product is equal to the capital

²⁴ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.557.

²⁵ Interestingly, Marx considered the mechanism surrounding ‘surplus value’ to be his greatest theoretical ‘discovery’. See Ernest Mandel, “Introduction”, in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.51.

²⁶ ‘Valorisation’ is the process of conversion of living labour (labour-power in action) into capital. This integral chapter appears as ‘Chapter 7’ in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp.283-306; and as ‘Chapter 5’ in *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1962), pp.192-213.

advanced” by the capitalist.²⁷ He shows that if workers were recompensed ‘fairly’, i.e., where wages actually represented the magnitude of value created by the worker (minus production costs), there would be no such thing as surplus value, and the capitalist would not be ‘paid’ – and in fact, is revealed as superfluous in his distinctive role. Society appears to be one in which everyone works for wages representing the value they toiled to create, and with which they can enter the market for the purpose of satisfying their personal needs. In this abstract formulation, the economic process appears to be in the service of the “wealth of human needs” (*Reichheit der menschlichen Bedürfnisse*).²⁸

While this hypothetical society resembles aspects of the ‘ideological story’ of capitalist modernity, the reality of capitalism, according to Marx, could not be further from this illustration. For Marx, capitalist determination is completely devoid of notions of affinity, equitability, and efficiency directed at the social interest. The only thing distinguishing the capitalist from the worker is the fact that arbitrary private ownership of the means of production (protected by law) affords the capitalist the ability to sell commodities on the market, in lieu of his own labour-power. In terms of ‘wealth’, the only value that capitalist determination is concerned with is the value accumulated in abstract labour.²⁹ As a result, capitalists are concerned only with extracting from their own purchased stock of labour-power “more value than it has itself”.³⁰

For this ‘trick’ to be possible, the capitalist relies on the ability to set wages at a level representing less value (i.e., less abstract labour) than the labour-power purchased via wages can create. According to Marx, this is accomplished in the setting of the ‘daily’ wage rate. The key is for the wage to sustain an average worker’s continuing capacity to work (i.e., secures the worker’s subsistence needs) for the set period of a day, while representing less than the actual value produced by the worker in a full day’s work. The worker therefore produces value to cover the costs of a full day’s production in a portion of that day, while the rest of the value created in that

²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.297.

²⁸ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, in *Early Writings*, p.358; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.546.

²⁹ Naturally, for Marx it is given that the only way in which this value may commence its circulation is through commodities, the ‘natural container’ for value, which must possess use-value for the value within it to circulate at all. It is only to this extent that capitalism concerns itself with use-values.

³⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.301.

day is, in Marx's terms, 'valorised', i.e., turned into surplus-value, which the capitalist takes for the purpose of reinvesting further in production. In other words, this capital pays for the creation of more 'means of production' (machinery, raw materials, etc.); here the abstract labour contained in the value of this capital is what Marx refers to as 'dead labour' (*tote Arbeit*). This is contrasted with the 'living labour' of the worker, or 'labour-power in motion', and confronts the worker most conspicuously in the form of automated machinery, which renders living labour less crucial to the production process itself.

Machinery commonly leads to mass worker dismissal while increasing the output of commodities.³¹ In this manner, "[c]apital itself is the moving contradiction, (in) that it presses to reduce work time to a minimum, while it posits work time, on the other side, as the sole measure and source of wealth".³² However, according to Marx, in increasing the rate of output of commodities, machinery reduces their market value, since the amount of abstract labour congealed in a machine-built commodity involves less 'living labour'. Rate of profit therefore drops, destabilising the overall rate of capital accumulation across society for that particular commodity. For Marx this is a demonstration of how, in spite of accelerating mechanisation, the capitalist system always relies on human work to continually accrue capital in the conversion of labour-power into abstract labour.

Considered by Marx as theft, the setting of a daily wage is covered up in "subterfuges and conjuring tricks", conducted by "the professors of political economy, who are paid for it".³³ The entire process of accumulation is shown here to rest on an ideological screen behind which the process of the abstraction of work remains opaque to actual workers. As a result, the worker is cut off from the objective nature

³¹ "Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour [*Arbeitsmittel*] confronts the worker during the work process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up [*beherrscht und aussaugt*] living labour-power" (in Marx, *Capital*, p.548; *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1962), p.446). The *Grundrisse* also contains a famous passage where Marx describes the capitalist worker being reduced by the presence of machinery to a "watchman and regulator [*Wächter und Regulator*]" in the work process, having been usurped from the any active and/or meaningful engagement; thus he "steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor [*Hauptagent*]" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.705; *MEW*, Vol. 42 (1983), p.601). However, for Marx, machines are not an inherent blight on the worker, since these conditions give rise to the possibility for production to be increasingly evacuated by the workers in favour of "artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them" (*ibid*, p.706; p.601). This view of the role of technology is a core theme for Marcuse, particularly in his later writings (see Ch. 7, Section 1, p.191; and Section 4, p.205).

³² Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.706.

³³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.300.

and operation of the overall system. The economic process appears not as an intrinsically social construction, i.e., as the product of the workers themselves, but as an independent force directing the creation and exchange of commodities. The work of the labourers' own hands appear to them as though the value it possesses were nothing to do with their own efforts, but is in fact intrinsic to the material substance of the commodities themselves. This is of course what Marx labels 'commodity fetishism' (*Warenfetisch*), and is ultimately a symptom of the alienation of work itself.

The various proportions in which different kinds of work are reduced to simple labour [*einfache Arbeit*] as their unit of measurement are established by a social process that goes on behind the backs of the producers [*Produzenten*]; these proportions therefore appear to producers to have been handed down by tradition.³⁴

4. Work and the market

The effects of the production process only fully play out on the return to the market.³⁵ After receiving their wages, workers re-enter the market to satisfy their needs by purchasing use-values. As the hub of public life, the market tends to dominate the concerns of individual workers, who are there for nothing more than to satisfy their own basic needs.³⁶

In the exchange process workers are confronted by a world of commodities whose prices have been set according to the average amount of abstract labour congealed within them. As a result of the wage system, the total accumulated value of the market's available commodities is disproportionately greater than the overall payout of wages to workers (as a class) for producing those commodities. In the meantime, the capitalists preside over the market with the difference, which has been distributed among the individuals of this élite. These individuals are able to pay themselves a sizable personal income to spend on commodities. However, Marx stresses that the bulk of the surplus-value accrued by capitalists is in fact reinvested back into the production process for the sole purpose of accumulating more capital.

³⁴ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.135.

³⁵ "Thus production, distribution, exchange and consumption form a regular syllogism....Production is determined by general natural laws, distribution by social accident....*exchange* stands between the two as formal social movement". In Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.89 (italics added).

³⁶ The needs of dependents are of course also factored in, which is important (see below).

This detail is an integral feature of capitalist determination, and of key social-theoretical relevance in the elaboration of the interests and motivations of the most influential individual agents in modern society.

At this point we can see another outcome reflecting on the value of work from the individual's perspective. According to Marx, the market also possesses a crucial function with respect to the categorisation of (commodity) production as socially relevant labour. This is a calculation made at the point of sale. It is only on the condition that commodities are sold that a worker's efforts are formally designated as 'social labour' – work possessing a social relevance.³⁷ Therefore, the nature of the system as Marx portrays it places no importance on any pre-existing notion of 'consumer demand'.

Objects of utility [*Gebrauchsgegenstände*] become commodities only because they are the products of the work of private individuals who work independently of each other. The sum total of the work of all these private individuals forms the aggregate work of society [*gesellschaftliche Gesamtarbeit*]. Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their work, *the specific social characteristics of their private labours* [*Privatarbeiten*] *appear only within this exchange*. In other words, the work of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total work of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products and, through their mediation, between the producers [*Produzenten*]. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e., they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things [*sachliche Verhältnisse der Personen und gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse der Sachen*].³⁸

This demonstrates that the social character of work under capitalism has been objectively decoupled from the worker's immanent activity in its reconstitution as 'living labour'. In addition, it reflects the important features of the social normativity

³⁷ Failure of a commodity's sale presumably designates the worker's efforts to be considered merely as an aspect of private action with respect to the worker ('fair' trade of labour-power for wages), or as 'waste production' with respect to society itself.

³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp.165-6; *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1968), p.87. Italics added.

attached to work by Marx in the *Paris Manuskripte*. It is commonly forgotten that for Marx the social character of work in general is not reducible purely to the social interaction taking place within the activity itself. The full social value of work concerns its reception by others in broader social existence. It is only when the human being becomes aware of the effect of its work on other social actors (i.e., as recognition) that work itself may contribute to individual self-determination.

Demonstrating precisely how far the worker is removed from this form of recognition is one of the key intentions behind *Kapital*.³⁹ The absence of public recognition is to a great extent generated out of the division created between the sphere of production and the market,⁴⁰ which bestows the label of 'social labour' on the work spent on a commodity only after the commodity is sold. Even if the individual could perceive of its work (through the veil of commodity fetishism) as personally responsible for a commodity's (eventual) exchange value, 1) the capitalist paid for that labour and in 'owning it' may claim the credit for its creation; and 2) as an effect of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', the conversion of abstract labour into social labour in 'sale' is made in such a way as to strip it of the public recognition that contributes to the intrinsic meaning of work for the worker. In buying the commodity, the consumer's attitude is not only inherently self-interested, it is doubly so; being just as fixated on exchanging as little value (i.e., money) as possible for a commodity as it is in acquiring a personal use-value. A worker attempting to observe the public reception of her alienated work would be destined for disappointment when she recognises the genuine intent of the consumer to offer as little recompense as possible for the commodity in question, regardless of any care taken in creating it. In capitalist society, consumption has been formalised as inherently selfish, as Smith's 'invisible hand' metaphor intends to illustrate. As the central hub of social existence under capitalism, the market's driving logic of 'reciprocal recognition of self-interested equals' sets down

³⁹ Note of course that, contrary to popular readings of Marx (even by Marxists), Marx does not intend to locate the source of alienation *per se* in the lack of recognition that a subject should receive specifically in its work. The lack of recognition for work that Marx's theory identifies is merely one objective symptom of the division between work as the dominant form of human activity in capitalist society, and the corresponding process by which its social value is calculated.

⁴⁰ On this division, compare *Kapital* to the following passage from *Die deutsche Ideologie*: "as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest [*zwischen dem besondern und gemeinsamen Interesse*]....the human being's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to it [*einer fremden, gegenüberstehenden Macht*], which enslaves it instead of being controlled by it." (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.53; MEW, Vol. 3 (1978), p.33.)

a fundamental precedent for any further recognition relations that may arise elsewhere in social existence.⁴¹

Marx also explains that while the price of labour-power is set by the market in the form of wages, labour-power itself is not produced according to the forces that create other commodities, i.e., production proper. This is because the individual is responsible for the 'production' of its personal labour-power as an aspect of its overall existence. Hence, unlike the production of regular commodities, the worker is not engaging in the process of producing labour-power with the specific aim of producing capital. Generally the worker 'produces' its sole tradeable commodity in the 'leisure time' (*Mußezeit*) allocated to it in accordance with external social conditions and production requirements.⁴² Here the space separating the realm of production from genuine private existence becomes particularly tenuous. Due to the continual need for human work, workers are not only replenishing their own labour-power with the wages they receive, but future labour-power in the form of children who will be responsible for the coming generation of proletarian labour-power.⁴³

We also see here capital's determination to make additional or 'surplus work' itself (overtime, etc.) a core need of the worker. The day-to-day prices set on the market for labour-power's purchase are, in reality, bound only by the minimum amount of money that ensures the worker's continued ability to keep working.⁴⁴ This creates the incentive for more work in order to accrue more than merely enough for basic essentials. The individual worker, having lost its capacity for free and creative expression in all of its normative dimensions, is ultimately afforded no means of attaining a way out of selling its work as labour-power in order to continue living. The only effective means of escaping the condition would be in attaining the capital

⁴¹ Of course, the lopsided logic surrounding these 'mutually self-interested equals' is even more apparent when considering the market's function in connecting the capitalists with those forced to sell their labour.

⁴² Since replenishment of labour-power, particularly in Marx's time, consisted predominantly in rest and recuperation, it would be necessary for labour-power replenishment as a 'form of production' to occur in leisure time, since the alternative is 'resting on the job'.

⁴³ See *Grundrisse*, p.325.

⁴⁴ And even this limit to wages may not always be binding. Marx speaks about the need for a relatively constant 'reserve army' or workers (*industrielle Reservearmee*) under capitalism, as a result of the tension between the growth of capital, which decreases this surplus of workers, and constant mechanisation, which increases it (see Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp.781-94). This reserve army affords capitalists the added luxury, under certain conditions, of reducing wages to below average subsistence levels to maintain profits, in the likely expectation that workers who consequently become unfit to work may be replaced. See Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp.781-94.

required to invest in the production of disposable commodities. Achieving this unlikely feat, the individual – now as capitalist – would in any case have become nothing more than a member of the *élite* class, not only leaving behind the working classes to their impoverished condition, but becoming the aider and abettor of their predicament in the service of capital.

5. Capitalism as human determination

It is clear that as a result of these processes, Marx considers the capitalist system of production to alter the individual subject's immanent potentiality so that the employment of its essential capacities appears to it as the force of an abstract and alien intentionality:⁴⁵ "All the social potencies [*Potenzen*] of production are the productive powers of capital, and it appears [*erscheint*] itself as their subject".⁴⁶

Talk of this 'false subjectivity' of capital, of which philosophers tend to disapprove,⁴⁷ annoys them for the very reason that Marx is not simply speaking metaphorically; in his view capital literally assumes the appearance of a false subjectivity to individuals. In this feature Marx's depiction of capital echoes the Feuerbachian conception of humanity's actual nature reflected back at it as God. For Marx, capital is 'God' for the modern age; the difference is that where Feuerbach describes the abstraction of human self-awareness into the form of an ethereal deity, Marx witnesses the abstraction of concrete *work* into the 'concrete abstraction' of *capital*. Unlike the *geistige Hegemonie* of religious consciousness, the systemic effect of transforming practical human activity into capital leads directly to the concrete transformation of social existence into a type of 'factory' directed purely at the ongoing enterprise of abstraction, valorisation, and accumulation. As a result, capital's

⁴⁵ An interesting discussion on Marx's theory in the context of intentionality is given in William Clare Roberts, "Abstraction and Productivity. Structures of Intentionality and Action in Marx's *Capital*", in Chitty and McIvor (eds.), *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, pp.188-201.

⁴⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.585; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.487.

⁴⁷ "Analytically inclined Marxologists hate it when Marx starts talking like this. Capital sounds like Hegel's *Geist*. It is a mysterious speculative construction that cannot be reduced to any set of lower-order mechanisms, a supra-individual intentional actor, a piece of providence in a godless universe – in short: nonsense" (in William Clare Roberts, "Abstraction and Productivity", in Chitty and McIvor (eds.), *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*, p.198). Of course this view is not restricted to Marxists. Axel Honneth is a self-professed Hegelian who presumably disapproves of Marx's 'philosophical flourishes' for reasons similar to those suggested by Roberts. Honneth states his approval of Marx's 'scientific' turn in the later writings; however, he argues that ultimately, Marx failed to "purify his analysis of capitalism of its socio-philosophical orientation". In Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social. The Past and Present of Social Philosophy", p.14.

process of human self-abstraction constitutes a concrete hegemony over social life, with the capacity to transform the human environment ‘behind the backs’ of human beings. In fact, modernity consists specifically in the success of capital in realising this transformation.

Through the lens of Marx’s dialectic, the particular nature of capital as an objective abstraction of human nature is itself perceivable as an objective contradiction, conceivable in the same moment as a completely independent determination and as the direct result of human hands. Marx repeatedly provides descriptions of capital as a kind of ‘animated monster’ (*beseeltes Ungeheuer*),⁴⁸ a creature that is set in motion (‘animated’) by human beings themselves. At other times he describes it differently; as a type of independent ‘supernatural’ creature that preys on unsuspecting humanity: “vampiric....sucking living labour”;⁴⁹ possessing a “werewolf hunger [*Werwolfsheißhunger*] for surplus labour”.⁵⁰

The reason for these two representations of the ‘monstrosity’ of the capitalist system may be seen partly as a reflection of the difference between the *appearance* of its distinctive effects, and the *reality*. On the one hand, workers and capitalists can recognise their own active role in the system’s reproduction. On the other hand, the system appears as an external, almost ‘supernatural’ entity, compelling them to engage in the production and consumption of commodities purely as a function of external need (*Not*) rather than as a result of their own ongoing activity.

This contradiction is expressed in the following statement: “Personified in the money owner or capitalist” ‘value’ becomes “a will in its own right, being-for-itself [*Fürsichsein*], a conscious end in itself”.⁵¹ The playing out of processes in which human beings are intrinsically integrated provides a situation which, in theoretical terms, individual causes and determinations become impossible to conceptually distinguish, except as aspects of the system as a unity.

⁴⁸ Capital, i.e., “[i.e.,] value which can perform its own valorization process, [is] an *animated monster* which begins to ‘work’ [*Arbeit*], ‘as if its body were by love possessed’” (quoting Goethe), in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.302 (repeated in the appendix, p.1007); *MEW*, Vol.23 (1962), p.209. Italics added.

Marx speaks similarly in describing capital’s ability to mechanise industry: “Here we have, in place of the isolated machine, a mechanical monster [*mechanisches Ungeheuer*] whose body fills whole factories, whose demonic power [*dämonische Kraft*]....bursts forth in the fast and feverish whirl of its countless working organs”. In Marx, *Capital*, p.503; *MEW*, Vol. 23 (1962), p.402.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, pp.342, 367, 416; *MEW*, Vol. 23, pp.247, 271, 319-20.

⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital*, p.353; *MEW*, Vol. 23, p.258.

⁵¹ Marx and Engels, *Theories of Surplus Value*, in *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol. 30 (1989), p.39.

As the ground of human existence in the modern age, capitalism *displaces* the universal potential of human intentionality. However, as a distinct intentionality, capitalism serves as the objective unfolding of *human* determination in the modern period. Hence, human determination consists in self-alienation (*Selbstentfremdung; Selbstentäusserung*),⁵² via the transformation of work into capital, and with it, human nature and self-understanding. Whether the determination is most appropriately represented as independent from human beings, or as the distinct result of their actions, makes no difference in an objective context, for the effects are the same. However, in theoretical terms, it may be more appropriate to view the determination in one way or the other, depending on the theoretical context.

While ultimately remaining a complete totality, for Marx the system's determination – *capital's* determination – may be seen to possess various 'moments'. We have already discussed three views of capitalist determination: firstly, from the perspective of the commodity, in which use-value is identified with exchange-value; secondly, from the perspective of work itself, i.e., the transformation of labour-power into abstract labour; and thirdly, from the experience of the individual worker, whose basic connection with social life is undermined by the determination of the market (i.e., social alienation).

A further crucial aspect of capitalist determination is that witnessed in the system as a unity of competing market forces. Here, another dimension may be witnessed.

Conceptually, *competition* [*Konkurrenz*] is nothing other than the inner *nature of capital* [*innres Natur des Kapitals*], its essential character [*wesentliche Bestimmung*], appearing in and realized as the reciprocal interaction [*Wechselwirkung*] of many capitals with one another, the inner tendency as external necessity [*äußerliche Notwendigkeit*]....Capital exists and

⁵² "It is entirely to be expected that a living, natural being equipped and endowed with objective, i.e. material essential powers should have *real* natural *objects* for the objects of its being, and that its self-alienation [*Selbstentäusserung*] should take the form of the establishment of a *real*, objective world, but as something *external* to it [*aber unter der Form der Äußerlichkeit*], a world which does not belong to its being and which overpowers it." In Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*, pp.388-9; *MEW*, Vol. 40 (1968), p.577.

can only exist as many capitals, and its self-determination [*Selbstbestimmung*] therefore appears as their reciprocal interaction with one another.⁵³

Capital's continuation of the process of valorisation is dependent on the permanent existence of 'competing capitals', or, the capital controlled by independent capitalists. This plays out in the capitalist's continuous fear of financial ruin which, regardless of the magnitude of one's stock of capital, is always an objective possibility. Financial ruin will reduce the capitalist to the humiliating level of selling his own labour-power, transforming him into a worker. In order to avoid this possibility, the capitalist is forced to continue to accumulate capital, which is most easily secured in the attempt to dominate markets; to edge other capitalists out of the process, i.e., force them towards bankruptcy. Far from being *only* a 'class war', capitalist social existence is simultaneously an environment that fits Hobbes's original description of the state of nature. The final contradiction therefore is that 'society', as a collective project directed at the freedom and flourishing of individuals in the face of natural necessity, is in capitalist reality an environment in which even commercial enterprise lives in "continual fear and danger of violent death"; while workers, who compete only to serve as the object of the capitalist's means of self-preservation, are confined to an existence that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short".⁵⁴

The overall determination of capital is perhaps best illustrated in this passage from the *Grundrisse*, which is worth looking at in full.

The great historic quality [*große geschichtliche Seite*] of capital is to create....surplus work [*S u r p l u s a r b e i t*], superfluous work from the standpoint of mere use-value, mere subsistence; and its historic destiny [*historische Bestimmung*] is fulfilled as soon as, on the one side, there has been such a development of needs (*Bedürfnisse*) that surplus work above and beyond necessity [*über das Notwendige hinaus*] has itself become a general need [*allgemeines Bedürfnis*] arising out of individual needs themselves – and, on the other side, when the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations (*Geschlechter*), has developed general industriousness as the

⁵³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.414; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.327.

⁵⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII.9, p.84. Of course, after the turn of the twentieth century, workers' lives became objectively less 'nasty, brutish, and short'. This is one problem with Marx's assessment of capitalism that Marcuse seeks to address in his own theoretical writings, as we will see in Part III.

general property of the new species (*Geschlecht*) – and, finally, when the development of the productive powers of work, which capital incessantly whips onward with its unlimited mania for wealth, and of the sole conditions in which this mania can be realized, have flourished to the stage where the possession and preservation of general wealth require a lesser work time of society as a whole, and where the working society relates scientifically to the process of its progressive reproduction, its reproduction in a constantly greater abundance; hence where work in which a human being does what a thing could do has ceased. Accordingly, capital and work relate to each other here like money and commodity; the former is the general form of wealth, the other only the substance destined for immediate consumption. Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives work beyond the limits of its natural neediness [*Naturbedürftigkeit*], and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose work also therefore appears no longer as work, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity [*Naturnotwendigkeit*] in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one. This is why *capital is productive; i.e. an essential relation* [*wesentliche Verhältnisse*] *for the development of the social productive forces*. It ceases to exist as such only where the development of these productive forces themselves encounters its barrier in capital itself.⁵⁵

In this explanation we see the clear identity of the determination of capital with human historical determination. The motivations that drive capital are human motivations purely for the reason that they are historical motivations, distinct from nature and directed in *the greatest view* to the progression of human society to a point where its own determination is stifled by the very processes that it calls forth. As an unleashed process, however, capitalist determination is unable to slow itself down where the line between work and consumption – the boundary between production proper and human activity in general (i.e., social life) – appears to exist but is objectively non-existent, i.e., when an individual's priority in private life or 'free time'

⁵⁵ *Grundrisse*, p.325; *MEW*, Vol. 42 (1983), p.244.

is the replenishment (or 'production') of labour-power (understood as 'recuperation' from labour) purely for the purpose of future engagement in the system of production.

Ultimately, Marx believed that capitalism was sowing the seeds of its own destruction. He remained convinced that workers possessed the will and the ability to overcome capitalism by attaining control of society's means of production. While he refrained from presenting the notion of proletarian revolution as a teleological certainty,⁵⁶ neither did he conceive the capitalist epoch as an era with the potential to stamp out humanity's progression towards a society structured in accordance with a universalising human essence.

For all of its impressive explanatory power and innovation, historical materialism as Marx conceived it remains a nineteenth century theory. While André Gorz's charge that Marx simply replaced Hegel's speculative *Geist* with a speculative ideal of the proletariat is ultimately unjustified, there are problems embedded within its complex account of human society and reality. In Marx's conviction concerning the potential of the working classes to revolt, his writings do place too much weight on the idea that the conditions that capitalism brings about will contribute to its demise, as its objective contradictions play out in a wider historical context. As subsequent history has testified, this is far from the case.⁵⁷ Marx also appeared to rely too heavily not only on individuals being able to maintain a commitment to collective organisation against the purveyors of capital, but on the conditions of actual work under capitalism to remain so insufferably alienating, miserable, and impoverishing that workers will continue to share an ethos of resistance.

By the nineteen-twenties and thirties it had become evident to some that workers were facing an even more sinister and powerful opponent in capitalist society than they had realised. One of the shining lights of intellectual Marxism in this time was the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, the so-called Frankfurt School, whose programme showed great promise in keeping alive the philosophy and spirit of historical materialism in a rapidly technologising society.

⁵⁶ As Sean Sayers states, Marx's theory "gives a materialistic and causal explanation of the fundamental processes of history in which teleology plays no part". In Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, p.162.

⁵⁷ And in the era of climate change, it is far from certain that capitalism will collapse before destroying human society itself; or alternatively, before destroying the material conditions under which human beings may one day realise a society that genuinely pursues universal freedom and flourishing.

Perhaps the most dedicated historical materialist associated with the Frankfurt School in the second half of the twentieth century was Herbert Marcuse, who remained keenly aware of the need to provide a renewed theoretical account of historical materialism if it were to remain a viable theory of human freedom and determination. Marcuse understood that Marxian thought was faced with a major challenge from a society that was inherently totalitarian in its perpetuation of capitalist domination. Along with capitalism's renewed assertion of its hold over the means of production, particularly troubling was its evident ability to ideologically manipulate the thoughts, behaviour, and beliefs of individuals in accord with its structural imperatives, at the level of the fundamental human instincts.

We will now turn to the philosophy of Marcuse, whose theoretical writings bespeak a commitment to reformulate and supplement historical materialism so that the historical limitations to Marx's own elaboration could be overcome, while remaining grounded in a theory of human nature that emphasises humankind's material interaction with nature as the foundation of human self-transformation and freedom.

Part III. Marcuse

There is no effective psychoanalysis, no possible moral conversion not accompanied by a Marxist criticism, not oriented by the Marxist ethical requirement that humankind be what it makes, and that it makes humankind.Psychoanalysis....must lead to the comprehension of the necessity for freedom to change the world, to change its condition, to modify its situation, as it must also lead to the activation....of every region of existence and dimension of being-for-itself as so many possibilities to make oneself free, to produce a human world.

—André Gorz,
Le Traître, 1958

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Chapter 5.

Marcuse's 'phenomenological' historical materialism

The observed failure of Marxism to predict the historical movement of civilisation into the twentieth century led numerous theorists to provide a revision of historical materialism, which emphasises the continued need for a radical critique of capitalism in a society that appears to have accepted it as a necessary foundation for free society.

Herbert Marcuse is one of the most significant thinkers to contribute to this important task, with work that incorporates a broad range of theories, including German idealism, along with contemporary theories including Freudian psychoanalysis, theories of technology, and ecological thought. His use of concepts such as Schiller's notion of play and the Freudian notion of Eros offer him a means of negotiating with and expanding upon Marx's early anthropological writings, in an effort to deepen our understanding of the relationship between individual subjectivity and social life, and on illuminating the changing nature of productive activity.

On the theme of work, Marcuse exhibited what is arguably one of the most creative theoretical explorations of Marx's theory. Contrary to the conclusions of many critics of his work,¹ Marcuse's emphasis of human sensuality and the hope of 'turning work into play' indicates not so much a turn away from the concept of work (and towards play) as a transcendence of such dichotomies via the emergence of what he would eventually call a 'new sensibility'. This notion is utilised by Marcuse as a

¹ For instance, C. Fred Alford argues that for Marcuse, "[i]t is the necessity of work that marks it as a constraint on human freedom and thus shows it to be labor....Marcuse's view of the relationship between labor and freedom is thus quite consistent, in spite of taking a few twists and turns under the influence of Eros: they are incompatible" (Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature. Marcuse and Habermas*, p.42). While it is correct that Marcuse consistently argues for the incompatibility between freedom and 'labour', or alienated work, it is important to also stress that Marcuse does not consider the 'anthropological' realms of work (necessity) and freedom to be *necessarily* divided. In this sense, his whole philosophy can be understood as a project dedicated to the theoretical enunciation of the transcendence of these 'realms' (and hence, of the 'fundamental' division between them) alongside the emergence of a genuinely liberated society.

normative concept with the intention of transcending the age-old division between the realms of necessity and freedom.

Marcuse's efforts in the 1950s and 60s would contribute to one of the most significant cultural-political movements of the twentieth century, and offer some unique perspectives on the nature of work and its relationship to human existence, particularly with respect to human psychology, the social and ecological impacts of technological development, and the ideological forces that permeate the era of advanced capitalism.

In each of the three remaining chapters we will examine a specific period in Marcuse's theoretical writings with regard to the notion of work, anthropology, and human determination. In the current chapter we will look in detail at Marcuse's 'existential' conception of work. This philosophy definitively began with the Heideggerian examination of work as "an ontological concept, that is, a concept that grasps the being of human *Dasein* [*das Sein des menschlichen Daseins*] itself and as such".² After discussing Marcuse's theoretical origins (Section 1), we will conduct an analysis of his important early essay on the philosophical concept of work in economics (Section 2). There Marcuse provides an analysis of work as a core feature in the life of human *Dasein*, focusing on the relationship between human nature, work, and play (Section 3), and introducing the concept of *Lebensnot* (examined in Section 4) that reappears in his later writings. Finally, through the introduction of the important Marxian distinction between the realms of freedom and necessity (Section 5), we will see that Marcuse positions work, as Marx does, as the specific anthropological feature that makes possible the human being's autonomous self-transformation via the transformation of nature.

This analysis will be followed in Chapter 6 with a look at Marcuse's conception of work in his 1941 study of Hegel, *Reason and Revolution*, and then in his major work *Eros and Civilization* (1955). Chapter 7 will explore his late writings on anthropology,

² Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics", John Abromeit (tr.), in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.124; *Kultur und Gesellschaft 2*, p.10. As Stephan Bundschuh observes, in Marcuse's early philosophy "the difference between the anthropological and ontological foundations of humankind is complicated and not very clear. But one could say that Marcuse's concrete philosophy has an anthropological basis. He is not concerned with being in general like Heidegger, but with the concrete being of humankind." In Bundschuh, "The Theoretical Place of Utopia. Some Remarks on Herbert Marcuse's Dual Anthropology", p.152.

work, and human determination – most notably “Nature and Revolution”, the central essay in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972).

From a philosophical perspective, we will observe that Marcuse’s historical materialism faces ongoing problems of theoretical consistency with regard to the added dimensions he attempts to introduce. Since his theory is ultimately concerned with the task of cultivating a practical revolutionary action in society’s members, these theoretical incoherencies are presumably of secondary concern to him. What does remain consistent across his writings is an ongoing focus on the practical significance of the ideals of individual freedom and self-determination in light of twentieth-century realities; particularly the role of instinctual repression and the advance of technology. His utopian ideal of human existence, based on the logic of sensual gratification, possesses an aesthetic orientation that draws on the inherent connection between human nature and nature in general.

1. Marcuse’s theoretical origins

Marcuse had already received a PhD *magna cum laude* (in 1922; with a literary dissertation entitled *Die deutsche Künstlerroman*)³ when he read Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* on its publication in 1927. The foundation of this groundbreaking text is laid with the purpose of recovering what has traditionally been regarded (i.e., since the Greeks) as the most primal philosophical concept, that of ‘being’ itself; Being ‘as such’: “‘what we really mean by this expression “being”’”.⁴ This undertaking is explicitly concerned with an ‘immanent’ conceptualisation of reality, upon which all other theoretical conceptions are directly grounded; including the realm of philosophical anthropology. Heidegger’s philosophy explicitly states that a ‘philosophical anthropology’ must

³ See Barry Kätz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, p.40. Also of note is Marcuse’s ‘first publication’, his *Schiller-Bibliographie. Unter Benützung Trömlerschen Schiller-Bibliothek* (1925), which Kätz tells us “was the first comprehensive record in sixty years of the numerous editions of Schiller’s poetry and prose” (*ibid.*, p.56). Kätz adds here that “while it is fully annotated, the notes are of a purely technical and organizational nature and reveal nothing of the personality or priorities of the editor”. According to Douglas Kellner, Marcuse insisted in an interview with him (in 1978) that this bibliography “was ‘just a job’ and ‘unimportant’ for his intellectual development” (in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.33). Kellner however suspects that Marcuse was in fact deeply influenced by this early work on Schiller – a conclusion that is, naturally, difficult to dismiss in light of his use of Schiller in *Eros and Civilization* (see Chapter 6).

⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.9.

ultimately rest “on a philosophically adequate basis”.⁵ Accordingly, any philosophy that rests merely upon a ‘traditional conception of the *human* being’ is therefore “an approach [that is] ontologically unclarified and fundamentally questionable”.⁶

On the strength of this landmark text, Marcuse returned to university and studied under Heidegger. His first published essay, “Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie des Historischen Materialismus” (1928), outlines from the outset an intention to challenge the ‘hard scientific’ image of historical materialism that was prevalent at the time and associated with the Soviet *Diamat* and the Second International.⁷ Early on in this ‘phenomenological’ period, the concept of work for Marcuse took a back seat to a more generalised concept of revolutionary action that was nonetheless strongly materialist.

Marxism, in whose epistemological context historical materialism enters into history, does not appear in the form of a scientific theory—as a system of truths whose meaning rests wholly in its accuracy as knowledge (*Erkenntnisse*)—but rather in the form of a theory of social action, of the historical act (*Tat*). Marxism is both the theory of the proletarian revolution and a revolutionary critique of bourgeois society; it is a science (*Wissenschaft*) insofar as the revolutionary action that it wishes to set free and to stabilize requires insight into its own historical necessity—into the truth of its being.⁸

The influence of Heidegger as a means of attaining philosophical clarification is clear, not only in phrases such as the ‘truth of being’ of historical acts, but in the occasional appearance of hermeneutical flourishes that mirror Heidegger’s own philosophical style. Marcuse wanted to reorient Heidegger’s ontological concept of ‘being-in-the-world’ (*In-der-Welt-sein*) towards a Marxist conception of revolutionary political action. Doing so was a way of mutually ‘correcting’ both an ahistorical and individual subject-centred ontology in *Sein und Zeit*,⁹ and the practical loss of any correlating

⁵ “The analytic of Da-sein....must be supplied if something like a ‘philosophical’ anthropology is to rest on a philosophically adequate basis”. *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.183.

⁷ See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp.39, 62.

⁸ Marcuse, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism”, in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.1.

⁹ John Abromeit argues that an important concept Marcuse adopts from Heidegger is that of ‘motility’ (*Bewegtheit*), which “signifies the uniquely and ontologically historical existence of authentic Dasein.

viewpoint in predominating conceptions of Marx's original theory. Though a committed Marxist, at the time Marcuse understood Heidegger's work to issue a historical turning point in which "bourgeois philosophy unmakes itself from the inside and clears the way for a new and 'concrete' science".¹⁰ The Heideggerian phenomenology could, in his view, complement historical materialism by offering an immanent subject-oriented perspective on society's effects on the individual.

In spite of its existentialist leaning, Marcuse's early work is also clearly drawing on the Hegelian reading of Marx as expressed in the separate work of both Lukács and Korsch earlier in the decade,¹¹ in situating the subject's imperative to act in a specific socio-historically real contradiction.

The radical act is, according to its essence, *necessary* (*Not-wendig*), both for the actor as well as for the environment in which it is performed. Through its historical occurrence it turns toward (*wendet*) the need (*Not*), transforms something that had become absolutely intolerable, and posits in its place what is itself necessary (*Notwendige*) that alone can abolish (*aufheben*) the intolerable.¹²

Most importantly, it signifies a particular relationship to time", in opposition to the passive historically situated 'movement' (*Bewegung*) of a 'mere thing'. According to Abromeit, Marcuse felt that the notion of 'motility' offered Marxian thought a resource through which to analyse the essence of Dasein's relationship with time, beyond its extant 'reified' relation to it, of which Marx himself was already aware. In turn, Marxian thought might in Marcuse's eyes help to improve on Heidegger's own extension of the temporal relation to the level of the human collective, which he judged to be 'pseudoconcrete'. See Abromeit, "Glossary: 'Bewegtheit'" in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, pp.177-8.

¹⁰ Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.11.

¹¹ According to Marcuse, "the Korsch-Lukács interpretations of Hegelian Marxism represented the most advanced and revolutionary current of Marxism which most strongly influenced his own appropriation of Marx" (in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.40). Marcuse's own important review essay on Marx's *Paris Manuskripte*, on their first publication, "Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus" (1932) is arguably as important today to the Hegelian reading of Marx as the works of Lukács and Korsch a decade earlier. Seemingly in response to its impact, Peter Lind criticises Marcuse's study as over-philosophical: "Out of a total of 140 pages, Marcuse focuses on little more than a dozen. The whole essay appears as if Marcuse only wants us to read....and *Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* [sic]". In Lind, *Marcuse and Freedom*, p.78.

¹² Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", p.5. I have adopted Douglas Kellner's translation of the passage (in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.41), which retains the specifically Heideggerian tenor of Marcuse's original text.

It is clear that Marcuse is drawing on the idea of revolution as a 'radical need', which resonates with Ágnes Heller's analysis of the Marxian concept of *Bedürfnis*.¹³ As Douglas Kellner observes, in this passage Marcuse is clearly conducting a hermeneutical play on the German term for 'necessary', as connoting an inherently situated 'need' (*Not*) residing within individuals and their historical condition, which they may 'turn to' (*wendet*) when directing their radical activity toward objective historical change. The intention is to challenge the idea of history as deterministic, while also offering an 'ontological' phenomenological account of the subject as a concretely situated and acting being.

Marcuse believed that Heidegger's notion of 'authenticity' (*Eigentlichkeit*) could be modified for use in a Marxian theory of radical need and action, allowing for a framework that transcends the quagmire of the Cartesian dualism while also accounting for the manner in which the individual subject (presented as Heideggerian *Dasein*) may come under the influence of the social conventions (ideology) of the day, in the personification of *das Man*.¹⁴

Marcuse offered a name for his project in his following essay, "Über konkrete Philosophie" (1929). 'Concrete philosophy' is intended to establish a theoretical perspective that is embedded in the concrete phenomena of capitalist existence in order to uncover a means of implementing practical liberating change. While Marcuse has not yet dismissed his Marxian 'faith' in the proletariat as the revolutionary force for change, his formulation of concrete philosophy does hint at a displacement of the historic role of the proletariat in favour of the rational force of concrete philosophy itself;¹⁵ which is Marxian in spirit in serving as its own paradigmatic example of radical

¹³ And which we also noted in Márkus' analysis of Marx's anthropology. Heller and Márkus are both associated with Georg Lukács and the so-called "Budapest School" of Marxism humanism. In Heller's account of Marx, Communism is attributed positive values in the sense of an 'Ought' (*das Sollen*), which relates dialectically to the individual and the collective. Following this, "radical needs are inherent aspects of the capitalist structure of need: without them....capitalism cannot function, so it creates them afresh every day. 'Radical needs' cannot be 'eliminated' from capitalism because they are necessary to its functioning....Those individuals for whom the 'radical needs' already arise in capitalism are the bearers of the 'collective Ought'". In Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*, pp.74-7.

¹⁴ 'Das Man' is translated by Eric Oberle as 'the they', representing in Heidegger the conventional, inauthentic self. See Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism", p.12.

¹⁵ This is in contrast to the more traditional Lukács, who maintained a consistent conviction regarding the proletariat's ordained revolutionary role. See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.65.

action. This attempt to sketch the beginnings of a 'new science' reflects the attitudes of Feuerbach and Marx regarding the dogmatism of 'theory' in general.¹⁶

Concrete philosophy can....only approach existence if it seeks out Dasein in the sphere in which its existence is based: as it *acts* [*im Handeln*] in its world in accordance with its historical situation. In becoming historical, concrete philosophy, by taking the real fate of Dasein upon itself, also *becomes public* [*Öffentlichwerden*]. It must take upon itself the existence of the Dasein contemporaneous with it, and this is at bottom only a grasping of its own fate [*Schicksals*]....it is burdened by the same cares [*'die selbe' Sorge*] regarding a life that must exist in this and no other way.¹⁷

At the time Marcuse held the view of philosophy as "the scientific expression of a specific basic human orientation (*Grundhaltung*), and, to be sure, a basic orientation of being and entities".¹⁸ This is a more deeply 'ontologically laden' expression of the view of philosophy that Marcuse would iterate throughout his life and writings, in which genuine 'theory' operates practically as a motivator for revolutionary action.¹⁹ Once again, it draws not only on a Heideggerian onto-phenomenological perspective, but a Hegelian one, reflecting the portrait of Hegel in Marcuse's first book, *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (1932). In this reading of Hegel, Marcuse indicates an intention to link Hegel's own conception of 'philosophy' as a necessary historical eventuation with his own conception of

¹⁶ Douglas Kellner states that Marcuse's enterprise in this period "represents a critique of the German existentialist tendency to withdraw from history and society in order to cultivate subjectivity far from the social issues and struggles of the day. Marcuse's essay suggests that this is an evasion which abandons the existing individual to the real powers of society and history". In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.66.

¹⁷ Marcuse, "On Concrete Philosophy", in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.47.

¹⁸ Marcuse, "Transzendentaler Marxismus?" (1930), cited in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.70.

¹⁹ Later expression of Marcuse's conviction regarding theoretical activity will manifest via his analysis of 'one-dimensional thought'. A large proportion of *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) is in fact devoted to a detailed analysis of 'one-dimensional theory', including a section on philosophy, in which Marcuse states, "the repression of society in the formation of concepts is tantamount to an academic confinement of experience, a restriction of meaning....the normal restriction of experience produces a pervasive tension, even conflict, between 'the mind' and the mental processes, between 'consciousness' and conscious acts. If I speak of the mind of a person, I do not merely refer to one's mental processes as they are revealed in expression, speech, behavior, etc....I also mean that which the person does *not* express, for which that person shows *no* disposition, but which is....'negatively present'". In Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp.208-9.

‘concrete philosophy’ as an answer to the world-historical human need-capacity (*Bedürfnis*) for revolutionary action in the modern era.

“The need for philosophy [*das Bedürfnis der Philosophie*] arises when the unifying power (*die Macht der Vereinigung*) has disappeared from the life of human beings, when the contradictions have lost their living interrelation and interdependence [*Wechselwirkung*] and assumed an independent ‘form’ [*Selbstständigkeit*].”²⁰

Regarding the modern era specifically, Marcuse himself believes that in response to the capitalist system human beings have developed a fundamental need for practical action that may manifest in the act of generating a specific philosophical perspective – one that allows individuals to understand themselves as complete and unified (human) beings in the face of their own ‘concrete’ fragmentation. The act of ‘philosophising’ is therefore understood as a fundamental need and capacity for the modern individual, which appears to take the place of the ‘classical Marxian’ resource embodied in the ‘proletarian masses’ themselves.²¹

We begin our investigation with a consideration of philosophizing as the human activity in which philosophy constitutes itself. Philosophizing, if one takes the meaning of this word seriously, is a mode of human existence [*eine Weise menschlicher Existenz*]. Human existence is in all its modes subject to the question of its *meaning* (Sinn). It is the distinguishing characteristic of human existence that it is not realized through its mere being [*bloßes Sein*], that it “confronts” [*gegenübersteht*] its possibilities in a very specific way [*in ganz bestimmter Weise*], that it must first seize these possibilities and, in this

²⁰ This is Marcuse’s own translation of the same passage from Hegel’s text *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*, which he cites again in *Reason and Revolution* (p.36). The original quotation can be found in Marcuse, *Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit*, p.9.

²¹ At the conclusion of his important essay on the philosophical concept of work in 1933, Marcuse entertains the idea of a “‘hierarchical order’ of the modes of praxis based on the immanent truth and plenitude of Dasein”, tentatively placing “‘intellectual work’ in art, science, etc., above other modes of praxis”. In Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, p.145; *Kultur und Gesellschaft* 2, p.40.

seizing, live in the shadow of the question concerning its “to what end”
 (‘Wozu’).²²

The trajectory of Marcuse’s phenomenological Marxism therefore appears at some points to constitute a significant step away from ‘work proper’ as the principal liberating aspect of human determination in modern society. However, a phenomenological turn away from work was not Marcuse’s intention. His ‘phenomenological period’ culminated in the publication of an important essay that resituated work at the centre of philosophical anthropology, revolutionary struggle, and social theory, to the extent that “work is an ontological concept, that is, a concept that grasps the being of human Dasein itself and as such”.²³

2. ‘Concrete philosophy’ and work

“Über die philosophischen Grundlagen des wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Begriff der Arbeit” (1933) attempts “a fundamental determination (*grundsätzlichen Bestimmung*) of the concept of work”,²⁴ as a ‘general’ philosophical notion that concerns “the place, meaning, and function [*Ort, Sinn, und Funktion*] of work in the totality of human Dasein”.²⁵ Marcuse commences with a claim regarding the importance of a robust philosophical conception of work for any reliable economic theory; a position that quickly evolves into an emphatic statement about the importance of work activity to the human essence. Comprising a dense fourteen thousand words, the essay sets up the philosophical arena for Marcuse’s mature thought, which will be intimately

²² Marcuse, “On Concrete Philosophy”, in *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.34. The original can be found in Marcuse, *Schriften*, Vol. 1, pp.385-406.

²³ Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.124.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.122. In this essay, which demonstrates a clear Heideggerian theme, it is worth recalling John Abromeit’s point that “Marcuse’s frequent use of the concept of *Bestimmung* is in line with [the dialectical] tradition, insofar as he shares Hegel’s rejection of the possibility of fixing the meaning of concepts once and for all in a static ‘definition’” (p.177). Significant also is the fact that, as we have seen, Schiller also made much use of this concept, particularly given Marcuse’s utilisation of Schiller’s philosophy of ‘play’ in *Eros and Civilization* (see Chapter 6, Section 2.5, p.181). Interestingly, the theoretical relationship between these philosophers of human activity can also be traced via their use of seemingly unrelated – yet core – philosophical concepts.

²⁵ Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, p.122.

concerned with the normative aspects of various conceptions of human activity *per se* in the generation of new liberating forms of social consciousness.²⁶

Marcuse claims that the concept of work used in contemporary political economy possesses an insufficient foundation, and that this is deliberate. Citing Karl Elster, Marcuse argues: “It is precisely this situation that gives the representatives of economics the right to utilize a specific economic concept of “work” (*Arbeit*) that is not derived from a general concept of “work” but, rather, through another procedure”;²⁷ i.e., in the analysis of prices, manufacturing, and costs. This is in spite of the fact that work is central to economics as the analysis of the concrete foundation of society, and of “the totality of the human Dasein”.

The problem is complicated further by the influence of economic theory on our everyday conception of the ‘essence’ of work itself; the implication being that political economy itself plays a direct role in ideological manipulation of populations,²⁸ with the result that any activity that is not ‘production proper’ is not generally considered within the common understanding of work. In Heideggerian terms, the inauthentic *das Man* conceives of ‘social labour’ not as the generation of socially determined use-values, but simply as the creation of market value. Meanwhile, “the activity of politicians, artists, researchers, and priests, for example, is characterized as work only in a metaphorical and somewhat uncertain sense and is, in any case, seen to be in fundamental opposition to economic activity”.²⁹ The narrow definition of work has influenced humanity’s general understanding of the creation of socially relevant use-values itself, and according to Marcuse, has continued to be narrowed within economic theory to the point where it increasingly denotes the activity of the wage-earner over the managerial worker.³⁰ As a result, Marcuse speaks of the concept of work being “fragmented” within the theory of political economy itself. What is

²⁶ As Douglas Kellner observes, in the essay Marcuse also creates “a *dialectic* that develops the interplay between labour’s subjective (i.e. the creation of the human self) and objective moments (i.e. the constitution of the human world)”. But most interestingly, it foreshadows Marcuse’s future theoretical endeavours by demonstrating an investment in “the question of the *liberation of labour*”. In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.88.

²⁷ Quote from Karl Elster’s *Vom Strome der Wirtschaft* (1931). In Marcuse, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics”, p.122.

²⁸ This evokes Marx’s own reference (recall Ch. 4, p.121) to the “subterfuges and conjuring tricks [of] the professors of political economy”, in Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.300.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.123.

³⁰ Marcuse refers here to Max Weber’s posthumous work *Economy and Society* (1922) as an example of the term *Arbeit* being considered as “‘oriented to the instructions of a managerial agency’ (and not ‘managerial’ [‘*disponierende*’] activity)”. Quoted in Marcuse, *op. cit.*, p.123.

required is a “fundamental philosophical discussion” of the concept of work: “a discussion that seeks to outline reliably the place and significance of work within human *Dasein*”,³¹ i.e., to locate work’s ontological relationship with human nature as a constituting phenomenon.

Marcuse stresses Hegel’s definition of the concept of work as a “doing” [*das Tun*] as opposed to an “activity” [*Tätigkeit*], which he considers to be Marx’s point of departure in the *Paris Manuskripte*: “Conceived in this way, work is not determined by the nature of its objects, nor by its goal, content, result, etc. [*Zweck, Inhalt, Erfolg usw.*], but by what happens to human *Dasein* itself in work”.³² The distinction between mere ‘activity’ and the more comprehensive ‘doing’ is reflective of work’s fundamental ontological significance. Work is therefore bound to human existence *as such* – as the aspect of human *Dasein* that determines it to be a ‘for-itself’ rather than simply a ‘*sachlich*’ ‘in-itself’.³³

To support this conclusion, Marcuse hermeneutically analyses the word *Arbeit* itself, arriving at various aspects of the ontological concept: the actual work activity involved or ‘practice’ of work (*Arbeiten*); the object worked upon (*Gearbeitete*); and the goal of work (*zu-Arbeitende*). His point is that for a philosophical understanding of work, all three of these moments must be kept theoretically in view. Combined with the intimate relationship identified between work and human *Dasein* itself, the notion of human subjectivity and its complex relationship with the external world is emphasised. When we consider the human subject philosophically, we are also referring to its work, its action-oriented goals, and even the environment of objects that satisfies its needs. This basic insight appears to offer the basis for a unified and comprehensive account of human nature and determination.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p.124.

³² *Op. cit.*, pp.126-7; *Kultur und Gesellschaft* 2, pp.13-4.

³³ Here the correlation between Marcuse’s Heideggerian formulation of the role of work in the constitution of human *Dasein*, and of work as the ‘universalising’ potentiality of Marx’s *Gattungswesen*, is particularly clear. Marcuse encourages further comparison by stating that “[t]he human being’s happening is a continual *making-happen* [*Geschehen-machen*]....while the happening of animal *Dasein* is a mere *letting-happen* [*Geschehen-lassen*]” (*ibid.*, p.131; *K&G2*, p.20). Further on, Marcuse also quotes from Erwin Wexberg’s *Arbeit und Gemeinschaft* (1932): “whereas animal activities are instinctively [*instinktmäßig*] carried out and are thereby connected with the ‘want inherent in the function’, work is not ‘humankind’s natural function’ and never takes place ‘instinctually’” (p.216, n.25; p.174, n.18).

Marcuse expresses the Marxian nature of his exploration with a designation of “work as the specific *praxis* of human Dasein in the world”.³⁴ While the human subject conceived thus is not essentially reducible to ‘work’, it is impossible to think of *Dasein*’s material being without incorporating the essential ‘doing’ of work into the conceptualisation. When speaking of this ‘doing’ in a normative manner, i.e., where this doing contributes to the development of the material environment of human *Dasein* or in its ongoing process of personal development (of skills, etc.), it is appropriate to speak of this ‘doing’ as *praxis*.

3. Work and Spiel

Marcuse continues his analysis by distinguishing the concept of work from “another form of human doing that is often used as a counterpoint to the determination of work [*Gegenbegriff zur Bestimmung der Arbeit*]: play [*Spiel*]”.³⁵ In work, the subject conforms to the “immanent lawfulness” or ‘givenness’ of an object, and also to the appropriate means of shaping and handling it. In play, however, the object is discarded as a means of orienting one’s actions, in favour of the subject’s own free expression.

In play it is as if the “objectivity” of objects and their effects and the reality of the objective world, which one is normally forced constantly to recognize and interact with, had been temporarily suspended [*für Augenblicke....gesetzt*]. For once, one does entirely as one pleases with objects; one places oneself above them and becomes ‘free’ from them. This is what is decisive: in placing oneself above the objective world one comes precisely to *oneself*, into the dimension of one’s *freedom* that one is denied in work. In a single toss of a ball, the player achieves an infinitely greater triumph [*unendlich größerer Triumph*] of human freedom over the objective world than in the most massive accomplishment [*gewaltigsten Leistung*] of technical work.³⁶

While objects may be involved in play, one’s ‘doing’ is still oriented with regard to oneself, rather than by reference to ‘the world’ and its constituent objects. Marcuse

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.127.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.127; K&G2, p.15.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.128; pp.15-6.

again refers to the types of language used when speaking of play: there is a tendency towards the use of expressions directed at the ego rather than at objects. Thus “we speak of distracting oneself, relaxing oneself, forgetting oneself, and recuperating oneself”.³⁷ In addition, Marcuse refers to a lack of “duration” or “permanence” in play; it occupies the subject’s time ‘in between’ more pressing ‘doings’ (*Tun*). In providing distraction, relaxation, and relief *from* these more important doings, play is dependent and always pointing away from itself: “Thus play is in its totality necessarily related to another from which it comes and at which it is aimed, and this other is already preconceived as *work* through the characteristics of regimentation, tension, toil, etc. [*Gesammeltheit, Angespanntheit, Mühsal usw.*]”.³⁸

The categorical distinction between play and work is definitively established in work’s position as “necessarily and eternally ‘earlier’ [*früher*] than play. It is the starting point, basis, and principle of play insofar as play is precisely a break *from* work and recuperation *for* work”.³⁹ The concept of play is therefore portrayed as a purer expression of freedom than work, while at the same time being inherently dependent on work for its inclusion in human life at all.⁴⁰ However, Marcuse places more overall emphasis than Marx on the practical expression of this universality via an activity (‘play’) that is theoretically distinguishable from work. What his conception appears to indicate is that *praxis* as work – the *struggle* for freedom – is distinguishable from the expression of freedom itself.

But while appearing to contrast the activity of work with that of freedom, Marcuse’s conceptualisation possesses an important similarity to Marx’s conception of work. As the anthropological basis for freedom in the first place, work still serves in a sense as the ‘form of human universality’ represented in objective self-transformation via the transformation of nature.

Marcuse’s account therefore possesses features that indicate the relation between work and human freedom to be more complex than a basic opposition. As

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.128; p.16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.129; p.17.

⁴⁰ This reliance of play upon work is (already) intended to reflect Marx’s distinction between the realms of freedom and necessity in *Kapital*, Vol. 3 (p.959), in a passage that Marcuse cites at the close of this essay, and which would continue to direct his philosophy of work and human nature. In contrast, Marcuse’s anthropological theory in *Eros and Civilization*, formulated with respect to the Freudian ‘pleasure-principle’, appears to challenge the ‘subordinate’ relation of play to work he establishes in 1933 (see Ch. 6).

human praxis, work in this formulation has ‘duration’ (*Dauer*) relative to play (which has none), in that work’s overall objective – the securing of *Dasein*’s basic needs – is actually never fully completed. Thus, the subject is always a “being-at-work” or “being-in-work”. As a result Marcuse maintains that human life may be defined against the concept of work, but not against play.⁴¹ ‘Freedom’ as the ultimate determination of a unified notion of *Dasein* – the ‘goal’ of work as praxis that finds its purest expression in play – is therefore also inherently tied to work itself.⁴²

Marcuse expresses the relative ‘permanence’ (*Ständigkeit*) of work, which “can be provisionally defined as follows: something should ‘come out of’ work that, in its meaning or function, is more enduring than the single process of work, and that is part of a ‘universal’ process”.⁴³ This ‘process’ may be more generally understood as contributing directly to change in the world, and also to the task of ensuring one’s ‘permanence’, i.e., survival: “this aspect of work has been treated under the heading of ‘objectification’. Work is objectifying doing; in work, human *Dasein* objectifies itself. It becomes actual, existing, historical ‘objectivity’ (*Objektivität*); it acquires an objective form in the happening of the ‘world’”.⁴⁴

Due to the essence of *Dasein*, work possesses a burdensome character (*Last-Charakter*) prior to any specific manifestation of work that the subject is compelled to undertake. This is due to “the modes and organization of work insofar as it places human doing under an alien, imposed law [*fremdes, auferlegtes Gesetz*]: under the law of the ‘thing’ [*Sache*] that is to be done (and which still remains a ‘thing’, something other than life itself, even after one has given his own work)”.⁴⁵ Work, in other words, is always directed at something ‘other’. Therefore this ‘burdensome

⁴¹ “Regarding the happening of human life, one can speak of ‘life as work’ but not ‘life as play’”. In *op. cit.*, p.129.

⁴² And hence, ultimately, *praxis* also extends “beyond material production and reproduction” (*op. cit.*, p.144). This complex interrelation of concepts demonstrates a Hegelian influence, which makes sense in light of the period, in which Marcuse had recently published his first book, *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (1932). According to Morton Schoolman, this book is “the first indication that [Marcuse] is distancing his thought from Heidegger’s”. In Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p.15.

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p.130. This statement may be read as a phenomenological step into what Marx (and presumably, the later Marcuse) might regard as ‘over-abstraction’. In being part of a ‘universal process’ over and above the immediate ‘happening’ (*Geschehen*), the concept of work may become problematically disconnected from the concrete subject’s ‘doing’. It is also clear in the statement that “duration, permanence, and burden do not characterise the particular work processes, but rather *the human doing that is at their basis*” (p.129, italics added).

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.130; K&G2, p.18.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.130; K&G2, p.19.

character' is not identical to the modern characterisation of work as the source of "apathy or....'feelings of unhappiness', 'inhibitions', 'appearances of fatigue' ['*Unlustgefühlen*', *Hemmungen*', '*Ermattungserscheinungen*'] associated with specific types of work".⁴⁶ Even when these contingent aspects of work are altered, "the burdensome character will not be affected by their removal because it is grounded in the structure of being of human Dasein itself".⁴⁷

4. The concept of *Lebensnot*

Marcuse interprets Marx's concepts of "*production and reproduction*" as "by no means refer[ring] simply to the happening of 'material Dasein' in economic doing, but to the making-happen of human Dasein as a whole: appropriation, overcoming, transformation, and development [*Aneignung, Aufhebung, Umgestaltung und Weitertreibung*] of human Dasein in all spheres of life".⁴⁸

The positing of the human being as a 'natural-organic being' (*naturhaft-organisches Sein*) in the scientific manner commonly taken by political economy ultimately limits the determination of work to a basic 'satisfaction of needs' (*Bedürfnisbefriedigung*), which validates the conception of reality as a 'world of goods' (*Güterwelt*). Work is rather a "purposeful doing" (*zweckmäßiges Tun*), a "mediating-knowing doing (*vermittelnd-wissenden Tun*)" encountered in every aspect of human life as the "most universal meaning relating to the happening of human Dasein in the world".⁴⁹ This requires viewing the human being as a historical being, which Marcuse seeks out through the concept of '*Lebensnot*' ('necessity for life'), which he associates with Friedrich von Gottl.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.216, n.23; p.174, n.17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.131; p.20. Marcuse adds here that after Marx, the concepts of production and reproduction "were deprived of their original essential meaning and relegated to the economic dimension".

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp.131-2; pp.20-1.

⁵⁰ As a political scientist, Gottl (a.k.a. Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld) appropriated the (philosophical) concept of *Lebensnot*, which was used not only by Freud but by Nietzsche and Husserl, among others. Interestingly (and like Heidegger), Gottl-Ottlilienfeld joined the National Socialist Party in 1937, after Marcuse had emigrated to the United States. In his writings, Gottl was an advocate of Fordism, describing Ford himself as the "Großmeister der technischen Vernunft". See Egbert Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten. 'Amerikanisierung' in Deutschland und Frankreich (1900-1933)*, p.196.

The translation of *Lebensnot* as 'necessity for life' comes from Douglas Kellner's version of the essay in *Telos*, No. 16 (Summer, 1973), p.22. It is translated as 'exigency of life' by John Abromeit, in *op. cit.*, p.135.

The binding of work to human *Dasein* is traceable to the “quasi-‘natural’ situation of the human being in the world”, which places it in the position of having to constantly fill an enduring and primordial ‘lack’ (*ursprüngliche ‘Mangelhaftigkeit’; Mangel*) that “makes ‘need’ (*‘Bedürfnis’*) the driving force of its doing”.⁵¹ This lack is what Marcuse designates *Lebensnot*, which “refers to an ‘ontological’ condition [that] is grounded in the structure of human being....the fundamental nature of the *Lebensnot* asserts itself in the fact that it is possible to imagine providing for all that is lacking [in human life], but that in the end something always remains lacking”.⁵² Through this perspective, the determination (*Bestimmung*) of the economy is understood to be geared not at “‘any quantitative maximum’”, but in fact “‘aims explicitly for an overall optimum’”: an “‘interaction of lack and provision’ always leads in the end to an ‘affirmation of life; that is, it inherently tends toward the promotion of life’”.⁵³

In order to avoid an abstraction of the social whole into individual economic agents (as well as assisting in historically situating his analysis), Marcuse contextualises *Lebensnot* in relating it predominantly “to the ‘structures’ of the economy as themselves already organized forms of life”.⁵⁴ In this manner an attempt is made to ‘historicise’ the notion as an element of the concrete human world.

Rather than limiting human ‘doing’ to simple material (and utilitarian) production and reproduction, Marcuse asserts that “‘all exchange and production is a contribution to bringing all happening together in the form of a unity of duration and permanence [*alles Geschehen in Gestalt einer Einheit zu Dauer und Bestand*]

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p.132; p.21.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p.135; p.26. It is in the context of *Lebensnot* that Marcuse conceives work as a “genuine ‘negativity’ [*eigentlichen ‘Negativität’*]” (*ibid.*, p.139; p.31). This concept of ‘negativity’ (elaborated below) is another that Marcuse retains in his mature philosophy, and relates to revolutionary *praxis* in general. Revolutionary thinking for Marcuse is thus inherently ‘negative’: “The transformation of ontological into historical dialectic retains the two-dimensionality of philosophic thought as critical, negative thinking. But now essence and appearance, ‘is’ and ‘ought’, confront each other in the conflict between actual forces and capabilities in the society.” In Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p.142.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p.134. Quotes are from Gottl-Ottlilienfeld.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* In addition to Gottl, Marcuse draws here on the work of Karl Bücher and Thomas Brauer, the latter of whom “replaces the [simple economic] satisfaction of needs [*Bedürfnisbefriedigung*] with ‘providing for wants’ (*Bedarfsversorgung*)” (*ibid.*, p.133; translation from Kellner in *Telos*, p.20). We will see (in Ch. 6, Section 2.4, p.177) that in contrast to this interpretation of *Lebensnot*, Marcuse’s Freudian anthropology relies on the dissociation of *Lebensnot* from the ‘already organised forms of life’, or the historically contingent reality. It is therefore reformulated there as a more positively ‘essentialist’ concept, from the perspective of historical materialism itself.

zusammen zu ordnen]”.⁵⁵ It is the concept of ‘unity’ (*Einheit*) in the ‘happening of work’ in relation to *Lebensnot* that is important for social theory. Through such a unity, work is able to represent not merely the securing of economic needs, but the self-effectuation [*Selbsterwirkung*] of human *Dasein* itself, allowing work to serve both as “the determination of *Dasein* [*Bestimmung des Daseins*]”⁵⁶ and as the general action-theoretic representation of human freedom and agency.

In spite of its description as an ‘ontological’ condition of the human being, Marcuse’s conception of *Lebensnot* is not intended as a one-sided ontological representation of a primordial ‘lack’ in human *Dasein*. As a ‘genuine’ but not ‘absolute’ ‘negativity’, *Lebensnot* reflects Marx’s use of the term ‘*Bedürfnis*’ to designate not simply ‘need’ (in the sense of *Not* or material necessity, as satisfied by economic activity), or even ‘want’, but all of these things in a manner that notes their simultaneous representation as ‘capacity’, ‘potentiality’, and ‘power’ (*Fähigkeit; Möglichkeit; Kraft*) located in a concrete historical material reality. In this context, Marcuse presents work as the presiding *Bedürfnis* of human *Dasein*, the “*Bestimmung* of *Dasein*” in the sense that without the concrete ‘doing’ of work, human *Dasein* will not possess the agency over its own concrete being that defines human *Dasein* as such.

As a result, *Lebensnot* sits in an ambiguous philosophical position, seemingly appearing as both an ‘ontological’ concept on the one hand, and as inherent in the historically-specific concrete structures of human reality on the other. In this manner it bears much of the burden of Marcuse’s ambitious attempt to reconcile Heideggerian (ontological) theory and the concrete and historically-focused perspective of historical materialism.

In order to demonstrate the complexity of *Lebensnot* as a “genuine ‘negativity’”, Marcuse elaborates further on two other important dimensions that situate the *Lebensnot* of *Dasein* more substantially in concrete historical conditions. These we will now briefly consider.

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⁵⁵ Friedrich von Gottl, in *Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft*, quoted in *op. cit.*, p.134; p.25.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.143; p.37.

4.1. *Lebensnot* as ‘other-*Dasein*’

Marcuse elaborates on the normative relation, occurring within the ‘happening’ of work, between individual human *Dasein* (*das Selbst*) and the various interrelated determinations of what we will call ‘other-*Dasein*’ (*Anderes-Dasein*).

The process of human being [*menschlichen Seins*] in the world is ‘self-actualization’ [*Selbsttäterschaft*] from beginning to end, making one’s own *Dasein* happen, being-oneself [*Selbst-sein*] in every *Dasein*, but this being-oneself is possible by letting the *objective world* happen, by being with and for an *other* [*Sein-bei-Anderem und für Anderes*]. This is why working on the objective world is essentially burdensome, independent of any burden [*Belastung*] implicit in any particular *process* of work [*Arbeitsvorgang*]. In the end, the burdensome character of work expresses nothing other than the negativity rooted in the essence of human *Dasein*.⁵⁷

Marcuse begins his discussion with the perception that some forms of work are less related to the ‘material’ world than others, e.g., in “‘intellectual’ [*geistige*] work, political activity [*politisches Handeln*], [and] social ‘service work’ [*gesellschaftliche ‘Dienstleistungen’*] (such as the activity of doctors, teachers, etc.)”.⁵⁸ However, even in intellectual work, other subjects and even one’s own body remain an intrinsic aspect of an objective world that can be understood more generally to stand over against the human self, in the form of a ‘lack’, which always bears the marks of history. All forms of work affect the external world; for this reason it is imperative that human *Dasein* work in a manner that allows the historically bound and inherently self-autonomous other-*Dasein* to unfold in a manner separated out from the (individual) self’s specific determination.⁵⁹ This normative orientation pertains to the totality of the overall reality in which *Dasein* is situated, contributing further to the complex nature of *Lebensnot* with respect to individual *Dasein*.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.139; p.31.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.136; p.28.

⁵⁹ In other words, in its fundamental being, human *Dasein* experiences the world ‘existentially’ as a confrontation with a conglomerated ‘other-*Dasein*’, consisting in other historically evolved manifestations of human *Dasein* (social and political institutions, objects of human production and culture, etc.) as well as, possibly (but left unspecified), other *non-human* forms of existence – all of which contribute to the subjective human experience as one of *Lebensnot*.

With respect to the human component of 'other-*Dasein*', it may be divided into two interrelated forms or 'happenings' (*Geschehene*) that indicate an intrinsic temporal dimension in *Lebensnot*: past-*Dasein* (*gewesenes Dasein*); and what we will call here a currently existing or 'present other-*Dasein*' (*gegebenes Anderes-Dasein*) possessing a history distinguishable from that of the individual working *Dasein*. These elements of *Lebensnot*, which together contribute to the happening of human *Dasein* as a unity, are dialectically bound to work's concern with individual subjective self-constitution and determination.

4.1.1 'Other-Dasein' as 'past-Dasein'

Marcuse describes the generation of the self as *being* only in the context of a "particular world as a whole", in which everything occurs "in a way 'other' than the self".⁶⁰ This world has its "own 'history' that never coincides with the history of the self....formed by a human animating power that is not [human *Dasein*'s] own, that is always already past and is yet present and real".⁶¹

This is a world of public institutions, organizations of a political, social, and economic nature, means of production and objects of consumption, things of use, works of art, etc. It is also a world of the universal division and organization of space and time that, as a whole, remains the work of past *Dasein*, even in every new creation.⁶²

In its orientation to this past-*Dasein*, a working individual *Dasein* "must preserve it, take care of it, develop it, and work on it [*erhalten, besorgen und weiterrichten, an ihr arbeiten muß*]"⁶³.

The work of human *Dasein* must therefore be directed towards the filling of what past-*Dasein* is lacking. This is accomplished in work through *Dasein*'s submission to laws external to itself: the 'taking-up-in-oneself' (*Aufsichnehmen*) of an "other than oneself" and of "the law of the thing".⁶⁴ Hence, in the operating of a machine, or simply in the manual creation of use-values, human *Dasein* is putting its own

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.137; p.28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.137; p.29.

⁶⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.138; p.30. Translation of *Aufsichnehmen* is from Kellner's translation in *Telos*, p.25.

immediate concerns aside for the interests of human *Dasein* as an ‘other’ with objective connection to the past.

Yet the process is simultaneously one of individual *self*-determination that looks temporally *forward*. The self’s future ‘potentialities’ are always contingent upon its orientation to greater history: “Work presupposes a well-determined *relation to time* that thoroughly penetrates *Dasein* and guides its praxis”.⁶⁵ Through its work human *Dasein* in general maintains its own temporality through ‘doing’; this can be seen, for instance, in the self’s adherence to past-historical *Dasein*’s division of life into ‘work’ and ‘free time’, etc., with respect to future plans and actions.⁶⁶

4.1.2. ‘Present’ other-Dasein

Following Hegel, Marcuse describes past-*Dasein* as having issued a concrete division of labour that constitutes an “opposition between *dominating and dominated* work (“directing” and “directed” work)”. Within this concrete situation, “work as knowing doing demands that one maintain and conduct oneself with a view to one’s own possibilities and one’s objectivity”.⁶⁷ As a result, individual selves constantly encounter each other as ‘aliens’ within the historical happening of human *Dasein*. While compelling individuals to follow their own objectivity and potentiality, the specific ‘knowing doing’ (*wissendes Tun*) of human praxis simultaneously “implies reckoning with other *Dasein*, with their possibilities and necessities”.⁶⁸ The result is a “certain circumspection and foresight” (*bestimmte Umsicht und Voraussicht*) regarding the doing of work, which forms an aspect of *Lebensnot* in a reliance on ‘other’ individual workers and groups “within the conditions of the ‘natural’ and socio-economic situation of *Dasein*”.⁶⁹ Human *Dasein* therefore involves a reality populated by individuals and groups who are caught up in a relationship with others, all of whom must make a conscious and continual effort to coordinate their personal work aims together within the greater determination of historical *Dasein*. This reality must be negotiated in a manner that extends the potentiality of human *Dasein* in general,

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.141.

⁶⁶ Of course, individual human *Dasein* also possesses its own personal past which of course also needs to be factored into its future potentiality.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp.146-7. Reference to ‘directed’ and ‘directing work’ of course clearly reflects Hegel’s ‘master and slave’ relation in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.147; p.43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

which naturally enfolds the self-actualising 'doing' of a collective of distinct individuals.

4.2. *Lebensnot* as 'excess' (*Überschuß*)

Within his discussion of *Lebensnot* as an inherent 'lack', Marcuse also occasionally offers descriptions that appear to conflict with this definition; he states, for instance, that "[h]uman being is always *more* than its *Dasein* at any given time";⁷⁰ and, even more interestingly, that the "essential excess of being [*wesentliche Überschuß*] over *Dasein* constitutes the fundamental and irremovable *Lebensnot*".⁷¹

It is true that Marcuse emphasises that work "is in and of itself lacking (*mangelhaft*), negative....directed toward something that is not yet there, that it is supposed to provide, and that is not already present in it".⁷² However, this 'negativity' of work, or of human *Dasein* as conceived in terms of *Lebensnot*, unfolds in a manner that also generates a unique human potentiality. Hence, the 'lack' that is intrinsic to *Lebensnot* may also be characterised as an 'excess' (*Überschuß*), since the determination of work is in fact directed not beyond *Dasein per se*, but beyond its immediate situation.

Human being [*menschliche Sein*] is always *more* than its *Dasein* at any given time. It transcends every possible situation and for this very reason there is always a discrepancy [*Diskrepanz*] between it and its immediate existence. This is a discrepancy that demands constant work for its overcoming, even though human *Dasein* can never rest in possession of itself and its world.⁷³

Conceived via the capacity for work, human being is always directed at a future concrete state: "genuine fulfillment of this lack [*Mangel*], the goal and end of work, is precisely that real plenitude of *Dasein* in its duration and permanence".⁷⁴ From a dialectical standpoint the inherent 'discrepancy' between human *Dasein* and its concrete existence is conceivable in terms of an inherent 'lack' – a *Lebensnot* directed toward constant completion or rectification; or alternatively, as an ever-present

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.136; p.27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p.143.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, p.136; p.27.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.143; p.37.

‘excess’ – *Lebensnot* as a potentiality residing in the greater objective reality of yet-to-be-realised human *Dasein* – including, perhaps, an anticipated connection with ‘other-*Dasein*’.⁷⁵

And just as the objective world is the reality of *Dasein* already past, so it also carries the future of this past life in it: it is the actuality of its provisions and plans, its discoveries and mistakes, its alliances and enemies. Thus, it is not a closed ‘state’ [*Zustand*], nor is it a static pre-existing multiplicity of disposable be-ings [*Seienden*], but is rather through and through unfinished and open—through and through movement, *happening*. The happening of the objective world with which *Dasein* is always already confronted....proceeds alongside the happening of *Dasein*; it has its own immanent dynamic and its own immanent laws, which even enable it to “take on a life of its own” [*‘verselbständigen’*] and to elude the control of *Dasein*.⁷⁶

As we have seen, for Marcuse, ‘past-historical’ *Dasein* confronts working human *Dasein* as an ‘other’ in the form of the objective world itself. Work consists in the appropriating of this past-*Dasein* in the sense of “tak[ing] into consideration what is lacking”.⁷⁷ This lack is also a form of opportunity that is inherent to *Lebensnot* as a ‘necessity for life’: while ““something always remains lacking....*Lebensnot* asserts itself in the fact that it is possible to imagine providing for all that is lacking””.⁷⁸

In this essay, Marcuse clearly places less emphasis on *Lebensnot* as ‘excess’ than as ‘lack’. A clue as to why resides perhaps in his assertion that, “when one says that the goal of work lies outside of [*Dasein*], this ‘outside of’ [*außerhalb*] is dangerously ambiguous [*in einem ungefährliche Sinne doppeldeutig*]”.⁷⁹ As an intrinsic aspect of work and human *Dasein*, *Lebensnot* as ‘excess’ looks outward into an objective world that is the work of past-*Dasein* and also constitutes the ‘raw concreteness’ of the

⁷⁵ A comparison can be made here between Marc use’s conception of *Dasein*’s interaction with an external reality, consisting of material objects and other-*Daseins*, and Marx’s conception of the human being’s metabolism with (external) nature. In Marcuse’s formulation an emphasis is placed on the dialectical-phenomenological unity of an objective reality consisting of (individual) subjects (*Dasein* itself) and objects (nature; ‘being’). This is a feature provided by the ‘subjectivist’ perspective of Heidegger’s phenomenology, which itself creates a tension with the ‘historicist’ perspective of historical materialism.

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.137; p.29.

⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.138.

⁷⁸ Gottl, quoted in *op. cit.*, p.135.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.143; p.37.

potentiality of human *Dasein* itself. But as Marcuse also states, the ‘happening of the objective world’ simultaneously possesses its own dynamic and laws and thus is always at risk of becoming independent and ‘eluding the control of *Dasein*’.

There is therefore a definite tension in the dialectical relation established by Marcuse between the work-praxis of human *Dasein* at its most general (i.e., a human *Dasein* encompassing all past, present, and future-directed determination), and the ‘independent’ forces of the objective world that human *Dasein* inhabits. On the one hand the objective world as past-*Dasein* must be ‘fulfilled’ and respected; on the other hand the objective world is one that possesses inherently ‘alien’ forces, a determination that is oppositional with respect to the genuine realisation of human *Dasein*.

While Marcuse does not specify the inclusion of non-human forms of existence in an ‘other-*Dasein*’ (in fact, he states that *Dasein* “finds itself confronted with a world that is the world of another *Dasein*: a world filled and formed by a *human* animating power that is not its own, that is always already past and is yet present and real”),⁸⁰ he does describe it as part of the “happening of the objective world with which *Dasein* is always already confronted [and which] has its own immanent dynamic and its own immanent laws, which even enable it to ‘take on a life of its own’ and to elude the control of *Dasein*”.⁸¹ At any rate, the inclusion of non-human existences in this ‘other-*Dasein*’ remains problematically unclear. Such an inclusion would actually assist in the theoretical representation of the intimate relationship between human beings and nature; subject and object, which is invaluable in social-theoretical contexts and all-too-often underemphasised.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.137. Italics added.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Whether or not Marcuse’s ‘other-*Dasein*’ incorporates the determination of ‘non-human’ forms of existence may depend on the strength of the Heideggerian element of Marcuse’s conception at this late stage of his phenomenological phase, when the influence of Heidegger on Marcuse’s thought is considered by some to be waning (as Kellner states, it is the last essay that Marcuse wrote before his break with Heidegger; see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.88). In comparison to historical materialism, which posits a relatively strong distinction between (deterministic) nature and ‘(human) history’, the existentialist and ‘subjectivist’ orientation of Heidegger’s philosophy would in my opinion be more likely to encourage the inclusion of non-human existences in the conception of other-*Dasein*.

⁸² As Marcuse himself argues of existing social theory in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*; see below: Ch. 7, p.199.

As Marcuse states, work as such is not an ‘end in itself’ (*Selbstzweck*);⁸³ rather, it has human *Dasein* itself as its end. In its essence, work “transcends the particular work process and all ‘otherness’, through which it passes, on the way to the *Dasein* of the worker itself”.⁸⁴ In an ‘ontological’ sense this appears valid; however, Marcuse leaves unaddressed the specific manner through which the concrete work process, in its intrinsic ‘circumspection and foresight’, serves as a resource through which human *Dasein*, in the form of the concrete worker, might distinguish between the genuine ‘fulfilment’ of past-*Dasein*, and falling in line with an objective circumstance whose determination may be understood as *intrinsically objective*, i.e., fundamentally alien to the ontologically grounded determination of human *Dasein*. As a result, the capitalist system of production may be seen to lie in a normatively ambiguous position, being the direct result of a past-*Dasein* (and the concrete foundation of ‘present-*Dasein*’), while also exhibiting features of an inherent ‘other-determination’ – an ‘independent force’ that has already eluded the control of working *Dasein*. Hence, while acknowledging the ‘dangerous ambiguity’ in the conception of work as existing ‘beyond’ human *Dasein* (or of the conception of *Lebensnot* as an ‘excess’ residing in the objective potentiality of human *Dasein*), Marcuse’s Heideggerian conception of *Lebensnot* is, ultimately, an ambiguous theoretical resource for the genuinely *praxis*-oriented worker.

5. The realms of freedom and necessity

In the closing sections of his essay on labour, Marcuse attempts to sketch out “the ‘place’ of work in the totality of human *Dasein*”:⁸⁵ “In spite of the essential universality and continuity [*wesentlichen Allgemeinheit und Dauer*] of work in *Dasein*, in spite of the determination [*Bestimmung*] of *Dasein* as work, every human doing is not necessarily work”.⁸⁶ From the results of his investigation, Marcuse argues that work in its most general form is a ‘doing’ that contributes positively to “self-actualization” (*Selbsttäterschaft*). Consciously emulating Marx’s division in *Kapital*, Vol. 3, Marcuse divides this self-actualising work into two basic categories: firstly, a ‘realm of necessity’ – production and reproduction that satisfies *Dasein*’s basic material needs;

⁸³ *Op. cit.*, p.143; p.37.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.142.

⁸⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.143; p.37.

and secondly, a 'realm of freedom' – "work that goes beyond these necessities and that is and remains tied to making *Dasein* happen".⁸⁷ Marcuse accepts this distinction because in his view it clarifies 'what is at stake', i.e., "the specific mode of *Dasein*'s praxis beyond material production and reproduction, and because it also expresses the fundamental relationship between the two spheres".⁸⁸ When considering the 'realm of necessity', Marcuse is clear that one needs to separate what is actually produced by the worker in its work – the 'social use-value' that it is directed at producing – from what "comes out" (*herauskommt*) of the 'doing' of the work for the worker itself. After all, "even a factory worker producing luxury items works for the basic necessities of his existence".⁸⁹ Within the complex manifold of society, the realms of necessity and freedom are intrinsically interwoven with respect to the fundamental being of human *Dasein* itself.

Human *Dasein* is however ultimately compelled to surpass in some way the realm of necessity in order to realise itself in freedom. Beyond the realm of necessity, human activity still remains praxis, i.e., work is still 'present' in the realm of freedom; however, "its character has changed" such that it is no longer directed at securing the conditions of a universalised human *Dasein*. Secure in the realm of freedom, work "contains its goal and end in itself; it is no longer *at the mercy* (*Ausgeliefertsein*) of an 'alien' objective world".⁹⁰ The similarity here with Marx's conception of the relationship between his (generalised) concept of work and the human essence is clear. As with Marx, work serves for Marcuse as the aspect of humankind that directly generates the individual subject's capacity to freely transform itself through the transformation of the concrete environment. In the final analysis, "work is in its very essence and meaning related to the happening of *Dasein* in its totality, that is, to praxis in both dimensions (necessity *and* freedom)".⁹¹ Thus, work possesses an intimate relationship to human *Dasein* itself that play – the ideal form of activity in the realm of freedom alone – simply does not.

In his reading of the essay, Douglas Kellner argues that "Marcuse excludes work from the realm of freedom and authentic individuality by – following Marx in *Kapital*,

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.143. In Heideggerian fashion, Marcuse notes a useful correlation between these categories and Aristotle's concepts of *anagkaiā* (necessity) and *kalá* (beautiful things) (p.144; *K&G2*, p.38).

⁸⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.144.

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.143.

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.144; p.39.

⁹¹ *Op. cit.*, p.149.

Vol. 3 – severing human activity into two realms: a realm of freedom which contains possibilities for creation of an authentic self, and a realm of necessity in which work is in bondage to the domain of material production”.⁹² However, this is somewhat reductive. Earlier in the essay, Marcuse constructs a hypothetical society in order to support his conviction regarding the historical persistence of work in the ‘realm of necessity’.

Imagine a society that has succeeded in procuring all the economic goods it needs and that this condition was guaranteed for the foreseeable future. The interaction between human *Dasein* and its world would continue to happen as ‘work,’ even if all economic motives and compulsions disappeared. Then this happening would for the most part shift from the economic dimension to other dimensions of human *Dasein* and its world (and thus the place, form, and function of the economy in the totality of human life would also change completely: in such a society economic labor could certainly no longer serve as a ‘model’ for work in general). The essential aspect of work is not grounded in the scarcity of goods, nor in a lag between the supply of goods present and utilizable at any particular time and human needs; on the contrary, it is rooted in an essential excess of human *Dasein* beyond every possible situation in which it finds itself and its world.⁹³

As with Marcuse’s contention that his “universal concept of work....spans the spectrum between two poles; both fall within the concept of work”,⁹⁴ this passage demonstrates that, even though work has clearly transformed when the worker crosses into the realm of freedom, it still possesses the same crucial relationship to the ‘self-actualisation’ of *Dasein* that itself constitutes work as human ‘doing’. As in Marx’s original anthropological elaboration, work for the ‘phenomenological’ Marcuse remains identifiable with the forms of human action that constitutes the “*free expression* and hence the *enjoyment of life*”.⁹⁵ As Morton Schoolman points out: What Marcuse means is that all activity is work insofar as work is understood as an act of

⁹² Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp.89-90.

⁹³ *Op. cit.*, pp.135-6.

⁹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.143.

⁹⁵ Marx, “Excerpts from James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*”, in *Early Writings*, p.277.

objectification, as the struggle to realize human potentialities and to impart to the world modelled by work a distinctively human form".⁹⁶

A final point is worth mentioning with regard to the above passage, in which Marcuse prefigures his future interest in 'utopian' thought by arguing for the enduring normative significance of work in a hypothetical post-scarcity society. There 'economic labour' – or work for the securing of basic human needs – would be over; however, work will persist because it is connected to the ontological condition of human beings as 'doing' beings. With 'economic labour' no longer required, the nature of work (and the human conception of it) will necessarily undergo some kind of historical or 'epochal' transformation. However, it will still remain as the basic ontological condition of human *Dasein* – for it *not* to remain so, human existence would no longer require a 'doing' of any kind, in the sense of an 'absolute idleness' that is practically unimaginable. Whether it is through art, physical activity (e.g., sport, dancing, games), social interaction, or any other pursuit of 'doing', human beings are "constantly in need of enduring self-fulfilment, in need of the reality of [their] own existence in all its possibilities—a task in whose service the economy also ultimately stands".⁹⁷ For Marcuse, a life of 'non-doing' is simply a non-human life. And as in Hegel, work "is that on which every single activity is based and to which each activity always returns: a *doing* [*Tun*]"⁹⁸. It is clear then that as early as his Heideggerian period, Marcuse's was engaging with the 'hypothetical' notion of a post-scarcity world that prefigures the signature 'utopian' component of his mature writings.

Nevertheless there are some legitimate problems with Marcuse's ontological conception of work and his particular attempt at extending Marx's anthropology in a phenomenological direction. Kellner argues that Marcuse's essay is flawed in its

⁹⁶ Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p.27. Perhaps Schoolman goes too far in the other direction, however – at least concerning Marcuse's intentions regarding the conception of human activity *in general*: "Embracing all activities in every form of social existence, and pertaining to the very nature of 'being' human, work becomes an ontological category" (*ibid.*). While Schoolman is of course correct concerning Marcuse's ontological intentions, Marcuse himself makes claims against reading *all* human activity in terms of 'work'; for instance: "In spite of the essential universality and continuity of work in *Dasein*, in spite of the determination of *Dasein* as work, every human doing is not necessarily work" (*op. cit.*, p.143). Overall, this of course may indicate a tension within Marcuse's 'ontological' reading of Marx's distinctive anthropology.

⁹⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.136.

⁹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.126.

“excessive ontological generalization and often extreme subjectivism”.⁹⁹ Regarding the first point, Kellner sees Marcuse making the error of attributing to Marx’s general concept of work certain historically contingent aspects of existing work conditions which have stripped work of any substantial element of ‘play’ or ‘creativity’. In the second case, Marcuse tends to focus too specifically on work’s effect of objectifying human subjectivity and gives too little attention to the ‘world-transforming’ aspect of the work of human *Dasein*. There is some legitimacy to these criticisms, which can be seen in the concept of *Lebensnot*. Kellner’s first criticism can be linked with the burden placed on *Lebensnot* to represent a crucial aspect of the ‘ontology’ of *Dasein* while also representing concrete (i.e., capitalist) historical conditions. Kellner’s second criticism is reflected in the idea of the *Lebensnot* of *Dasein* as ‘excess’, in which emphasis is placed on the potentiality of *Dasein* to transform the objective world in its work activity to reflect simply *its own* prospected future state.

Marcuse was to say later in his career that his initial infatuation with Heidegger’s philosophy was based in a specific reading, which conceived of it, against the historical events of the time, as a kind of “new beginning”, as an alternative to the entrenched ‘transcendental’ (traditional German) approach to philosophy: “at long last, a concrete philosophy: here there was talk of existence (*Existenz*), of our existence, of fear (*Angst*) and care [*Sorge*] and boredom [*Langweile*] and so forth”.¹⁰⁰ Yet, Marcuse gradually realised “that the concreteness of Heidegger’s philosophy was to a large extent deceptive—that we were once again confronted with a variant of transcendental philosophy (on a higher plane), in which existential categories had lost their sharpness, been neutralized, and in the end were dissipated amid greater abstractions”.¹⁰¹ This realisation would lead Marcuse to seek alternative ways of providing depth to Marx in an effort to secure its relevance in a rapidly technologising capitalist modernity, where post-scarcity and a ongoing satisfaction of individual needs were becoming an ever more likely reality.

⁹⁹ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.90.

¹⁰⁰ Marcuse, “Postscript. My Disillusionment with Heidegger”, in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, p.176.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 6.

Work in Reason and Revolution and Eros and Civilization

Living and working in the United States (from 1933) led Marcuse to reconsider his theory, which resulted firstly in a new Hegelian-Marxist reading of the relationship between work and human nature, culminating in his second book-length examination of Hegel, *Reason and Revolution* (1941). It would then be over a decade before the publication of his landmark text in Critical Theory, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), in which he combines the Marxian anthropological foundation in concrete work activity with the Freudian concept of Eros: the immanent biological drive for sensuous gratification. *Eros and Civilization* is a pivotal text in Marcuse's body of writings. There he attempts to map out a philosophical anthropology based on the human instincts. In this endeavour, an attempt is made to formulate a conception of the human impulse towards sensual gratification within a historical materialist framework.

This chapter will begin (in Section 1) with a brief look at the Hegelian view of work and anthropology in *Reason and Revolution*, before exploring in detail the anthropological theory of the human instincts in *Eros and Civilization* (Section 2), with specific reference to the notion of work activity contained therein. The Freudian concept of the instincts, expressed via the 'Nirvana principle' (examined in 2.1), is utilised by Marcuse against the grim prognosis issuing from Freud's own metapsychological theory (2.2) to argue against the notion that human civilisation is intrinsically destructive. In identifying the nature of the contingent socioeconomic reality with the trans-historical ('philosophical') condition of human scarcity or 'Ananke' (2.3), Marcuse claims that Freud incorrectly identifies human existence *per se* as inevitably self-destructive in his notion of the 'reality principle'. With the theoretical distinction established between the historical state of affairs (what Marcuse terms the 'performance principle') and the underlying nature of human instinctual forces, Marcuse contends that the current pathological reality may in fact be seen not as the necessary outcome of human instinctual forces, but as a historically

specific state of affairs that may be superseded. Marcuse proceeds by deriving a philosophical anthropology grounded in the key concepts of Eros and Ananke (2.4), which leads to an orientation towards human activity, represented in 'work' and 'play' (2.5). In social theoretical terms this normative orientation towards activity provides the basis for Marcuse's critique of capitalist civilisation.

We will conclude the chapter with an assessment (2.6) of the theoretical coherence of Marcuse's ambitious instinct-based anthropology, which would continue to inform his later anthropological conception of work.

1. Reason and Revolution (1941)

Marcuse's turn away from Heideggerian philosophy overlapped with the development of his association with the Frankfurt School. After abandoning the project of 'concrete philosophy', he continued his productive output of writings with the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in a turbulent period of exile that saw him ultimately claiming political refuge (along with his colleagues, for a time) in the United States. The writings of this period mark his turn towards the development of a Hegelian-Marxian social theory, in which "[r]eality, where the human being's essence is determined, is the totality of the relations of production".¹ While retaining a strong use of the Hegelian dialectic, Marcuse began to mediate his philosophical orientation with a more 'interdisciplinary' approach that Horkheimer outlined in his seminal essay "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie" (1937), which outlined the historical materialist programme of the Frankfurt School. During this time Marcuse clearly embraces Horkheimer's approach, as demonstrated in his own essay "Philosophie und kritische Theorie" (1937).

Philosophy thus appears within the economic concepts of materialist theory, each of which is more than an economic concept of the sort employed by the academic discipline [*Fachwissenschaft*] of economics. It is more due to the theory's claim to explain the totality of the human being and its world in terms of its social being. Yet it would be false on that account to reduce these concepts to philosophical ones. To the contrary, the philosophical contents relevant to the theory are to be educed [*zu entwickeln*] from the economic

¹ Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence", in Marcuse, *Negations*, p.82.

structure. They refer to conditions that, when forgotten, threaten the theory as a whole.²

In his Frankfurt School years, Marcuse conducted in-depth research on Hegel, producing two books on him. *Hegels Ontologie* (1932) still demonstrates the influence of the ontological perspective of Heidegger (and in fact special mention is given to Heidegger in the introduction). However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Marcuse also makes much there of Hegel's overall approach to philosophy: "philosophy arises from a need (*Not*), from a need (*Bedürfnis*) of human life in a specific historical situation: that of division".³

Marcuse's interest in Hegel is a reflection of his enduring attraction to ontological and 'speculative' philosophical foundations, which is an ongoing feature of his particular Hegelian-Marxist orientation. In his later work he would turn to other 'philosophical' theories in an attempt to draw out the introspective and subjectivist aspects in Marx's own work.

Marcuse's first book in English, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Critical Social Theory* (1941), would be the result of his extensive period of research as a member of the Frankfurt School. In it Marcuse offers what is perhaps his most pure Hegelian-Marxist position on work and human determination.⁴ Though the work is an exegesis and exploration of Hegel's theory, Marcuse does tend to favour Marx over Hegel on the ultimate nature of the concrete foundation of truth.

[F]or Marx, as well as for Hegel, the truth lies only in the 'negative totality'.

However, the totality in which the Marxian theory moves is other than that of

² Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory", in Marcuse, *Negations*, pp.134-5. Within a few years, Benjamin had passed away and Horkheimer and Adorno had distanced themselves from the programme established in 1937. Marcuse would eventually become the most prominent member of the Frankfurt School's so-called 'inner circle' whose mature writings retained an explicit historical materialist orientation, as outlined in Horkheimer's landmark essay (this in spite of the fact that Marx's name does not actually appear in Marcuse's 'signature text', *Eros and Civilization*).

³ Marcuse, quoted in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.71.

⁴ Douglas Kellner states that following his 1933 phenomenological essay on work, Marcuse "extensively revised" his analysis of work activity, and that "[t]he relevant chapters of *Reason and Revolution* contain a major statement of his revised position". In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.91.

With respect to the concept of work and the anthropological foundations of historical materialism, Marcuse's stance in *Reason and Revolution* resembles the interpretation of Marx elaborated in Part I. In this context the most relevant section of *Reason and Revolution* can be found in "4. Marx: Alienated Labor" (pp.273-322).

the Hegelian philosophy, and this difference indicates the decisive difference between Hegel's and Marx's dialectics....Hegel's dialectical process was....a universal ontological one in which history was patterned on the metaphysical process of being. Marx, on the other hand, detached dialectic from this ontological base. In his work, the negativity of reality becomes a *historical* condition which cannot be hypostatized as a mere metaphysical state of affairs.⁵

Out of what is ultimately a highly sympathetic interpretation of Hegel, therefore, is a strong Marxian materialist dialectic that demonstrates a definitive move away from the 'ontological' orientation that had occupied Marcuse since his first reading of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927.

The in-depth analysis on Marx and work in *Reason and Revolution* is both an exegesis and an endorsement both of Marx's anthropology and of his theory of society, in which Marx's analysis of labour is described as "deep-seated, going further than the structure of economic relationships to the actual human content".⁶

Freed from the limitations of a specialized science, the economic categories are seen to be determining factors for human existence (*Daseinsformen, Existenzbestimmungen*), even if they denote objective economic facts (as in the case of commodity, value, ground rent). Far from being a mere economic activity (*Erwerbstätigkeit*), labor is the 'existential activity' of humankind, its 'free, conscious activity' not a means for maintaining its life (*Lebensmittel*) but for developing its 'universal nature.' The new categories will evaluate the economic reality with a view to what it has made of the human being, of its faculties, powers, and needs. Marx summarizes these human qualities when he speaks of the 'universal essence' of human being; his examination of the

⁵ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp.313-4. Kellner states that, as with his 1932 study of Hegel, an uncritical attitude towards Hegel persists; this time in the Hegelian manner in which he reads Marx. "Marcuse seems to believe that Hegel's logic and ontology explicate the structures of reality and contain the canons of philosophical truth", and furthermore, that it "is critical, radical, and subversive: 'negative philosophy'". For Kellner, this completely ignores the uncritical nature of Hegel's ultimate conception of 'Absolute knowledge' in the *Phänomenologie*. The result for Kellner is that "Marx himself made sharper criticisms of Hegel's philosophy than Marcuse". In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp.145-6.

⁶ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p.278.

economy is specifically carried on with the question in mind whether that economy realizes humankind's *Gattungswesen* (*universelles Wesen*).⁷

Marcuse acknowledges the direct heritage of this theory in Hegel and Feuerbach, including the claim that human nature "lies in its universality....the human being is free if 'nature is his work and his reality', so that he 'recognizes himself in a world he has made'".⁸

Marcuse considers Marx's later 'economic' writings to be a result of the limitations of philosophy itself as a form of political (i.e., human self-realising) praxis – a realisation that Marcuse understands as a direct response to Hegel's overall standpoint. For Marcuse, Marx's 'economic' turn is portrayed as occurring precisely where it is theoretically required: following Marx's philosophical 'self-clarification', he moves away from 'philosophical terminology' at a point where the "critical, transcendental character of the economic categories, hitherto expressed by philosophical concepts....in his *Capital*, is demonstrated by the economic categories themselves".⁹ The analysis is therefore solidified as a concrete empirical – rather than as a speculative and ontological – 'science' of human (social) reality.

In this analysis of Marx, Marcuse emphasises the anthropology upon which historical materialism is based. Marx speaks of work "in its true form" being the "medium for the human being's true self-fulfillment, for the full development of its potentialities; the conscious utilization of the forces of nature should take place for the human being's satisfaction and enjoyment".¹⁰ The theory as Marcuse interprets it here is therefore heavily and unashamedly anthropocentrist. Where work is experienced as 'labour' (or alienated work due to the capitalist division of labour), it is the alienation of the work activity itself that Marcuse stresses as the major "expropriation that touches the very essence" of the individual's nature; the "worker 'does not affirm but contradicts his essence'".¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.274-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.275; quotes in the text are from the *Paris Manuskripte*. Incidentally, in this section of *Reason and Revolution* (and just as we noted earlier regarding *Eros and Civilization*; see Chapter 3, p.86, n.5), Marcuse opts for the English term 'genus' when speaking of the human 'species', reflecting George Márkus' point regarding Marx's intentions in his use of the concept of *Gattungswesen*.

⁹ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, p.276.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.277.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Quote is from the *Paris Manuskripte*.

The *Paris Manuskripte* are given as the ‘first explicit statement’ of the process of reification, which Marcuse connects directly with the ‘Fetishism of Commodities’ section of *Kapital*. There Marx expands on the process in which social life in all of its inherent complexity is structured entirely according to the relationship between the value of their commodities; including the “social status of individuals, their standard of living, the satisfaction of their needs, their freedom, and their power”.¹² The overall purpose (in other words, the determination of capital itself) is to conceal the “human core and content” of the process of production and of social relations in general; to cast a veil over the workers’ direct control over the process of production, and over the inherent potentiality residing in every individual by means of its capacity to work.

Crucially, Marcuse explicitly emphasises the distinctive individualism inherent in historical materialism.

The true history of humankind will be, in the strict sense, the history of free individuals, so that the interests of the whole will be woven into the individual existence of each....It is, then, the free individuals, and not a new system of production, that exemplify the fact that the particular and the common interest have been merged. The individual is the goal. This ‘individualistic’ trend is fundamental as an interest of the Marxian theory.¹³

Marcuse’s interpretation of Marxian theory therefore seeks to positively emphasise the importance it places on individual freedom, a dimension existing in Marx’s original writings which Marcuse felt had been crucially overlooked by twentieth-century Marxists and philosophers alike. Marcuse’s dedication to the theme of individual subjectivity and human freedom would only increase as his interest in anthropology and social theory continued to develop.

* * *

¹² *Ibid.*, p.279. As with his acknowledgement here of the ‘expounded’ theory of commodity fetishism in *Kapital*, Marcuse makes a point here of stating that “Marx’s early writings are mere preliminary stages to his mature theory, stages that should not be overemphasised” (p.295). This is intriguing, given the argument of his influential interpretation of the *Paris Manuskripte* at their time of publication in 1932, as well as his heavy use of quotations from them in *Reason and Revolution* itself.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p.283.

2. Eros and Civilization (1955)

An uncharacteristically quiet period preceded the publication of what is regarded by many as Marcuse's signature work, *Eros and Civilization* (1955).¹⁴ After more than two decades living in the United States, Marcuse had witnessed firsthand what he understood to be the waning of the 'Marxian proletariat' as a viable foundation for revolt.¹⁵ He interpreted the failure of the development of a widespread revolutionary consciousness to be a result of counterrevolutionary measures, which involved the perpetuation of a mass consumerism that encouraged conformity and complacency across the developed world. The core Marxian identification of the proletariat with the revolutionary movement appeared to be in need of reconsideration. In response, Marcuse acquired the dual motivation of providing historical materialism with a means of explaining how the working majority could come to accept a society based on mass oppression, while at the same time reinvigorating a revolutionary consciousness.

In its focus on a Freudian anthropological framework based on the constitution of the human psyche,¹⁶ *Eros and Civilization* may be regarded as Marcuse's most significant departure from a philosophy of work.¹⁷ In comparison to his earlier and later writings,¹⁸ the concept of work takes a back seat to the instinctual determination

¹⁴ The only major piece of writing that Marcuse published between 1941 and 1955 (aside from many short reviews and comment pieces) was his essay "Existentialism. Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*" (1948). See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.150.

¹⁵ As Marcuse states in 1967: "All you can do [in advanced capitalist society] is to make [the worker] aware of the costs of his (poor) well-being – the perpetual toil of his own life and the misery of others....[I]n the period of advanced capitalism, the driving revolutionary force may not be generated by poverty and misery but precisely by the higher expectations within the better living conditions, and by the developed consciousness of highly qualified and educated workers: precursors of a new working class or a new part of the old working class". Marcuse, "The Problem of Violence and Radical Opposition (Questions and Answers)", in Marcuse, *The Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, Vol. 3, p.66.

¹⁶ As Kellner asserts, Marcuse "takes over Freud's theory that human nature is constituted by a conflict between the life instincts, Eros, and the destructive instincts, Thanatos" (in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.161). In contrast, C. Fred Alford argues that in "order to appreciate *Eros*, it is best to see it not as a reworking of Freud but as Marcuse's version of the dialectic of Enlightenment, adapted to an age in which the human being's final triumph over nature—the abolition of labor—seems possible" (Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature*, p.39).

¹⁷ As Peter Lind states of *Eros and Civilization*: "Instead of labour or work in a more extended sense, play and the new need for beauty constitute dominant themes of [its] vision". In Lind, *Marcuse and Freedom*, p.186.

¹⁸ Douglas Kellner describes Marcuse's Freudian critical theory as being based on an 'anthropology of liberation' (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.161). While Kellner argues that *Eros and Civilization* "establishes the foundation for much of [Marcuse's] later work", he also states: "in his later writings his Marxian theory plays a far greater role than Freudian theory" (p.189). In contrast, Morton Schoolman states: "Whereas Hegel's universal constitutes the philosophical foundation for

of Eros, or the human life instinct (*Lebenstrieb*). The tensions that remain in Marcuse's synthesis of Freudian metapsychology and historical materialism are to a great extent due to his objective to generate a link between concrete socioeconomic life and the 'instinctual roots' of human nature. While he plays down the 'biologistic' qualities of Freud's categories in favour of their 'sociohistorical content', the anthropological schema he seeks to build retains inescapable 'naturalist' qualities traceable to this source.¹⁹

In spite of a later turn away from the conception of work that appears in his Freudian analyses, Marcuse maintained his belief in a Freudian-Marxian synthesis long after completing his major analysis of Freud, and continued to refer to it in his later writings.²⁰

2.1. The Nirvana principle

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse builds on Freud's metapsychology to develop his own philosophical anthropology, the determining logic of which involves the interplay between Eros, and Thanatos (*Todestrieb*; 'death instinct'): "the human instinct of repression and self-destruction".²¹ In Marcuse view, this fundamental dynamic provides a conceptual foundation for both an ontogenetic and phylogenetic account of human development,²² which may ultimately combine with historical materialism to provide a robust critical theory of capitalism.

Presiding over the human psyche is what Freud referred to as the 'Nirvana principle' (*Nirwanaprinzip*), or the human being's fundamental instinctual dynamic. While Eros quickly asserts itself as the dominating 'life instinct' in order to ensure the flourishing of the living organism, it requires mediation in order not to end up

critical theory, Marcuse's interpretation of Freud's instinct theory and metapsychology is intended to form its anthropological basis" (Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p.89).

¹⁹ Kellner speaks of Marcuse's acceptance of "the biological and mechanistic elements of Freud's instinct theory" (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.162), while Schoolman concludes that Marcuse's "anthropological conception determines the subject and the subject's mode of being in advance and in a manner precluding the issues and problems with which a free subject would contend" (Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p.285).

²⁰ In the 1966 preface to *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse expresses a continuing endorsement of the work, though he does state that he "neglected or minimized the fact that [the] 'obsolescent' rationale [for the continued acceptance of domination in the capitalist era] had been vastly strengthened (if not replaced) by even more efficient forms of social control". In Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.11.

²¹ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p.92; Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp.35-6.

²² Hence: "The vicissitudes of the instincts are the vicissitudes of the mental apparatus in civilization". In *Eros and Civilization*, p.29.

spiralling into a trajectory of 'regression' in which Eros seeks to recover a level of gratification from previous (primordial) states of development, via the expression of unfettered sexuality. In doing so, it neglects the imperatives deriving from the hazards of objective reality which threatens immediate survival: "The uncontrolled Eros is just as fatal as his deadly counterpart, the death instinct".²³ The two core instincts thus inhibit each other in their aims and ensure that neither attains complete gratification that would spell destruction for the human organism.

Interestingly, Marcuse does not attempt to illuminate this relatively arcane dynamic by pursuing a specifically 'historical materialist' epistemological grounding for the instincts; though he does concede that the "ultimate relation between Eros and Thanatos remains obscure".²⁴

Marcuse aligns the instinctual dynamic of the Nirvana principle with Freud's earlier conceptual framework,²⁵ constituted by two other 'principles'; the primary of which is the 'pleasure principle' (*Lustprinzip*), or the drive towards the seeking out of pleasure in the concrete world. In this pursuit, the human being is confronted by a reality that proves to be one of generalised pain in the absence of mediation. In his later work Freud describes the pleasure principle as an 'expression' of the Nirvana principle, in the sense that both represent "'the effort to reduce, keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli'".²⁶ While not effectively identical, they tend to emphasise distinct aspects of the same process: the Nirvana principle emphasises the *internal* dynamic of the psyche, where the pleasure principle is oriented more at the human being's external (corporeal, etc.) existence. Thus, with respect to the integrating task of culture, Marcuse speaks of a 'regression' of the pleasure principle to the Nirvana principle as catastrophic.²⁷

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.38.

²⁵ According to Marcuse, throughout Freud's various conceptualisations there appear a constant "union of opposites", which "find their most striking expression in the two ultimate principles which govern the mental apparatus: pleasure principle and reality principle". In *op. cit.*, p.35.

²⁶ Freud, quoted in *op. cit.*, p.37.

²⁷ "The cultural task (the life task?) of the libido—namely, to make the destructive instinct harmless—[might come] to naught: [in such a case] the instinctual drive in search of ultimate and integral fulfillment regresses from the pleasure principle to the Nirvana principle. Civilization has acknowledged and sanctioned this supreme danger: it admires the convergence of death instinct and Eros in the highly sublimated and (monogamic) creations of the *Liebestod*, while outlawing the less complete but more realistic expressions of Eros as an end in itself". In *op. cit.*, p.51.

However, a close link between Eros and 'sensual gratification' leads to a conception in which the determination of human existence is constituted by an ultimate assertion of Eros over Thanatos – "the Nirvana principle not as death but as life".²⁸

As a 'logic of sensuality', Eros provides Marcuse with a contrast to the 'traditionally human' notion of 'rationality', which involves the subject's self-conscious and reasoned interaction with external reality.²⁹ In this crucial capacity, the human being is seen to fall under the determination of the pleasure principle's counterpart, the 'reality principle' (*Realitätsprinzip*). This principle reflects a rational orientation towards an external (existential) condition of natural scarcity, or *Lebensnot* – which Freud himself associated with the mythical personage of Ananke. In this analysis Marcuse defines Freud's conception of *Lebensnot* as "the struggle for existence....in a world too poor for the satisfaction of human needs without constant restraint, renunciation, delay".³⁰ Together, Ananke and Eros are presented as the basis for a philosophical anthropology,³¹ a somatic-psychic representation of the pleasure and reality principles, the latter of which are the key categories of a 'Freudian' critical social theory. In Freud the pleasure and reality principles offer a basic normative framework through which human action can be understood.

According to Freud, the repressive modification of the instincts under the reality principle is enforced and sustained by the 'eternal primordial struggle for existence,....persisting to the present day.' Scarcity (*Lebensnot*, Ananke) teaches human beings that they cannot freely gratify their instinctual impulses....Society's motive in enforcing the decisive modification of the instinctual structure is thus 'economic; since it has not means enough to

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.122.

²⁹ It is here that we see clearly the impact of Marcuse's time at the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, in the nature of his treatment of the relationship between rationality and civilization. In this context, the appeal to human sensibility (sensuality) in *Eros and Civilization* plainly serves as a response to Horkheimer and Adorno's rather grim prognosis of the relationship between rationality and civilisation in their landmark work, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947).

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.42.

³¹ The connection between individual and social aspects of anthropological life is expressed in the following: "The communal life of human beings had....a twofold foundation: the compulsion to work, which was created by external necessity, and the power of love, which made the man unwilling to be deprived of his sexual object...., and made the woman unwilling to be deprived of....her child. Eros and Ananke (Love and Necessity) have become the parents of human civilization too" (in Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p.48).

support life for its members without work on their part, it must see to it that the number of these members is restricted and their energies directed away from sexual activities on to their work'.³²

We will return (in Section 2.4) to the theoretical foundations of an anthropology based in the framework of Eros and Ananke, the adoption of which poses a challenge to Marcuse with regard to the generation of a genuinely *Marxian* critical social theory out of a Freud-Marx synthesis.

2.2. Revisiting Freud's metapsychology

Marcuse does not accept Freud's framework at face value, however. In Marcuse's reading of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930), Freud claims that a harmonisation of the psyche (i.e., the mutual gratification of Eros and Thanatos) – the central prerequisite for a felicitous existence – is ultimately incompatible with civilisation (*Kultur*) as an ongoing project through which human beings secure their concrete existence in a stable, rationally ordered, and relatively free social environment.

According to Freud, the individual's motivations under the pleasure principle give way to the ongoing practical reproduction of civilisation, involving the 'subordination of happiness' ("the methodical sacrifice of libido") to "the discipline of work as full-time occupation....of monogamic reproduction....the established system of law and order".³³ The result is that human happiness, obtained via individual gratification according to the pleasure principle, is sacrificed for the sake of rational utilitarian concerns with a view to maintaining basic social cohesion.

In response to this unavoidable mediation, Freud predicts a bleak future for human culture and civilisation: "The methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expressions, *is culture*".³⁴ In the modern era, the march of civilisation has arrived at the point where human beings "have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man".³⁵ Inevitably the

³² *Op. cit.*, p.32.

³³ Freud, quoted in *op. cit.*, p.23.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.23.

³⁵ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, p.92.

sacrifice of libido for the sake of wider social stability leads to the inevitable reassertion of the death instinct, linking civilisation itself with overt destruction.

Marcuse is critical of this conclusion, identifying in Freud's own argument "elements that break through" his troubling assessment. In "showing up the repressive content of the highest values and achievements of culture", Freud "denies the equation of reason with repression on which the ideology of culture is built".³⁶ Taking as his point of departure Freud's identification of the reality principle with an 'economic motive', Marcuse seeks a theoretical nexus between Freud and historical materialism, arguing that the externally conditioned orientation that Freud associates with the reality principle (as the response to Ananke) is in fact nothing more than a contingent historical effect of the capitalist system of production. Stated in Marxian terms, Marcuse is claiming that Freud made the mistake of perceiving the empirical conditions of modernity as a logical outcome of the structure of the 'human essence', when it is merely the concrete result of the existing system of production, and is therefore simply an aspect of contingent human existence that Marx understood as '*Menschennatur*'.³⁷

If this is the case, Marcuse contends that the principle of civilisation *per se* may be rescued from Freud's logical identification with human oppression and destruction. Since Freud himself associated the reality principle with 'economic factors', his own theory actually harbours the potential to "shatter the predominant tradition of Western thought and even suggest its reversal".³⁸ With this insight, Marcuse replaces Freud's despairing prognosis with a sense of revolutionary hope. In presenting Freud's metapsychology as the foundation for a robust critical theory that "uphold[s] the tabooed aspirations of humanity" and looks towards "a state where freedom and necessity coincide",³⁹ Marcuse believes that a positive conception of human determination (*Bestimmung*) may be derived in which the human life instinct, conceived as activity directed at the experience of pleasure, operates as a normative

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.32.

³⁷ Thus, in anthropological terms, Marcuse believes that the "reality principle sustains the organism in the external world. In the case of the human organism, this is an *historical world*" (*op. cit.*, p.41). And, as a historical world, presented concretely as a contingent historical epoch, it need not determine human existence to *essentially* be heading towards (self-)destruction.

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.32.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.33. We have already seen Marcuse make use of this dichotomy, as elaborated by Marx in *Kapital*, Vol. 3.

basis for human praxis, even in a world that confronts the human being as one of scarcity.

2.3. The performance principle

Having historicised the reality of modern social domination as a contingent manifestation of Freud's 'universal' reality principle,⁴⁰ Marcuse labels it the 'performance principle': the reality principle "of an acquisitive and antagonistic society in the process of constant expansion".⁴¹ In order to express this alteration, Marcuse provides another conceptual distinction, this time between 'authority' and 'domination'. Where authority represents a justifiable application of restrictions on instinctual impulses, i.e., the exercise of repression, for the purpose of rationally mediating the basic condition of Ananke (most importantly within the division of labour), domination consists in the exercise of authority beyond the achievement of this mediation. To express this notion, Marcuse introduces the concept of 'surplus repression',⁴² defined as "the restrictions necessitated by social domination.... distinguished from (basic) repression: the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary" for the reproduction of humankind.⁴³ Marcuse deepens this connection to historical materialism by associating it with "the fact of *alienated* labor, which is the predominant mode of work under the given reality principle".⁴⁴ Under the performance principle, the individual's "body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor", which requires "the renunciation of the libidinal subject-object which the human being primarily is and desires".⁴⁵

Marcuse's conception of the link between work and instinct involves the subject's internalisation of the imperative of the performance principle into feelings of duty and of guilt, which directs the subject's activity towards renewed efforts within

⁴⁰ Although in both *Eros and Civilization* and in his essay "Freedom and Freud's Theory of the Instincts" (1956), Marcuse does claim that Freud's theory itself "is fundamentally social and historical" as well as political, even though it "appears to be purely biological", i.e., 'abstract' rather than historical. (In *Five Lectures*, p.1).

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p.47.

⁴² Freud's conception of the *Libidoökonomie* (discussed below) forms the basis of Marcuse's notion of surplus repression, which is only nominally connected to the historical materialist notion of 'surplus value'. As Kellner states, Freud's *Libidoökonomie* can be traced back through Freud to the naturalistic 'energy-instinct model' of "nineteenth-century science" (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.162).

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p.42.

⁴⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.155.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.48.

the established system of production: “The economic and political incorporation of the individuals into the hierarchical system of labor is accompanied by an instinctual process in which the human objects of domination reproduce their own repression”.⁴⁶ This cyclical process intensifies the individual suppression of feelings of injustice and any personal pretensions towards revolt.

Marcuse’s underlying intention is to create in historical materialism the capacity to provide an explanation of the psychological effects of this process on individual and social consciousness.⁴⁷ This compensates for the fact that Marxism did not address how individuals might fail to rebel against a social reality of exploitation and domination,⁴⁸ in which “labor time, which is the largest part of the individual’s life time, is painful time, for alienated labor is absence of gratification, negation of the pleasure principle”.⁴⁹

In line with the requirements of the division of labour, human consciousness is manipulated by a performance principle that ensures that individuals submit to a life that is divided into increments of ‘work-time’ and ‘private time’. Even within the confines of one’s private time, the presiding socioeconomic framework exerts its influence in the form of regimentation, repression, and alienation. With work taking up the majority of an individual’s life, ‘leisure time’ is generally limited to activities devoted to the preservation and upkeep of vital functions and the sublimated release of instinctual energy that will enable ongoing participation within the established order. In modernity this requires the delivery of a particular standard of consumer living in order to ensure that alienating work remains tolerable for the individual worker.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.75.

⁴⁷ For Marcuse, Freudian psychoanalytic theory offers historical materialism the resources to incorporate “the conflict between the individual and its society, between the instinctual structure and the realm of consciousness” (*op. cit.*, p.172). It therefore provides insight into the practical potentialities of social-historically constituted forms of individual subjective consciousness in social contexts.

⁴⁸ In Marx’s defence, the widespread subscription to a culture of mass consumption is of course a reality that Marx himself did not live to observe. Arguably, it definitively established itself only after the close of the Second World War, long after Marcuse had resettled in the United States. Following this argument, *Eros and Civilization* is the first major work in which Marcuse himself could analyse the significance of the change.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.48.

⁵⁰ “The basic control of leisure is achieved by the length of the working day itself, by the tiresome and mechanical routine of alienated labor; these require that leisure be a passive relaxation and a re-creation of energy for work” (*op. cit.*, p.49). This conception clearly reflects Marx’s own assessment (recalling Ch. 4, p.125) of the socioeconomic role of private time as the replenishment of expended

Generally, satisfaction of the human life instincts is subjugated to the continued reproduction of capitalism. For example, in the case of the sex instinct, social taboos operate on the individual to ensure that libidinal impulses are satisfied in a manner that does not disrupt the process of capitalist accumulation.

According to Marcuse, the performance principle's imperative to repress and contain Eros nevertheless encourages a dangerous instinctual equilibrium in human beings, in which widespread destructive behaviours, drawing on Thanatos, lead to a generalised social reality consisting in a normalisation of misery.⁵¹ Routine technological destruction of nature, and of human nature through the practices of repression and of active aggression (particularly through the operations of the military-industrial complex), ensures "that cruelty and hatred and the scientific extermination of human beings have increased in relation to the real possibility of the elimination of oppression".⁵²

[T]his feature of late industrial civilization would have instinctual roots which perpetuate destructiveness beyond all rationality. The growing mastery of nature then would, with the growing productivity of labor, develop and fulfill the human needs *only as a by-product*: increasing cultural wealth and knowledge would provide the material for progressive destruction and the need for increasing instinctual repression.⁵³

2.4. 'Philosophical' foundations of Ananke and Eros

Marcuse's synthesis of Freud and Marx rests significantly on the features of the concept of Ananke or *Lebensnot*, which is associated here not only with an anthropological "struggle for existence", but also with an 'external' material condition of 'scarcity' that is mediated through the existing system of production. In other

labour-power. However, Marcuse's notion places emphasis on consumption as a sublimated release of libidinal energy as an outlet for 'instinctual' recuperation, alongside the crucial physical recuperation (rest, etc.).

⁵¹ "Civilization plunges into a destructive dialectic: the perpetual restrictions on Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and thus strengthen and release the very forces against which they were 'called up'—those of destruction". In *op. cit.*, p.47.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p.73.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*

words, Ananke is related to a notion of 'natural scarcity' that is eternal and constant for human beings.⁵⁴

As a basic anthropological condition, Ananke in this formulation is intimately bound to the general imperative of the reality principle in any historical epoch. This appears to present a shift in the concept of Ananke (as *Lebensnot*) in comparison to Marcuse's phenomenological theory of work. There, as we saw in the previous chapter, *Lebensnot* represented "an 'ontological' condition grounded in the structure of human being" as well as representing "the 'structures' of the economy as themselves already organized forms of life". In this manner, *Lebensnot* could be understood as the conceptual link between Heideggerian ontology and historical materialism, and thus served to connect an essentialist philosophy with 'concrete reality' (what Marx would call 'science').

In Marcuse's theory of Eros, however, Ananke or *Lebensnot* now seems to present as a positive *philosophical* concept that expresses an essential aspect of human nature, an essential condition of scarcity, mediated in concrete society by a historically specific reality principle (in capitalism, the performance principle) that itself determines the shape of the contingent reality of a given society.

Unlike Freud's theory, which ultimately identifies the anthropological conditions of Ananke itself as the determination of the imperative (the reality principle *per se*) towards the destruction and repression characteristic of capitalist civilisation, Marcuse's revision breaks this direct link. His own framework depends on the determination of the *performance principle* as a historically conditioned imperative originating not as a direct requirement of the anthropological condition of Ananke itself, but from a "specific *organization* of scarcity [Ananke], and of a specific existential attitude enforced by this organization".⁵⁵ As a result, the anthropological condition of Ananke itself is detached from the direct unfolding of the destructive tendencies in concrete society, and with it, human nature is saved from a fatalistic

⁵⁴ Marcuse's interpretation of Freud's notion of Ananke has met with some criticism: Christopher Lasch argues with Norman O. Brown and against Marcuse that in Freud, "the 'lack of sufficient means and resources' derives not from the social organization of production but from the very urgency of instinctual demands. 'Scarcity' is experienced first of all as a shortage of undivided mother-love" (Lasch, *The Minimal Self*, p.235). However, it could be argued that Marcuse was probably aware of this. In an anthropological context, his own interpretation of Ananke situates the subject *corporeally*, i.e., in the material environment as a totality – something that Ananke defined as a 'shortage of mother-love' could not do.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.42.

connection with the oppression and destruction of modernity. In historical terms, “the *distribution* of scarcity as well as the effort in overcoming it, the mode of work, have been *imposed* upon individuals—first by mere violence, subsequently by a more rational utilization of power”.⁵⁶

As a result, an alternative organisation of society *is* possible, which demonstrates that, while Ananke connects human nature to an essential condition of scarcity, it does not itself determine that social life will inevitably consist in domination, repression, and (eventual) destruction. The avoidance of such an outcome depends to a significant extent on the human being’s concrete capacity to organise its own work activity in an appropriate manner.⁵⁷

The result however is that Ananke is now positioned as a positive *philosophical* concept. While producing an innovative restructuring of Freud’s framework, Marcuse’s alternative positioning of Ananke generates a conflict with historical materialism in that it detaches the concept itself from Marx’s concrete ‘epistemological basis’, the system of production itself, making it a truly ‘philosophical’ anthropological notion. Hence, rather than serving to unite the human essence with a concrete and verifiably objective (human) reality, Marcuse’s formulation effectively presents Ananke as an ‘essentialist’ category, arising from nature itself (the basis of ‘human nature’) as a force external to the social system of production.⁵⁸ While in this respect Marcuse’s representation of Ananke generates a significant tension with historical materialism, it also serves the pragmatic (theoretical) function of dissociating anthropological determination from the concrete system of production and the *alienating* work situated within it. In other words, it leaves room for the

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.43.

⁵⁷ Even though he fixes the notion of Ananke at a philosophical (anthropological) level, and in doing so distances his theory from Marx’s own by detaching it from concrete socioeconomic life, Marcuse’s argument in *Eros and Civilization* retains aspects of a Marxian approach to history. He argues for instance (in *op. cit.*, p.114) that there have been two points in history where the need for surplus-repression could have been eliminated: firstly, in the “primitive beginnings of history”, consisting in the “non-oppressive distribution of scarcity” – perhaps in a ‘matriarchal phase’ of social development; and secondly, in modernity, where technology has facilitated the conquest of scarcity. Here a ‘non-teleological’ Marxian conception of history is demonstrated, in the implication that there could have been other ‘historical states of affairs’.

⁵⁸ While Kellner denies that Marcuse ‘uncritically appropriates’ Freud’s ahistorical anthropological theory and in fact “historicises Freud” (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.163), he concedes that his “attempts to undercut traditional dichotomies between....essentialism and historicism in both his earlier existentialist-Marxian anthropology and later Freudian-Marxian anthropology....are not always explicit or successful, and therefore [there] are tensions between historicist and essentialist aspects of his thought” (p.372).

instincts – for the logical of sensual gratification – to offer an alternative organisation of social existence that is consistent with human flourishing.

Marcuse's repositioning of Ananke as a philosophical notion is perhaps a sign of a conscious adoption of speculative (utopian) thought, in the interest of keeping a revolutionary orientation alive. Unlike Marx, Marcuse was faced with the reality of a civilisation whose inhabitants were, generally, no longer explicitly dissatisfied with civilisation. The gradual improvement in material conditions cultivated a sense of complacency to the extent that it was no longer possible to conceive of them as 'revolutionary workers'.

As a result, Marcuse tends to place more importance on the generation of a normative ideal that might reinvigorate a revolutionary consciousness than in maintaining the coherent epistemological foundations of historical materialism. Marcuse is therefore more comfortable than Marx in basing his anthropology on 'philosophical' arguments.⁵⁹

Marcuse's 'instinctual' concept of the pleasure principle, with its basis in the psychosomatic condition of the 'biological' subject (a Nirvana principle normatively driven by Eros), is combined with an essentialist 'somatic' conception of Ananke or 'scarcity' to build a dualistic schema of human nature situated within a reality (nature in its 'deterministic' guise) that provides something of a 'quasi-essentialist' reflection of a concrete socioeconomic existence represented (and mediated) by the pleasure and reality principles. History is in turn understood along Marxian lines as the evolution of the concrete production process (incorporating the 'specific organisation' of scarcity), and of the shifting effects of this evolution on the internal operation (rather than on the immanent and concrete constitution) of a biologically grounded human psyche under the direction of the Nirvana principle.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, in the context of Ananke, Marcuse's anthropology can be viewed as less Marxian than Freud's own, in that Freud's theory – at least according to Marcuse's reading – ultimately identifies Ananke itself as the cause of a destructive concrete civilisation and in doing so, unites the concept of Ananke with that of concrete social reality itself. In contrast, Marcuse's formulation relies on a conceptual division between Ananke, as an anthropological ('philosophical') category associated with the reality principle, and concrete 'civilisation', which in the capitalist era is under the hegemony of the performance principle. Marcuse's claim to have overcome Freud's pessimism can be traced to this conceptual distinction. But this division is also what introduces the utopian aspect of his thought that distances it from Marx's own foundational epistemology. Marcuse was ultimately comfortable with this outcome – in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) he would in fact advocate a "passing from Marx to Fourier", the French utopian socialist, by asserting the possibility of an "ingression of freedom into the realm of necessity" (Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.30).

However, since this 'essentialist' anthropology effectively serves to ground the social theory (pleasure and reality principles), history is ultimately positioned as 'embedded in (human) nature',⁶⁰ a theoretical move that dispenses with Marx's epistemological claim regarding concrete socioeconomic existence as the sole basis for a legitimate representation of objective reality.⁶¹ Instead, Marcuse provides a 'philosophical' framework that involves anthropological essentialism.

2.5. Work and play under Eros

Using this anthropology as a foundation, Marcuse discusses the real potential for generating a new reality principle that "transforms the human existence in its entirety, including the work world and the struggle with nature".⁶² He formulates an ideal not of concrete human activity *per se*, but of an orientation to activity that he equates with Schiller's aesthetically oriented play drive. In doing so, he emphasises the normativity of Eros at the expense of those of Ananke (imperative of survival, etc.). However, Marcuse does not completely neglect the concern for the satisfaction of basic (scarcity) needs, which distinguishes his ideal from that of Schiller.

Marcuse's formulation also shares with Schiller's own the overall objective of a unification of the faculties of sensibility and reason, which Marcuse expresses through the notion of a "new *rationality of gratification* in which reason and happiness converge".⁶³ Drawing on Schiller's critique of Kant, Marcuse reveals this rationality to be inherently aesthetic, arising out of the Kantian conception of the imagination as the human faculty in which morality (reason) and sensuality (sensibility – *Sinnlichkeit*), "the two poles of human existence", meet to generate an 'aesthetic dimension'.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ In what is regarded as his last major work, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1977), Marcuse states that "Eros and Thanatos cannot be dissolved into problems of class struggle. History is also grounded in nature". In Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p.16. In Chapter 7 (p.199) we will see that in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), he presents *nature* as grounded in *history*, in order to present it as a 'subject-object'.

⁶¹ Incidentally, it also runs against the epistemology outlined in the original methodological programme of the Frankfurt School provided by Horkheimer in "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie" in 1937.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, p.117.

⁶³ *Op. cit.*, p.158.

⁶⁴ Through this formulation, Marcuse also connects the Kantian concept of the imagination with the Freudian notion of phantasy, the notion of art, and of 'remembrance' (memory) as liberating subjective capacities. While "*phantasy* is 'protected from cultural alterations' and stays committed to the pleasure principle" (*op. cit.*, p.30), art culture "allied itself with the revolution", and in doing so expresses as its 'primary characteristic' the "Great Refusal....the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom" (*op. cit.*, p.113). Both phantasy and art are both represented in the anthropological concept of play. Memory serves to remind the subject of past experiences of unrepressed expression, which feeds the hope for future such experiences, and the fight to attain

The influence of the *Ästhetische Briefe* on Marcuse, and of Schiller's derivation of "the notion of a new mode of civilization" from Kant's theory, are clear.⁶⁵ His exegesis of Schiller is an attempt to "rescue the full content of Schiller's notion [of play] from the benevolent aesthetic treatment to which the traditional interpretation confined it".⁶⁶

While Marcuse's anthropological framework contains a conceptual distinction between the life instinct of Eros (pleasure principle) and the natural condition of Ananke (reality principle), the conception of human determination expressed in his normative ideal involves both sides of the conception in its dependence on the determination of Eros to mediate Ananke in the domain of work, in such a manner as to exclude the appearance of work as 'labour' (*entfremdende Arbeit*),⁶⁷ as well as any other alienating social practices leading to the repression of the life instincts. Hence: "The irreconcilable conflict is not between work (reality principle) and Eros (pleasure principle), but between *alienated* labor (performance principle) and Eros".⁶⁸

The result is that Marcuse's philosophical concept of work activity is presented in a manner that suggests an inherent connection to Eros. He calls attention to Freud's own claim that "work provides an opportunity for a 'very considerable discharge of libidinal component impulses, narcissistic, aggressive and even erotic'....Freud [therefore] links the libido not merely to the satisfaction of the great vital needs but to the joint human effort to *obtain* satisfaction, i.e., to the work process".⁶⁹ Hence, while Marcuse's theory of human determination as Eros clearly makes use of human faculties that are traditionally opposed to the notion of work, this ideal seeks out the

them. For a discussion of Marcuse's concept of remembrance, see Martin Jay, "Anamnestic Totalization. Reflections on Marcuse's Theory of Remembrance", pp.1-15.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.130.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.135. In this context (and as already noted in Ch. 1, p.33, n.29), Marcuse's bypassing of Schiller in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* to speak of the 'revolutionary' content residing directly within the Kantian critical philosophy itself is notable.

⁶⁷ Marcuse criticises Freud's prognosis regarding civilisation for making "no distinction between alienated and non-alienated labor (between labor and work)" (*op. cit.*, p.151). Terminologically this is of course making use of the distinction that Engels emphasised as a positive feature of the English language, in Engels' footnote to the fourth edition of *Kapital*, Vol. 1 (*Capital*, Vol. 1, p.138). It is also worth noting that Marcuse states: "not all work [in modernity] is unpleasurable, is renunciation.... Moreover, work in civilization is itself to a great extent *social utilization* of aggressive impulses and is thus work in the service of Eros" (in *op. cit.*, p.71). This indicates that, like Marx, Marcuse does conceive of concrete society as a complex mixture of positive and negative forces.

⁶⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.54, n.45. As Kellner states, with regard to *Eros and Civilization*, "it would be a mistake to read Marcuse as simply a hedonist espousing play and rejecting labour". In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.191.

⁶⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.151.

resolution of this dichotomy.⁷⁰ At the same time that “altered societal conditions would....create an instinctual basis for the transformation of work into play”,⁷¹ it is logically also the case that instances of play under a new reality principle would possess such a character as to dissociate it from its conception as ‘pure gratification’.

Rather than resting on a dichotomy between work and play (as in Schiller), Marcuse’s ideal of human activity as Eros may be tentatively expressed as work *or* play depending on which of ‘the two realms of....human reality’ the activity may be more appropriately associated – the realm of necessity or the realm of freedom.⁷² While this distinction is important, it is not an absolute one.⁷³ Activities undertaken specifically for the purpose of securing basic material needs are of course categorised as belonging to the realm of necessity, and therefore of work: hence, “if work were accompanied by a reactivation of pregenital polymorphous eroticism, it would tend to become gratifying in itself without losing its *work* content”.⁷⁴ Similarly, the realm of freedom involves activities undertaken for their own sake, and characterise play – even if they possess an element of ‘toil’.⁷⁵ In each case the activity’s execution serves as an instance of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) on the part of the individual or group engaged in it.⁷⁶ Hence, “it is the purpose and not the content which marks an activity as play or work”.⁷⁷

The theme of ‘necessity and freedom’ introduces the importance of the temporal dimension of the human ideal of a flourishing life. Marcuse links the Freudian account of capitalist society (i.e., as a society premised upon surplus

⁷⁰ See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.191.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p.152.

⁷² See *op. cit.*, p.158.

⁷³ “Marcuse challenges the notion, which runs through mainstream Western philosophy, that freedom and necessity are fundamentally separate. Marcuse argues instead that freedom and necessity are dialectically intertwined”. In Agger, “Work and Authority in Marcuse and Habermas”, p.195.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.152.

⁷⁵ A connection can be made here with Marcuse’s later preference of the account of activity in the *Grundrisse* as opposed to the account in *Kapital*. Where Marcuse reads Marx’s later analysis (in *Kapital*) to imply a relatively distinct separation of the realms of freedom and necessity, he approves of the earlier account in which ‘full automation’ allows for the individual worker to ‘play with technology’, indicating a convergence of the two realms (see Marcuse, “The Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom. A Reconsideration”, p.22). It is worth noting that in the *Grundrisse*, Marx also speaks of “really free working, e.g., composing”, as “precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion [*grade zugleich verdammtester Ernst, intensivste Anstrengung*]” (in Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.611; *MEW*, Vol. 42 (1983), p.512). Of course, ‘composing’ is far from being an activity of ‘necessity’, but more one of ‘play’; at the same time, it is an activity that involves ‘toil’.

⁷⁶ On the notion of objectification, “Eros strives for ‘eternalizing’ itself in a permanent *order*”, which involves activities in both realms. In *op. cit.*, p.157.

⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.152.

repression) to the Marxian condition of alienated work by connecting instinctual repression to the perpetuation of an unequal distribution not only of material wealth but also of *time*. Along with the social division of labour, this involves the partitioning of concrete life into work time and leisure time. Generally, a worker is more repressed by virtue of being more dependent upon his or her access to work time in order to survive, as a direct result of the unequal distribution of material wealth. There is also the tendency for work (or in the case of the unemployed, 'work concerns') to occupy the larger portion of a worker's time. Meanwhile, 'leisure time' is considered predominantly in relation to work time, with the result that rest and recuperation from work become its major purpose, rather than time for creativity, social interaction, and self-constitution.

Following Marx,⁷⁸ Marcuse advocates a new system of value in which social wealth is determined according to the aggregate amount of free time – i.e., the time spent in the realm of freedom – that is allocated to individuals. In Marcuse's conception, even "technological progress, the conquest of nature, the rationalization of the human being and society have not eliminated and cannot eliminate the necessity of alienated labor, the necessity of working mechanically, unpleasurably, in a manner that does not represent individual self-realisation".⁷⁹ As a result, a certain proportion of human life must always be allocated to the realm of necessity, in activity that tends to possess a utilitarian objective, and as such is not intrinsically valuable, i.e., not undertaken for its own sake. There is a dual priority here that combines the minimisation of alienating work with the overall minimisation of human involvement in the realm of necessity at all.

For Marcuse, a rationality of gratification approaches this dual motive in two key ways. Firstly, it involves the application of technology and automation, so that purely utilitarian objectives may be achieved without individual workers becoming consumed by the tasks; to the extent that "total automation would be the optimum [since] the more complete the alienation of labor, the greater the potential of freedom".⁸⁰ The

⁷⁸ On Marx's conception of value expressed in terms of free time, see Edward Granter, *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*, pp.64-6.

⁷⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.158.

⁸⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.117. This statement opens up an important and far-reaching issue in Marcuse's philosophy – whether work itself plays an intrinsic role in the experience of human flourishing in an anthropology based on Eros. The 'total automation' comment can be read as a statement in favour of the complete eradication of work activity from human life, if it were possible. I believe however that this would be an

realm of necessity is, in other words, reduced – at least in terms of human participation in it – via its conversion into a realm of automation. Secondly, the rationality of gratification is directed at maximising the pleasurable aspects of the work that cannot be eliminated by automation. This involves a rational consideration of the nature of the needs pursued, and their coordination (as far as possible) with a pleasurable execution of the processes required to realise them.

Marcuse does also hint at the possibility of the transformation of the realm of necessity itself, in the direction of the realm of freedom. This involves the ‘re-emergence’ of the “roots of aesthetic experience....in the struggle for existence itself”, as the realm of necessity “assumes a new rationality” that is unconnected to that of the performance principle.⁸¹

With the realm of necessity reorganised according to a libidinal rationality, Marcuse envisages greater general access to an expanded realm of freedom across society. In the face of this libidinal rationality, the culture of repression fixated on the perpetual goal of ‘productivity’ will be replaced by a social reality geared towards an engagement in phantasy, creativity, and art.

While Marcuse’s Freudian anthropology positions work as compatible with a rationality of gratification and offers the possibility of Eros’s extension “to lasting libidinal work relations”,⁸² work activity itself does not form the ultimate basis for Marcuse’s conception of human determination in *Eros and Civilization*. We will now look briefly at some of the theoretical outcomes of Marcuse’s formulation.

2.6. Anthropological outcomes

Unfortunately, Marcuse’s Freudian anthropology fails to provide a framework that allows for the inherent unity of the human being to be clearly displayed within an

oversimplification of Marcuse’s position. Marcuse understands the intrinsic role that human corporeality itself plays in the realisation of human freedom – a corporeality that not only provides the potential for sensuously realised freedom, but also the corresponding need for practical mediation of nature in concert with this practical endeavour. As a dialectician, Marcuse would have understood that human beings cannot have the one without the other.

⁸¹ *Op. cit.*, p.158. Kellner goes so far as to state that Marcuse “suggests that in a non-repressive civilization, the sharp dichotomy between work and play would be overcome and all activity would be geared towards fulfilling needs and developing potentialities. Liberated labour would in a sense ‘play’ with technology, tools, ideas and aesthetic forms, realizing new possibilities of human creativity and interaction, allowing freedom and gratification to enter the work world” (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.191). This being the case, the distinction between the realms of necessity and freedom would also be overcome.

⁸² *Op. cit.*, p.153.

(ultimately) historical materialist paradigm. As it stands, a Cartesian-style dualism persists at the anthropological (and at the social-theoretical) levels in the distinction between Eros (the pleasure principle) and Ananke (the reality principle). In large measure, this dualism can be traced to Marcuse's marriage between, on the one hand, Freud's 'biologistic' conception of the instinctual impulses and of the philosophically grounded Ananke; and on the other, Marx's historical materialist conception of production, directed anthropologically at the concrete objectification of human subjectivity in the creation of new needs and capacities out of the transformation of the material world.

From the point of view of historical materialism, what is ultimately omitted by Marcuse is a systematic account of the manner in which concrete human activity and the instincts themselves might be understood to relate in a manner that reflects a *unified* human subject. Only by presenting how 'human nature' and social action may be conceptually united in the concept of (individual) human subjectivity could the theory reflect (according to the epistemological demands of historical materialism) the concrete reality of a complete and unified human being whose two basic aspects – an internally focused (psychic) instinct and an externally directed (somatic) action – may be understood to interrelate in a dynamic, dialectical and historically evolving form of existence. This is a momentous task, particularly when the Freudian anthropology already possesses naturalistic foundations, while human activity is presented as unfolding in relation to a historically specific system of production. The two paradigms therefore represent incommensurable epistemological approaches.

Marcuse does in fact attempt to provide a conceptual connection between the psycho-somatic subject and concrete activity in the adoption of Freud's 'economy of the instincts' (*Libidoökonomie*), in which the psyche issues distinct 'quanta' of instinctual energy, upon which the struggle between Eros and Thanatos is maintained. Here, "destructive energy cannot become stronger without reducing erotic energy: the balance between the two primary impulses is a quantitative one; the instinctual dynamic is mechanistic, distributing an available quantum of energy between the two antagonists".⁸³ Marcuse implies the conversion of an aggregate of this instinctual

⁸³ Marcuse, "Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society", in *Negations*, pp.257-8. Kellner reminds us that Marcuse "stuck to this model of Freud's instinct theory to the end of his life" (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.427, n20).

energy into concrete activity, as in the description of such energy being “channelled into toil (alienated work)”.⁸⁴ In this way, he presents the realms of instinct and concrete social activity as aspects of a common objective reality involving the production and release of ‘psychic energy’ in measures of quanta.

Unfortunately, the mechanistic (i.e., ‘abstract’) nature of the concept of instinctual energy means that Marcuse is ultimately unable to link the realm of instincts with normative action in a manner that presents the human being in the ‘unified’ dialectical manner. According to historical materialism, normatively guided human activity (situated in relation to the system of production) must be understood to influence the fundamental process of human (self-)constitution – i.e., the generation of new needs – in order for the theory to represent a complete and unified human being within a single epistemological framework. By its nature as an ultimately ‘speculative’ concept, the notion of ‘instinctual quanta’ is incapable of being represented in social reality as a historically specific action, or collection of concrete needs. The instincts are therefore unable to inform the representation of a historical process in which actual normatively guided human action plays out as the creation and satisfaction of such needs. Hence, the conversion of instinctual quanta into specific quanta of activity is ultimately a cosmetic solution that does not withstand theoretical scrutiny.

At any rate, Marcuse consciously adopts a ‘utopian’ or ‘speculative’ orientation that could be given as an apologia for this foundational issue – theoretical rigour being ostensibly sacrificed for the sake of a theory aimed *practically* at reinstating a sense of hope in qualitative cultural and socioeconomic change, at a time where despair itself had become a major obstacle within theory. While the spirit of such a project is undoubtedly consistent with Marx’s idea of the practical role of theory, Marcuse’s anthropological synthesis of Freud and Marx draws on philosophical justification from two distinct epistemological frameworks, and in doing so fails to overcome the persistent anthropological duality. It therefore cannot present the working and playing, somatic-psychic human being in a comprehensively unified and undifferentiated manner.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.76.

⁸⁵ For his part, Kellner argues that the categories employed in *Eros and Civilization* “displace Marxian class struggle with the struggle between Eros and Thanatos”, and that Marcuse “has developed....a

Nevertheless, the ideas developed in *Eros and Civilization* would influence Marcuse's later philosophy in which work is reinstated as a central category. One of the most important concepts appearing in his subsequent work is the notion of a 'new sensibility', which is a development of his notion of 'libidinal rationality'. It is to these late writings that we will now turn.

Chapter 7.

Technology, nature, and the 'new sensibility'

Marcuse's late theoretical writings would retain the notion of the instincts as an aspect of human nature, while placing a renewed focus on human activity with particular emphasis on the role of technology in socioeconomic life. He would also continue to consider the relationship between individual human beings and nature.¹ Hence, in contrast to the instinct related analysis of *Eros and Civilization*, we see something of a return to the central problem of work in human life and society.²

Marcuse would continue to develop the utopian element in his thought (which he variously labels 'utopianism', 'speculation', and 'romanticism') by connecting his vision of socialism with the potentials residing not only within human consciousness and sensuality, but also within the concrete system of production; specifically with respect to the growth of technology and automation in the capitalist era. Regarding Marx's work, his mature writings would draw heavily on the early *Paris Manuskripte* (and certain 'philosophical' passages from the *Grundrisse*) in favour of the more empirically oriented *Kapital*.

¹ Though they do not directly concern the philosophy of human nature and work, brief reference should be made to two of Marcuse's most notable works: his detailed critique of really existing socialism in *Soviet Marxism* (1958) (for discussion, see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, pp.197-9), and also the highly influential *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), which involves a major analysis of 'advanced industrial society'. Barry Kätz considers *One-Dimensional Man* to contribute "almost nothing to the theoretical framework [Marcuse] had already constructed", although it "resonated perfectly" with earlier writings. In contrast, Peter Lind argues that *One-Dimensional Man* is "most certainly Marcuse's worst book", being "furthest away from his basic Marxist orientation" (Lind, *Marcuse and Freedom*, pp.5-6). In Lind's view, it also features sociological material that is "of a very unequal quality" (p.7). Lind's rather extreme view of this text appears to concern Marcuse's own critical attitude to theoretical Marxism in it, which Lind regards as a major inconsistency. But, as Kellner argues, in the work "Marcuse challenges some of the basic postulates of Marx's theory, while using Marxian categories and method of analysis and critique" (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.229). Most relevant in our context is Lind's observation that "[i]n *One Dimensional Man* there is virtually no references to labour" (Lind, p.186).

² As Kellner argues, in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* "the concept of labour is vigorously reasserted as the core of critical theory". In Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.91.

While Marcuse's writings can be seen to shift with regard to specific issues or perspectives,³ his work continually involves the possibility of overcoming the classical Marxian distinction between the realms of necessity and freedom – which, as we have seen, also has its correlate in Schiller's philosophy. Building on the arguments developed in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse embraces more emphatically the idea of a collapse of the dichotomy between necessity and freedom; 'work' and 'play'.⁴ Contrary to his view in 1933, in his late work he contrasts his own thesis with what he reads as Marx's assertion (in *Kapital*, Vol. 3) of a fundamental distinction between necessity and freedom, which "epitomizes the division of the human existence into work time and free time, the division between reason, rationality on the one hand, and pleasure, joy, fulfillment on the other hand, the division between alienated and non-alienated labor".⁵ Against this view, Marcuse continually refers to the possibility that human beings may be able to attain a new form of consciousness, such that their activity may transcend these 'concrete' dichotomies that characterise modern socio-economic life.

³ Numerous scholars have pointed out inconsistencies across Marcuse's writings, including among those of his 'late period'. Worth mentioning is a seeming discrepancy between *An Essay on Liberation* (p.38), in which Marcuse appears to celebrate the idea of reality 'appearing as' a union of human desire and natural determinism; and *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (p.108), where he considers an elimination of the distinction between art and reality to represent "the impossible final unity of subject and object", which is, in philosophical terms, "the materialist equivalent of absolute idealism". Regardless of such seeming inconsistencies, Marcuse's overall project continues to pursue a normative account of the sensible (materialist) and conscious (rational) human being, in which the subjective and objective aspects of human liberating activity are united in a praxis which takes on various concrete and 'sensually oriented' forms.

⁴ This is supported by Kellner (see *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.324). C. Fred Alford points out that Marcuse never systematically pursues the possibility of a collapse of the distinction between the realms of freedom and necessity (Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature*, pp.32-3), and merely expresses the postulation merely "as a profession of faith or hope" in the essay "The End of Utopia" (1967), and in "Protosocialism and Late Capitalism", written shortly before his death. While in the latter work, Alford reminds us, Marcuse speaks in terms of the "emergence of the realm of freedom *within* the realm of necessity", it is Alford's assessment that Marcuse ultimately considers "labor and freedom" to be incompatible (p.42).

In response to Alford, it may be said that Marcuse refers to this possibility in other writings as well, including in "The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity. A Reconsideration" (1969; p.22), and in *An Essay on Liberation*, in which he discusses the extension of Kant's theory of the imagination to reality such that "could (in a literal sense!) embody, incorporate, the human faculties and desires to such an extent that they appear as part of the objective determinism of nature—coincidence of causality through nature and causality through freedom" (Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.38). It is also worth pointing out that Marcuse's entire project culminates in an emphatic embracing of utopian thinking, which prioritises the function of 'imagination' and 'hope' as pointing towards the 'essence' or 'potential' inherent in things.

⁵ Marcuse, "The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity. A Reconsideration", p.22.

In this chapter we will discuss aspects of Marcuse's late writings, which indicate changes in his anthropological theory and in his views on work and human determination. We will begin with a look at his theory of technology and its relationship to the ever present concept of *Lebensnot* (Section 1), followed by an analysis of the concept of 'toil' in relation to work and creative activity (Section 2).

In the important 1972 essay, titled "Nature and Revolution" (Section 3), we find an attempt to delineate the relationship between nature and (human) history, with the presentation of nature as a historically determined phenomenon with the normative status of 'subject-object'. As a result human agency and determination is seen as inherently bound to nature, to the extent that a radically new normative attitude arises regarding the metabolism between human beings and nature itself. As a key aspect of the 'new sensibility', this new orientation to objective life incorporates a radical critique of the dominating rationality of modernity, and provides normative guidance to a new revolutionary movement.

We will conclude (in Section 4) with an overview of Marcuse's ideal of a technological utopia. As we will see, tensions remain within his anthropological theory. But overall, we will find once again that Marcuse is less concerned with matters of foundational (*purely* rational) consistency than with the important task of promoting the virtues of a normative orientation towards human activity based in corporeally situated, sensual gratification. In his view, society possesses the technological means to overcome the demands of nature, and is thus capable of pursuing a union between the realms of necessity and freedom in a manner that eradicates society's perpetuation of unnecessary repression and alienation.

1. Technology and Lebensnot

The theme of technology and automation can be seen in Marcuse's writings as early as 1938, where in the essay "Zur Kritik des Hedonismus" he stated that: "Modern technology contains all the means necessary to extract from things and bodies their mobility, beauty, and softness in order to bring them closer and make them available....The organization of technology, science, and art changes with their changed utilization and changed content".⁶ Three years later he would publish his first

⁶ Marcuse, "On Hedonism", in *Negations*, pp.184, 198.

essay on the destructive effects of modern technological rationality, in “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” (1941).

As we have seen, the theme of technology reappears as a central idea in *Eros and Civilization*, where ‘total automation’ is recommended as a means of extricating individuals from alienating work and roles of subordination, while also reducing the total amount of time spent by individuals in ‘necessary work’. This notion would continue with the pronouncement in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) that the revolution may use “the achievements of technological civilization for freeing humankind and nature from the destructive abuse of science and technology in the service of exploitation”.⁷

Marcuse iterates in his late writings that in late capitalism, human society has reached a stage of technological development such that it is (or will be) no longer necessary for individuals to engage in work where the purpose is solely to mitigate conditions of ‘natural scarcity’: “Utopian possibilities are inherent in the technical and technological forces of advanced capitalism and socialism: the rational utilization of these forces on a global scale would terminate poverty and scarcity within a very foreseeable future”.⁸ This argument is employed as a means of justifying the cultivation of a ‘new sensibility’ in which human beings reorient their general perspective on social reality (and hence, on *reality*) away from an ethos of productivity driven by a purely technological rationality, and towards one premised upon sensually based needs as the underlying imperative for action. Technology therefore is presented as the means for securing the material basis for individual freedom and widespread flourishing.

With machines capable of providing the most basic biologically determined needs, modern human beings are in the position of being able to focus on the reorganisation of society according to the idea of merging the harsh division between mere utility and intrinsic pleasure. In other words, while machines ‘do the work’, human beings will be able to direct their sensuously grounded capacities towards a merging of the realms of necessity and freedom, to the point where activity will no longer be conceivable within the parameters of such a paradigm.

⁷ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.60.

⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.13. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Marcuse stresses the fact that in “the most advanced stage of capitalism....work for the necessities is technically reducible to a minimum” (Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.18).

There is a major anthropological implication in Marcuse's notion that, through the implementation of the technological rationality unleashed by capitalism, human beings may already have attained a state of existence such that the natural constraints to which they have been subject since anthropogenesis – on the basis of their biological corporeality – have effectively been overcome. It means that the condition of scarcity (*Lebensnot*, Ananke), which (we will recall) Marcuse had incorporated as an (abstract) philosophical category in *Eros and Civilization*, has been mitigated via historical forces. In this 'resolution', *Lebensnot* now appears not as an abstract essentialist anthropological category, but merely as a historically contingent one that is capable of being overcome. While capitalist society has subjugated individuals and imposed a repressive form of life and activity upon them, it has (somewhat paradoxically)⁹ delivered a means through which socialist society may be realised: "The rationality of the repression organized in the capitalist mode of production was obvious: it served the conquest of scarcity and the mastery of nature; it became a driving force of technical progress, a productive force".¹⁰

Nevertheless, this conception generates interesting tensions. To recap, Marcuse considered *Lebensnot* in 1933 as an 'ontological' condition of human nature, appearing most overtly as a fundamental 'lack', but also serving as the basis of a Marxian 'need' and therefore also of an innate human potentiality residing within concrete existence. In *Eros and Civilization*, we saw *Lebensnot* portrayed via the notion of Ananke, which serves as an abstract philosophical grounding for the historically specific reality principle, and so informs the current social organisation of production.¹¹

⁹ Again we see the appearance of the Marxian dialectic of history in Marcuse's argument. Like Marx, Marcuse acknowledges the historical process as one involving the unfolding not only of domination and repression, but simultaneously potential and realisation.

¹⁰ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.22. Marcuse's words here in fact reflect Marx's statement in the *Grundrisse*: "Capital's ceaseless striving....drives labour beyond the limits of natural paltriness (*Naturbedürftigkeit*), and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity [*Naturnotwendigkeit*] in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken place of a natural one [*weil an die Stelle des Naturbedürfnisses ein geschichtlich erzeugtes getreten ist*]. This is why capital is productive; i.e., an essential relation [*wesentliche Verhältnis*] for the development of the social productive forces". In Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.325; MEW, Vol. 42 (1983), p.244.

¹¹ Or, as stated in *Eros and Civilization*, the converse: the performance principle is the 'specific [social] organization of scarcity'. See *Eros and Civilization*, p.42.

In his late writings, Marcuse's even more positive assertion of the transformative potential of automation appears to indicate a marginalisation of the role of *Lebensnot* in his anthropological conception. His claim now that human beings possess the historically developed (and situated) capacity to overcome scarcity seems to represent a demotion of the concept of material dependence from Marcuse's 'essentialist' conception of human nature, to a mere historical condition that technology can eradicate.

A new problem arises here: the notion that technology possesses the capacity to uncouple human existence from the basic imperatives of natural scarcity may be understood to conflict with the notion of the human being as an innately corporeal and therefore *sensuous* being – if the intention is to argue that technology itself possesses the capacity to render natural scarcity irrelevant as an essential anthropological category. The problem revolves around the fact that it is on account of its corporeality that the human being possesses a susceptibility to the restrictions of natural scarcity *as well as* the positive capacity for sensual gratification. Elimination of the restrictions of scarcity would require a conceptual displacement of the intrinsic involvement of human corporeality itself in the unfolding of human existence, which would also prevent the normative prioritisation of a fundamental human sensuality. No conception of technology can serve to represent the corporeal 'situatedness' of the human being as an innately *sensual* being.

2. The notion of 'toil'

Marcuse never engages in a detailed analysis of this apparent dilemma; on the issue he tends to rely somewhat pragmatically on the correlation between the really existing potential of 'post-scarcity' technology and the utopian ideal of an eradication of alienating work as the means of attaining individual freedom. In spite of this appeal to utopian thought, to which Marx was opposed,¹² Marcuse's position here embraces something of the spirit of Marx in its own 'revolutionary pragmatism'; in the sacrifice of philosophical coherence, Marcuse is placing the practically oriented 'sensual needs' of individuals ahead of rationalistic rigour.

¹² As in his criticism of Fourier (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.611) – a utopian socialist, whom Marcuse would later speak of embracing in favour of Marx (see Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.30). More will be said about this below.

In his utopian conception, Marcuse continually returns to the notion that with technological automation achieved and socioeconomically implemented, human beings will possess (a maximum amount of) free time to develop a culture in which traditional work roles may incorporate an intrinsic sensual element that transforms the activity beyond recognition as 'work' – even to the extent that the realms of freedom and necessity will be united.¹³ If work is not eradicated altogether, the possibility exists at the very least that "certain lost qualities of artisan work may well reappear on the new technological base",¹⁴ providing a crucial element of creativity and personal investment in the performance of social labour.

As we have seen, in his early phenomenological conception Marcuse engages in what Douglas Kellner refers to as 'ontological generalisation' – equating 'concrete reality' of (capitalist) work with work's own philosophical essence. At times, Marcuse gives the impression that he makes a similar error in equating the philosophical concept of work activity itself with the concept of 'effort' or 'toil' as it appears within the capitalist division of labour. This impression is clearly a result of the centrality of 'pleasure' (rather than work) as Marcuse's central normative concept; the logical opposite of 'pain' and 'toil'.

Marcuse does sometimes appear to equate 'capitalist' alienating work (as 'servitude') with the notion of basic (psychosomatic) hardship, or 'toil', as the opposite of happiness and enjoyment; for example: "The capitalist production relations are responsible not only for the servitude and toil but also for the greater happiness and fun available to the majority of the population — and they deliver more goods than before".¹⁵ Generally, it is apparent in Marcuse's writings that that he considers human reality to remain inherently bound to 'work' as an existential condition; that it is 'alienated work' that he seeks to eradicate.¹⁶ However, his ideal of

¹³ This notion is proposed explicitly as late as 1969, in *An Essay on Liberation* (see p.29) and in the short address "The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity. A Reconsideration", p.22.

¹⁴ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.60.

¹⁵ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.22.

¹⁶ Marcuse's embracing of Fourier encourages the (relatively common) conception that Marcuse entertained Fourier's notion that a socialist society will lead to a transformation of reality, to the extent that nature itself will undergo a metamorphosis that will make work activity itself obsolete. As Marcuse states, "[t]he transformation of labor into pleasure is the central idea in Fourier's giant socialist utopia" (*Eros and Civilization*, p.153); while in *An Essay on Liberation*, he suggests that in embracing utopian thought, socialism means "passing from Marx to Fourier" (p.30). Fourier himself is infamous for going into intricate details about how the realisation of socialist society would generate environmental changes such that the seas will not only be drinkable, but will possess "a flavour of the kind of

a society geared towards 'sensual activity' (as opposed to a 'work oriented' or a 'craftsman' or 'artisan' ideal, which Marx generally gravitated towards) appears to occasionally blind him – particularly after his embracing of Freudian thought – with regard to the distinction between alienating work (i.e., 'labour') and basic 'toil'.

As Marx demonstrates in response to Adam Smith in the *Grundrisse*, there is a clear element of basic 'hardship' – and indeed, of (unalienated) work – in the notion of 'creative' pursuits, such as composing music. This however does not detract from their proper identification with the notion of a 'free play' of human capacities, and therefore as a qualitatively different form of activity than social labour, which is geared at the creation of use values. Marcuse is clearly aware of the idea that artistic and other creative pursuits possess an element of effort and toil, of a kind that has traditionally been associated with work activity. However, he (somewhat understandably) focuses more on the notion that 'work' can be made 'playful' than on the 'toil' that is already contained in authentically 'free' activity.

This tendency can be seen in his critique of science, in which it is the strict adherence to a pure technological rationality that has led scientific research and application to be in the service of capitalist domination and destruction.¹⁷ By drawing on and enhancing the creative and playful aspects of science, Marcuse believes human beings may (re)discover life-enhancing features of nature that modern rational thought has obscured from view. In his earlier writings, Marcuse elaborated on the capacity for 'remembrance' as an instinctually based source of human potentiality (i.e., sensible, but related to the imagination) in its ability to present past experiences of pleasure as a measure of contrast with the existing reality.¹⁸ In his later writings he makes a connection between 'recollection' and science to demonstrate both the liberating potential both within science, and by extension, within nature itself.

lemonade known as *aigresel*" (Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements*, p.50n). Marcuse's clear and ongoing commitment to historical materialism, however, protects him from such beliefs. His notion of a 'new sensibility' itself indicates a historical materialist conception of the dialectical relationship between human society (subjective and cultural consciousness) and nature that precludes this form of speculation.

¹⁷ Hence, under the new sensibility, it is possible that "the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated" (Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.32). For a discussion of Marcuse's critique of science, see Alford, *Science and the Revenge of Nature*, pp.49-57.

¹⁸ See Martin Jay, "Anamnestic Totalization: Reflections on Marcuse's Theory of Remembrance", pp. 1-15.

‘[T]ruth’ is attributable to nature not only in a mathematical but also in an existential sense. The emancipation of humankind involves the recognition of such truth in things, in nature. The Marxian vision recaptures the ancient theory of knowledge as *recollection*: ‘science’ as the *rediscovery* of the true *Forms* of things, distorted and denied in the established reality, the perpetual *materialistic core of idealism*.¹⁹

Of course, this ‘new science’ is drastically different from the traditional discipline, which in the capitalist era bears for Marcuse an almost irredeemable connection with technological rationality and the creation of technologies that are inherently connected to the exploitation of nature and the perpetuation of needless human toil.

Rather than denying the crucial existence of effort and hardship within activities that we ultimately categorise as ‘pleasurable’, Marcuse’s focus on the idea of a transformation of work into play may be conceived as a direct challenge to the prevailing repressive ethos of ‘productivity’. Here he concentrates on the idea that motivates the most pressing and confrontational critique with respect to modern life: that the prevalence of hardship and pain in our work activity is in fact unnecessary.

This focus on the theme of ‘pleasurable work’ rather than ‘toilsome play’ may also be seen as a tacit acknowledgement that human activity will in fact always involve a concern with problems related to ‘scarcity’, not so much in the sense of a fulfilment of basic (natural) material needs (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), but in the deeper sense of a basic ‘lack’ resembling Marcuse’s earliest conception of *Lebensnot*, i.e., an anthropological vulnerability to misfortunes resembling what in today’s work environment are labelled ‘contingencies’, or unforeseen occurrences that disrupt human life and planning.

The common coexistence of ‘creativity’, ‘toil’, ‘pleasure’, and ‘utility’ within so many particular concrete human tasks can be provided as evidence in favour of Marcuse’s overall promotion of an eradication of the distinction between work and play. Support for this reading can be found in *An Essay on Liberation*, where he equates ‘labour’ with toil, while also postulating “the union between causality by

¹⁹ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, pp.69-70.

necessity and causality by freedom”,²⁰ which, from the individual subject’s perspective, represents the union of work and play.

Ultimately, Marcuse’s positioning of ‘toil’ does contribute to the marginalisation of brute struggle and effort as inherently valuable to human beings, as an incentive for the attainment of (physical and mental) strength and endurance in the face of objective hardship. This may have led him to the conclusion of his final major work, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1977). There Marcuse appears to deny a philosophical relationship between the two forms of ‘productive activity’; at least in the sense of ‘labour’ and ‘art’: “Art is a productive force qualitatively different from labor; its essentially subjective qualities assert themselves against the hard objectivity of the class struggle”.²¹ One may read this conclusion as a final assertion that the notion of ‘toil’ is incompatible with intrinsically liberating activity.

3. ‘Nature and Revolution’

Possibly the most important essay in Marcuse’s later writings regarding work, anthropology, and human determination is “Nature and Revolution”, the central (though the shortest) essay in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972). While it refers little to the concept of work itself, in it Marcuse deals with the relationship between nature society, and subjectivity – a theme that draws heavily on Marx’s conception of work as the connection between the human being and its ‘inorganic nature’. The essay therefore demonstrates a return to a more robust Hegelian-Marxist foundation. Marcuse describes his focus here as the “relation between humankind and nature—its

²⁰ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.30.

²¹ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p.37. In this final work Marcuse goes so far as to express art as a solace even to the unavoidable eternity of death, which is itself described as a “negation inherent in society, in history” (p.68). There is some justification to the claim that *The Aesthetic Dimension* comprises a final, major departure from Marcuse’s earlier work, in its assertion of an innate dichotomy between the realm of freedom, as represented in the aesthetic realm, and the realm of necessity: a world that “was not made for the sake of human being and....has not become more human” (p.69). Therefore in this final statement it may even be possible to conclude that Marcuse identifies *Lebensnot* once again as a fundamental condition of human being, incorporating not only a natural scarcity of resources for the satisfaction of needs, but also the ultimate victory of mortality over the determination of human freedom.

Also interesting to note, however, are the aspects of this final account of art that appear in the concluding essay of *Counterrevolution and Revolt* entitled “Art and Revolution”; for instance the idea of a necessary “distance between art and practice” (Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.111).

own, and external nature”;²² a connection that Marcuse admits “is rarely made explicit in social theory”.²³

In “Nature and Revolution”, Marcuse treats nature explicitly as a historically grounded notion, while retaining some of his ‘essentialist’ concepts (such as referring to human nature in terms of ‘drives’). Gone however is his former emphasis on history being embedded in nature, in favour of the converse notion.

[N]ature is a historical entity: human beings encounter nature as transformed by society, subjected to a specific rationality which became, to an ever-increasing extent, technological, instrumentalist rationality, bent to the requirements of capitalism. And this rationality was also brought to bear on humankind’s own nature, on its primary drives.²⁴

3.1. Return to the *Paris Manuskripte*

The strong Marxian nature of the argument can also be seen in Marcuse’s positioning of Kant’s idea of the pure concepts of the intuition, time and space, as only one aspect of the ordering of human sensibility. Emphasis is placed on “other syntheses, far more concrete, far more ‘material,’ which may constitute an empirical (i.e., historical) a priori of experience”.²⁵ These he identifies as the five corporeal human senses, which Marx specifically spoke of in the *Paris Manuskripte*; there he spoke of the “‘complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities’ as the feature of socialism: only this emancipation is the ‘transcendence of private property’”.²⁶

In a manner evoking his earliest Marxian writings, and those of other classical Hegelian Marxists, Marcuse therefore perceives the connection between human beings and nature as so close that “the radical transformation of nature becomes an integral part of the radical transformation of society”.²⁷ While evoking the Marxian ‘metabolism between society and nature’, Marcuse situates this relationship with respect to his notion of a new sensibility: “the medium in which social change

²² Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.59.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.61.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp.59-60. We can see that Marcuse appears to concur here with Lukács’ reading of Marx’s relationship between nature and history, according to the reading of Marx and Lukács conducted by Alfred Schmidt (recall Ch. 2, p.64, n.20).

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.63.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.64.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.59.

becomes an individual need, the mediation between the political practice of ‘changing the world’ and the drive for personal liberation”.²⁸

Marcuse’s ultimate intention in the essay is to elaborate on the inherent ‘philosophical’ core of Marxian thought which, in his view, highlights the connection between the inherent forces of nature and revolutionary struggle; what he calls “the liberating forces of nature”.²⁹ In this context, Marcuse presents the concept of ‘total revolution’ as directed not only at the overcoming of capitalism, but also in moving “toward an ever more peaceful, joyful struggle with the inexorable resistance of society and nature”.³⁰ In this statement we can see Marcuse’s own acknowledgement of the ‘struggle’ inherent in a life categorised as ‘peaceful’ and ‘joyful’.

Overall, a hidden treatment of the Cartesian dichotomy can be seen in the classical Marxian distinction between history and nature, dealt with here by Marcuse in the concept of nature as signifying both ‘human nature and external nature’, which is in turn embedded in history. The theoretical struggle towards the resolution of the Cartesian dualism – the harsh division residing in modern consciousness in the separation of thought itself (rationality) and the objective body (reality) – may be understood as reflected in the revolutionary struggle itself, which seeks to undo the concrete rupture produced in modern civilisation between human beings (society) and the natural world. The objectives of both struggles are represented in Marcuse’s concept of the new sensibility, which contains the prospect of a new consciousness (theory) and a new society (praxis).³¹

²⁸ *Op. cit.*

²⁹ *Op. cit.*

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.71. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, the power of art may also be applied in the struggle as a general ‘negative’ force against the dominating power not merely of the capitalist system of production, but of the propaganda prevailing throughout modern civilisation: “At precisely this [historical] stage, the radical effort to sustain and intensify the ‘power of the negative,’ the subversive potential of art, must sustain and intensify the alienating power of art: the aesthetic form, in which alone the radical force of art becomes communicable” (p.110). We can see that there are forms of thought emerging directly from human civilisation and history, such as the ‘aesthetic form’, which escape the focus of radical revolt and may in fact be employed in the revolutionary struggle. While art and revolution possess their own objectives, they “are united in ‘changing the world’—liberation” (p.105).

³¹ In “Nature and Revolution”, Marcuse continuously returns to German idealism and Marx’s connection to it: “Imagination, as *knowledge*, retains the insoluble tension between idea and reality, the potential and the actual. This is the *idealistic core* of dialectical materialism: the transcendence of freedom beyond the given forms. In this sense too, Marxian theory is the historical heir of German Idealism” (*op. cit.*, p.70). Marcuse even states of Kant’s aesthetic concepts that they “have not yet been explored in their truly revolutionary significance” (pp.66-7).

3.2. Nature as 'subject-object'

In seeking a theoretical resolution to the division between human beings and nature, Marcuse makes a signature radical gesture in “recognizing nature as a *subject* in its own right—a subject with which to live in a common human universe”.³² This notion is directed at the exploitation of nature via the specific destructive configuration of the capitalist system of production as the means through which human beings remain subjugated as objects of domination. The realisation of the new sensibility “is the discovery (or rather, *rediscovery*) of nature as an ally in the struggle against the exploitative societies in which the violation of nature aggravates the violation of humankind”.³³ In the exploitation of nature – the senseless overuse of resources, widespread pollution, and threat of ecological collapse – Marcuse thus sees an inherent connection with the repression of human nature, in a manner that requires a radically new orientation and relationship with the natural world as the focus of “erotic cathexis” that cannot be developed under modern conditions: “This deprivation is not undone by the opening of nature to massive fun and togetherness, spontaneous as well as organized—a release of frustration which only adds to the violation of nature”.³⁴

Underlying Marcuse’s discussion is the premise that the vital human need for social labour must (equally importantly) be satisfied via a system of production that ceases the exploitation of nature that is characteristic of the capitalist era. The fact that this exploitation goes largely unacknowledged (at the time of writing) is demonstrative of the power of modern civilisation to conceal the importance of nature in the endless production of ‘false needs’.

Given the process of the objectification of nature that is central to the Marxian concept of freedom, Marcuse settles for the normative position of nature as a ‘subject-object’, sharing a place with human beings within history. He draws again on what he calls the ‘unscientific’ argument of the *Paris Manuskripte*, in which the liberated human sensibility would direct human action.

³² *Op. cit.*, p.60.

³³ *Op. cit.*, p.59.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p.60. This ‘inauthentic’ form of a ‘return to nature’ may be read into a popular saying in contemporary ‘tourist’ culture: “The world is your playground”. Ideologically, this slogan perpetuates in equal measure an ‘individualist’ philosophy concerning the assertion of one’s own ambitions to experience the world, and the notion that nature exists purely to satisfy the consumer’s personal caprices.

The emancipated senses, in conjunction with a natural science proceeding on their basis, would guide the 'human appropriation' of nature. Then, nature would have 'lost its mere utility,' it would appear not merely as stuff—organic or inorganic matter—but as life force in its own right, as subject-object; the striving for life is the substance common to humankind and nature. Humankind would then form a living object. The senses would 'relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing....' And they can do so only inasmuch as the thing itself is objectified human *Verhalten*: objectification of human relationships and is thus itself humanly related to humankind.³⁵

Making reference to Marx's claim that "[h]uman beings are the only beings who can 'form things in accordance with the laws of beauty'", Marcuse considers the possibility that Marx himself may have been open to the notion of an 'aesthetics of liberation': "beauty as a 'form' of freedom".³⁶ For Marcuse this "anthropomorphist, idealistic conception" is, in the *Paris Manuskripte*, actually a specifically materialist vision which does away with Feuerbachian 'naturalism' – and yet involves the material activity of a humankind that is unique in being able to perceive beauty not only in works of art, but in nature itself. Like art, therefore, Marcuse sees nature itself as a source of human liberation.

While remaining aware of the limitations of this notion, he argues against the conventional scientific critique of a 'subjectivity of nature' as being speculative and unfounded, in warning against the attribution of 'intention' to the universe. By way of response he argues that the only intentionality of nature is human: "liberation is the possible plan and intention of human beings, brought to bear upon nature".³⁷ In this respect, Marcuse considers nature's subjectivity to fit Kant's notion of 'purposiveness without purpose' (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) from the third *Kritik*. His position as a result appears not to conflict with the scientific view of a purely deterministic

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.65.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.66.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.66. James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' is an interesting case study in this context. In spite of the relatively orthodox scientific conclusion that result from it with respect to the ecological effects of human production, it has generated serious critique for its 'unscientific' character, including its implicit attribution of 'subjecthood' to Earth itself: "there was outright hostility to the name 'Gaia' (a goddess of the Earth metaphor, implying the Earth was alive)". In Stephen Schneider, et al., "Preface", in *Scientists Debate Gaia. The Next Century*, p.xiii.

universe: “Nature as subject without teleology, without ‘plan’ and ‘intention’”.³⁸ The relationship between human beings (society) and nature is therefore one such that any ‘natural intentionality’ emerges on account of the human nature residing within nature itself – a truly Hegelian dialectical notion.

3.3. The limits of nature’s subjectivity

Ultimately, however, Marcuse does address the limits of the notion of nature-as-subject, via the notion of ‘appropriation’. According to Marcuse, this concept is retained in historical materialism’s concept of objectification, which is unavoidably a *human* appropriation of nature. It is here that Marcuse acknowledges “a definite internal limit to the idea of the liberation of nature through ‘human appropriation’”.³⁹

While Marcuse describes Marx’s understanding of this relation as being “nonviolent, nondestructive: oriented on the life-enhancing, sensuous, aesthetic qualities inherent in nature”,⁴⁰ he concedes that even Marx’s account “retains something of the *hubris* of domination. ‘Appropriation,’ no matter how human, remains appropriation of a (living) object by a subject. It offends that which is essentially other than the appropriating subject, and which exists precisely as object in its own right—that is, as subject!”.⁴¹ Even a society organised under the imperatives of a new sensibility produces needs that can be met only via the objectification of nature as the essence of freedom. The result is that nature is inevitably an object of ‘human violence’: “To treat nature ‘for its own sake’ sounds good, but it is certainly not for the sake of the animal to be eaten, nor probably for the sake of the plant. The end of this war, the perfect peace in the animal world—this idea belongs to the Orphic myth, not to any conceivable historical reality”.⁴²

This passage marks an interesting departure for Marcuse. In *Eros and Civilization*, he dedicated a chapter to an expression of the new reality principle in the mythical personages of Orpheus and Narcissus.⁴³ For Marcuse, the “Orphic Eros

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.66.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p.68.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.67.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p.69.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p.68.

⁴³ See Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp.109-27. Significantly, Marcuse overtly contrasts these archetypes against (the young) Marx’s own preferred mythical personage, Prometheus – which Marcuse considers “the culture-hero of toil, productivity, and progress through repression” (p.120). In contrast, Marx wrote in his doctoral dissertation (1841) that, on account of his revolt against the gods,

transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is *play*".⁴⁴ In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Marcuse distances his theory from this ideal, on account of the limitations inherent in the concrete unfolding of the relationship between human life and nature. Nature cannot be a "manifestation of 'spirit'", i.e., of human determination; rather, Marcuse concedes, it represents "its essential limit".⁴⁵ As a result, it is evident to him that "priority must be on *human* solidarity among human beings".⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the inherent dialectical connection between nature and human nature produces a normative imperative within human determination to limit the form and extent of the process of appropriation of nature. In response, Marcuse connects what he calls an 'ecology drive' to the revolutionary cause, involving an orientation that focuses on the political relevance of the connection between nature and freedom. Violation of the environment "is a political struggle; it is obvious to what extent the violation of nature is inseparable from the economy of capitalism".⁴⁷

At the same time, nature remains the bearer of its own "*objective values*".

These [values] are envisaged in such phrases as 'violation of nature,' 'suppression of nature.' Violation and suppression then mean that human action against nature, humankind's interrelation with nature, offends against certain objective *qualities* of nature—qualities which are essential to the enhancement and fulfillment of life. And it is on such objective grounds that the liberation for humankind to its own humane faculties is linked to the liberation of nature.⁴⁸

It is relatively clear that in his elaboration of a normative concept of nature's subjectivity that also indicates the need for the 'priority' of human intersubjective relations, Marcuse seeks to fix the orientation to nature within the new sensibility at

"Prometheus is the foremost saint and martyr in the philosopher's calendar" (in Marx, *Selected Writings*, David McLellan (ed.), p.17). Prometheus of course is a predictable icon for the working class movement in being the mythical founder of civilisation, having stolen fire (representing human ingenuity; specifically technology) from the gods and bestowed it upon humankind, who subsequently utilised it in the struggle against nature.

⁴⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.125.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p.69.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.68.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p.61.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p.69.

the absolute limit of an ‘anthropocentrist ecology’.⁴⁹ This objective indicates that, in his embracing of ‘philosophy’ and utopian ideas, Marcuse has not distanced himself from Marxian materialism as thoroughly as his work may sometimes imply.

4. Tensions in Marcuse’s technological utopia

Another important inference can be made from the argument of “Nature and Revolution”. Marcuse’s reluctant (but definite) acknowledgement of an inherent connection between the appropriation of nature (i.e., its objectification as subject-object) and a liberated society – the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom – indicates an incorporation of the role of work as a substantial feature of human existence; not as an “abstract value”, but as a “*concrete universal*”. As in the early Marx, liberation ultimately involves the “‘human appropriation of nature’, i.e., through the transformation of nature into an environment (medium) for the human being as ‘species-being’; free to develop specifically human faculties: the creative, aesthetic faculties”.⁵⁰

This is possibly Marcuse’s most direct treatment of the reality facing the project of utopian society. Elsewhere in his promotion of automation, he refrains from addressing the philosophical issues that arise from this increased redirection of ‘modern’ technological rationality towards the extraction of basic resources from nature, in an effort to mitigate the problem of alienating work. Marcuse commonly speaks of the inherent destructiveness of pure technological rationality, such as in *One-Dimensional Man*, where he connects it to “industrial society which makes technology and science its own....for the ever-more-effective domination of man and nature, for the ever-more-effective utilization of its resources”.⁵¹ The specific problem that arises regarding his adoption of the notion of the ‘automation of the realm of necessity’ is that the concrete means of production have been, *historically*, devised

⁴⁹ It is no coincidence that in “Nature and Revolution”, Marcuse includes a reference to two essays in Murray Bookchin’s well-known text *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*. Interestingly, the volatile environmental anarchist Bookchin was a vehement critic of André Gorz, who was himself an ‘ecological socialist’ and also a close friend and colleague of Marcuse himself. For a summary of Bookchin’s critique of Gorz, see Finn Bowring, “André Gorz. Ecology, System and Lifeworld”, p.74, n.23.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, p.64.

⁵¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p.17. What is interesting in *One-Dimensional Man* (going by the book’s sub-title), and in this particular statement, is that in contrast to Marx, Marcuse tends to associate ‘industrial society’ *per se* with capitalist society. This is consistent of course with his radical focus on instinct over ‘rationality’ which, as with ‘work’, is liberating only when combined with ‘sensuality’.

and constructed according to the imperatives of capital accumulation. 'Technological rationality' has, as he specifies, been developed and executed by 'advanced industrial society' itself. As a result the question arises as to the suitability of this form of technology – constructed in a manner that maximises the extent of the 'violation of nature' in serving as the principal means of providing a liberated society with its basic material requirements. We have seen how clearly Marcuse links human freedom itself with a normative orientation to nature that positions it as a form of historical 'subject-object' alongside human beings, with its own normativity that should be acknowledged by a liberated society in a way that capitalist society specifically does not.

This tension reflects the ambiguous position of 'rationality' in Marcuse's theory. In the same passage in *One-Dimensional Man* (quoted above), Marcuse speaks of the "internal contradiction of this civilization: the irrational element in its rationality". Of course, the concept of a truly 'rational' rationality is for Marcuse one that issues from the imperatives of sensual gratification – what traditionally is considered rationality's antithesis. Philosophically, Marcuse therefore sets up a negative dialectical relation between sensuality and rationality. However, in the empirical context of *social analysis*, Marcuse considers it acceptable to speak of (exploitative) rationality and (liberating) sensuality as opposing forces.⁵²

A consistency can be found in this seeming contradiction if we place it alongside one of Marcuse's central (Hegelian-Marxist) foundational ideas, that of the interrelation between 'reality' and 'potentiality'. The development of a specific form of rationality in the concrete system of production implies that there may be other forms of rationality that issue from imperatives other than basic utility, and its historical manifestation in the exploitative accumulation of capital. In a sense Marcuse's utopian ideal relies on this idea as a conviction rather than as a traditional rational argument; a conviction supported by the 'universalising' potential of human

⁵² Of course the central theme of 'rationality' in critical social theory in general is an outcome of the heritage of Kant and German Idealism. The continual return to a 'rational critique' of particular forms of rationality is arguably a symptom of the limits of rationality with regard to the philosophical elaboration of human existence – this horizon being perhaps best demonstrated in Horkheimer and Adorno's 'heretical' *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. With the truly radical introduction of sensuality rather than rationality as the primary bearer of normativity in social life, Marcuse has made, if not the most inspired theoretical contribution, then certainly one of the most daring in modern critical social thought.

(practical) ingenuity, which draws its creative force from phantasy and the imagination. The outcome is an objective 'utopian' investment of sorts in the real possibility that technology may be 'reconfigured' according to sensualist imperatives which might 'contain' the chaotic destructive forces in an automated technological system of production.

The tensions regarding 'total automation' also appear in the context of its effects on individual autonomy. It is presumably an *a priori* requirement of a free society that individuals possess the unfettered capacity to choose not only the social roles and activities in which they will engage, but also the method of this engagement. The widespread implementation of automation calls attention to the practical problem of determining which social tasks are so devoid of the potential for 'personal gratification' that they warrant technological mediation in the form of automation. While there will always be tasks in which it is uncontroversial to label as intrinsically unpleasant, a prescription of 'total automation' would appear to prevent an individual from choosing to 'manually' engage in certain tasks; a 'rational' restriction on the individual's practical choice (in the sense of Kant's *Willkür*) to engage in it – 'play with it' – in a free and 'creative' fashion. As we have seen, Marcuse addresses this in his idea that the realm of necessity will become one in which individuals will be able to 'play with technology': to "play with, experiment with the technical material, with the possibilities of the machine and of the things produced and transformed by the machines",⁵³ etc. However, the choice *not to* play with technology in some corners of his liberated division of labour appears absent, given the predominant role of automation in the satisfaction of basic needs. In social theoretical terms, a culture of 'economic automation' can be understood to contain at least one structural restriction on one's capacity for creative expression. While this may be a minor issue, it does indicate a limit to Marcuse's utopian conception of 'creative freedom' in the social realm. Philosophically, it perhaps demonstrates the logical tension between the notions of 'personal freedom' and 'social interest' in political life.

There is also an intrinsic philosophical tension in the employment of technological automation in an environment that is geared towards a 'transcendence'

⁵³ Marcuse, "The Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom", p.22.

of the distinctions between work and play, necessity and freedom. Marcuse discusses the effects of this most often with respect to the abolition of alienating work.

The quantitative reduction of necessary labor could turn into quality (freedom), not in proportion to the reduction but rather to the transformation of the working day, a transformation in which the stupefying, enervating, pseudo-automatic jobs of capitalist progress would be abolished.⁵⁴

In involving technology, Marcuse's utopian conception of this 'transformation of the working day' effectively allows for the conversion of 'work time' itself into 'free time' for other activities. There is a sense therefore in which automation generates the possibility for individuals to 'extract themselves' – at least to some extent – from the (former?) realm of necessity. Hidden in this solution is the notion that certain crucial tasks – crucial because they serve the satisfaction of basic human needs – are in fact intrinsically utilitarian and only undertaken for their outcomes. Hence, it appears in Marcuse's utopian society that the realm of necessity is incapable of being united with the realm of freedom in a manner that achieves 'transcendence'; that the union is in fact *contingent* in its dependence on technology. The distinction between necessity and freedom, work and play, therefore persists within a 'united' human nature, which is realised in the development of a society organised in accordance with the new sensibility. What remains uncertain, however, is the extent to which human beings may reconcile with nature through their activity when the 'trans-historical' manner in which their relationship (i.e., 'metabolism') with nature was maintained – logically their most intimate interaction with it – is now undertaken via 'total automation'. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes automation as humankind's 'insertion of the process of *nature itself*' as the mediator between society and nature, implying a displacement of human productive activity *per se* in the application of the human being's "own *general* productive power....its *understanding of* nature and its mastery over it by virtue of its presence as a social body".⁵⁵ In other words, the worker is able to insert technology – conceived here as a harnessing of 'natural processes' – as the mediator between human beings and nature itself by means of its existence as a 'social body',

⁵⁴ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p.29.

⁵⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, p.705 (italics added). The passage continues: "it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth".

i.e., a being with recourse to the technical knowledge and resources of society as a whole.

Marcuse does not address the impact of automation in contributing to the alienation of human beings from the 'liberating forces' which he attributes to the natural world. Nor does he address the problem that in leaving its most intimate and direct interaction with nature to the distanced application of 'automated instrumentality', human beings might risk the status of nature as a 'subject-object' in possession of its own normativity – might in fact prevent nature from becoming “‘on the poor earth....what perhaps it would like to be’”.⁵⁶

When considering the varying focus of his writings following *Eros and Civilization*, it is clear that Marcuse came to associate an anthropological notion of human determination closely with what he calls a 'new sensibility'. While this notion retains the Marxian conception of the inherently social human being, emphasis is placed on the individual's capacity to engage actively in the world on the strength of its inner sensual capacities, which are stifled by a repressive capitalist domination. In spite of this pervading form of repression (and out of the potential for revolution creating from it), Marcuse's writings are for the most part optimistic about the capacity for human civilisation to draw on the idea of a new sensibility,⁵⁷ based on the norms of sensual gratification and the harnessing of the liberating potential of nature itself.

Overall, Marcuse's anthropologically grounded critical theory focuses less on the elaboration of a normative ideal of human activity than on a particular sensibly grounded normative *orientation towards* activity.⁵⁸ This is reflected in Marcuse's embracing of utopian socialism in his late writings, a direction taken in his continued response to the changed reality of capitalist society. In theoretical terms, Marcuse's 'utopianism' clearly distances him from Marx; while at the same time, in endeavouring to maintain its materialist conception of social reality, it also demonstrates an

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, quoted in Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.66.

⁵⁷ In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse speaks of a 'new consciousness' containing the elements of a new rationality, which presumably replaces the reliance on 'technological rationality' (of 'social' and 'environmental' domination) with one that is compatible with the sensually grounded norms generating from the human instincts. Together, the new sensibility and the new consciousness create in individuals the idea of liberation "as a vital, 'biological' need" (*An Essay on Liberation*, p.57).

⁵⁸ Hence we see Marcuse focus on many different forms of human activity; for instance, the notion of work, creativity and art, and 'praxis' or revolutionary action.

enduring commitment to the Hegelian reading of Marx's conception of human determination, as dependent on the continued capacity for human beings to autonomously transform their sensuous-material interaction with objective reality (nature). The numerous unexplored tensions in Marcuse's theory provide fertile ground for exploring the Marxian themes of human nature and activity, and the relationship between nature, society, and freedom. In particular, his writings open Marxian theory to the importance of the instinctual 'depth dimension' of individual human subjectivity. This dimension is central not only in the process of social integration itself, but in modernity's continually evolving system of repression and exploitation, which directly draws on the inherent connection between human activity and human 'instincts'. As a result, Marcuse's critical theory contributes to themes and issues that Marxian theory had traditionally avoided.

In spite of Marcuse's embracing of 'philosophy', his theory still shares much in common with Marxian theory. Firstly, it is clear that Marcuse is interested in demonstrating that human life is materially grounded. His employment of the instincts is a part of this attempt to cultivate the notion of the sensual unity between consciousness and embodiment within the individual subject. While philosophically, the specific position of nature in relation to human society promotes its conception as a perpetual 'external imposing' influence on human beings, it is at the same time a contingent and concrete force within history; and in fact resides fundamentally within human nature.

Secondly, in Marcuse's connection of nature's potentiality and social freedom, the system of production remains central. With human freedom grounded in its innate sensibility, freedom is impossible in a society where this sensibility is repressed in an intrinsically exploitative economic framework: "In a society based on alienated labor, human sensibility is blunted: men perceive things only in the forms and functions in which they are given, made, used by the existing society; and they perceive only the possibilities of transformation as defined by, and confined to, the existing society".⁵⁹

It is perhaps through Marcuse's emphasis on the power of sensuality in art itself that we can see the greatest divergence between himself and Marx, as he shows in

⁵⁹ Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p.71.

the overall argument of *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. But even there, it is clear that his understanding of the specific agency bestowed on the human subject by art is classically 'Hegelian-Marxist' in its dialectical union of reality and potentiality.

The sensuous immediacy which art attains presupposes a synthesis of experience according to universal principles, which alone can lend to the oeuvre more than private significance. This is the synthesis of two antagonistic levels of reality: the established order of things, and the possible or impossible liberation from it—on both levels, interplay between the historical and the universal. In the synthesis itself, sensibility, imagination, and understanding are joined.⁶⁰

What binds Marcuse and Marx together in the end is the idea that human life is directed by fundamental needs, wants, and capacities (*Bedürfnisse*), which are concrete, and yet consistent with the universalising imperative of human determination, always looking towards the realisation of their further potential in an interaction with nature. As such, these needs and capacities are intrinsically bound to the individual human subject as a concrete and embodied instinctually guided being. Additionally, the generation and fulfilment of these needs relies inherently on the individual's concrete connection to communal life. In terms of human activity, these needs generally involve an orientation of utility or instrumentality in order to be fulfilled, particularly in the context of mass social life, where activity must be organised. However, for Marcuse as well as for Marx, all instrumental needs may be traced back to the fundamental need for freedom, the exercise of which is intrinsically connected to the satisfaction of sensual or corporeal needs that emerged in (biological) anthropogenesis. The basic connection between instrumental needs and human freedom points towards revolutionary praxis itself as a vital need, arising directly out of the concrete condition of capitalist work practices. It is perhaps in their conviction regarding this final notion that Marcuse and Marx's philosophical relationship is most apparent.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.95.

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Conclusion

In this thesis we have examined how the philosophical anthropologies of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse inform their various conceptions of human subjectivity and social interaction. Their conceptions of subjectivity represent the human being as a complete and unified whole, referring to a particular mode of life intrinsically connected to work activity, which in a critical social context calls for the elaboration of a distinctive ‘human’ determination. This determination represents an accumulation of human life imperatives that may be expressed in a single conception of corporeally situated activity within a concrete environment, possessing ‘social’ (human) and ‘natural’ (non-human) elements. While each offers an ideal of human activity through which human beings may interrelate, each conception also involves a view of human social existence as intrinsically connected to nature, and therefore vulnerable to ‘external’ imperatives. Rather than simply providing human beings with recourse to a non-social instrumental action, the subject’s embodied existence offers human beings avenues of personal expression and forms of meaning that are themselves inherently value-laden, and therefore intrinsic to the process of social reproduction itself.

In these concluding remarks we will look briefly at the need for critical social theory to incorporate anthropological frameworks such as those examined in this thesis – frameworks that reflect a conception of human subjects as beings whose knowledge, values, and capacity for freedom, expressed in a corporeally situated activity, possesses an intrinsic relationship to nature. In this way human beings may be presented as beings that live and thrive – are truly free – on account of a specific form of determination that finds expression in work activity.

1. Anthropology and social theory today

In recent decades, critical social theory has in large measure withdrawn from engagement with questions of philosophical anthropology. In many cases, social analysis is conducted under the implicit assumption either that the question of what

makes human beings 'human' has been settled; or, that in a climate of disciplinary pluralism, such overarching questions are antiquated or even theoretically irresponsible. As a result, social theory has placed less emphasis on the complexity of human subjectivity, which as a social form of being belongs to a distinct community of other subjects, while also possessing a unity of its own. But as Axel Honneth and Hans Joas argue in *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur*, the failure of social theory to integrate such a conception of human subjectivity has been to its detriment. The relevance of social theory with respect to 'determinate historical and political problems' relies on the discipline taking up the challenge of conceptualising the complexities of human subjectivity, including both the unity of the individual human being and the relationship between human beings and nature in general.¹

Yet even in Honneth's own social theory, elaborated extensively a decade later, human interaction is considered to be meaningful only in terms of a social grammar created between the interactions of subjects themselves. Subject-nature interaction is attributed a specifically 'social' meaning only via reference to these pre-established 'recognition' relations. While Honneth naturally acknowledges the human transformation of nature, or *work*, as the process that creates the material conditions for social reproduction in the first place, he leaves this form of activity entirely out of the process by which the creation and reproduction of social meaning occurs.²

¹ See quote cited in 'Introduction', p.2 (above).

² As a self-professed Hegelian, Honneth's position on recognition is interesting. Saul Tobias reminds us that Honneth specifically orients his own theory of social grammar according to Hegel's early Jena writings, which Hegel himself discarded in favour of the interpretation of social relations in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. By 1807 Hegel had realised that recognition relations need to be represented as 'contingent' circumstances, against which 'pure reciprocal' recognition relations, i.e., those existing in the absence of concrete inequalities between relating subjects, present as insufficiently abstract. Nevertheless (and presumably for a 'dialogically-based' account of human self-determination, which he understands to fit more comfortably with Mead's social psychology), Honneth consciously modelled his own theory according to Hegel's earlier Jena writings. What is missing from the framework presented there is the notion that the inevitable (material) discrepancies arising between 'concrete' social actors, according to differences in their particular life circumstances (generally for reasons of strength, natural skill, or 'situated advantage', one is likely to be positioned as 'dominant', the other 'submissive'), should be seen to play their role in the establishment of actual human relations and the possibilities available for each actors' individual self-determination. This dimension incorporates the position of each actor in relation to nature, and therefore to work. According to Hegelian dialectical logic, the subject's acknowledgement of such 'contingent difference' ought not to conflict with a simultaneous acknowledgement of a shared 'common humanity' between social actors.

As a result, Tobias contends that "Hegel's *Phenomenology* addresses a dimension of autonomy which is often absent from these debates" (Tobias, "Hegel and the Politics of Recognition", p.108). This is a dimension that involves the relative material circumstances of a 'master' and a 'slave', which has a concrete effect on the individual life choices available to the subject in a specifically social context. Of

In excluding this form of activity from his conception of society as a whole, the human being's interaction with nature (as opposed to social interaction) is explicitly positioned as irrelevant to the development and well-being of human subjectivity *as an inherently social being*. Honneth's recognition theory therefore reflects a notion of human nature that excludes a crucial aspect of human subjectivity as a *materially embodied* subjectivity – comprising of the potentials that nature (placed externally to society) presents to the individual subject through its work activity. The idea that the subject's direct interaction with nature may be categorised as having no normative relevance to society – i.e., makes no contribution to the creation of social meaning and subjective social life *per se* (and vice-versa) – reflects a fundamental division within this subject's underlying anthropological constitution that cannot be theoretically justified.

The philosophical anthropologies of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse are directed at a conception of human nature that points to an ideal of human (social) action that reflects an accumulated multiplicity of human needs, interests, and capacities. When applied to social theory, an inherent relationship is established between the various existing forms of human activity, in a manner that reflects the human being as a complete and unified being, embedded in a material environment that is also inherently social. In its unity, this environment – an environment in which society and nature can be seen to merge – contains a manifold of meaning that reflects an inherent relationship between human traits and capacities. In theories of intersubjectivity and human action, the creation and fulfilment of the subject's manifold of needs and capacities may be given appropriate expression in the concept of work, conceived as a socially directed interaction with natural (i.e., material) environment that is also inherently social. In this sense, the unity of human nature and of individual subjectivity is given an appropriate conceptual foundation.

The argument of this thesis supports Honneth and Joas's original claim about the insufficiency of social theories that dispense with such an account of human subjectivity and human nature. But their diagnosis of the state of social theory as generally lacking such an account remains relevant today, the development of Honneth's critical social theory notwithstanding. Prevailing social-theoretical

course, this difference, residing within real social recognition relations, appears in the Marxian paradigm as the discrepancy between the capitalist and the worker.

conceptions of human subjectivity and action today are informed by an insufficient representation of human nature. On account of this shortcoming, they fail to predict the emergence of important social and political crises.

2. Social theory in the current climate

Many social theories attempt to emphasise the specific liberating potential of socio-political involvement as opposed to action directed towards nature, conventionally represented as work. In doing so the importance of social interaction over human-nature interaction may be emphasised as intrinsic to individual subjective development, while a greater (and equal) participation in established political institutions may be proposed as the dominant means through which human beings attain and express a specifically *human* freedom.

Social theories that distinguish between a pure intersubjective (or ‘political’) action, commonly expressed through language, and an instrumental (‘material’) action suggest that, in order to provide an appropriate framework for the analysis of society, ‘instrumental’ action should be understood as normatively directed at the non-human world, while being controlled and mitigated by a presiding, truly *human*, and therefore *liberating* action. According to this way of thinking, any alternative orientation risks the disinterested application of an instrumental ‘systems rationality’ towards human beings themselves, such that they come to be treated as nothing but ‘things’. The most compelling argument to this effect reminds us that the logical conclusion has already been realised in Auschwitz, and other death camps.

This argument is powerful. But nevertheless, when intrinsically meaningful human action – action that bears relevance to the pursuit of freedom – is classified in a manner that excludes certain socially necessary forms of activity, another risk arises. When work in general is categorised outside the realm of human freedom, a theoretical rupture is created that portrays human life as fundamentally divisible into activities that possesses a direct relevance in the pursuit of a genuine, distinctly human, freedom and flourishing, and activities that simply do not. From the perspective of lived human experience, which as ‘social reality’ presents as a vast interweaving of objects, ideas, and activities, this distinction shows its practical limitations. Human reality simply does not accommodate the notion that particular

aspects of it – such as particular forms of socially necessary activity – somehow intrinsically lack normative relevance with respect to human freedom and flourishing.³ In concrete terms, the idea that a realm of liberating (generally, politically directed) activity exists in isolation from a realm of private and purely instrumental concerns places too much faith in the capacity for society to realise and implement a system of universal participation within the ‘liberating’ realm. In the case of work, the empirical fact that in modern society work occupies the greatest part of the lives of the greatest proportion of society’s individuals leaves the reality of work itself as a distinct and concrete barrier to meaningful ‘universal participation’ in public life, as proposed commonly in social theory today. While the great proponents of technology in the twentieth century predicted a radical increase in material living standards, coupled with a dramatic reduction in the working day, history has shown that the capitalist system of production – itself responsible for the rise of automation – has seen the average individual’s basic dependence on work increase, coupled with the widening of gaps between rich and poor as a consistent trend.⁴

Such trends might be understood to challenge theories that embrace analytical distinctions between ‘liberating (social)’ and ‘instrumental’ forms of human activity. It would appear that these theories are caught between two inconvenient realities. The apparent dependence of social actors on work, exhibiting by gradually increasing demand, can be interpreted as evidence that work is indeed – and contrary to the

³ With respect to Hannah Arendt’s theory, Richard Sennett argues that her division between the instrumentally focused *Animal laborens* and the more social, ‘project-focused’, *Homo faber* seems “false because it slights the practical man or woman at work. The human animal who is *Animal laborens* is capable of thinking; the discussions the producer holds may be mentally with materials rather than with other people; people working together certainly talk to one another about what they are doing. For Arendt, the mind engages once labor is done. Another, more balanced view is that thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making” (in Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p.7). The same criticism may be made of Arendt’s other key distinction between the activity of *Homo faber* and genuine political action, which involves language as the medium for genuinely free expression. For *Homo faber* – and *Animal laborens* for that matter – also speaks.

While not entirely without merit, Arendt’s distinctions do encourage a devaluation of certain intrinsic aspects of human life that encourages the partitioning of lived human experience into ‘human and non-human’ activity, that in a philosophical context serves as a problematic counter-position to Heidegger’s famous (and certainly more troubling) equation of the Holocaust with “mechanized agriculture” (see Sennett, p.3).

⁴ This trend has been particularly visible in recent decades, and continues post-GFC. For instance, in the United States, a report by the Federal Reserve (‘Fed’) on median incomes has revealed that the top ten percent of U.S. households saw an increase of ten percent in their overall incomes, while every other bracket experienced a general decrease. This has taken place in the period between 2010 and 2013, in which the GDP of the United States has grown. See Leubsdorf, “Fed: Gap Between Rich, Poor Americans Widened During Recovery” in *The Wall Street Journal* online, published 4th Sept., 2014.

conclusions of these theories – an intrinsically meaningful activity for subjects possessing access to ‘separate’ socio-political freedoms. Or alternatively, it could indicate that in a complex social reality, individuals generally tend to be so dependent on engaging in ‘instrumental’ activity for their basic life needs that work itself (coupled with low living standards) tends to impede their participation in a socio-political realm, where an enunciation of their overdependence on work may be expressed. In this latter case, the indirect relationship between work life (along with relative socioeconomic status; generally ‘private life’) and an individual’s social and political participation (‘public life’) presents as an eminent barrier to the practicability of theories that position ‘public’ participation as the cornerstone of a free social existence.

These theories are arguably beginning to show their theoretical limitations, particularly in light of the specific socio-political challenges that have emerged in recent decades. Perhaps the most notable challenge is indicated in ecological analysis, which continues to deliver evidence of the specific effects of human production in the acceleration of global climate change.

The scientific evidence on anthropocentric global warming provides a serious challenge particularly to those social theories that rely on a distinction between liberating human action and material or instrumental action. Ongoing analysis of the world’s climate indicates that society’s economic activity is having a significant negative impact on the Earth’s atmosphere. Meanwhile, in light of the overwhelming *scientific* consensus on the issue, the political attitude has generally been one of continued equivocation and denial, in the face of decades of reports revealing an increase in global climate temperatures, environmental spoilage, mass extinctions of species, and diminishing natural resources. Only recently has the first serious global political commitment been made (between the United States and China) to reduce the carbon emissions of the aggregate system of production to levels recommended by scientists and environmental specialists.

The question needs to be raised why certain social theories, which have proven effective predictive tools in the past, are struggling to account for this failure of political will.

Generally, theories that incorporate a divided conception of human action explain the process of a socially organised mitigation of ecological crises in the following manner. In the political arena, laws grounded in free and equal participation are passed by democratic consensus following the recommendations of scientists and specialists. These laws impose formal restrictions on specific aspects of the process of production (etc.) that have been identified as the cause of a given environmental concern. Such laws serve to limit the instrumental activity in the sphere of material production in a manner that over time produces a positive environmental outcome.

In this manner a coherent framework is presented through which society's negative impacts on the environment may be mitigated through an intersubjective process of deliberation and consensus. According to these theories, this process must be considered to exist in isolation from the system of production, or from any other purely 'instrumental' apparatus, in order to represent a genuinely free and exclusively 'intersubjective' process accessible to all individuals.

In the past, social theories based on a divided conception of human action have proven effective in diagnosing social pathologies and in predicting empirical outcomes. However, in the case of political action on climate change, these social theories appear unable to account for the absence of responsible practical action in light of the scientific evidence. One may argue that the reason lies in the failure of these theories to identify the intrinsic effect that systems of production (and its related processes of wealth accumulation and distribution; i.e., the market) have on the creation and reproduction of social norms.

The problem with these frameworks may be understood to lie specifically in their conception of human experience in terms of separated 'intersubjective' and 'material' action – directed generally at human (social) and non-human ('instrumental') aspects of daily life.⁵ Since it has taken over three decades for human beings to begin to adequately prioritise the social importance of concrete global ecological collapse, i.e., the direct reliance of human freedom *per se* on particular

⁵ As it turns out, this division may be seen to reside somewhere within the realm of the 'corporeal', which involves both intersubjective and purely instrumental activity. Even the strongest proponents of a 'dualistic' conception of human action understand (on some level) that there is an inherent 'material' aspect to human intersubjectivity, contained at the very least within the concept of 'action' itself. Jürgen Habermas, who is among the most influential 'dualistic' theorists of human action, is himself a prominent representative of the Frankfurt School, and as such is a direct theoretical descendent of Marx's historical materialism.

ecological conditions, including a healthy metabolism between social production and nature, then there is sufficient evidence that something is lacking in these social theoretical frameworks.

One may even argue that the discrepancy between our knowledge of the dangers of carbon-based economies and political action may in fact be influenced by certain preconceptions about the relationship between society and nature – and about human nature – that persists within these dualistic social-theoretical paradigms. Since they have proven to be useful predictive tools in the past, these theories might serve to influence the general consensus regarding the future structure and operation of society. In the process they contribute to the shaping of existing social institutions and relations of production; in doing so, they also influence existing cultural beliefs about human beings. The idea that freedom and flourishing in a ‘social context’ bears no specific relation to material production becomes a common background assumption.⁶ As a consequence, the notion that human freedom might rely inherently upon nature’s delicate metabolism and on human interaction with(in) it, recedes from broader cultural consciousness.

By this account, the failure to act on climate change may be due to the prevalence of a problematic conception of human freedom. Individuals and groups may consider their own pursuit of freedom and a flourishing life to be secure purely on the basis that existing political institutions and deliberative processes continue to function and operate. Since climate change has not yet affected political processes and institutions themselves, the underlying risk it poses to social life in the future appears merely as the concern of one ‘interest group’ among many, rather than as an ‘immanent’ threat to the social (and political) framework itself. And, since this form of freedom continues to operate in the political arena – no more so than in the market – the existing structure of society serves as a general reflection of the dualistic frameworks of human action (and by extension, of human nature itself) presented within some of the most influential social theories today.⁷

⁶ Recall Marx’s position regarding theory as a ‘real abstraction’ (Ch. 2, pp.79-80) may possess an observable influence over the social realm, whether its conclusions are demonstrably accurate, or not.

⁷ In the reinforcement of any social-theoretical framework in the face of particular socio-historical realities, there will presumably be a time when diagnostic application should make way for a re-examination of its internal structure, at the risk of theoretical dogmatism, or the promotion of abstract theory over empirical fact. Relevant here is the criticism of Marx and Engels that, “[i]n direct contrast to

Of course, the social-theoretical importance of philosophical anthropology extends beyond the crucial exchange between the subject/society and *external* nature, to include the relationship between the subject itself and its interaction with an inherently material *social* environment. The importance of anthropologically informed approaches to social theory therefore extends to the subject's involvement in all forms of work – not merely to action directed 'outward' towards nature, but also 'internally directed' material action, such as social services, distribution, etc.⁸ Research is currently being done to determine ways in which critical social theory can address the intrinsic role of all forms of work on human subjective development and social cohesion.⁹

Additional attention should be given to the strand of philosophy examined in this thesis. In providing a general conception of 'human determination' based on a complete corporeally situated human nature, an ideal of human action is generated that represents the human being as one whose freedom is dependent not only on a socially-determined 'political' freedom, but also on interaction with and within a fertile and robust natural-material environment in a sustainable metabolism with society itself. The external natural environment serves to ground social interaction as well as being the 'natural source' of a multiplicity of additional semi- (or even non-)

German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven." (In Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.42.)

⁸ In addressing the various forms of 'paid work' that appear in late capitalist society, the social philosophical writings of André Gorz prove immeasurably valuable to further analysis on the social theoretical value of the concept of work. While Gorz's practical solution to the problem of capitalism involves a widespread departure from institutionalised work activity, this departure is specifically from and "unambiguously [from] the specific 'work' peculiar to industrial capitalism" (Gorz, *Reclaiming Work. Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, p.2). His philosophical orientation is consistent with the strand of anthropologically informed thought presented in this thesis. This is reflected in his writings on the social benefits of automation and technology (a view similar to that maintained by his friend and colleague, Herbert Marcuse), and his notion of 'autonomous activity' that is traceable to his early work in Sartrean existentialism. While this activity is generally positioned against the category of (heteronomous) work (and his social theory is often compared structurally with the work of Habermas), his theory of liberating human action retains a strong materialist-subjective focus that is informed by a 'unifying' anthropology. For discussion, see Bowring, *André Gorz and the Sartrean Legacy. Arguments for a Person-Centred Social Theory* (2000).

⁹ A field of analysis has begun to receive attention in the Anglophone scholarship, emerging from clinical psychoanalytic studies conducted by Christophe Dejours and others. These philosophical analyses involve the investigation of new ways in which subjective work-related pathologies can be afforded closer social-theoretical scrutiny, specifically in the manner in which work, as a 'psychodynamic' activity, exerts an innate impact on individual subjective development and social freedom. Elements of this field are being employed in the criticism of Honneth's recognition theory. See the various essays in Nicholas H. Smith and Jean-Philippe Deranty (eds.), *New Philosophies of Labour. Work and the Social Bond* (2012).

social avenues through which individual subjects may formulate, express, and realise a free and flourishing life.¹⁰

3. Human determination as an anthropological notion of work

Philosophical anthropology points toward the need for human subjects as social actors to be conceived as discrete individuals that are inexorably bound to material existence on account of an innate and naturally determined corporeality. At the same time, these subjects possess an inherent need for social interaction. This thesis has investigated anthropologically informed theories that propose work activity as a ready means of conceptualising these features of human being, subjectivity, and action in a social theoretical context.

The human being's various activities occur within a single concrete reality. An anthropologically informed theory of human action hence recognises that all activities that may be deemed essential for social reproduction contribute to a single manifold of meaning; and in contributing in this way demonstrate in a social-theoretical context a unique and intrinsic contribution to the realisation of human freedom and flourishing. From this perspective, the idea that certain forms (or aspects) of human activity fall outside the domain of 'meaningful' human action, much less the domain of politics – or the 'social pursuit of freedom' – is to argue not that these activities are (or 'ought to be') ultimately pursued in isolation from 'meaningful' social reality, but that human freedom itself ought to be.

The specific strand of anthropology represented in this thesis obtains its social-theoretical relevance by establishing an ideal of human activity according to a specific

¹⁰ Marx's theory generally reflects the ecological attitude of his age, whereby nature does ultimately exist as raw material through which the self-transformation of human subjectivity is achieved. However, his concept of metabolism, as a central aspect of his ideal of human determination, provides him with a critical awareness of the need for a sustainable environment external to society. For instance: "Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance. This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between humankind and the earth, i.e., it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by humankind in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil" (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p.637). This sentiment may easily be extended well beyond humankind's agricultural productivity to economic activity in general, while maintaining the element of liberating agency in the process of production that discursively focused (etc.) social theories attempt to downplay or claim in the name of other crucial human activities. As such, among the numerous notions explored in this study, it is my view that Marx's concept of 'metabolism' remains the most robust and promising concept with respect to ecological thought.

concept of human ‘determination’ – or *Bestimmung* – that operates as a mediating concept between the idea of a unified human nature and a concrete form of human action, represented in its corporeal nature by the activity of work. This ensures that in its theoretical representation, the concept of action employed in critical social theory preserves the intrinsic constitution and unity of the embodied and active human subject, while also representing a form of social activity that is aimed at the realisation of human needs and capacities (*Bedürfnisse*). The intention is not to argue that all human activities are ultimately reducible to a single form of activity; specifically, *work*. Rather, it is to ensure that truly meaningful human activity *in general* is represented in the overarching process of embodied, concrete human self-constitution (individual freedom), and of social reproduction and development. In doing so, the theory is understood to reflect the overall nature of the human being as one whose activity connects its concrete exemplars, via its intrinsic embodiment, to the real world.

The analysis of Schiller, Marx, and Marcuse presented here has emphasised the theoretical advantages of adapting critical social theory to more precisely account for the intrinsic liberating role of human activity towards nature, or work, which captures the notion human corporeality that serves as the categorical basis for a unified human nature. This approach contains theoretical resources and perspectives through which the interwoven relationships between the human individual and its social and natural-material surroundings may be perceived and analysed, in a manner distinct from certain alternative theoretical paradigms, which require reconsideration. As a result, this *anthropological* strand of socially-oriented philosophy possesses a particular significance in light of current social and political challenges.

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