A MORE HUMAN LANGUAGE:
AN EXPLORATION OF MARX’S THEORY
OF SPECIES BEING

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL URBAN AND SOCIAL STUDIES
RMIT UNIVERSITY

MELBOURNE
MARCH 2013
CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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John Fox

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research reflects an extraordinary journey undertaken with the inspiration and support of many extraordinary people. From the very beginning, I have been blessed with the support of my parents, Terence Michael Fox and the late Margaret Mary Fox. They have taught me the meaning of selflessness and unconditional love. I have also been guided for so many years by a great many teachers. I am grateful for the vision and commitment of those at Benedict College, who saw more in this Western suburbs boy than I saw in myself. I am grateful, too, for those who introduced me to the riches of the critical tradition at the University of New South Wales as an undergraduate student and those at RMIT University who, in the course of my Masters studies, allowed me to discover and develop a sense of how I could contribute to that tradition.

My debt extends to those who taught me about the centrality of our corporeality. These include my fellow students, who worked so hard to succeed, notwithstanding the difficulties they faced. They include those people who shared their experiences and insights whilst I worked in the community sector and then local government, especially their testimonies about poverty. They showed me how little their difficulties involved any lack of will or commitment, and how cruel dualist models of the human self could be, especially through the support they lend to arguments that mind can always conquer matter. I am conscious of the debt that follows from their trust. This thesis is a response to that debt. I also want to acknowledge the gift my dance teachers passed on to me. I began to dance for recreation but discovered so much more. I found a sense of joy and fulfilment in my body and in bodily interactions that multiply those pleasures. To dance is to experience one’s humanity as expanded rather than limited by the corporeal. This thesis a response to that discovery, and to those who have opened those possibilities for me, especially Melanie Dacres, Kate Hatfield, Rose Hawas, and Renay Taylor. Last, but not least, I want to acknowledge and celebrate the support and guidance of those who have worked with me in academic life, both as fellow academics and as students. If I am to speak of joy, then I must speak of that which comes from sharing this life of reflection and debate amongst them.
Of those fellow academics, I have been privileged to be guided in developing this thesis by my supervisors, Rob Watts, Kim Humphreys and, for the earlier stages, Bob Pease. I am grateful for their patience and generosity as I wrestled with the issues, and for their faith in the worth of this endeavour. I hope I can follow well in their footsteps in contributing to the critical tradition. Now, as this journey draws to its end, I must also thank Samantha Murray for her timely, clear-sighted copy-editing of my writing. In exploring Marx’s vision of a ‘more human language’ I have consistently struggled to present that language clearly and in a way that does justice to Marx and those who influenced him. In seeking to better convey the promise of their thought, I deeply appreciate the care lent to that endeavour by both Rob Watts and Samantha Murray.
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In our sleep, pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart and in our despair against our will comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

*Aeschylus, Agamemnon*

We would not understand a human language and it would remain ineffectual. From the one side, such a language would be felt to be begging, imploring and hence *humiliating*. It could be used only with feelings of shame or debasement. From the other side, it would be received as an *impertinence* or *insanity* and so rejected. We are so estranged from our human essence that the direct language of man strikes us as an *offence against the dignity of man*, whereas the estranged language of objective values appears as the justified, self confident and self-acknowledged dignity of man incarnate.

*Karl Marx, Excerpts from James Mill’s Elements of Political Economy, 1975d, 276-7* (emphasis in original)

You can’t cut a man in two and polish up his soul while you throw his body on the rubbish heap...If reason and revelation mean anything they mean that a man works out his salvation in the body by the use of material things ... Unnecessary misery is an even greater defect because it is an impediment to salvation. When you don’t know where your next meal is coming from, how can you think or care about the state of your soul?

*Morris West, The Devil’s Advocate, 1959, 97*
INTRODUCTION

I remember the sweat and the enthusiasm that my schoolmates exuded one summer afternoon. I remember their absence of restraint within the brick and chain-fenced boundaries. I was sixteen. The memory is still vivid: rolled up sleeves, shirt-tails loose, sweat pouring from their skin, and concentration and energy I found amazing in the heat—but then I was never a sportsman. I remember worrying (a little) for some of the boys, particularly when the lawless soccer of the school yard extended intercepts to pulling—and potentially tearing—the school uniforms that so many of them still wore.

I remember worrying for those in school uniforms, as I knew they did without sports gear as their families could not afford both. I remember, too, being conscious of my different circumstances: of the private bedroom/study I enjoyed, and of the few household chores that were asked of me. Others had no private space, and less free time, to study at home, given family and work commitments. I could accept that some genetic lottery had given me some academic advantages, yet from times shared with those playing soccer in school uniform, I knew they had more ability than their academic performances displayed. I also knew, having seen their efforts and desire, and their hurt and humiliation, that their lower marks were not the product of a simple lack of will or effort.

Years later, in the midst of a discussion with some refugees, I was witness again to hurt and humiliation, to the pain of will and efforts frustrated by limited resources. Several spoke of their experience of Australia’s income support provisions for the unemployed, and of the ‘activity tests’ they had to meet:
They are just keeping us busy in a circle, an empty circle. We go for assistance with Centrelink. Centrelink puts pressure [on us] to join the Job Network. The Job Network puts pressure on us to see employers. Employers send us letters of rejection and we keep repeating the circle year after year after year...The result, we know the end result anyway. We want to contribute, but there’s no way we’re allowed to contribute our expertise in this country because we’re going in a vicious circle. ...They [Centrelink] don’t admit that they cannot help us. They keep promising us there will be something at the end...We’re wasting our lives sending...job applications (Hume City Council 2004a, 46).

One man, displaying great courtesy, explained to me how much money he received to support his family. He went on to show me the text book list from the school his children attended, and how he could only afford to buy the books for one child. He asked me how he should go about choosing between them. I had no answer for him then. It was a question—accompanied by some pain and shame—he should never have been burdened with.

In this thesis, I respond to that man’s trust, and that of his fellow refugees, as well as others who have trusted me with their stories, including my former schoolmates. I seek to honour the debt that follows from that intimacy—if only to contest the legitimation of oppression that can follow from our silence. This thesis is a response to their lives’ testimony: that their disadvantage and suffering were not due to any lack of effort or commitment on their part. It is a demand for a better response, for policies and practices
that take into account something too often and too easily forgotten: the influence of the material or corporeal world.

Drawing on these experiences, this thesis seeks a better understanding of the role of what are often treated as ‘external’ or ‘subordinate’ ‘influences’ upon a person’s capacity for agency. It is a response to deeply embedded attitudes and actions that reflect the persistent neglect of the influence of our bodies and the materiality of our world.

It is also a response to a deepening appreciation of the role of the materiality of my own self, and the centrality of that materiality to human expression. I have felt the expansiveness of my self in my body—and its independence and resistance—and seen it in others too. As these very words suggest, with their distinction between my ‘self’ and my ‘body’, I have also encountered the lack of an adequate language to express those experiences.

I am not the first to seek a more adequate language with which to consider the influence of the corporeal. The pre-Socratic philosophers made it a central theme of their works. They sought to determine what comprised the foundation of being and, in the face of the volatility of matter, considered the relationship between that foundation and change (that is, whether the foundation of being had to be un-changing). Since that time, many others have wrestled with these questions. Amongst the ancient Greeks, these included Epicurus, Lucretius, Democritus, and Aristotle. The works of later philosophers, such as Bacon and Hobbes, also evidence a keen interest in the influence of matter, reflecting the impact of Newtonian science on efforts to understand the world. Natural and
Romantic philosophers such as Goethe, Herder and Schelling equally sought to capture the depth and breadth of its influence. The material world was central to Marx’s thought and remains a core concern of those building on his initiatives. More recently, phenomenology has emphasised the centrality of the material world, with writers such as Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1948, 1968) highlighting the central role of our senses. The manipulation of our corporeality has also been a central concern of many postmodernist or poststructuralist writers, with Foucault (1990a), for example, concentrating on the invasive intimacies of ‘biopower’. Most recently, post-humanist or post-representative thought, such as that of Barad (2007), Bennett (2010), Hodder (2012), and Thrift (2008), has renewed interest in the volatility and influence of the material world.

This recognition of the influence of the corporeal has, however, long been overshadowed by those who assert the corporeal to be of little or no significance. As long ago as Aristotle’s era, Western philosophy gravitated towards a view that the foundation of being had to be unchanging, and thereby dismissed the material world. Plato presented the long influential identification of the foundation of being with ‘forms’ or ‘ideas’, and classified the corporeal as a significant, but passing, burden upon that foundation. Gnostic and Stoic thought amplified this emphasis on the non-corporeal, and presented the corporeal as deficient, even evil, and demanding subordination. These tendencies were amplified by Christian thought, perhaps most famously represented by St Augustine, who treated the flesh as the source of enslavement and shame. Throughout this perspective, the foundation of human being has been located in the non-corporeal, be that called the soul or some aspect of consciousness, such as reason or will. More recently, Enlightenment philosophers, such as Kant, maintained
this emphasis. Indeed, efforts to then recognise the influence of the corporeal produced
the Idealist philosophy of Fichte and Hegel, and an endeavour to reduce the corporeal
to the terms of the non-corporeal. This preference for the non-corporeal has also lent its
influence to postmodernist or poststructuralist thought, such as Judith Butler’s *Gender
Trouble*, with the corporeal frequently treated as the passive text on which the non-
corporeal freely inscribes itself.

This preference for the non-corporeal gives insufficient recognition to the ‘weight’ of the
body, to borrow Bordo’s (2003) expression. It fails to account for the manner in which
the corporeal both limits and enables all our actions in this world. Moreover, it is hardly
representative of human experience. In privileging the dominated body and disciplined
material world, this perspective reflects the typically white, masculine, ‘able-bodied’,
bourgeois experience of the body as an instrument or tool, and the material world as a
thing to be dominated and used. It does not reflect the lives of those who experience the
corporeal as far more troubling. Feminist writers, such as Bordo (2003), Grosz (1994),
Martin (2001) and Shildrick (1997), present women’s experience of a much more
resistant, ‘leaky’ body—one that often cannot serve as the simple instrument of one’s
wishes. Those with different corporeal abilities and different states of health do not
experience the ease of corporeal action that is assumed in this model. Further, it does
not reflect the lives of those who labour directly with the material world, and bear the
mark of its resistance in their bodies, as testified by writers such as Ehrenreich (2002),
the experience of the domesticated body is, moreover, a myth of eternal youth—a myth
that is ultimately, inevitably betrayed by the inescapable and universal ageing of the body.

The treatment of the body and material world as dominated, or requiring domination, retains its place of privilege today. In particular, as detailed below, it frames and limits the terms of social policy, and tends to render that policy an instrument of oppression instead of relief. With limited exceptions, particularly those within the Marxist, feminist and post-humanist traditions, we have not been provided with an adequate answer to the questions first confronted by the pre-Socratic philosophers. We have not developed an adequate way in which to treat the material world as an essential part of our human being without still, to some important degree, awarding greater value to the non-corporeal. We have not fully confronted the uncertainties and anxieties and pains that follow from the unstable, volatile character of the material world, nor its influence on what we commonly treat as the non-corporeal. We have not abandoned the flight from our limitations, and their pain and promise.

In this thesis, I set out to redress this long history of neglect, and the too frequent denial of the central and pervasive role of the material character of our being. The Western tradition has rarely embraced the corporeal as a central, essential, valuable part of our humanity. Rather, it has long been treated as having no influence on being (as absent) or as having inappropriate, even contaminating, influence (and so treated as wrongful and with hostility—as something to be subdued and excluded). These characterisations have persisted such that, in the ordinary course of our lives, we have taught ourselves to ignore our bodies. As Shildrick (1997, 168) has pointed out, we have become, too
often, deaf to its prompts: so much so that “the body is scarcely experienced...at all.”

Kleinman, cited in Shildrick (1997, 168), described this “fidelity of our bodies [as] so basic that we never think of it – it is the certain ground of our daily experience.”

However, when present:

...the body is experienced as alien, as the not-self, the not-me. It is ‘fastened and glued’ to me, ‘nailed’ and ‘riveted’ to me, as Plato describes it in the Phaedo...the body is experienced as confinement and limitation: a ‘prison’, a ‘swamp’, a ‘cage’, a ‘fog’ – all images that occur in Plato, Descartes and Augustine – from which the soul, will, or mind struggles to escape... (Bordo 2003, 194).

It is a view of the body expressed in some of the oldest and most celebrated works in the Western philosophical tradition, and remains a defining feature in our time:

...we [don’t] need to delve particularly deeply, either historically, philosophically, or personally to recognize that our culture, our philosophic culture especially, has a profoundly somatophobic streak. The dualism of Western philosophical thinking is almost always hierarchical, valuing the mind (or soul) above the body, despising the body as something wholly other, as confining, as disruptive, as something we must struggle against and win control over. We are not our bodies, but we make use of these unreliable and intractable instruments, or flee their influence so that we can realize our true nature as intellectual or spiritual beings. As for us today, at the turn of the twenty-first century, although we recognize the traces of this attitude in history, we congratulate ourselves that we are no longer engaged in a flight from corporeality, we who are constantly surrounded by
images of and presentations for the flesh, we who are no longer repressed in sensual matters as were [our] benighted grandparents. And yet, what are these but directions for the use of the body: we are not our bodies, but we discipline, manipulate, and sell our bodies in order to get what ‘we’, not our bodies, want (Howe 2003, 97).

One key axis on which this treatment has turned, enabling us to flee our bodies and to see this flight as a celebration—rather than a denial—of our very being, has been the tradition of considering particular beings and Being (in the sense of the totality) in terms of ‘substance’. The ‘substance’ of a being or thing was supposed to be that which provided its permanent, ongoing character, notwithstanding observable changes in its properties (Robinson 2004, 3). As one of the greatest philosophers of the seventeenth century, John Locke, put it, ‘substance’ is:

The idea then we have, to which we give the general name substance, being nothing, but the supposed, but unknown support of those qualities, we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist…without something to support them, we call that support substantia, which, according to the true import of the word, is in plain English, standing under or upholding (cited in Robinson 2004, 12).

‘Substance’ assumes the existence of some quality that is separate to—and unaffected by—other, passing observable qualities. Spinoza (2002b, 217) defined it as:
that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.

It is this separate quality that is relied upon to give a being continuity, and to render that which is changeable—including the corporeal—ephemeral, inessential and, if influential, pathological. Whilst there is no single, widely embraced definition of ‘substance’, the tradition of debate has emphasised the defining of a thing or being by reference to its continuing, and not ‘accidental’ or temporary, properties. This emphasis is one of the key foundations on which the devaluation of the corporeal aspect of the human self rests.

The corporeal, or matter, has, within this tradition of debate, been considered as unfit to fulfil the role of substance. Its apparent volatility and changeability has disqualified it from providing the permanent, ongoing, undergirding character desired of ‘substance’. Instead, by virtue of its pervasive presence, the volatility and mutability of the corporeal has more often seen it characterised as a threat to that desired continuity, and promoted its devaluation. In its stead, the non-corporeal, including qualities like reason or the will (to say nothing of an idea like the ‘soul’) has been treated as the human substance and, with the influence of the Enlightenment, as capable of subduing all that is ‘external’ to it, including the corporeal.

This rejection of the corporeal has not gone unchallenged. Arguably one of the most striking challenges to the traditional debate about substance and defence of the corporeal was mounted by Karl Marx. In this thesis I argue that Marx’s contribution to
this debate, when illuminated with reference to his predecessors’ work, complements and extends the consideration of the body, and the broader material world, that has occupied much scholarly debate over the last thirty years. During those years a range of contemporary theorists, including feminists such as Bordo (2003), Grosz (1994), Martin (2001), and Shildrick (1997), and post-humanist theorists such as Barad (2007), Bennett (2010), Hodder (2012), and Thrift (2008), have drawn attention to the volatility of the corporeal, and its resistance to regulation. They, and others, not least Foucault (1980, 1990a, 1990b, 1995) and those working within his legacy, have highlighted the intimate impact of this discipline, not only on the body and social relationships, but on the very identity or subjectivity of those affected. Most recently, drawing on the work of Deleuze, Haraway and Latour, post-humanist theorists have further explored the disciplines imposed by the material world itself, and the manner in which the tendency of things to ‘fall apart’ (Hodder 2012, L1699) draws us, in many unanticipated and sometimes unconscious ways, into mutual and increasingly complex ‘entanglements’ of reciprocity and dependence (Barad 2007, L19, Hodder 2012, L367). Most of these themes are clearly established in Marx’s theory of species being, and I suggest that his theory provides a promising framework to explore and integrate these contemporary debates. Marx’s theory focuses on the pervasive influence of the corporeal, the openness, vulnerability and interdependence that follows from that influence, as famously considered by him in terms of the ‘mode of production’, and the depth to which that combination of material and social relationships affects individuals caught up in that system. Moreover, Marx’s model suggests that the same volatility, openness and involvement holds emancipatory potential. In this thesis I argue that potential exceeds
the extreme circumstances Marx imagined and, drawing on contemporary literature about the body and the impact of bodily experience, suggest that the everyday experiences of pleasures and pain provide prompts towards a recognition of interdependence and the obligations we owe to each other. I suggest that this combination of old and new can progress the contemporary interest in resisting the discipline that extends so deep into our bodies and our sense of self and provide the terms from which to create a ‘more human language’. That is, a way of conceiving of our substance as human beings that differs to the traditional debate and better enables us to resist its cruel neglect of material and other needs, particularly as the key attribute of that approach to substance – especially ideas of independence and the privileging of the non-corporeal over the corporeal - are currently championed within liberal philosophy, politics and social policy.

To that end I address a few central questions in this thesis. What was the idea of substance and how had that idea become central to a tradition of inquiry preoccupied with a conception of substance? What kinds of challenges had philosophers before Marx mounted against this account of substance? How did Marx appropriate this alternative tradition and develop his own account of corporeality? How does Marx’s account compare to contemporary reflections on substance?

Similar questions have been asked by others before me. Marx’s works have inspired rich and varied scholarship, much of which has considered his views on materiality and, through his engagement with dialectics and emphasis on historical transitions, change. However, this work generally considered Marx through the lens of his late works, and
this led many—such as Althusser (1996) and Colletti (1973)—to regard Marx’s earlier works as immature and outdated. This devaluation of Marx’s earlier works led many to disregard the works of previous philosophers; even those expressly relied on by Marx in his earlier texts. This was, in no small measure, the product of Marx’s own express statements. In Concerning Feuerbach, Marx insists that philosophy was inadequate for the task of human emancipation: this meant many viewed the works of Hegel and Feuerbach, for example, as merely preliminary “chapters in the book written by Karl Marx” (Hanfi 1972, 1). This characterisation of philosophy has, to a large extent, prevented them from fully appreciating Marx’s continued use of a range of philosophical terms throughout his works. Those asserting Hegel’s consistent influence on Marx, such as Arthur (2003, 2004a, 2004b), Levine (2012), Reuten (2000) and Smith (1999), illuminate some part of this inheritance, as do those who, for example, highlight the Spinozan character of much of Marx’s analysis, such as Althusser & Balibar (1997) and Negri (2004, 2011). However, I argue that Spinoza and Hegel, whilst of great significance, form part of a larger tradition, and that Marx’s works need to be understood in the context of that tradition.

The long-standing (and ongoing) debate as to Hegel’s influence on Marx has played a significant role in this neglect. As part of the idealist endeavour to render all the world explicable in terms of the non-corporeal (and thereby found a comprehensive system of thought), many such as Althusser & Balibar (1997) have regarded Hegel’s works as entirely tainted and of no help in explaining Marx’s thought. Althusser & Balibar, and

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1 These are frequently referred to as Marx’s ‘Theses on Feuerbach’. Hereinafter, I will refer to them as Marx’s ‘theses on Feuerbach’.
others following their lead, have treated Marx’s later works as presenting an entirely new conception of dialectics. Others, with regard to Marx’s critique of Hegel distorting experience to conform to his logic, have treated the dialectic as overshadowed by Marx’s historicism, if not replaced by it. The ambiguities as to what ends the dialectic operates, whether predictive or analytical, have contributed to this pattern, as pointed out by Ollman (1976, 2003). This, too, is part of Marx’s legacy. Not having written his planned book on method, we have been left with limited express discussion of his understanding of dialectics. This neglect of Hegel’s influence has recently been opposed by the revival of Marxist scholarship in relation to Hegel’s works on logic, particularly through Arthur (2003, 2004a, 2004b), Levine (2012), Reuten (2000) and Smith (1999). The implications of this exploration have not, however, been applied to the character of human being.

Given the controversy over the character and status of the dialectic in Marx’s works, the significance of change has largely been considered through an historical lens. This emphasis, too, is suggested in Marx’s works (1998, 1973, 1976) where change is principally presented as the consequence of human initiative, particularly through distinctions such as ‘living’ and ‘dead’ capital, where animation is supplied solely through human labour. Change has tended to be considered on the large scale, in terms of transitions in modes of production, as driven by those modes’ internal dynamics. Discussions of the material world have, in large part, reflected the privileged view of matter as passive, and acting only as a weight or obstacle to be borne and shaped.
More recently, this tendency has been contradicted, and the older view of matter as active and volatile has been revitalised, primarily in response to environmental or ‘green’ politics, through the efforts of writers such as Castree (2000), Foster and Burkett (2000) and Sheasby (2001; 2004a; 2004b). Their works, however, focus on whether Marx praised or criticised the industrial transformation and wastage of the non-human material world. They do not explore the consequences of environmental sustainability for Marx’s conception of human being.

Scholars that do focus on Marx’s concept of human being (‘species being’) have also tended to neglect these issues. These writers, such as Archibald (1989), Arendt (1958), Geras (1983), Heller (1984), Markus (1978), McMurtry (1978), and Soper (1981), have tended to focus on those aspects of Marx’s texts that directly address issues such as needs, rather than the foundations of being itself. Those who have considered those foundations, such as Gould (1980) and Schmidt (1971), appear to have applied an Aristotelian model that locates being within individuals, and have not been consistent with Marx’s dialectical approach. Moreover, most of those investigations were undertaken over twenty years ago and do not reflect the more recent engagements with the influence of Spinoza and Hegel, for example.

A close reading of Marx’s works, however, reveals his continued use of a range of key terms developed as part of the long-standing endeavour to understand the influence of the material world and, given its volatility, to understand being in terms of change. Such a reading shows Marx to have directly or indirectly drawn on a range of philosophers

\[2\text{ Whereas Meikle (1985, 1991), who also applies an Aristotelian model, emphasizes the dialectic but fails to account for the influence of materialism in Marx’s thought.}\]
whose influence is not well recognised in Marxist scholarship. Those philosophers provided key parts of the materials that Marx drew on in presenting a human being as a material being, with those corporeal and non-corporeal dimensions deeply entwined and equally deeply conflicted in a life-long dialectic—a tension that, in extremity, bore the promise of promoting a better understanding of our selves and our relationships with others.

This thesis, then, situates Marx’s theory within a history of the debate about substance (and of its corollary, essence). It is a history of that tradition, in the sense that MacIntyre proposed in his Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (1988, 12), where he speaks of a tradition as an “argument extended through time’ based on some ‘fundamental agreements.”

Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ forms part of the tradition focussed on the idea of substance—the idea that there is some underlying, grounding, defining aspect of all beings. As such, Marx’s works address the three ‘fundamental agreements’ that have founded that tradition: the first is the idea that a good human life is one free of anxiety and pain; the second is that uncertainty is to be avoided; and finally, the premise that this required some foundation for life that does not change. These convictions set loose a series of questions about which the history of the debate about substance turns. It is these questions which I address in the first part of my thesis. In what terms should substance be defined? Where is that substance located? In particular, can it be located in matter? How to explain change? In particular: how can apparently fundamental changes in the substance be explained (such as the transformation of an acorn into an
oak tree)? How can changes in the ‘external’ or inessential parts or aspects of a being be reconciled with the continuity or repetition of their association with that being’s substance? How might the experience of limitation and pain be reconciled with the security and immutability of substance? Can uncertainty, anxiety and pain ever work towards the human good? Addressing these questions first enables me to locate Marx’s work, and to show in what fashion he set out to resolve certain problems. These questions constitute what might be called the ‘tradition questions’: these questions address two core categories, namely substance and essence. Marx’s use of ‘essence’ places him at the heart of a debate in which Aristotle, Epicurus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Fichte and Hegel were key contributors. An appreciation of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ demands an engagement with their contributions. It also requires a consideration of others involved in key points of transition and translation of those concepts, such as Lucretius, Herder, Schelling and Feuerbach.

Following this, I turn to another series of questions centring on Marx. What critique did Marx make of the traditional debate about substance, and its application to humanity (whereby the non-corporeal was treated as the human essence)? What alternative did Marx suggest (specifically, how did Marx seek to comprehend corporeality as central to the human essence)? What explanations did Marx provide for the appeal of treating the non-corporeal as the human substance (and for the circumstances in which that appeal might be overcome and enable the adoption of a ‘more human language’)?

Marx’s answers to those questions are founded within his characterisation of the ‘human essence’ as the ‘ensemble of social relations’ in his theses on Feuerbach
(1975g, 570). Marx treated the essence of our humanity as located in the structures of our society, rather than in its individual members, with those structures serving to organise, like a musical ensemble, a series of interactions between elements that were interdependent. These interactions, moreover, gave this essence a dynamic, unstable character, which Marx described in the *Grundrisse* as the ‘absolute movement of becoming’, contrasting, again, with the stable, unchanging character traditionally ascribed to substance. For Marx (1973, 242-3, 488), it was this experience of interaction and change that, through the experience of working together, would bring “each [worker] [to confront]...the other as owner of the object of the other’s need, [and realise] that each of them reach beyond his own particular need etc, as a human being, and...relate to one another as human beings; [with]...their common species being...acknowledged by all.” This experience would promote an awareness of interdependence, not only with those a worker directly encountered, but with that larger ‘ensemble of social relations’ that comprised their very essence.

In this thesis, I want to answer those questions centring on Marx through a close consideration of his key works, in particular his discussions in his doctoral thesis and notebooks, the *1844 Manuscripts, Concerning Feuerbach, The German Ideology, The Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

Why should we ask these questions and attend to these matters?

There are several grounds for asking these questions. One rationale is theoretical. I will only indicate briefly here the theoretical rationale, which has to do with the way a relevant body of scholarship has set out to make sense of Marx’s work and has
struggled with the questions I address here. The foundations and terms of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ require further examination.

As noted above, whilst there is an extensive literature from the 1970s and 1980s concerning Marx’s theory of ‘species being’, there has been relatively limited relevant scholarship in recent years. When ‘species being’ is being addressed, that engagement generally considers three kinds of issues. One strand represents those who, like Castree (2000), Foster and Burkett (2000,) and Sheasby (2001; 2004a; 2004b), have an ecological interest, and emphasise the interdependent character of the human/nature relationship. Another strand, exemplified by Foster, Clark and York (2008), and Toscano (2010), revisit Marx’s critique of religion as part of an endeavour to understand its increasingly prominent and resilient influence in recent times and global conflicts. Finally, there is also an emerging scholarship seeking to re-assert the influence of the corporeal, evidenced by works by Cerni (2007) and Fracchia (2005; 2008), which, in large part, respond to the manner in which so much postmodern thought tends to treat the corporeal as passive, if at all present. Overall, the critical observation of Fracchia (2005, 35), made after a review of the literature, continues to apply: “they have stalled [because]...they are not materialistic enough and have failed to grasp Marx’ [theory]...by its corporeal roots.” My thesis is founded on the belief that the literature still fails ‘to grasp Marx’ by his ‘roots’, as it has not adequately considered the influence of the tradition of debate about substance.

A second rationale for addressing the questions central to my thesis has a more ‘practical’ dimension. I believe that the neglect of the corporeal has a wide-ranging,
oppressive effect. Though this is far from being self-evident, the absence of the corporeal, for example, is central to the constitution of modern social policy.

In contemporary social security policy, neglect of the corporeal grounds the promotion of the transition from ‘welfare to work’, the payment of inadequate benefits and denial of those benefits for several weeks on the ground that this denial will somehow crystallise the recipient’s motivation to secure work. A recipient of, for example, the Newstart unemployment benefit may be denied those benefits for up to eight weeks after failing to comply with the applicable ‘activity’ and other requirements (ACOSS 2005, 6).

Contemporary social security policy locates the substance of our humanity—that which secures and ensures our humanity—in the will and, as substance, by definition continuous and independent of the corporeal, and unaffected by it. This approach legitimates a systemic cruelty. It supports and enables a long-standing emphasis on frugality, on ensuring that social security is ‘less eligible’ than waged work, and on hard physical labour within poorhouses as a test of will and of deservedness (Beder 2000, 17-18). Here, corporeal discomfort and pain are treated as less important than the will, regardless of their actual impact. In social security policy, then, willpower is seen to be that power which, if engaged, can overcome all else, including less essential features of our humanity like our corporeal selves. This concept of substance has not only promoted a focus on the will and the neglect of the corporeal, but on the will as independent of all other influences and, in turn, has enabled a focus on independence and self-reliance as the essential character of our humanity.
The capacity to act independently, and to be self-reliant, has long been the objective of social security policy, and is reflected in demands that a beneficiary be ‘deserving’ of support. From the outset of Australia’s income support system, requirements reflecting the demands for self-sufficiency were central to the aged pension (Jones 1996, 18-21). In recent years, the focus on promoting self-reliance and discouraging dependence has become more explicit, and more oppressive. The review of Australia’s social security system (Cass 1986a, 1986b, 1986c) in 1989 recommended an increased emphasis on an ‘active’ system. The characterisation of the ‘problem’ in terms of ‘dependency’ was explicit in the government’s response:

The Government has been progressively moving towards a more targeted, integrated system of income support and labour market assistance. *The major focus has been on tackling the problem of long-term unemployment and welfare dependence* through targeted packages of assistance aimed primarily at moving unemployed people back into work (Howe, 1989, 7, my emphasis).

The Howard government (1996-2007) continued this emphasis. In 1999, it commissioned the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, which was chaired by Patrick McClure and was informally referred to as the ‘McClure Inquiry’. The perceived need to change the social security system from a ‘passive system’ promoting ‘dependency’ to one enforcing ‘self-reliance’ was one of the six principles governing that inquiry. The Inquiry was directed to propose means to create:
... greater opportunities for people to increase self-reliance and capacity-building, rather than merely providing a passive safety net (Commonwealth Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000a, 63).

The same emphasis anchored the mutual obligation regime:

The primary purpose of this partnership is for the community to provide the support that individuals need to develop and realise their own capacity for self-reliance (Commonwealth Reference Group on Welfare Reform, 2000a, 51, my emphasis).

This emphasis was retained in the final report (2000b, 6, 9, 14).

These practices were key features of the reforms effected through the Employment and Workplace Relations (Welfare to Work) Act 2005 which, as pointed out by the Australian Council of Social Services (2005, 12), affected some of the most disadvantaged welfare recipients—people with a disability, single parents, the long-term unemployed, and mature-aged unemployed.

This understanding of our humanity is not restricted to social security policy. It is the common objective of most welfare and human services policy. The core policy framework of the current Australian government, for example, which aims to promote ‘social inclusion’, reflects this same ideal. In early 2010, after extensive consultation and planning, the Rudd Labor government published a detailed statement of that strategy: A Stronger, Fairer Australia. The report documents a sympathetic and extensive approach
to human welfare, which was clearly and centrally expressed in its definition of social inclusion:

Social inclusion means building a nation in which all Australians have the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in the nation’s economic and community life, develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect...An inclusive Australia is one where all Australians have the capabilities, opportunities, responsibilities and resources to learn, work, connect with others and have a say (Social Inclusion Unit, 2009, 2).

However, the report (2009, 3 and 10) goes on to state that:

This means focussing on the people facing the greatest disadvantage and helping them build the skills and capabilities that encourage self-reliance...[and] avoid long term dependency...[and] getting people to take responsibility for the choices that are within their control and providing support in ways that build and reinforce their capabilities, resilience and independence (my emphasis).

Self-reliance has been largely uncontested as a goal—and as the key characteristic of the human substance—in Australian social welfare policy. Motivation—the state of a person’s will—has been the commonly presented arena within which the pathway to expressing or realising that substance is to be found. The human essence, and correspondingly, human dignity, has been equated with independence, with freedom from reliance upon others. Saunders, in upholding that equation, has frequently demonstrated the passion with which that belief is held, and the judgements implicit in it:
Self-reliance might be considered a good thing in and of itself. Liberals believe that rather than relying on handouts from others, *self-reliance is virtuous* and should therefore be encouraged wherever possible...Liberals believe it is immoral for the government to take money away from people who are *maintaining themselves* and their families through their own efforts and redistribute it to people who have no intention of even trying to achieve *self-reliance*...The right to welfare is a demand that others do something for you, not a decision to do something for yourself and as such it is still based in *weakness and dependency* (cited in Watts 2003, 18, my emphasis).

Dependence has become a synonym for debasement, for some profound degradation or corruption of the substance of one’s humanity.

The difficulty with this approach is that it denies the recognition of the humanity of those who bear the ‘stain’ of the corporeal, and who cannot exhibit that self-reliance founded on willpower untrammelled by its influence—children, women, the aged, the ill, those with a disability, those experiencing poverty and others. It is an approach that oppresses them for revealing their—and our—humanity:

> There is something shocking about...a concentrated spectacle of sickness, decrepitude and mortality. We still live in a society that tends to hide illness and death, as if it were somehow symbolic of failure or defeat (Brown 2006, 43).

The adoption of a concept of human being (and of human agency) in social policy based on the traditional debate about substance, gives that policy an oppressive
character. Instead of shaping it towards the fullest recognition and flourishing of those excluded from participation in the life of the community, it provides too little recognition of the influence of the corporeal to promote those people's agency. Moreover, in treating the foundation of that agency as located in the non-corporeal, it positions its supposed beneficiaries as the cause of its failure. Whilst this criticism of social policy as ‘blaming its victims’ is not a new ground of criticism, the connection of this failure to the debate about substance is. It is hoped that this thesis will demonstrate the inadequacy of concepts such as independence and self-reliance as the objectives of social policy, and help promote policies that recognise both our interdependence and our corporeality, and the influence both have on any person’s capacity to act.

While it may not seem to be the case, I must indicate something of the limited scope of my thesis: my argument engages with one aspect of the history of Western philosophy, with a view to understanding Marx’s theory. Accordingly, this thesis does not engage with some of the major contributions to the debate concerning substance, such as the work of Plato. To that end, the development of this thesis has been guided by Foucault’s genealogical approach to the history of ideas—that the engagement with potential influences on a particular body of thought be limited to those that are apparent on the ‘surface’ of the relevant works, rather than determined by the ‘second guessing’ of the researcher. In this thesis, I have concentrated on those works Marx expressly engaged with in his own texts, as well as those of his predecessors whose work was not explicitly acknowledged by Marx, but which influenced him. Where no such express reference is available, but Marx appeared to be using a term given a particular meaning

\[3\] See, for example, Beder (2000)
in the tradition of debate about substance, the investigation has focussed on known writers in Marx’s time, and as the primary shapers of those terms within the debate.

My thesis is also limited in the sense that it is a history of the idea as it impacted on Marx’s theory, and not on the broader influence of the idea: it is not a social history of the debate about substance. Neither does this thesis fully consider the impact of the broader social context on the content of the ideas as expressed, such that it may be that their full meaning, as intended by their authors, or as appreciated by their intended audiences, is not captured. That, however, is not the objective of this thesis: rather, the objective is to comprehend those texts as Marx encountered them.

In doing so, this thesis is not part of a history of philosophy per se – it does not attempt to capture the breadth of the entire system of the various contributors’ thought, or of Marx’s thought. Reference is made to other aspects of those contributors’ works and context, where relevant, but the risk of the full meaning failing to be captured remains. In this context, however, the character of the history of the debate about substance as a tradition in MacIntyre’s sense, justifies its consideration independently of such a comprehensive review. The debates concerning substance, having been clearly established well before Aristotle considered them, make it an exemplar of MacIntyre’s idea of a tradition—a long-standing, clearly understood debate defined within a set of ‘fundamental agreements’ that cuts across a variety of systems of thought. Given the founding role of ontology in any system of thought, its consideration as a tradition suggests that it is one of the areas that can legitimately be considered in its own right.
To adequately engage with the influences on Marx’s views concerning substance and the corporeal is a substantial undertaking in its own right and is the focus of this thesis. Having explored the foundations of those views, this thesis only touches upon their detailed application to contemporary capitalist society so as to demonstrate their retention, notwithstanding arguments made to distinguish the late or ‘mature’ works from earlier ones. To consider in detail the application of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ to capitalism, one would need to start with an exploration of the economic and other political literature of Marx’s time, including the works of Saint Simon, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mill, Jean Baptiste Say, Jean Sismondi and others. To adequately do so is beyond the scope of this thesis. The character of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ can be well appreciated independently of its application to specific kinds of social formations, given that it forms part of the tradition of the debate about substance. Moreover, in many respects, the focus on the economic and other literature has limited the appreciation of the general theory and, in turn, limited the comprehension of that theory, as applied to capitalism.

As I have indicated, any exploration of Marx’s critique of the traditional debate about substance, the development of his alternative model, and of the circumstances in which the movement might be made from one to the other, is part of a history of debate about substance.

To indicate what this debate has been about, I start in Chapter One by examining the work of those, like Augustine and Descartes, who promoted an account of being (or substance) founded in its traditional terms of independence and separation, and who
'made sense' of being human in terms that devalued and dismissed the material and corporeal. In effect, the first chapter of this thesis outlines something of the contours of the mainstream philosophical approach to substance, by outlining Augustine and Descartes' approach to substance as exemplars of a tradition central to Western philosophy which treats the corporeal either as a problem or as irrelevant. The contrast serves to ground Marx's critique and illuminate the alternative he proposed.

Chapter Two considers the works of Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius as key contributors to the early debates concerning substance and the place of the corporeal within it, as well as key influences on Marx. Aristotle looked favourably on the traditional emphasis on separation as a means of promoting certainty, yet, in developing his dualist hylomorphic alternative, and incorporating matter into it, highlighted matter's volatility and influence. Such was matter's instability that Aristotle, in seeking a secure location for the human substance, placed it in the species—rather than in individual beings—contrary to the approach preferred in the traditional debate. Epicurus and Lucretius, as some of the earliest materialist influences on Marx's thought, also emphasised the activity and influence of matter, and the manner in which it involved the experience of limitation and of connection or interdependence, in contrast to the traditional concept. Epicurus and Lucretius also illuminated Marx's critique of religious thought, with its images of lives without limitation—lives of godlike ease—undermining our capacity to live with limitation, tension and each other. They suggest, however, the transformative potential of this tension that Marx was to later locate in the extremities of alienation—and the manner in which this potential was frustrated through their insulation from the material world through their institutions of slavery. They suggested
that the experience of uncertainty, limitation and pain were not always antithetical to the good.

Chapter Three addresses one of the great turning points in the debate. It considers Spinoza’s contribution through his inversion of the traditional approach to substance—treating only nature as a whole as meeting its qualification of independence, rather than individual beings. In particular, this chapter considers the outcomes of this inversion, whereby individual beings or bodies within this inverted universe, having been denied the robust independence traditionally attributed to substance, become ‘essence’: fragile, uncertain aggregates that continue only so long as their dominant relation—or ‘mode’—continues to persist. With Spinoza, the central place previously accorded to substance in discussing being comes to be occupied by the concept of essence and, with that change, the ‘fundamental agreements’ and shared understandings that framed the tradition of the idea of substance further challenged. Spinoza demands attention as crystallising and exploring a profound shift in that tradition. His works provide a fresh approach to the character of particular beings, their interdependence, and the incorporation of the mode of relation into the foundations of those beings: in turn, they illuminate Marx’s concepts of individual beings and the pivotal role of the mode of production in his works. This chapter also considers the influence of Leibniz, Herder, Fichte and Schelling, who, together with related theological and scientific debates, placed Spinoza’s thought in more organic, interdependent terms, and in the form in which it most directly influenced Marx’s thought. They made the concepts of being and of species in terms of an aggregate or ensemble commonplace, and gave them the character that Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx, following them, were to adopt. Their works,
however, provided a more radical development—even transformation—than the mere translation and expansion of Spinoza’s insights: they presented particular beings as active and brought out the movement between those incomplete, dependent particular beings and Spinoza’s transcendent, all-embracing substance. No longer was being characterised in the traditional terms of stability, separation and independence, and as only exceptionally, improperly, disturbed by change. Through the work of Idealist and Romantic philosophers, being became equated with change and thereby able to accommodate the instability of the corporeal that had long been excluded by the traditional debates about substance.

This is the movement – the dynamic universe – that became the focus of Hegel’s works, which I consider in Chapter Four. Hegel’s Logic, as rejecting the traditional emphasis on independence and the source of the underlying concepts applied by Marx, is considered in detail in this chapter, particularly the early discussion of being and nothing, and the manner in which being could be understood as the aggregate of, and movement within, a variety of relations. Hegel’s exploration of particular beings’ drive towards a greater unity within those relations—of the dependence of any being on its objects and its conscious experience of this feeling of incompleteness, of desire, as a constant, troubling drive towards change—was central to Marx’s own understanding of ‘species being’ and of the circumstances in which it might be fully realised. The tension, movement and transformative promise in this experience, as the focus of Hegel’s dialectics of the ‘Lord and Servant’ and the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ in the Philosophy of Spirit, is also explored in this chapter. This examination serves to highlight the influence of insecurity and uncertainty in Hegel’s work: goaded on by insatiable desire, Hegel’s humanity
searched for a more secure sense of self. For Hegel, contrary to the traditional debate about substance, insecurity, instability and anxiety were the norm. His is an image of an uncertain being only achieving some stability, some sense of freedom from the corporeal (from desire), through imposing the confrontation with desire on, and enslaving, others. Hegel not only represented the human substance as profoundly dependent on others, but as bound up with an oppressive flight from the corporeal, and foreshadowing the links between the constitution of our being and relations of oppression that Marx was to highlight.

Marx subsequently criticised Hegel’s idealism as an instance of that flight from the corporeal. In ‘inverting’ Hegel’s thought, so as to give primacy to material experience, Marx reflected the criticisms made by Feuerbach before him. Chapter Five sketches Feuerbach’s critique of Hegel, and his emphasis on the importance of the corporeal encounter. In his call (quoted above) for a ‘more human language’, Marx drew on Feuerbach’s call for a philosophy that focussed on “the realm of embodied, living spirits...the realities of human misery...a human understanding, and human language” (cited in Wartofsky 1977, 196). In his exploration of ‘species being’, and of the character of being more broadly considered, there is a clear nexus between Feuerbach’s work, particularly his Thoughts on Death and Immortality, and that of Marx. Marx drew on Feuerbach’s insistence on the limited, anxious, material character of the human condition, and on our ‘religious’ denial of, and flight from, that experience (and the intolerant, oppressive relationships that promoted).
The next three chapters focus on Marx’s theory. Chapter Six outlines Marx’s rejection of the traditional debate about substance and the manner in which Marx adopted key concepts from Hegel’s *Logic*, so as to characterise being in terms of an ‘ensemble’ of relations, interdependence and becoming. It presents any being as ‘objective’—as deeply dependent upon what, in traditional approaches to substance, is treated as ‘external’ and inessential, and emphasises the neediness, openness and instability of any such ‘objective being’.

Chapter Seven builds on this presentation of being, in terms of an open, unstable, ensemble of relations. It explores the manner in which that character makes the human substance extrinsic, located in nature (humanity’s ‘inorganic body’) and thereby in the social (as the mode of production is the mode of life, the means by which the relationship between humanity’s organic and inorganic bodies are mediated). So precarious was individual being, in the face of nature’s resistance, that maintenance of the individual’s mode of unification, and hence, continuity was dependent on social cooperation—so much so that the ‘human essence’ was located in the ‘ensemble of social relations’ Marx described as the ‘mode of production’. The character of our humanity was not that of the fixed, independent and separate, as favoured in the traditional debates about substance, but the openness, interdependence and volatility of essence.

The connections between this unstable, interdependent being and the revolutionary transformation of society—the shift from the independent, non-corporeal self to ‘species being’—are explored in Chapter Eight. Drawing on writers from Epicurus to Feuerbach, this chapter also draws out the character of individual or particular beings as radically
insecure or anxious, and the manner in which Marx, drawing on these predecessors, comprehended religious thought both as providing the reassurance demanded by that anxiety, and working to exacerbate it. It draws out the links between the denial of our corporeal, interdependent character, anxiety and oppression. It suggests the manner in which that flight, however, is self-defeating and, yet, by virtue of that failure, capable of promoting a change in consciousness—the shift towards species consciousness.

I have argued that we need an approach to considering being that treats the corporeal as a central component, and allows for its influence upon the non-corporeal—a way of thinking and talking about being that does not treat the two as separate and independent, and is not only sufficiently open to comprehending the influence of our bodies, but of the ‘external’ corporeal world. I argue that, to that end, Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ is a better approach. His work was founded on a recognition of interdependence: that our lives are punctuated by, and organised around, moments of separation and of unity, and of anxiety, pain and pleasure. His theory embraces this breadth of experience, this mix of absence and presence, rather than favouring only one side. His theory is one that suggests a different ‘human language’ to that of the traditional debate about substance: one founded in relationships, rather than separation, thus embracing the corporeal as central to our sense of self. Moreover, Marx’s works (1975d, 276-7) were founded on an appreciation of the tenacity with which that language would be opposed:

We would not understand a human language...From the one side, such a language would be felt to be begging, imploring and hence *humiliating*. It could
be used only with feelings of shame or debasement. From the other side, it would be received as an *impertinence* or *insanity* and so rejected. We are so estranged from our human essence that the direct language of man strikes us as an *offence against the dignity of man*, whereas the estranged language of objective values appears as the justified, self confident and self-acknowledged dignity of man incarnate (emphasis in original).

Chapter Nine explores the unrealised potential of this language. Here, I suggest that the transformative potential of corporeal limitation and pain is not limited to the extremities which Marx thought necessary, but extends to much more everyday occurrences. With regard to the breadth and influence of the many ways in which we are called upon to discipline our bodies, and the extent to which related bodily anxieties have featured since the middle of the twentieth century, I argue that corporeal prompts towards a different sense of our selves are both immanent and promising. These arguments not only draw on the Marxist tradition, but on feminist insights, and the experience of those suffering serious, chronic illness, as well as the moments of joy and exhilaration we can experience in our bodies. I suggest that Marx’s notion of ‘species being’—as a collective mode of mediating between our organic and inorganic bodies—can equally apply to other experiences of the body, such as those shaped around gender. Whilst maintaining Marx’s emphasis on a dominant mode of production, I also draw on his recognition of the co-existence of other, less pervasive, modes to explore the potential application of Marx’s model to those whose life experiences are more immediately affected by other long-established, oppressive relations. Drawn together, these diverse experiences of the body testify to its centrality to our humanity, and to its potential realisations. To
consider other co-existing modes of being, as part of a larger ensemble or symphony dominated by a particular mode of production, is consistent with Marx’s views. To draw on that breadth of experience is also to soberly assess the influence of those varied corporeal experiences, and to recognise the efficacy with which relations of domination continue to dampen and distort the emancipatory prompts of the corporeal. It is to recognise that, absenting the extremity of pain Marx anticipated, more than those prompts will be required to support any real change in the foreseeable future. It is to that end this thesis is dedicated—the promotion of the terms with which those prompts might better be recognised and responded to. Through it, I seek to promote a ‘more human language’ that will allow us to encounter and interpret our corporeality afresh, and as the source of the best of our humanity.
CHAPTER ONE – The Flight from the Corporeal

This thesis seeks to promote a better recognition of the centrality and promise of the corporeal. It seeks to contest the manner in which the material foundations of, and obstacles to, human agency are often ignored or underestimated in social theory and social policy by promoting what Marx, drawing on Feuerbach, called a ‘more human language’. I argue that Marx, in engaging in that endeavour, participated in that tradition of philosophical debate focussed on ‘substance’. As part of a tradition, Marx drew on and developed the arguments of those who preceded him. Chapters Two through to Five of this thesis explore the influences of those predecessors. However, to understand the contribution Marx and his predecessors made to that debate, it is necessary to have some sense of what they opposed. In this chapter, I provide a sample of those arguments that rejected the corporeal as essential and founded the human character—the human substance—in the non-corporeal. Perhaps ironically, considering this rejection extends to the passions, this sampling is also important to understand the extremity of conviction with which the corporeal has been rejected and devalued, and a dispassionate reason or will preferred. This passionate conviction suggests, in part, why Marx was to place so much faith in the transformative potential of extreme pain—that is, extreme alienation and immiseration. In Chapter Eight, I argue that, given the strength with which beliefs in the traditional debate about substance are held (particularly the idea that substance is something separate from all else, including the taint of the corporeal), Marx could only imagine their transformation through equally powerful experiences.
So strong is the conviction in the separate, untainted notion of a non-corporeal substance, that an assertion of the value and promise of the corporeal is often met with revulsion. For those who privilege the non-corporeal, the corporeal is something less than, despoiling the truly human. One of the greatest exemplars of that revulsion—and resulting disciplines—is St Augustine. Having located the human essence in the will, the volatility of the corporeal, and its capacity to contradict and even override the will, made it a threat demanding the most urgent and unrelenting discipline.

More recently, growing from the confidence borne of empiricist science, the corporeal and material world has ceased to be regarded as a threat, so much so that the non-corporeal has almost eclipsed the corporeal in everyday consciousness. In the light of science’s successes, the former’s unpredictabilities and insecurities regarding the natural world have lost much of their influence and prominence. So confident has contemporary Western society become, that the domination of the non-corporeal over the corporeal, if not already seen to be accomplished, is treated as a certain future achievement. The corporeal world has been reduced to humanity’s current or future representation of it. René Descartes is widely regarded as providing the first philosophical expression of this view, and I survey his consideration of substance as an exemplar of those who so devalue the corporeal, rendering it almost invisible. St Augustine and René Descartes are key exemplars of those who, in searching for some sense of the human character, treated the corporeal as inessential. However, this is by no means intended to suggest that they were the first philosophers to grapple with these questions. A preoccupation with ‘Being’ (ousia in Greek) or ‘Substance’ (substantia in Latin) has proved to be a recurring motif in Western philosophy. From the earliest traces
of metaphysics, philosophers have set out to say what reality is. For example, Parmenides, the most important pre-Socratic writer claimed that there was a changeless *Doxa* ruled over by a deity:

…who steers all things. For she rules over frightful childbirth and copulation of all things, sending the female to mingle with the male, and again contrariwise, the male to mingle with the female (Graham 2006, 208).

If a preoccupation with Being provides one striking and persistent aspect of the architectonic of Western thought, another has been the tendency to treat the material world or the fact that we humans live in, and have, bodies, as a deeply unfortunate thing. That this disdain for the material and the corporeal has also had a lot to do with persistent religious beliefs and practices should come as no surprise.

This concatenation is on full display in the work of one of the greatest Christian philosophers, St Augustine. Augustine’s vision of the true human existence was clear:

The flesh will rise imperishable, the flesh will rise without blemish, without deformity, without mortality, without being a burden or a weight (Sermon 240.3 cited in Miles 2005, 321).

The flesh would no longer “confound” and “shame” us (Augustine 2012b, Book 13 Chapter 13). As we secured the perfection of substance—the security, stability and certainty of our true being—it would fall or die.
Yet this prospect of death, regardless of the spiritual rewards it offered, provided little comfort to Augustine’s fellow Christians. He recognised that the ‘deepest human’ desire was to enjoy immortality:

I know you want to keep on living. You do not want to die. And you want to pass from this life to another in such a way that you will not rise again as a dead person, but fully alive and transformed. This is what you desire. This is the deepest human feeling (Sermon 344.4 cited in Miles 2005, 321).

The ‘deepest human’ desire was to continue living, but free of the burdens of a mortal, limited, material body. For Augustine, as a Christian, and so committed to the idea of bodily resurrection, this involved no simple abandonment of material existence, but its transformation from the body of the ‘flesh’, with its ‘corruptibility’, to that conforming to the substance or foundation of our humanity. It was to render our humanity an image or reflection of the divine—an image of the body conforming to the will, just as the world, as god’s artefact, perfectly conformed to his will (Dyson 2005; Holt 2008; Vessey 2012); a body free of “blemish...deformity...mortality...burden or weight”; a perfectly disciplined body, so much so as to be almost invisible, unnoticeable; a pure instrument.

Augustine, writing in the fourth century, with his central, unsettled pre-occupation with the significance of the corporeal, marks one extremity of the Western engagement with the debate about the extent to which the corporeal forms part of the human substance. Descartes, writing in the seventeenth century, marks another important extremity in the Western tradition. In contrast to what, for Augustine, was the troublesome presence of the corporeal, Descartes treated its influence as diminishing to the point where it
disappeared. Both locate the foundation of all being, including the human substance, in the exercise of reason, and make the domination of the external world its task. For Augustine, this task is not easily met, whereas Descartes almost defines it out of relevance.

Augustine’s vision (and his appreciation of the difficulties in realising it) makes him an exemplar in a theoretical tradition concerned with spelling out an account of being. His treatment of the relationship of the corporeal to the divine captures the manner in which, for so long, the corporeal has been treated as something foreign and corrupting of our substance and being. In this chapter, I want to represent a slice of the tradition which dealt with substance, and did so in ways that were dismissive of the corporeal. Rather than offering a comprehensive account, I have chosen to summarise this tradition by focussing on just two of its exemplary figures, St Augustine and René Descartes. Their work exemplifies this approach to Being or substance. Moreover, both philosophers are widely regarded as having made a lasting impression on Western thought. So significant was Augustine’s contribution that Dyson (2005, 3) prefaced his recent survey of Augustine’s works with the comment that, “it is hard to exaggerate Augustine’s influence on the development and character of European thought.” Further, Augustinian scholars point to him as the first person to legitimate the “first person standpoint” (Matthews 2005, 3; Taylor 1989). As such, despite the time between them, Augustine is seen as a, if not the, key predecessor to Descartes. Descartes’ influence, however, is not merely as a successor to Augustine. Woolhouse (1993, 1) points to how Descartes is “often named as [modern philosophy’s] father”, with his search for epistemic certainty influencing “the style, the shape, and the content of much subsequent philosophy.”
Matthews (2005, 2) has pointed out, Descartes’ “proposal has so fully insinuated itself in modern ways of thinking that it cannot be ignored.” Together, Augustine and Descartes are two of the key contributors to that architectonic of Western thought that privileges the non-corporeal as the locus of being.

In both men’s work, we see something of the characteristic disdain for the corporeal in which our bodies are treated as inappropriate, unseemly, shameful or contaminating, and requiring the most rigorous discipline. The kinds of views which they exemplified were hardly uncontested. Augustine himself wrote well after philosophers like Epicurus and Lucretius had rejected much of the debate about substance which Augustine and Descartes sought to defend. This very limited sampling of a major theological/philosophical tradition of thought about the nature and limits of the corporeal is the necessary starting point for my treatment of how and why it was that Marx contested this privileging of the rational, the ideational and the spiritual.

Needless to say, my treatment follows where whole armies have marched before me. From the records of pre-Socratic philosophers, the earliest contributors to the Western philosophical tradition, one can trace the pre-occupation with being. The surviving fragments of the sixth century BCE works of Thales, Anaximanes, Exenophanes, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles suggest that the debate about the nature of primary matter was central, with water, air, earth and fire, individually or collectively, being held to fulfil the role (Curd 2011; Graham 2006; Macauley 2005; McKirahan 2010). Equally prominent were arguments about change. Anaximander and Anaximanes, for example, held that change characterised the world (Graham 2006). Perhaps most famously of all,
Heraclitus emphasised its universal character and the manner in which that universality enabled it to be considered a source of stability: “We step into and we do not step into the same rivers” (cited in McKirahan 2010, 118; see also Graham 2006). Others—with Parmenides, Zeno, Anaxagoras and Melissus prominent amongst them—denied any change, insisting that it was only a re-arrangement of existing materials or periodic shifts between different degrees of concentration of the same materials (Curd 2011; Graham 2006). This emphasis on change was to characterise the work of the atomists. Leucippus and Democritus, who reduced the variety of materials to the one uniform atom, represented change, through the atoms’ repeated collisions, as the constant feature of the universe (Graham 2006).

Matter, however, was not the only candidate for the foundation of the universe. Anaximander suggested some uniform, unlimited starting point or foundation (arkle) (Graham 2006). Pythagoras presented the universe or kosmos as a harmonia, a ‘fitting together’ or connection, reflecting the universal logic of mathematics. He also introduced the notion of human beings as a combination of body and soul, with the latter treated as immortal. It was at this stage we find some of the earliest records of the distrust of the body, with Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Melissus characterising the senses as misleading and unreliable (McKirahan 2010).

This distrust grew under the influence of Stoicism from the third century BCE. The Stoics developed the concept of the logos, as meaning both the order external to humanity in the world at large as well as an innate capacity in any human being to comprehend that order (Baltzly 2003; Nussbaum 1994 Tillich 1968). This participation in
the *logos*, and the potential to do so consciously, distinguished humanity from all other beings (Nussbaum 1994). However, it could only be realised with a rigorous ascetic discipline: one that distinguished *oreixeis* (healthy or necessary desires attendant on being a corporeal being) and *pathe* (`unruly passions` that prevented one securing unity with the *logos*) (McGinn 1991, 105; Nussbaum 1994). The ideal Stoic relationship to the body was one of `indifference` (Fiala 2003, 154; Baltzly 2003; McGinn 1991). This discipline, however, and the wisdom it promised, was only expected to be achieved by a few. The Stoics had a pessimistic view for the bulk of humanity. They were not expected to free themselves of unwieldy passions and secure their position in the *logos* (Tillich 1968; Tillich 2000). Whilst rejecting any original or innate evil, the Stoics still tended to regard the passage from an ordinary human life mired in passion to a life governed by wisdom as “an unbridgeable gap” (Tillich 1957, 112).

However, it was Gnostic thought, including Manichaeism, in the second century CE (and later) that transformed this subordination of the corporeal into an unqualified rejection. Not only was the corporeal treated as unstable, unreliable and deceptive, Gnostic thought presented it as of a different, and evil, origin, as compared to the incorporeal (Atac 2006; Williams 1996). Gnostics treated the body as a prison within which the ‘spark’ of god’s spirit had been imprisoned.\(^4\) They regarded bodily desires as reinforcing and legitimising this imprisonment, and thus as something to be guarded against and disciplined. In particular, sexual activity was to be avoided, lest in the act of

\(^4\) Whilst the diversity within those traditions commonly described as Gnostic makes it a contested category, and even suggest a more ‘ambivalent’ view as to the body, their characterisation of matter as evil appears to remain a widely accepted feature (Williams 1996, 117).
procreation another innocent soul or ‘spark’ be captured in a body (Ranke-Heinemann 1990).

This was the world in which Christianity sought, and eventually achieved, acceptance. That acceptance, however, was secured following a lengthy competition with both Stoicism and Gnosticism, and saw Christianity take on their hostility to the body. Contrary to Christianity’s Jewish origins, and Judaism’s more accepting attitude to the body, Christianity adopted the hostility that had been the standard of its competing belief systems. In particular, as Ranke-Heinemann points out (1990, 57) “virginity was [to become] the Christian virtue”. This assumption of pre-existing values was particularly clear for Ambrose, who was bishop of Milan in the fourth century CE (cited in Ranke-Heinemann 1990, 57):

This virtue is in fact our exclusive property...Though we share the same air with all others, and participate in all the aspects of an earthly body, though we are no different from others in our birth, yet we escape the miseries of nature, which is otherwise the same, only by virginity, while virginal chastity seems to be held in reverence by the pagans, but is nonetheless violated (even though it is placed under the protection of religion) and is persecuted by the wild tribes, and totally unknown to all other creatures.

This process of accommodation—of the mutual adaptation of Christianity and the ancient world—was exemplified by the life of St Augustine. Encountering Christianity as an educated man, and sharing the dominant culture’s deep pessimism about corporeality, Augustine was only able to seriously consider that faith on being convinced
it shared that pessimism. So significant was this anxiety towards the corporeal, however, that it marked the balance of Augustine’s life and his works and, with them, the character and influence of the Christian church and Western philosophy.  

**AUGUSTINE’S PESSIMISM**

Augustine wrestled with the character of the corporeal throughout his works, as the Christian church had made a significant positive role for the body non-negotiable: Augustine himself, like Paul, emphasised that the belief in bodily resurrection was a fundamental Christian doctrine (Augustine 2012b, Chapter 22, Book 4). This same faith, however, in celebrating an omnipotent god, made the non-corporeal both superior to, and the ground of, corporeality. It made the corporeal irrelevant to the divine ground of all being—an absence—whilst placing it at the centre of their vision of fulfilled human

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5 Recent scholarship in relation to Augustine, such as Meilaender (2001), Vessey (2012) and Wetzel (2011), suggest that Augustine had a much less antagonistic attitude towards the corporeal. They posit a difference between his early works, such as the *Confessions*, and his later works, especially *The city of god*, as evidencing a distancing from the influence of Manichean thought in his early life. However, this view remains contested (see Van Oort 2010 and Harrison, cited in Holt 2008). They present Augustine’s characterisation of the Fall as an act of disobedience that severed the unity of the will of Adam and Eve from that of god, resulting in the lack of unity between humanity and its various appetites (Dyson 2005, Holt 2008, Vessey 2012). Vessey (2012) also emphasises the context within which Augustine wrote, particularly the view held by other influential Christian thinkers in his time that sexuality was not a feature of the pre-lapsarian body. Sexuality, they held, was a product of sin. On this basis, Vessey argues that Augustine’s presentation of pre-lapsarian humanity as sexual and engaged in reproduction evidenced a much more inclusive approach to the body than has been recognised. Similarly, Wetzel (2011, 46) suggests that Augustine’s attitudes to materiality were much more ‘complex’ than ordinarily reflected in the literature. However, as detailed in this chapter, I find Augustine’s later works, including *The city of god*, to still express a loathing of the corporeal. Whilst Augustine does appear to be less concerned with the corrupting influence of the corporeal in his later works, and more with the divisions created by human disobedience, this concern itself evidences a lower valuation of the corporeal. Augustine’s treatment of the resurrected body, whilst incorporating sexuality, for example, is still an incomplete embrace for it is a body shorn of its defining characteristics. In any event, there remains a remarkable continuity in Augustine’s consideration of the corporeal. Contrary to Vessey’s (2012, 805) claim that the mature Augustine was ‘embarrassed about…the…barely veiled contempt’ in his early works, I argue that same contempt remains present in his more mature writings, as demonstrated by the passages quoted later in this chapter.
being. Here, in Augustine’s attempt to reconcile his faith and experience, lies a central, and influential, exemplar of the problem of an approach to thinking about what the substance of human being is. With all beings dependent on the Christian god, and that god defined in terms of omnipotence, the corporeal was seen to have no influence on the universal substance. However, with this omnipotence seen to be expressed in both the act of creation and in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the tensions of corporeal existence demanded some reconciliation. Humanity, as initially created and placed within the ‘garden of Eden’, was embodied and good. The return to perfection, as modelled for Christians in Jesus, involved the resurrection of the body. Yet it seems bodily existence troubled Christians from their earliest days. The Christian insistence on the one transcendent, creator god denied them the comforts drawn by many of their contemporaries from the dualist doctrines of Gnostic and Manichean thought. Augustine made a key resolution to resolving this tension. He did so by re-inventing the body, making it, both before the ‘Fall’ and after the ‘Resurrection’, present, but docile, domesticated and without influence. It made for an account of the body as experienced—as uncomfortable, demanding and resistant—in terms of deviancy. With Augustine, the body, when influential, when driving our being, became a form of perversion, a lesser humanity, a descent towards no-thingness, demanding discipline. Augustine’s domestication or sanitisation of the body is illuminated by his vision both of god, and of humanity before the ‘Fall’ and after its salvation (that is, after the resurrection of the body). Together, despite his attempts to attribute some value to our corporeality, we find Augustine clearly preferring the non-corporeal as substance. His account of the Fall, moreover, clearly represents that corporeality as a punishment: that
our sensuousness and the vivid tensions of life are not sources of exhilaration or enlightenment, but penal servitude and corruption. For Augustine, to be corporeal was to suffer with only one worthwhile end: to discover our substance in the non-corporeal, and to discipline ourselves towards that end in the hope of resurrection, thereby securing release from the anxieties, instabilities, pains and delights of corporeal life.

Augustine’s journey began with his reservations about Christianity. As a member of the educated elite, Augustine initially had trouble accepting the corporeal images of the Christian god (Griffin and Paulson 2002, 98). The popular belief in an anthropomorphic god (or gods) was widely held, and was well-grounded in both Jewish and Christian scripture, as well as Greek and Roman traditions (Griffin and Paulsen 2002, 97-103). This reluctance founded his initial—some, such as Van Ourt (2010), say life-long—attraction to Manichaeism, with its emphasis on two fundamental substances and the location of the good in the non-corporeal. It reflected a “profound pessimism about reality”, which Tillich (1968, 106-7) argued, continued to characterise Augustine’s work, even after his conversion to Christianity. It produced a theology and philosophy in which “evil was displaced from God [and substance] to man” (Dollimore 1991, 145).

So powerful were these reservations about the corporeal, and so widely ridiculed the Christian emphasis on resurrection, that Augustine only fully embraced the Christian tradition following his introduction to a conception of the Christian god in non-corporeal, ‘spiritual’, terms (Griffin and Paulson 2002, 104). Augustine later confessed that:

...although what was the nature of a spiritual substance I had not the faintest or dimmest suspicion – yet rejoicing, I blushed that for so many years I had barked,
not against the Catholic faith, but against the fables of carnal imaginations...

(2012a, 6.3.4).

Augustine’s works, and his frequent dealings with issues of corporeality and sexuality in particular, evidence the life-long effects of these reservations. His conversion to Christianity made questions of substance central to his thought and practice. Christian doctrine, with its insistence on one absolute, omnipotent god, and of creation ab initio (from nothing), ruled out the recognition of any claim to treat evil, or corporeality, as substance (as the ground of being). However, those doctrines also denied any easy subordination or devaluation of the corporeal, despite its insistent repetitive pains and appetites. In insisting on the centrality of the future resurrection of the dead, Christian doctrine required some validation of the corporeal. Augustine may have explicitly abandoned Manichaeism in his conversion to orthodox Christian beliefs, but this only aggravated the ongoing prominence of a dualism he was unable to resolve.

The tale of Adam and Eve in the perfect Garden of Eden provided a basis for Augustine’s attempt to reconcile those tensions—just as it had his Christian predecessors, such as Gregory of Nyssa (Ranke-Heinnemann 1990, 52-4). Through it, he was able to insist that existence was, as created, founded in the one substance (god) and hence good, but made defective, deviant, or perverse by humanity’s disobedience (Dyson 2005; Holt 2008; Vessey 2012). The account in Genesis of the fall of humanity enabled Augustine to uphold one universal substance by locating the foundations of this disobedience—this deviation or perversion—in the ground of being itself. The Christian god, as omnipotent creator, experienced no limitation or obstacle to
his will. Substance then, in its purest form, was understood as will, as an expression of the capacity to choose. As that capacity, however, it also included the freedom to differ from god—to turn away—and that, for Augustine, was the essence of the Fall. Moreover, that same shared substance—the will—provided the potential for the future return (and eventual resurrection) of humanity.

Augustine treated the choice made by the first humans in the Garden of Eden (to disobey the commandment to not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge) as a choice made to turn away from unity with god’s substance—his will—and to privilege the interests of the human. To align one’s self with any finite thing was to align oneself with something less than god—as the creator ab initio, the creator from nothing, the Christian god was the source of all finite things. To turn one’s attention to those things was to turn away from the fullness of being towards nothingness (Dollimore 1991, 133, 136). It was a turn towards death. Augustine described it as the “death of the soul” (Tillich 1968, 127). This death was a diminution of that which animated us, that which enlivened and ordered our bodies (our will). It was a turn to the always, ever, incomplete and, in Augustine’s eyes, enslaved us to insatiable, undisciplined desire: “the subjection of the spirit to the flesh in a sordid servitude” (2012c, Book 1, Chapter 9).

This turn, as founded on the axis of will, could turn again. The same capacity that enabled humanity to found its existence in the finite could turn again towards the infinite.

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[6] It is this division that recent scholarship (such as Dyson 2005, Holt 2008 and Vessey 2012) emphasises, rather than the turn to nothingness or a lesser good. Still presenting god as will, and human disobedience as the catalyst for the Fall, these writers present Augustine as concerned with the selfish division or separation it produced. This focus on the will—on the non-corporeal—only reinforces my reading of Augustine’s location of the human substance in the non-corporeal. The absence of the resisting body in the garden of Eden, moreover, parallels Augustine’s post-lapsarian treatment of that body as a punishment. For Augustine, the messy, volatile, troublesome body was not part of our essential humanity.
Here, Augustine’s Neo-Platonic heritage, and the conviction that our incorporeal character is more valuable, was reconciled with the Christian insistence on one substance and the resurrection of the corporeal body. If we focus our will on our participation in the divine substance—the incorporeal—we can, with the ‘grace’ (that is, support) of god, enjoy the greatest good. As Taylor (1989, 134) has put it, “By going inward, [we can be] drawn upward”.

This involved no abandonment of the body, however. Augustine was clear that, as lesser beings, even when in union with the divine courtesy of constant contemplation, we cannot help but be embodied beings. These bodies, however, will not be ‘fallen’. They will experience no pain or desire, but return to their perfect pre-lapsarian condition (Dyson 2005; Holt 2008; Miles 2005, 319; Tillich 1968, 126; Vessey 2012). Prior to the Fall, Augustine pictured the body as completely subject to the will. The same perfect alignment—the same perfect discipline—would, in his view, characterise our resurrected bodies. However, Augustine recognised that this transformation would not be easy. In his eyes, humanity’s efforts to return to the good would always be fraught with risk. We would always be vulnerable to being overwhelmed, tempted, distracted and perverted by the corporeal. This was humanity’s punishment. Just as our forebears, Adam and Eve, disobeyed god, so, too, would our bodies disobey us. As Augustine (2012b, Book 13, Chapter 13) put it:

They experienced a new motion of their flesh, which had become disobedient to them, in strict retribution of their own disobedience to God. For the soul, revelling in its own liberty, and scorning to serve God, was itself deprived of the command
it had formerly maintained over the body. And because it had wilfully deserted its
superior Lord, it no longer held its own inferior servant; neither could it hold the
flesh subject, as it would always have been able to do had it remained itself
subject to God. Then began the flesh to lust against the Spirit, in which strife we
are born, deriving from the first transgression a seed of death, and bearing in our
members, and in our vitiated nature, the contest or even victory of the flesh.

Our punishment, as Tillich (1968, 126) described it, was ontological.

The extremity of the body’s disobedience was overwhelmingly evidenced, for Augustine
(2012b, Book 14, Chapter 16), in human sexuality:

[Sexual] lust not only takes possession of the whole body and outward members,
but also makes itself felt within...So possessing ... is this pleasure, that at the
moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended.

So dangerous was sex that it, even if only temporarily, completely severed our link with
the divine, and with our true substance. It was for this reason that Augustine described
sex as “a miniature shadow of death” (Brown 1988, 408, 417). In succumbing to lust,
one succumbed to slavery—a sacrifice of one’s will and one’s substance. In embracing
our corporeality, we became, for Augustine, inhuman.

Moreover, this servitude was not hidden. It was readily apparent in the autonomy of a
man’s penis. A man could have an erection against his will, and not have one when he
truly desired it (Soble 2009, 108-9).
This extremity, and its ready observation, made plain man’s defect: that in his very self he experienced disobedience, a turning away from the will, and thereby from substance or being itself. It made this failure plain and founded the experience of shame. Hence, the pudency found in the shameful parts (pudenda): “It was after sin that our nature, having lost the power it had over the whole body, but not having lost all shame, perceived, noticed, blushed at, and covered it.” (2012b, Book 14, Chapter 21).

For Augustine (2012c, Book 1, Chapter 9), this obvious, repetitive disobedience characterised the fallen, perverted body and founded the identification of discipline—the re-assertion of the will—as the pathway to resurrecting humanity’s substantial, anxiety-free, existence:

> A man turns to good use the evil of concupiscence...when he bridles and restrains its rage...and never relaxes his hold upon it except when intent on offspring, and then controls and applies it to the carnal generation of children...not to the subjection of the spirit to the flesh in a sordid servitude.

The demand for this discipline and restraint extended to women as the necessary partners in that act of generation. Moreover, for Augustine, women, as corporeal, sexual beings, were “identified as concupiscence, [as] the locus of temptation” (Power 1995, 145). The feminine, for Augustine, was “a progression towards inferior things” (Power 1995, 131), and embodied the risk of being “foully polluted by fornication” and “[plunging] into a foul whirlpool of carnal pleasure” (2010, 12-9-14). Augustine stressed that women (2010, 12-9-14) had to be veiled “because too great a progression towards inferior things is dangerous to that rational cognition” that comprises the substance: they
needed “to... be restrained”. He was “…convinced...that nothing turns the spirit of man away from the heights more than the caresses of woman” (Ranke-Heinnemann 1990, 86). Augustine admonished husbands to “love the fact that...[their wives were] human, and hate the fact that [they are women]” (cited in Ranke-Heinnemann 1990, 96).

This discipline of the corporeal, and its temptations, extended well beyond issues of sexuality. Augustine was at pains to point out that the Fall followed from the less tempting desire to eat (and was a greater fault for the greater potential ease of restraint). This basic corporeal demand represented in many ways a far more immanent, demanding threat:

There is another evil of the day... This much hast Thou taught me, that I should bring myself to take food as medicine. But during the time that I am passing from the uneasiness of want to the calmness of satiety, even in the very passage doth that snare of concupiscence lie in wait for me. ... And whereas health is the reason of eating and drinking, there joineth itself as an handmaid a perilous delight... And oftentimes it is doubtful... ... Placed, then, in the midst of these temptations, I strive daily against longing for food and drink. For it is not of such nature as that I am able to resolve to cut it off once for all, and not touch it afterwards, as I was able to do of concubinage (2012a, Book 10, Chapter 31.44 and 47).

7 “And as this commandment enjoining abstinence from one kind of food in the midst of great abundance of other kinds was so easy to keep,—so light a burden to the memory...the iniquity of violating it was all the greater in proportion to the ease with which it might have been kept.” (Augustine 2012b,Book 14, Chapter 12)
The body was not only difficult to discipline; it was even more difficult to discern when discipline was required. For Augustine:

...vice [was] not so much the antithesis of virtue as its perversion, the more dangerous and potentially subversive for being in intimate relation with the good, rather than being an absolute difference or otherness (Dollimore 1991, 141).

The difficulties posed by the corporeal and its desires, and the immanent, effervescent threat of corruption, made living a fully Christian life an anxious, unstable experience.

Augustine’s effort at reconciling the demand for a monist model of substance that conformed to the Christian ideals of an omnipotent god, together with their belief in bodily resurrection, was a failure. His image of the resurrected human body was a fiction, made possible only by the denial of those things that make it a body. As a needless, painless, comprehensively disciplined entity, Augustine’s resurrected body was that of a god: a being in no way bound by the finite or by an existence as a body.

The body’s value, then, was purely instrumental. It was, for Augustine, merely the means by which we discovered our inadequacy and our absolute dependence on god, and only when it approached absolute subordination. The value of the corporeal, and in particular, the senses, was their failure—their incapacity to give us reliable access to the world—and the way in which that failure forced us to rely on reason and appreciate its superiority. It was for this reason that Charles Taylor (1989, 132) has described Augustine as making the “proto-Cartesian move” of emphasising that one could not
doubt one’s own existence. It was the foundation for relying on reason, which, in turn, would lead us to discover its external source, god:

God has not taken this punishment from us, in order that each of us might still remember to what places we have been called and by Whom; so that each one of us might seek out that embrace, in which no instability is found (Augustine’s Sermon 51.3.4, cited in Brown 1988, 426).

For Augustine, the substance—the stable, certain foundation—of our humanity, was grounded in, and shared the character of the divine. It was not corporeal, but rather, partook of the character of the divine will. It was the exercise of this will that had turned humanity away from the divine, and had the potential to return to unity with it. It was only when, having faced the unreliability and insatiability of the corporeal, we turned within to reason that we would recover our substance. It was only through the contemplation of god, of discovering perfection in the incorporeal in contrast to the unreliable corporeal, and in turn being saved through the grace of god, that we would find the stability—the relief—we desired.

**THE CARTESIAN TURN**

Augustine’s pessimism about the corporeal and the ‘external’ world was not unique. Darrin McMahon (2006) has mapped how people were resigned to a life of suffering, or at least to one in which their quality of life was out of their control and subject to the unpredictable vagaries of fate. So deep was this sense of resignation, McMahon (2006,
that to seek some surety of happiness was, at least for fifth century BCE Herodotus, “an outrageous act of hubris”. For much of the history of the West, the human experience of the world was hostile—neither comprehensible nor predictable, the impact of both the social and natural worlds was widely regarded as a question of fate. So pervasive was this view, McMahon (2006, 10-11) argues that its influence is evidenced in the links between happiness and luck or fortune, retained in modern Indo-European languages: in English, we see it in the “root of ‘happiness’...[in] happ, meaning chance, fortune, what happens in the world, giving us such words as “happenstance”... and ‘perhaps’.

We can trace a similar sense of resignation, even as recently as the close of the seventeenth century: Hobbes then denied the capacity to enjoy lasting happiness or ‘continual prospering’ in our mortal lives:

For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense (cited in McMahon 2006, 184-5).

That perspective must have appeared particularly true for Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the wake of the post-Reformation religious wars. Gillespie (2008, 130) points out that only “the Holocaust and the killing fields of Cambodia can begin to” approximate the devastation of those wars. Referring to conservative estimates, Gillespie indicated the impact in terms of the proportion of population lost. For England it was 10%, France 15%, Germany 30% and more than 50% for Bohemia (now part of Czech Republic).
Having faced generations of religiously-inspired conflict, the capacity of religion to provide comfort must have seemed much reduced in the seventeenth century. Moreover, that authority had long been challenged by the growing success and popularity of experimental science: science suggested a radical, promising capacity to escape the vicissitudes of fate and to secure some certainty in relation to the previously unknowable, unpredictable natural world. It suggested the capacity to comprehend and even avoid the pains and uncertainties of this life, particularly as they concerned the vagaries of our corporeal bodies.

It was in this context that René Descartes continued, and deepened, the inward turn previously advocated by Augustine. He, too, saw the corporeal world as unreliable and could only find certainty in doubting it, and in reasoning that an opposing perfection existed. Descartes, however, broke with Augustine when he accepted that humanity could, of its own endeavour, secure that stability and enjoy the independence and character of substance. With the scientific achievements of Galileo and others before him, Descartes was able to approach the external world as having been rendered comprehensible and manageable in terms of mechanism. Nature, desire, and the experience of incompleteness and dependence were no longer an inescapable part of the human experience. Nature, rather than god, had become discoverable through the inward turn to reason, and subject to the laws humanity could discern.

For Descartes, nature, including humanity’s nature, was not necessarily unpredictable, uncertain or threatening. Like Augustine, Descartes had found much that was threatening in the world about him, although his experience had less to do with the
desperate passions of concupiscence, and more to do with his experience of the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Thirty Years War shadowed Descartes’ life. It had begun when he was 22, and he was well aware of the atrocities undertaken in the name of religion (Gillespie 2009, 129; Phemister 2006, 17). Descartes’ response was not to bother with seeking security by submission to god, but to turn inwardly to seek there the source of authority. Like Augustine, the vital, bloody, corporeal terms in which the religious conflicts played out in Descartes’ time proved, for him, its unreliability. However, working within the light cast by the scientific revolution wrought by Galileo and others, Descartes did not emulate Augustine. Rather, he reduced the corporeal to an inessential, mechanical, temporary influence. In Descartes’ works, we witness its near-complete eclipse by the illumination he expected to be derived from a methodical and disciplined application of reason.

This makes Descartes another exemplar of the Western tradition of debate about substance. Like Augustine, Descartes treated the corporeal as something foreign to our true human character. However, Descartes’ near-invisible treatment of the corporeal approximates the contemporary confidence in our ability to manage, and enjoy, our bodies.\(^8\) Having displaced faith in god with faith in science, Descartes displaced the

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\(^8\) The interpretation of Descartes’ work in relation to substance remains contested (Afloroaei 2010, Christofidou 2001, Rozemond 1995). In particular, the emphasis on the near invisibility of the corporeal has attracted a good deal of attention in recent scholarship. Writers such as Afloroaei (2010) and Christofidou (2001) are concerned with rehabilitating Descartes from what Christofidou (2001, 215) describes as his “role of anti-hero”. They argue that the treatment of Descartes as denying—even doubting—the existence of the corporeal or material world is incorrect. In their view, Descartes’ treatment of different substances as ‘separable’ was an epistemological and not an ontological distinction—such that his doubting the certainty with which he could reason about the corporeal did not mean he denied its existence (Afloroaei 2010, Ahlstrom 2010, Christofidou 2001, Rozemond 1995, and Wee and Pelczar 2008). Instead, Descartes is presented as
comfort previously gained from religious thought to experimental science and, above all, mathematics.

Descartes defined ‘substance’ in traditional terms of completeness and independence—it comprised “only those things whose existence is in no way reliant upon the existence...of anything else” (Phemister 2006, 68-9). He recognised, as had others before him, that only one being satisfied this definition—god (Christofidou 2001, Phemister 2006, 69)—and thereby continued to privilege the spiritual as the highest order of being and substance. However, Descartes treated ‘thought’ and ‘extension’ as substances, notwithstanding their dependence on god (Christofidou 2001; Phemister 2006, 69). Nevertheless, Descartes treated the status of ‘extension’ as inferior: it did not resemble the divine—it lacked capacity for activity and did not provide the ground for Descartes’ much-desired certainty.

Like Augustine, Descartes regarded the senses as deceptive and unable to provide a certain, reliable access to the world (Gillespie 2009, 191). He also regarded the

asserting that experience was the sole source of knowledge of existence and not the logical process he presented in his Method (Afloroaei 2010). The tide, however, has not completely turned. Others, such as Broadie (2001, 295, 296), continue to see Descartes as having “identified the self...with the incorporeal”. Moreover, even those seeking to ‘rehabilitate’ Descartes admit that the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal remains unclear and that no adequate explanation for their ‘union’ or interaction was provided by Descartes. Afloroaei (2010, 130) goes so far as to state that Descartes abandoned the attempt to do so and accepted the “paradox of two natures”. The current debates concerning Descartes’ dualism demonstrate, as Christofidou (2001, 237) put it, that “there is a lot of unfinished business”. Even so, I expect that the effort to rehabilitate Descartes will not completely succeed. The value Descartes placed upon the non-corporeal and his confidence in its continuity or immortality necessarily diminishes the value and significance of the corporeal. Even if Afloroaei (2010) and Christofidou (2001) are correct to claim that the reception of Descartes’ works has been distorted, to locate the source of that distortion exclusively outside those works would be misleading. The privileging of the non-corporeal in them is not, as Afloroaei (2010, 130) asserts, solely produced by the “search for ‘unquestionable proof’” by those reading them, but by the same search undertaken by Descartes himself.
imagination as problematic. He believed the religious wars had been prompted by the impassioned exaggerations of a fear of god and divine punishment. He sought to promote a humanity “governed by good sense, rather than the fear of god” (Gillespie 2009, 206). For Descartes, the only certain basis of knowledge was doubt. The very act of doubting pointed, in Descartes’ view, to the certainty of our existence. As the only source of certainty, doubt, for Descartes (like Augustine) provided the foundation for understanding and acting in the world. It also prompted a turn towards the divine, as the very character of doubt implied its opposite—some fullness or perfection, assuming of course that god was not being deceptive (Ahlstrom 2010; Wee and Pelczar 2008).

The question of god as deceitful was central to Descartes’ time and, despite his conclusion that a perfect god could not be deceitful, drove the ‘radical’ inward turn that characterises Descartes’ presentation of our humanity (Taylor 1989, 143). Consistent with Christian doctrine, Descartes grounded his thought in a perfect god. Consistent, too, with his experience of religious conflict, he imagined that god was both distant from, and not interested in, everyday practice, leaving its resolution, as Gillespie (2009, 204-5) points out, to human hands. This impotent or irrelevant god did not affect nature, leaving humanity free to understand it.

This world was one, in terms of extension or corporeality, and governed by fixed laws of mechanism and motion. It was a world in which the total quanta of motion between bodies was maintained by the omnipotent god, but in which no new motions arose—only changes in direction. It was a world in which all extension was passive, having received its momentum from god, and from which all initiative or autonomous activity
was absent. All beings with some corporeal dimension – extension – were bound by these laws of mechanics, including living organisms (Phemister 2006, 119). Descartes (cited in Byers 2006, 730) invited his readers:

… to consider … all the functions … such as the digestion of food, the beating of the heart and the arteries, the nourishment and growth of the limbs, respiration … [and] to consider that these functions follow from the mere arrangements of the machine’s organs every bit as naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the arrangements of its counterweights and wheels. In order to explain these functions, then, it is not necessary to conceive of this machine as having any vegetative or sensate soul or other principle of movement and life, apart from its blood and its spirits, which are agitated by the heat of the fire burning continuously in its heart – a fire which has the same nature as all the fires that occur in inanimate bodies.

In contrast, thought, for Descartes, was the truly active and central principle. It was the basis upon which we, as humans, engaged with the world. Founded in god, and most resembling god, thought or reasoning was the ground from which Descartes secured a sense of certainty in the world. For Descartes, we did not have certain knowledge through the senses or perception, or when our imagination provided us with a mental image or interpretation of those perceptions. It was only when we had scrutinised—

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9 The characterisation of Descartes’ physics as deterministic is not uncontested. Wee and Pelczar (2008) argue that some room for changes in direction caused by non-material influences remains as Descartes’ physics only addressed the process by which things were set in motion. With regard to Descartes’ works and the literature, Ahlstrom’s (2010) conclusion in this respect is more convincing. Ahlstrom argues that Descartes, whilst holding that subjective certainty or logic could not comprehend the character of the mind-body union, remained confident that it was not inconsistent with the mechanical laws of physics.
doubted—those impressions and reduced them to the clear logic of mathematics and
gometry that ambiguity and uncertainty were removed. For Descartes, it was only
when we construct our own representation of a thing that it becomes certain
(Christofidou 2001; Gillespie 2009, 198, 200; Taylor 1989, 144-5):

For Descartes, everything that we know is known only when it is perceived,
transmitted to the brain, and represented upon the screen of the imagination by
the will. The sensed object in this way is transformed into a mathematical line or
form on a coordinate system, which Descartes refers to as extension. Thus the
world only truly is when it is represented rather than sensed or imagined, that is,
only when it is factual in a literal sense as something made or constructed
(Gillespie 2009, 198).

This is what Taylor (1989, 143) describes as Descartes’ ‘radical’ inward turn, which was
undertaken to secure a basis for epistemological certainty\(^\text{10}\). The only certain foundation
on which to build a stable, secure human life was to render the human substance its
own creation. It was, as Gillespie (2009, 205) asserts, to make the human life godlike by
assuming the very characteristics associated with the one true substance—omnipotent
will.

With this turn, Descartes rendered the “cosmos an artefact” (Gillespie 2009, 200) —
understood either as a product of, or at least responsive to, human will. In just the same
way that a craftsman intimately understood his craft, so, too, could we use our

\(^{10}\) This turn to oneself—to ‘subjective certainty’— is why Descartes’ work was so radical. This departure—
this radical subjectivity—remains unchallenged as a defining characteristic of Descartes’ work, even in
the recent literature, such as Ahlstrom (2010), Christofidou (2001), and Wee and Pelczar (2008), that
contests his treatment as doubting the existence of the material world.
knowledge of the universe to make ourselves “the masters and possessors of nature” (Smith 2004, 590).

This primacy of the will remained in the midst of Descartes’ accounts of mind and body interaction. As two formally equal substances, thought and extension were capable of reciprocal influence (Phemister 2006, 149). The sensations experienced through extension were, in Descartes’ view, conveyed from body to soul through the pineal gland (Ahlstrom 2010; Phemister 2006; Wee and Pelczar 2008). This, however, was no direct transfer: rather the sensations were the ‘occasion’ on which the passions were activated (Phemister 2006, 155-6; Wee and Pelczar 2008). Far greater emphasis was given to the influence of thought over extension, with the human will, as a like substance to that of god, able to prompt god to alter the movement of the body (Phemister 2006, 157-8). The capacity of god, as the one true incorporeal substance, to directly affect extension when human thought lacked that capacity, only served to accentuate the identification of substance with the non-corporeal. Thought and extension may have been formally equally recognised as substance, but Descartes only ever accorded the former any meaningful weight or influence.

Notwithstanding those texts in which Descartes described the corporeal—the human body—as a form of substance, and as interacting or “intermingling” with thought, this “unsatisfactory vacillation” (Phemister 2006, 124, 149) did not disrupt the privilege given to the non-corporeal. Faced with the brutal, painful traumas of religious conflict, Descartes turned from both the material and religious worlds and initiated the epistemic turn—the philosophical contemplation—that has shaped so much of modernity. In
searching for certainty and freedom from anxiety, Descartes' body, like Augustine's, was no body. It had in effect ceased to matter:

We could also call it neutralising the cosmos, because the cosmos is no longer seen as the embodiment of meaningful order which can define the good for us. And this move is brought about by our coming to grasp the world as mechanism... Gaining insight into the world as mechanism is inseparable from seeing it as a domain of potential instrumental control (Taylor 1989, 148-9).

The corporeal, through the discoveries of science, was reduced to a ready calculation, a simple ordering: one that, with the right methodology, demanded so little of us as to deserve little recognition. The body was no longer the active, corrupting, seductive, threatening influence Augustine imagined, with its demands for a difficult, precarious discipline. At best, it formed part of an interaction or union that ended with death, whilst Descartes remained convinced that the non-corporeal, in some form, endured. The corporeal body was merely a co-incidence, a passing combination with the soul that had no direct impact upon it nor future with it (as, for Descartes, the soul continued independently of the body after death) (Phemister 2006, 39, 161-2):

I knew I was substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. Accordingly this “I” – that is, the soul by which I am what I am – is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist (cited in Smith 2004, 588).
The corporeal, in Descartes’ view, was not part of the human substance. Its presence, if registered, was negligible and temporary, and was so much in the shadow of thought as to be almost completely eclipsed.

**CONCLUSION**

Taken together, Augustine and Descartes exemplify the religious character of a long standing tradition in Western thought: the flight from the trials and anxieties of painful existence by means of a fantasy of godlike domination. With Augustine, the corporeal remained present and threatening—a significant, if distressing and perverted, aspect of the human substance. There substance was equated with will, and access to that will, thereby enabling a blissful life—if only after death—in some incorporeal depth secreted within our bodies. In Descartes, that internal, incorporeal location of the human substance is located deeper still: so deeply internal to our humanity as to be substance in its most traditional sense—that which relies on nothing else. With Descartes, the Western search for the human substance—and for some stable foundation upon which to engage the trials of existence—led to the inversion that characterises modernity. It was but a small step from Descartes’ attribution of godlike powers to humanity and treatment of god as distant and disinterested, to treating humanity as god, and capable of godlike bliss.

Together, Augustine and Descartes mark the poles of our struggle with our status as corporeal creatures. At one extreme, its pains, limitations and bliss are said to reveal the undoing of our godlike substance: the corporeal is prominent and central, but
demanding correction and discipline. At the other, the endeavour to reconcile its promise and pain is abandoned and, with it, the world external to the will. Contrary to Descartes’ vision of a stable, sensible community, the ‘inward turn’ was an act of self-denial: an abandonment of the effort to live well in the world and the flight to a place of fantasy—a fantasy, however, that reflects the lives of few and encourages the pain and oppression of many. It is this fantasy which Marx, like Epicurus and Feuerbach before him, objected to. It is the very set of tensions—of pleasure and pain, of stability and anxiety—that Marx sought to reclaim as central, and as valuable, to our humanity.
Augustine and Descartes are exemplars of the long-standing rejection of the corporeal as essential to the substance of our humanity. That rejection has, however, been paralleled by an equally long-standing insistence on matter, or on some material thing, as central to our substance. That contest is made plain by an examination of the pre-Socratic philosophers, and is clearly evident in Aristotle’s own consideration of the issues.

In this chapter, I begin the consideration of those various philosophers whose ideas, whether directly or indirectly, significantly influenced Marx’s conception of substance. Aristotle stands at a central point in this account. His works clearly engage in the traditional debate about substance—that of some separate, underlying foundation. However, having done so in the face of opposing characterisations, and having examined the merits of the arguments for and against the inclusion of matter within substance, Aristotle’s thought witnesses the tensions that have remained at the heart of the tradition, which I called the ‘tradition questions’ in the introduction to this thesis. Those questions included the following: How might the experience of limitation and pain be reconciled with the security and immutability of substance? Could uncertainty, anxiety and pain ever work towards the human good?

The tensions addressed by these questions are central to Aristotle’s works. He recognised, and wrestled with, the desire for certainty and security, as did Epicurus and Lucretius. Here, with some of the earliest recorded reflections on the nature of a true or
good human life, we find again the persistent religious beliefs and practices that have been central to the Western consideration of substance. In Aristotle and Epicurus, we find the longing for the certainty and tranquillity experienced by the gods, lives of uninterrupted contemplation or ataraxia. In the works of Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius, we find a recognition of the inescapable demands of the corporeal—the practical demands of life—together with a longing for the life of an immortal, a life free of the limitations and uncertainties our humanity constantly confronts.

Marx confronted these same tensions. He confronted the pain and suffering of the emerging proletariat. He refused to accept prescriptions such as those of Malthus, who sought to naturalise the experience of poverty, and abandon the pains of the industrial poor and working class to extermination through starvation and disease. Marx rejected the normalisation of alienation promoted by classical political economy, particularly its strategies of abstraction that celebrated the formal freedom of the labourer and ignored the devastating impact of exhaustion and hunger in their lives. Marx sought to portray the extent to which corporeal pain was not restricted to one part of our being, but resonated throughout it, and to that end, engaged with Hegel’s dialectic. He sought a language with which to demonstrate the impact of the corporeal as it resonated throughout individuals, classes, and societies. He confronted and “inverted” (Marx 1976, 103) Hegel’s idealism, so as to place the corporeal at the heart of that dialectic, and in doing so, drew on those who had previously participated in debates about substance and matter, such as Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius. Marx’s doctoral thesis, in relation to Democritus and Epicurus, is not merely of historical or biographical relevance. Rather, I argue that it marks his wrestling with this tension within Hegel’s works with the
aid of his predecessors in this tradition. Aristotle’s influence looms large here too. Hegel is said to have considered himself as “Aristotle redividus” (McCarthy 1992, 59; Depew 1981, 134, 135, 137, 140). They were both dealing with the central issues concerning substance. Aristotle looked back to those who preceded him—the pre-Socratic philosophers—and confronted the tensions between certainty and change, particularly change as driven by the foundational elements of the world. Hegel, centuries later, sought to bridge a similar divide between certain and uncertain knowledge. Aristotle, like Hegel, discounted the influence of the corporeal, and sought to exorcise its unpredictability in order to secure a certain understanding of the world. However, unlike Hegel, Aristotle admitted that this goal could not be completely secured. He recognised the ongoing, significant influence of the corporeal. Epicurus and Lucretius gave this influence even greater scope: they challenged the association of certainty and reliability with the non-corporeal, instead placing it in the encounter with the material world. Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius, on the one hand, and Hegel and Marx (and Feuerbach), on the other, all wrestled with the same questions that I present as central to the tradition of debate about substance. An examination of the former’s works illuminates those of the latter.

Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius all considered the definition and location of substance and its relationship to change. Aristotle addressed those questions by relying on the notion of potential awaiting actualisation. For Epicurus and Lucretius, it involved a validation of desire, coupled with a disciplining of its excesses. For each of them, it involved an understanding of being or substance as volatile, as somehow always, unavoidably, on the brink of change. It involved a grappling with the meaning of
substance and the extent to which it should be characterised in terms of openness and inter-dependence, rather than purity, isolation, independence and separation. As I will argue here, Aristotle struck a balance in favour of the latter, yet engaged with the volatility and challenges of the material world in ways that left that balance open to question. Epicurus also gravitated towards the latter, given his emphasis on ataraxia—freedom from disturbance and anxiety—but Lucretius, drawing on key themes of Epicurus' work, moved in the opposite direction, towards a more open conception of being. Each of these writers reflect on the instability of human existence and the accompanying anxiety that inspired, and continues to inspire, vigorous debate about the character of our humanity.

The influence of Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius on Marx goes well beyond a distant illumination. Like so many others in nineteenth century Europe, Marx drew on the works of the Ancient Greeks in their search for a better understanding of our humanity, to the extent that many of the key terms used by Marx in his discussions of the character of humanity, such as 'capacity', draw directly on their thought. This is particularly so in relation to Marx's materialism and his views on religion. It is quite easy to view the early debates on matter, such as those of the pre-Socratic philosophers sketched in the last chapter, through the lens of a Newtonian physics, with passive, inert matter predictably following the dictates of some external activation. The Western tradition has long located the source of activity or agency outside of matter: however, Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius did not have so simple a view. Their emphasis on the volatility of matter was to profoundly influence Marx and his response to the suffering and oppression he witnessed in early industrial Europe. A consideration of the works of Aristotle, Epicurus
and Lucretius highlights the centrality and difficulty of securing material needs, and suggests why labour, not as a mere footnote in the evolution of human industry, but as an ongoing ontological necessity, looms so large in Marx’s works. The works of Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius also cast Marx’s treatment of religion in a different light. Their works suggest that religion was part of the broader flight from the experience of uncertainty and instability, and reflects the powerful, pervasive influence of that experience. Considered together, Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius highlight the instability of matter, the difficulties it presents, and the solace provided locating the human substance elsewhere, whether in the immaterial or the immortal. Their works suggest why beliefs in the non-material essence of humanity continue to be so closely held and so vigorously defended. An examination of Epicurus and Lucretius’ thought is central to understanding Marx’s views as to how those beliefs might be overcome and replaced by a ‘more human language’.

**ARISTOTLE**

Aristotle was one of the earliest and most influential contributors to the traditional debate about substance. To be substance, in his eyes, required the primacy of independence and separation—that the entity be that which underlay all else: “Things are called substances in two ways, whatever is the ultimate subject which is no longer said of anything else; and whatever, being this so and so is also separable” (Aristotle cited in Pike 1999, 32; see also Politis 2004, 198; Shields 2007, 63). This went to his
doctrine of the categories, which is not epistemological, but ontological, in its presentation and function in his thought.

This was not the substance Plato meant when he talked about the immaterial forms, nor was it what Democritus referred to in his discussion of atomistic materialism. Aristotle refused to dismiss the materiality of existence, and yet held that substance was more than matter alone. He refused to accept the Platonic dualism and its dismissal of the significance of the material, but still sought to recognise the regularities and repetitions that patterned the world: he sought a middle ground (Burns 2000, 3, 11; Shields 2007, 285). That middle ground was to consider substance as a composite of those competing models—of matter (hyle) and form (morphē): hylomorphism.

Aristotle’s work was centrally concerned with the tensions of existence, with the volatility and instability—and potential—of substance. His consideration of the material and concrete brought the issue of change to the forefront. Instead of dismissing it as evidence of the inessential, Aristotle elevated matter to a necessary, productive role. In this way, he rejected the Platonic view of matter as the dross of a temporarily burdened existence. He made matter potent—a force that had to be reckoned with: however, as I argue here, he did so with such prominence as to limit the persuasiveness of his own solutions.

In valuing the material and particular, Aristotle attributed potency to matter. Matter, whilst non-substantial in isolation, was not so much dead weight, as a volatile, change-laden dimension of being, when combined with form. It became the locus of potential—of realising substance—as well as its decay and decline: its limitation. Substance, then,
comprised an unhappy marriage: bound together, matter and form constituted one irreducible being, but one that was bound to decay and dissolve. Pike (1999, 117, 118-119) described this decay (*phthora*) as the ultimate, inevitable successful resistance of matter to form, with the latter only effecting a temporary ‘dislocation’ of matter, and citing Williams’ suggestion that, in Aristotle’s eyes:

matter is...a negative entity, like a negative charge or a negative number, which neutralizes and obliterates, saps and substracts from...form.

By incorporating matter into substance, Aristotle gave the explanation of change equal weight to that of stability. He challenged the foundational and traditional idea that substance was free of change. Rather, in characterising life in terms of tension, resistance and limitation, change, for Aristotle, was no longer a flaw to be discounted or dismissed. However, it was this very characteristic—the volatility of matter—that led him to dismiss the atomistic materialists’ treatment of it as substance. In this regard, Shields (2007, 259-261) emphasises that, in Aristotle’s eyes, pursuing matter to its purest expression was to confront an amorphous, undefinable mass. It was to seek certainty in uncertainty, given that which was incapable of being known and incapable of definition.

Aristotle’s preference for form over matter as the primary substance was founded on this demand for certainty. He answered the final tradition question—whether uncertainty, anxiety and pain could ever work towards the good—in the negative. He held that our capacity to reason depended upon the ability to distinguish between entities, at least in some essential, unchanging respect: it demanded conformity with the principle of non-contradiction (that a thing could not be said to both have, and not have,
the same characteristic in the same respect at the same time) (Politis 2004, 124). In the absence of certainty, Aristotle (1984b, Book IV, 1006a 19-24) held that neither thought nor speech was possible.

The starting point for all such arguments [about the principle of non-contradiction] is not the demand that our opponent shall say that something either is or is not…but that he shall say something which is significant both for himself and for another, for this is necessary, if he really is to say anything. For, if he means nothing, such a man will not be capable of reasoning, either with himself or with another.

For Aristotle, the capacity to reason, and thereby know the world, was bound up with the existence of independent, identifiable substances: the two were mutually reinforcing demands and explanations (Politis 2004). For him, thought, speech and action turned on the firm, certain ground of some continuing, predictable substance. His metaphysics sought the knowledge of this being or substance in general, foundational terms. Each other exploration of a particular kind of being or substance was an application of that metaphysics—knowledge of the particular substance’s essential characteristics. This certainty then—this form—was the point towards which change was, in his view, directed: its ‘flourishing’ or full functionality in terms of those characteristics. Aristotle insisted that substance was this definition, understood as a known set of behaviours or functions, which he called ‘essence’, and which dictated the ‘form’ of the entity.

This endeavour, as undertaken by human beings, was central to Aristotle’s work. The means by which a human being enjoyed eudaimonia or a ‘flourishing’, good life was the
overriding concern of a number of Aristotle’s works, not least of which were the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*. It is generally accepted that efforts to that end comprised contemplation (*theoria*), practical wisdom (*phroneisis*), including politics, and the development of character or the virtues (*arete*), although the precise hierarchy of their relationship remains controversial (Lawrence 2006, Shields 2007).

Aristotle’s consideration of *eudaimonia* began with his claim that all things are done with an end in mind (1984c, 1094a 1-3). This, for human beings, turned on some exercise of rationality as the feature that distinguished humans from animals (1984c, 1098a 4). Ultimately, Aristotle held out contemplation (*theoria*) as the highest form of human flourishing.\(^\text{11}\). Founded in our rationality, it was the one activity where human existence approached that of a god. For Aristotle, once you sought that which was unique to our humanity, and not shared with other beings, the highest human good was obvious:

> Now if you take away from a living being action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness (1984c, 1178b 20-23).

However, Aristotle recognised that the volatile character of human life meant that enjoying this uncompromised contemplation was rarely, and then only temporarily,

\(^{11}\) This represents what Meyer (2011) described as the ‘intellectualist’ approach to Aristotle’s work. On this approach, practical wisdom serves to support contemplation. This interpretation is hotly contested. Others, such as Akrill and Meyer, propose an “inclusivist” approach, which gives contemplation and praxis a more equal influence on *eudaimonia*. Even on the latter interpretation, however, the argument that I make in this chapter would remain the same.
enjoyed: “such a life would be too high for man” (1984c, 1177b 27). As human beings, we had to deal with the exigencies of life through the exercise of our practical wisdom.

This made securing *eudaimonia* a question of character, of the acquisition and living out of the virtues (Ross 1995). The exercise of choice was central to acquiring and exercising those virtues. The option chosen was to be appropriate to the object, the domain and overall circumstances (Leighton 2011). Just how those ‘appropriate’ decisions were to be made was the subject of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean. This doctrine—whilst still the subject of continuing debate, as evidenced by Lawrence (2006), Leighton (2006), Long (2011), Meyer (2011), Shields (2007) and others—concerns, as Sir David Ross (1995, 202) describes it, the “avoidance of both excess and deficit”.

To have character was to conform to the virtues: it was to successfully engage in an ongoing discipline. With regards to the corporeal, it involved the control of feelings or passions (*pathe*) “by the ‘right rule’ or ‘sense of duty’” (Ross 1995, 205; Meyer 2011) or in the ‘right way’ (Leighton 2011, 213). For Aristotle (1984c, II.3.1104b 5-10):

> …the man who abstains from bodily pleasures and delights in this very fact is temperate, while the man who is annoyed at it is self-indulgent…For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains….

To fail to discipline the corporeal—to be incontinent (*akrasia*) —was to be weak-willed. It was to live in non-conformity with our human substance.
This is not to say that this discipline was always successful. Rather (and this is the
source of much of the controversy in current scholarship), Aristotle recognised that our
human condition—in particular our material needs—presented a real distraction from
contemplation, so much so that much of his work on ethics concerned how we struggled
in practice to realise that desired state. Notwithstanding Aristotle’s emphasis on the
ideal of contemplation, his works recognise the prominence of practice and the
centrality of *phronesis* (practical wisdom). Once his *Ethics* are read together with his *De
Anima* and *Metaphysics*, the pervasive influence of Aristotle’s notion of substance and,
in particular, a consciousness of the underlying instability of human life, becomes clear.
Aristotle, notwithstanding his insistence that the ideal existence was that of
contemplation of wisdom already secured—of wisdom that, like substance, was
complete, independent and separate—recognised that life, as experienced, was an
insecure striving towards that end.

Aristotle placed the experience of incompletion, instability and movement at the centre
of being. He sought to straddle the ideal, desired life of certainty and stability with the
immanence of movement and change that characterises this life. His concept of
hylomorphism reconciled the immanence of change with the demand for certain
knowledge through the concept of potential. The actualisation of the form of a particular
entity then became the actualisation or expression of a pre-existing, but hidden,
feature—a potential. Change (*metabole*) occurred in expression, rather than in
substance. As Politis (2004, 58) and Waterlow (1982, 36-7, 107) both point out,
substance, for Aristotle, ceased to comprise stability, but process, at least until the final
form was actualised: “something [was then] an acorn only as part of the process of the
generation of a tree”.

Delays in that actualisation, then, did not alter the substance of the entity. Substance, or
being, for Aristotle, whilst reconfigured in terms of process, remained present as
independent and self-sufficient. Whilst change might only occur in the presence of
certain external entities, their presence only provided the conditions for the actualisation
of the pre-existing potential. However, this division between the essential and
inessential, between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’, tended to blur. In some cases, matter’s
potential would be triggered—a change result—from the mere presence of the relevant
condition. Whilst Aristotle reserved a role for some ‘internal’ trigger (such as the will in
‘rational potentialities’), a significant influence remained for the ‘external’ to trigger the
realisation of an ‘internal’ potential. Even those ‘rational potentialities’—those in which
realisation of the potential required an act of will—depended upon the presence of the
relevant object. Absent those objects, the potential remained inert—something less than
being. For Aristotle, a person’s ‘internal’ capacity (or ability) did not precede, or exist
independently of, the ‘external’ object, but only in its presence: a potential became
actual in the presence of its necessary object. That potential was not merely exercised
through the use of the object—leaving it available and otherwise ready for use—but
arose because of the object. Despite his efforts to retain a sense of substance in terms
of independence, Aristotle’s middle ground made that substance intimately open to the
influence of that presented as ‘external’ and inessential.
Aristotle’s treatment of these ‘external’ influences captured the defect that their absence entailed. Whilst not treated as forming part of the composite substance, the absence of those necessary conditions was considered an intimate deprivation—one Aristotle described in terms of ‘privation’ and ‘suffering’ (pathos) (Waterlow 1982, 119-120 and 168). Aristotle’s substance, whilst presented in terms of independence, was founded in a relationship of deep dependence: absent the requisite ‘external’ conditions, a being could not be its full self. It was only independent—substance in traditional terms—at the cost of its inadequate or incomplete enjoyment of its character.

This suggestion of a deep inter-dependence is particularly strong when Aristotle turns to consider what comprises substance within the domain of biology. For a biological being, ‘form’ referred to a creature’s species. Each particular being founded its character—its certainty—in its movement towards the exhibition of those behaviours or functions that were typical of a healthy or flourishing member of its species. The continuity of the substance—of the species form—then turned on its conveyance through the reproductive acts of its species’ members, with species-form-substance preserved through the cyclical, repeated imprint on unformed matter. The substance of a biological being was not located in separation and independence of its individual members, but in their species, as constituted and renewed constantly in those members—it depended on a process, a way of living and of making new life. Aristotle not only expanded substance to incorporate matter, and thereby the processes of change, but extended it
beyond the individual instances in which it was actualised to include the broader processes of reproduction.¹²

Hylomorphism provided Aristotle’s middle ground—it incorporated both stability and change. It preserved a semblance of substance as independent and stable by its expansion, so as to incorporate change, and its source, matter, into its core: change became an internal, pre-ordained characteristic. Matter was then the potential that moved towards the actualisation of form.

Form was, however, not simply the realisation of potential, but its imposition, and the exclusion of other potential expressions, other matter/form combinations. In Loux’s (2005, 121) view, Aristotle’s theory of biological reproduction involved a process of subordination—that “natures impose a top-down organisation on the things that have them”. Hand-in-hand with matter’s volatility, Aristotle presented its subordination, making the marriage of matter and form not only unhappy, but unequal. Substance and subordination became, in Aristotle’s hands, desirable: the stability of being came from form disciplining matter. This discipline is equally apparent in Aristotle’s discussion of the good human life. His characterisation of good character or virtue implied the discipline of the pains and pleasures of corporeality to an appropriate ‘mean’. Moreover, Aristotle’s ideal life of contemplation was one that was changeless—one in which, for

¹² Richards (2010) presents a detailed, well-supported argument in favour of interpreting Aristotle’s understanding of ‘species’ in processual or ‘development’ terms, rather than in conformity with the traditional understanding of substance. He demonstrates how one thousand years of intervening interpretations, and the limited availability of the full body of Aristotle’s works, promoted the latter outcome. A broader consideration of Aristotle’s thought, in particular that concerned with biology, reveals a “functional approach” that “focuses on the relation between the parts of an organism, an environment, and way of life” (2010, 27). Richards (2010, 30) acknowledges the ambiguity in Aristotle’s works, but, as I have argued, presents this as arising from “a fundamental tension in Aristotle’s epistemology – the tension between being as particular, and knowledge as universal”.


however brief a time, one did not need to wrestle with the practical exigencies of life. Whether that experience was, without qualification, superior to the dominant experience of life as pre-occupied with practical demands, or of equal status, remains the focus of much scholarly debate. That very debate, however, reflects the tensions that Aristotle addressed so directly in his work—the contest between what was to be valued in a human life, and the role of the material world in it. Unlike Plato and others who treated our corporeality as something inessential and contaminating, Aristotle strove to recognise its inescapable influence. Like his predecessors, however, he could not treat that corporeality as somehow bound up with what is best in us. He continued to privilege the non-corporeal as that which partook of the divine. Because of this, notwithstanding his pragmatism, there remains a kind of brutality in Aristotle’s work. His insistence on definition meant that relations of domination and subordination were the very threads by which there could be a fully human life. His insistence on certainty as a precondition to thought or action made oppression characteristic of those thoughts and actions. His vision of the happy or perfect human life as one of virtuous effort—the endeavour to secure one’s pleasures and pains within a modest ‘mean’—remained founded in a devaluation of the corporeal. It was this dimension of Aristotle’s works that Hegel, and then Marx, revisited and re-worked.

Aristotle’s composite category of hylomorphism remained a ‘sleight of hand’. He gave matter prominence and potency, yet sentenced it to a life-long discipline of form. He sketched a middle way, but one that relied upon a purported internalisation, definition and confinement of the tensions of being, rather than an acceptance of their essential character. Moreover, Aristotle’s approach to our corporeality involved far more than a
philosophical exercise. It was an attempted reconciliation with the demands of life that could only be upheld at the cost of an economy of the same, and through the imposition of a hierarchical teleology. Aristotle’s selection of form as substance closed off possibilities in order to ensure conformity to previously known traits: it limited substance to what was already known, and those features were restricted to those perceived to be unique to the substance. It limited what was recognisably good or virtuous in our humanity. It converted difference and diversity into deficiency and defect or, at least, infancy. Moreover, in seeking certainty, it assumed the original accuracy of that definition, of those lists of features, arriving (unsurprisingly) at the very place it began. In so doing, it had the potential to normalise that which was, in fact, defective.

It was this flaw that Hegel was to later criticise. Hegel argued that Aristotle’s consideration of substance was limited and distorted by his acceptance of the practice of slavery in his time. Depew (1992, 68) and others have argued that Aristotle could not reconcile the tensions between matter and form because his society, and the way of life prized by him, was founded on the suppression of the corporeal. Matter, and its demands, was devalued and, in practice, ignored through its imposition on others—slaves and women—together with a sustained denial of their claims on their beneficiaries (that is, those who enjoyed the benefits of their labours). Aristotle held that to be truly human and deserving of citizenship was to be free of necessity (1984a, III, 1278a 8-11), thus free to enjoy a life of contemplation, and that this freedom was justly secured through the enslavement of others (1984a, I, 1253b 15-23). For Aristotle, a slave was “a living possession” (1984a, I, 1253b32) and “a part of the master, a living but separated part of his bodily frame” (1984a, I, 1255b 11-12), a mere living tool (an
organon) that did not warrant equal recognition or valuation, as a slave lacked the “deliberative faculty” (1984a, I, 1260a 13-14) that defined humanity. A slave was less human, making his subordination, like that of matter to form, a part of the natural order:

there are many kinds both of rulers and subjects...for in all things which form a composite whole...a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to light...A living creature consists in the first place of soul and body, and of the two, the one is by nature the ruler and the other the subject...And therefore we must study the man who is in the most perfect state both of body and soul, for in him we shall see the true relation of the two; although in bad or corrupted natures the body will often appear to rule over the soul, because they are in an evil and unnatural condition...the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life (Aristotle 1984a, I, 1254a 24 – 1254b 25).

In Aristotle’s (1984a, I, 1253b 25) eyes, “no man [could] live...unless he is provided with necessities”. Equally, humans only realised their human potential to the extent they were freed from concern with those ‘necessities’ (hence his idea that theoria was a pursuit only for scholiae or gentlemen). To be human was to be both matter and form, but the substance of our humanity was located in the latter (the dominance of reason). To have truly embraced the inter-dependence of matter and form would have placed Aristotle on the path to challenging the institution of slavery—the very means by which he enjoyed freedom from necessity.
Aristotle sought a more direct engagement with the influence of change within our world. In refusing to adopt the eternal, fixed forms of Plato’s universals, Aristotle brought matter and, with it, change and inter-dependence to the very centre of substance. However, when confronted with a choice between the need for certainty and stability on the one hand, and on the other, the uncertainties and volatilities of life, he gravitated to the former. When considering the nature of a good human life, notwithstanding his recognition of the demands of life, it was the godlike stability and perfection of contemplation that he privileged. Aristotle presented substance as involving an intimate interdependence, but on unequal terms, with form dominating matter. Likewise, he recognised the fleeting enjoyment of contemplation—and its restriction to few people—but maintained the godlike status of contemplation. These stances arguably accurately reflected Aristotle’s own dependence upon the institution of slavery for the way of life he preferred and celebrated—one free of the demands of ‘necessity’. Nevertheless, having brought matter, change and uncertainty to the centre of the debate, matter, true to the character he gave it, retained its potency and its resistance to the neat confines he sought to impose on it via form. Matter, in Aristotle’s hands, transformed the character of substance, shifting it from the firm, fixed substrata towards process, flux and inter-dependence. Matter, as inadequate alone in his eyes, yet still essential to existence, became goal-orientated, moving, yearning, needing something alien yet intimate. As such, corporeality remained a compromise in our character: something, so long as we strove to live a human life, we also strove to restrict and resist, even if by imposition of its care and management on others. Aristotle, in seeking to defend a stable, well-
defined, certain substance, left a legacy that Marx would avail himself of in developing
his own vision of substance and of its ties to oppression.

**EPICURUS**

By contrast, Epicurus developed far less ambiguous answers to the question of
substance. In his view, matter was substance, and social beliefs were the source of
troubling, oppressive experience. His emphasis on matter as substance and his critique
of religion as one of the sources of harmful social beliefs was central to Marx’s own
doctoral research. The foundations of those emphases, however, have been less fully
considered by those scholars who have considered Marx’s own consideration of
religion, such as Foster, Clark and York (2008), McKinnon (2005) and Toscano
(2010). In particular, Epicurus’ emphasis on the character of substance (and hence
humanity) as material and mortal was part of a broader organising theme of limitation,
while more fully developed by Lucretius, has not been actively explored. The social and
religious beliefs that Epicurus and Lucretius criticised involved a flight from accepting
limitation. That flight, moreover, depended upon that very experience—the direct,

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13 These writers have tended to focus on Marx’s immediate predecessors, such as the Young Hegelians
and Feuerbach, and on Marx’s critique of Feuerbach, given the latter’s influential works on religious
thought. As regards the latter, McKinnon (2005) and Toscano’s (2010) presentation of Marx’s adaptation
of Feuerbach’s critique of religion echoes the well-established treatment of Marx abandoning Feuerbach’s
works as essentialist and contemplative. I critique this limited engagement with Feuerbach in Chapter
Five. Neither McKinnon nor Toscano explored the influence of earlier philosophers, including Epicurus
and Lucretius, although Toscano (2010, 18) expressly acknowledges that his article did not deal with “the
Marxian response to the idea of ineliminable anthropological basis to religious phenomenon”. McKinnon
(2005) explored the various nineteenth century interpretations of ‘opium’ as a way into Marx’s views. He
emphasised the status of opium as an almost ‘unquestioned good’ for medicinal purposes, and the
manner in which Marx’s usage clearly connected it to the pain produced by capitalism. The consideration
of pain, and religious responses to it, is only considered in that historical context, and with reference to
philosophical works produced in that same period. Marx’s works have not been interpreted in their
broader, longer term context, as drawing on Epicurus and Lucretius.
troubling experience of limitation, whereby the senses not only challenged pre-existing beliefs, but suggested better grounded alternatives. For Epicurus and Lucretius, the objections to the influence of uncertainty, anxiety and pain that are central to the traditional debate about substance were ill-founded: those experiences were, contrary to the traditional approach, essential to the promotion of a good life. The role of the corporeal encounter with pain, which promoted a different, more inter-dependent sense of substance, suggests an explanation for Marx’s confidence in the transformative potential of extreme alienation. It is also this very same potential—this troubling, challenging character of corporeal experience and desire—that suggests that anxiety and the temptation to flee the experience of limitation are, and will remain, a feature of the human condition. The impact of corporeal pain suggests not only why Marx saw the promise of transformation in alienation, but why that potential may be far broader and accessible than Marx himself appreciated.

Epicurus argued that the failure to accept that all substance, including humanity, was comprised of aggregates of material atoms, was the foundation of much human suffering. He argued that the inability to accept our involvement in the natural world, and, with it, our mortal, limited character, was the cauldron within which desires were transformed into insatiable, self-defeating, anxious appetites and, with them, a life of ataraxia—freedom from disturbance and anxiety—transformed into a troubled, oppressive one.

As natural beings, Epicurus saw humanity as desiring beings which, like animals, only sought objects that were ordinarily accessible to them. The Epicurean philosophy of
living within these natural limits was a key theme: living within these limitations was the key to an anxiety-free life (Asmis 2008, 144; De Lacy 1969, 106, 109). Needs, within these ‘natural’ limits, were restricted and readily satisfied. Epicurus, in his letter to Menoeceus (cited in Inwood and Gerson 1994, 29-31), emphasised that:

…when we are not in pain, then we no longer need pleasure…simple flavours provide a pleasure equal to that of an extravagant lifestyle when all pain from want is removed…when we say that pleasure is the goal we do not mean the pleasures of the profligate or the pleasures of consumption…but rather lack of pain in the body and disturbance in the soul….

However, unlike animals, humans had come to value those pleasures that extended beyond those ‘natural’ limits. Nussbaum (2009, 149-154, 212, 261) characterises these as pleasures that are extended over time—particularly the extension of human life, which was expressed in the pursuit of an after-life—in passionate, erotic love, and in the acquisition of wealth, status and power. Epicurus criticised the ‘opinions of the many’ and their desire for immortality:

…a correct knowledge of the fact that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life a matter for contentment, not by adding a limitless time…but by removing the longing for immortality… (Letter to Menoeceus cited in Inwood and Gerson 1994, 29).

However, believing these larger pleasures to be within our grasp, human beings sought to secure impossible goals—they invested in desires that were incapable of fulfilment.
(‘empty desires’). In Epicurus’ view, human society had become obsessed and distorted by these ‘empty’ desires, and preoccupied with their impossible satisfaction. In addition to irrational behaviour, on the list of harms attendant on these false beliefs, Nussbaum (2009, 103, 197) included subservience to religious leaders and the harms done to others in religion’s name. This understanding of religion—as founded in an inability to accept our material, mortal character, and as the foundation for anxiety and oppression—was to be a key influence on Marx’s thought, particularly through Feuerbach’s works.

The appropriate strategy, in Epicurus’ eyes, was to understand ourselves as part of nature: that is, as mortal and limited. This, at its most basic, turned on an appreciation of atomistic physics. Epicurus believed the universal substance was constituted out of atoms: all beings were ultimately comprised of atoms. These atoms, in Epicurus’ view, were in constant motion and repeatedly collided with each other:

…and the atoms move continuously for all time, some recoiling far apart from one another [following collision] and others, by contrast, maintaining a [constant] vibration when they are locked into a compound… (Epicurus’ letter to Herodotus, cited in Inwood and Gerson 1994, 7-8).

Understanding life—and death—relied on understanding this physics. In this view, death was not an end or discontinuity, but simply a transformation. Understanding this physics, and thereby death, was Epicurus’ antidote to existential anxiety. This freedom from anxiety about finitude was also expected to free humanity of other ‘empty desires’,

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including the lust for love, wealth, status and power, and the oppressions justified in their names.

Nussbaum (2009, 115) presents Epicurean therapy as relying on rationality to dispel false beliefs and thereby to dissolve ‘empty desires’. A key element of this discipline involved the disproof of religious beliefs and other misconceptions so as to promote a sense of self—and substance—as immersed in and contained by the natural world. That same discipline involved a removal from the social world as the source of false beliefs and of suffering—the social, in Epicurus’ view, was not part of our substance. The cure from distorting social beliefs, then, involved a move towards social self-sufficiency through the total immersion in Epicurean philosophy: it relied on making Epicureanism a way of life and the exclusion of different ways or philosophies of life. In short, it involved a form of social separation. For Epicurus:

> The most unalloyed source of protection from men, which is secured to some extent by a certain force of expulsion, is in fact the immunity which results from a quiet life and the retirement from the world (Principal Doctrine No 14, cited in Vitzthum 1995, 30).

This cure did not rely on rationality or philosophical argument alone. Instead, anticipating the emphases of later materialists (including Feuerbach and Marx), Epicurus treated the senses as “heralds of the truth” (cited by Schaffer 2006, 43, 98). The senses were the reliable point of access to our natural state—our substance—once freed from distorting social influences: “Every sensation [was] its own verification” (Schaefer 2006, 43). There was, as Nussbaum (2009, 110) has put it, “truth in the body”.
In particular, in extremity, sensation served to disrupt the circularity of rationalisation—the sensuous could force us to make different sense of our experiences and overcome false, distorting, unsettling social beliefs. Nussbaum (2009, 199) describes these dramatic corporeal encounters as “moments of truth” with particular influence as the “force of [the] event” strips “bare” our life and penetrates our habits, leaving the “soul…raw and unprotected, simply perceiving itself”.

The measure of this good for Epicurus—indeed the greater and enduring good—was the enjoyment of serenity or ataraxia, understood as freedom from disturbance and anxiety (Gillespie 2008, 140; Nussbaum 2009, 109). This was secured by the reduction of the scope of our desires to those readily and quickly satisfied: for Epicurus (Inwood and Gerson 1994, 29), “what is good is easy to get”. Nussbaum (2009, 213) explains the Epicurean view of natural pleasures as those which are immediately satisfied and not involving an extended period of effort and time. They were not “vulnerable to interruption” and to the “accidents of life”. This, however, was to seek to not only escape the ‘empty desires’ prompted by false social beliefs, but to escape desire in its totality. Epicurus’ insistence on living simply was to reduce desire and its pains to some tame, domesticated experience that knew none of desire’s demanding character.

Whilst not quite removed from our experience, Epicurus’ tamed desires still spoke of a humanity enjoying a godlike existence. These ‘tamed desires’ evoked humanity in the terms of the traditional debate about substance: as independent and separate from the world, rather than immersed within it. Instead of a full embrace of humanity, a full immersion in nature, Epicurus preferred a society better characterised by self-
sufficiency, than by interaction or interdependence. It was the world Epicurus strived to create in his famed garden—one with limited social interaction, and certainly one removed from diversity and contradiction. It was a world which, like Aristotle’s, sustained the practice of slavery, so as to free Epicurus’ community to enjoy labour’s fruits without its difficulties (Baronovitch 1992, 169). In the face of the contradictions within his thought—between a life modelled on nature and that modelled on a god, Epicurus’ reconciliation weighed towards the latter. Epicurus, in the face of the experience of pain and limitation by virtue of social relationships, still engaged in a flight much like that involved in religious thought. As Marx (2006b, 106, emphasis in original) was to later observe:

Epicurus confesses finally that his method of explaining aims only at the ataraxy of self-consciousness, not of knowledge of nature in and for itself.

Epicurus relied on his physics as a means by which humans might pry loose of the exaggerations of society. He promoted it as a means to return to a more natural, limited life. His physics, with its emphasis on participation in nature, was a means to promote a withdrawal from society and to secure that tranquillity of life commonly enjoyed by the gods.

**LUCRETIUS**

Lucretius, a Roman follower of Epicurus in the first century BCE, whilst adhering to Epicurus’ core directions, found less appeal in emulating the lives of the gods. He
pursued Epicurus’ core themes, but applied Epicurus’ naturalism much more thoroughly, emphasising our participation in, and vulnerability to, the natural world to a much greater extent. The volatility of the natural world of atoms was one that Lucretius presented as applying to our social world and, unlike Epicurus, as holding promise in addressing our anxieties. The social world was not simply the exaggeration or distortion of natural need. Rather, in just the same way that Epicurus held that we could learn to live well by reference to the physical structure of the world, Lucretius suggested that we could learn by paying attention to the most intimate of our social relationships. As Asmis (2008, 144, 149) has pointed out, Lucretius merged his physics and ethics so as to “transform Epicurean physics into an ethical system”. For Lucretius, participation and limitation not only characterised the physical, but the social worlds: a true human life was not one of withdrawal or self-sufficiency, but of intimate, often painful, involvement. So accurately and passionately did he portray the latter through his poetry, and so long has the West been troubled by the power of sexual desire, that it has only been relatively recently that his great work has not been dismissed as the drunken or poisoned excesses of an erotically distorted mind. Rather than focus on the distant and tranquil gods to gain insight into our fullest humanity, Lucretius focussed on the intimate dramas of sexual and emotional intimacy. He drew us closer to embracing the value and promise of our corporeality.

Lucretius developed Epicurus’ response to pain and limitation in a novel direction. He embraced its difficulties, and its delights, and characterised our humanity in terms of social interdependence rather than self-sufficiency. Rather than treat desire as that which takes us outside our selves, as a force which, if not readily reckoned with,
becomes a threat, Lucretius presented desire as a source of unity and connection (Nussbaum 2009, 158-9). He gave it a much larger, more constructive, and enduring role in substance. Rather than treat limitation as mere restriction, Lucretius “transformed Epicurean physics” and made limitation “a unifying [and enabling] principle” (Asmis 2008, 144).

This is not to deny the vision of atomistic physics that Lucretius shared with Epicurus. For Lucretius, all being was comprised of atomistic matter, constantly engaged in collisions and movement (Greenblatt 2011; Vitzthum 1995). Moreover, there were no set forms or purposes driving those collisions and occasional resulting combinations of atoms. Life involved “ceaseless creation and destruction, governed entirely by chance” (Greenblatt 2011, L2960). The “swerve” —the movement from the straight line or direct fall—of atoms was the “most minimal” and “unexpected, unpredictable movement of matter” (Greenblatt 2011, L2973 and 179). It was the maverick element that denied any role for gods, for the sustained experience of ataraxia, or escape from limitation and pain.

Lucretius’ characterisation of this instability as productive or enabling also reflected the concern he shared with Epicurus as to the manner in which social beliefs distorted human desires. As Greenblatt (2011, L3029) has pointed out, Lucretius shared Epicurus’ vision of all human beings as driven by a deep “craving for security”. Those anxieties fed the creation and maintenance of delusions of flight from mortality—of projections of “images of the power and beauty and perfect security that they would like to possess” (Greenblatt 2011, L3049-53). Like Epicurus, Lucretius did not see pain as
the principal obstacle to a good life, but delusion (Greenblatt 2011, L3089). It was the disastrous effects of fantasies of erotic love, however, that featured centrally in *In Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). Here, Nussbaum (2009, 173) has highlighted how Lucretius characterised erotic love as demanding unity—a fusion of the lover and the beloved:

> For e’en on the verge of consummation, with a vague unrest doth shift the lovers’ passion, as they doubt what first with hands or eyes they should enjoy. What they have grasped they tightly press, and e’en give pain unto its body, and oftentimes clash teeth on lips as mouth on mouth they crush, since tainted is their pleasure, and beneath lie secret stings, that goad them on to hurt the very thing, whate’er it be, whence spring these germs of madness (Lucretius 1946, 4. 1079-89).

Lucretius understood this excessive love as driven by the lovers’ pain and insecurity. The lover seeks to secure his position by what Nussbaum (2009, 173-4) sees as the complete possession or control of the other. This was a demand, however, that literally could not be met. Our corporeal condition placed boundaries on the depth of fusion and unity that can be achieved sexually.

These same social beliefs, in promoting unrealistic expectations of one’s lovers, also imposed demands that could not be met, absent deceit and distance. They were demands for the presentation of an appearance in conformity with social standards of beauty and desire. Lucretius understood them to involve fantasies of perfection and the divine (Nussbaum 2009, 174-5). They were also demands that required time apart and,
if not satisfied, often extinguished desire. Nussbaum’s account of this loss of lust brings home another of the key continuities between the work of Epicurus and Lucretius: the emphasis on the senses as ‘heralds of the truth’ and that, in certain circumstances, the experience of pain was essential to the good. Lucretius wrote of lust lost on encountering the beloved’s experience of menstruation:

But let her be as fine of face as she can be and let the power of Venus arise from all her limbs, still...she...reeks...of foul odours...the tearful lover...if he were...let in, and if just one whiff of that smell should meet him as he came in, he would think up a good excuse to go away...Nor are our Venuses in the dark about this. That’s why they are all the more at pains to conceal the backstage side of their lives from those whom they want to keep held fast in love. All for nothing, since you can still drag it all into the light of your mind, and look into the reasons...and...overlook all this in your turn, and yield to human life (Lucretius cited in Nussbaum 2009, 178).

This was, in the most direct terms, an encounter with the corporeal. It was also, in Lucretius’ view, a prompt towards a different form of love—a different foundation for a relationship that valued the person over the fantasy. It was a sensual encounter, a difficult encounter that prompted a different view of ourselves and others: one that prompted us to ‘yield to human life’. Nussbaum (2009, 185) has presented this as a challenge “to attend to the everyday and make it an object of delight”. Not only did the encounter with the sensual challenge our ordinary beliefs, but it intimated the form of alternative beliefs. In the case of erotic love, it prompted a greater recognition of one’s
partner and the possibility of love founded in a greater mutuality, a greater reciprocity of
pleasure, than erotic love’s calls for possession and incorporation. Here, in embryo,
were ideas that, nearly two millennia later, Marx would seize on in his account of how
human emancipation might take place.

This ‘yielding to our humanity’, however, complicated life and the capacity to enjoy
ataraxia. Nussbaum (2009, 187) has emphasised how:

this new attachment to marriage and the family leads Lucretius to defend as
valuable a way of life that does not seem to be the one best suited for individual
ataraxia, since it includes many risks and possibilities for loss and grief...by
describing a marital relationship that is, in effect, a form of philia,
Lucretius...considerably widened the sphere of the good person’s need and
interdependency.

Lucretius promoted a deeper embrace of our mortality and sensuality than Epicurus. He
suggested a more consistent recognition of the senses as ‘heralds of the truth’ arguing
of a truth founded on a deeper integration into the natural world than Epicurus imagined.
His was a vision of the truly human life as increasingly involved and inter-dependent—a
life in which desire and anxiety were permanent, difficult features, but heralding the
possibility of a richer human life by virtue of those difficulties, rather than their
avoidance.

It was a life that addressed the pressing fear of death and the attraction of religious
thought; an approach that reconciled the tensions within Epicurean thought between a
life modelled on nature and one modelled on a god. Epicurean physics demonstrated that to be human was to not only be a part of nature, but to exceed it through gaining comprehensive knowledge of it. This knowledge did not change our material character—our sensation of experience—but did enable a change in the sense we made of that character. Nussbaum (2009, 216-7) has presented this knowledge of the whole as enabling one to reduce the impact those limitations on one’s actions.

The experience and acceptance of limitation—and of uncertainty, anxiety and pain—provided, as Asmis (2008, 144, 149) put it, “enabling conditions rather than constraints”.

This expanded sense of inter-relation, however, was no secure achievement. Despite his confidence in the revelations ‘heralded’ by the senses, both Greenblatt (2011) and Nussbaum (2009, 264) see Lucretius as imagining our existence as remaining unstable. Epicurean physics presented that interdependence as a fragile unity, one that was not free of strife. Asmis (2008, 148) emphasises here that atoms collided until some pattern and stability emerged, and continued, within that unity, to tend towards some fresh conflict:

… [the] fixing of boundaries brings a condition of stability. At the same time, each created thing continues to be engaged in strife with its neighbours. This competition is vital to the existence of each created thing; for it receives reinforcement from its neighbours, just as it gives up something of itself to them.

This was not a rigid, confining unity, but a constitutive, enabling one. Within its confines—its limits—variation, spontaneity and freedom were experienced: De Lacy
(1969, 107-108) described this as “the domain of...swerve”. The swerve of the atom emphasised by Epicurus, and later noted as a key distinction from the atomism of Democritus, suggests a form of enabling through interdependence, rather than freedom from all limitation: according to De Lacy (1969, 108-9), “its consequences [do] not disrupt the fixed limits of natural processes but must only add variety within those limits”. This correlation of intimacy and tension, when translated to social relationships, founded Nussbaum’s final comments on Lucretius in *The Therapy of Desire*:

"It appears, then, that no development in the direction of a gentler and, in a sense, less bestial life – no advance towards more responsiveness to the claims of others, to more complex forms of interdependence – is without its cost. For each new softening brings new fears and dependencies; and each new complex device of protection generates attachments that lead the soul into increasing anxiety for itself and its own – and, from anxiety, all too often, into competitive and hostile raging (2009, 268)."

This is the rub of desire: the experience of being incomplete and needy and the demand that we learn to live with it—we learn that “a human life is necessarily vulnerable and incomplete” (Nussbaum 2009, 275) and not the stable, secure, self-sufficient entity that the traditional debate about substance imagined. “The atoms”, Lucretius insisted, “wage war that started when boundless time began” (cited in Vitzthum 1995, 39). Centuries later, Marx (2006b, 92), in his doctoral consideration of Lucretius’ work, recognised that, instead of immunity and continuity:
Decay itself is prefigured in the living, its shape should therefore be just as much grasped in its specific characteristic as the shape of life.

Limitation and inter-dependence were, for both Lucretius and Marx, essential, and promising, characteristics of substance.

**CONCLUSION**

Epicurus and Lucretius, like Aristotle, sought a more direct engagement with the influence of change within our world. Grasping desire more acutely than Aristotle, Epicurus made its acceptance and its limitation the theme of his effort to secure an anxiety-free existence. However, like Aristotle, his confrontation with the openness and interdependence expressed by desire led to an incomplete recognition. Epicurus’ immersion in nature was a partial one, limiting the intimacy and compulsion of desire and asserting a freedom from adverse social influences. It failed to recognise that the very character of desire was a source of social unity and of mutual recognition. It is this emphasis that characterises Lucretius’ revision of his work. In an expanded application of Epicurus’ own commitment to recognising our intimate involvement in the natural world, Lucretius suggested its simultaneous parallels in the social world.

Together, the work of Epicurus and Lucretius, like Aristotle’s, laid down lines of thought which would prove to be central to Marx’s own conception of the human substance, particularly his reliance on the potency and productivity of our corporeal experience. In their works lie suggestions of the sources and meaning of Marx’s later musings, with
their emphasis on the centrality of desire, of the material, and on our intimate participation in the natural and social worlds. In their critique of religious thought lie themes later developed by Feuerbach, that greatly influenced Marx, including their characterisation of that thought as the frustrated flight from limitation, and that a human life is one characterised by limitation, uncertainty and anxiety. Their valuation of the senses, too, as the ‘heralds of the truth’, is also illuminating, and suggests that confronting limitation was not merely the goad to a rational review of our sense of self, but to the very transformation of our rationality, with a transformative impact of comparable depth to Marx’s vision of alienation. Within their works, matter rose in prominence and influence, becoming a central feature of substance, if not defining it. The volatility and resistance of matter loomed larger too, and, with it, the pervasive influence of uncertainty and anxiety, and the repeated human efforts to evade it. They presented the human substance as more open, more involved and more vulnerable. Limitation and involvement, or inter-dependence, rather than the freedom and immunity suggested by the traditional debate about substance, came to characterise Epicurean thought, with Lucretius’ influence. Not only were we deeply immersed in nature, but in each other, in all the varied forms our societies conjured up. In Lucretius’ eyes, the substance of our being—the relationships and boundaries that constitute, define and enable us—strays well beyond the boundaries of any individual. Like Aristotle before them, where the incorporation of matter, and hence change, into substance prompted an expanded boundary of substance—one that extended to the species—Epicurean thought prompted a vision of substance as exceeding the individual again, and as deeply immersed in both the natural and social worlds. Substance could not be defined
in terms of independence and separation: it had somehow become trans-individual, both of and exceeding any particular being.

The influence of these suggestions was not developed for centuries after Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius considered them. With the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman empire in the third century, the influence of Epicurean thought waned. The rise of the dominance of Christian thought throughout the West led to a near complete suppression of works that valued the corporeal. The religious trends evident in Aristotle and Epicurus’ thought, with their identification of the human substance with the non-corporeal divine, came to dominate Western Christianity, as exemplified by Augustine’s thought in the fourth and fifth centuries. It was not until the late eighteenth century that one could safely refer to Epicurus in public, and even then it could attract severe, and ongoing, censure. Greenblatt (2011) has traced the efforts through which the works of Epicurus and Lucretius once more entered broader debates, and highlighted the ferocity with which they were opposed. In 1549, the Catholic Church had considered placing Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* on the Index of Prohibited Books (Greenblatt 2011, L3586). Later that century, Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake for defending its claims. In 1632, the Society of Jesus condemned the doctrine of atoms (Greenblatt 2011, L4019). Later that century, the ordeals and trial of Galileo evidenced the continued extremity of the opposition and the consequences of challenging it. That opposition, and its savagery, continued through the seventeenth century, when Spinoza, whose work is considered in the next chapter, lived and worked. Whilst not attracting punishment by death in the eighteenth century, so deeply influential did Christian dogma remain, that the same attempts at censure shaped much of Marx’s
time and that of some of his immediate influences, preventing many of them securing academic positions. So deeply wrought are our anxieties about the instabilities and pains of life, that the threats to our sources of comfort and security have, and continue to, provoke some of the worst in us.
CHAPTER THREE – Substance Transformed:

Spinoza, Leibniz and the Romantic Movement

Hegel claimed that “one must first be a Spinozist” in order to engage in philosophy (cited in Beiser 1993, 4, Negri 1991, 140-1). Spinoza’s work is central to my argument, as it provides insights into the foundations of the totalising concept of substance that subsequently shaped Hegel and Marx’s thought. That influence, aside from some brief references, is not immediately obvious, although both Hegel and Marx were familiar with, and praised, Spinoza’s thought (Beiser 1993, 4; Casarino 2011, L2547, Levine 2012; Vardoulakis 2011, L67).

Spinoza led the modern challenge to the traditional debate about substance and, in particular, its characterisation of genuine being with independence. Jonathan Israel (2006, 46), for example, has emphasised that Spinoza’s:

...one-substance doctrine...eliminates the traditional view that man consists of a separate substance, or combination of substances, thereby possessing a specially close and significant relation to God...[and removing] the ontological gulf between man and other creatures and products of nature.

It is for this reason that Feuerbach (1986, 24) and Hegel credited him with beginning modern philosophy. Jonathan Israel (2009, 240) has characterised Spinoza as having
had an “unparalleled...role as a key progenitor of the Radical Enlightenment”, as his equation of god and nature was understood by many as an assertion of reason to the exclusion of religion and superstition.

Radical as his views were, Spinoza still worked within the traditional debate about substance. He rigorously pursued its key feature—that only that which enjoyed self-sufficiency could be substance—and consistently argued that only one entity, god or nature, met that demand. Working within the traditional arguments for substance, Spinoza inverted it: no longer was there a multiplicity of independent entities, but rather, there was one totality with a range of entities or beings that formed part of it, were dependent on it (and each other), and gave expression to it. Spinoza made interdependence the common feature of being, with each such being interrelated with other beings by virtue of their common participation in, and dependence on, the totality.

Having inverted the traditional location of substance, Spinoza had also shifted the locus of being. That locus, for particular beings, was no longer internal but external—bound up with its relations with other beings and the particular configurations or modes of those relations from time to time. Beings were no longer closed entities but radically open, dependent upon and vulnerable to each other. No longer was being founded in independence and self-sufficiency, but need. In Spinoza, we find the vision of the totality that was to inform both Hegel and Marx’s works. We find the architecture Marx used to construct his vision of humanity, with its deep dependence on the mode of production.

This is not to claim that Marx drew directly on Spinoza. Rather, I argue that Marx received these insights through a range of intermediaries, and ultimately, Hegel. My
argument is that Spinoza initiated the radical re-orientation of the debate, and provided the soil in which Hegel’s, and then Marx’s, ideas grew. This transmission is not readily apparent: in part, this is because of the style in which Spinoza presented his work, drawing on the forms of mathematical argument that appear far from the more organic language that was to characterise Marx’s work. This genealogy is also difficult to follow because Spinoza’s infamy made any public defence of his works dangerous. To baldly equate god and nature, as Spinoza did, was fraught with risk, as it challenged one of the common Christian (and Jewish) dogmas that there was a creator god who was independent of his creation. Given the close alignment of so much political authority with the Christian churches in seventeenth-century Europe, Spinoza’s challenge was not only religious but political.\footnote{Spinoza was more consistent than his fellow rationalists, Descartes and Leibniz, in treating religious passion as the cause of Europe’s then recent instability (Sharp 2011). He did not merely seek to dampen this god’s influence, but to remove it (and that of religion). For this reason Hampshire (2005, xxiv) described Spinoza as one of the “children of Epicurus”, as he, like Epicurus and Lucretius, located the attraction of false, but “comforting supernatural beliefs” in the fear of death, which had then been exacerbated by the contests between different religions.} It attracted extraordinarily vehement censure and vilification (Israel 2006, 36; Negri 1991). According to Hampshire (2005, 33), Spinoza was known as “the destroyer of all established religion and morality”. As a consequence, he was excommunicated from his Jewish community in Amsterdam in 1656, and expelled from that city in 1660 (Phemister 2006, 8). Having moved to The Hague, the publication of his \textit{Theological-Political Treatise}, notwithstanding its anonymity and false imprint, rapidly attracted the local authorities’ intervention. The book was banned and Spinoza described as “a freak (\textit{monstrum})” (Klever 1996, 39-40). In that same year, the publication of similar views by Spinoza’s friend and mentor,
Franciscus van den Enden, led to van den Enden being hanged in Paris (Klever 1996, 46).

The risks of offending religious orthodoxy meant that the more immediate means by which Spinoza’s ideas could be transmitted was through Leibniz’s promotion of a “science of forces and powers” (Hatfield 1979, 115). Having acknowledged the authorship of the Christian god, Leibniz was free to incorporate much of the scientific discoveries of his time. Drawing on studies in biology, chemistry and magnetism, and their characterisation of the natural world in terms of a pervasive interaction or flow of various ‘forces’, Leibniz reconfigured substance by transforming matter from the stable blocks or units of atomic and mechanical thought, to the more dynamic relations of attraction and resistance suggested by the science of his time.

Herder, one of the leading figures of the radical Enlightenment, and a pioneer of key themes in Romantic thought, drew on Leibniz’s ‘science of forces’ to enliven Spinoza’s substance. Herder made force, rather than matter, the ground of all things and thereby gave Spinoza’s open interactive expression of substance a more organic character. He transformed nature into a “system of forces” (Lamm 1996, 168), and considered the implications of that transformation for particular societies and their individual members. Drawing on Spinoza’s vision of an open, vulnerable interdependence, Herder considered the deep interaction between individual people, their societies and their environment. He drew out the importance of ‘belonging’ and the damage that followed from the loss of those constitutive connections. Having appreciated the openness and dynamism of being, Herder translated Spinoza’s vision of vulnerability from the plane of
Being to that of individual beings and societies. He drew out the senses of insecurity and anxiety that characterised such an existence, and explored their influence as goads to action, driving uneven and uncertain experiences of development and becoming. Having shifted the focus from the totality, Herder expanded Spinoza’s consideration of the notion of ‘expression’. All beings ‘expressed’ the totality, but their experience of that activity was an uneven one. It involved an uncertain struggle to re-cognise or re-cover the interconnections that comprised their being.

This is the struggle that then featured in Idealist thought. Confronted with this vision of incompletely realised interconnection, and with the chasm drawn by Kant between *noumena* and phenomena, Fichte and Schelling bridged that gap by equating the totality with the absolute ego. They presented the movement of ‘expression’ as one of consciousness. For Fichte, individual consciousness, with its emphasis on separation, was constantly goaded by an intuition of a greater involvement, prompting constant revisions of that consciousness towards a recognition of the absolute ego. This endeavour, however, involved no easy transformation. Fichte and Schelling presented this process of development and becoming as an uncertain, agonistic, unending struggle.

This analysis brings us to the point from which many have commenced Marx’s story. Hegel developed Fichte and Schelling thought to develop the dialectic that features in his works on logic and the struggle to realise absolute consciousness that is one of the most famous features of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I traverse the foreground constructed by Spinoza, Leibniz, Herder and others as I argue that Marx’s dialectic is
best understood by reading Hegel in light of his predecessors. It illuminates the terms Marx used to comprehend being, such as ‘expression’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’. This exploration also reinforces the productive role of matter and of the experience of limitation and suffering. For Herder, Fichte and Schelling, that experience prompted the recognition of the interdependent character of being. Their recognition of its difficulty—that reason alone could not effect that transformation—is also central to understanding Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and Marx’s anticipation of the productive impact of alienation and immiseration.

**SPINOZA**

There have been many different, conflicting interpretations of Spinoza’s works (Hampshire 2005, 6; Sharp 2011; Vardoulakis 2011, L105). As Stuart Hampshire (2005, 6) has pointed out, “...there have been a Parmenidean Spinoza, a Cartesian Spinoza, a materialist-atheist-determinist Spinoza, [and] a mystical pantheist Spinoza”. Norris (2011) has recently detailed the reach of Spinoza’s influence and the variety of different responses to his work, many of which, like those of Spinoza’s contemporaries, were strikingly passionate. This includes contemporary writers, such as feminists Susan James and Moira Gatens, who refer to a “real fascination” and “magnetism” in Spinoza’s works, and “something awe-inspiring about Spinoza” (Colebrook 2000, Gatens 2000, James 2000, 42). Within the Marxist tradition, writers such as Antonio Negri, Etienne Balibar and Louis Althusser have also been inspired by Spinoza, with Althusser (1997, 102) describing him as “Marx’s only direct ancestor, from a philosophical standpoint”.

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Notwithstanding this variety, however, all interpretations have one thing in common: they all recognise Spinoza’s unbending commitment to a non-dualistic or monist notion of substance (Negri 2011; Norris 2011; Sharp 2011; Vardoulakis 2011).

During Spinoza’s lifetime, the Cartesian and atheistic characterisations dominated, in large part because Spinoza could not safely contest those views. Come the eighteenth century, notwithstanding his continued controversial association with atheism, his reputation was somewhat rehabilitated, so much so that some enthusiastically embraced Spinoza as providing a more credible understanding of the Christian god. For Novalis, Spinoza was “a god-intoxicated man” (Garrett 1996, 1). Schleiermacher, one of the most prominent (and controversial) theologians in eighteenth-century Germany, founded his theology on Spinoza’s works, and described them as providing a “middle way” between atheism and an anthropomorphic understanding of god (Lamm 1996, 24, 26).

In the twentieth century, a fresh revival of interest in Spinoza followed Althusser expressly drawing on Spinoza’s work to promote a ‘structural’ Marxism. Here, Althusser drew on Spinoza to suggest a less determinist conception of the influence of the economic on other social structures, in contrast to the tighter causal relationship he claimed followed from interpretations of Marx through the prism of Hegel and Lukac’s works (Althusser and Balibar, 1997; Norris, 2011, L368; Vardoulakis 2011, L67). More recently, Deleuze and others have expanded on the more open character Spinoza gave to substance through his equation of god and nature. The equalising effect this equation had on being—doing away with a hierarchy of being—has founded a great interest
Spinoza’s vision of being as a “plane of immanence” (Deleuze 1988, 122), or an “ontological horizon of surfaces” (Negri 1991, 168). Writers, such as Susan James and Moira Gatens, have drawn on Spinoza as part of the long-standing feminist commitment to challenging the mind/body dualism. More recently, those seeking to promote a post-humanist point of view—that is, one that does not consider human beings separately to other beings—such as Sharp (2011), have also drawn heavily on this ‘plane’ as a means to better consider the intimate interdependence of human and other, including inanimate, beings. There remains, in this century, a continuing creative engagement with Spinoza, including from those working within the Marxist tradition. Frederic Jameson has described the current form of capitalism as “the absent totality, Spinoza’s God or Nature” (cited in Casarino 2011, L2327). Casarino (2011, L2341, L2610-2612), again drawing on Spinoza’s ‘plane of immanence’, has described Marx and Spinoza as the early theorists of globalisation, by virtue of the characterisation of substance in those terms.

Spinoza’s works have also been of lasting interest to artists and writers, perhaps more than any other philosopher (Uhlmann 2011; Bal and Vardoulakis 2011). Deleuze (1988, 129) suggested the foundation for this interest, and for much of the widespread appeal of Spinoza’s vision, when he observed that “…writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers…painters too…may find that they are Spinozists” as “they think in terms of speeds and slownesses, of frozen catatonias and accelerated movements”. Similarly, in considering a Spinozist conception of agency, Sharp (2011, L2793) drew on musical metaphors, with her suggestion that agency resembled musical composition, with actions limited by available tones and the relationships between them. Once this appeal
is highlighted, it is not surprising that Spinoza was of great influence on the
development of natural and Romantic philosophy in the eighteenth century, particularly
in the works of Herder, Goethe and others. I argue that Spinoza’s works, whilst of direct
influence on Hegel and Marx in relation to logic or dialectics, were at least equally
influential (albeit indirectly) through their effect on those natural and Romantic
philosophers.

Spinoza did not challenge the focus of the traditional debate about substance—only the
breadth of its application. Drawing on Aristotle’s definition of substance (Spinoza 2002b,
217, Part 1, Definitions 3), which had, by virtue of Aristotle’s insistence on self-
sufficiency, previously supported the recognition of a range of substances or beings,
Spinoza (2002a, 44 and 46; 2002b, 94) held that only one being could satisfy that
definition—God or Nature (which he treated as identical). Spinoza’s inversion of the
Aristotelian idea of substance turned on the location of the source of change. Aristotle
set out to make that location internal to being—something separate to, and independent
of, its surroundings. However, as Hampshire has pointed out, Spinoza, having sought
the same degree of independence, could not locate it in the majority of beings. Spinoza
insisted that a substance was that which “can be described as ‘cause of itself’ (causa
sui)” (Hampshire 2005, 40) and of its modifications, not that which changes through is
interaction with others. This, however, could only be the totality, which Spinoza called
“God or nature” (Hampshire 2005, 40).

Spinoza (2002a, 60; Hampshire 2005, 40, 43, 62, 67) argued that all other beings were
merely limited or subordinate modes of that universal substance:
Particular things are nothing but affectations of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way...The being of substance does not pertain to the essence of man; ie, substance does not constitute the form of man (Spinoza 2002b, 232 and 249, Part I, Proposition 25, Corollary, and Part II, Proposition 10).

All beings then reflected the universal substance (god or nature) and were comprised of its attributes, which Spinoza described in terms of thought and extension. The consideration of one attribute expressed—mirrored—all of substance as did other attributes, as they were all part of the one substance.

All particular beings were founded in the one substance and each gave ‘expression’ to that substance. This ‘expression’, however, did not involve any sense of incompleteness or creation. God, as substance, was perfect and completely realised in existence. For Spinoza, all things were dependent on god and reflected, just like a mirror held up before god, his pre-existing and unchanging perfection. ‘Expression’ referred to the pervasive immanent presence of this god. ‘God’, for Spinoza, was the:

\[
\text{immanent and not a transient cause, since all that he produces is within himself, and not outside him, because there is nothing outside him (2002a, 50, 51).}
\]

Moreover, “God is a cause through himself, and not by accident...The predisposing cause is [God’s] perfection itself” (2002a, 51).

For Deleuze, this meant that “God’s nature is...in itself expressive”, and involves “a kind of [unavoidable, ever-present] unfolding”, such that the expression of god on the one
hand, and that of the world on the other, is identical and simultaneous (1990, 99 and 175-6).

Expression involved the revelation of, or the encounter with, that which already existed, that which was always immanent. Particular beings, as dependent on this substance, revealed part of that substance and discovered other parts in their encounters with other beings. There was no previous state in which those particular beings were not involved in, and dependent upon, the substance and on other beings. The connection to, and interdependence on other beings, and on the substance, was not something acquired or secured by those beings in a process of change. All were, from the moment of their inception, and would remain, ‘expressions’ of the substance. None existed independently of each other. ‘Expression’ did not suggest any coming to be, but the radical and pervasive depth of interconnection. All being was a reflection of god. All beings always were, and always would be, dependent on each other and that substance.¹⁵

Within that substance, there was diversity—a range of attributes. However, no single attribute—neither matter/extension, nor form/thought—constituted a superior realisation of that substance. Extension and thought were both equal attributes of the one universal substance, and both equally gave expression to it. Being, for Spinoza, was not divided—it did not have a dualist character or hierarchy, whether by virtue of some absolute character or the latent or potential realisation of some characteristic. All of

¹⁵ Negri (1991, 45-6) describes this as the ‘first foundation’ of Spinoza’s thought. Through it, “the ontological totality is the endpoint of the spontaneous expression of reality; reality is the product of the spontaneity of the infinite totality. To the spontaneity of existence corresponds the spontaneity of production.”
substance's attributes 'expressed' that substance. Having inverted substance, Spinoza had also equalised its attributes. The Spinozan vision, to borrow from Deleuze’s (1988, 122) description, was of a common “plane” of existence; one characterised by activity and instability; one in which change was “immanent” —a vision of intimate, dynamic, interdependence. Having equalised the attributes or expressions of the one universal substance, Spinoza had converted the character of particular beings. Being was now founded in matter and interdependence, rather than form and independence.\(^\text{16}\)

The character of these beings Spinoza (2002b/1675, Part 2, Axiom 5) described in terms of modes of extension or thought—we could only know “individual things...[as] bodies and modes of thinking”. An identifiable aggregate of the attribute of extension—a mode of extension—Spinoza called a “body” (2002b/1675, Part 2, Definition 1). The human mind, too, was also an aggregate, or mode of ideas or thought (Phemister 2006, 168). Thought and extension, considered in relation to a particular being, paralleled or corresponded with, but did not cause, each other. Only in substance—god or nature—did they exhibit identity. Outside that, they were parts of the larger ensemble of god/nature and dependent on it (Phemister 2006, 58, 166; Woolhouse 1993, 155, 172-3).

\(^{16}\) Here I differ to Negri’s (1991, 2004, 2011) view that Spinoza is mired in a Renaissance pantheistic view that maintains some ‘transcendent’ aspect. I argue that Spinoza’s recognition of one substance—the totality—goes hand-in-hand with a recognition of the equality of the attributes, and of their dynamism. The very basis on which Spinoza expands upon his all-inclusive definition of substance equates it with the sum of its attributes, and not as something over and above them. That interdependence necessarily makes for an open, unstable matrix of relationships, notwithstanding the continuity of the totality as a whole, for the reasons set out over the balance of this chapter. However, Negri’s point is well made to the extent that he points out that the Ethics does not give sufficient emphasis to the instability in substance itself that follows from the instability of its constituent bodies. In this sense, Spinoza does emphasise the “centripetal direction” of substance’s “emanations” over the “centrifugal reaction of the determinations” (1991, 54, 58).
All beings other than god (or nature) were not independent and separate, but intimately, already, involved with others: they were best defined against those others (2002b/1675, Part 1, Proposition 28). As Deleuze has pointed out, Spinoza laid “a common plane of immanence [and] ‘intersection’” (1988, 122). Any particular being was to be defined in terms of divergence or negation, or of ‘negation of negation’, as both Hegel and Marx were to later characterise it. One could only comprehend a particular being by reference to its relationships with others, rather than by reference to some underlying, unalterable character or substance, as it had been traditionally understood.

Here, again, as with Lucretius, limitation is treated as both constituting and enabling, rather than antagonistic to the character of a particular being. For Spinoza, each and every being was constituted by virtue of its relations with others. This is the “relationship between liberation and limit” that Negri (1991, 177, 180) “insisted” was a feature of Spinoza’s work: “liberation as the continual conquest and construction of being”. No being existed in freedom from limitation (as it would then be substance). Rather, freedom was borne of necessity:

That thing is said to be free which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. A thing is said to be necessary or rather, constrained, if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way (2002b/1675, Part 1, Definitions, 7).

We live, then, not in some internal sanctuary, occasionally interrupted by some external, alien, influence. Rather, we live by virtue of our borders and boundaries: it is those encounters that frame and found and define us.
This is not to deny the particular, nor the individual, since it concerns only how they are understood. It is not to suggest that there is no distinction from the balance of existence—only that such distinction does not require separation. This was the point Spinoza (2002c, 849) made when referring to a worm living in a person’s blood:

That worm would be living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe, and it would regard each individual particle of blood as a whole, not as a part, and it could have no idea as to how all the parts are controlled by the overall nature of the blood.

Rice (cited in Lamm 1996, 33) has emphasised that Spinoza’s point concerns how individuation occurs. For Spinoza, an individual could be distinguished as the focus of ‘a network’, but not in terms of absolute separation or independence. “Singularity”, to draw on Balibar (2008, 108), “is a trans-individual function. It is a function of communication”.

This was to criticise the process by which a being was traditionally considered in isolation—as abstracted from those relations that determined, defined and constituted it. Particular beings or ‘individuals’ could not be understood outside of those relationships. All beings outside god or nature were interdependent: to consider them outside of their defining relations was to consider an incomplete, distorted picture. It was to consider an image that assumed independence and approximated that being’s life to that of a god.

Spinoza’s inversion of substance—his treatment of the majority of beings as dependent—involved no such godlike security. Rather, his approach to substance revealed all beings as open to the influence of others. In place of the robust security and
continuity of substantive being—and the serenity of a god—Spinoza made being vulnerable and bound up with change. For Spinoza, all beings depended on one or more others and enjoyed a contingent, indefinite and vulnerable existence—separation and continuity were not taken for granted, but were instead seen as exceptional and of uncertain duration. Being was not only limited in the sense of being carved out of existence and constituted by its relations with others, but was limited in terms of duration by them.

For Spinoza (2002b, 253), then, the continuity of a being—whether considered in the attribute of thought or extension—was determined by an ensemble of relationships:

When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together form one body or individual thing, which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies’.

This ensemble—which was called the being’s “essence” (Deleuze 1990, 243, 249) — provided for a very open concept of being, as that essence was only expressed or realised for so long as the relationships between those parts endured (Hampshire 2005, 66). This ‘essence’ was to perform the role traditionally reserved for the concept of substance—it was to determine the definition and location of the character and continuity of a particular being, and to reconcile that continuity with the experience of
change and pain. In Spinoza’s works, and in the work of those who followed his initiative, this led to a radical reconfiguration of the responses to these issues.

Being became seen as an uneasy tension between the internal and the external, as a result of this inversion of substance. In Spinoza’s terms, there was a tension between the preservation of the aggregate that comprised a particular being (its essence) and the ongoing threat that the other, external, relationships in which its aggregate parts participated might come to exert an irresistible attraction. The particular form those relationships took, as those various parts could form different relationships, was one ‘mode’ of existence. The continuity of any particular being—its duration in the world—was no longer located in some internal location, as it was with the traditional debates about substance, but in the continuity of that mode of relating that had constituted it.

Having placed interdependence or relationships at the centre of the constitution of any particular being, Spinoza had also made fragility, precariousness and vulnerability a part of being. In his view, any being comprised that parallel or corresponding existence of particular modes of the attributes of thought and extension (respectively, mind and body). Each such mode was an ensemble or aggregate, held together by a dominant relation, but not in such a way that each participant in that relationship—each body or idea—could be isolated from external influences. Rather, each part of an ensemble could potentially be part of another ensemble of the same attribute (Hampshire 2005, 66). The essence of any being, for Spinoza, was a process of interaction and exchange, rather than separation and independence enjoyed by ‘substance’, as traditionally understood. It comprised a dynamic process of aggregation and disaggregation, with
the efficacy and continuity of any being is the product of a shifting balance between the ‘internal’ (or distinguishing) aggregating relation and extrinsic, disaggregating, attractions—a tug of war, even in the case of so apparently well-bounded a being as the human body:

The human body needs many other bodies for its preservation...But that which constitutes the form...of the human body consists in this, that its parts communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed proportion...Therefore, whatever is conducive to the preservation of the proportion of motion-and-rest, which the parts of the human body maintain toward one another, preserves the form of the human body, and, consequently...brings it about that the human body can be affected in many ways...whatever effects a change in the proportion of motion-and-rest of the parts of the human body...causes the human body to assume a different form; that is...it causes it to be destroyed... (Hampshire 2005, 66).

In this way, the ‘interior’ of a body was not privileged over its ‘exterior’: rather, its very enmeshment in the world—its very constitution—also made it vulnerable to encounters with other, damaging, bodies. Negri (1991, 42, 222, 2004, 42) describes this as the “savage aspect” of Spinoza’s thought. The finite life of any body was due, as Deleuze (1988, 100) put it, not to some “internal” characteristic, but because the very character of any body meant that it was “necessarily [and continuously] open to the exterior”.

The continuity of a being was understood to be the product of particular forms or processes of exchange. That the relations comprising the entity or body changed
however, did not mean that all those relations would change, or that they would do so at
the same time, or in such degree as to prevent recognition of that being over time. This
co-existence of change and continuity is the contradiction Heraclitus pointed to in saying
that one cannot step in the same river twice. The changes in the river’s constitution are
continuous but, at least for short periods of time, not sufficient as to make it
unrecognisable. This same recognition was apparent in Spinoza’s works. According to
Hampshire (2005, 65, 98-9), any body was best understood as a form of “configuration”
and of varying levels of complexity, from combinations of “elementary particles” through
to “configurations of configurations of configurations”. Changes could occur within any
such configuration as to the “distribution” of activity but, so long as the total activity
remains roughly constant over the entire configuration, it could be considered to
maintain a continuous identity.

As Spinoza (2002b, 254, Proposition 13, Lemma 4 - Proof, and Lemma 5) insisted:

> Bodies are not distinguished in respect of substance...That which constitutes the
> form of the individual thing consists in a union of bodies...But this union...is
> retained in spite of continuous change of component bodies...If the parts of an
> individual thing become greater or smaller, but so proportionately that they all
> preserve the same mutual relation of motion-and-rest as before, the individual
> thing will likewise retain its own nature as before without any change in its form.

In the context of Western philosophy, Spinoza ended the traditional divorce between the
character or substance of a being and change. Being no longer needed to be reconciled
with the experience of change. Spinoza argued that if all beings were open and
interdependent, then any assumption of permanence underlying traditional approaches to substance ceased to be credible.

Spinoza presented a particular being as an aggregate or ensemble, as enduring so long as its particular ‘relation of motion-and-rest’ continued. He called this the being’s ‘essence’ or ‘conatus’, meaning simply its tendency or momentum to endure. In the twentieth century, and after Heidegger’s no less radical revision of Being, Deleuze (1988, 122, 123) demonstrated just how readily that endurance can be thought of in terms of a particular habit or way of life:

…to be in the middle of Spinoza is to be on this modal plane - which implies a mode of living, a way of life…The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of a form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities…A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence. In the same way, a musical form will depend on a complex relation between speeds and slownesses of sound particles. It is not just a matter of music but of how to live: it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a tabula rasa; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms….

17 This is the sense with which Spinoza wrote of ‘conatus’, rather than any inherent organising principle or purpose that existed independently of the relations within which a particular being was comprised. This is evident from Shirley’s translation of Spinoza’s works, where ‘power’ is used interchangeably with ‘conatus’ (see Spinoza, 2002b, 254, 283, 293, 297, 306, 309, and 332). It is the interpretation given by Deleuze—for a definition of conatus, one is referred to that of ‘power’ (1988, 58 and 97) —and Hampshire (see 2005, 98).
The constitution of a being was profoundly dependent upon the way in which its constituent parts related to each other. That constellation of relations was not merely an expression of its life, but the basis on which that life or existence was constituted. For Spinoza, mode became central to being: that which defined its character and its continuity. In place of some underlying substance, Spinoza inserted the mode of relationship as the source of character, stability and duration. It was no longer sufficient to seek to comprehend a being in isolation, or by reference to some internal foundation or substance: the essence of any being was comprised of the mode by which its various parts related to each other. With Spinoza, the locus of being became ‘external’ and unstable. Marx was to construct his vision of our humanity from this very locus—a being driven by need and deeply dependent on the various ‘modes’ of production (and hence of life) by which those needs were met.

The character or essence of being was, then, ‘becoming’. For Spinoza, being was immanent—always on the cusp of change, without the direction, form or outcome of that change predetermined. This “plane of immanence” (Deleuze 1988, 122) meant that the character of any being was never finalised as it was in a “constant interchange”. As Gatens (2000, 61) has noted, for Spinoza, “the body [was] a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity”.

Spinoza, through Hegel and Feuerbach, provided much of the materials from which Marx worked. Revisiting them provides the means to illuminate and explain much of Marx’s key works. Those connections are, in part, obscured by the formal, mathematical style of Spinoza’s works, and by the criticisms made of their apparently rigid character
by Hegel and others. Those criticisms, however, are themselves founded in the adoption and reworking of Spinoza’s key ideas by the Romantic movement, and the philosophers of nature. Their emphasis on a more organic, interactive world was explicitly developed in reliance upon Spinoza’s works—and that very reworking also served to obscure their influence. This reworking was also profoundly influenced by the revolutions occurring in scientific thought at this time.

**LEIBNIZ**

In so many ways, Leibniz was the key seventeenth-century rival and critic of Spinoza, by means of his engagement with that scientific revolution. He provided a key contribution to the transition of Spinoza’s thought from mechanistic, rationalist terms to those of natural philosophy, and thence to the terms that Hegel and Marx adopted. Leibniz made it possible to speak of all of nature in terms of a fluid interaction, by giving a central place to the emerging concept of ‘force’ (kraft) in explaining substance. Whilst Spinoza’s infamy and the limited publication of his works restricted their adoption in his lifetime, Leibniz’s accommodation within religious orthodoxy made it possible to revise the notion of substance without attracting religious or political censure.

Leibniz, like Spinoza, rejected the lifeless, passive world of mechanistic thought. However, Leibniz preserved the traditional emphasis on the independence of substance through his assertion that the fundamental, indivisible components of all being were atom-like substances called ‘monads’. He considered that the entire potential of being resided within these monads, and that this potential included all its various relationships.
with other monads, such that those relationships were ‘internally’ inscribed within each monad. As such, each monad ‘mirrored’ or ‘expressed’ the universe—all of its ‘external’ relationships were contained within it. Moreover, the consideration of any single monad—indeed, the consideration of any single attribute of any single monad—enabled the exploration of the totality because each monad, and each of its attributes (by virtue of these ‘internalised’ relationships) “mirrored” or “expressed” the world (Jolley 2005, 49, 51-2). In this view, the world was ‘internal’ to—and immanent within—each being.

Drawing on the Aristotelian tradition (Jolley 2005, 37, 45-7, 60-1), Leibniz located the source of change within these monads. Matter, composed of monads, was active and productive—it was no longer simply a negative or restrictive influence. Nevertheless, Leibniz’s use of the concept of ‘expression’ gave the realisation of the Aristotelian potential a radically different sense. ‘Expression’ by a monad referred to a profound interconnection. A being was only itself by virtue of a deep-seated, pre-existing, interconnection, as established by god: a ‘pre-existing harmony’. With Leibniz, as with Spinoza, the term ‘expression’ gave substance a radically different character to Aristotle’s potential—one founded in interdependence and on immanence; on the revelation or unfolding of that which already existed, rather than creation or emergence or realisation of some previously unexpressed potential.18 Leibniz, in emphasising this dynamic, expressive character, added to Spinoza’s challenge to traditional approaches to substance: whilst still internally located and apparently separate, substance, in

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18 Althusser and Balibar (1997), in ascribing a more traditional interpretation to ‘expression’, miss this change. Leibniz is not merely preserving the traditional ‘internal’ notion of substance, but is seeking to capture the essential interconnectedness of all being. Having neglected this change, Althusser and Balibar then fail to recognise Hegel’s contribution to this effort, and to Marx’s works.
Leibniz’s hands, was intimately involved in the world and bound to express that world—to change.

Leibniz, like Spinoza, sought to make matter active, and to do so within the theological strictures of their time (that is, within a context of still terrifying political fury about these matters). However expressed, the transcendence and omnipotence of the one all-powerful god needed to frame their works, if they were to avoid controversy and potential expulsion from their communities. Spinoza’s approach involved the pantheistic equation of god and nature, and failed to avoid that fury. As noted above, he was ‘excommunicated’ from his Jewish community in Amsterdam, his early publications were banned, and others were withheld from publication during his life for fear of the repercussions. Leibniz avoided the suspect taint of pantheism—and its suggestion that god was not transcendent—by presenting a more distant god; a god allowing a wider breadth to embrace the views of contemporary science as those views were only ever then a revelation of god’s pre-existing plan. It was on that basis that Leibniz was able to adopt the new concept of force or kraft that was coming to dominate the sciences of his day, and provide the means by which Herder and others could adopt and expand on Spinoza’s work without themselves attracting censure. Leibniz used this new concept to radically reconfigure the mechanistic science of atoms into a “science of forces and powers” (Hatfield 1979, 115). Force, for Leibniz, was an all-pervading influence, and the ground of the monads. Matter, when active—that is, in motion—was called “living force” (and matter without motion, “dead force”) (Meld Shell 1996, 22). The language of force suggested a greater sense of interconnection between monads and reduced the apparent impermeability of the boundaries suggested by their atom-like character.
This language of ‘force’, or kraft, had become one of the defining themes in eighteenth-century science. It marked a shift in the conceptual grounding of all matter from the Newtonian emphasis on mechanistic notions of motion and impact between objects with firm boundaries, to the more fluid, porous interactions suggested by biology and chemistry. Mechanistic terminology failed to adequately capture the continuity of organic life: the manner in which so much of life did not appear to be the haphazard aggregation of component parts, but the unfolding of a pre-existing pattern, much in the sense suggested by Aristotle’s notion of potential. New developments in physics, geology, chemistry and biology pointed to a higher degree of interaction and interdependence between objects than previously appreciated.19 The discoveries in relation to magnetism, particularly the forces of attraction and repulsion, were widely influential and became key descriptive and explanatory terms. So influential was this new unitary theory that Neuser (cited in Petry, 1993, 383) has described it as possibly the one concept that captures the overall character of eighteenth-century science.

Any object, or distinct part thereof, could be represented as the unity of opposing forces of attraction and repulsion, typically presented by analogy to the forces tied up in a magnet.

The location of those forces was widely debated and, in many ways, paralleled the philosophical debates concerning ‘substance’. For some, the forces were independent of, and animated or vitalised, otherwise dead matter. In this view, force formed a

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19 Newton’s discoveries in physics, and Haller’s discoveries in biology had a profound impact (Beiser 1987, 128, 147). Haller’s influence, for example, is clear from Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature and Herder’s Ideas For A Philosophy of History (Barnard 1969, 259, 282). Additional indications appear in Clark (1942, 742, 745, and 748) and Kant’s Opus postumum (1993, 103, 104, 261, 271).
substitute for the interventions of the unknowable distant god in what remained closer to
a mechanistic and mysterious view of the world. For others, however, forces were not
foreign to, but were the very stuff of matter and of empirical science.

This same debate extended to biology and the notion of an organism. Broadly speaking,
the concept of an organism was that of a self-organising and self-preserving entity,
reflecting the traditional approaches to substance. Here, too, the location of that
organising principle—the character of an organism’s substance—was vigorously
debated, particularly in relation to the continuity of a species. That debate turned on
whether reproduction was dominated by an internal substance in the traditional sense
(preformation) or was intimately affected by the ‘external’ environment (epigenesis).
Those who advocated preformation, like Kant, thought reproduction was effected by
means of previously formed, genetic-like material or factors, whilst proponents of
epigenesis, such as Forster and Herder, drew on notions of force and argued that
reproduction involved the interaction of various forces or *kraft*, including some
generated within the external environment (Beiser 1987, 154, 155; Reill 2005, 188). The
latter was described as “spontaneous generation” by some of its advocates, whereby
forces present within matter spontaneously “adapt and react to [those in] their
surroundings” (Beiser 1987, 155).

These changes in scientific thought prompted and supported the transition from
rationalist, mechanistic concepts, metaphors and models of substance to more organic
ones. The notion of force, initially borrowed from the mechanical Newtonian sciences,
had squarely fitted with the Rationalists’ vision of a world founded in reason, and could
be discovered and applied with the same confidence as mathematics. As such, the early considerations of force also reflected the Enlightenment confidence in the power and universality of reason. As apparently illustrated by the notion of force, reason could found not only the science of universal laws of physics, but of animate substances, including human beings. The endeavour to understand and regulate the world by means of reason was, however, challenged by the increasing recognition of the diversity of the world. As indicated above, the extension of the concept of force to animate beings, whilst effective at some level of generalisation, involved the recognition of a greater sense of diversity in the world. Johann Gottfried von Herder was instrumental in responding to that challenge. Drawing on contemporary scientific debates, he promoted a much more dynamic, organic model of being and substance. In particular, he made a critical contribution to the manner in which the terms ‘expression’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’ were understood by Marx and his contemporaries. These terms, moreover, were grounded in Herder’s application of the notion of force to a Spinozan concept of substance.

**HERDER**

Herder made Spinoza’s challenge to the traditional approaches to substance accessible and relevant to his generation. His influence was substantial and far-reaching. He formed part of a well-connected group, which included those with key interests in natural philosophy, including Goethe (Berlin 2000, 224; Pratt and Brook 1996, 352, 354-6, 359; Richards 2002, 135, 340, 379, 485) and Schelling (Beiser 1987, 5; Richards
2002, 120, 135, 225; Seigel 2005, 299, 382), and extended to others sharing an interest
in Spinoza’s thought, such as Schleiermacher with his pantheist theology. Herder’s
influence was such that Beiser characterised his “vitalistic pantheism [as] the inspiration
for Schellings’ and Hegel’s Naturphilosophie” (Beiser 1987, 163; see also Pinkard,
2000, 43, 59, 61; Seigel 2005, 299, 361). Jonathan Israel has gone further, describing
Herder as one of “the two foremost figures of the German Radical Enlightenment”
(Israel 2009, 70). Herder’s work comprised one of the original and ground-breaking
endeavours in the movement towards Romantic thought. The key themes of his
works—including his contribution to thought concerning substance—became key
themes of that movement and helped undermine the confidence in universal reason
promoted by the Rationalists and the Enlightenment.

Herder’s preoccupation with particular beings and societies reflected the secular,
subjective emphases of the eighteenth century. The driving issue was no longer the
relationship between substance and the divine but, in the chaotic, uprooted world of that
time, the manner in which particular beings and societies retained—or re-established—
a sense of belonging, of being ‘at home’ in, and an integral, secure, part of the world. By
the eighteenth century, the experience of the French Revolution and the Terror,
together with the Napoleonic wars and civil reforms, had reduced the authority of
religious thought. Those events had, however, maintained much of the instability of the
preceding century. The widespread impact of the emerging capitalist system had added
to this experience, undermining long-established agrarian ways of life, and promoting a
more mobile, urban society. The instability and excesses of religious wars had largely
been replaced by those problems arising through the social and economic restructuring
of their society. Herder’s exploration of the concept of expression was a negotiation of the tension between the scientific (and other) views of a unified world, and the broadening experience of estrangement and alienation. It was a tension that became a key concern of Romantic thought. Goethe, for example, like Herder, held that “Everything that a man sets out to achieve…must spring from all his powers combined; all segregation is deplorable” (Berlin 2000, 228). Their task became reconciling the conflicting experiences of dissociation and of belonging.

Drawing on the Aristotelian tradition (Beiser 1987, 128, 142, 349), Leibniz’s “dynamic, self-developing…entities” and Spinoza’s insistence on “rigorous interconnection” (Berlin 2000, 239-40, see also 231-2; Beiser 1987, 15, 163; Seigel 2005, 332, 334, 336, 347, 372), Herder represented kraft as providing the universal, connecting, dynamic (Barnard 1969, 273-4). It comprised a range of forces that, through their varying interactions, grounded and drove all change (Berlin 2000, 201).

Herder “translated Spinoza’s substance into substantial force” (Lamm 1996, 21). Instead of matter, he made kraft the ground of all things, and thereby made explicit its active or dynamic character that had previously only been hinted at. Aristotle had conceived of matter as dynamic, but in a destructive or negative way, with it working constantly to decay the form imposed upon it. Lucretius had insisted on the ‘swerve’ of the atom, as against Democritus’ atom’s passive fall. Spinoza’s ‘god or nature’ incorporated the creator’s dynamic within the universe. Leibniz’s monads worked through a system of forces (kraft) to realise the ‘pre-existing harmony’ stored up within them. Applying Leibniz’s system of powers and forces Herder gave the open, expansive
relations of Spinoza’s substance an organic character. In Seigel’s words (2005, 335), “Herder portrayed the whole of existence as ‘a colossal organism...’”

Herder enlivened Spinoza’s vision of particular beings as aggregates through substituting the fluid language of force for the fixed rigidities of mechanistic thought, with its residual suggestions of substance-like fixed, foundational, unalterable atoms.

*Kraft*, or force, was not directly observable, and so retained a deeply mystical character in Herder’s treatment. It possessed, as Sloan (1986, 410) argues “an almost pantheistic vitalism”. Berlin (2000, 201) said it owed “more to Neoplatonic and Renaissance mysticism and, perhaps, to Erigena’s *natura naturans* than to the science of his time”. This amalgam of mysticism and contemporary science, however, suggests the basis of some of its appeal. Beiser (1987, 163) notes how:

> This synthesis of Leibniz and Spinoza – a pantheistic vitalism or vitalistic pantheism...made Spinozism into an appealing doctrine for the post-Kantian generation. It thus seemed possible to combine one’s scientific naturalism and one’s moral and religious beliefs.

It marked the change in views that was to begin the rehabilitation of Spinoza: no longer was he simply the ‘freak’ who threatened to undermine all religion and morality (although many still vehemently held this view and would continue to do so well into Marx’s time).

This synthesis, however, was only a partial solution. It constituted a clear movement towards the interdependent organic totality that was to profoundly shape both Hegel and
Marx’s work. Insofar as kraft was given a mystical character, it reflected the epistemic problems emphasised by Kant, and the manner in which Kant’s solution had, as it were, reintroduced the problem of dualism ‘by the back door’. Herder’s work, whilst providing the foundation upon which the latter problem would be addressed, left the resolution of that problem to the work of Fichte and Schelling, which I will discuss in the next section.

Herder’s innovative engagement with the concepts of force and organism did, however, enable him to effectively address some of the key tensions arising within the debate concerning substance. Herder overcame the tensions between Spinoza’s dynamic presentation of individual beings and their dependence on the originating and underlying, immanent, absolute, perfect substance of god or nature. The latter’s influence, together with the manner in which Spinoza had limited his discussion of substance’s attributes to thought and extension, and the formal, mathematical model by which they were presented, had tended to obscure the open, dynamic character of Spinoza’s universe. Herder’s contribution was to emphasise this aspect. He made nature itself a “system of forces” (Lamm 1996, 168).

Herder also explored the implications of Spinoza’s inversion of substance. Spinoza’s works had begun with, and been overshadowed by, an emphasis on the underlying totality and retained much of the rationalists’ language, with its emphasis on an atomic, largely disconnected, universe. Herder, and many of his contemporaries, effected the translation of Spinoza’s relatively abstract model into one that better reflected the sciences of their day, and the realms of individual and social experience.
Inspired by Spinoza’s reflections on particular being, and by contemporary science’s notions of force, Herder held that any being, including an individual human being, was an aggregate of forces: “Whenever and whoever I shall be, I shall be what I am now, a force in a system of forces” (Herder cited in Berlin 2000, 239). The essence of any being was an aggregate of forces, some genetic or internal, others external. Contrary to the traditional debate about substance, there was no single distinguishing feature or element that freed any being, including humanity, from interdependence. Herder pointedly objected:

Philosophers have exalted human reason to a position of supremacy, independent of the senses and organs. But just as there is no such thing as an isolated faculty of reason, so there is no man who has become all he is entirely by his own efforts, as he is wont to imagine in the dream of his life...Upon returning, however, from the world of fantasy to the world of empirical reality he, and the philosopher, cannot but recognise that the whole chain of human development is characterised by man’s dependence on his fellows (Barnard 1969, 311).

Building on Montesqieu’s works and their emphasis on the variation of human societies with local geographies and climates (Berlin 2000, 171; Seigel 2005, 334), Herder adopted the notion of force to present this interdependence as intimately tied to the climate and culture of a place, and its history. Berlin (2000, 223), in this regard, emphasised how Herder came to regard our humanity as only fully realised in
“belonging” to a particular culture, with that culture intimately influenced by its environment (*klime*).

So significant was the influence of *klime*, Herder (Barnard 1969, 295) warned that it should “not be thought that man can by the sheer power of his will and by the application of his skills arbitrarily turn any foreign region into a second Europe”. The influential of each particular environment was so fundamental, and so unique, that one could not consider human capacities independently of it. Whilst Europe’s climate may have supported a form of human development of one kind, it could not be assumed that someone from Europe could replicate the same conditions elsewhere. There they might well be very different people with very different capacities.

This openness amplified the variety of forms in which particular beings and particular societies developed. This made for what Berlin (2000, 170) described as one of Herder’s “cardinal and influential” ideas, and major departures from traditional approaches to substance: plurality. It also provided the ground for Herder’s emphasis on belonging. The variety of forms of climate and society and particular beings made each being intimately attached to its usual context or environment. A plant taken from its usual environment would wilt. A human being removed from her community would also be diminished. So deep was the influence of the ‘external’ that it moulded the forms in which the ‘internal’ was expressed: it made the character of each particular being diverse, in stark contrast to the traditional assertion that each kind or species of being was unique and distinct. Moreover, for Herder, the plurality of humankind made belonging—the deep attachment to the ‘external’ in the form of one’s society and
environment—constitutive rather than contextual. The actualisation of any particular being required that being to ‘be at home’. Beiser (1987, 143-4), points out that, for Herder, there was no universal or “absolute” human essence, and that the one consistent feature of our humanity was our “plasticity” and openness to the influence of local culture, geography and climate.

The continuity of any particular being was then dependent upon that of the climate and institutions that constituted its habitat. In just the same way that Spinoza’s beings continued so long as their particular constellation or mode of formative relations continued, so, too, did Herder’s individuals and societies only continue so long as their formative climate, culture and institutions continued. Bridging the gulf between particular beings and substance, constituting and stabilising particular beings and societies, stood those institutions and ways of life, those habits—the forms by which the particular and the absolute, the finite and the infinite, were mediated and maintained, and by which this mediation became of the essence of their being.

However, those institutions, ways and habits were themselves only relations and only maintained so long as they were enacted: Herder’s belonging or unity was the product of, and preserved by, activity. This belonging, or unity of ‘internal’ and ‘external’, of character, climate and culture, was the product of, and preserved by, activity. Whereas Spinoza’s aggregate of bodies depended on the relatively limited bundle of relationships constituting that aggregate for its continuity, Herder located the essence of any person in a much wider range of relationships. Herder not only shifted the character of being from matter to activity by the notion of force or kraft, but expanded its boundaries by
emphasising the person’s deep dependence on, and openness to, their habitat (and habitus and history). Over the longer term, this activity not only preserved each individual being but her community. Contrary to traditional approaches to the individual being’s substance or character, change, rather than stability, had come to characterise being.

Herder, drawing on Hamann, treated this activity linguistically, arguing that the rhythms and demands of a way of life was enacted by giving the formative and preservative influence to action words (verbs) rather than contemplative words (nouns) (Berlin 2000, 193). The ‘incarnation’ of society, indeed, human beings’ fundamental, constitutive activity was, for Hamann and Herder, speech: it provided the foundations for consciousness and for social solidarity, and made “anthropology the key to understanding humans” (Berlin 2000, 189, 191, 194). This link between corporeal activity and language was particularly clear for Hamann: he saw the rhythms of Livonian poetry as clearly derived from their work (Berlin 2000, 224 n4). For Herder, poetry itself was activity: “words, rhythms, actions [were] aspects of a single experience” (Berlin 2000, 195). Hegel, and Marx, would likewise emphasise activity as primary and constitutive, rather than secondary to, or a consequence of, some other ground or essence of being.

Herder’s emphasis on the plasticity, openness and integration of being with what would ordinarily be regarded as the ‘external’ world also made the concept of a ‘species’ much more open. So varied were the different expressions of human plasticity, that the human species could only be considered in terms of an aggregate of individual beings.
Contrary to the traditional debate about ‘substance’, Herder saw the reproduction of the species as occurring at, and perpetuated by, particular communities, by means of their characteristic form of activity. The species was as much a product of environment and culture as it was genetics or some other underlying unique substance.

Herder’s emphasis on interdependence meant that all of being, both human and the natural world, developed over time, but not in terms of a smooth progression to a pre-defined end:

… man is not an independent entity. All elements of nature are connected with him...And whilst he is...formed and changed with the help of the universe around him, he, in turn, whether he be awake or asleep, at rest or in motion, contributes towards its change...he continually interacts with the elements of his environment...Man constitutes a multitudinous harmony, a multiplicity and a unity, with his living self, acting and acted upon, by the harmony of the forces surrounding him (Herder in Barnard 1969, 282).

All being was, then, historical, and Herder presented that history in terms of a deep, open-ended involvement through his use of the concepts of ‘expression’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’.

Berlin (2000) described the concept of expression as one of Herder’s key concepts. His approach was different to Spinoza’s. With both Spinoza and Leibniz, ‘expression’ was under the shadow of substance—that is, of the transcendent, omnipotent, god. For Spinoza, all things, being dependent on that one substance, reflected it. In Leibniz, one
finds a parallel interdependence, notwithstanding the independence of the monads, through the original, internal and unchangeable inscription of the universe of inter-relationships in a harmony pre-established by god. Herder shared the emphasis on an immediate, but still varying, interconnection. However, he focussed on particular beings, on individuals and societies, on beings of lesser stature than substance or god, and on their experience and character as incomplete, inter-dependent beings. This focus gave ‘expression’ a different character—it suggested the experience of some characteristic coming into being; of the individual, and his particular society, coming to a comprehension or consciousness or recognition of the breadth and depth of their interconnection. It also suggested, by virtue of its focus on a particular being or group of beings, that their realisation of that interconnection would always remain incomplete. No individual or group thereof could ever become the totality.

In nature, substance was already, immanently, expressed. It involved no movement towards a more complete expression or existence. Like the monotheistic visions of god, it was already complete and perfect. However, its components—particular beings—were changing, caught in a process or development towards the full recognition and enactment of their universal interconnection. For human beings, Herder saw this development as a movement of consciousness and of culture towards a recognition of interdependence—the establishment or realisation of what he called the humanitarian, in which all sense of division and separation was overcome (Berlin 2000, 230-1). This theme of recognition—of the ‘many’ coming to comprehend their participation in the ‘one’, and in each other—revived the Aristotelian emphasis on the actualisation of a pre-existing potential. It was a key concern of the Romantics, the Idealists, and of Marx. On
the one hand, the Spinozan emphasis on pre-existing, ever immanent, interconnection remained. Yet freed of the constraints of an omnipotent god, and concerned more with the experience of individuality, the language of ‘expression’ sought to combine the two different emphases given by Spinoza and Herder. It involved the co-location, coincidence, or the co-recognition—and seeming contradiction—of both individuality and interdependence, and of continuity and change.

Expression, then, for a particular being, involved some kind of movement towards Being. Any being was comprised by activity and becoming. A particular being could not be understood in the traditional, stable sense of substance, but only in terms of activity that was both already founded in Being, in the sense of the totality, and yet still striving towards fully or accurately reflecting or giving effect to that totality. The realisation, development and expression of a particular being as one with the totality was an expansive movement, an interaction with what, at an earlier stage of that movement, appeared separate and ‘external’. However, like the actualisation of Aristotle’s potential, the changes this expression brought shared the character of continuity, of having always, already, been a part of the totality. Expression, then, involved a re-cognition, a re-covering, of objects that were always, already, a part of the particular being. It was for this reason that Herder held that any action involved, reflected, or expressed the whole being of the actor and extended to her or his objects. An object altered or created by a person—or by a group of people—already, necessarily, expressed their entire character, and their ability to better, more fully, be that character—to better express their selves as part of the totality—involves a necessary, non-negotiable dependence on those objects.
Herder’s emphasis on particular beings introduced a necessary character to their engagement with apparently ‘external’ objects. It replaced the haphazard or accidental interactions of the various aggregates of Spinoza’s universe and gave the relationship between a person and his object direction as a movement towards the whole or totality. With Herder, ‘expression’ spoke of the connection between a being and an ‘external’ object as a dynamic intimacy. They comprised an expression or revelation, and not a fresh creation or change, notwithstanding the movement or expansion apparently involved. Ollman (1976, 16, 17), in explaining this feature of Marx’s dialectics, described this as involving an internal-relationship, one that was an ‘inner-action’, rather than an inter-action. A person’s artefacts were not ossified, detachable, inessential objects (Berlin 2000, 176), but part of that person.

All particular beings were immersed in nature/substance. All of their actions expressed that immanent interconnection, whether consciously or not.

This unity did not need to come to be—to come to exist—but only to be recognised or, more accurately, remembered or recovered, by humanity. In Herder’s view, modern society had interrupted that unity. Previously, there had been a closer identification between people and their objects: men ‘were all things: poets, philosophers, land surveyors, legislators, musicians, warriors’. In those days there was unity of theory and practice, of man and citizen, a unity that the division of labour destroyed; after that men became ‘half thinkers and half feelers’” (Berlin 2000, 227).

The negotiation of this tension—of an immediate, yet unrecognised, interdependence between parts and whole—was to become the defining feature of Fichte and Hegel’s
works. It helped generate the Idealist school of thought. There, each particular consciousness was seen to be, in actuality, identical to the absolute or total consciousness. However, that identity only came to be appreciated or recognised through the efforts of the particular consciousness to comprehend that which, initially, appeared to be ‘external’ to it. For Berlin (2000, 229, 230), Herder’s response to this dilemma made him, together with Hamann, the “originator of the doctrine of the unity of art and life, theory and practice”, and a key influence on Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx and others.

It was a doctrine founded in treating interdependence as an existing reality, and yet one incompletely experienced, making much of modern life characterised by a deep sense of frustration, and a search for the means to assuage it. Herder’s works focussed upon the latter—on better comprehending how central a sense of interconnection or ‘belonging’ was to our human being. For him, a human being uprooted from its social and material environment would, like a plant removed from its traditional environment, wither and possibly die. Herder made ‘being at home’ more than a question of comfort. Rather, it was constitutive and went to the root of our being. A person or group denied their ‘roots’ experienced a profound sense of being undermined. Herder’s emphasis on belonging gave the sense of dis-location or dis-ease a central place. Whilst Herder focussed on how the experience of anxiety and pain provided an obstacle to the realisation of particular being, he also indicated that it could act as the very driver to secure the desired sense of expression and belonging. Contrary to the long tradition of treating anxiety in purely negative terms, the different poles of experience canvassed by the concept of ‘expression’ gave anxiety, limitation and pain a productive potential: more
than that, the Romantic and Idealist engagement moved anxiety to a central place and role.

Herder’s vision of expressive being—and that of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and Marx, following him—was of an incomplete being; a being deeply engaged in efforts to engage in the totality, which would always, necessarily, be incomplete. Herder’s sense of being was of a process of uneven development and uncertain becoming:

At no single moment can he be said to be the whole man, rather he is always in a state of development, of progress, of becoming. One activity is increased by another, builds upon, or evolves from, the foregoing...We are always growing out of childhood, however old we may be; we are always in motion, restless and dissatisfied. The essence of our life is never fruition, but continuous becoming, and we have never been men until we have lived our life to the end (Barnard 1969, 156-7, see also 171-2, 262-3).

This remained true even for those who retained their ‘roots’. Being, for Herder, was an endless process of becoming—of moving beyond the particular to better ‘express’ the totality, and yet, by virtue of its character as a particular being, never able to fully effect the desired ‘expression’. On this basis, “a man’s life is one continuous series of changes...The species as a whole goes through a ceaseless metamorphosis” (Barnard 1969, 282-3). Change was no longer antithetical to characterising a being, but central to it. This experience of becoming, moreover, was not a smooth or trouble-free one. Here, Herder expressed what was to become one of the central themes of Romantic thought: that becoming was both beautiful and a burden, involving what Richards (2002, 201-2)
catalogued as “strife”, in “a garden of mixed delights”, involving “an antagonistic and perpetual struggle”.

Herder’s emphasis on the individual as a composition of various forces—the organism as an aggregate—became a common model in his time. Goethe, for example, held that “Each living thing is not a singularity, but a majority; even when it appears to us as an individual, it still remains an assembly of living independent essences” (Reill 2005, 138). Similarly, Schleiermacher, drawing on both Spinoza and Herder, characterised an individual entity as “nothing other than the cohesion, the identical combination of forces of a certain measure at a single point” (Lamm 1996, 34). Marx, when he asserted that the human essence was an ‘ensemble’ of relations, clearly borrowed from this revision of the definition and location of substance.

Herder first expressed many of those themes that were to characterise the Romantic movement. As both Reill (2005) and Richards (2002) have emphasised, a shared fascination with the natural world and science, particularly the organic sciences as they developed, challenged the notion of reason as a universal foundation for knowledge and action.

Much of that challenge, however, reflected the broader circumstances of that time. As noted above, the vigilance and active intervention of religious authorities and their allies only heightened the tensions and fragmentations of post-Reformation Europe. Those tensions were amplified both by the original emancipatory impulse signalled by the French Revolution, and by the experience of the Terror that followed it. The capacity to establish a safe, well-ordered society solely by reference to the dictates of reason was
widely doubted. The notion of reason as universal was widely contradicted by the
instability of life at that time. The agrarian and Industrial revolutions had allowed the
growth of the capitalist system and undermined much of the old economies that had
stabilised life in previous times. The wars fought with Napoleonic France continued the
uncertainty that had characterised the upheavals of the previous century, and reaffirmed
the same desire to secure a place to which one could safely belong.

Experimental science, whilst lending weight to the universality of reason, also
challenged our capacity to know the world with any certainty. Those sciences reinforced
the dubious status of our senses and direct empirical knowledge. Absent the discipline
of reason, experimental science repeatedly demonstrated the deceptiveness of our
senses. Yet, upholding this perspective demanded the contradiction of one of the tenets
of experimental science—the supposition of a consciousness independent of those
senses. Kant, in responding to the various threats to reason’s central status, held that
reason had to be exercised by some capacity or consciousness that preceded
experience. There could be no knowing or ‘representation’ before some ‘I’. Working
from this distinction, Kant projected a dualist approach into the world: one in which our
senses gave us some access to the phenomenal world, and which reason could judge
and assess and provide us with some certainty. But this certainty was founded on a set
of propositions which could not be tested—propositions suggested by reason as to how
it worked, but which remained ultimately unknowable noumena. Here, in suggesting an
underlying foundation that provided certainty, Kant effectively reintroduced the dualism
that troubled that the traditional debates about substance since before Aristotle’s time.
Kant’s contribution set loose a debate that continues today. In his time, it led to the re-invigoration of interest in Spinoza’s works, principally through the controversy surrounding Jacobi’s claim that Lessing had admitted being a ‘Spinozist’ (which continued to be identified with atheism and demonstrated the ongoing hostility and influence of the Christian churches late in the eighteenth century) (Beiser 1987, 44-7, Bowie 2003, 73). Nevertheless, the growing influence of those seeking to promote reason to the exclusion of religion meant that this controversy enabled the rehabilitation of Spinoza’s works (Vardoulakis 2011). Perhaps ironically, then, those works were to influence the Romantic challenge to the universality of reason. However, in promoting and defending a monist model of substance, Spinoza’s works also inspired many to seek to fulfil Kant’s work by characterising that singular substance in terms of subjectivity.

Fichte was one of those who sought to complete Kant’s project. In his hands, the universal became the absolute ego. It underpinned all things. All particular beings or entities were attributes or creations of that ego. With Fichte, Kant’s emphasis on incomplete knowledge was retained, but without presupposing some insurmountable duality. Drawing on the debates concerning expression, Fichte presented the movement from the finite and limited to the infinite as a movement of consciousness. The realisation of the identity between a particular consciousness and the absolute or totality then became, in effect, an epistemic endeavour. With Fichte, encounters with what
appeared to be external and distinct from our being became the goad to better realise the identity between those obstacles and the particular ego and, over time, between that ego and the absolute ego.

Fichte made explicit Descartes’ equation of subjectivity and divinity. Descartes had treated humanity as if it shared the divine nature. Fichte developed that equation in order to allow humanity to recognise itself in—to feel at home in—the world. He recognised, consistently with the tradition concerning ‘substance’, the obstacle that this discomfort or anxiety presented to the enjoyment of the good. In addressing this, like Herder, he asserted an original unity, and he founded this unity in subjectivity. With Fichte, subjectivity and substance were made of like kinds, with a distinction between particular subjectivities or egos, and the underlying, all embracing substance or ‘absolute ego’. Like Spinoza’s ‘substance’ and its various attributes, expressed in different modes, Fichte’s ‘absolute ego’ was expressed to varying degrees in particular egos or particular individuals and societies. There was—and remained—an original, ongoing unity. Fichte argued that such a unity had to be presupposed as, in its absence, there was no capacity for self-recognition (Bowie 1993, 18-9; Seigel 2005, 366-7). Absent that original unity, he argued that there was no foundation for consciousness or thought.

The very experience of consciousness or thought, however, involved a contradictory experience of separation from the world. Any thought about anything involved some determination or limitation—some separating out from the original unity: “thought itself instantiates limits” (Richards 2002, 151; Seigel 2005, 364). Thought was both
constitutive and limiting. In distinguishing one aspect of that unity from another, thought involved the creation of objects, including one’s self (self consciousness). That very creation, however, involved some extraction from, or division of, the original unity. The very act of self recognition, then, involved some limitation or diminution of one’s self—of one’s original unity and of one’s substance or essence. For Fichte, this evoked a sense of inadequacy and frustration: so much so as to make self consciousness a life-long process of self-revision, of revisiting and revising one’s self definition and constitution, drawn on by an underlying sense of an unrealised unity, which Fichte called the “intellectual intuition” (Bowie 1993, 23-4). In Seigel’s words (2005, 364), these encounters acted as “a spur, an incitement to further action”, repeatedly prompting a movement or process that could never be complete, making “…its being…an endless striving”.

The ego was both development and becoming. Fichte treated the ego as active and in constant flux, in the same way Herder had treated the self. This self was historical and developing (Seigel 2005, 383). With Fichte, the polarities in the exploration of ‘expression’ became those of consciousness. The tension central to considering being, whether considered from the identification of god and nature, that is, the totality, or considered from the perspective of particular beings, as had Herder, were internalised in the striving of consciousness to recognise itself. The experience of change, and of anxiety, limitation and pain, contrary to the traditional debate about substance, were confirmed as essential and as productive. The character of being was no longer the stable, serene security of separation, independence and continuity, but the uncertain striving of becoming.
Schelling expanded this vision. He took Fichte’s idea of the ‘absolute ego’ and transferred it to nature, making “nature...visible mind, [and] mind invisible nature” (Schelling cited in Bowie 1993, 39). He extended the sense of tension, incompleteness and striving to nature by use of Herder’s concept of force, and supported that by an extensive engagement with the science of his time. In so doing, Schelling “synthesised materialism and vitalism” (Richards 2002, 293) — all of being became comprised of forces of attraction and repulsion, and characterised by the tensions and dynamism that pervaded Spinoza’s works.

All of nature was comprised of forces. Any particular body was a “concatenation”, a “meeting point” or equilibrium of these forces (Bowie 1993, 37; Richards 2002, 143), and of uncertain duration. Schelling was at pains to point out that this equilibrium was no peaceful balance, but involved “a continuous exchange of resistance and strife” (Richards 2002, 310). It involved a life of tension in which:

In every individual body attractive and repulsive forces are necessarily in equilibrium. But this necessity is felt in contrast to the possibility that this equilibrium should be disturbed. The ground of it can indeed be thought of as an endeavour of matter to escape from the equilibrium and yield to the free play of its forces (Schelling 2007, 148).

Schelling translated Fichte’s dynamic of absolute ego and developing forms of self consciousness into an idea of nature as unlimited “productivity” and a variety of “products” (Richards 2002, 143). Substance, then, as it was for Spinoza, was equated with nature. However, in Schelling’s work, substance, in the form of nature, had become
permanent activity. A being did not enjoy a relatively stable, albeit vulnerable, existence for any duration: instead, being was in the process of constant re-creation. Schelling (cited in Bowie 1993, 36) suggested that we:

Think of a river which is pure identity; where it meets resistance an eddy is formed, this eddy is nothing fixed but disappears at every moment and reappears at every moment. In nature nothing can be originally distinguished; all products are still, as it were, dissolved and indivisible in the universal productivity.

Schelling heightened the sense that being was not only interdependent and fragile, but gave that fragility a dynamic character. He made that fragility purposive—part of the endless striving of the absolute ego to express itself. He, together with Hegel, as Taylor (1989, 301) put it, made the notion of expression central to of nature and thereby gave nature the character of a subject.

Nature was productive of self-consciousness—or what Schelling called the “objective self” (Richards 2002, 152). This was the self as an abstraction from the whole, the self constituted through limitation. This experience of limitation, however, was unambiguously productive. Whilst consciousness was initially ‘unconscious’—simply a response to the resistance of the natural world (Bowie 1993, 48) —that very resistance was essential to the realisation of its inadequacy. Philosophy, then, for Schelling, again drawing on Fichte, was a history of developing levels of self-consciousness—a development of expanding concepts of the self in the face of, and in response to, the resistance of this process of objectification (Bowie 1993, 47). That history might be said to include the debates concerning substance—that, driven by the experience of
limitation and resistance to assertions of independence, philosophy’s insistence that substance was independent and free of uncertainty, anxiety and pain, was transformed.

The resistance of the world was such, however, as to promote uneven development. The forms or expansiveness of consciousness varied throughout the world. This meant, for Schelling, that no single individual could represent a species—one only approximated the character of a species by considering an aggregate of those individuals (Richards 2002, 302).

This resistance also grounded the unavoidable experience of desire and its frustration. To be conscious of the absolute would be to think without the limitations that comprise thought—it would be thought without determination or limitation or distinction—and thus not thought at all (Seigel 2005, 384). Self-consciousness, by its very character, comprised endless striving and endless becoming—approximations to the absolute which are always limited, and experienced in terms of suffering and frustration (Bowie 1993, 33; Richards 2002, 153). The human essence, rather than independently constituted and maintained, was intimately bound up with limitation.

**SENSUOUSNESS AND SELF-TRANSFORMATION**

This process of becoming, then, whilst productive, was no simple, effortless transition: a change in consciousness was no easy feat. Here, the insights of the traditional debates concerning substance, and the recognition of the difficulty of dealing with uncertainty, anxiety and pain were respected and explored. Those experiences, whilst necessary for
the productive or fuller realisation of being, were no small obstacle: rather, the real
difficulties they posed were explored. Romantic philosophers like Schelling appreciated
that the intellectual intuition, whilst it could not be satisfied in any particular
objectification—any particular form of consciousness—“actually requires the surrender
of that consciousness” (Bowie 1993, 26). They recognised that it required a surrender of
one’s self—of one’s stance in the world. It was not the product of some aloof,
dispasionate, detached analysis, but an intimate agonistic experience. As Seigel
(2005, 385) has suggested, it was not possible for an individual to fully express or
manifest the totality, so much so that Schelling described the realisation of freedom—
that is, the expression of the absolute ego or totality, as requiring the ‘destruction’ or
‘absorption’ of the individual, at least in the form of that individual’s then current
understanding of himself.

This self-surrender or dependence demanded an act that challenged self preservation
and expression. It demanded the very denial of the substance or essence of the self
and called for a form of expression that exceeded the self.

Schelling only imagined one arena in which expression could take this form: art. In art,
meaning is expressed in a concrete, accessible form, but expresses meanings—is open
to interpretations—exceeding those of the artist who created it (Bowie 1993, 52). So
open is a work of art to interpretation that what is expressed in it might be said to
approach the absolute. Outside that arena Schelling considered the process of
becoming—of ever broader, more encompassing forms of consciousness, and hence of
philosophy—as an endless task.
Schelling, however, was not alone in this recognition and in seeking to reconcile the common experience of limitation and pain with a sense of some underlying unity. It was, for many of his contemporaries, one of their key concerns. It was central to Novalis’ work, who “detected a feeling of dependence on the absolute ego, if not a reflective awareness of it” (Richards 2002, 32), and proceeded to suggest that the encounter with nature was central to securing some sense of re-unification (Seigel 2005, 380). It was central to Goethe’s works too, who held that “we are conscious of such a unity: for we are conscious of being in a perfect state of health when we sense the whole and not its parts” (cited in Richards 2002, 455-6). It was explored at length by Schleiermacher, who argued that the self, through its encounter with limitation, discovered a sense of ‘absolute dependence’ on the absolute, which Schleiermacher understood in terms of the Christian god.

For Schleiermacher, the experience or “feeling of finite things” enabled the “feeling for being” to arise (Lamm 1996, 54) —the experience of limitation, anxiety and pain was not foreign to the character or continuity of being, but the means by which we could understand it. He recognised that this path to self-recognition involved the experience of self-surrender, even destruction, suggested by Fichte and Schelling. I will argue that this was the sense of transition through trauma that was to become central to the work of Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx. Hence, notwithstanding the critiques made by both Hegel and Marx of his work, Schleiermacher provides some useful illumination of what was a shared concern and, in broad terms, a shared solution. For Schleiermacher, the encounter with ‘finite things’ was potentially transformative. Thandeka, in her analysis of Schleiermacher’s works (1995, 96, 98), explains this encounter as creating a “state of
sheer openness", because the shock of the encounter "strips" us of our ability to think or act. In that state, we share the passivity usually associated with the external world. Having lost the initiative as subject, we also lose the sense of distinction from the natural world.

For Schleiermacher, the encounter with the objective world had a dramatic impact. It promoted a sense of reciprocity—interdependence—with other beings and of 'absolute dependence' upon god as the ground of being (that is, as substance). Sensuousness, or "feeling" as Schleiermacher termed it, enabled one to become conscious of one's "immediate existential relationship" with god. (Schleiermacher cited in Lamm 1996, 184) This was to experience "absolute dependence"—to be conscious that one is "posited" (Lamm 1996, 189). Moreover, this discovery was not the product of reason or even of individual effort, but followed from the encounter with finite objects and their resistance—hence, the absolute or objective character of this dependence (Thandeka 1995, 100). It was an encounter borne of interaction with the world—an "existential encounter" (Thandeka 1995, 13). Knowledge of being was inseparable from knowledge of nature, of the corporeal, as accessed through our senses (Lamm 1996, 54).

Sensuousness made this capacity to encounter Being a central part of the human condition and, with it, made the prompts towards a different sense of substance and self (a recognition of interdependence and absolute dependence) immanent in life. Lamm (1996, 192), in considering Schleiermacher's perspective, explained that, for Schleiermacher, the feeling of absolute dependence or interconnection could only arise through the experience of the resistance of the natural world. This made the potential for transformation something possible in everyday experience.
Hegel made this theme of encounter central to his work. The experience of an encounter with another, and that experience of limitation and restriction, was the point of Spinoza’s work—of determination by negation—from which the key elements of Hegel’s work in logic proceeded. The experience of a pre-rational consciousness, or one founded in the encounter with the world and in the experience of desire, of need for the world, also founded Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, building on Fichte and Schelling’s work, Hegel sought to resolve Kant’s dualism. The ‘I’ that reasoned was not separate to the sensuous self, but borne of struggle by and with it. Hegel reasserted a non-dualistic model of substance by founding the rational ‘I’ in the experience of corporeal need.

**CONCLUSION**

Spinoza’s inversion of substance made for a radical departure from the consensus that had dominated debates concerning substance stretching back to Aristotle. By means of a strict application of the traditional definition, with its emphasis on independence or self-sufficiency, Spinoza transposed the site of substance from individual or particular beings to the aggregate of all beings or nature. So elevated did the material world become in Spinoza’s vision that it attracted the language ordinarily reserved for the absolute, solitary god of Judaism and Christianity: substance—including materiality—became immanent throughout all beings, immediately and diversely expressed by those beings, with that expression varying and shifting in its particular instantiations whilst remaining constant as a whole. Substance, for Spinoza, and the many influenced by
him, became the ‘one and the many’, with all beings originally and always interdependent, and yet varying in the manner and form in which that interdependence was exhibited or expressed. The inversion of substance, however, made change for particular beings (now known as ‘essence’) of far greater consequence: not only were they interdependent, but also vulnerable. No longer was a particular being rooted in its own, ‘internal’, solid substance, but an aggregate or ensemble of elements, enduring only so long as that combination continued. It shifted that being’s foundation from ‘internal’ to ‘external’, whether that being was an individual or a group of like individuals, such as a species. It made particular being the site of the coincidence of forces, a nexus of tension and oppositions rather than harmonies.

Being had become ‘external’: held together as an ensemble of components or forces through some shared mode or manner of being, and in the process matter ceased to be the stuff of foundations as traditionally conceived and became pure process—simple activity—itself. Being became less the changeless, eternal, fixed stuff of the universe and more the maintenance of this ensemble, this mode, this equilibrium; it became activity itself, a constant re-enactment, a re-constitution. All beings resonated with movement—a movement oriented outwards, towards those interconnections and distant foundations, that was described in terms of ‘expression’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’. These terms became central to the Romantic and Idealist movements and, through them, Marx’s works. They reflected the tensions inherent in Spinoza’s inversion of substance: of the coincidence of experiences of deep interconnection, as well as tension and conflict; of an immanent, existing reality, as well as one that was yet to be.
They reflected desire as a defining characteristic of being—a defining experience of incompleteness as both a source of frustration, and as a goad towards action.

Any particular being only existed as a limitation of the all-encompassing substance—as some sub-set of relations carved or constituted out from the whole. That very act of creation, however, simultaneously made it an incomplete being—one torn apart from its roots in substance—and bound to experience that act of limitation/constitution as its inadequacy. It made for being as endless striving, as endless movement, as becoming that could never cease. Spinoza’s inversion, then, made desire and its frustration—anxiety and pain—central to all being. Not only did it make the very constitution of being the instantaneous transition from the fullness of constitution to the emptiness of craving, but it made that craving an expression of that being, and its satisfaction of that craving—the overcoming of the lack or limitation—its self-destruction. To satisfy desire and move towards substance required the loss of the very self that founded that momentum. It made becoming an act of self-sacrifice, a giving up of being, a profound trauma. It suggested the difficulty, and tragedy, of becoming—and of the depth of difficulty involved in giving up limited forms of self-understanding or consciousness in order to achieve richer ones. It finally, thoroughly, addressed the very credible foundations for the traditional treatment of uncertainty, anxiety, limitation and pain as obstacles to the good. In doing so, it suggested the need for an act that exceeded the capacity of that particular being—an act of self-realisation that could not be enacted by that being. It made not only particular being, but becoming, deeply dependent on the ‘external’ and made the experience of pain and trauma central to that transformation. It suggested the reasons why Hegel relied on the confrontation with death, and Marx on
the extremities of alienation, as the means by which we moved towards a more human, and more interdependent, existence.
CHAPTER FOUR – Hegel

An exploration of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’ necessarily involves a consideration of Hegel’s influence on his work. Whilst the extent of that influence remains hotly contested in the scholarly literature by theorists such as Althusser (1996), Arthur (2003, 2004a, 2004b), Colletti (1973), Levine (2012), and Reuten (2000), I argue that Marx drew on Hegel’s thought throughout his working life, in two respects. In the first instance, in Chapter Six I argue that Marx’s dialectic was founded in Hegel’s works on logic: in particular, that Marx’s references to ‘objective being’ in his early works (1975e, 390) and to an ‘ensemble of relations’ in the theses on Feuerbach (1975g, 423) are best understood with reference to Hegel’s concept of being. It is only recently that scholars such as Arthur (2003, 2004a, 2004b) and Levine (2012) have concentrated on the influence of the earlier parts of the Science of Logic, where Hegel directly engages with the traditional arguments regarding substance. No one, excepting Ollman (1976, 2003), appears to have closely read Marx’s approach to being with regard to those parts of Hegel’s works. In the second instance, in Chapter Eight I argue that key passages in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit—namely the ‘master/servant’ dialectic and the ‘unhappy consciousness’—suggest the foundations for Marx’s confidence that the experience of profound alienation and pain would promote ‘species consciousness’ (that is, a more interdependent understanding of the self). Whilst there has also been an extensive debate about the extent to which Marx drew on those passages, especially
the ‘master-servant’ dialectic, Hegel’s emphasis upon corporeal experience (in the key passages noted above) has attracted little attention in Hegel-Marx scholarship.

In this chapter, I survey these two aspects of Hegel’s works in preparation for a detailed consideration of their influence on Marx in Chapters Six and Eight. I also place Hegel’s works in the context of the debate concerning substance, both in terms of the longer-term tradition, and in relation to the more immediate prompts for Hegel’s work, with regard to relevant scholarship. Unsurprisingly, this scholarship also features much that is contested. The interpretation I present here is that which appears to have most influenced Marx. It is what Heidemann (2008, 1) has described as a form of ‘conceptual realism’ and gives a greater weight to Aristotle’s influence on Hegel. Beiser (2005, 65-6) and Stern (2002) adopt a similar approach. My interpretation places Hegel squarely in the Spinozan monist conception of substance, and as challenging Kant. Other writers, such as Taylor (1975), whilst writing within the Spinozan tradition, gave Hegel’s works (particularly the *Phenomenology*) what Glazer (2011, 482) and Pinkard (2004, 397) describe as a metaphysical, platonic characterisation. More recently, however, prominent scholars, such as Honneth (2008), Pinkard (2000b and 2004) and Pippin (1993 and 2011), place less emphasis on the metaphysical or logical character of Hegel’s works. Instead, they present Hegel as having continued and supplemented Kant’s work, rather than opposing it. This has been accompanied by what Heidemann (2008, 2) describes as a more “epistemological” reading, with a greater emphasis on textual context, albeit with varying outcomes. With McDowell (cited in Pippin 2004), for example, the master/servant passage in the *Phenomenology* is read as a metaphor or, as Pippin (2011, L237) put it, a “mythic confrontation”, for a process internal to
consciousness. On the other hand, Honneth (2008) and Pippin (2011), for example, even with their neo-Kantian reading, treat that passage as involving the external conflict of distinct combatants.

For the purpose of my argument, I have mostly drawn on the metaphysical or logical argument, as that has the greater relevance to Marx’s understanding of ‘species being’. That argument suggests the ready ‘inversion’ Marx wrote of, given its greater consistency with Marx’s own materialist argument. This, however, is not as far a departure from other interpretations of Hegel as it may suggest. Almost all the key commentators highlight the key role of desire in Hegel’s works, and thereby, the power of something external to self-consciousness, to both thwart particular expressions of the self and act as the goad to the development of others. In particular, they refer to the manner in which desire served as a key influence and stage in the development of a more social self, whether or not Hegel allowed for the kind of individual freedoms that Kant, and those following him, insist upon.

Hegel’s *Science of Logic* directly considered the debate about substance. Hegel, like Fichte, Schelling and others, sought to resolve the difficulties posed by Kant, who, in claiming that “an ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations” (cited by Bowie 2003, 23), had reinvigorated the traditional debate about substance. Kant’s distinction between the transcendental—a thing’s condition or conditions of possibility (Bowie 2003, 14)—and empirical renewed Descartes’ hierarchy of thought over extension (Beiser 2005, 104). As noted in Chapter Three, Kant, and those others working within Descartes’ heritage, insisted that the ‘I’ of self-consciousness—in some
form—had to precede our knowledge of every other thing (including our bodies) in order for there to be some capacity to make those observations. Whilst couched in terms of the quest for certain knowledge, Kant’s claims insisted on the independence of being—or at least its non-corporeal aspect—from the balance of nature. His claims centred on the re-assertion of the shared concern of the traditional debate about substance.

Hegel responded to Kant’s legacy by challenging the ‘immediacy’ or independence of the self. Rather than assume a certain unconditioned starting point, Hegel claimed that all being was mediated, such that no being existed independently of others (Bowie 2003, 80, 82). He argued that Kant, in failing to consider the logic of concepts themselves, had not gone far enough with his critique (Beiser 2005, 156-7). Hegel argued that the completion of that critique revealed that no concept, representation or knowledge was complete until the system, as a whole, was revealed—that the determination of any concept, including that of an individual or consciousness, was necessarily incomplete and only determined by negation, as Spinoza had insisted. Drawing on the Spinozan inversion of substance, Hegel rejected the treatment of being as independent: he argued that being was comprised of an aggregate of properties or relationships. In Chapter Six, I argue that Marx’s (1975g, 423) “ensemble of relations”, for example, drew directly on this aspect of Hegel’s work. For Hegel, no being was self-sufficient. To know itself—to develop its self-consciousness—was then dependent on an encounter with an Other. It did not precede that experience (Bowie 2003, 86).

Those same works present that aggregate or body as characterised by tension or pain, and place Hegel’s work in the same vein as that of Herder, Fichte, Schelling and others.
who understood the difficulty and trauma with which the fullness of being would be expressed or realised. It is this recognition that shapes Hegel’s ‘master-servant dialectic’ and ‘unhappy consciousness’. In Hegel, those passages explore key moments of transition and recognition as the products of extended periods of pain and suffering. Hegel, through the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, challenged the primacy of self-consciousness by presenting all consciousness as dependent on its interaction, in some way, with some Other. Pinkard (2000, 170-1) characterises the starting point of the *Phenomenology* as a rejection of the “isolated subject”, with “knowledge of the objective...then developed out of the subjective”. Rather, the starting point had to be an “already shared world”.

Hegel, through the *Phenomenology* and his works on logic, identified the self with activity, and with engagement with the ‘external’ world. For Hegel, only the totality satisfied the core criteria of substance: all other beings were intimately bound up with, and dependent upon, other beings, so much so as to make being identical with activity or labour. Hegel, following on the initiatives of Fichte and Schelling, treated the foundation of this movement—the sensation of being incomplete or of desire—as a defining characteristic of being, rather than, as tradition had it, some compromise, contagion or pathology. Rather than something foreign to rationality, Hegel founded the development of self-consciousness and rationality in desire. This was, in many respects, the central theme of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the repetitive experience of desire was seen to obstruct a certain, stable sense of self and to drive a search for a more secure foundation for identity. For Hegel, desire repetitively challenged that sense of self, founded in separation from the world, and in a rationality
distinct from our corporeality. It drove that search through states of denial—states in which others were enslaved in order to evade that uncertainty and instability, and states in which efforts were made to subordinate desire through ascetic disciplines. Here, again, like Herder, Fichte and Schelling before him, Hegel respected the traditional emphasis on the troubling—even disabling—human experiences of anxiety, incompleteness and pain, and on the popular investment in their evasion. Building on his predecessors’ insights, Hegel suggested some of the attraction—even advantages—of those efforts, and of the tenacity with which they were pursued.

Hegel recognised the driving influence of desire and anxiety, and made it a central theme in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In particular, he confronted the difficulties in responding to those experiences. So fraught was the acquisition of a certain, stable expression of one’s self, with its demand for the sacrifice of one’s previous sense of self, that Hegel argued one would sooner impose that cost on another. The master/servant dialectic is Hegel’s famous, and widely debated, account of the lengths to which some people went to avoid bearing that cost. However, what has been less recognised is that Hegel’s wrestling with the demand for self-sacrifice did not end with that account. Instead, for Hegel, it only ended when extreme ascetic disciplines failed to still the experience of desire within one’s own body. In this chapter, I look to highlight the significance of those corporeal struggles to Hegel’s understanding of the fullest realisation of self, and to prepare the ground to suggest, later in this thesis, how readily that understanding supported Marx’s materialist ‘inversion’ of Hegel’s work.
This chapter focuses on those two key passages of the *Phenomenology* as key points of transition from ideas of a self based on the insistence on separation in much of the traditional debate about substance—the independent, self-reliant self—to a realisation of a more interdependent, and social, sense of self. That is, one based on mutual recognition and its embodiment in a range of social practices and institutions, an embodiment so profound that Hegel described it as the “ethical substance” (Taylor 1975, 379). The *Phenomenology* also served as the justification and introduction to Hegel’s dialectic, which he detailed in his *Logic* and *Science of Logic*. These works distilled Hegel’s argument that the constitution of any particular being depended upon the continuity of its relationships with other beings. I argue they provided the direct foundation for Marx’s own version of the dialectic, and for the interpretation of key terms used by him in his consideration of ‘species being’, such as ‘development’ and ‘becoming’.

**HEGEL ON BEING**

The *Phenomenology* served as a prologue to the *Science of Logic*, and it is here, and in the *Logic*, that Hegel directly addressed the debate about substance. Building on Spinoza, Hegel elaborated the critique of the emphasis on independence and, by way of tracing out the efforts to resolve its contradictions, expanded upon the concept of ‘essence’ and provided the immediate materials from which Marx developed his own concept of the human substance. In the *Logic*, and in his lectures on the history of philosophy, we also find a detailed exposition of other concepts that are central to
Marx’s own theory, particularly those of ‘development’ and ‘becoming’. Throughout these works and the *Phenomenology*, we find a continued application of the concept of expression, and a reconciliation of the differing perspectives offered by Spinoza and Herder.\(^{20}\)

We will also see Hegel acknowledging the limitation and pain that had long featured in earlier philosophical work on substance. Hegel’s account highlights the profound influence of desire as an expression of the limitation of any particular being. Hegel also emphasised the costs incurred when denying those desires, with consequences like alienation and pain—costs so profound and so troubling as to found ways of living built on their denial and avoidance, and oppression of others and of the self to that end. Hegel went further, arguing that the experience of anxiety, limitation and pain held the promise of transformation through our inability to deny our corporeality, and our eventual surrender of a claim to independence in the face of its resistance. The acceptance of our corporeality was the catalyst enabling the acceptance of interdependence—of mutuality—as the essence of our being and, from there, the recognition and development of the social or, as Hegel described it, the “ethical” character of our being. From that point, desire left Hegel’s stage, revealing his project as one of rational freedom. It was, however, the very place to which Feuerbach and Marx were to return as part of their materialist ‘inversion’ of Hegel’s work. As indicated

\(^{20}\) Unlike Althusser and Balibar (1997, 97, 186-7, 252), I argue that Hegel’s use of ‘expression’ had the opposite meaning to that of the traditional notion of ‘substance’ or ‘essence’, such that, rather than contradicting their notions of a ‘centre’ less combination or structure, it forms one of the terms Marx used to describe that structure. Furthermore, in Chapters Six and Seven, I argue that the Spinozan use of ‘expression’ contributes to a richer understanding of that complex structure, particularly when considering the location of individuals within that structure.
above, it is for this reason that this chapter focuses on this particular selection from Hegel’s works.

Hegel’s project is best understood as a critique of the traditional debate about substance which assumed the existence of some unique quality that was both separate from—and unaffected by—other, passing qualities. A ‘pure’ substance or being was not defined by its ‘accidental’ or temporary properties. Hegel’s critique, however, held that when substance or being was defined in such abstract terms, it was to equate it with nothing:

The distinction between Being and Nought is, in the first place, only implicit, and not yet actually made: they only ought to be distinguished. A distinction of course implies two things, and that one of them possesses an attribute that is not found in the other. Being however is an absolute absence of attributes, and so is Nought. Hence the distinction between the two is...no distinction (1975, 128).

On this criticism, Hegel built an understanding of the world and life that did not rely upon on the traditional assumption of separation. It was also the basis from which Marx was to build his theories of the self, corporeality and agency.

Hegel proposed that once the idea of property-free, secret being or substance was abandoned, there could only be “determinate being”—being with some particular character (1969, 406, 409; see also 1975, 134). Being, then, necessarily involved a relationship with something else as the property of a thing only consisted in its difference to others. This character or property was not identical with the idea of an
inner, private, pure being, but an Other to it—a negation or contradiction of this presumed state of separation (1969, 395, 398, 418; see also 1975, z134, 135):

Given something, and up starts an other to us: we know that there is not something only, but an other as well. Nor, again, is the other of such a nature that we can think something apart from it; a something is implicitly the other of itself…When we say “something else” our first impression is that something taken separately is only something, and that the quality of being another attaches to it only from outside considerations. Thus we suppose that the moon, being something else than the sun, might very well exist without the sun. But really the moon, as a something, has its other implicit in it (1975, z136).

Hegel (1969, 441) illustrated this implicit Other using the idea of identity as relational using:

The most trivial examples of above and below, right and left, father and son…Father is the other of son, and son the other of father, and each only is as this other of the other.

The Other was a negation of the conventional idea of being or substance because it contradicted the assumptions of independence and separation. For every being, an Other was present and co-located because of their mutual reliance.

Like Spinoza, Hegel referred to this relationship between being and its Other as ‘essence’. Essence was “Being coming into mediation with itself through the negativity of itself”, its Other (1975, 162). It provided a way of envisioning the self that Seve (1978,
263) later characterised as Hegel’s version of a “Copernican revolution”—shifting the centre of being outwards and transforming the status of a relationship from mere accident to foundation. It provided, as we will see later, the basis for Marx’s more open, and more holistic account of the self.

In the chapter on ‘Essence’ in the Logic, Hegel discusses “the domain in which we see things not just by themselves, ‘immediately’, but as founded on an underlying basis...the manifestation of a thoroughgoing systematic web of necessary relations” (Taylor 1975, 258). Hegel illustrated this with reference to both Democritean atomistic theory and to contemporary concepts of attraction, repulsion and force. Democritus’ atomism was seen to offer:

... an inadequate notion...because it conceives [the] relation [of the atoms]...their combination, as purely contingent...some atoms ‘swerve’, and hence encounter others; whereas in reality, the [atoms] can only exist in relation to each other (Taylor 1975, 246).

The “atomistic principle, according to which the essence of things was the atom and the void” treated the:

... many [atoms as having]...affirmative being [and]...their relation to one another [as] a non-relation, [as] external to them...In this determination repulsion is an exclusion (Hegel 1969, 166, 170).

However, this, as Hegel (1969, 170-2) explained, was an inadequate explanation:
The plurality is...non posited otherness, the limit is only the void, only that in which the ones are not. But in the limit they also are; they are in the void, or their repulsion is their common relation...They are...and they are only insofar as they reciprocally negate one another...This is not only a relating of them by us, an external bringing of them together, on the contrary, repulsion is itself a relating; the one which excludes the ones relates itself to them, to the ones, that is, to its own self (emphasis in original).

This traditional approach to substance, with its emphasis on separation, was inadequate, not only for dealing with inanimate objects, but with animate ones:

... the organism...is not exhaustively expressed...in the way anatomy analyses and describes [it]...In the systems constituting an embodied form...the organism is apprehended from the abstract side of lifeless physical existence: so taken, its moments are elements of a corpse and fall to be dealt with by anatomy; they do not appertain to knowledge and to the living organism. Qua parts of that sort they have really ceased to be, for they cease to be processes...The actual expression of the whole [of an organism], and the externalisation of its moments, are really found only as a process and a movement, running throughout the various parts of the embodied organism; and in this process what is extracted as an individual system and fixated so, appears essentially as a fluid moment. So that the anatomy which anatomy finds cannot be taken for its real being, but only that reality as a process, a process in which alone even the anatomical parts have a significance (Hegel 2003, 157).
In Hegel’s view (1969, 487), one part of a being did not exist without the other, nor did an animate object exist without inanimate objects. In other words, the properties (or predicates) of a being are its relations with other beings:

… the property is this reciprocal relation itself and apart from it the thing is nothing…If, therefore, one is speaking of a thing or things in general without any determinate property, then their difference is merely indifferent, quantitative. What is considered as one thing can equally be made into or considered as several things; the separation or union of them is external. A book is a thing and each of its leaves is also a thing…The determinateness through which one thing is this thing only, lies solely in its properties… (1969, 490-1).

Properties—‘external’ features—are what comprised a ‘thing’, and were not merely subordinate and incidental aspects of it, contrary to the traditional emphasis on some underlying, unchanging, substance. This ‘essence’ was “the truth of being” (Hegel 1969, 389):

The ‘this’ thus constitutes the complete determinateness of the thing, the determinateness being at the same time external…The thing as ‘this’ is…their merely quantitative relation, a mere collection, their ‘also’. It consists of some quantum or other of a matter, also of a quantum of another, and again of others; this connexion of having no connexion alone constitutes the thing (Hegel 1969, 493-4).
A being was thus comprised of its contextual (or coinciding) properties—that is, its relationships with other things:

This abstract universal medium, which we can call Thinghood...is nothing else than ...a simple togetherness. This salt is a simple Here and at the same time manifold: it is white, and also pungent, also cubical in shape, also of a specific weight, and so on...It is, then, in truth the thing itself which is white, and also cubical, and also tart, and so on (Hegel 2003, 64, 68).

However, like the mode or conatus which organised Spinoza’s aggregates, Hegel's being was not any random combination of properties, but precisely those properties in relevant quantities (like its specific weight, size, etc.):

Sugar is, of course, not the mere plurality of its different adjectives; but why should it be more than its properties in relation? When ‘white’, ‘hard’, ‘sweet’ and the rest coexist in a certain way, that is surely the secret of the thing. The qualities are, and are in relation (Bradley 1959, 16).

For Hegel (1975, 516), a being or substance could not exist or act outside or independently of those relationships. Its ‘truth’ then lay in the mediation of these relationships. Its continuity—its essence—was constituted in that relational dynamic.

The combination of this being and its Other—the stage at which the negation or contradiction of being by its Other was itself negated or resolved (the ‘negation of the negation’) —was the outcome of action. Once a being achieved unity with its Other—“completed the circle of intermediation” (Hegel 1975, 179) —Hegel called it “existence”:
It follows from this that existence is the indefinite multitude of existents as reflected-into-themselves, which at the same time equally throw light upon one another – which, in short, are co-relative, and form a world of reciprocal dependence and of infinite interconnection…In this motley play of the world…there is nowhere a firm footing to be found: everything bears an aspect of relativity, conditioned by and conditioning something else…The existent is, when so described, a Thing (1975, 179-180).

This unity, however, was always both an exception and temporary. Essence, for Hegel, was an incomplete state because the Other was both part of, and yet outside, it. Essence was “a still imperfect combination of immediacy and mediation…the sphere in which the contradiction, still implicit in the sphere of being, is made explicit”, but not resolved (1975, 165).

**LIFE AS PAIN**

It was out of this account of essence as becoming that Hegel understood the nature of pain. For Hegel, to understand a particular being demanded that one recognise the contradiction that resided within it. It was both founded in—and against—the totality of relations. Constituted by a variety of relations, its being depended upon an involvement with others that expanded towards the totality. Yet constituted, too, by a particular locus or intersection of those various relations, it was defined against those situated outside the arena carved out by those relations. For Hegel (1969, 770), “the living being is for itself this disharmony and has the feeling of this contradiction, which is pain”. To
penetrate to the ‘essence’ of being was to see that it was both complete and incomplete, absent those ‘extrinsic’ relations and their essential objects. It was to posit an essential incompleteness or defect—an ontological lack—at the heart of being, at the very site at which the tradition of debate about substance thought it to reside. It is this ontological lack that provides the foundation for Marx’s understanding of human agency, rather than need per se (Hegel 1967, 235; Seve 1978, 321). For Hegel (1969, 439):

... everything is inherently contradictory...contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.

In this fashion, Hegel understood being as contradiction, movement and pain. Being was to be discovered in the expansionary movement from a narrow to a comprehensive set of relations. It was found in the movement from an incomplete or inorganic unity to an internal, organic unity, and in the movement from the contradictory state of essence towards the totality. It was to found being in desire and change:

Animal wants and appetites...are the felt contradiction, which exists within the living subject, and pass into the activity of negating this negation which mere subjectivity still is. The satisfaction of the want or appetite restores the peace between subject and object. The objective thing, which, so long as the contradiction exists, i.e., so long as the want is felt, stands on the other side, loses this quasi-independence, by its union with the subject...Appetite is, so to speak, the conviction that the subjective is only a half-truth, no more adequate than the objective. It brings about the supercession of these finites: it cancels the
antithesis between the objective which would be and stay an objective only, and
the subjective which in like manner would and stay a subjective only (Hegel
1975, 269).

However, and contrary to the traditional characterisation of substance, Hegel (1969,
135) insisted that this experience of incompleteness need be neither disabling nor
disheartening, but rather, act as a goad to action:

The sentient creature, in the limitation of hunger, thirst, etc, is the urge to
overcome this limitation and it does overcome it. It feels pain, and it is the
privilege of the sentient nature to feel pain; it is a negation in its self, and the
negation is determined as a limitation in its feeling, just because the sentient
creature has the feeling of its self, which is the totality that transcends this
determinateness. If it were not above and beyond the determinateness, it would
not feel its negation and would feel no pain (emphasis in original).

Hegel (2006, 235-6) drew on Aristotle’s concept of potential to capture the immanent,
effervescent character of this drive:

… there are two principal forms, namely, that of potency … and, secondly, that of
actuality or, more precisely, energy...These are characteristics that crop up
everywhere in Aristotle, and we must be familiar with them in order to grasp his
meaning. Specifically, ‘potency’ is not ‘force’ but rather...‘capacity’ or ‘potentiality’.
The Scholastics translated it as potentia. It is not an indeterminate possibility but
is for Aristotle what is objective, what is implicit. The implicit is the idea, which is
also just *potentia*; for only energy...or form is what is active or that which actualises. In saying ‘essence’...we have not yet posited activity.

The concept of essence described a bundle or ensemble of relations with a variety of objects and, through them, a range of contradictions that was experienced as pain or dis-ease. This, in turn, drove that being to repeatedly open itself to the ‘external’ through the very process of its self-expression:

Since of necessity it has to be this subsistence, ie, to express, externalise itself, its expression takes the form that the other approaches it and incites it...Since...it must of necessity be this essential nature, which as yet it is not affirmed to be, this other comes forward soliciting or inciting it to reflect into self, to turn the pseudo-external factor into a factor of itself; in other words, this other cancels its external expression...Each of these two sides, the relation of inciting and the relation of the opposed determinate content, is on its own account an absolute process of permutation and transposition (Hegel 2003, 78, 84).

This process, as Hegel thought (1970, 24z), was “development”, the “positing of what it is in itself...as an utterance or expression, a coming forth, or setting forth, a coming-out-of-self”. It made change central to, rather than the contradiction of, continuity. It was:

...the movement...by which that only is explicit which is already implicitly present...Thus e.g. the plant is developed from its germ...in the process of development the notion keeps to itself and only gives rise to alteration of form, without making any addition in point of content (Hegel 1975, 224z).
This concept of development, while it drew on Aristotle’s work (Hegel 1994, 214), was indebted to Spinoza. Whereas Aristotle sought to present particular beings as enjoying the independence of substance, Hegel held all such beings were founded on, and deeply involved in, the totality. No ‘pure being’ existed—only beings bound up with others. All beings were engaged in a movement of deepening engagement with the ‘external’ world as the only means by which to express their own essence—and in so doing, they expressed their existing dependence on the one, universal substance:

The concept of development is a wholly universal concept. Development is the movement or vitality of spirit, of nature, because everything living, from the feeblest to the noblest, is development. The inner life of God in itself is this very development, for God in his universality determines himself, that is, God posits a distinction and brings himself to determinate being, to being for another. In this determinate being there is the eternal creation of the world...and at the same time there is absolute identity with self – an absolute movement that is at the same time absolute rest. God is an eternal mediating of himself with himself, an eternal coming together...of himself with himself....Absolute development, the life of God or of spirit, is simply a process, a universal movement and, as concrete, it is a series of developments. This series is not to be represented as a straight line but as a circle, a return into itself...The entirety of the progression, the goal in this development, is none other than spirit’s coming to itself, knowing itself...in that it has consciousness of itself, that it becomes object for itself, namely, brings forth what it is, and that it empties itself out, becomes wholly object for itself, wholly
discloses its innermost being, that it descends into its depth and, in doing so, its depth comes forth (Hegel 1994, 52, my emphasis).

This not only applied to the absolute or the totality, but to particular beings as well:

When we reflect on these statements we see that the human being, who was implicitly rational and who makes this rationality into the object, is nothing in addition to what he was at the beginning. What was implicit maintains itself and remains the same thing, and yet there is a vast difference (Hegel 1994, 214-5).

This process, moreover, could not be understood in isolation, nor could particular beings:

…Thus both the sides of the entire movement which were before distinguished, viz., the setting up of individual forms lying apart and undisturbed in the universal medium of independent existence, and the process of life – collapse into one another…The entire circuit of this activity constitutes Life. It is neither what is expressed to begin with, the immediate continuity and concrete solidity of its essential nature; nor the stable, subsisting form, the discrete individual which exists on its own account; nor the bare process of this form; nor again is it the simple combination of all these moments. It is none of these; it is the whole which develops itself, resolves its own development; and in this movement simply preserves itself (Hegel 2003, 101-2).

The preservation of any particular being was, then, in effect, the continuity of a movement:
The object is in its essential nature the same as the process; the latter is the unfolding and distinguishing of the elements involved; the object is these same elements taken and held together as a single totality (Hegel 2003, 63).

This process, and the terms Hegel used to grasp it—namely ‘expression’ and ‘development’—require that “we…think pure flux”, a “flux of thorough-going change”, of “flux [as]…the substance of the independent forms” —that we regard life as “endless, infinite movement” and the self as “this very unrest” (2003, 92, 84, 100, 12, my emphasis). Here, Hegel (2006, 74-5) reached back to Heraclitus to present this being-in-flux as ‘becoming’:

Heraclitus says that everything is becoming, that becoming is the principle. This is contained in the expression ‘Being no more is than is non-being’ – this is precisely becoming, for becoming contains the identity of the two, of being and non being. By ‘becoming’ we understand arising and perishing; neither is on its own account, but they are identical...This unity is what is true. It is a great thought to pass over from being to becoming; it is still abstract, but at the same time it is also the first concrete element, that is, the first unity of opposed characteristics. The latter are thus restless in this relationship, for it contains the principle of vitality...This principle of motion itself is becoming, the stirring of the vitality of generation according to one aspect or another.

The substance of a living being is best understood as activity, relationship and dependence:
It is an ancient proposition that the one is many and especially that the many are one. We may repeat here the observation that the truth of the one and the many expressed in propositions appears in an inappropriate form, that this truth is to be grasped and expressed only as becoming, as a process, a repulsion and attraction – not as being, which as a proposition has the character of a stable unity (Hegel 1969, 172).

All beings, animate and inanimate, however, engaged in these processes of expression, development and becoming. The objects of each being’s expansionary movement were themselves engaged in movement. Spinoza had already highlighted the tensions then immanent in life. In like fashion, Hegel emphasised the central role of contradiction. It may equally aptly be considered in terms of resistance—of the contradiction posed by one particular being to another’s expression, development or movement.

One can understand the potential of a thing—and its realisation of that potential—to be central to what that thing is. Everything has some potential to be realised and that potential is often realised inconsistently with the movements of other beings affected by it. The thing can be expected to move towards the unification of essence, of being and objects, to move towards a fuller expression of the totality, even when that conflicts with the movements of other things:

If…an existence contains the Notion not merely as an abstract in-itself, but as an explicit, self-determined totality, as instinct, life, ideation, etc., then in its own strength it overcomes the limitation and attains a being beyond it. The plant transcends the limitation of being a seed, similarly, of being blossom, fruit, leaf;
the seed becomes the developed plant, the blossom fades away, and so on (Hegel 1969, 135).

In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel (1969, 134) insisted that even a stone, as a determinate being, “transcends its limitation”.21

On Hegel’s terms, animate and inanimate beings engaged in their own movement, their own expression, development and becoming. All beings had part of their essence located ‘outside’ their selves and were driven to unify the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ aspects of their essence—to organise themselves more securely or completely (1975, 134, 135, 766). This made the experience of limitation and resistance an ordinary and unavoidable feature of development, in the combination of subject and object, which, in the case of human beings, Hegel (and later Marx too) described as the relationship between the individual’s ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ body.

As Malabou (2005 64, 75) has noted, Hegel used the category of habit to refer to the regular ways in which this process of unification occurred:

Habit is what gives a being the impression of its existence as something continuous, and this Hegel calls the “impression of selfhood”. Habit makes it possible to retain the changes that occur and to expect that they will recur…[It] is the process whereby the contingent becomes essential.

The open character of being—as intimately involved in the ‘external’ and perpetually engaged in becoming—made any particular being ‘plastic’ (to use Malabou’s term). The

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21 Aristotle also treated “inanimates” as realising their potential (Lawson-Tancred 1998, 133).
relative independence of other beings, and their potential resistance to the movement towards unification that mark the stages of becoming, made all beings contingent. Rather than the pre-existing, pre-defined certainties suggested by the traditional debate about substance, Hegel, like Spinoza, made particular being an uncertain, even precarious, achievement: “Effected by habit, the singularity of the ‘plastic individual’ becomes an essence *a posteriori*” (Malabou 2005, 73-4).

Continuity was no longer secured by a stable unity, but by a process or habit that, whilst tending towards repetition, was always vulnerable to the character of being as ‘becoming’. The tension and productivity—the volatility in the sense of some imminent transformation—that characterised any particular being made, then, for a kind of inherent restlessness. It made it difficult for a being to find its ‘home’ in the world, as the stability preferred in the traditional debate about substance always remains a state to be achieved. To be was to experience this tension—the contradiction Hegel emphasised—and to not feel ‘at home’ in the world. To be was to experience this pervasive discomfort—this pain. As Hegel emphasised (1969, 770), to live was to experience “this disharmony”, this “feeling of contradiction, which is pain”. Standing against the traditional approaches to substance, Hegel treated the experiences of uncertainty and pain, not as exceptions or pathologies, but as essential to being itself.

One response to this pain, to the desire for stability and a world that consistently reflected back one’s self—a world in which one was ‘at home’—was to ignore or deny that pain. It was to impose its management on others—to enslave others to that end—or to deny its claims on one’s self and to pursue some kind of ascetic discipline. Hegel
explored the latter evasion in the *Phenomenology*. It was to seek to secure stability by ignoring the call of contradiction and desire—by dampening and denying the dual tensions of expression which, for Hegel, formed the foundation of the character and continuity of any being. This was, however, to deny one’s self—to engage in a self-defeating act—in order to gain some sense of security and stability. In this sense, Malabou (2005, 75) could draw on Hegel to conclude:

Man does not have a substance…The Hegelian man is above all a man of habits, and that means, paradoxically, a disappearing subject. The more closely habit is studied, the more it becomes clear that human subjectivity is constituted in self-forgetting; consciousness and will, under the influence of repeated practice, win their force through a kind of self-absenting.

A being could secure some stability, some substance in the traditional sense, by imposing limits on its self—by separating itself from the world, and from others. Limitation here, again, in the sense of separation and boundaries, was central to the constitution of a particular being or self. It remained, however, a denial of one’s essence, of one’s immersion and participation in the totality, and one that was bound to fail because the very nature of one’s being was constituted by that involvement. A stable sense of being, like the human experience of selfhood, founded on a notion of separation, was both dependent upon, and pained by, limitation. It was an identity, however, by virtue of the movement immanent throughout all being, that was bound to be undermined, bound to be disrupted, forcing one from pain to pain, and from one grasp of self and identity, to reaching for another. Contrary to traditional approaches to
substance, it was a pathway that was destined to fail until the demand for separation or independence was abandoned—until being was re-conceived in the non-traditional terms of involvement and dependence, and one could feel at home in the world through feeling an identity with all the world. This was the pathway Hegel explored through his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

**THE PHENOMENOLOGY**

It is for this reason that the *Phenomenology* has been properly described as the prologue to the *Logic* (Stern 2002; Taylor 1975, 221). It was an argument, drawn from the experience or phenomena of being, that revealed the foundations of the *Logic*. Moreover, as Taylor (1975, 137) has pointed out, it was an effort to explain and reconcile the two different dimensions of expression. It involved a certain self-concept and encounter with “realities on which [that particular person] depends” where those realities, however, do not meet the requirements of that dependence, but express something alien.

The *Phenomenology* narrates a search for a world that reflects, expresses or provides a ‘home’ for a particular understanding of one’s self. It is an account of the effort to experience substance, as traditionally understood in terms of separation, whereby the rational is treated as the human substance, and as free from corporeal influence. It is an account of an effort to secure a world that is free of desire, its uncertainties and demands. It is an account of the productivity of those efforts, of the civilisations they established, and of their failure. It is an account of the manner in which the failure to
secure a world that recognised or reflected back the traditional image of one's essence ultimately forced the surrender of that image. As Taylor (1975, 148) put it, the realisation of this goal—of experiencing an identity with, rather than limitation by, the external world—could only occur when one saw oneself as an “emanation” of that world. It made the *Phenomenology* an account of the re-definition of the rational: one that embraced, rather than excluded, the corporeal.

The embodiment of this *Geist*, or ‘Spirit’, was central to Hegel’s project. It was the movement through which the immanent interconnection, captured in Spinoza’s approach to expression, becomes embodied in the thought, culture, institutions and practices of a society—when the expression of being, in the sense emphasised by Herder, becomes identical with that of Spinoza. It was a movement in which the corporeal (or matter) played a central part. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel (2003, 101, 102,103) highlights the character of self consciousness prompted by corporeal experience—desire—and the failure to subordinate that desire:

… self-consciousness is thus only assured of itself by sublating this other, which is presented to self-consciousness as an independent life: self-consciousness is Desire...In [the] state of satisfaction, however, it has experience of the independence of its object. Desire and the certainty of its self obtained in the gratification of desire, are conditioned by the object; for the certainty exists through cancelling this other; in order that this cancelling may be effected, there must be this other. Self-consciousness is thus unable by its negative relation to
the object to abolish it; because of that it rather produces it again, as well as the
desire.

Life turned on the experience of painful contradictions, which were addressed, in part,
through an endless cycle of empty, temporary satisfactions. No sooner did one satisfy a
desire, and affirm one’s sense of independence, than desire arose anew to contradict
that sense of self. No sooner did one secure a sense of stability and independence—of
substance—than the sensation of incompleteness and need returned to undermine that
sense of self. Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is an account of the attempt to assert the
traditional characterisation of substance as separate and independent in the face of the
challenges posed by matter, the experience of change, and the depth to which they
challenged the desired stability and security of substance. As Berthold-Bond (1998, 38)
argues, it:

… details the journey of self-discovery of consciousness...The various shapes
consciousness takes on this voyage are each attempts to respond to the
fundamental desire of all consciousness, the desire for self-unification, the
overcoming of disparity between our actual situation in the world and our
possibilities...Yet unity is a perpetually vanishing achievement: again and again
the tantalising possibility of security and certainty is lost. The self is never able to
achieve a lasting satisfaction, a stable resting place – it is always incomplete,
always in process of becoming, ever restless in desire, and “it is just this unrest
that *is* the self”...This is the “tremendous power of the negative” which underlies
the very ontology of human selfhood, the fundamental experience of discord
which is the dynamic element of all life, such that "the life of spirit is not the life that...keeps itself untouched by devastation...[and] dismemberment...but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it".\textsuperscript{22}

Hegel saw that corporeal experience repeatedly provided such a sense of contradiction in one’s self that it drove a search for other forms of certainty and stability—for other means to enjoy the sensation of substance. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, Hegel charted the basis for a change in self-consciousness—from the particular, abstract, separate individual to that dependent for her or his existence on the universal, which he called Reason. In doing so, as Beiser (2005, 185) and Jenkins (2009, 122) put it, Hegel was engaged in a radical critique of a central strand of the traditional debate about substance. Central to that critique was one of Hegel’s most striking and influential ideas: the master-servant dialectic.

**THE MASTER-SERVANT DIALECTIC**

The interpretation of this dialectic, however, remains one of the most complex and contested aspects in the scholarly literature on Hegel, and on the Hegel-Marx relationship. This is, in part, a reflection of its role as one of the most significant responses to Kant’s arguments, substituting a social foundation for individual, inherent, and thus, universal pre-existing rational capacities. In its identification of the individual

\textsuperscript{22} See also Beiser (2005, 182), Neuhouser (1986, 252, 253) and 258; Pippin (cited in Beiser 1993, 67) and Stern (2002, 73), who argue to similar effect.
with a social substance or ‘ethical life’, it is also central to concerns that Hegel’s works legitimate an authoritarian state.

These difficulties are exacerbated by the ambiguity of many of the terms used by Hegel, some of which are open to dramatically varied translations. The brevity of text, set forth in less than nine pages, has added to these difficulties, as does the apparent change in focus in the chapter. The latter has promoted ‘patchwork’ interpretations of the *Phenomenology*, with some treating chapter four, which contains the dialectic, as comprising a completely different work to the preceding chapters (Dudley 2008). Whilst contemporary research (such as Pippin 2011) favours a more integrated interpretation, these characteristics of the text limit the extent to which surrounding materials can be drawn on to aid its interpretation. Nevertheless, as the later research emphasises, these very difficulties make a close reading of the text a necessity. It is on the basis of such an attentive reading that I argue that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the role of the corporeal in understanding the Master-Servant dialectic.

The *herrschaft-knechtshaft* dialectic was one stage in the search for a certain, stable sense of self defined in terms of rationality.\(^{23}\) That dialectic was founded in the search for certain knowledge of one’s self, and the effort to evade the influence of the corporeal was central to it. Springing from the experience of contradiction, Hegel (2003, 106, 107) argued that self-consciousness required the recognition of another self-consciousness, and that the dialectic was based upon the effort to sublate all others, so as to reveal the self as “a pure abstraction of existence”. It was an effort to secure “a standing negation,

\(^{23}\) The German ‘knecht’ is here rendered as ‘servant’, rather than ‘slave’ or ‘bondsman’ (Arthur 1983, 68 and Pippin 2011, L1375).
whose otherness could be negated without its being abolished”, where desires could be met without the loss of the other. This was potentially available “in other men in so far as they recognise him as a human being” (Taylor 1975, 152). Unlike other objects of desire, another human being had the capacity to meet the desire for recognition without himself having to change. Securing this recognition as a free rational being, however:

... consists in showing itself [self-consciousness] as a pure negation of its objective form, or in showing that it is fettered to no determinate existence, that it is not bound at all by the particularity everywhere characteristic of existence as such, and is not tied up with life (Hegel 2003, 107).

It demanded the demonstration that one conformed to the traditional emphasis on separation or independence.

This search ultimately involved the encounter between two self-consciousnesses, each one bent on proving its ‘abstract existence’. So intent was each on proving its independence or freedom from nature, it led to a “life and death struggle” (Hegel 2003, 107). Proof of their self-concept—that their true selves, their substance, was distinct from the natural world—led them to place their lives at risk. That struggle concluded with one, the Servant, being forced to act for the other, and thereby assume consciousness “in the form and shape of thinghood”:

The one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent and its essence is life or existence for another. The former is the Master, or Lord, the latter, the [servant] (Hegel 2003, 108).
The Master could only secure his sense of identity—his sense of self as independent—through oppressing another. A number of writers, such as McDowell (1996), understate the corporeal character of this encounter. Hegel was well-versed in politics and could readily have presented this encounter as a negotiation, which is the sense conveyed by the widespread focus on the conflict as one of social or normative recognition. However, I will show that these were not the terms used by Hegel. The struggle here was not just a normative or social struggle, but a fiercely physical one, so desperate had the protagonists become. Corporeal desire drove them to, and fuelled, that fight, as well as its resolution. I am not the first to make this point. The more recent emphasis on a close reading of the text has led to a number of writers highlighting the influence of the corporeal. Honneth (2008, 79, 82), for example, sees Hegel’s use of ‘desire’ as a reference to “corporeal activity” and the subject’s “own biological nature”. I think Pippin (2011, location 149), notwithstanding others’ criticisms of him, best captures Hegel’s approach, in stating that Hegel deals with “a corporeal, historical, labouring subject...in the service of a further elaboration of the possibility of intentional consciousness”. That corporeal subject features throughout the first four of the Phenomenology’s eight chapters. Whilst, in Hegel’s presentation, the influence of the corporeal is surpassed by rationality, the literature has only recently begun to give due recognition to the corporeal in Hegel’s overall project. Through this chapter, I promote a better appreciation of that role. Hegel’s works provide a powerful argument that desire—notwithstanding our most

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24 Jenkins (2009, 112) makes the same criticism of Pippin, similarly drawing on the text of the Phenomenology: “Hegel’s talk of the consumption of an object, the fear of death, and the work performed upon a physical object for the sake of pleasing another subject all suggest a more straightforward understanding of the practical here...Hegel’s elaborate description of the phenomenon of work certainly seems to indicate an interest in just this practical relation to an object...not simply an interest in the ungroundedness of our operation with norms of action".

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determined efforts to assert our freedom as pure rational beings, independent of the perceived corruptions of corporeal desire—is a vital, inseparable part of us.

The subordination of the servant in the master/servant dialectic appears, in the first instance, as the master successfully asserting freedom from the corporeal and its uncertainties. However, Hegel presents the subordination of the Servant as inadequate to provide the Master with certainty. The capitulation of the Servant did not provide the required “standing negation” (Taylor 1975, 152). Instead of a stable experience of recognition, the Master returned to the cycle of desire. In Beiser’s words, the outcome of the struggle “degraded” the Master’s “status as a rational being” and “regressed” him back to his “animal desires” (2005, 189). The Master himself degraded the servant from an equal, like, rational being (at least potentially), to a mere instrument of the Master’s will, no different from the other objects used to satisfy his desires, and so unable to provide the desired stable experience of recognition (Beiser 2005, 188-9; Stern 2002, 83-5). Here, the effort to confirm a sense of the self as separate and independent revealed its flaw—absent some permanent resistance, it left the Master in the unstable, uncertain grip of desire (Kojeve 1980, 24,).

It would only be through restraint—through a different sense of self, one that did not rely upon independence, but on interdependence or mutual recognition—that this cycle could be stilled (Hegel 2003, 107-8). For Hegel, it was only with the substitution of a social form of certainty—mutual recognition—that the Sisyphus-like trial of corporeal experience could be escaped. The Master’s willingness to struggle to the death did not
secure his own certainty. It did not secure his freedom from desire. Indeed, rather than confirming his independence:

... he really finds that something has come about quite different ...It is not an independent, but rather a dependent consciousness that he has achieved (Hegel 2003, 110).

Here, notwithstanding the failure to uphold his self-concept, the person who gained most from the confrontation is the Servant. The Servant, by virtue of his subordination and its continuation in corporeal labour—that is, by virtue of his acceptance of limitation and restraint, and surrender of a demand for the independence of substance—experiences a profound change in self-consciousness. In the first instance, his concept of himself as free and independent was overturned through subordination to the Master. However, the extremity of that experience—the confrontation with death—provided the possibility of developing an even stronger sense of independence:

...because it has experienced this reality within it...not in peril or fear for this element or that, nor for this or that moment of time, it was afraid for its entire being, it felt the fear of death, the sovereign master. It has been in that experience melted to its inmost soul, has trembled throughout its every fibre, and all that is fixed and steadfast has quaked within it...[It had experienced the] complete perturbation of its entire substance, [the] absolute dissolution of all its stability into fluid continuity... (2003, 110).²⁵

²⁵ See also Taylor 1975, 155.
This is the experience—the trauma—Hegel thought to be central to the transformation of consciousness. This is because it forced the Servant to consciously confront “the simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness”, which was “absolute negativity, pure self-referent existence” (2003, 110). In Taylor’s words (1975, 155), “the prospect of death shakes them loose”. For the servant the “transitoriness of life” is “brought home” (Stern 2002, 84). It had brought being and non-being together in unity: the idea of the self as absolutely free, together with the experience of absolute servitude (being for self contrasted with being for another—substance, as traditionally understood in terms of separation and independence, as contrasted with essence). Notwithstanding his dominion, the Master was unable to participate in this ‘negative dialectic’.

In addition, Hegel insisted that this transformation was equally dependent upon this experience of fear being protracted over time in an intensely intimate way—through the restraint of desire (Taylor 1975, 154; Jenkins 2009; Stern 2002, 84). This protracted confrontation ensured the comprehensive dissolution of the Servant’s former sense of self:

… this [servant]’s consciousness is not only this total dissolution in a general way [following from the fear of death]; in serving and toiling the [servant] actually carries this out…fear and service in general…are necessary. Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear remains formal and does not spread over the whole known reality of existence…If it has endured not absolute fear, but merely some slight anxiety, the negative reality has remained external to it,

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26 See also Jenkins 2009, 130; Kojève 1980, 22, 27 and 47-8
its substance has not been through and through infected thereby. Since the entire content of its natural consciousness, has not tottered and shaken, it is still inherently a determinate mode of being… (Hegel 2003, 110, 111-2).

However, this thoroughgoing restraint and discipline simultaneously provided the basis for the development of a stronger sense of self, a stronger self-consciousness, as it enabled the Servant to better experience the resistance or “independence” of the objects of his labour (2003, 109). The Servant, unlike the Master, was able to sublate the objects he worked on. He could annihilate their form and substitute a new one. As Hegel (2003, 110-1; my emphasis) put it, it was only:

...Through *work and labour*, however, [that] this consciousness of the [servant] comes to itself. In the moment that corresponds with desire in the case of the master’s consciousness, the aspect of the non-essential relation to the thing seemed to fall to the lot of the servant, since the thing there retained its independence. Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby unalloyed feeling of self. This satisfaction, however…is itself only a state of evanescence, for it lacks *objectivity or subsistence*. Labour, on the other hand, is desire restrained and checked, evanescence delayed and postponed; in other words, *labour shapes and fashions the thing*. The negative relation to the object *passes into the form of the object, into something that is permanent and remains; because it is just for the labourer that the object has independence*. This negative mediating agency, this activity giving shape and form, is at the same time the

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27 See also Kojeve 1980, 25 and Taylor 1975, 154.
individual existence...which now in the work it does is externalised and passes into the condition of permanence. The consciousness that toils and serves accordingly attains by this means the direct apprehension of that independent being as its self... Thus precisely in labour where there seemed to be merely some outsider’s mind and ideas involved, the [servant] becomes aware, through this rediscovery of himself by himself, of having and being “a mind of his own”.  

However, for Hegel, the sense of self—of essence—acquired by the Servant in ‘cancelling’ the form of an object remained inadequate. It remained a stage in the movement towards a sense of the self rooted in universal Reason. As such, more was needed. Hegel considered this in the section following ‘Lordship and Bondage’ - the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’.

**THE UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS**

The interpretation of this passage is as complex as the Master-Servant dialectic. The ‘unhappy consciousness’ (‘das unglückliche bewusstsein bewust’) is equally difficult to translate, with bewusstine bewust suggestive of a diversity of meanings, including awareness, knowledge, sense, cognition, deliberation, calculation, and consciousness. Moreover, with its central references to stoicism, scepticism and Christianity, it provides even stronger suggestions of a collective social experience than a practical, corporeal experience. My argument, however, is that close attention to the text demonstrates that

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28 See also Ciavatta (2008), Honneth (2008), Jenkins (2009), Pippin (2011), Stern (2002, 84) and Taylor (1975, 156).
this remains a stage of the intimately corporeal experience explored in the foregoing parts of the *Phenomenology*, and which Honneth (2008, 77) describes as “the transition from a natural [or animal] to a spiritual [or rational] being”.

‘The Unhappy Consciousness’ continues Hegel’s account of the Master-Servant relationship. The Servant, having secured a stable sense of self, remained enslaved. His experience of freedom or independence was “merely stoic independence, the independence of thought, and this finds, by passing through the process of scepticism, its ultimate truth in that form we called the ‘unhappy self-consciousness’ – the soul of despair” (Hegel 2003, 440). The inability to resolve the contradictions of being produced this experience, one that Berthold-Bond (1998, 48) described as the “deepest descent into the anguish of self-division”. This, however, was where Hegel saw the potential for a different sense of the self to emerge. Contrary to the traditional negative characterisation of human anxiety and pain, Hegel, like Herder and those following him, saw that painful experience as essential to better comprehending our essence.

In the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’, Hegel presents the continuing effort to secure an independent, free self with reference to stoicism, scepticism and Christianity—references which were not only to systems of belief, but ways of life. Here, again, Hegel explored a set of senses of the self—of substance and essence—that treat the non-corporeal as essential and the corporeal as inessential (Beiser 2005, 334n7; Jenkins 2009, 127). Moreover, here, just as in the Master-Servant dialectic, Hegel emphasised the central role of corporeal resistance in transforming those senses of the self (2003, 122).
The Servant, subject to domination, experienced a stoic sense of freedom, one that was “indifferent towards natural existence”, and thus “merely the notion of freedom, not living freedom itself” (Hegel 2003, 115). For Hegel (2003, 116), scepticism progressed beyond this through the recognition of this contradiction and the assertion of the full freedom of thought in negation, as “thinking which wholly annihilates the being of the world”. As a result, the contradiction previously “divided between two individuals, the lord and the [servant], [was] concentrated into one”, constituting the ‘unhappy consciousness’ (2003, 118-9).

Hegel (2003, 119) explored the experience of alienation as “the Unhappy Consciousness, the Alienated Soul which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being”. This consciousness involved a heightened effort to elevate itself beyond corporeal life by engagement with the “unchangeable” —an account of the influence of Christianity (2003, 120-2). This comprised a “triple process” (2003, 122).

The first activity of this ‘triple process’ dealt with “pure consciousness” in the form of “pure emotion” and “infinite yearning” (2003, 123). That consciousness “merely [felt]” its objects, rather than “grasping [their] real nature” (2003, 124). As a result, it turned back on itself and became mere “self feeling”. This condition, in Hegel’s view, was that of ‘desire’, which is determinate and tied to corporeal life, and paralleled the position of the Master (only now within the one consciousness). This first process thus turns to the second, “the condition of desire and labour” (2003, 124), which similarly parallels the

experience of the Servant in dealing with objects. In this condition, however, the object of Christianity—‘the unchangeable’ or god—cannot be cancelled and so cannot provide the parallel experience of confirmation of independence:

The unhappy consciousness...finds itself merely desiring and toiling...its inner life really remains still a shattered certainty of itself; that confirmation of its own existence which it would receive through work and enjoyment, is, therefore, just as tottering and insecure (2003, 124-5, my emphasis).

In a setting where desire and subordination co-exist and contradict each other, the effect of alienated labour is to promote a sense of one’s existence and abilities as a gift from “…the unchangeable ‘beyond’…” —a sense that one’s “faculties and powers...[are] an external gift [from]...the unchangeable” (2003, 125). The experience of alienation was seen to prompt the development of a sense of self that is profoundly dependent upon the ‘external’, rather than some internal, secure, personal essence or substance.

This prompt, however, remained superficial in Hegel’s view because a sense of division from “the beyond” remained (2003, 126). The self then, in “appearance”, renounced the “satisfaction of its self feeling”, but had not done so in actuality (2003, 126). It remained subject to the instability and uncertainty of desire. Here, the self became conscious that “its actual performance ... becomes a doing of nothing at all” (2003, 127). In this withdrawal from corporeal labour and activity, the self was ultimately forced to become conscious of itself “in the functions of animal life” (2003, 127). That is, as Berthold-Bond (1998, 48-9) put it, “the self [discovered] ... that it is precisely its desire itself which is the
source of despair... The despairing soul thus comes to see its desire as the ‘enemy’ lurking within it, the source of its wretchedness, which it seeks to destroy”. Matter had long been the ‘enemy’ in traditional debates about substance. It was the source of the volatility—the change—the contradiction of the stable continuity that was seen as the ‘truth’ of substance. Here, Hegel, in imagining a confrontation with matter, addressed the manner in which the traditional debate about substance had pathologised it. So critical was this issue—this rejection of tradition, that Hegel presented it as again another “fight to the death” (although, in the literature, it has not attracted any of the attention given to the more overt struggle presented in the preceding dialectic). Hegel presented the assertion of independence in the form of passive resistance to the corporeal, as an ascetic-like discipline, with “fastings” and “mortifications” (2003, 129) directed against its own bodily functions:

These latter, instead of being performed unconsciously and naturally as something which, per se, is of no significance, and can acquire no importance and essential value in spirit – these latter, since it is in them that the enemy is seen in his proper and peculiar shape, are rather an object of strenuous concern and serious occupation, and become precisely the most important consideration (2003, 127).

This “attempted immediate destruction of its actual existence”, however, was destined to fail:

Since, however this enemy creates itself in its very defeat, consciousness, by giving the enemy a fixedness of being and of meaning, instead of getting rid of
him, really never gets away from him and finds itself constantly defiled (2003, 128).

This failure to overcome the corporeal as limitation and pain, however, enabled the development of a universal consciousness. Hegel (2003, 128) thought that “both the feeling of its misfortune and the poverty of its own action [were] points of connection…with the unchangeable”. This experience of negation drove the dialectic of becoming. In effect, having failed again, but on so intimate a level, the self was “stripped … of its Ego” and of its self “deception”. Here, again, in the face of failure, the self experienced itself as a gift with “gratitude”, and at the same time was forced to “[disclaim] all power of independent self existence” and to “[ascribe] this power as a gift from above…[and thereby] put off its unhappy condition” (2003, 129).

The experience of alienated labour, unable to dominate the corporeal, including one’s own body, nonetheless had the potential to move beyond a sense of one’s self as independent to one grounded in a sense of ‘gratitude’ and interdependence. Berthold-Bond (1998, 50) presented this experience as providing:

...the possibility of resolution. It is precisely through the torment of experiencing the self as an utterly torn and divided nature that, as Martin Heidegger puts it in another context, “through the rift [of division], torn consciousness is open to admit the Absolute”...there is what might be called a narrative rift through which a therapeutic resolution of despair is admitted.
The extremity of corporeal pain—like the sharp extremities of desire or fear—confronted in the effort to embrace ascetic discipline, promoted a ‘rift’ or tear in that sense of self founded in the traditional emphasis upon separation. It disrupted the narrative in which the sense of self as independent, non-corporeal rationality was grounded. It was:

... the tragic fate that befalls certainty of self which aims at being absolute, at being self-sufficient. It is consciousness of the loss of everything of significance in this certainty of itself, and of the loss even of this knowledge or certainty of self — the loss of substance as well as of self; it is the bitter pain which finds expression in the cruel words “God is dead”... (Hegel 2003, 440).

Those ‘cruel words’—‘God is dead’— were drawn from a prominent theme in medieval mysticism that god (as Christ) had to die bodily in the world so as to be reborn in spirit. The phrase ‘God is dead’ pointed to the period between death and rebirth—a time of transition borne of “alienation, loss of self-certainty, loss of essential being, loss of substance...intolerable pain...[and] meaningfulness...” (Von der Luft 1984, 265, 266).

Whilst, for Hegel (2003, 130), this experience did not complete the process (its full development is detailed in the balance of the *Phenomenology*), he thought it was the necessary catalyst for the “idea of Reason” to “arise”. It had brought separate self-consciousnesses to the state in which “they could recognise themselves as mutually recognizing one another” (2003, 106). This was the “gift” Hegel (2003, 103, 104) referred to in the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’; the common objective of that and the preceding ‘Lordship and Bondage’ passage; the objective Hegel set out immediately before the latter passage commenced:
A self-consciousness has before it a self-consciousness. Only so and only then is it self-consciousness in actual fact...What consciousness further has to become aware of, is the experience of what mind is – this absolute substance, which is the unity of the different self-related and self-existent self-consciousnesses in the perfect freedom and independence of their opposition as component elements of that substance: Ego that is “we”, a plurality of Egos and “we” that is a single Ego. Consciousness first finds itself in self-consciousness — the notion of mind — its turning point, where it leaves the parti-coloured show of the sensuous immediate, passes from the dark void of the transcendent and remote super-sensuous, and steps into the spiritual daylight of the present.

Hegel’s discussion of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ and ‘The Unhappy Consciousness’ offered an account of the process by which a sense of self as separate and independent—that is, in the traditional terms of substance—was revised. It provided an account that respected the attraction and resilience of this sense of self, but suggested the circumstances in which change might still occur. For Hegel, several elements were essential to enable that change: the consciousness of the other, and dependence upon that other to secure a sense of self (mutual recognition); the need for some profoundly traumatic experience to negate one’s sense of self as separate, independent and capable of domination; the need for prolonged servitude to thoroughly effect that negation; and the resistance of the corporeal to prompt the development of a new sense of self.
This transformation was not only considered in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel also considered it in his account of religion. In doing so, he continued to emphasise the transition from a sense of identity founded in separation and independence—traditionally understood, in substance—to one founded in interdependence, and the central, productive role of pain and loss in effecting that transition.

His consideration of Judaism, unsurprisingly, has clear parallels with Spinoza’s emphasis on the immanent, perfect god. In Hegel’s eyes, Judaism exaggerated the absolute character of god, and thereby the distinction from the balance of life. This approach, like those of the stoics and sceptics, promoted both pain and the potential for transformation. In Taylor’s words, Judaism so emphasised the “sublimity of God” as to deny any possibility of re-union, leaving man with a profound sense of incompleteness and “absence” (1975, 498).

Hegel’s consideration of the Greek religions, where the gods took on familiar human forms and faced familiar human limitations sees humanity face a world that is “no longer in unity with him”. It is an “alien land” with no prospect of securing unity, one that provokes a deeply painful experience of “pining” and “loss” (Taylor 1975, 502).

Hegel’s account in chapter four of the *Phenomenology* suggests how alienated corporeal labour, in extremity, contradicts the idea of the separate, independent self and prompts recognition of a more interdependent sense of being. In particular, it suggests how the experience of corporeal pain can overcome that sense of self defined in terms of non-corporeal rationality (and in freedom from the corporeal). Hegel’s account of religion suggests a similar trajectory.
‘Prompt’ is used deliberately here to suggest a catalyst or possibility, but not a certainty. Hegel’s account recognised both the ambiguity of those prompts, and the capacity of ideas of separation to resist the contradictions they provide. The periods spanned by both the *Phenomenology* and Hegel’s account of religion both suggest the resilience of the notion of the separate self. Nevertheless, the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ also demonstrated how the very character of self-consciousness repeatedly produces these prompts—how a human existence regularly and necessarily contradicts our concepts of independence; that is, a human existence is one in which the potential to realise our interdependence is immanent. In considering this point, Taylor (1975, 159) emphasised how the corporeal, despite its rejection, “returns unceasingly and inescapably”, producing a sense of “oscillation” between contrasting experiences of independence and interdependence, and forcing a repeated process of redefinition.

Indeed, the centuries-long span of Hegel’s account is more suggestive of our ability to ignore those corporeal prompts, notwithstanding their immanence. The loss experienced by the Greeks, for example, did not prompt a change in the Greeks’ understanding of the world. In his lectures, Hegel (1994, 95, 195, 231) repeatedly described the Greeks’ practice of slavery as evidence of their limited understanding of Spirit because they had failed to understand the universal freedom of humanity. It is but a short step to then wonder, with regard to the clear parallels with the Master/Servant dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, whether the enslavement of others insulated the Greeks from the very corporeal experiences that were essential to their transformation. These were conclusions that both Feuerbach and Marx, drawing on Hegel, would make forcefully.
This risk of oppression remains a central concern in the literature today. The tension between a sense of involvement with the world on the one hand, and separation from it on the other, is not unique to some distant past. Rather, it is part of the human condition as each of us is born into, and progresses to some form of self-consciousness in, a particular way of life. Taylor (1975, 382) points to the ongoing tension between the pre-existing character of those norms and their dependence upon their continued adoption for their sustenance.

Siep (2008, 191) considers Hegel’s identification of the individual with his or her society to demand a “willingness to sacrifice rights” beyond those of even a conservative “communitarian renewal of classical political philosophy”. For Hegel, the mutually recognised norms, together with the institutions and practices that gave effect to them, constituted Spirit’s ‘objective’ body or what he described as ‘objective spirit’ and ‘ethical substance’ (sittlichkeit). Hegel’s description of the ‘ethical life’ in the Philosophy of Right suggests the risk that this identity might support a society that is equally oppressive to that of Ancient Greece, with its central reliance on slavery. There, he presents the individual as “an accident to substance” (1967, paragraph 145). Hegel (1967, paragraph 152) also claims that, under conditions of sittlichkeit, “...the self-will of the individual has vanished, together with his private conscience which had claimed independence”.

However, the central and express use of the language of substance suggests another interpretation. If Hegel had adopted that interpretation of substance where the ‘incidents’ of substance are treated as peripheral and not essential to its being, then Hegel’s ‘ethical life’ might evidence a low regard for individual life. However, my
argument is that Hegel was firmly and deliberately entrenched in a different understanding of substance—one that emphasises interdependence and mutuality rather than independence and subordination. Hegel’s ‘identity’ of individual and society, or of ‘incidents’ and ‘substance’, then, was not an exhaustive or comprehensive one, but one which allowed considerable room for movement within its borders. The breadth of that movement is suggested by the broad historical periods that Hegel presented as representing a particular “ethical substance”, such as the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (Siep 2008, 185). Each civilisation provided a recognisable dominant or habitual way of life, but are also equally known for the lives of individuals who worked both within, and against, that pattern.

A more fulsome response to these concerns requires some careful consideration of the definition of the self or individual living this ‘ethical life’. My argument is that this person is not the independent Kantian individual that appears to be assumed in the literature. Rather, it is that person constituted by an “ensemble of relations”, to use Marx’s words (Marx and Engels 1998, 570). Whilst I do not claim that Marx and Hegel had an identical definition, there is more than sufficient common ground, given Marx’s substantial drawing on Hegel’s logic, to return to this issue in that context. Therefore, I will argue that, properly understood, Marx’s concept of the self allows room for considerable diversity and resistance.
CONCLUSION

Hegel, like Spinoza, rejected the traditional debate about substance with its emphasis on separation and independence. To regard substance in that atomistic sense, with its relations to other entities as contingent and accidental, was, in Hegel’s mind, a fiction. Instead, he insisted on the centrality of the interaction and interconnection that characterises organic life. Substance was revealed to be a combination of relationships (which he, like Spinoza, called ‘essence’) and in a constant state of ‘development’, of more comprehensively inhabiting those relations and thereby moving towards expressing the totality, of ‘becoming’ its reflection.

For Hegel, this made contradiction the principal characteristic of being. Rather than the stability and self-sufficiency preferred in traditional debates about substance, Hegel regarded the substance of particular beings as radically incomplete: to always be confronted with one or more needed objects, and to always, on securing one object, be confronted afresh with another needed object. Any being was always in the process of—labouring towards—becoming.

The tension between the different dimensions of expression was made transparent, and reconciled in Hegel’s works. Hegel presented each particular being as bound up with, but not identical with, its other—as both immersed in the pre-existing immanent totality or substance, and yet not identical with it (and inadequate, or incomplete, with it). This was the central theme of the Phenomenology: the search for a world that reflects or expresses a particular self-image (that of substance in terms of independence) rather than that of the world as then existing—a search for a world in which that being could be
‘at home’. It is a search, however, that only ends with the surrender of that self-image and of that insistence on the stability and security of substance.

Contrary to the traditional debate, Hegel made this tension, its pains, and the efforts to subdue or avoid it, defining characteristics of life. He made the themes of limitation and pain central to his work. A particular being was both constituted and frustrated by limitation. It was only by the assertion of some separation from the world and its demands that a being secured some continuous sense of self. It was only by the fixing and repetition of particular processes of unification of subject or being and object—through habit—that it gained some sense of continuity of self, and yet those self-constituting acts were also acts of alienation. They involved the suppression and denial of those relationships in which that self was founded, and on which it relied to secure its necessary objects. It involved processes of alienation from nature, from other human beings and, ultimately, from itself.

These processes of denial, however, were bound to fail. To live was to be engaged in this expansive movement to incorporate new objects and new relations. The sensation of this need—desire—repeatedly worked to de-stabilise each constitution or limitation of self. Hegel presented an image of life in terms of tension and of pain, and in terms of the efforts to avoid that pain; efforts that became so desperate that they coloured the relationships between like beings and drove the effort to transfer the burdens of desire onto others. This was the foundation of Hegel’s Master/Servant dialectic: so desperate were two men to evade the demands of the corporeal that they were willing to risk their lives in the effort, and even more ready to enslave others to serve that end. So driven
were they by desire and their need to still its demands, violence and systematic
oppression became institutions of expression of the core concerns of the traditional
debate about substance—of securing some stability and identity for some at others’
cost.

It was, however, this very subordination, and the sacrifice—in part—of the servant’s
former sense of self that provided the greater experience of stability. However, in just
the same way that the Master’s domination of the servant was insufficient, so, too, was
that of the servant’s domination of the material he worked on. It did not relieve the
servant of the demands of desire. The effort to deny those demands, temporarily stilled
in the ‘Master/Servant’ dialectic, is resumed in the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’, as the
servant confronts the experience of desire in his own body. However, even the most
direct endeavour to conform to the traditional emphasis on separation and to dominate
the material through ascetic disciplines then failed. It was only in the intimacy,
immediacy and non-negotiability of the resistance of one’s own body—another fight to
the death, taking the master/servant struggle to the internal—that one was finally forced
to surrender one’s concept of one’s self and its constitution through limitation,
separation and subordination.

It was a pathway retraced, in key ways, by Marx, with his application of the dialectic,
albeit with the unity of Hegel’s reason replaced by one grounded in the material world. It
was a pathway that, particularly through Hegel’s Logics, provided Marx with some of the
key terms he used to present his own understanding of the human substance or
essence, including those of ‘expression’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’. It was also an
approach that this chapter incompletely explores, as the balance of that pathway concerns the application of Hegel’s identification of universal reason, or the Ideal, as the substance or ground of the world. This chapter explores, in detail, a limited portion of the *Phenomenology* as that portion was of the greatest influence on Marx. It focuses on the issues that were central to the tradition concerning substance, and on the three questions directly addressing Marx’s work. In terms of the tradition of debate about substance, Hegel systematised Spinoza’s radical inversion of substance and further explored its consequences. He explored the troubling character of matter—and of the need or desire for it—thereby crystallising the difficult, yet productive, influence of both matter, and of anxiety, limitation and pain. In particular, this chapter explored the manner in which Hegel’s treatment traces out the themes of desire, limitation and pain considered in previous chapters, and suggests a response to the third of the questions this thesis addresses to Marx—that is, what explanations did he provide for the appeal of treating the non-corporeal as the human substance (and for the circumstances in which that appeal might be overcome and enable the adoption of a ‘more human language’)?

Those influences on Marx are canvassed in the rest of this thesis. One final major influence on Marx’s thought needs to be considered first—Feuerbach. The substitution of the material for the Ideal, the influence of pain, and the oppressive means by which it was avoided were central to Feuerbach’s work. It was also through Feuerbach’s work that Marx ‘discovered’ the term he would use to describe the human substance—‘species being’.
CHAPTER FIVE – Feuerbach

Friedrich Engels, looking back on the early 1840s, wrote, “we were all Feuerbachians then” (Wartovsky 1977, xix). Marx enthusiastically wrote of, and corresponded with, Feuerbach, holding that “there is no other road...to truth and freedom except that leading through the Fire-brook [the Feuer-bach]” (cited in Hanfi 1972, 41-2). Yet a few short years later, in 1845, Marx wrote his theses on Feuerbach, proclaiming the shortcomings of Feuerbach’s thought.

Since that time, many have approached Feuerbach through Marx: as Hanfi (1972, 1) put it, “read [Feuerbach’s philosophy] as a chapter in the book called Karl Marx”. Writers such as Althusser (1997), and Meszaros (1970) have treated Marx’s engagement with Feuerbach as merely a transitional ‘period’, and look to the theses and The German Ideology as a ‘break’ or ‘rupture’ from which the true or mature Marxism emerged. As a consequence, Feuerbach is rarely treated as having a serious contribution to make to our understanding of Marx. However, more recent scholarship, such as that of Breckman (2001, 2006), Brudney (1998), Caldwell (2009), Johnston (1995), and Leopold (2007), have paid more attention to Feuerbach’s works. Like them, I demonstrate here that Feuerbach’s works addressed some of the essential questions Marx also addressed. I will argue that Feuerbach shaped the development of Marx’s thinking in relation to the key questions addressed in this thesis. I share the position Wartovsky (1977, 1) sets out at the beginning of his Feuerbach: that, whilst weaknesses
in both style and substance detract from Feuerbach’s work, he should be treated “seriously” for the originality of his insights.

In the early 1840s, Marx, Engels, and many others were all ‘Feuerbachians’, if by this we mean that Feuerbach gave expression to the radical freedoms promised by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. He covered ground that was, as Hans Kung has emphasised, previously “terra incognita” (Johnston 1995, 205). Hans Kung is one of those who have called for the originality and insight of Feuerbach’s work to be recognised. He argued that Feuerbach had progressed past the Enlightenment position in treating religion as “man’s self-worship”, rather than merely a “fraud” or “illusion” (1995, 205).

It is for his work in relation to religion that Feuerbach is best known. It was his *Essence of Christianity* that made Engels and others “all Feuerbachians” (Wartovsky 1977, xix). Having begun his assault anonymously with his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, Feuerbach’s *Essence* was widely regarded as a *tour de force*. Having surveyed a range of key Christian beliefs, Feuerbach argued persuasively that those beliefs, whilst expressing genuine desires, were human characteristics projected (and exaggerated) on an imagined divine being. He also cogently argued, in the second half of the *Essence*, that the genuine human impulses expressed in religion were distorted and betrayed by the artificial abstractions of theological thought.

This aspect of Feuerbach’s work is also one of the most widely recognised connections with Marx’s thought. Both criticised religion as distracting its adherents from a better understanding of experience, and understood its appeal in the comfort its beliefs
provided. Marx, in subsequently criticising Hegel’s works (particularly his ‘inversion’ of subject and predicate), drew that method of ‘inversion’ from Feuerbach: Hegel’s Absolute, like the gods Feuerbach considered, was a projection of human attributes.

Feuerbach is also well-known for his rejection of Hegel’s idealism in favour of his theory of ‘sensuousness’. Feuerbach’s perceived claims to some form of immediate knowledge through the senses, independent of some cognitive mediation, together with Marx’s criticism of their ahistorical character, have no doubt contributed to the lack of interest in this part of Feuerbach’s work. They have, instead, been seen as a transitional influence on Marx’s road to a more credible materialism.

Whilst Feuerbach’s works do lack depth in some instances, and fail to adequately address some key issues, they are worthy of a more detailed examination. This is particularly the case with his work in relation to philosophy, which both preceded and followed his more famous works on religion, as they reveal Feuerbach’s long-standing objection to abstract understandings of our humanity. Even whilst adhering to Hegelian thought, Feuerbach understood his task to be the “overthrowing from its throne the ego, the self in general” (letter to Hegel in 1828, cited in Breckman 2001, 1). In this, he stands within the reactions to Idealist thought that sought to provide a unified explanation of human experience by dismissing the significance of the corporeal. Feuerbach’s consideration of the corporeal gathers much more weight when illuminated by his long-standing objection to abstraction.

Feuerbach’s work needs to be taken seriously. It needs to be understood as much more than a transition to Marx, but rather as an engagement with the character or substance
of ‘man himself’. Feuerbach’s work addresses those foundational issues that were Marx’s concerns throughout his life, namely how to understand the human substance or essence, and how that better understanding might come to be accepted.

It is this insistence on our material character, together with his vigorous application—and critique—of Hegel’s dialectics, that made Feuerbach’s work intensely interesting to Marx. Feuerbach’s work attends to some key elements of Marx’s thought. As such, they enable me to address those questions about Marx’s work posed in the Introduction to this thesis, rather than continue to explore those broader questions concerning the tradition of debate about substance that have been the focus of the preceding chapters.

Those questions addressed to Marx’s thought, as set out in the Introduction, were: What critique did Marx make of the traditional debate about substance and its application to humanity (whereby the non-corporeal was treated as the human essence)? What alternative did Marx suggest (specifically, how did Marx seek to comprehend corporeality as central to the human essence)? What explanations did Marx provide for the appeal to treat the non-corporeal as the human substance (and for the circumstances in which that appeal might be overcome to enable the adoption of a ‘more human language’)?

In regard to Feuerbach’s works, I want to address the first two of the above questions. Above all, I look to consider the third question: why have the terms of the traditional debate about substance proved so resilient and how might they be replaced?

Feuerbach’s most original contribution arose from his consideration of the relationship between our essence and the experience of pain, and goes a long way in illuminating
that third question. Feuerbach, drawing on Hegel, emphasised the ontological lack that stands at the root of the human condition and again, like Hegel, understood the pain—the misery—it caused so many. It was Feuerbach’s recognition of that pain that inspired much of his work. It was not something that could be surpassed or sublated in the course of development, but something that stymied and defied development, trapping humanity in a prolonged adolescence. It trapped humanity within circles of fantasy and denial—fantasies of lives of godlike ease, free of limitation and pain. This was the illusion that comprised religious thought, but only the asserted solution, and not the pain, was illusory. Here, in much the same way as Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, the inescapable, unavoidable character of our corporeal tensions and pains provided a goad towards action, sometimes with oppressive results. Those tensions and pains, however, also bore promise, as they provided a consistent prompt towards change; towards recognition of our interdependence, and of our character as ‘species beings’.

It is in this last respect that Feuerbach’s works contribute most to understanding Marx’s confidence that the long-standing prejudice, in favour of a separate, self-reliant ‘self’, would ultimately be replaced by one grounded in interdependence. Feuerbach’s work also goes far in suggesting why that prejudice has proven so resilient and difficult to replace. However, these aspects are, by no means, Feuerbach’s only influence on Marx’s thought. Like Marx, having wrestled so intimately and earnestly with Hegel’s thought, Feuerbach’s turn to materialism provided much support to Marx’s own turn in that direction. Feuerbach, working out from Hegel wrestled with the ‘material’, and thereby ‘limited’ character, of human being, and developed the category of ‘species
being’ which Marx adopted to refer to the human essence as both limited—and constituted—by an ensemble of relations.

The resistance of the corporeal loomed large in Feuerbach’s works, as it had in the early portion of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. For Feuerbach, as for Hegel, the contradiction the corporeal presented to conventional ideas of the self made pain, or at least a profound discomfort or estrangement, endemic to existence, and a goad towards efforts to overcome it. Feuerbach’s efforts began within the Idealist tradition, and worked towards the rational reconciliation imagined by that tradition. That approach, however, was soon abandoned, as it provided no adequate place for that suffering, no adequate recognition for its influence and immanence.

**FEUERBACH’S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION**

Feuerbach, in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, railed against the Idealists’ privileging of the non-corporeal. If reason was to be treated as the foundation or essence of our humanity, Feuerbach (1986, 67) insisted that it be understood not as “beingless, colourless, and nameless”, but a reason “saturated with the blood of man”. This was not to be reason as affected by perception—a non-corporeal reason—as it was for Hume (Norton 1998), but a form of reasoning that included bodily sensations. That kind of reason, Feuerbach argued, would enable a better appreciation of human limitation and suffering as essential characteristics of our being, that were not
subordinated to demands and expectations of mastery through willpower or imagination. He called for “a more human language”:

The philosophy of the future has the task of leading philosophy out of the realm of departed spirits back to the realm of embodied, living spirits; out of the godly felicity of a world of thought without neediness, back to the realities of human misery. For this purpose, the philosophy of the future requires no more than a human understanding, and human language’ (cited in Wartofsky 1977, 196).

For Feuerbach (Johnston 1995, 63), the experience of particular beings was not the Idealists’ unlimited freedom, nor the independence claimed in the traditional debate about substance, but, rather, limitation. As Johnston (1995, 285) suggests his “…materialism asks us to accept with maturity our finite existence and the limitations of our existence in the world”.

Feuerbach secured both his notoriety, and his attractiveness to Marx, in making this point. In Feuerbach’s view, the resistance and limitations of our corporeality meant that the continuity of humanity was not to be found in its individual specimens. For Feuerbach (1980, 162):

Death is the manifestation of the fact that you are not a being without determination...and, thus, without limitation. As death negates you, it is the manifestation, the confirmation, the affirmation of your limit.
Death was the ultimate confirmation that the individual was unable to independently exist—and so could not be ‘substance’ in the traditional sense. Instead human being, substance and continuity were located in the species:

> Your determinate individual body, the organic body in the determinate singleness of its existence, as distinguished from the organic body in its species and essence, is a mortal, lacking, finite body...the organic body itself is absolutely without lack...it is an immortal, divine body. The organic body itself is the species, the essence... (1980, 94).

Feuerbach rejected any claim to individual immortality and in so doing challenged the Christian belief in resurrection. Feuerbach’s engagement with religious belief, however, went much further. In his *Essence of Christianity*, he also challenged almost every other core article of the Christian faith.

This challenge, however, was not simply a claim that Christianity was wrong or a delusion. It was not simply that the god category was an anthropomorphic projection. Feuerbach argued that the roots of this belief in a transcendent god and in the capacity to transcend mortality—as Christ was believed to have done—lay in a desperate flight from limitation, and that, mistaken though it be, the religious impulse was a meaningful response to the human condition. It was a response to the experience of limitation and of our being somehow bound up with something that was both immanent and transcendent. Like Spinoza, Herder and Hegel, Feuerbach tried to capture the tensions between the contradictory experiences of immediate participation in the totality, on the
one hand, and of incompleteness, yearning and inescapable movement towards greater involvement, on the other.

Feuerbach thought all religions were open to this charge. This impulse, however, was not limited to religion. Feuerbach charted the flight from limitation from neo-platonic philosophy, and across the tradition concerning substance. He traced that evasion back to Idealist philosophy (1986, 45-7). Feuerbach (1986, 40-1) argued that “thought overstepped itself”, such that a truthful acknowledgement of human limitations was transformed into an independent being, where the subject of the acknowledgement became god, rather than the world. It was in this process, Feuerbach asserted, that we abandoned our recognition of the world, and of our limitations. This was the process by which human characteristics were projected onto an imagined deity.

Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* characterised all religion as the projected human fantasy of absolute subjective freedom: as the fantasy of complete freedom from the restrictions of the natural or corporeal world, as the fantasy grounding substance, traditionally understood. For Feuerbach (1989, 207), “the secret of theology was none other than anthropology”. He argued that Idealist or speculative philosophy was merely a “rational mysticism” (1972, 86) —the continuation of the religious projection of human characteristics onto a super-human being (the Absolute Idea rather than god). It was another form of religious thinking.

Religion was, in Feuerbach’s eyes, a characteristically human response to the experience and uncertainties of the human condition. It was the expression of, and flight from, corporeality, limitation and dependence. As Feuerbach put it “… dread of limitation
is dread of existence. All real existence, ie, all existence which is truly such, is qualitative, determinative existence” (1989, 15).

Unable to accept this condition, human beings constructed a fantasy about freedom from that condition, and ascribed it, together with the ability to grace humanity with that same freedom, to the divine:

All religions…rest on abstraction…Even the Homeric gods, with all their living strength and likeness to man, are abstracted forms; they have bodies, like men, but bodies from which the limitations and difficulties of the human body are eliminated…The Divine Being is the human being glorified by the death of abstraction…In religion man frees himself from the limits of life; he here lets fall what oppresses him, obstructs him, affects him repulsively…The divine being is the pure subjectivity of man, freed from all else…he is nothing else than the personal nature of man positing itself out of all connection with the world, making itself free from all dependence on nature (Feuerbach 1989, 97, 98, 99; see also 2004, 30).

For Feuerbach (1989, 136), this fantasy was developed to its greatest extreme by Christianity, which made nature an object of ‘horror’, and stigmatised any association with nature as diminishing human dignity. As Feuerbach (1989, 161) put it, “Separation from the world, from matter, from the life of the species, [was] therefore the essential aim of Christianity”.

For Feuerbach (1989, 66), the Christian god:
... as an extramundane being, is...nothing else than the nature of man withdrawn from the world and concentrated in itself, freed from all worldly ties and entanglements...the consciousness of the power to abstract oneself from all that is external, and to live for and with oneself alone.

The religious construction of god, particularly as the creator of the world from nothing, was also an expression of the human desire to escape limitation and pain:

When thou sayest the world was made out of nothing, thou conceivest the world itself as nothing, thou clearest away from thy head all the limits to thy imagination, to thy feelings, to thy will, for the world is the limitation of thy will, of thy desire...Thus, subjectively, thou annihilatest the world; thou thinkest God by himself, i.e., absolutely unlimited subjectivity, the subjectivity or soul which enjoys itself alone, which needs not the world, which knows nothing of the painful bonds of matter. In the inmost depths of thy soul thou wouldst rather there were no world, for where the world is, there is matter, and where there is matter there is weight and resistance, space and time, limitation and necessity (Feuerbach 1989, 109-110; see also 2004, 45).

Moreover, despite the impact of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and the debates that continued to rage in his own time, Feuerbach asserted that Western philosophy retained this character, and that it reached its extreme exaggeration in Idealist thought. The dominant ‘language’ applied to describe humanity—that of freedom and independence—continued the trajectory of religious thought and of the traditional of debate about substance. It was based on the idea that humanity in its truest, purest,
form—that is, in its essence—was free of all corporeal (or other) limitations. It was, as Feuerbach pointed out, a fantasy of humanity as divine—as not limited by the profane and earthly.

**FEUERBACH ON HUMAN BEING**

For Feuerbach, the influence of religious thought was readily apparent in many of the debates within German philosophy during his time, and extended to the concept of ‘happiness’. For Feuerbach, the idea that one could secure a consistent state of happiness, as distinct from the long-standing belief that happiness was a fleeting state, and one outside control and subject to ‘hap’ (the hazards of nature and god) (McMahon 2006, 10-13), was another expression of the flight from limitation. He saw it as the ‘wish’ for:

‘… a heaven in which *all limits and all necessity of Nature are destroyed and all wishes are accomplished*; a heaven in which there exist *no wants, no sufferings, no wounds, no struggles, no passions, no disturbances, no change of day and night, light and shade, joy and pain*…a God…*without appellation*, because the object of their wishes is not a *named, finite, earthly happiness*, a determined enjoyment, such as the…enjoyment of beautiful music…but…a transcendental [enjoyment]…the enjoyment of an *infinite, unlimited, unspeakable, indescribable happiness*. Happiness and divinity are the same thing (2004, 71, emphasis in original).
It was a wish—expressed in exaggerated terms—for the experience of a pain-free existence, in terms that resonated strongly with traditional approaches to substance.

Feuerbach, however, insisted that we are not divine, and that the religious aspiration to happiness was an illusion because we are, and always will be, limited beings. In this sense, limitation is synonymous with having qualities. This idea is central to Feuerbach’s criticism of Hegel’s Logic and Phenomenology of Spirit. Feuerbach says that Hegel’s concept of ‘nothing’—as the contradiction to ‘Being’—assumed that any being had to have some qualities in order to exist. Feuerbach (1972a, 72-9, 88-9, 92-3) assumes that we need to start with a determinate, rather than fantastic or speculative, being: a being that is a bundle or ensemble of qualities—that is, relationships. This also assumes the limitations of corporeal or material being. However, for such an interdependent being, limitation goes beyond the sense of external boundary its ordinary usage suggests, because, as Feuerbach (1980, 74-5) indicates:

… the limit does not exist as externally circling, as the fence around a field; it is the middle that is proper and central to a reality. Thus, everything in nature is what it is, not because of the matter out of which it is constituted, but, rather, because of the determinate proportion, manner of unification, and degree of mixture of the matter…this...measure...penetrates everything, determines everything, dwells in everything... [A fish] lives in a determinate climate, in a determinate element, water, but, again, not in any water, but in a determinate spring, river or sea. Ocean water is just as much water as that which flows in a river, and yet this fish, just because it can never escape the limit that is the centre
To understand being as interdependency is to understand limitation as a thoroughgoing aspect of being. Contrary to the separation and purity of substance (as traditionally understood), being is to include those relationships with others and so conceive of any determinate or concrete being as open and in flux. The very constitution of an interdependent being makes relationships with others—and so the experience of limited control of one’s self—essential, ‘internal’ and unavoidable. This made:

The ego...corporeal...[and] 'open to the world' by no means ‘through itself’ as such, but through itself as a corporeal being, that is, through the body. In relation to the abstract ego, the body is the objective world. It is through the body that the ego is not just an ego but also an object. To be embodied is to be in the world; it means to have so many senses, ie, so many pores and so many naked surfaces.

The body is nothing but the porous ego (Feuerbach 1972b, 142-3).

The character of any particular being, then, depends on the nature of its constituent relations, in just the manner Spinoza had thought several centuries before:

Being, determinateness, limitation are posited together with one another; only nothingness is without limitations...There is only one weapon against nothingness, and this weapon is the limit; it is the only stable point of a reality, the only bulwark of its being...everything in nature is what it is, not because of the matter out of which it is constituted, but, rather, because of the limitation of the
indeterminate matter, because of the determinate proportion, manner of unification, and degree of mixture of the matter...If the mode of unification of those realities that are called the elementary constituents of a thing changes, if this determinate mode changes together with the proportion of the elements that are limited by this determinate mode, then the thing itself changes (Feuerbach 1980, 74, my emphasis).

It is for this reason that Feuerbach (1986, 24) credited Spinoza with beginning modern philosophy.

For Feuerbach, like Hegel, the character of any particular being was bound up with its various objects, and constituted by that being’s relationships with them. Contrary to the traditional debate about substance, a particular being was not independent of the ‘external’ objects to which its predicates (or properties) referred, but was fundamentally bound up with them:

Being is not a general notion that can be separated from objects. It is one with that which exists. It is thinkable only through mediation; it is thinkable only through the predicate on which the essence of the object is based...The fish exists in water; you cannot, however, separate its essence from this being [i.e. the water]...Being after its removal from all the essential qualities of the objects is only your conception of being – a being that is made up and invented (1986, 42).

It is with this sense that Feuerbach (cited in Wartofsky 1977, 408), like Hegel before him and Marx after, asserted that “the physiologist has to violate life...to make it an object of
his inquiry and his observation”. It was on this basis that Feuerbach objected, stating that “all abstract sciences mutilate man” (cited in Hanfi 1972, 285).

As Zawar Hanfi (1972, 22) has pointed out, Feuerbach’s anthropology provides for a mutual openness between a being and its objects, so much so that it can be said that the object itself can enter into the being. They are, in that sense, a single being.

Each being’s very existence is bound up with its relationships with its objects, and the limitations that follow from them. To consider their absence as a goad to action, then, is potentially misleading—it suggests a choice, a pathway to continued existence in their absence. Feuerbach’s coupling of being and ‘nothingness’ is intended to convey the absence of any such choice in just the same way Hegel presented that interdependence in his Logics. Feuerbach, like Hegel, intended to convey the depths to which all being is shaped by that desire, and the depth to which any being is denied comfort in this world, absent its placation. It was to not only place this ontological lack or insecurity at the core of our character, but to reveal that character as unavoidably conscious of, even obsessed by, that absence. It was to suggest that the character of our humanity is not one of control, of the security and confidence of our ability to render this world in our image, and to serve our comfort, but as irretrievably, inescapably, anxious.

The essence of our humanity entails a consistent experience of insecurity and uncertainty, as the very composition of the self is such that it is never completely subject to ‘internal’ control, or stable. To be is to never be ‘free’ of the external. It is to never enjoy the security and independence of substance. The character of the human condition—as a being in flux—makes uncertainty, rather than stability and control, the
state towards which we gravitate (muted, however, by the institutions and practices of habit).

As Feuerbach and Marx (and others) recognised, these ‘religious’ beliefs are, however, “not only an escape from reality, but a method of dealing with it” (Kamenka 1970, 66). They help to make sense of, and live within, a painful world. They act as an ‘opiate’ which, like Freud’s ‘intoxicants’ and the ideologies criticised by Marx, anaesthetises one to the contradictions, anxieties and pains of existence.

Understood as a flight from the experience of limitation, religious belief is popular and addictive because it meets a human need—an aspect of the human condition—in negotiating the uncertainties and openness of being, as does the traditional debate about substance. Johnston (1995, 127) has described this recognition as the “positive core” of *The Essence of Christianity*:

…. Feuerbach takes religion seriously [and saw]...a body of fundamentally human truth embedded within religion which must be recovered if men and women are to live fully human lives (emphasis in original). 30

These beliefs “relieve intolerable stress…[and] overcome the feeling of helplessness” (Malinowski cited in Kamenka 1970, 68). As such, they have a profound and widespread therapeutic effect, because they provide a means by which:

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30 Brudney (1998) comes to a similar conclusion.
man acquires emotional comfort not only [in terms of a] simple fantasy, but by shaping the whole of his knowledge into an ordered scheme [upon it] (Kamenka 1970, 67).

Our notions of being or substance provide the foundations of all our thought and all our engagements with the world. They are the foundations on which we build and order our knowledge of, and actions in, the world. Yet, as Johnston (1995, 286) has observed, this flight, and its comforts, comes at a cost:

The materialist disenchantment of the world also demands that we accept the finite, limited nature of our human being, and all that this entails. Feuerbach does not so much deny the therapeutic or edifying potential of Christianity (or any other transcendent religion), as refuse to accept that this edification is valuable...[In his view] by refusing to accept our finitude and our limitations, we deny ourselves the opportunity to develop and realise our full potential as mortal, human beings.

**FEUERBACH ON THE LIMITATIONS OF CRITIQUE**

At the least, Feuerbach’s work is valuable for the insight he provided into the resistance likely to occur when criticising these ‘religious’ ideas. Feuerbach argued that the need of a limited, interdependent being for stability is so fundamental, so central to its very

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31 The ‘re-enchantment’ of the world witnessed since the late twentieth century, with the growth in both traditional and non-traditional, or ‘new age’, forms of religion and spirituality, the prominence with which local and international conflicts have been associated with religion, together with the popular interest in the occult, astrology and magic, are demonstrative of the resilience of these beliefs.
sense of being, that to describe the forms in which it is secured as merely ideas can fail to convey the strength of the grip with which they are held. Its visceral sensitivity is well conveyed by Feuerbach’s imagined reaction of ‘horror’ to the perceived reduction of human dignity that would follow any compromise of the privileging of mind over body in the traditional debate about substance. Its rejection, he said, would be ‘intestinal’.

This was not only because these ideas provide a sense of stability, continuity and control, but because the experience of separation upon which they rely was, for Feuerbach, the soil in which all human consciousness arises, and is thereafter expressed and confirmed. These beliefs were embraced so deeply because they were grounded in the immediate, concrete experience of being: the contradictions experienced in corporeal being, its pains and tensions. These experiences are part of the human condition and are repeated and reinforced daily. They are experiences that, once rendered comprehensible, are as fundamental and unquestionable to our mode of life as the very ground beneath us. They provide what Kamenka (1970, 67) has called “an ordered scheme” of things. Feuerbach (1972b, 144) described this as:

… the original and most essential antithesis, an antithesis necessarily connected with the ego, [the antithesis provided by] the body, the flesh. The conflict between the spirit and the body alone is the highest metaphysical principle; it is the secret of creation and the ground on which the world rests. Indeed the flesh or, if you prefer, the body has not only a natural-historical or empirico-psychological meaning, but essentially a speculative, metaphysical one. For what else is the body if not the passivity of the ego? And how are you going to deduce
even the will and the sensation from the ego without a passive principle? The will cannot be conceived without something striving against it; and in all sensation, however spiritual, there is no more activity than passivity, no more spirit than flesh, no more ego than non-ego.

For Feuerbach, this was to experience being as contradiction. It was the experience of intersection: of discovering the self as a site of contradictions. It was the experience of the body as the inescapable locus of any engagement with the world—as a part of our essence. It is how we gain a sense of our self—a universal or constitutive experience. However, it is not, as Margaret Archer (2000) has pointed out, how we make sense of that experience. She asserts that the range of concepts with which we make sense of the experience of corporeal contradiction are negotiable and diverse. They too, are ‘externally’ sourced. They are drawn from the world around us, as contemporary beliefs and practices—habits and ways of living—they are copied, taught and imposed upon each infant by the society into which she or he is born.

This is the insight provided by Feuerbach’s focus on human belief. Our ideas about our selves are not derived either from abstract, universal, reason or from objective science reflecting some kind of empirical reality. As such, they cannot be dislodged by mere critical thinking or efforts at ‘consciousness-raising’. Rather, they, and the traditional debate about substance upon which it rests, express a phenomenology based on a very

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32 The suggestion that the experience of corporeal contradiction is a universal human experience does not entail that the ways in which different people make sense of that experience are identical. They will reflect the relationships in which the infant is born, and hence those of her or his parents and other teachers and initiators into the social world. As such, the terms on which the infant makes sense of this experience will draw on relationships of class and other positions, such as those relating to gender, and will reflect their diversity.
human experience of the world, as re-interpreted through a distorting idealist and mechanical lens. This suggests why the separatist approach to the world—the traditional approach to substance—has been both so resilient and so popular. That is, it reflects ‘real’, unavoidable, universal human experiences. It reflects a ‘common’ sense. It also indicates why the potential resistance to a non-dualist model is, and will be, so strong, and why the effort to critique and replace it will be substantial. Any such attempt is likely to be denounced as nonsense. Its rejection will draw on vestigial, primal roots, such that the effort to replace it will need to draw on equally profound and common foundations, those elements that constitute our ‘species being’.

**SPECIES BEING**

Feuerbach saw those foundations in the all-too-human experience of extreme pain and death. The absolute limit of any particular being—mortality—was, in Feuerbach’s eyes, the catalyst by which we discover that our substance did not reside in our separate selves, but in the species. In the experience of uncertainty, limitation and pain we do not confront a pathology or flaw, so much as our very essence. In confronting death—that is, the realisation that there is no individual infinity—each human individual is faced with the location of continuity, of infinity, in the species (Feuerbach 1980, 17), rather than in its separate self. For Feuerbach (1980, 132), in confronting death, a person faced absolute, undeniable limitation and that his ‘true being’ was ‘determination’. The experience of substance—traditionally understood as separation—was only experienced once:
You exist as pure I, as pure self, you exist only for yourself but once, and this moment is the moment of not-being, of death...But the nothingness, the death of the self at the moment of isolation, at the moment it wishes to exist without the object...is the revelation that you can only exist with and in the object (1980, 126).

This revelation, however, was not limited to the time of death: “death [could] be conquered before death” through the experience of limitation and of pain (1980, 126). Pain, in Feuerbach’s eyes, was the means by which we moved to realise our character as ‘species beings’. Pain could produce a confrontation with being itself:

In every pain, the species celebrates the triumph of its unique actuality...There are more philosophy and reason in your pains and sighs than in your whole understanding. You really philosophize only when you moan and cry out with pain. The only sounds of wisdom that come from you are the sounds of pain. For in your pain, you assent to and affirm the essence, the species, the absolutely perfect universal, the actuality of which you deny in your understanding. Your pains and sighs are the only ontological arguments that you can furnish for the existence of God. The only lecture halls of the philosophy of time are hospitals and sick bays...you experience pain...because you experience limit and absolute, not-being and being all at once. In the feeling of determinate lack, you possess at once the feeling of the nothingness of the totality of your single being on its own and the feeling of sole lordship and reality of the substance that is perfect in itself (1980, 95).
Extreme pain tears and strips away the layers we have constructed about our selves until all that remains is a remnant, an abstraction. It is in extreme “pain, [that we] assent to and affirm the essence, the species, the absolutely perfect universal, the actuality of which [we] deny in [our] understanding” (1980, 95). It is in pain that we discover that our foundation lies outside our will.

Feuerbach and Marx share their witness and response to the experience of pain—to the misery in which so much of humanity seems to be mired, and resigned. This commitment resonates in strains of anger and of grief and compassion that run through their works, and in their railings against the false comforts of ideas that deny the influence of that pain and legitimate and accommodate the practices that cause it.

Echoing the critiques Epicurus and Lucretius made of the false needs and unnecessary conflicts thereby generated, Feuerbach also called for a way of life grounded in experience, rather than illusion. Instead of a flight from our materiality, our corporeality, and its pains and tensions, Feuerbach, like his Roman predecessors, called for a mature, honest engagement with that dimension of our experience and our being. It was this integrity to lived experience—this commitment to responding to the experience of pain—that made Hegel’s sublation of corporeal experience intolerable for Feuerbach. That sublation discounted and devalued the impact of pain through merging it in some gradually emerging, encompassing and comforting comprehensive rationality. It suggested that the pains of this world, the contradictions that Hegel named as the essence of being, were destined to pass and merge into the order of a rational universe. It dismissed, devalued and diminished the lives of those who remained mired in that pain. Feuerbach’s great contribution was to ‘invert’ that order and to place that
experience of pain, uncertainty and anxiety at the foundation of our humanity, and to thereby reveal so much of the Western traditions in theology and philosophy as a response to that foundation. Pain, for Feuerbach, was central to the human essence. Religious thought, including traditional approaches to substance, however, in its varied and continuing forms, was no mere illusion—it was grounded in a real human need, in the grappling with that need, and the dependencies and vulnerabilities it entailed. It reflected the tensions between transcendence and immanence others had explored in terms of expression—the sense of a self that exceeded the forms of its current, or at least conscious, deployment. Like Hegel, Fichte and others before him, Feuerbach understood these tensions as both painful and productive, as a goad to action and a search for some place or way to be ‘at home’ in the world. Like those others, Feuerbach appreciated the discomforts of material being, and the endless strivings its desires seemed to burden us with. Unlike those others, however, and on terms that resonate with the convictions expressed by Epicurus and Lucretius before him, Feuerbach located the potential to resolve those tensions and pains, and discover that sense of ‘home’, in our corporeality itself. The pains and tensions of material, corporeal being were not to be resolved by dismissing and devaluing that aspect of our being, but by means of the disruptions and contradictions it makes of our illusions; the prompts by which the pains and uncertainties and anxieties of corporeal existence reveal the limitations of our ideas of our selves and our substance, and remind us of our intimate inescapable interdependence. They remind us of our ‘species being’.
CONCLUSION

Feuerbach’s consideration of ‘religious thought’ was, in large part, an engagement with the traditional debates concerning substance. Drawing deeply on Hegel, Feuerbach rejected the conventional emphasis on ‘separation’ and ‘independence’, and asserted the priority of interdependence. Like Hegel, and Fichte and Schelling, Feuerbach respected the long-standing objections to the experience of uncertainty, limitation and pain, so much so as to treat them as central and promising, rather than as a pathologies or compromises. So insistent was Feuerbach on recognising the significance of pain, it grounded his claim that substance was located in the material, rather than the Ideal, world. He was true, however, to the long-standing tradition of treating matter as volatile—as the source of unpredictable, often transformational, change—and believed that gave a more truthful expression of Hegel’s dialectic. The contradictions and movements driven by desire were not exceptions or passing phases, as Hegel treated them, but the very essence of our character.

Working within the long-running debate concerning substance, Feuerbach, reaching back to Aristotle, found that the limitations of particular beings meant that their essence, their continuity, could only reside in their species. Feuerbach made limitation a central category and a thematic focus. In this respect he emulated Epicurus and Lucretius before him. Limitation marked the boundary between being and non-being. Limitation, for Feuerbach, as it had been for Fichte, was both constitutive, and yet somehow simultaneously a betrayal, of being. It made being and pain co-terminous. Pain was endemic to the human condition, so much so, that much of human life was engaged in
responding to it. This was the central theme of Feuerbach’s works on religion: that religious thought and practice was an effort to deny—and a hope to eventually flee—the experience and pain of lives that were defined by limitation. This, for Feuerbach, was the essence of religion—the effort to evade the confrontation demanded by being—and the basis for its failure.

Marx, in later demanding that the focus of political debate shift from religious to political (and thence economic) thought, developed and expanded Feuerbach’s critique. Likewise drawing on Epicurus, Lucretius and Hegel, Marx developed the conception of humanity as both limited and open, as bound up with others, and other things, to such depth as to make the tensions in those relationships an intimate goading pain. Drawing more deeply on Hegel to better envisage our humanity as labour—as the ongoing endeavour to reconcile those conflicting relationships—Marx better understood the breadth and intimacy of that interaction, as it had changed over time. He took Feuerbach’s emphasis on corporeal limitation and pain and amplified it, and, in so doing, anticipated a greater potential for that pain to realise a revolutionary potential.
Ludwig Feuerbach, when reflecting on the pains and tensions of a material, mortal being, called for "a more human language": one concerned with "the realm of embodied, living spirits" and responsive to "neediness...[and] the realities of human misery" (cited in Wartofsky 1977, 196). Like Feuerbach, Marx's early works were concerned with the search for such a 'human language' and reflected a keen awareness of the difficulty of the task. In 1844, Marx (1975d, 276-7) complained that:

We would not understand a human language and it would remain ineffectual. From the one side, such a language would be felt to be begging, imploring and hence humiliating. It could be used only with feelings of shame or debasement. From the other side, it would be received as an impertinence or insanity and so rejected. We are so estranged from our human essence that the direct language of man strikes us as an offence against the dignity of man, whereas the estranged language of objective values appears as the justified, self confident and self-acknowledged dignity of man incarnate (emphasis in original).

However, the difficulties in understanding this 'human language' go deeper than mere offence.

Plamenatz, in Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man (1975, 118), went so far as to describe them as seeming, to the "common-sense reader", a "sheer abuse of language".
Leopold, with regard to “the writings of the young Marx”, highlighted the difficulties and attractions of Marx’s work. For him:

the writings seemed...to possess two signal properties: they were suggestive, that is, they gave the impression of containing ideas worthy of further consideration; and they were opaque, that is, their meaning was far from transparent...[particularly] Marx’s account of human emancipation (Leopold 2007, 1, 183).

These reactions arise, in part, because those writings are fragmented, “abbreviated and opaque” (Leopold 2007, 183), and are often located in manuscripts that were not intended for publication. They also reflect the way Marx drew on the tradition of debate about substance and few have recognised this.

Ollman is one of the few modern writers who have done so. He captured the challenges anyone reading Marx (without reference to the traditions Marx drew on) faced:

The most formidable hurdle facing all readers of Marx is his “peculiar” use of words. Vilfredo Pareto provides us with the classic statement of this problem when he asserts that Marx’s words are like bats: one can see in them both birds and mice (1971, 3).

In this chapter, I begin to spell out my argument that Marx worked within a ‘peculiar’ tradition—that his approach to understanding the human condition drew upon, and contributed to, the tradition of arguments concerning the concept of substance, and its
corollary, essence. Like Ollman (1976, 3), I argue that “without a firm knowledge of what Marx is trying to convey with his terms, one cannot properly grasp any of his theories”.

This is not readily apparent from Marx’s works. In part, as indicated above, this is because of the ‘peculiar’ ways in which Marx used words. This is also why many of those who have considered Marx’s thought in this area have not done so with reference to the tradition of debate about substance. Leopold, for example, claimed that “Marx’s use of the term ['species being'] appears largely straightforward and intelligible” (2007, 184), but made no reference to substance.

Finally, one possibly greater obstacle to my claims is the status of those ‘early’ works in which many of the relevant discussions are located. Many writers, foremost amongst them Althusser (1996) and Colletti (1973), have argued that those works were overshadowed, if not completely superseded, by Marx’s later, more ‘mature’ works. However, I think that Marx’s works evidence a remarkable continuity. This is not to claim that the terms used by Marx to express his views did not change. Rather, it is to argue that the issue he sought to resolve and consider in relation to substance remained consistent. Marx rejected the traditional characterisation of being in terms of independence in favour of one based on a profound interdependence and openness to other people and the world.

This is a controversial position. Since Althusser (1996) first claimed that there was an “epistemological break” in Marx’s thought evidenced in the theses on Feuerbach and The German Ideology, the argument has been made that Marx’s earlier works are fundamentally flawed. The ‘break’ or ‘rupture’ argument as made by Althusser was
essentially that Marx’s later works, beginning with *The German Ideology*, abandoned the humanist, idealist, elements said to characterise his previous works in favour of historical materialism. Althusser treated Marx’s use of ‘essence’ in those early works as a “universal attribute”, and hence a form of idealism (1996, 228).\(^3\) Moreover, he argued that Hegel’s methodology could not be adopted without being tainted by idealism’s influence. It was, in Althusser’s words, part of the same “ideological field”. In its stead, Althusser (1996, 82) held that Marx applied “a logic of actual experience and real emergence” (emphasis in original).

However, the difficulty with these claims is that they provide little recognition of Marx’s own words. Marx (cited in Fraser 1997, 82) emphasised how Hegel’s *Logic* had assisted him in developing the *Grundrisse*. In relation to *Capital*, Marx (cited in Fraser 1997, 101) explicitly praised Hegel, and held that he had discovered the “rational kernel within the mystical shell” of Hegel’s thought. For Lenin (cited in Fine 2001, 72), this influence was so obvious that he claimed “it is impossible completely to understand Marx’s *Capital*…without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of the *Logic*”.

Nevertheless, as Arthur (2004a, 2) has recently pointed out, Marx’s words were “cryptic” and provide no straightforward resolution of the debate.

Moreover, the core of Althusser’s argument—that the theses on Feuerbach and *The German Ideology* marked a significant change in Marx’s focus and key concepts—has some merit. The degree to which they depart from his previous works, however, has

\(^3\) As previously noted in Chapter Four, this interpretation mistakenly understood Hegel’s use of ‘expression’ in terms of the traditional definition of substance. For the reasons given in Chapters Three and Four, I argue that Hegel used the term in the Spinozan sense, which ‘inverted’ the traditional approach and gives Hegel’s methodology a character much more consistent with the methodology Althusser attributes to Marx.
been exaggerated. This was also the conclusion reached by Fromm, who, while insisting on “continuity”, noted that Marx’s works did evidence “changes in concepts, in mood, [and] in language” (2004, 23, 64). Meszaros similarly argued that Marx’s works demonstrated “the most remarkable continuity”, and rejected the ‘rupture’ argument as a “highly undialectical separation” (1970, 220, 217; 2008). Nevertheless, he still recognised “Marx’s intellectual development” over time (1970, 232). Lucien Seve considered this issue in detail, given its central importance to his project of developing the foundations for a Marxist psychology. Seve (1978, 71), while rejecting Althusser’s arguments for a radical ‘break’ and for uninterrupted continuity, agreed there were ‘ruptures’:

But, at the same time, [held] it is unquestionable that...the succession in these ruptures in continuity marks out a continuous effort to master an unchanged domain of the real with transformed concepts...[such that] throughout his life Marx never stopped taking up again and reincorporating the pre-1845 materials, particularly the 1844 Manuscripts, by reworking them.

Rather, Seve argued for a ‘transmutation’: i.e. a shift from an internal, natural essence seemingly determined by its concept, to an external, changing essence determined by the historical, changing ‘ensemble of social relations’. For Seve:

It must be said...that what defines Marxism is the inversion of the speculative relation between the human essence and social relations, with all the theoretical consequences which this leads to in the conception of man (1978, 80, 99).
His conclusion was:

It is therefore a case not of an abandonment but of a scientific transfiguration of the concept of man; the concept of human essence is to have a meaning for mature Marxism, quite a new meaning, a materialist and dialectical meaning: the essence is not abstract but concrete, not ideal but material, not natural but historical, inherent not in the isolated individual but in the ensemble of social relations’ (1978, 119-120).

However, Seve, like Meszaros, Wood (2004), and even Althusser, did not consider Marx’s use of ‘essence’ in the light of the broader tradition of arguments concerning substance. Instead, these writers tended to equate ‘essence’ with the traditional emphasis on separation and continuity, treating it as having the unchanging character of a ‘nature’. They failed to consider the manner in which Marx drew on the broader tradition to understand ‘essence’ in far more open, interdependent terms.

The argument for continuity is even stronger for those who have considered that broader tradition. Those writers, such as Arthur (2003, 2004a, 2004b), Levine (2012), Reuten (2000) and Smith (1999), who have considered Hegel’s engagement with that tradition, particularly through his *Science of Logic* and *Logic*, reject Althusser’s claim that Hegel’s method cannot be separated from its content or his ideology. They hold that Hegel’s method—that is the demonstration as to how “a given whole…reproduces itself” (Arthur 2004a, 64)—is independent of the subject-matter of its application. In Marx’s hands, it comprised, in Levine’s (2012, 31) words, the “isolating [of] the core social relationships which sustained and preserved a social totality”. Arthur (2003,
Carver (1976), Reuten (2000), Smith (1999), and Williams (2003) hold that *Capital* (at least) is a clear application of that method. Levine (2012), Van Leeuwen (1972, 1974) and Williams (2000) go further, claiming that the application of Hegel’s logic was a consistent feature of Marx’s works, including his doctoral dissertation.

It is my argument that Marx’s works, at least from his doctoral dissertation in 1841, evidence (if anything) a continuous effort to critique the abstract, independent concept of human being promoted by political economists, and to replace it with a much more concrete, corporeal, interdependent vision. In this and the next chapter, I argue that Marx consistently pursued this project across the three broad stages in which his works have commonly been considered. The first stage began with his doctoral dissertation and ended with the *1844 Manuscripts*. It concerned Marx’s consideration of ‘objective being’—that any being was so intimately involved with its necessary objects as to make them part of its very constitution. These are often referred to as Marx’s ‘early’, or immature works. The second stage embraced Marx’s theses on Feuerbach in 1845 and the preparation of *The German Ideology* in 1846, and is read as part of Marx’s supposed ‘turn’ to a historical materialism. My argument, however, is that these works were logical developments from his previous work. In particular, I point out the important, unrecognised, continuing consistencies between Feuerbach’s and Marx’s works. The final stage concerns those works subsequently produced by Marx—in particular, *The Grundrisse, An Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*. I suggest that these ‘mature’ works are an application of the framework developed over the two preceding stages: having determined that the human essence is that “ensemble of social relations” (1988, 570), that varying mode of production that
mediates the permanent relationship between humanity’s organic and inorganic bodies (namely, the human body and the balance of nature), Marx then drew on that framework to analyse the then current capitalist mode of production. In short, I argue that Marx never abandoned the concept of being that was central to his early works—’species being’—and its largely unrealised potential remains available to us today.

As such, here I focus on the first stage of Marx’s project: his rejection of the traditional characterisation of substance in terms of separation and independence, and hence ‘essence’ in the sense of a fixed nature. I want to illuminate his characterisation of being in terms of an aggregate of relations and becoming, which Marx called ‘objective being’, by reference to previously established, and more open, concepts of substance. In doing so, this chapter sets the foundations for a later and more detailed exploration of ‘species being’ and the centrality of the corporeal (in Chapter Seven). Here, I detail the critique Marx made of the traditional debate about substance and its application to humanity. I also address the question: what alternative did Marx suggest (specifically, how did Marx seek to comprehend corporeality as central to the human essence), by setting out the framework within which he was positioned to treat the material as part of the human essence? The manner in which Marx then, in the second stage of his work, drew on Feuerbach and others to ‘invert’ this framework (to ground the human substance in the corporeal, rather than the non-corporeal, and in the dominant mode of production) can then be considered in Chapter Seven.
One of Marx’s consistent emphases was his critique of abstraction—involving, for example, in the practice of treating one aspect of a being as determining that being’s character, independently of the influence of all other aspects of that being. As such, it was a critique of the core premise of the traditional debate about substance—that there was some singular, particular quality or feature that lay under, supported and determined all other aspects of a being, yet was not reliant upon or affected by those other aspects.

This position was central to Marx’s doctoral dissertation. There he argued against Democritus’ determinism, but also qualified the asserted ‘freedom’ of the atom by means of his critique of Epicurus, in which he rejected treating the atom as completely independent of other atoms. On the face of it, Marx’s dissertation interrogated the competing materialist theories of Democritus and Epicurus, and demonstrated a preference for the latter. As Schafer has noted (Schafer 2006, 14, 16, 40), it served as a mechanism to promote a Hegelian model of expressive being over more mechanistic models. In doing so, it has appeared to fit squarely “within the limits of Young Hegelian thought”, as noted by Burns (2000) and Kolakowski (2005, 86-7). On this basis, it has been treated as having only historical relevance, and certainly not as a source of illumination for Marx’s more ‘mature’ theory. In part, once again, this may have followed from the “vagueness of the text” (Stanley 1995, 157), yet a number of writers nevertheless recognise the ‘germ’ or ‘embryo’ of Marx’s enduring interests in the dissertation. Some, like Stanley, go so far as to claim that “the same qualities that
contemporary critics are so anxious to bestow upon the Eleven Theses are largely present in Marx’s first work” (1995, 158). At the very least, I claim that the dissertation evidences the early stages of Marx’s lifelong opposition to any understanding of being founded in abstraction.

In the earlier portion of his dissertation, Marx argued that being was not simply defined in terms of determination, and still enjoyed some freedom—that the movement of the atom was best understood in terms of the ‘swerve’ rather than the ‘fall’, and as comprising some “pregnant vitality” (Schafer and Marx 2006, 15). It was not the mechanistic object, moved solely by external influences, but somehow self-sufficient (Marx cited in Schafer 2006, 15). For Marx “the motion of falling [was] the motion of non-self-sufficiency” (cited in Schafer 2006, 112).

This, however, was only part of Marx’s argument. In his thesis, he proceeded to criticise the one-sidedness of Epicurus’ model and its emphasis on abstract individuality. This critique is, in one respect, clearly Hegelian: Marx asserts that every particular being, every atom, only exists in the bundle or intersection of a range of relations (in a network of attractions and repulsions). Marx rejected the characterisation of the atom as independent and self-sufficient (Stanley 1995, 155-6). Rather, the atom, like any particular being, was only realised in the midst of its relation to the ‘external’, even if in ‘negative’ terms of repulsion (Schafer 2006, 53-4):

We now consider the consequence that follows directly from the declination of the atom. In it is expressed the atom’s negation of all motion and relation by which it is determined as a particular mode of being by another being. This is
represented in such a way that the atom abstracts from the opposing being and withdraws itself from it. But what is contained herein, namely, its \textit{negation of all relation to something else}, must be \textit{realised, positively established}. This can only be done if the \textit{being to which it relates itself is none other than itself}, hence equally an \textit{atom}, and, since it itself is directly determined, \textit{many atoms}. The \textit{repulsion of the many atoms is therefore the necessary realisation of the lex atomi [law of the atom]} (Marx cited in Schafer 2006, 116, emphasis in original).

On this basis, Marx (cited in Schafer 2006, 130-1) rejected any conceptualisation of being in independent, self-sufficient, or abstract terms:

If the atom is considered as pure concept, its existence is empty space, annihilated nature. Insofar as it proceeds to reality, it sinks down to the material basis which, as bearer of a world of manifold relations, never exists but in forms which are indifferent and external to it. This is a necessary consequence, since the atom, presupposed as abstractly individual and complete, cannot actualise itself as the idealising and pervading power of the manifold. Abstract individuality is freedom from being, not freedom in being. It cannot shine in the light of being.

Marx’s critique of abstraction continued to feature strongly in the \textit{1844 Manuscripts}, in his discussion of the abstract character of political economy. In the first manuscript, ‘Wages of Labour’, Marx characterised the “separation” of “capital, landed property and labour” as a “necessary, essential and pernicious” feature of capitalist system. He criticised the English and French political economists for treating that separation as “natural” or justified as a result of their narrow, abstract, approach to the issue:
It goes without saying that political economy regards the proletarian...as nothing more than a worker. It can therefore advance the thesis that, like a horse, he must receive enough to enable him to work. It does not consider him, during the time when he is not working, as a human being. It leaves this to the criminal law, doctors, religion, statistical tables, politics and the beadle (1975e, 288).

This critique continued throughout Marx’s life, and figured prominently in the second and third stages of his works.

In like fashion, it informed Marx’s criticism of Idealist thought in *The German Ideology*—that Idealism was founded on the artificial separation of the unity of existence. In Marx’s words:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material condition of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity...Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science...When reality is described a self-sufficient philosophy loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever (Marx and Engels 1998, 36-7 and 43).
In the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973, 264-5) criticised both economists and socialists for making the same error in regard to the relationship between society and economic conditions:

Proudhon, for example ...[states that]: “For society, the difference between capital and product does not exist. This difference is entirely subjective, and related to individuals”...Thus he calls subjective precisely what is social; and he calls society a subjective abstraction. The difference between product and capital is exactly this, that the product expresses, as capital, a particular relation belonging to a historic form of society. This so-called contemplation from the standpoint of society means nothing more than the overlooking of the differences which express the social relation...Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand. As if someone were to say: Seen from the perspective of society, there are no slaves and no citizens: both are human beings. Rather, they are that outside society. To be a slave, to be a citizen, are social characteristics, relations between human beings A and B....Proudhon...abstracts from just the specific difference on which everything depends.

In the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1975h, 2) continued to expound the same critique, directly addressing political economy’s reliance on the fictitious, abstract, independent—or substantial—individual:

The individual and isolated hunter or fisher who forms the starting point with Smith and Ricardo, belongs to the insipid illusions of the eighteenth century...the
period in which this view of the isolated individual becomes prevalent, is the very one in which the interrelations of society...have reached the highest state of development. Man is in the most literal sense a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society.

The recovery of these lost or neglected relations was central to Marx’s discussion of his method. In the course of criticising the methodology of political economy in the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1975h, 16) sketched his own method:

> we shall proceed from the imaginary concrete to less and less complex abstractions until we get at the simplest conception. This once attained, we might start on our return journey until we would finally come back to [the concrete], but this time not as the chaotic notion of an integral whole, but as a rich aggregate of many conceptions and relations.

Revealing and contesting the distortions following from this process of abstraction—from the practice of treating things in terms of the traditional approach to substance—profoundly shaped the architecture of *Capital*. Beginning with what appears to be an example of substance, traditionally understood, in the form of a commodity—a thing that exists independently—Marx then proceeded to draw on Hegel’s logic to explore each of the multiple relations that gave it its character (Arthur 2004a, 2004b; Fracchia 2004; Smith 1999).³⁴

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³⁴ Whether the starting point is the commodity as a use-value, exchange-value, or as capital, is still subject to debate (Arthur 2004a and 2004b, Reuten 2000).
The critique of abstraction—and, by implication, the traditional approach to substance—was a central, continuing emphasis in Marx’s works, and forms part of the answer to the first key question of this thesis: what critique did Marx make of the traditional of debate about substance and its application to humanity (whereby the non-corporeal was treated as the human essence)? Marx’s critique of abstraction implied a view of the traditional approaches to substance as incomplete; that is, as an abstraction that neglects central features of our humanity, and enables the abstracted features to be treated as the essence of our humanity. In the balance of this chapter, I consider the alternative approach applied by Marx, and map out what Marx considered to be a more comprehensive framework to capture all that comprises being.

OBJECTIVE BEING: INCORPORATING THE ‘EXTERNAL’

The second key question is: what alternative did Marx suggest? I will argue, over the remainder of this chapter, that Marx considered being as the composite or aggregate of its various relations. This has the effect of making the participants in, or objects of, those relations ‘internal’ to being. I will argue that, in the first stage of his work, Marx adopted the foundational terms of Hegel’s *Logic* and that this, together with a range of key terms (such as ‘expression’) suggest a concept of human being that is the opposite of substance, as traditionally understood.

35 The second question also asks how Marx sought to comprehend corporeality as central to the human essence. This follows from Marx’s adoption of the aggregate or ensemble of relations as his model of the human essence, which is the focus of the balance of this chapter. Once that foundation has been discussed here, the manner in which Marx applied it to give a central emphasis to corporeality will then be discussed in Chapter Seven.
For Marx, the essential character, the essence, of a being was not separation or independence—not the traditional approach to substance—but interdependence. This essence was not some separate, unchanging, dimension of a being, but the aggregate of its relationships with other beings. Just as Spinoza, Herder, Goethe, Schelling and others had argued, a being that had no object was not, in Marx’s eyes, a living being. A living being, for Marx, was an ‘objective being’. For every being, an other or object was present and co-located because of their mutual reliance. Just as Hegel, in considering the argument for ‘pure’ being, held that a being with no object—no relationship to another being—was the equivalent of nothing, Marx (1975e, 390) argued that:

To say that man is a corporeal, living, real, sensuous, objective being with natural powers means that he has real, sensuous objects as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects. To be objective, natural and sensuous and to have object, nature and sense outside oneself…A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural being and plays no part in the system of nature…A non-objective being is a non-being.

For Marx (1975e, 389), to be a living being was to be so intimately involved in and so dependent upon the ‘external’ or independent world of objects as to blur the borders between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’:

An objective being acts objectively, and it would not act objectively if objectivity were not an inherent part of its essential nature. It creates and establishes only objects because it is established by objects, because it is fundamentally nature.
In the act of establishing it therefore does not descend from its ‘pure activity’ to the creation of objects; on the contrary, its objective product simply confirms its objective activity, its activity as the activity of an objective, natural being.

To be a living being was, for Marx, to have its essence ‘outside’ itself. It was to be profoundly open to, and dependent upon, objects that are ordinarily considered to be separate and external—it incorporated ‘external’ objects as part of its self. A particular being was better understood as dependent, rather than independent—as an interdependent, ‘objective’, being. A being that existed independently of any other thing was a fiction:

Man lives from nature, ie nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature (Marx 1975e, 328, my emphasis).

This connection was not the relationship found between two separate things. Objects were of man’s essence—they were needed “to complete…existence and to realise essence…” (Marx 1975d, 267). The relationship between man and nature was an “inner relation”:

The longing for these…objects, i.e. the need for them, shows each owner…that he stands in another essential relation to the objects…that he is not the particular being as he imagines, but a total being and as a total being his needs stand in an inner relation to the products of the labour of others – for the felt need for a thing
is the most obvious, irrefutable proof that that thing is part of my essence (1975d, 267, my underlining).

This concept of ‘objective being’ was central to Marx’s concept of human being. Just as Hegel held that no ‘pure’ being existed—only in mediation or relationship with its various objects—Marx’s ‘objective being’ did not exist separately to its objects. As Foster (2008, 67, 68) has pointed out, and as Arthur (2008) and Hartsock (2008) have agreed:

Marx’s basic ontological scheme for understanding the world, as with Hegel, was one of internal relations…For Marx, each thing consists of the totality of its relations.

These relationships are not the aloof, hardy independence of the traditional approach to substance, but that of essence—of being constituted by, and open to, its relationships with what, in traditional terms, are seen as separate. Meszaros (1970, 170) has emphasised this point:

...a being’s nature is not some mysteriously hidden “essence”, but…the necessary relations of the objective being to its objects.

To be human, then, in Marx’s eyes was indistinguishable from the various relationships any person had with his various objects—those objects were not in an ‘external’ relation to it, but an ‘internal’ one. An ‘objective’ being was one comprised of a range or aggregate of relationships. From this, it can be readily appreciated that Marx’s 1845 characterisation of the human essence in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach as “the
ensemble of social relations” suggests an essential continuity between the first and second stages of his work.\textsuperscript{36}

Ollman has stressed how this emphasis on externality and separation was the focus of Marx’s critique, as well as presenting one of the major obstacles to understanding Marx’s work:

This is really the nub of our difficulty in understanding Marxism, whose subject matter is not simply society but society conceived of “relationally”. Capital, labour, value, commodity, etc., are all grasped as relations, containing in themselves, as integral elements of what they are, those parts with which we tend to see them externally tied (1976, 14).

Ollman points out that, for those who start “with a conception of factors as logically independent”, their interaction is then an “intrusion”, whereas, for Marx, interaction is, properly speaking, inneraction’ (1976, 16, 17). Richard Levins has similarly emphasised that the relation between the parts “is not mere ‘interconnection’ or ‘interaction’ but a deeper interpenetration that transforms them” (2008, 35).

This interpretation of Marx is not uncontested: Gould (1980), Schmidt (1971) and Wood (2004) argue that Marx posited a greater division between a being and its objects. All three emphasise the role of social relations in Marx’s works, and tend to treat them as distinct from the individual-nature relationship. Whilst Wood does not consider this issue in any detail, Gould and Schmidt appear to rely on traditional concepts of substance, possibly reflecting Aristotle’s influence on Marx. In my view, however, their accounts fail

\textsuperscript{36} This continuity is considered in detail in the next chapter.
to explain the strength of the connection that Marx placed between those various relations, and exhibit a form of abstraction. In particular, they do not consider how the social may be seen as generated out of the individual-nature relationship, which, as I argue in Chapter Seven, is central to Marx’s account.

**NATURE – MAN’S ‘INORGANIC BODY’**

Marx’s approach made human being so open that he treated nature as humanity’s “inorganic body” (1975e, 328, 329). Here, ‘inorganic’ recognised some degree of separation, but not a profound or ontological one. Contrary to its dismissal by Wood as “highly metaphorical”, “hyperbolic” and “exaggerated” (2004, 177), Plamenatz’s dismissal of Marx as “speaking absurdly” (1975, 82), and the arguments made by some ‘green’ or ecological writers, such as Clark (2001), man’s organic body, whilst physically separate to his ‘inorganic body’, was functionally so dependent on the latter as to make them a unity. For Marx (1975e, 328):

> The universality of man manifests itself in practice in that universality which makes the whole of nature his inorganic body, (1) as a direct means of life and (2) as the matter, the object and the tool of his life activity. Nature is man’s inorganic body, that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.
Here, Marx’s use of “organic”, together with his reference to nature as the “tool of his life activity”, suggest that he was drawing on the classical Greek understanding of ‘organ’ as an integrated extension of the body:

In ancient Greek usage, the word organ (organon) also meant tool, and organs were initially viewed as ‘grown-on tools’ of animals – whereas tools were regarded as the artificial organs of human beings...Characteristic of the natural-dialectical worldview of the ancient Greeks was the recognition of a close relationship between tools as extensions of human beings and the organs of animals, because they were both part of the general process of species adaptation to natural conditions (Foster and Burkett 2000, 408).

Moreover, Marx’s use of ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ needs to be understood with reference to Hegel’s works and their influence upon him. As Foster and Burkett (2000, 411) have argued:

In Marx’s dialectical understanding, in which he was heavily influenced by Hegel, all of reality consists of relations, and any given entity is the summation of the relations of which it is a part...In this sense the organic body of humanity (like all species) includes within itself the inorganic conditions of its existence, which may at first appear (in a society characterised by the alienation of human beings and of nature) as mere “external” things.

This extended, inorganic, body does not resemble the independent, self-contained entity featured in the traditional debate concerning substance. Instead, it represents the
depth and breadth of involvement explored by Spinoza and those who worked within his legacy—a view of being as open and interdependent.

A living body then, as both Hegel and Marx recognised, comprised both its organised, internal or ‘organic’ dimension and its disorganised, external or ‘inorganic’ dimension. It is, however, one body—the dependence of the organic on the inorganic for its realisation is so intimate, as Hegel argued in his *Logics*, that the two cannot be considered as distinct. To do otherwise is to consider the being in the abstract—as Marx put in his doctoral dissertation, to consider “freedom from being, not freedom in being” (cited in Schafer 2006, 131).

The continuing salience of this understanding is clear in Marx’s later works. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx presents a history of the relationship between man’s organic and inorganic body in the course of considering the changing character of property. For Marx, the first form, that of the family or “natural” community, made property appear, for the individual, as “the objective, nature-given inorganic body of his subjectivity” (1973, 473). This description remained unchanged, even with the emergence of the second form of property—that evolving with towns—with “the earth in itself” described as the “inorganic nature of the living individual” (1973, 474). For the worker, “he himself is not only the organic body, but also the subject of this inorganic nature” (1973, 488). Marx insisted that:

> It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but
rather the separation between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence…Property thus originally means no more than a human being’s relation to his natural conditions of production as belonging to him, as his, as presupposed along with his own being; relations to them as natural presuppositions of his self, which only form, so to speak, his extended body’ (1973, 489; see also 473, 474, 485, 488, 490, 491, my emphasis).

What was ‘unnatural’ was the form of property which was sustained within the capitalist mode of production, and its separation of the individual from his inorganic body. Even in Capital, Marx’s most ‘mature’ work, “nature becomes one of the organs of [man’s] activity, which he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible” (1976, 285).

**SUFFERING, VULNERABLE HUMAN BEING**

However, to consider a living being on those terms —of an aggregate or ensemble of relations—goes further. It imports the vulnerability of Spinoza’s aggregates to the depths of every being, whether animate or inanimate. It makes the experience of pain and uncertainty endemic to the human condition. It makes being precarious.

Contrary to the long-standing effort in traditional approaches to substance to exclude the volatility and uncertainty of material existence, I argue that Marx’s conception of human being in terms of an aggregate of relationships made the experience of uncertainty, anxiety and pain a persistent, troubling feature of human experience.
Contrary to the deep, stable, internal security emphasised in the traditional debate about substance, Marx (1975e, 389, 390) envisioned a fundamentally contradictory, unstable being passionately—and painfully—dependent upon needed objects:

… as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the objects of his drives exist outside him as objects independent of him; but these objects are objects of his need, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers…To be sensuous, i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a sensuous object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one’s sense perception. To be sensuous is to suffer (to be subjected to the actions of another). Man as an objective sensuous being is therefore a suffering being, and because he feels his suffering, he is a passionate being. Passion is man’s essential power vigorously striving to attain its object.

Marx (1975e, 375) emphasised that these “feelings, passions, etc are not merely anthropological characteristics in the narrower sense, but…truly ontological affirmations of…essence (nature)”. To be an objective being was to be an open, unsettled, vulnerable being. It was, in the terms suggested by Spinoza, the Romantics and the Idealists, to be profoundly, inescapably bound up with what was, in traditional terms, ‘external’. Objective being was constituted out of a range of varying relations, and to experience those relations, as Schelling put it, as “a continuous exchange of resistance and strife” (cited in Richards 2002, 310). It was to have its centre of gravity located in
the ‘external’ and in the tensions that, in traditional conceptions, had been located in the subordinated volatility of matter and the inconsequential, ‘incidental’, passing moments of change. It was to experience the constitution of the self by some uncertain, un-fixed limitation or setting off against the relations within which that self was positioned, and yet to experience that limitation as some form of self-sacrifice. It was to experience the “felt contradiction” Hegel (1975, 269) placed at the heart of being, together with the goad or “urge to overcome this limitation” (1969, 135). This was the foundation for Schelling’s use of the expression ‘objective being’—of a self constituted and simultaneously pained by limitation and abstraction—and thereby committed to an endless striving in an effort to secure its fullest sense of self. In contrast to the independence and self-sufficiency of substance, traditionally understood, Marx’s adoption of a more open conception founded being in the movement from the contradictory state of essence or inorganic unity towards an internal, organic unity.

The resolution of this contradictory state—the satiation of this ontological need and passion/pain—is the movement from essence to notion, and inorganic to organic unity. Contrary to the traditional emphasis in locating substance in the unchanging, Marx’s expansive approach—his treatment of nature as man’s ‘inorganic being’—located being in the very process of change. It made activity central to being human and reinforced why still life—abstracted studies of isolated individuals—cannot capture the human essence. It also demonstrates how unity of being—the aggregation of organic and inorganic bodies—is a state of perpetual striving.
Marx uses terms like ‘powers’, ‘capacities’, ‘appropriation’, ‘expression’, ‘realisation’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’ to describe this process, thereby amplifying this open characterisation of being. They provide a rich description of being in such open, interdependent terms as to render Marx’s rejection of the traditional approach to substance unambiguous. They are, I argue, just the kind of “peculiar terms” Ollman had in mind when referring to Pareto’s complaint that one could see both “birds and mice” in Marx’s words (1971, 3). They are words, however, that few writers have given sufficient attention, with reference to the tradition of arguments concerning substance—such that the openness, fragility and potential of human being, as Marx envisioned it, has been overlooked. These words are, I suggest, the basis for much of the ‘suggestive’ character Leopold (2007, 1), and others, find in Marx’s works.

**POWERS, CAPACITIES AND ‘KRAFT’**

For Marx, the movement towards the unification of our organic and inorganic bodies depended upon the use of a person’s ‘powers’ and ‘capacities’:

As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand equipped with *natural powers*, with *vital powers*, he is an *active* natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as *drives* (Marx 1975e, 389).

However, Marx does not elaborate on what he means when he talks about ‘powers’, ‘dispositions’, ‘capacities’ and ‘drives’, despite frequent reference to them. They can be read in terms of the traditional debate about substance so as to suggest a pre-existing
ability—something ‘internal’ to the being and opposed to the world around it: a distinguishing feature. Most discussions of Marx’s works—such as those by Wood (2004), and even Ollman (1976)—have tended to assume that this is what Marx meant.

I argue, however, that Marx’s use of ‘powers’ and ‘capacities’ is better understood as accentuating the instability and dependence of objective being. ‘Power’ and ‘capacity’ here should be understood in terms of Aristotle’s concept of ‘potential’, as discussed in Chapter Two, and the late eighteenth century concept of ‘kraft’ or ‘force’, and so suggesting an openness and an essential, constitutional tie to the ‘external’, a sense of being in process and movement and not in some solidly established self.

Aristotle considered ‘power’ and ‘capacity’ as part of his theory of potential (which would have been very familiar to both Hegel and Marx, and their intended audiences). The categories of ‘power’, ‘capacity’ and ‘potential’ are alternative translations of the same Greek word, *dunamis* (Lawson-Tancred 1986, 118; Lawson-Tancred 1998, lvi), and suggestive of a connection. Their use by Hegel (1970, 323) in this sense is suggested by his explanation of ‘power’ in terms of possibility, as “secret forces which are still slumbering”, and the parallels between Aristotle’s and Hegel’s approaches to substance. Both preferred the ideal form of the being as its substance, yet both recognised the pervasive, troubling influence of the material world. Both proposed

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37 Marx was both conversant in, and respectful of, Aristotle’s works, as was Hegel, although they differed on some key points. Marx was educated with considerable depth in Attic philosophy (Meikle 1985, 1991; Pike 1999, 21, 49), as was demonstrated by his doctoral dissertation, and his repeated express references to Aristotle (2006b, 80, 90-3, 97, 102, 111, 136, 140 and 192; 1975e, 356; 1973, 134, 160; 1976, 253, 267, 444, 532, 997, 1041; Pike 1999, 16, 21-2; McCarthy 1992, 1, 2, 40; Depew 1981, 136-7, 139; Ollman 2003, 3). Hegel drew heavily on Aristotle’s works, particularly De Anima, and is said to have considered himself as “Aristotle redivivus” (McCarthy 1992, 59; Depew 1981, 134, 135, 137, 140). However, as discussed in the preceding chapters, they differed in one crucial respect: Aristotle broadly advocated the traditional concept of substance.
alternatives to the traditional emphasis on separation with regards to substance that brought their ideal and matter together in a volatile, changing combination.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Aristotle’s concept of ‘potential’ does not imply a separate or independent foundation for being. Instead, the mutual dependence of matter and form on each other to constitute being, together with the dependence of potential upon the presence of an external catalyst for its realisation, accentuate the open, interdependent character of ‘power’ and ‘capacity’. Matter, in Aristotle’s hands, transformed the character of substance, shifting it from the firm, fixed substrata towards process, flux and interdependence. This intimate dependence was heightened by Aristotle’s use of terms such as ‘privation’ and ‘suffering’ to describe the impact of the absence of those necessary, although external, conditions.

Moreover, Marx often drew on the language of ‘kraft’ or ‘force’ in the context of describing powers and capacities. As we saw in Chapter Three, new developments in physics, geology, biology and other sciences in the eighteenth century suggested a higher degree of interaction and interdependence between objects than previously appreciated. The discoveries in relation to magnetism, particularly the forces of attraction and repulsion, were widely influential and became key descriptive and explanatory terms within the Romantic movement. They suggested an underlying, universal connection—an openness—that was generally described as ‘force’. This term—‘force’—or ‘kraft’ in German, drew on Latin roots which extended its meaning to
'strength', ‘ability’, ‘faculty’ and ‘power’ (Clark 1942, 740). Moreover, the work of Leibniz, Herder and the Romantic movement made ‘kraft’ a widely adopted term. Nature itself had become, as Schleiermacher expressed it, a "system of forces" (Lamm 1996, 168). Any particular being, including an individual human being, could be treated as an aggregate of forces. Those terms reinforce the Aristotelian suggestion of an open, interdependent being, with their portrayal of being in terms of a universal, connecting dynamic. Herder made this sense of dependence plain, in asserting that:

Pure, naked capability which, even without impediment, is still no real power but only capability, is like an empty sound, or like ‘plastic forms’ which give form, yet themselves are not forms. If the most negligible amount of positive power is not combined with the capability, then there is nothing – the word is a purely academic abstraction (cited in Barnard 1969, 133i).

In the first stage of his works, Marx used the term ‘force’ in contexts consistent with the sense of openness and interdependence that is central to kraft. It is evident in early works, like The Holy Family, where the organic characterisation was expressly preferred over a mechanical one:

Among the qualities inherent in matter, motion is the first and foremost, not only in the form of mechanical and mathematical motion, but chiefly in the form of an impulse, a vital spirit, a tension – or a “Qual,” to use a term of Jacob Bohme’s - of matter. The primary forms of matter are the living, individualizing forces of being

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38 See also Beiser 1987, 148, 230, and Lamm 1996, 28, 33 and 168-9, where ‘kraft’ is alternately translated as “power” and “force”; Kamenka’s translation of a passage from The Jewish Question differs from that set out below, in substituting “power” for “forces” (1970, 117-8).
inherent in it and producing the distinctions between the species (Marx and Engels 1975, 128, my emphasis).

As early as 1843, in *The Jewish Question*, Marx (1975b, 234) described human emancipation—securing a truly human existence—as the re-assembly of those forces:

> Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognised and organised the *forces propres* [translated by the editor as “own forces”] as *social forces* so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political force*, only then will human emancipation be completed.  

Marx continued to use ‘force’ in this same sense in his later work. In the *Grundrisse* (1973, 464-5), he equated ‘force’ with ‘capacity’ in describing the extremity to which, to constitute ‘wage labour’ under capitalist system, the capacity to labour needed to be distinguished from its objective conditions. In those circumstances:

> Living labour capacity belongs to itself, and has disposition over the expenditure of its forces, through exchange…What the free worker sells is always nothing more than a specific, particular measure of force-expenditure

> [Kraftausserung]…As a totality of force-expenditure, as labour-capacity, he is a

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39 Note that Kamenka (1970, 117) regards this passage as clear evidence of Feuerbach’s influence—which, suggests, in turn, that of Leibniz and Herder. Note also that Kamenka’s translation of the same text varies slightly: he translated ‘kraft’ as ‘force’ in ‘social force’ and ‘political force’ as ‘power’ (1970, 118). Translations of Marx’s works also suggest the use of *kraft* through references to ‘vital forces’, although these terms appear much less frequently than ‘powers’ and ‘capacities’.
thing...belonging to another, and hence does not relate as subject to his particular expenditure of force, nor to the act of living labour.

In *Capital*, Marx (1976, 283) used both the concepts of ‘potential’ and ‘forces’ to characterise:

...the labour process independently of any other specific social formation...[as] a process by which man...mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature...[where] man...confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentials slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.

Similarly, the dependence of a potential on its object is evident in Marx’s discussions of ‘labour power’ and ‘labour’, and in his contrast between ‘living’ and ‘dead’ labour. The capitalist system not only maintained human beings in an incomplete, alienated state, but relied upon the exaggeration of that privation for its continued operation: human beings were reduced to ‘labour power’—to mere, bare capacity or potential, the possibility of—but-not-yet—human being (which, when activated, became ‘living labour’—the source of all value within capitalist society).  

40 Marx’s concepts of “dead”, or “objectified”, labour and “living labour” reinforce the centrality of the concept of *kraft/force* to all his works, as they appear to be derived from the concepts of “living” and “dead” forces introduced by Leibniz and modified by Kant. Both Leibniz and Kant used these terms to
the ‘vital forces’ that comprised and maintained a human being were artificially separated out—‘abstracted’ in the sense of ‘torn apart’—from the aggregate of forces that made up a person.\footnote{For Marx (1976, 1052, 274), “labour [was] an expression of labour-power”. Labour-power was a potential which did not exist until “activated...through labour”. It became “a reality only by being expressed”. That expression, however, was dependent upon its essential objects:

> When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not speak of labour, any more than we speak of digestion when we speak of capacity for digestion. As is well known, the latter process requires something more than a good stomach. When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not abstract from the necessary means of subsistence (1976, 277).

Together, these suggest that, contrary to the suggestions of stability and continuity conveyed by a conventional understanding, Marx’s use of ‘powers’ and ‘capacities’ is better understood as \textit{kraft}, and accentuating the openness and interdependence of objective being. Here, power and capacity suggest an essential, constitutional tie to the ‘external’, a sense of being in process and movement and not the independent, unchanging substance.}

locate the presence of motion—of change—in bodies. In Leibniz, the difference was between a body without motion and one with motion. Kant modified this to indicate the source of that motion—“dead force” was force that originated outside the body, whilst “living force” originated within it (Meld-Shell 1996, 22-4). Marx appears to have used these terms to distinguish between labour power as objectified in an object (in capital) and the “living force” that originated in “living labour”—and to express the dependence of the former on the latter: “Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour” (1976, 342; see also 289, 315 and 993; 1973, 576-7).
**APPROPRIATION**

Marx referred to the process by which a being entered into unity with its object, and so completed its essence, resolved its contradiction and achieved some secure, stable identity, as ‘appropriation’. In this section, I argue that Marx’s presentation of this process further emphasised his open, interactive characterisation of being. Marx argued that the process of appropriation was not the straightforward enjoyment of exclusive possession or ownership, but much more open—a process in which an object could be appropriated in many varied ways, including simultaneously by a number of people. Marx’s view of appropriation, while only touched on briefly by him, suggests an enormous variety of relationships between ‘being’ and ‘object’ and so an equally varied range of forms for ‘objective being’. Considered with the open character of ‘objective being’, of a being that is always incomplete and striving to secure its many objects and many relationships, Marx’s sketches of appropriation suggest a being with an extraordinary openness to the world.

When he wrote of the human essence as ‘activity’ or ‘labour’, Marx was referring to appropriation. It formed the process by which the very being of the aggregate or interdependent being was constituted and maintained. The relations that comprised that ensemble or intersection—that incomplete unity of being and object—were expressed and fulfilled through appropriation:

> All his human relations to the world – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving – in short, all the organs
of his individuality…are…in their approach to the object the appropriation of that object (Marx 1975e, 351).\footnote{See also Marx 1973, 774, which also provided that appropriation could simply be “mental.”}

Moreover, the manner in which an appropriation occurred was not fixed, but varied. It could involve the exclusive possession and use of the object (including its consumption and destruction) or merely its apprehension through one or more of the senses. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of Nature* (1970, 406), had indicated that it could involve the construction of an ‘external’ object (an artefact):

Here, an external object, something belonging to the animals’ non-organic nature, is assimilated: but in such a manner that at the same time it is also left to remain as an external object. Thus the constructive instinct…is a self-externalisation, but as a building of the form of the organism into the outside world.

For Marx (1975e, 353), the forms of appropriation could be as varied as the objects:

The *manner* in which they become his depends on the *nature* of the *object* and the nature of the *essential power* that corresponds to it; for it is just the *determinateness* of this relation that constitutes the particular, *real* mode of affirmation. An object is different for the *eye* from what it is for the *ear*, and the eye’s object *is* different from the *ear’s*. The peculiarity of each essential power is precisely its *peculiar essence*, and thus also the peculiar mode of its objectification, of its *objectively real*, living *being* (emphasis in original).
Appropriation, then, was not limited to the creation of artefacts or the transformation of materials. It was one of those terms Ollman described as bearing a ‘peculiar’ meaning. Extending to “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving” (Marx 1975e, 351), appropriation captured all human relations to the ‘external’—all of the relations between organic and inorganic bodies. It was that degree of relation that involved the unification of being and object, even if that unity remained physically separate and could be simultaneously enjoyed by others (herein lay the rationale for communal or communist forms of appropriation over private ones).

**REALISATION AND EXPRESSION**

However, whilst the appropriation of an essential object unified a person’s inorganic essence and addressed the ontological void that motivates and drives them, it did not render that person stable, separate or independent. Whilst Marx described the effect of an appropriation as a ‘realization’ and ‘expression’ of the self, this was not in the sense of any closure or stability. Rather, I argue that these two terms also express the open, incomplete character of the human essence and accentuate its thoroughgoing, unavoidable, constitutive interdependence.

On the face of it, ‘realization’ and ‘expression’ suggest a sense of conclusion and completion. Much of Marx’s use of these words appeared to express this sense: a person needed objects “to complete [his] own existence and to realize [his] own
essence” (1975d, 267); a worker’s product was “his life-expression” and the “externalisation of his life”.43

Marx’s language suggests the attainment of an end—a stable, independent self, no longer dependent upon the ‘external’, no longer participating in a broader way of life. It does not suggest the reciprocal influence of being and object—rather, the former dominating the latter and bending it to its end. Nor does his language suggest the ongoing influence of the ‘external’, but of independence from it. It suggests a dominant, separate private self, rather than the interdependent self. This appears to be the way in which Wood (2004) has interpreted ‘expression’.

Marx provides no clear explication or exegesis of his use of terms like ‘realization’ and ‘expression’, notwithstanding his frequent and consistent use of them throughout his works. However, here again, I argue that Marx was drawing on the tradition of debate about substance. His use of ‘expression’ and ‘realization’ reflected the continuation and development of the Aristotelian tradition by Spinoza, Leibniz, Herder and Hegel, and the resistance to the abstractions of Enlightenment thinking expressed by Vico, Hamann, Herder, Goethe and the Romantic Movement. Its influence on Marx, particularly in his critique of alienation44 and his vision of an emancipated society (discussed below), was profound (Berlin 2000, 227).

For Marx (1975e, 390), a real being was always, already, involved in and expressed through its objects:

43 Both “realize” and “express” describe the process of objectification (Marx 1973, 289, 462, 470), See also Marx 1975d, 267; 1975e, 324; 1976, 993.
44 Marx’s theory of alienation is considered in Chapter Seven.
To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being with natural powers means that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects.

An ‘objective being’ was deeply bound up with its objects and reliant upon them for its realisation: “he is not the particular being as he imagines, but...as a total being his needs stand in an inner relation to” those objects as they are needed to “complete...existence and to realise...essence” (1975d, 267).

This deep involvement in one’s objects made for an equally deep involvement with others—it involved others intimately in one’s expression. Marx was at pains to point out that:

> It is above all necessary to avoid once more establishing ‘society’ as an abstraction over against the individual. The individual is the social being. His vital expression...is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man’s individual and species-life are not two distinct things (1975e, 350).

Plamenatz (1975), and others, recognise the ‘external’ dimension of ‘expression’ in this social sense: in particular, in terms of a need for recognition by others. Plamenatz even suggested a deeper sense of connection in describing it as “spiritual” (1975, 94, 102), but did not explore its ontological status in Marx’s thought.

Marx drew on ‘expression’ and ‘realisation’ to convey the sense of tension, volatility, movement and involvement considered in Chapter Three: a sense of a drive or
extension that never reaches completion. The terms reflect, on the one hand, the Aristotelian/Herderian sense of an emerging ‘internal’ character. On the other, they position that potential as ‘external’ in the Spinozan and Idealist sense of an immanent totality of relations, and the manner in which they draw a being ‘out’ of itself. They suggest a being that was always, ever, involved in the ‘external’, but with an increasing degree and intimacy. They gesture to a fundamental unrest and tendency towards expansion.

Expression, then, for Marx, was founded in a deep relationship with what might ordinarily be considered separate to being. It was intended to convey a profound intimacy. So much so, that, when “we...produced as human beings...In my production I would have objectified the specific character of my individuality and for that reason I would…have enjoyed the expression of my own individual life during my activity” (1975d, 277). Our activity, our objectification, however, also served another’s needs, such that:

In the individual expression of my own life I would have brought about the immediate expression of your life, and so in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realized my authentic nature, my human, communal nature. Our productions would be as many mirrors from which our natures would shine forth (1975d, 277-8).

The expression and realisation of one individual was bound up with that of others, so much so as to involve reflections of each other.
Marx made the same point again in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*—expression was not an individual dynamic, but rather a dialogue:

If we assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one, then love can be exchanged only for love...Each one of your relations to man – and to nature – must be a particular expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love unrequitedly, ie, if your love as love does not call forth love in return, if through the vital expression of yourself as a loving person you fail to become a loved person, then your love is impotent, it is a misfortune (1975e, 379),

Marx’s use of ‘expression’ to convey this intimate connection between a person and his objects continued throughout his works. It is clearly evident in the *Grundrisse*, particularly in Marx’s discussions of alienation:

Indeed, living labour itself appears as alien vis-a-vis living labour capacity, whose labour it is, whose own life’s expression...it is, for it has been surrendered to capital in exchange for objectified labour, for the product of labour itself (1973, 462).

These terms—‘expression’ and ‘realization’—are key parts of a vocabulary of thoroughgoing, unavoidable, constitutive interdependence, and were used to emphasise the openness and overlapping of what is ordinarily conceived as separate, independent and optional.
The emphasis on the open, incomplete, character of the human essence is equally suggested by Marx’s (and Hegel’s) use of the term ‘development’ (‘entwicklung’). This term, together with ‘expression’ and ‘realization’, formed the suite of terms they both used to describe the outcome of an appropriation. Entwicklung, like kraft, has a variety of meanings. It can mean development within a life-cycle stage (that is, evolving), producing, expanding, expansion or growth.

Marx provides no clear explanation of the meaning of ‘development’ in the first stage of his works, notwithstanding his frequent use of it throughout those works. Its meaning—and the continuity of Marx’s thinking—is clarified in his later works.

In The German Ideology, Marx (Marx and Engels 1998, 47-8) discussed appropriation in the course of setting out the three “premises of all human existence”. The first premise was the production of the means to meet needs. The second was that appropriation did not involve completion: rather, “…the satisfaction of [a]…need…leads to new needs…”. With regard to the concept of ‘objective being’, this suggests that the very act of appropriation—of securing the desired object and meeting a need—can be understood as changing the relationship of an ‘objective being’ with that object. As such, it changes one of the relations that comprises that being—and thereby changes (‘develops’) that being. Dietzgen (1928, 198), a philosopher whose works Marx endorsed (Dietzgen 1928, 15; Ollman 1976, 36-37), drew out the manner in which this volatility followed from the character of ‘objective being’: 
Here is a drop of water. Look how different it is according to the different things with which it is connected. It cannot be what it is without a certain temperature...In fat the drop remains compact, in salt it divides infinitely, runs usually downhill, and in a loaf of sugar, uphill....Without a connection with the earth, with its temperature and gravitation, this drop and all others would disappear in the bottomless abyss and have no existence. Thus, the forms of things change according to their connections.

This interpretation is suggested again by Marx’s use of ‘development’ in The Grundrisse (1973, 494). In the course of the preservation of the ‘old community’ and hence old means of production, its destruction or supersession necessarily followed. Marx made it clear that:

Not only do the objective conditions change...the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language.

The same approach is suggested again in Capital. Changes in objective conditions—namely, an inhospitable or challenging climate – ‘spurs man on to the multiplication of his needs, his capacities, and the instruments and modes of his labour’, unlike the tropics, ‘where nature is too prodigal with her gifts’ (1976, 649)

Development, despite its ordinary connotations of completion and stability, appears to have meant just the opposite for Marx. The appropriation of a needed object is not a
resolution nor an ending, but an increase in complexity; a broadening rather than a closure, an increasing neediness and dependence, rather than independence and self-sufficiency. Contrary to the “[prevalent] view of the isolated individual” in an advanced industrialised society as separate and independent, Marx viewed it as the “very one in which the interrelations of society have reached...their highest state of development” (1975h, 2).

**BECOMING**

On its face, ‘becoming’ or ‘werdens’, like other terms discussed in this chapter, suggests a sense of conclusion and completion. Marx’s use of it to describe the communist state in the *1844 Manuscripts* suggests that interpretation:

Communism is the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social, ie, human being...it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution. The entire movement of history is therefore both the actual act of creation of communism – the birth of its empirical existence – and, for its thinking consciousness, the comprehended and known movement of its becoming (1975e, 348).
Marx provided no clear explanation of ‘becoming' in his early works. However, here again, I argue that Marx was drawing on the tradition of debate about substance. His use of the term reflected its use by those who preceded him, such as Herder and Hegel, such that, notwithstanding contrary indications, Marx’s use of the term involved the conception of being in terms of continuous flux—of being as permanently open to, interdependent with, and changing in response to, the world about it. In this section, I argue that Marx characterised being in terms of openness and constant interaction and change—i.e. as ‘becoming’—rather than the closed, unchanging, independence of substance, as traditionally conceived. I argue that the concept of becoming is both the culmination of the chain of concepts discussed so far in this chapter—from power or capacity to appropriation to expression/realisation and then development—and complements Marx’s critique of abstraction.

The term ‘becoming’ had acquired a well-established meaning within the philosophical traditions that Marx drew on. It was a vision of ever-incomplete being, evident, for example, when Herder characterised mankind:

At no single moment can he be said to be the whole man, rather he is always in a state of development, of progress, of becoming. One activity is increased by another, builds upon, or evolves from, the foregoing…We are always growing out of childhood, however old we may be; we will always be in motion, restless and dissatisfied. The essence of our life is never fruition, but continuous becoming (cited in Barnard 1969, 156-7).

Moreover, in Herder’s eyes:
The strife of becoming would be the eternal lot of human nature...the dialectic of freedom and necessity would sow a garden of mixed delights, aims and values that would grow in an antagonistic and perpetual struggle, perhaps never achieving final harmony (cited in Richards 2002, 201-2).

As we have seen, the same emphasis on ‘becoming’, and its difficulties, shaped the works of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Their use of the term conveys a sense of being in terms of process, rather than stability and closure.

Hegel made this plain. Referring back to Heraclitus, Hegel (2003, 92, 84, 100, 12) emphasised that it requires that “we…think pure flux”, a “flux of thorough-going change”, of “flux [as]…the substance of the independent forms” —that we regard life as “endless, infinite movement” and the self as “this very unrest”. This instability arose directly from the character of being as an aggregate of relations and interactions—the vision that was central to Spinoza and to those who worked within his legacy. Hegel pointed out that:

...this truth is to be grasped and expressed only as becoming, as a process, a repulsion and attraction – not as being, which as a proposition has the character of a stable unity (1969, 172).

This is not to ignore Hegel’s or Marx’s confidence in a future resolution of these tensions. It is only to assert that, pending that resolution, Marx’s use of ‘becoming’ does not suggest a smooth, inevitable unfolding of some independent or pure essence, but the tensions and vulnerabilities of an open, dialectical being.
Drawing on Marx, then, it can be argued that an understanding of a living being is one in which life is not adequately described in terms of stability or self-sufficiency, but rather as activity, relation and dependence. Life is then less a question of the objects artificially created by abstraction from context, but of the intimate, mutual influence of participants in a relationship. Life then involves an intimate ‘internal’ influence by ‘external’ things and boundaries and borders recognised as points of reference, imposed for our convenience, and abandoned as each incorporation begs their further extension.

Jonas’ suggestion (in Grosz 1994, 11) that this fluidity and dynamism is analogous to that of a flame captured well the concept of becoming, and its contrast to the traditional debate about substance:

...the permanence of the flame is a permanence, not of substance, but of process in which at each moment the ‘body’ with its ‘structure’ of inner and outer layers is reconstituted of materials different from the previous and following ones so the living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents and has its permanence and identity in the continuity of this process.

‘Becoming’, in this sense, reflects the tensions and dynamics of power and capacity, expression and realisation. The moment of constitution of any particular being—of its expression in Aristotle’s sense—is a moment of passing satisfaction as it equally involves an experience of inadequacy and loss. To carve one’s self out—to abstract one’s self from the bundle of relations from which it is comprised—is an act of partial self-sacrifice, of dismemberment, accentuating the feelings of loss and pain that Fichte
and then Hegel had emphasised, feelings that prevented any feeling of being ‘at home’ in the world.

The nature of a being can then be considered as ‘becoming’. The moment of satiation, satisfaction and completion for a passionate, objective being, becomes so fleeting as to be illusory. The completion of the dialectical movement—the organic unification of being and object—changes a key relationship, a key component in the constitution of that being and thereby changes that being.

This characterisation becomes clearer in Marx’s later works. In the *Grundrisse* Marx (1973, 488) contemplated unlimited becoming (courtesy of *kraft*):

> what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc, created through universal exchange? The full development of the human mastery over the forces of nature...The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presuppositions other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?

In this approach:

*Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product etc...is merely a moment, a vanishing moment, in this movement.* The direct production process itself...as a
moment. The conditions and objectifications of the process [as]...themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects...the individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, 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 they create (1973, 712, my emphasis).

The communist state, then, was to involve the “positive supersession [or ‘transcendence’] of private property” and end of alienation. It was to be the “genuine resolution of the [conflicts]” involved in “the true appropriation of the human essence”, freeing that process of appropriation from the obstacles involved in alienated relationships, and enabling one to “do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner...without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (Marx and Engels 1998, 53). It was not an end to the openness and constitutional instability of our being, but of enabling its free realisation.

This is why Marx’s key term for that endeavour came to be ‘labour’ in his later works. Marx (1975e, 389, 390) envisaged humanity as “suffering”, “needy” and “passionate” as these words best captured the dependence of any being on its objects—they were not optional or external, but essential. Securing those objects, however, did not end this state but renewed it—meeting one need served to create another. It made substance the state of ‘becoming’ and permanently committed this ‘suffering’, interdependent, being to the activity of securing its needed objects. It made being one with activity or ‘labour’.
Marx’s comprehension of being was the direct opposite of that underlying the traditional debate about substance. It was not stable, secure or independent, unaffected by other beings. Rather, it was open and interdependent—far more a process than a settled state. It was ‘becoming’ and the mechanism of that ongoing process of unification and change was ‘appropriation’ or ‘labour’. It was for this reason that Marx (1975e, 395) praised Hegel’s insights, notwithstanding their alienated terms, for recognising that the character or essence of our humanity was labour:

Therefore, in grasping the positive significance of the negation which has reference to itself, even if once again in estranged form, Hegel grasps man’s self-estrangement, alienation of being, loss of objectivity and loss of reality as self-discovery, expression of being, objectification and realisation. In short, he sees labour – within abstraction – as man’s act of self-creation and man’s relation to himself as an alien being as the emergence of species-consciousness and species-life (emphasis in original).

It is for this same reason that Marx regarded the extremity of the capitalist mode of production, with its separation of workers from their needed objects and their reduction, in so many ways, to just the capacity to labour—‘labour power’—as the most advanced stage of human development. In its extremity, it exposed the essence of our being. This essential, unavoidable character of labour is one of the great continuities across all stages of Marx’s works.
CONCLUSION

Marx’s search for a ‘more human language’ was founded in a vision of a humanity intimately involved in the world. In the first stage of his works, drawing on Hegel’s Logics, his concept of ‘objective being’ is of a being deeply bound up with, and dependent upon, its various objects. It is a vision of an interdependent being, immersed in the world, rather than abstracted and torn from it: a being so involved in that world as to make nature its ‘inorganic body’. It was not secure, stable or changeless, but constantly in, and open to, change, with all the fragility and tensions that the works of Spinoza, Herder, Hegel and others had suggested.

It is also a vision of a being wrestling with the necessity and pain of limitation—as having some sense of self by virtue of some form of boundary and limitation, and yet unable to live with that amputation, that vivisection, of itself. Marx’s vision of being is founded in pain—in the experience of ever, always, feeling incomplete. It is an image that resonates with the legacies of Spinoza’s thought, and his emphasis on the openness, vulnerability and fragility of being. It is an image of constant yearning, of an essential yearning, of seeking, to use Hegel’s terms, to be ‘at home’ in the world, and of the endless nature of that task. It is a vision of being founded, not in the stability and security of favoured in the traditional debate about substance, but in movement and constant effort to secure some unity, some security, only to find that yearning renewed in the moment of its satisfaction and expression. Contrary to the more commonplace understandings of the key terms Marx used to describe being, ‘powers’, ‘capacities’, ‘appropriation’, ‘expression’, ‘realisation’, ‘development’ and ‘becoming’ speak of an

45 See Marx 1975d, 276-7.
open, vulnerable, fragile, needy being. They speak of interdependent being: of a being that, lacking its necessary objects, is incomplete, is “no being” (1975e, 390); a being so fragile, Marx realised, that, absent the support of others, it could not exist. That realisation marks the transition from the first to the second stage of Marx’s work—the recognition that an ‘objective being’ could only survive as a ‘species being’ and in cooperation with others of its kind.
CHAPTER SEVEN – TOWARDS A MORE HUMAN LANGUAGE: MARXIAN SPECIES BEING

In 2005, Fracchia, after surveying attempts over the previous twenty-five years to “offer a historical-materialist account of human nature”, argued that those attempts had “stalled” because they were “not materialistic enough and [had] failed to grasp Marx’s materialist conception of history by its corporeal roots” (2005, 24, 35). He went on to quote Terry Eagleton as “best summarising” the “daunting challenges” this involved. Eagleton (1990, 197) had characterised Marx’s “massive undertaking” as “animated” by the following question:

What if an idea of reason could be generated up from the body itself, rather than the body incorporated into a reason which is always already in place? What if it were possible, in a breathtaking wager, to retrace one’s steps and reconstruct everything – ethics, history, politics, and rationality – from a bodily foundation?

Marx’s works were just that ‘wager’. His thinking about ‘objective being’, which I addressed in Chapter Six, provided him with the means by which to pursue it. With this foundation, Marx was able to recognise the influence of our ‘corporeal roots’ and to outline and sketch that reconstruction—one in which the corporeal is no longer considered an obstacle or hindrance to our humanity, but rather as the foundation of its character, its fragility and promise.
Here, I address the second key question posed in the introduction to this thesis: what alternative did Marx suggest to the traditional approach to substance and, in particular, how did Marx make the case that corporeality was central to the human essence? I have already argued that Marx criticised the traditional approach to substance as incomplete and as an abstraction that neglects the most central features of our humanity. This, in turn, enables the non-corporeal to be treated as our essence, independent of all other things, by abstracting it from—that is, ignoring—its intimate, inescapable ties to the balance of existence. In place of the traditional formulation of substance, Marx—drawing on the legacy of Spinoza, the Romantic movement, Hegel, and others—understood human being as ‘objective being’ comprised of a range or “ensemble” (1975g, 423) of relationships, such that the objects of those relationships were not external or foreign to our being, but part of its essential constitution.

Marx built on this foundation to demonstrate that this intimate involvement in the world makes our being precarious and deeply dependent on the cooperation of others, so as to secure a stable relationship with the objects of those relations, including those objects that form part of nature. The very ontological openness and incompleteness of our being renders the common labour under a common mode of production essential to, and pervasively, intimately influential over, our very constitution. I will argue that this very dependence on other people to constitute and maintain our selves founded Marx’s understanding of ‘species being’, and explains his central emphasis on the mode of production.
This dimension of Marx’s works—the precarious, unstable and fragile character of our being—has not been well recognised in the literature. In part, this is because of a failure to consider Marx’s works in light of the tradition of debate about substance, which allows assumptions of stability and independence to exert a lingering effect, such that the insufficiently exorcised ghosts of political economy’s ‘abstract man’ continue to appear to somehow stand outside of the relations that comprise them. To treat Marx’s works as part of the tradition of debate about substance is to crack open this resilient kernel of that debate, and is an essential first step to fully comprehending Marx’s intent. It is to reveal the fragility and vulnerability of every being, and the immanent risk, so well marked by Spinoza, of that being’s compromise and collapse. It is to reveal that creature’s deep dependence on what, traditionally, is considered external to it. In those ‘external’ relations, our stability and continuity resides. Those relations, which Marx described as the dominant mode of production, exercise a permanent, pervasive influence. It is, equally, to note the promise and beauty of being: to participate so openly in many relationships is to participate in a near-boundless potential. It is to approach the breadth and promise of ‘expression’ in the manner in which Spinoza, borrowing from theological traditions, used it—it is to imagine being with the reach formerly reserved to gods.

Marx, by ‘inverting’ Hegel’s dialectic, grounded our being in the world. He made matter relevant. In adopting the language of materialism, with its emphasis on the volatility of matter, Marx made our bodies matter. No longer was our corporeality one relation among many. The centrality of this influence has, however, not always been recognised by commentators on Marx’s work. Whilst the necessity of the corporeal is acknowledged
without hesitation, it tends to only be in the sense of the most basic sense of a limiting need—as suggested by Agnes Heller (1974)—and an obstacle to be overcome. The treatment of the corporeal in the literature still, too often, resembles Feuerbach’s ‘religious thought’—that which imagines human fulfilment in terms of the disembodied, immortal lives of gods, rather than as inseparable from our limitations and mortality. If only by omission, our corporeality is still, too often, treated as an obstacle to be overcome, or an instrument to enable other pleasures. It still, too often, is treated as disappearing from relevance and influence in ways reminiscent of Hegel’s treatment of desire. The engagement with Marx’s works has failed to recognise the aches and pains of the corporeal, and their role in our emancipation: we remain so enamoured of our non-corporeal achievements and challenges.

Here, I trace the basis on which Marx’s theory of ‘objective being’ incorporated the corporeal. I consider the shift in Marx’s language from ‘sensuous’ to ‘material’ being, which incorporated the classical Greek understanding of matter as active and volatile. It marks the parallels between materialist philosophy and that criticising the traditional debate about substance, with particular regard to Feuerbach’s influence, so as to present Marx’s materialism as an expansion and reinforcement of his treatment of objective being. This chapter also draws out the way that instability permeates each individual being and makes the experience of alienation and of anxiety inherent risks of the human condition.
INCORPORATING THE CORPOREAL

Marx rejected the traditional approach to substance, with its emphasis on separation and abstraction from the world. In its place, he insisted that the only real being was an ‘objective being’—one that had its “nature outside itself” (1975e, 390). In this way, he expanded the extent of each being’s involvement in the world around it. With the foundation of any particular being no longer restricted to some underlying, independent substance, the various objects of the relations that comprised its being became incorporated into that being. In particular, the material or corporeal could no longer be treated as distinguishable from a non-corporeal human essence, and therefore, discardable. Rather, with Marx’s ‘objective being’, it became central.

However, notwithstanding his debt to Hegel, Marx found a prime example of the “German disease” (Marx and Engels 1998, 29). Like Herder and Feuerbach, Marx was concerned to avoid confusing the convenience and comfort of our concepts with reality, and thereby “purchase clarity at too high a price” (to paraphrase Berlin 2000, 188). Hegel, notwithstanding his appreciation of the breadth and interdependence of being, privileged a concept of being over its actual experience. As Feuerbach had objected before Marx, Hegel’s Logics had concerned a contest of concepts, rather than of concepts and reality. “Truth”, for Feuerbach (cited in Johnston 1995, 87):

...consists not in unity with its opposite, but rather in the refutation of the same. The dialectic is no monologue of speculation with itself, but rather is a dialogue of speculation and empirical reality...The opposite of Being – in general, just as the Logic considers it – is not Nothing, but sensuous, concrete being.
It was on this basis that Marx argued in the *1844 Manuscripts* (1975e, 397) that:

...the whole of the *Logic* is proof of the fact that abstract thought is nothing for itself, that the absolute idea is nothing for itself and that only *nature* is something.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx similarly criticised the manner in which the corporeal world, once canvassed in his theory, had been ‘sublated’ by Hegel because it had been subsumed in, and subordinated by, what Marx called “the rule of the concept” (Marx and Engels 1998, 29). As such, as Marx expressed it in *Capital*, Hegel’s approach to the dialectic was “standing on its head” and needed to be “inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell” (1976, 103).

A consistent application of Hegel’s own dialectics demanded, as Feuerbach (1986, 67) insisted, a broader view of the human essence and of reason, one which treated a “reason saturated with the blood of man”, rather than “a beingless, colourless, and nameless reason”. To consider any particular being as interdependent—as an aggregate of relations—made the corporeal central. As Feuerbach emphasised, “in relation to the abstract ego, [the dialectic made] the body…the objective world” (1972b, 142-3). It was that which, at least in the first instance, ensured the coherence and continuity of a being, and brought Feuerbach (1989, 91) to ask:

...Is there, in general, any other force, the opposite of intelligence, than the force of flesh and blood – any other strength of Nature than the strength of the fleshly impulses…Nature…is nothing without corporeality. The body alone is that negating, limiting, concentrating, circumscribing force, without which no
personality is conceivable. Take away from thy personality its body, and thou takest away that which holds it together.

Marx, building on Feuerbach, went further and grounded the human essence in nature as a whole:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity...The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature (Marx and Engels 1998, 37).

This was Marx’s ‘inversion’ of Hegel’s Logic. The breadth of Hegel’s concept of being was not captured by reason, however defined, but by the breadth and variety of existence itself.

A CENTRAL, PERVASIVE INSTABILITY

In recognising the centrality and significance of the corporeal, and in refusing Hegel’s sleight of hand by way of ‘sublation’, Marx not only incorporated the corporeal into being, but made it a prominent feature. Contrary to the quiet subsidence of desire from Hegel’s dialectic following the trials and revelations of the Unhappy Consciousness, the
rigorous application of Hegel’s own Logics resurrected desire in all its troubling character. No longer could desire—the consciousness of incompletion and drive to resolve it—be readily wrestled into obedience. No longer was it to be disciplined in the manner demanded by St Augustine. Desire, and its reminders of our incompletion and imperfection, could no longer be dismissed and devalued. To consider being dialectically, in terms of an aggregate or ensemble of relations, was to make the inescapable instability of being—called desire—a central feature of being. It was to highlight the fragility and vulnerability of each particular being—our character as “suffering”, “passionate” beings (Marx 1975e, 389.390).

This was not an uncommon view in Marx’s time. It was one consequence of Spinoza’s inversion of the traditional approach to substance. If nature or the totality alone enjoyed the stability and security that characterised that concept, then all other beings, to some degree, unavoidably experienced instability and insecurity. The model of all beings as interdependent and constituted by an aggregation of various relations could be found in the works of Herder, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Goethe and others. So, too, could an appreciation for the tensions and uncertainties that this entailed. The two went hand in hand. Schelling noted that being, understood in this way, entailed “a continuous exchange of resistance and strife” (Richards 2002, 310) and, in doing so, echoed themes explored since the earliest expressions of Western philosophy. Even in Epicurean philosophy, the relations between atoms were characterised by conflict (Asmis 2008, 148). As Hegel (Hegel 1969, 770) had emphasised, to live was to experience “this disharmony and…contradiction”.

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This recognition of resistance, strife, conflict and contradiction was further amplified by Marx’s adoption of the language of materialism. In the *1844 Manuscrypts*, Marx asserted that sensuousness “must be the basis for all science” (1975e, 355), adopting Feuerbach’s advocacy for a greater recognition of the intimate involvement of man and nature—of man’s organic and inorganic bodies. The language of ‘sensuousness’, however, did not capture the volatility of matter or the essential role of human labour. It was an incomplete realisation of Feuerbach’s own demand that the concept of being be contrasted with sensual experience. Feuerbach’s was a contest between concepts, which Marx criticised as a “contemplative” view of nature, and one that inadequately recognised the degree to which our organic and inorganic bodies had become intertwined (Marx and Engels 1998, 46). Such ‘sensuousness’ did not capture the openness and instability of the body, nor the manner in which its ‘suffering’ prompted a much more active engagement and expression on its part. Shifting from the language of ‘sensuousness’ to materialism in *The Holy Family*, in the theses on Feuerbach and *The German Ideology*, Marx maintained the emphasis on the intimate involvement of man and nature, but heightened the sense of conflict and instability inherent in that relationship. Moreover, Marx did not only rely on the recent proponents of materialist views, such as Bacon and Locke, but on a tradition of argument he saw as dating back to the early Greeks. This is readily apparent from Marx’s frequent reference to both ancient and recent references in the course of his works, including in his praise of Bacon:

The real progenitor of *English materialism* and all *modern experimental science* is *Bacon…Anaxagoras* and his *homoeomoriae*, *Democritus* and his atoms, he
often quotes as his authorities (Marx and Engels 1975, 128, emphasis in original).

Marx’s comprehension of materialism drew on both its old and new proponents. The new aided best Marx’s critique of dualist views of being. The old, however, better served the purpose Marx shared with Feuerbach: it better enabled him to express the open, vulnerable and volatile character of being, and the defining role of the corporeal therein.

The Greeks gave matter a very active role. Aristotle considered matter to be the active aspect of substance. It was, however, so dynamic that Williams described it as “a negative entity, like a negative charge or a negative number, which neutralizes and obliterates, saps and subtracts” (cited in Pike 1999, 32). It wore against the influence of form, eventually, inevitably, wearing it down and bringing about its dissolution. Matter was volatile. It was always, ever, on the brink of change. It was unstable: so much so that Aristotle only imagined its stabilisation through some kind of violence. Aristotle’s preference for stability, notwithstanding his recognition of the influence of matter, gave his hylomorphism a kind of disciplinary violence. Stability in being demanded the imposition of form over unruly matter. It demanded a constant effort or labour to maintain its unity.

Marx, by adopting the language of materialism, was reinforcing the point he made through using the language of essence. A fuller comprehension of the nature of being—one that expanded beyond the abstractions of substance—not only included the corporeal in a non-dualistic conception of being, but was much more unstable and
uncertain. Marx’s materialism did not supersede his philosophical thought, but extended it.

**SPECIES**

This emphasis on instability and volatility, as Epicurus and Lucretius had recognised, highlighted the limitations and mortality of any particular being. This was the point of Schelling’s presentation of particular beings as products caught up in nature’s ongoing productivity, and as the temporary, formless eddies that appear momentarily in a river’s passage. Spinoza made the same point in his consideration of the limited and uncertain duration of particular beings in the face of eternal substance. For the Romantics, Feuerbach, and for Marx, drawing on that same tradition, the volatility of the corporeal and accompanying fragility of being meant that continuity or immortality did not reside in the individual, but in a larger aggregate of relations, the species. This was a central theme of Feuerbach’s *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* where he insisted that:

> Your determinate individual body, the organic body in the determinate singleness of its existence, is a mortal, lacking, finite body...the organic body itself is absolutely without lack...it is an immortal, divine body. The organic body itself is the species, the essence (1980, 94).

This ‘species being’ was not that of some natural type or essentialist ‘essence’. It was not the site of biological identity and replication. It did not comprise the repetition of an unchanging pattern or the unfolding of designs inscribed by means of genetic codes or
some fixed Aristotelian potential. With regard to the then current debates concerning ‘species’ (as we saw in Chapter Three), a ‘species’ was simply a larger aggregation of relations—a larger abstraction from the totality—and enjoyed a relative semblance of stability, as compared to particular beings, simply by virtue of its closer approximation to the totality. For Feuerbach and his contemporaries, ‘species’ did not involve the sense of a rigid fixity, but was more a term of reference and one that was understood as a larger, and therefore less volatile, combination of relations within the totality.

**MODE OR HABIT**

The species, however, remained less than substance. It was not independent or self-sufficient, but also deeply dependent on its ‘external’ relations. Herder, in considering the endurance of any particular being, emphasised the dependence of that being on its climate and habitat. It was dependent on the continuity of its surroundings. For Spinoza, that endurance turned on the continuity of the dominant mode of relation of its constituent parts, which he described in terms more suggestive of coincidence and momentum, than self-sufficiency or stability. So insecure was this being for Hegel that he located its continuity in habit—a continuity so uncertain that it could only be confirmed in retrospect; so much so, that Malabou characterises the Hegelian essence as only ascertainable ex post facto (2005, 73-4). Marx, in characterising the key features of materialism in *The Holy Family*, drew on this same sense of habit. In his view, Condillac, in expanding on Locke’s discoveries, had:
...proved not only that the soul, but the senses too, not only the art of creating ideas, but also the art of sensuous perception are matters of experience and habit. The whole development of man therefore depends on education and external circumstances (Marx and Engels 1975, 129).

The continuity of any particular being or group, as Feuerbach recognised in Thoughts on Death and Immortality, depended upon the way in which their constituent parts were unified:

...everything in nature is what it is, not because of the matter out of which it is constituted, but, rather, because of the limitation of the indeterminate matter, because of the determinate proportion, manner of unification, and degree of mixture of the matter...If the mode of unification of those realities that are called the elementary constituents of a thing changes, if this determinate mode changes together with the proportion of the elements that are limited by this determinate mode, then the thing itself changes (1980, 74, my emphasis).

Like habit, this ‘mode’ or ‘manner of unification’, can be thought of as a way of securing the necessities of life—in effect, as a way of life. This understanding follows from the Spinozan inversion of substance. This is how Deleuze (1988, 122, 123), drawing on Spinoza, understood a being as an aggregate or ensemble maintained through a particular habit or way of life:

…to be in the middle of Spinoza is to be on this modal plane - which implies a mode of living, a way of life...The important thing is to understand life, each living
individuality, not as a form, or a development of a form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities...a composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence. In the same way, a musical form will depend on a complex relation between speeds and slownesses of sound particles. It is not just a matter of music but of how to live: it is by speed and slowness that one slips in among things, that one connects with something else. One never commences; one never has a tabula rasa; one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms....

Marx, drawing more consistently on this same insight—that the composition of any being is a particular ensemble of relations maintained in a particular manner—heightened the emphasis on the latter and hence on the extrinsic character of any being. So central was this habit that it grounded Marx’s assertion in his theses on Feuerbach. Marx writes:

the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual...it is the ensemble of the social relations (1975g, 846, 570).

Marx located the human essence ‘externally’ to its individual specimens. So significant was the tension between our ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ bodies, between humankind and the balance of nature, that stability and continuity for the human self was only possible—at least outside the ‘temperate’ areas—when we clothed ourselves in social structures, when we imposed a comforting layer between ourselves and the ruder elements. So open is our organic body that we only gained some stability in being—
some certainty in appropriating the objects we needed—through adopting a shared, consistent approach to meeting those needs.

This is not to suggest that this ‘clothing’ was a secondary act—something undertaken by human beings after striving in the world for some time. Rather, it was the “first historic act” (Marx and Engels 1998, 47): the first act in history or, more accurately, an act that has been part of the human condition since the emergence of humankind. We have been so vulnerable to the vagaries of the ‘external’ world, so deeply affected by it, that co-operation, of some kind and scale, has always been a condition of our very being. To be human was to be thrust into an “ensemble of social relations” (1975g, 423)—no individual existed independently of them. The very foundation of our being, of our existence—our corporeality—has demanded this co-ordination and co-operation. As Lukacs (1978) affirms, our social being is founded in this corporeal or ‘objective’ being. To be human has always comprised some social mediation between our organic and inorganic bodies, and the duration of that existence, that form of life, has depended upon the strength and stability of the mode by which those relations were organised.

**STABILISING BEING – THE MODES OF PRODUCTION**

It is for this reason that Marx described a mode of production—a mode of relating to our inorganic natures—as a mode of life. He insisted that:

> This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite
form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production (Marx and Engels 1998, 37).

This activity, this expression, turns on what Marx described as ‘appropriation’. As I have already noted, the development of any being follows from the unification of the elements of its essence—from the appropriation of its necessary objects. The manner, or mode, of appropriation is not then an activity of an otherwise established being, or “internal dumb generality” or *genus* as Marx described it in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach (1975g, 423). Rather, it is the mode by which that being is constituted, and persists. It *is* its being, its existence. It is not secondary, an act *by* a being, but primary: the establishment, and re-establishment, *of* that being. For Marx (Marx and Engels 1998, 62):

> This sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and every generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as “substance” and “essence” of man.

A mode of production, of appropriation, then, is not a quarantined part of our existence or our selves. It is our substance. It provides the pulse and breath of our lives, setting a rhythm that does more than pervade and affect a life: it is life. It is the first, last and defining act of our lives. It is the levy-bank against the uncertainty and threat of our
corporeality. Unseen, unthought-of of, but pervasive, universal and defining, it buoys us up and enables us to bear the weight and gravity of our bodies. Against the constant movement of the world about us, and of our necessary objects away from us, our mode of production enables us to draw our selves together.

So central is this rhythm to understanding Marx, that Lefebvre claimed that the “analysis of rhythms” constituted a new “science, a new field of knowledge” (2004, 3). Lefebvre wrote of the “dressage” or education of human beings which filled:

...the place of the unforeseen, of the initiative of living beings...Space and time thus laid out make room for humans, for education and initiative: for liberty. A little room. More of an illusion: dressage does not disappear. It determines the majority of rhythms. In the street, people can turn right or left, but their walk, the rhythm of their walking, their movements, do not change for all that (2004, 39, 40-1).

From this perspective, the body sounds out a rhythm with the regularity of a metronome (2004, xii).

We are engaged in this necessary self-constituting activity, which unifies our organic and inorganic nature, from our infancy. Notwithstanding the potential variety of forms of appropriation, the demands of our inorganic nature impose a co-operative regime. One is born into a way of life, a mode of production, into a division of labour, a division of tasks concerning the domination and appropriation of nature:
...each stage contains a material result, a sum of productive forces, a historically created relation to nature and of individuals to one another, which is handed down to each generation...which on the one hand is indeed modified by the new generation, but on the other also prescribes for it its conditions of life and gives it...a special character. It shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances (Marx and Engels 1998, 62).

One grows up in a particular place and time exposed to and educated in its rhythms of action and its customary objects, completing one’s essence—one’s being—in the manner in which those rhythms and objects permit. One is born into an existing way of life, which is modelled, taught and enforced. A mode of production is not merely a mode of activity for adults, but a mode of life that shapes a society, from youngest to oldest, even if they do not directly participate in its core activities. Merleau-Ponty (1968) wrote of the body and the self as the accumulation of these rhythms. He considered these to provide a “style”, as “the continual auto-production of schemes in the body’s mobilizing of itself [that] ‘gives our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions’” (1968, liv)⁴⁶.

A particular society’s way of life provides an organising rhythm: it shepherds and corrals its individual members into particular positions and in particular directions. It does so with sufficient consistency to significantly contribute to the continuity of their constitution. Like a piece of music, its rhythms provide a means for people to coordinate their movements, but it does not dictate those movements. It is only at a larger scale that one

⁴⁶ Bourdieu (1977), too, has founded much of his work on the formative influence of habit.
can entertain the possibility of a comprehensive, determined matrix of relations constituting the human—in the sense of species—essence (and, with that, laws governing their conduct). It was on this basis that Spinoza could stress interdependence and still allow for individuality: the latter formed one configuration within the broader configuration of the species (which, in turn, sat within the total configuration of nature) (Hampshire 2005).

The expression of our humanity, of our very selves, is not an abstracted activity, but a corporeal one—an activity between our corporeal body and its objects in accordance with a commonly accepted mode or manner. The manner in which that activity occurs—and the manner in which we conceive of it, and of our selves—shapes our bodies and ourselves in ways that remain with us outside of the dimensions of our labours (paid and unpaid). It is not a mantle we can discard or a character we cease to play, but a rhythm—promoting a shape—that permeates the balance of our existence.

**HISTORICAL BEING - A HISTORY OF CHANGING MODES**

Marx sought to demonstrate the centrality of this rhythm—of the mode of unification of organic and inorganic bodies—by tracing its development and variation across human history. A change in the means of production—such as the advent of steam engines—enabled the emergence of a new mode of unification, a new form of co-operation and mediation, and hence new forms in the very practice and expression of life. So profound was the influence of the mode of production, that Marx described the balance of social relations as “superstructure”: 310
The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (1975h, 425).

This is not a determining or causal relationship, but one of deep and pervasive influence. To have suggested otherwise would have been to repeat the Idealists’ error.47 Marx made the relationship a little clearer in his Contributions To A Critique of Political Economy, where he described the influence of the dominant mode of production in terms of conditioning—but not determining—life:

The totality of the relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life (1975h, 425).

In the Grundrisse, he used terms suggesting an even more indirect influence:

In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their

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47 This was the point of Althusser and Balibar’s (1997, 97, 100, 101, 108, 188) insistence on rejecting any simple or mechanistic understanding of the influence of the mode of production in favour of notions of “complexity”, “relative autonomy”, “intersection”, “correspondence, non-correspondence…displacement and torsion” and “overdetermination”.

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particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized in it (1973, 106-7).

This is not to deny the tendencies and trends Marx saw in the workings of history and economic relations, but to recognise these as general directions or momentums, and not exhaustive prescriptions or predictions.

Once the notion of separation or substance is abandoned, openness and fluidity become equally key descriptors of our selves, as does our corporeality. Once we appreciate the extent of that openness, and the corresponding diminution in control it involves, the significance of our efforts to secure some control, some stability, loom large—as do, correspondingly, the objects of those efforts. Those efforts, and their objects, speak to a permanent, profound tension in the human constitution.

Marx’s history of different modes of production is not a history of technological, economic or social change—it is a history of this tension and the manner in which our predecessors have lived it. It is a history of how human beings have come to be, and become. Marx’s concern with this history was to demonstrate the depth and influence of this tension. His effort to promote a materialist history was an effort to promote the recognition of our inorganic natures and to demonstrate that to be human was to be intimately, inescapably, involved in ‘external’ nature, rather than independent of it:

…it is quite obvious from the start that there exists a materialist connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production, and which is as old as men themselves. This connection is ever
taking on new forms, and thus presents a ‘history’…In the whole conception of history up to the present this real basis of history has either been totally disregarded or else considered as a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history. History must, therefore, always be written according to an extraneous standard; the real production of life appears as non-historical, while the historical appears as something separated from ordinary life…With this the relation of man to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created… (Marx and Engels 1998, 49 and 62-3).

Fracchia makes this same point in discussing Marx’s aphorism that “people make their own history, but not always as they please”, and acknowledges that:

Marx generally intended this to refer to socially determined capacities…and…social limits and constraints…But, behind changing social capacities such as the specific character of technology, it is the set of corporeal capabilities that establishes the possibilities for humans to make their own histories; and beyond the changing limits of inherited socio-cultural conditions, it is the set of corporeal constraints, the needs and limits embedded in the human corporeal organisation, that prevents humans from making their histories as they please (2005, 43).

One of Marx’s key criticisms of Feuerbach was that Feuerbach’s materialism—his ‘sensuousness’—failed to sufficiently recognise this interaction and its impact. Feuerbach, in disclaiming others’ flight from the corporeal, had himself paid insufficient attention to how that relationship changed over time. One consequence of that
emphasis was his failure to appreciate the breadth of interaction between our ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ body. Feuerbach, as Marx pointed out:

...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; 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, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest ‘sensuous certainty’ are only given him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse (Marx and Engels 1998, 45).

In place of this incomplete, abstracted history, Marx offered a history of the movement of different modes of relation between our organic and inorganic bodies. Marx’s consideration of the division between, for example, city and country, pointed not merely to a change in modes or location, but to a movement away, a distancing and separation from, our ‘inorganic’ bodies—a process of containment, of abstraction, and of forgetting the corporeal.

**THE CORPOREAL’S CONTINUING RESISTANCE**

This distancing makes it easy to miss Marx’s recognition of the ongoing human vulnerability to nature, its ‘inorganic’ body. It makes it easy to accept the sometimes
triumphant tones of Marx’s history of human development at face value, and not see its
twin character as a history of human struggles against the vagaries of nature. It makes it
easy to miss the first historic act of production pictured by Marx as the ready domination
doing it of the world, instead of an ongoing effort to stabilise a world, a society and one’s self.

Marx presented Capitalist humanity as dominating and transforming nature, so powerful
had human powers of appropriation become. His writings conjure up images of a world
that was comprehensively shaped and formed by human activity:

The bourgeoisie…has created more massive and more colossal productive
forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature’s forces
to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam
navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for
cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground –
what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces
slumbered in the lap of social labour? (Marx and Engels 1988, 214).

This vision of a thoroughly subjugated ‘natural order’ can also be found in Marx’s
description of the communist state. Marx (1981, 959) characterised it as one with a
shrinking “sphere of necessity” and an expanding experience of freedom; one in which:

...nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become
accomplished in any branch he wishes, [where] society regulates the general
production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another
tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening,
criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic (Marx and Engels 1998, 53).

The openness and choice Marx imagined in communist society relied on a mode of production that seems to have almost transcended nature: a mode of secure, prolonged domination. It suggests a stable self, one able to—given this predictable environment—engage freely in agency. Absent a conscious application of the dialectic and a deliberate recognition of the reasons why Marx emphasised a materialist approach, it is easy to imagine as Marx seemed to imply that the communist state was one in which history ends—as a mode of existence in which the sphere of freedom was, in practice, independent of that of necessity (that is, of inorganic nature). It suggests that stability and independence would, on balance, come to better characterise our being than openness and becoming.

This impression is reinforced by Marx’s frequent use of terms like ‘subjection’ and ‘domination’ in relation to humanity’s ‘inorganic’ body, and often in combination with expressions of confidence in ‘progress’. The confidence that science, developed and applied on a cooperative basis, would “shrink” the “sphere of necessity” (1981, 959) was central to his vision of the future, and was expressed from the 1844 Manuscripts through to Capital. It can also be seen to be fundamental to his view of humanity, as conveyed by his life-long repeated references to Prometheus, who brought fire—and with it the capacity to subdue nature—to humankind.

Yet for all of Marx’s triumphant Modernist claims there remained a caution, a consciousness of the volatility and immanent, gravity-like resistance of nature.
Humankind’s ‘inorganic’ body was not a domesticated, safely disciplined, body. Whilst Marx portrays humanity as the victor, the very descriptions he provides—and the permanent relationship they depict—are subject to the restrictions imposed by nature. In *Capital*, Marx (1976, 649) recognised that:

Even if we leave aside the question of the level of development attained by social production, the productivity of labour remains fettered by natural conditions.

Any being, including human beings, lived and acted within this tension. This tension is the essence of need, the drive towards appropriation and becoming. It is, as Hegel (1970, 385) pointed out, the essence of the human self: “a being which is capable of containing and enduring its own contradiction”.

It is this notion of an uncertain, insecure unity that grounded Marx’s adoption of the concepts of ‘objective being’ and ‘species being’ and his emphasis on the mode of production. The human condition consists of this ongoing tension and resistance, as managed and stabilised, from time to time, by different modes of production.

This sense of nature’s ongoing resistance founded both Hegel and Marx’s explanations of the absence of industrialisation outside of Europe. The European experience of dominating nature was, in their view, a response to the resistance of the ‘inorganic body’. As Marx put it:

Where nature is too prodigal with her gifts, she “keeps him in hand, like a child in leading strings”. Man’s own development is not in that case a nature-imposed necessity. The mother country of capital is not the tropical region, with its
luxuriant vegetation, but the temperate zone...It is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society...of appropriating or subduing it on a large scale by the work of the human hand, that plays the most decisive role in the history of industry (Marx 1976, 649).

Here nature is presented as shaping man—and playing the ‘most decisive role’ in doing so. Absent nature’s denial of basic human material needs Marx imagined man as lacking initiative. Absent nature’s resistance to human need in Europe, there would have been no prompt for display of human agency signified by Western industrialisation.

Nor did this resistance end with industrialisation. Sheasby (2001, 2004a and 2004b), referring to Marx’s later correspondence, has demonstrated how Marx was concerned with modern agricultural processes. That concern was evident in Marx’s comments in Capital and his belief that nature could not be exploited without reservation, making those processes destructive:

All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is progress towards ruining the long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth - the soil and the worker (Marx 1976, 638).
This emphasis on the struggle to maintain the form or body against decay was also central to Marx’s reflections upon reproduction. Reproduction was, for Marx, an equally permanent condition of human existence and being as production:

...the first premise of all human existence [is]...that men must be in a position to live to ‘make history’...The second point is that the satisfaction of the first need, the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired leads to new needs...The third circumstance which, from the very outset, enters into historical development, is that men, who daily re-create their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind...These three aspects of social activity are not of course to be taken as three different stages, but just as three aspects or...three ‘moments’, which have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and which assert themselves in history today (Marx and Engels 1998, 48-9).

Reproduction involved individuals addressing the ever-renewed needs of the body for food, water, and rest, and the species reproducing itself. It was the ever-present underside of production—the unavoidable, non-negotiable minimum for ongoing ‘productive’ activity. Its cost was the base line above which surplus value could be created, making it the essential other to capital. Marx (1976, 277) emphasised that, “when we speak of capacity for labour, we do not abstract from the necessary means of subsistence. The value of labour was equated with that of the means of subsistence, and varied with it. On the contrary, their value is expressed in its value” (1976, 274, 276-7). The unavoidable cycle of reproduction limited the excesses of capitalist practice to
ensure the regular renewal of workers’ labour power—every worker needed rest and nourishment:

...by [reason of] the physical limits to labour-power. Within the 24 hours of the natural day a man can only expend a certain quantity of his vital force...During part of the day the vital force must rest, sleep; during another part the man has to satisfy other physical needs, to feed, wash and clothe himself (Marx 1976, 341).

There was much that the body could be compelled to do, but there were limits on its elasticity: its resistance compelled compromise on those demands. The body consistently resisted both the will and the impulse to social conformity: it imposed “certain insuperable natural obstacles” (Marx 1976, 599).

This recognition of nature’s ongoing resistance follows from the conceptual foundations of Marx’s work. The conceptual framework that enabled Marx to see human being in terms of relations and of ongoing change also required a comparable vision of the balance of the natural world.

In large part, nature resists humanity because its various beings involve some degree of potential, if only in Spinoza’s sense of momentum or conatus, together with an openness or exposure to change. Drawing on Aristotle, one can understand the potential of a thing—and its realisation of that potential—to be central to what that thing is. Everything has some potential to be realised—regardless of any human intention regarding it. The concept of expression, from both the perspectives of Spinoza and Herder/Aristotle, is immanent with movement and change. To draw on Hegel, the thing
can be expected to move towards the unification of essence, of being and objects, even when that conflicts with any human will. In Marx’s conceptual framework, all beings—animate and inanimate—must be understood as engaged in their own movement to fulfil their potential or express their being. As part of man’s inorganic body—notwithstanding its capacity to serve human purposes in a more integral way—all of nature must be seen to also move to its various rhythms, with their potential to conflict with human purposes. All of nature must be seen as pregnant with resistance. For Aristotle—and the other philosophers considered in the preceding chapters—matter (or nature) was not the docile instrument of form or human will, but the object of constant compulsion: the stability or continuity of a being or even a species was never a fait accompli, but a constant achievement—an activity. Moreover, it was always an ‘uphill’ effort—fighting the gravity of the corporeal, its domestication was always insecure and liable to failure.

**THE SOCIAL DOMINATION OF NATURE?**

This is a controversial interpretation. Marx wrote of the ‘domination’ of nature sufficiently often as to suggest a different view, reflected in various debates, like that between Clark, and Foster and Burkett. Clark (2001, 433), relying on Marx’s use of ‘inorganic being’ (amongst other things), argued that Marx had “a certain antagonism toward nature” and sought to dominate it. Foster and Burkett (2001) contest this view.

Writers like Clark have not given sufficient weight to the influence of the problem of substance. If Marx’s specific comments on the ongoing resistance of the corporeal are considered, together with his critique of practices of domination and the dialectical
character of his work, it is clear that Marx’s vision was not built on an idea of domination, or on the unqualified celebration of technology or progress. Castree (2000) and Foster and Burkett (2000) make the same argument: the extreme modernist view is not reconcilable with Marx’s dialectical perspective, particularly as he expressed it when characterising nature as humanity’s ‘inorganic body’. Considered in context, Marx’s references to domination appear to mean more conscious or informed management (with increasing success) than unrestricted domination. Grundmann (1991, 5) described this as a project of “conscious control”.

Domination, in this sense, registered something closer to Hegel’s concept of sublation—surpassed and somehow encompassed in something superior, but still present and operative. It is in this sense that Marx’s critique of Feuerbach’s vision of unchanging nature and his recognition of its continued resistance can be reconciled: pure or pristine nature has been sublated to, and incorporated in, the capitalist mode of production, but nature or matter has not been extinguished nor lost its volatility or resistance.

This is not to deny that Marx had his “modernist moments” that were, when compared to his more dialectical discussions, suggestive of “horrific crudities” (Benton 1992, 9). His familiarity and frequent reference to Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* has been seen by many as an expression of extreme modernism, given the association of Prometheus, and his theft of fire from the gods, with a celebration of human technology (Kolakowski 2005, 337-339). However, Foster (1995, 2) persuasively argues that to view Marx in that way would be to neglect the Romantic influence on the Promethean myth (and on Marx). He claims that Prometheus was a popular model in Romantic thought, not just
because of his association with technology, but primarily because he openly rebelled against the gods. According to Foster, this latter characteristic was equally emphasised by the classical Greeks, with Aeschylus and Plato presenting Prometheus as championing their favoured social classes (see also Sheasby 1999).

Treating Prometheus as a rebel against authority, especially religious authority and its flight from limitation, implies a vision of humanity as something less than gods—as material beings who cannot escape the trials and limitations of their mortality. This is consistent with Marx’s praise of Epicurus, as well as his critique of him. Marx, like Epicurus, criticised religion for promoting false, harmful beliefs: beliefs that created ‘empty’ desires and needs (which was the way Marx characterised need in Capitalist society). However, Marx went on to criticise Epicurus for his subordination of nature in his religious-like pursuit of tranquillity, or ataraxy. The tensions and trials of existence could not be evaded through some self-sufficient life because those conflicts are the chains with which, like Prometheus, we are bound up for eternity. Rather, like the atoms caught up in—and constituted by—relations of attraction and repulsion, human beings cannot secure peace and security through independence. To be human is to be situated in the tension and resistance of being.

The resistance and volatility of the corporeal is what made Marx’s ‘objective being’ a ‘suffering’ being. Marx’s vision is at once expansive and agonistic in ways resembling the thoughts of the Romantics and Idealists who preceded him. It is a vision of being that is expansive and fragile.
MEDIATION

However, even for those who do not expressly rely on the domination of nature, Marx’s emphasis on the social, particularly on the ‘socially mediated’ character of the relationship between an individual and the balance of the natural world, has led writers like Gould (1980), Schmidt (1971) and Wood (2004) to miss or underestimate the ongoing influence of the corporeal and the fragility of the individual. The concept of ‘mediation’ lends itself too readily to interpretations that are consistent with the traditional debate about substance, and suggestions of some separation or freedom from other participants in a relationship. Once expressed in terms of a social character, ‘mediation’ too readily suggests that nature is totally eclipsed by social relations. Marx’s criticism of Feuerbach’s characterisation of nature reminds us that:

Even the objects of the simplest “sensuous certainty” are only given to him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse. The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit trees, was…only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of definite society in a definite age has it become a “sensuous certainty” for Feuerbach…the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere (Marx and Engels 1998, 45 and 46).

Marx’s concentration on social relations in his later works, particularly Capital, is just one of the persistent themes we find in his work.
However, to treat mediation as a relation between two absolutely separate things is to
make the error of abstraction. It is to ignore Marx’s own characterisation of the
relationship between our conceptions of different aspects of being as “moments” or
“aspects”, rather than “stages” (Marx and Engels 1998, 48). It is to prefer the abstract
over the concrete—to fall prey to the “German disease” (1998, 29). It is to miss the
manner in which the multiple, manifold relations that comprise the concrete or ‘real’ are
not truly separate, but ever present, ever influencing, each other. Hegel, in The Science
of Logic (1969, 496-7), described this interaction in terms of porosity and
interpenetration:

Therefore where one of these matters is, the other also is, in one and the same
point; the thing does not have its colour in one place, its odorific matter in
another, its heat matter in a third…but in the point in which it is warm, it is also
coloured, sour, electric and so on. Now because these matters are not outside
one another but are in one ‘this’, they are assumed to be porous, so that one
exists in the interstices of the other. But that which is present in the interstices of
the other is itself porous…they are a multiplicity which interpenetrate one another
in such a manner that those which penetrate are equally penetrated by the
others.

The relations that comprise a being are no mere aggregate or ensemble, combined and
coordinated without contamination, influence or merger. Rather, as Feuerbach (1980,
74-5) emphasised, they have an effect that pervades a being:
For the limit does not exist as externally circling, as the fence around a field; it is the middle that is proper and central to a reality...this...measure...penetrates everything, determines everything, dwells in everything... it can never escape the limit that is the centre of its nature, the limit that determines and includes everything that exists in it.

A century and a half later, Lukacs made this same criticism:

Above all, social being presupposes in general and in all specific processes the existence of inorganic and organic nature. Social being cannot be conceived as independent from natural being (1978, 7).

Both Schmidt and Geras emphasise that to treat nature otherwise is to succumb to idealist thought. Schmidt, in *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1971, 69), emphasised that:

The specifically Marxist discovery that historical relations are objectified in the form of the commodity can be misinterpreted so as to produce the idealist conclusion that...the world is [only] composed of relations and processes...[Rather], the mode of existence...always...presupposes a natural substratum irreducible to human social determinations.

Similarly, Geras, in *Marx & Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (1983, 96-7), argued that an emphasis on the social that presented an “absolute distinction” or “divorce” from the natural world was also Idealist. By contrast, a “genuine materialism” emphasised the
very opposite, with human beings “...’irredeemably’ rooted in a given biological
collection; absolutely continuous with the rest of the natural world”.

Notwithstanding the hegemonic character of the capitalist mode of production, and the
social relations which constitute it, the human body has not lost its character— its
volatility—nor has the individual, corporeal, body lost its fragility. It is an immanent,
ever-present, feature of our existence.

FEUERBACH AND THE CONTINUITY OF MARX’S PROJECT

I have set out to show that there is an essential continuity in Marx’s project, at least
insofar as it dealt with the characterisation of the human condition, nature or essence.
The principal obstacle to this argument, however, appears to be Marx’s own explicit
critique and apparent rejection of Feuerbach’s philosophical-anthropology.

That critique appears unambiguous in Marx’s sixth thesis (1975g, 423) which, given its
centrality and influence, warrants quotation in full:

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human
essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the
ensemble of the social relationships. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism
of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as
something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human
individual.
2. Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as “genus”, as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.

However, Marx’s characterisation of Feuerbach as promoting an essentialist concept of the self—with the human essence ‘naturally’ located in each individual—is demonstrably incorrect. In *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* in 1830, Feuerbach had clearly asserted:

Being is abundance that is rich in relations; it is meaningful union, the inexhaustible womb of the most manifold connections. That which exists must exist with, in, and for another (1980, 122).

Moreover, he had expressly stated that the unity and continuity of these relations was dependent upon their external mode of unification:

...everything in nature is what it is, not because of the matter out of which it is constituted, but, rather...because of the...manner of unification...of the matter...If the mode of unification...changes...then the thing itself changes (1980, 74, my emphasis).

In *The Essence of Christianity*, published in 1841, he had similarly emphasised:

Man is nothing without an object...the object to which a subject essentially, necessarily relates, is nothing else than the subjective’s own, but objective, nature (1989, 4).

Similarly, in 1843’s *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Feuerbach argued that:
The essence of a being is recognised, however, only through its object; the object to which a being is necessarily related is nothing but its own revealed being (1986, 9).

This had the consequence that “being is as varied as the objects that exist” (1986, 41).

Marx was familiar with all these works and expressly referred to the latter two in the theses and in the relevant portion of *The German Ideology* in which he presented his critique in detail. As I have argued, Feuerbach was consistent in rejecting the traditional emphasis on separation and, in particular, the denial of the location of the human essence in any single individual. Breckman (2001) and Johnston (1995) understand Feuerbach’s work in these terms, with Johnston (1995, 201) insisting that:

> to say that the essence of man “is the ensemble of social relations” is fundamentally consistent with Feuerbach’s own conception.

There are, however, three important clues that suggest that Marx intended to make a much narrower point than the sixth thesis suggests. In the first instance, the opening sentence of that thesis refers to the ‘religious essence’. Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*, with its focus on religious thought, does tend to refer to a general human essence, without reference to the more sophisticated discussions contained in his other works. As a criticism of the *Essence*, the sixth thesis has some traction.

The second clue supporting this narrower application is Marx’s clear intention to shift the focus of popular debate—including that of the Young Hegelians—away from a
critique of religious and theological thought towards political thought. In Marx’s (Marx and Engels 1998, 35) view:

...the entire body of German philosophical criticism from Strauss to Stirner is confined to criticism of religious conceptions....The Young Hegelians are in agreement with the Old Hegelians in their belief in the rule of religion.

The introductory section to Marx’s lengthy critique of Feuerbach in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1998, 34) stated that its purpose was “...to bring out clearly the pettiness, the parochial narrowness of this whole Young Hegelian movement”.

Given that Feuerbach’s popularity was almost entirely based on the *Essence*, Marx’s sixth thesis might be seen to be focussed on that public debate, rather than addressing the whole of Feuerbach’s work.

The third and most significant clue is that, whilst the other substantive criticisms made in the theses were repeated in *The German Ideology*, the claims made in the sixth thesis were not. Given that the theses were taken from Marx’s notebooks and were never intended for publication (Johnston 1995), the omission seems likely to have been deliberate and best characterised as an outcome of Marx rethinking his critique.

The substance of Marx’s other criticisms of Feuerbach were that his concept of the human essence was neither ‘active’ nor historical. As Marx summed up his complaints in *The German Ideology*:

As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist (Marx and Engels, 1998, 47).
For Marx, the “chief defect” was that “the thing” was “conceived of only in the form of the object” and “not as sensuous human activity” (1975g, 421-2). It was presented as “given” and not “as a product of activity and hence history” (Marx and Engels, 1998, 45). In particular, he considered that Feuerbach “naturalises everything and does not see nature as a product of history and activity” (1998, 66).

These comments, however, constitute a better explication of their shared approach to substance, having regard to the volatility of both man’s organic and inorganic bodies, rather than a wholesale abandonment of Feuerbach’s thought. To consider any being as a bundle or ensemble of relationships is to open it up to the world. It is also, as Spinoza recognised, to make it fragile and vulnerable. It is, however, as the Romantics and Idealists recognised, to also be engaged in an ongoing effort to better secure its self—to better realise and express the various relations of which it is comprised. It was to make that being always liable to change and active in pursuing it—and hence a being with a history.

Without question, Feuerbach did not adequately develop these aspects of their shared interests in corporeality and substance. Feuerbach clearly understated the volatility of nature, and the impact of the interaction between our organic and inorganic bodies. He tended to use language that suggested a single form for the human essence (at least in the Essence) and a relatively unchanging nature. However, when regard is given to the works Marx drew on as a whole, and to those many detailed instances in which he considered the character of the human substance, it is clear that Feuerbach did not
assert that substance or essence took on the character of a ‘dumb genus’ or ‘reside[d] in isolated individuals’.

In short, Marx’s sixth Thesis on Feuerbach exaggerated his critique of Feuerbach. Marx subsequently refined it in preparing his arguments for publication in The German Ideology. This reading better reflects Marx’s own abilities and diligence, and better reflects Feuerbach’s published positions. It might also be said to reflect, once again, the difficulties of understanding Marx’s works without reference to the ‘peculiar language’ of the tradition of substance.

**ANALYSING CAPITALISM AND THE CONTINUITY OF MARX’S PROJECT**

Marx’s critique of Feuerbach is, however, only one of the objections to my claim that there is an essential continuity in Marx’s project. The other, and possibly greater, obstacle is the focus and content of those works that comprise the last stage of Marx’s work. Their overwhelming focus on economic matters suggests a profound, and permanent, abandonment of the philosophical framework and of much of the content of the first stage of Marx’s works.

However, I want to argue that the final stage of Marx’s works, including Capital, involves an application of the concept of human being settled in the second stage of his works. That concept was founded on objective being, which rendered the essence or substance of being extrinsic to each individual, and thereby made that individual open and vulnerable. It opened up being far beyond Hegel’s homogenous Idea to one that
incorporated matter with all its volatility and on such a scale—once that openness was extended to the balance of nature—that amplified the fragility and neediness of being. It made human being dependent upon cooperation—on being social—so as to secure, through a common form of mediation with nature, some stability and continuity in life. It shifted the locus of being from its traditional, internal, independent locus, to one that was external and interdependent. It shifted its character from the unchanging sameness of substance to the unceasing labour of becoming, and thereby a notion of being with a discernible history. The question then became what, having regard to current circumstances—current history—that mode of cooperation had become, and, with it, what had become of the character of our being.

Marx addressed that question in the Grundrisse, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, and Capital. They each reflect a commitment to critique the abstract model of human being promoted by political economy. They reflect a search for the best approach to present being as an ensemble of relations specific to the capitalist mode of production. In doing so, they marked a search to make sense of the world in a way that contradicted the common-sense certainty that the traditional debate about substance sought to give to the world.

In the first lines of the introduction to The Grundrisse, Marx announced that “Individuals producing in society – hence socially determined individual production – is, of course, the point of departure” (1973, 83). He immediately proceeded to criticise the ahistorical character of the “individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, with whom Smith and Ricardo begin” (1973, 83), and to justify a different approach based on those
“characteristics” that are “common” to “all epochs of production”, namely the “identity of the subject, humanity, and of the object, nature” (1973, 85). It is noteworthy that, in the course of this discussion, Marx observed that “...the more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole” (1973, 84).

Later in that introduction, under the heading ‘The method of political economy’, Marx (1973, 100) returned to the question of beginnings:

It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g., the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production.

This, however, he held “proves false”, as the population itself is an abstraction. A correct analysis would involve the consideration of different classes, but that, too, would demand consideration of the “elements on which they rest” (1973, 100). Thus, to begin with the population would be to consider a “chaotic conception”. In its place, Marx sought a “simpler category” (1973, 102). Having considered “labour” (1973, 103), he concluded that “capital…must form the starting point” (1973, 107).

Marx begins with capital (and, in particular, the commodity) in his next major work, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. It seems, however, that Marx was still wrestling with his desire to critique the Robinson Crusoe-like individualism of political economy, as the second paragraph of the preface refers to “a general introduction” that he had drafted but then decided to omit, as it “anticipated results which still have to be
substantiated” and would be “confusing” to the reader (1975h, 424). That ‘general introduction’ was the Grundrisse (1973, 188).

The continuity of Marx’s endeavour is evident in Capital, with its opening (and organising) discussion of the commodity. It clearly reflects Marx’s intention to “examine…the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse that correspond to it” (1976, 90).

With “the ultimate aim” of “revealing the economic law of motion of modern society” (1976, 92), Marx begins that unravelling through his analysis of the commodity, and its dual character of having both a use-value and an exchange value—concepts which draw on the understanding of human being developed over the first two stages of his work. Throughout Capital, labour, as the creator of all value, and as the essence of our humanity, figures prominently. Marx defines “labour” as:

...the creator of use-values, as useful labour, [and]...a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society: it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself (1976, 133).

Later in the text, the influence of Marx’s prior work is clear:

The labour process...is purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore
independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live (1976, 290).

As such, this condition—the necessity to labour—forms the basis for assessing the humanity of any society. It provides the standard against which any mode of production, as a mode of living, may be judged. *Capital* evidences Marx’s compliance with the concept of the human essence he developed over the first two stages of his work, with particular attention to the findings of the second of those stages, and hence a focus on activity in the particular historical context. It does not evidence the abandonment or supersession of that work. Rather, parallel discussions in the *Grundrisse* demonstrate that it founds the distinction between use and exchange values:

Before it is replaced by exchange value, every form of natural wealth presupposes an essential relation between the individual and the objects, in which the individual in one of his aspects objectifies himself in the thing, so that his possession of the thing appears at the same time as a certain development of his individuality: wealth in sheep, the development of the individual as shepherd (1973, 221-2).

**THE SELF**

From his earliest works, Marx was concerned to elucidate the character of our humanity and to contest the poverty of political economy’s conception of that character. That endeavour led to the mammoth and uncompleted project of *Capital*, with its focus on
those relations that, whilst ordinarily considered external, Marx asserted to be of our essence. Having considered that “ensemble of relations”, we can return to and better explore Marx’s life-long desire for a “more human language” (1975d, 276-7) —one that better describes the character of our humanity, and of individuality.

The foundation for comprehending any individual human being remains Marx’s concept of ‘objective being’, as outlined in the sixth *Thesis on Feuerbach*: any being is an “ensemble” of “relations” (1975g, 423). This is a being that is profoundly open to the world and interdependently constituted with those other beings with whom it participates in relationships. This is what Gramsci understood of Marx’s answer to the question, ‘what is man?’:

...one must conceive of man as a series of active relationships (a process) in which individuality, though perhaps the most important, is not, however, the only element to be taken into account…The individual does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, in as much, that is, as he belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex. Thus Man does not enter into relations with the natural world just by being himself part of the natural world, but actively, by means of work and technique…So one could say that each one of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the hub. In this sense the real philosopher is, and cannot be other than, the politician, the active man who modifies the environment, understanding by environment the *ensemble* of relations which each of us enters to take part
in...one’s own individuality is the ensemble of these relations’ (cited in Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971, 352).

As Gramsci observed, to characterise a person as an ensemble of relations is not to merge them in some indiscriminate whole. To conceive of a person in these terms is not to deny some distinction from the balance of existence—only to suggest that distinction does not require separation. This was the very point Spinoza (2002c, 849) made when referring to a worm living in a person’s blood:

That worm would be living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe, and it would regard each individual particle of blood as a whole, not as a part, and it could have no idea as to how all the parts are controlled by the overall nature of the blood.

Rice (cited in Lamm 1996, 33) pointed out that Spinoza allowed for individuality not in terms of separation or independence, but in terms of an active “network” of relations with others.

To conceive of the self as a bundle of relations is to conceive of distinction in the midst of connection by considering the self as a unique space, rather than an isolated, separate space. Each ‘bundle’ or ‘ensemble’ of relations constitutes a unique combination. It enables us, to use Marx’s words, to conceive of “true individuality” (1975d, 265, 269):

...though man is a unique individual – and it is his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual communal being – he is equally the whole, the
subjective experience of society as thought and experienced (Marx cited in Mitias 1972, 247).

That uniqueness is amplified by the passage of time and activity—that is, history. The constant change in the self’s contextual relations makes each particular ensemble, as constituted at each point of time, a unique event:

Individuals have always and in all circumstances stood on their own feet, but they were not “unique” in the sense of not needing one another: their needs...are such as to make them mutually dependent, and so they have been obliged to enter into relationships. This they did not as pure egos but as individuals at a particular stage of development of their productive forces and needs, which were in turn determined by their mutual intercourse. In this way their personal, individual behaviour towards one another has created their existing relationships and renews them day by day...The history of an individual cannot be detached from that of his predecessors or contemporaries, but is determined by them (Marx cited in Kolakowski 2005, 139).

The uniqueness of a particular bundle provides sufficient distinction from the balance of the world to allow both for identity and agency.

This character of being—including its volatility and resistance—is, however, not captured well by the term ‘ensemble’ (as in a musical ensemble playing). It suggests a smooth coordination, which is far from the implications of Marx’s theory. To describe being in terms of interdependence provides some better illumination, and captures
some sense of its fundamental dynamism. However, it may be better to describe being in terms of an intersection than an ‘ensemble’ or even interdependence, so as to capture the ‘internal’ tensions and conflicts of the various relations.

“Intersection” is one of the terms proffered by Althusser and Balibar (1997, 214, 220) in their endeavour to conceive of individuality, consistent with their notions of the totality, as a “complex combination” of “overdetermined”, yet “relatively autonomous” structures. To describe an individual in terms of an “intersection” captured the sense in which they saw the various “levels” of structure within capitalist society as only shaped by the mode of production in “the last resort” and otherwise interacting in terms of “peculiar relations of correspondence, non-correspondence, articulation, dislocation and torsion” (1997, 108).

To consider being in terms of an ‘intersection’ better captures Spinoza’s model of a body as a precarious aggregate, influenced by external forces, with varying integrity and cohesion and with its parts (relations) sometimes drawn in contradictory directions.\(^{48}\) It allows a better appreciation of the depth and extent of the influence of those relations, as suggested by Hegel:

> Therefore where one of these matters is, the other also is, in one and the same point…they are assumed to be porous, so that one exists in the interstices of the other…they are a multiplicity which interpenetrate one another in such a manner that those which penetrate are equally penetrated by the others (1969, 496-7).  

\(^{48}\) Negri (2004, 42-45) repeatedly uses “intersection” to describe the self within Spinoza’s perspective.
The relations that comprise a being are no mere aggregate or ensemble, combined and coordinated without contamination, influence or merger. Rather, as Feuerbach (1980, 74-5) emphasised in his consideration of the limitations that constitute a being, they have an effect that pervades a being:

For the limit does not exist as externally circling, as the fence around a field; it is the middle that is proper and central to a reality...this...measure...penetrates everything, determines everything, dwells in everything... it can never escape the limit that is the centre of its nature, the limit that determines and includes everything that exists in it.

The relations that comprise a being and that constitute the limit that distinguish it from the totality, can interact, with the potential for those interactions to support some, and interfere with other, relations. Hegel’s works have been criticised by others as “monologic” (Bakhtin 1986, 147, 162) and as an “aerial view” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 87, 89) for failing to consider the interaction of the multiple relationships that comprise a particular being, making it a more complex ‘bundle’ than Hegel’s description suggested. Seve (1978, 120), however, allowed for just this effect in stating that the “internal” reproduction of “external” relations might be “contradictory, fragmented and incomplete”.

The spaces opened up by the interference—or contradiction—of these ‘operational’ or

49 Althusser and Balibar, notwithstanding their exploration of notions of ‘intersection’ and interference between different ‘levels’ of a particular society, do not present that interaction in such thoroughgoing terms. Whilst maintaining Marx’s insistence on the influence of the mode of production, their emphasis on the ‘relative autonomy’ of the different ‘levels’ limits the extent to which they can explore that influence. In this regard, their work continues to reflect the traditional doctrine of substance. They tend to give excessive weight to the borders or limits—the incidents rather than the substance—of each ‘level’ as the only site of interaction, rather recognising the immanent pervasive influence of the mode of production. In Chapter Nine, I argue that this follows from an insufficient emphasis on Marx’s materialism. Having neglected the centrality and volatility of the corporeal, Althusser and Balibar fail to treat the relationship with the corporeal—the mode of production—as equally pervasive.
active relations are the spaces in which possibilities for reflection and agency exist. This is the conclusion that Meyers also reached, approaching the idea of an intersectional self from a feminist perspective. The ‘internal’ interaction of a person’s various constitutive relations created opportunities for agency, particularly when some of those relationships enjoyed a privileged position (in Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 153, 156, and 160). In that view, a white woman disadvantaged by her gender relations, may be able to enjoy agency by means of an advantaged relation, such as race.

For these reasons, it may be better to define the self as an ‘intersection’ of relations, rather than Marx’s ‘ensemble’ with its connotations of orderly coordination. The advantage of this perspective can be appreciated by analogy with a road intersection: vehicles (relations) enter such an intersection with an orientation to pass through without interference, but are frequently changed whilst in that intersection. Some of those changes are not significant when compared to the relation as it stands outside the intersection—but at intersections delays, interference, damage and sometimes destruction are experienced. Each particular being is a unique place created by the intersection of external relations, but it is not a space those relations traverse with immunity or without contradiction.

This point is vividly conveyed by Lefebvre’s conception of the body in terms of “polyrhythmia” (multiple rhythms), “eurhythmia” (united rhythms) and “arrhythmia” (conflicting rhythms) (2004, 16)⁵⁰:

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⁵⁰ Lefebvre is not the only writer in the Marxist tradition to consider these relationships in terms of rhythm. Althusser and Balibar (1997, 100) also refer to the influence of the mode of production, and of the internal dynamic of the different ‘levels’ in terms of rhythm. Negri (1991, 70, 154, 180, 188) also uses the term to
Every more or less animate body and *a fortiori* every gathering of bodies is consequently polyrhythmic, which is to say composed of diverse rhythms, with each part, each organ or function having its own in a perpetual interaction that constitutes a set (ensemble) or a whole (un tout). This last word does not signify a closed totality, but on the contrary an open totality. Such sets are always in a “mestastable” equilibrium, which is to say always compromised and most often recovered, except of course in cases of serious disruption or catastrophe (2005, 89).

These images of intersections and ‘polyrhythmia’—as sites of interaction, orchestrated towards harmony, but never securely, and often interrupted – are more consistent with the open, interdependent characterisation of being and the rejection of arguments for some immune sanctuary of ‘pure’ substance. Being human, even in that ‘ensemble’ of social relations that grant continuity, involves the thoroughgoing, constitutive experience of tension, of the demands and contradictions of ‘external’ relations. To consider being in terms of an intersection or ‘polyrhythmia’ captures Marx’s insistence from his earliest works—his doctoral dissertation—that being not be considered in terms of a peaceful existence or *ataraxy*, but as the product of a range of attractions and repulsions. It better captures Marx’s own emphasis on suffering and alienation.

describe the interaction of bodies with Spinoza’s system. However, they do not develop the concept any further.
**ALIENATION: AN INHERENT INSECURITY**

To consider being as pervasively influenced by its various constitutive, and sometimes contradictory, relations makes the experience of alienation and anxiety an inherent hazard of the human condition, rather than the exception suggested by the traditional debate about substance and its undivided, unchanging, character. To consider any being as comprised of its various relations, and to allow for their interaction and conflict, is to make the character of any being uncertain, and bound up with other participants in those relations. It is, to some degree, to be denied control of one's deepest self.

To experience alienation was, for Marx, a consequence of treating an object, through which a person has expressed his powers, as if that object were external or separate to him:

> 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 should take the form of the establishment of a real, objective world, but as something external to it (1975e, 388-9).

Alienation involves a loss of control of self-expression:

> ...as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must
remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood (Marx and Engels 1998, 53).

To alienate a person from his object was to “[t]ear away from him his species life, his true species-objectivity” (1975e 329).

To experience alienation is to be radically incomplete. Lacking one’s necessary objects—or like Hegel’s slave—to be unable to fully assimilate or appropriate them, makes life “radically insecure” in just the sense intended by Heidegger (Barrett, 1990, 136): denied the capacity to unify one’s self, and yet conscious of and desiring that completion, is to experience anxiety in its extremity. It is to confront the very uncertainty the idea of substance—whether in traditional or dialectical terms—is intended to placate. It is to experience the tensions that Spinoza, Herder and Hegel canvassed by means of the term ‘expression’—to be inescapably involved in the totality, but be unable to fully realise that involvement. It is to experience some profound inadequacy or lack in being in just the pervasive sense of mood that Heidegger used to describe anxiety, and Fichte and Schelling wrote of a self conscious of its incompleteness. It is, in the absence of the stabilising effect of habit or a mode of production, to face both the contradiction that lies at the heart of being and the possibility of its radical transformation. This is not, however, as Lukacs (1968) and Meszaros (1970, 251 and 282) have argued, to “liquidate the historicity of an inherently historical, objective being” and assert a “frozen ontology”—it is not to universalise alienation as experienced under capitalism. Rather, in just the same way that Marx held that labour was a necessity of the human condition, but varied over time and with different modes of production, it is to assert that the open,
interdependent character of being—as understood by Marx—made its security and stability essentially uncertain and variable.

It is this potential of extreme alienation that Marx saw as underwriting the promise for revolutionary change—for the change from the popular perception of self in terms of independence to those of interdependence—that is, ‘species consciousness’—and is the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

**CONCLUSION**

Drawing on Spinoza, Hegel, and others, Marx presented an alternative theory of being human in which the certainty and continuity, previously sought in the traditional terms of substance, shifted from independence, separation and sameness to interdependence, involvement and change. Marx adopted and modified Feuerbach’s concept of ‘species being’ to arrive at an account of an objective interdependent being. Having conceived of being as a bundle or aggregate of relations in which the objects of those relations were not ‘external’, but were the essence of being, Marx readily presented that essence as incorporating the corporeal.

To be an objective being—a being that is inseparable and indefinable apart from its objects—was to be a being founded in interdependence and not the independence and stability traditionally associated with substance. It was to be a being so open and so fragile—so threatened by its inorganic body’s resistance—that its stability and continuity was dependent upon that social and cooperative endeavour, that joint effort to secure
necessary objects, that Marx called the mode of production. It was this insecurity, this inability to thrive independently, that made these social relations the foundation of the substance of our humanity. Those relations were not secondary or optional. They were not activities undertaken as an act of an established being, but the very acts that constituted, stabilised and preserved that being. They provided not an optional rhythm that could be taken up or left, but the pulse of being itself that organised and stabilised being, and enabled the engagement in, even the focus on, other relations and activities.

This is not to present that rhythm as the only pattern by which our beings are constituted. The openness of interdependent being, and the variety of relations that comprise it, leaves open the possibility that those relations may themselves clash. Given this potential, and, with it, the potential for change in the constitution of a being, Marx’s model might better be understood in terms of an intersection than an ensemble. Both represent the organising influence of the mode of production and the character of any being as that unique combination of relations, but the metaphor of an intersection better captures the freedom of movement—and possibilities for change—that remain within that constellation. It also suggests how alienation, as the experience of loss of control over a key relationship, and anxiety, as the uncertainty that follows in one’s sense of self, might best be seen as inherent to the human condition and as enabling its endurance of loss and its potential transformation. As such, it provides the basis upon which I can address the final key question of this thesis: what explanations did Marx provide for the appeal of treating the non-corporeal as the human substance (and for the circumstances in which that appeal might be overcome and enable the adoption of a ‘more human language’)?

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CHAPTER EIGHT – TOWARDS A MORE HUMAN LANGUAGE: MARXIAN SPECIES CONSCIOUSNESS

Marx argued that our character or substance as human beings was embodied in an ensemble or intersection of various relations, such that tension and uncertainty were endemic to the human condition. In this chapter, I argue that this renders the need for some way to ‘make’ sense of that pain an equally essential feature of the human condition. In this way, Marx explained the functionality of ‘religious beliefs’. Religious ideas were, as Feuerbach argued, a ‘flight’ from mortality and limitation. So painful were mortality and limitation that these beliefs—these defences—were not readily overturned. It was only in the extremity of corporeal pain—in the grip of the irrational—that these rationalisations could be overcome. On this point, Marx agreed with Epicurus and Lucretius, Feuerbach and Hegel. Real possibilities for change, including emancipatory change, emerge when we are overwhelmed by the corporeal. This, I argue, was the foundation for Marx’s interest in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, especially the ‘Master-Servant’ dialectic and the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’. That is, it is only in the face of such extreme corporeal pain that the surrender of one’s prior sense of self and the recognition of one’s dependence on the ‘external’ becomes possible. I argue that the centrality of the idea of corporeality for Marx, together with his dialectical account of objective and ‘species being’, provided the foundations for his confidence that a ‘more human language’ would be adopted.
Whilst there are some suggestions in Marx’s works that the experience of class conflict and of class solidarity would prompt the emergence of class consciousness, Marx places equal, if not greater, emphasis on the restraining effects of ideology. It appears that Marx placed his confidence in the eventual transformation in the processes of the capitalist system itself: that its repeated crises would betray its own contradictions and so immiserate the workers as to force—by means of that clear confrontation—a change in attitude. It is my argument, however, that this interpretation is not materialistic enough and fails to give sufficient weight to the catalyst-like effect of corporeal pain itself. It is not sufficiently materialistic, as it does not approach the issue with that breadth of openness that comprises objective being. Further, it fails to consider the intimate influence of the corporeal on our consciousness, developed, as that is, through the intimate experience of contradiction that grounded Marx’s notion of praxis. That intimacy is far better conveyed by McNally’s (2004, 149) explanation that:

...for both Marx and Hegel, dialectics [which, for McNally, includes praxis] pertains not to the study of objects and events “out there”, in the independently existing objective world, but also to self-understanding, to the ways in which we, as human agents, are already out there (and the ‘out there’ in us), the ways in which knowledge of self and world coincide. Dialectics accomplishes this by grasping human activity as the moment of intersection and interpenetration of subject and object...

It is my argument that Marx believed that the experience of corporeal pain, in extremity, acted to overwhelm any sense or idea of the self as separate to the corporeal, and
imposed, in its stead, an inescapable recognition of individual limitation and deep
dependence on others.

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT – LIVING WITH INSTABILITY AND ANXIETY

The experience of corporeal pain, however, had long been denied any moral or
educative priority. That denial tended to take the form of a desire for, and belief in,
immortality. However, the philosophers Marx drew on rejected this belief, and its
corollary that the human essence was not subject to corporeal limitations and would, at
some point, be free of them, and their pains too. Those philosophers recognised that
these beliefs founded the long-standing assertion that the substance or essence of our
humanity was free of that pain, and of the corporeal dimension through which it was so
often experienced. Those beliefs made the influence of the corporeal a kind of burden
on our existence that demanded, in some way, some rectification or relief, if only
through treating that burden as temporary.

For Epicurus and Lucretius, this was the central function of religious thought, and hence
their criticism of that thought. Epicurus argued that the failure to accept that all
substance was comprised of aggregates of material atoms was the foundation of our
suffering. In particular, he argued that the inability to accept our involvement in the
natural world and our mortal, limited character was the foundation of the experience of
anxiety, and the production of insatiable, self-defeating appetites, including that for
immortality.
It was this rejection of religion—of the flight from corporeal limitation—as an ‘empty desire’ that Marx emphasised in his review of Epicurus. For Marx (2006b, 89-90):

Philosophy…will never grow tired of answering its adversaries with the cry of Epicurus: “Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them is truly impious”.

Marx (2006b, 154) made clear what that ‘impiety’ was in his comments on Plutarch’s critique of Epicurus:

In the masses, who have no fear of what comes after death, the myth-inspired hope of eternal life and the desire of being, the oldest and most powerful of all passions, produces joy and a feeling of happiness and overcomes that childish terror [of death].

Epicurus, in dismissing those hopes, had ‘confirmed’ that ‘terror’ (Marx 2006b, 154).

Most commentators on Marx’s views of religion, like Geoghegan (2004), McKnight (2005), and Toscano (2010), miss this point and seem to be left guessing at Marx’s meaning when he wrote that religion reflected real suffering and acted as a source of comfort. To Marx, they impute the Enlightenment view that religion was an irrational, infantile superstition, readily remedied by a disciplined rationality. However, the problem, for Marx, was just the opposite: namely, an excess of rationality.

Epicurus, Lucretius and Feuerbach had each located the strength and popularity of beliefs in a being free from corporeal restrictions in the anxiety concerning mortality—an existential anxiety—that concerned constitutional or foundational issues of being, and
not something so readily escaped as infancy or adolescence, nor subordinated so readily by some exercise in logic. In just the same way as Marx and those before him sought to express the constitutional tensions of intersectual being, so, too, did they suggest—or at least imply—the immanence and inescapability of the ‘terrors’ of those tensions. They cannot be overcome. No society develops in such a way as to be free of them.

Feuerbach’s contribution is particularly important in this regard. In his view, those ‘childhood’ terrors were not overcome by Enlightenment rationality, notwithstanding its confident proclamation of a new, universal and ‘rational’ maturity by the likes of Kant (1784). Feuerbach demonstrated that the efforts to escape those ‘terrors’ were not limited to religion per se, but shaped Western philosophy, in both ancient and modern times. For Feuerbach, this effort to deny the pain of corporeality constituted a core and persistent theme in Western religious and philosophical thought. His early works trace the history of key elements of Western philosophy, including those concerning ‘substance’, as a flight from corporeality, limitation and death by means of a fantasy of pure, true or highest being. Moreover, for Feuerbach, this flight was not only characteristic of ancient philosophy and Christian theology, but of modern philosophical thought. This is why he treated the concepts of reason, happiness and progress as expressions of this longing for freedom from limitation and pain.

Marx saw that continuity as reflected in the belief in the independent, non-corporeal self. It reflected the same hierarchy as the belief in immortality, namely that the pains associated with finitude and limitation are some kind of corruption or contamination that
could, and should, be disciplined or evaded. The attraction and resilience of this tradition, notwithstanding the variations in the forms it has taken, reflects the constitutional character, and so repetitive experience, of the profound anxiety and insecurity that is at the very heart of ‘species being’.

Marx understood the influence of these beliefs. So deep does the need to comprehend pain run, that it is bound up with our very comprehension of our selves. So deeply bound up are these beliefs, they have made alienation—the denial of our dependence on the corporeal, on others, and on our society—an assertion of our essence. This was the foundation of Marx’ criticism of political economy which equated alienated labour with all labour, and treated alienation as the norm (1975e).

**RELIGIOUS THOUGHT, ALIENATION AND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE**

However, Marx anticipated that these beliefs would, nevertheless, be self-defeating. In promoting an idea of our humanity as an unlimited non-corporeal, internal and individual preserve, these ‘religious’ beliefs promote attitudes and activities of abstraction and separation—they promoted an ideal of life, and a way of living, that severed our links to our human essence. Moreover, in responding to the interdependent character of our being—the unavoidable pull and push of those relationships in which we are situated and comprised—they deny the essentiality of those relationships. They deny that things external to our skin—our ‘inorganic’ body in the material world and in society—are essential. They make strangers of humanity and nature, of each human
being and her or his necessary objects. Their effect, as Marx (1975e, 329, 342) said, is to:

…[estrange] man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his…human essence…[making] what was formerly being external to oneself, man’s material externality…the act of alienation.

This was the critique Marx made of religious thought in *The German Ideology*:

The only reason why Christianity wanted to free us from the domination of the flesh and “desires as a driving force” was because it regarded our flesh, our desires as something foreign to us (cited in Geras 1983, 62).

He made the same point about Christianity in *Capital*, on substantially the same grounds: “Christianity, with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, ie in Protestantism…is the most fitting form of religion” (cited in Toscano 2011, 16).

Here, and notwithstanding his theses on Feuerbach, Marx demonstrated his debt to Feuerbach’s influence: this continuity concerning religious thought has been noted by a number of writers, such as Brien (2009), and Geoghegan (2004).

Marx asserted that this ‘religious’ attitude makes the alienation—the separation—of those parts of our selves an assertion of the human essence or substance. He appreciated that, in doing so, this attitude asserts a vision of humanity that only served to narrow and deplete it. In particular, he appreciated that the insistence on independence and separation in ‘religious thought’—including in relation to the
corporeal—was self-defeating, as it involves an attempted flight from our constitutive relations. It encouraged a dis-membering that was (and remains) impossible to fully achieve.

For some modern commentators, like Ignatieff (1997, 38, 51, 54), the modern Western idea of the separate self is only achieved by doing “a certain violence” to oneself and others. The precarious character of intersectual being provokes a cycle of violence—an intensification of the flight from intersectual being. It is an enterprise or endeavour that, in the face of its insecurity, in moments of greater instability, provokes desperate attempts to fend that failure off. It provokes the kinds of extremity that Lucretius (2008, 4.1079-89) long ago saw following from similar false needs and producing selfish, abusive relationships:

Yea, in the very moment of possessing, surges the heat of lovers to and fro, restive, uncertain; and they cannot fix on what to first enjoy with eyes and hands. The parts they sought for, those they squeeze so tight, and pain the creature’s body, close their teeth often against her lips, and smite with kiss mouth into mouth, because this same delight is not unmixed; and underneath are stings which goad a man to hurt the very thing, whate’er it be, from whence arise for him those germs of madness.

With regard to contemporary efforts to discipline the body, it is not difficult to see parallels with Lucretius’ critique of erotic love and the manner in which it demanded the absolute possession and abuse of the other. Martha Nussbaum (2009, 174) presents
Lucretius’ view in just those terms. She presents him as seeing the lovers experiencing the need for the other as a weakness and seeking to end it through “complete possession of the other”.

The same desperate lengths can be seen in the ‘fight to the death’ in Hegel’s Master/Servant dialectic, and in the exaggerated ascetic disciplines of his ‘Unhappy Consciousness’. They can also be seen in the deliberate self-deprivations and eating disorders of too many young people today. There is a comfort—a sense of confirmation, of warding off the threats of dissolution—provided by the belief in the separate, independent, non-corporeal self, but it is an incomplete comfort. The character of being as becoming or flux repeatedly disturbs that comfort and security. The corporeal (desire) arises and threatens repeatedly, and ‘religious thought’ leaves us unprepared for, and ill-equipped to, tolerate that challenge, prompting renewed flight from the corporeal and renewed investment in that ‘religious thought’.

The ‘religious’ foundations of the concept of the independent, non-corporeal self—in particular, its roots in the ‘terror’ of mortality—suggest why idea of the self has been so popular and resilient, and why its replacement by intersectual being cannot occur by some simple substitution of one concept for another. It will not occur simply by virtue of a rational or educative encounter. As Feuerbach and Marx (and others) have recognised, these religious beliefs are “not only an escape from reality, but a method of dealing with it” (Kamenka 1970, 66). They help to make sense of, and to live within, a painful world. They act as an ‘opiate’ which, like Freud’s ‘intoxicants’, anaesthetise one to the contradictions and anxieties of existence.
Marx appreciated the needs met by these religious beliefs in terms rendered famous by repetition:

Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. 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. (Marx cited in Foster, Clark and York 2008, 33).

Giving up those beliefs would not be a simple task. As Marx emphasised, “To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions”. (Marx cited in Toscano 2010, 9)

The notion of the independent, non-corporeal self is both popular and addictive because it meets a human need—an aspect of the human condition—in negotiating the uncertainties and openness of intersectual being. Malinowski (cited in Kamenka 1970, 68) understood that this belief “relieve[s] intolerable stress…[and] overcome[s] the feeling of helplessness”. As such, it has a profound and widespread influence. It is a means by which, as Kamenka (1970, 67) emphasised, “…man acquires emotional comfort not only [in terms of a] simple fantasy, but by shaping the whole of his knowledge into an ordered scheme [upon it]”.

Given its foundational significance, the challenges regularly presented to this ‘imperfect’ understanding by unstable, intersectual being does not result in either its radical revision or abandonment. Instead, they prompt further investment and fresh endeavours to conform to it, so deep does its influence run.
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND THE ‘ORIGINAL AND OLDEST ANTITHESIS’

Marx recognised that mere education or the raising of awareness about the inadequacies of religious solace would not be enough to promote change. They were not ideas and practices that could be reformed through relations of sympathy, or by enacting some version of the liberal idea of the social contract. The need of a corporeal, dependent being for stability is so fundamental, so central to our very sense of being, that Marx’s analogy with an opiate is apt and illuminating. The comfort it provides, regardless of any contradictions the user may become aware of, is addictive and any attempt to give it up is traumatic and aggressively, and creatively, resisted. These ideas are held so deeply that the Idealists treated them as almost indistinguishable from the self—they are held so deeply that change, as Schelling saw it, would amount to the surrender, even death, of that self. Feuerbach captured this visceral sensitivity in his imagined reaction of ‘horror’ to the perceived reduction of human dignity that would follow any compromise of the hierarchical separation of mind and body. It is the reason why Marx (1975d, 276-7) anticipated the intestinal rejection of a more ‘human language’ as “an impertinence or insanity”.

The aversion to pain, and investment in comforting beliefs, runs deep for Feuerbach and Marx, but not just because those beliefs provide a widely embraced sense of stability, continuity and control. It is also because they reflect the very processes by which the actual sensation of self was originally experienced, comprehended, and

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51 Even as reformulated by Rawls (1972), his suggested imagined negotiation still takes the separate self for granted
thereafter acted on. For Feuerbach and Marx, the belief in the independent, non-corporeal self is so strongly held because it is grounded in the immediate, concrete experience of corporeal being. However, its attraction is not only as a comfort against the instabilities experienced after the constitution of the self, but the means by which we come to perceive of our selves as somehow distinct from the rest of the world. That understanding arises through the practical experience of the contradiction and clash between the corporeal and non-corporeal. From the beginning until the end of our lives, it is generated and revisited, although rarely significantly revised, through the clash between our ideas of the world, and the sensations we experience in acting in reliance on those ideas. It is what Marx called ‘praxis’. For Marx (1975g, 423), “all mysteries...find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of that practice”. Praxis, as Ollman (2008, 11) considered it, comprised consciously acting in the world in reliance upon a belief, and in the process both changing the world and testing the belief. However, it is more than that. Jha better captures its significance in describing praxis as “transcendence” (2010, 217): it “cannot be grasped...as mere manipulation or modification of things”. It is, as McNally (2004, 149) described it in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, “the moment of intersection and interpenetration of subject and object”, whereby both are changed. Kolakowski (2005, 1169) similarly characterised praxis. It is the process of becoming that follows from the appropriation of one’s object, as described in Chapter Six, which constitutes both the confirmation of that being and its change. This is not a process that occurs at some distance from one’s self. It is the site of the revisiting of the self, and involves the possibilities of both continuity and change. It has the potential to be so transformative as
to seem like the surrender or death of one’s self, as suggested by Schelling (Seigel 2005, 385).

Feuerbach presents that experience of contradiction and transformation as a part of the human condition from the earliest moments of our consciousness. He (1972b, 144) described it as:

…the original and most essential antithesis, an antithesis necessarily connected with the ego...the body, the flesh. The conflict between the spirit and the body alone is the highest metaphysical principle; it is the secret of creation and the ground on which the world rests. Indeed the flesh or, if you prefer, the body has not only a natural-historical or empirico-psychological meaning, but essentially a speculative, metaphysical one.

‘Original’, here, was not a historical reference, but a reference to the very foundation of our being. The experience of contradiction precedes any clear ‘idea’ of our self, at least in terms of one adopted from a common language, when as infants, even embryos, we encounter a surface or edge or object that resists us. Having once ‘made’ sense of that experience in terms of separation and distinction, it is an approach to the world that is then revisited, repeated and reinforced every day of our lives, albeit with different objects. This resolution, Wartovsky (1977, 376) points out, was not something independent of activity and not simply “an idea or thought”, but the “direct encounter” between sensibility and consciousness: it is not something the ‘I’ observes from the distance of some border or separation, but “the original locus of being itself, a spatiotemporal here and now”. It is an experience, once rendered comprehensible in
terms of individuation or separation from the world, that is as fundamental and unquestionable to our mode of life as the very ground beneath us.

As Marx (1975g, 423) insisted in his eighth *Feuerbach Thesis*, it was only through praxis that so central and profound a belief could be challenged.

Marx understood that any belief in the separate, independent self was not founded in logic or exclusively derived from abstract, universal, reason or objective science. As such, he understood that this idea could not be undone by some kind of autopoietic act of rational criticism. Rather, the belief expresses a very human experience of the world. This suggests why the dualist, separatist approach to the world has been resilient and popular. It reflects ‘real’, unavoidable, universal human experiences and to this extent it reflects a ‘common’ sense. It also indicates why Marx understood that the potential resistance to a non-dualist model is, and will be, strong and why the effort to critique and replace it will be substantial. Any such attempt is likely to be denounced as nonsense. Its rejection will draw on vestigial, primal, roots, such that the effort to replace it will need to draw on equally profound and common personal experience.

**RATIONALITY, IDEOLOGY AND CONSCIOUSNESS**

Marx did not provide any clear explanation as to how ‘class’ or ‘species’ consciousness was to replace the emphasis on separation and independence. On occasion, Marx thought such consciousness would arise in the course of the conflict between different
classes as a part of the development and operation of capitalism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx (Marx and Engels 1998, 60) forecast:

> ...a stage when productive forces and means of intercourse are brought into being which, under the existing relations, only cause mischief, and are no longer productive but destructive forces...and connected with this a class is called forth which has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages, which is ousted from society and forced into the sharpest contradiction with all other classes; a class which forms the majority of all members of society, and from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness.

For this class, the proletariat, “the condition of life forced upon [its members] becomes evident to [them], for [they are]...sacrificed from youth onwards” (Marx and Engels 1998, 88).

Here, Marx seems to imply that the development of ‘class’, and thence ‘species’ or ‘communist’, consciousness, was the product of a conscious, logical or rational evaluation prompted, even, necessitated, by the increasingly harsh conditions experienced under the capitalist system. However, the foundation of our sense of ourselves as separate in praxis, together with Marx’s emphasis on the deadening or restrictive influence of ideology, suggest that the development of class consciousness, and thereby species consciousness, would never be a simple rational process. For Marx (Marx and Engels 1998, 68), ideology comprised the “ideas of the ruling class...[given] the form of universality and present[ed] as the only rational, universally
valid ones". These ideas—this logic or rationality—suggest that something more was required.

Marx (1976, 1068) emphasised that, compared to other species, none surpassed humanity in its capacity to “Irish”, that is, delude, itself. Our capacity to reason could serve to both free and oppress us. Something more than reason—however provoking the conditions of work and life were for many workers—was required: something that could break the circularity of rationalisation. Corporeal pain was, in extremity, that mechanism. Our corporeal character made that potentiality an immanent, rather than exceptional, aspect of our lives.

**ALIENATION AND INSTABILITY – THE HUMAN CONDITION**

I have argued that the unstable, resistant character of our corporeal, inorganic body made some form of social interaction—a mode of production—necessary. It was the means by which our very being was constituted and given some stability and security. That interaction, however, only stilled and stabilised the species or society as a whole, and not its individual members, and then only on terms repeatedly compromised by the very process of becoming and, in extremity, crises. Whilst all benefited from interaction within the mode of production, not everyone either made an equal contribution of labour or received an equal share of the benefits. Participation did not mean an end to the experience of the tension and pain that characterises intersectual being. This was certainly the case for the capitalist system and the modes of production preceding it. Notwithstanding the advances each mode made in stabilising the relationship between
our organic and inorganic bodies, the changes came at no little cost, and, in Marx’s view, tended towards a concentration of that wealth—of that stability, security and freedom—among an increasingly small number of people. Marx’s history of changes in the mode of production was as much a history of increasing oppression, an increasingly uneven distribution of the burden of our corporeality and our open, interdependent character, as it was a history of securing a greater control of nature.

Even enjoying the benefits of increased productivity Marx and Engels described in the Communist Manifesto (1988), humans remained intersectual beings—constitutionally exposed to and unable to escape the tensions and contradictions of the relations that comprise us. We remain the ‘passionate’, ‘suffering’, beings Marx described in 1844 Manuscripts. We retain the character of ‘objective being’, exposed to that suffering inherent to being. As Hegel, before Marx, had held, the very character of being means to live with, and to seek to comprehend, the pains of our contradictions. We remain exposed to the destabilising effect emphasised by Schelling, Fichte and others—the manner in which those tensions denied a being rest, the sense and comfort of being ‘at home’. The character of an objective or intersectual being was such as to make the experience of anxiety, alienation and pain a consistent feature of the human condition and, as such, an ever-present potential catalyst for change.

It was the extremity of this instability—the manner in which it permeated the life experience of the swelling ranks of wage labourers—that made the emancipation of the proletariat contain “universal human emancipation” (Marx 1975e, 333). However, as Mulholland (2009, 319-320) has noted, the dismissal of the foundation of the
emancipatory potential of the proletariat, in its “assumed correspondence, when
idealised in thought, with certain philosophical abstractions”, has led to “strangely little
attention” being given to Marx’s confidence in this potential. My argument is that Marx
saw that potential as founded in their corporeal or material experience. Mulholland
(2009, 329) makes the same point, arguing that the “debilitating insecurity” promoted by
the capitalist system so affects the proletariat’s very being as to compel them to act.

For Mulholland, paying attention to the conditions of existence was a consistent feature
of Marx’s work. Engels had asserted in The Conditions of the Working Class in England
that it was “the insecurity of his position, the necessity of living upon wages from hand
to mouth, that in short which makes a proletarian of” the English working man (cited in
Mulholland 2009, 328-329). Mulholland reminds us that the same concern featured in
The Holy Family (already cited above) and in The German Ideology. With reference to
the Communist Manifesto, Mulholland (2009, 331) pointed out Marx’s recognition that:

Well before it develops collective volition, the proletariat has “instinctive
yearnings…for a general reconstruction of society”.

Mulholland (2009, 334) argues that Marx founded the ultimate development of working
class consciousness in a “psychological desire for security”.

However, I argue that Marx’s confidence had ‘deeper’ roots, and that his belief that the
proletariat would develop a form of consciousness with revolutionary potential was
founded in his theory of ‘species being’. The character of that being is instability and
flux. Marx had argued in The German Ideology:
the conditions of existence, the mode of life and activity of an animal or human individual are those in which its “essence” feels itself satisfied…if millions of proletarians feel by no means contented with their living conditions, if their “existence” does not in the least correspond to their “essence”, then [they]…will prove this in time, when they bring their “existence” into harmony with their “essence” in a practical way, by means of a revolution (cited in Mulholland 2009, 330).

The realisation of class and species consciousness is not an abstractedly rational exercise, but one driven by the experience of being. It is a matter, as Marx put it in *The German Ideology*, of ‘feeling’ and how those sensations and experiences drive us towards an understanding of the world. If production was the first—and continuing in the sense of foundational—act, as Marx asserted in *The German Ideology*, then finding some way to live with, or make sense of, that pain was equally part of that act.

**THE PROMISE OF ALIENATION**

In short, alienation was a precondition for change. Marx appears to have expected the extreme alienation of capitalism to provide an experience that was sufficiently common and compelling to overcome the independent sense of self and so provide a momentum for emancipation.

The distinction drawn by Margaret Archer between our experience of our selves, and the concepts we apply to interpret them, is useful here. Archer (2000, 126) has
described the experience of contradiction as the very foundation of both self-consciousness and of logic. Like Feuerbach, she treats that experience as an “original antithesis”. It is a universal or constitutive experience and how we gain a sense of our self. However, Archer points out that this experience does not dictate how we subsequently make sense of that experience. Archer (2000, 124) stresses that “a major distinction [should be] made between evolving concepts of the self, which are indeed social, and the universal sense of self, which is not, being naturally grounded”.

For Marx, our character as corporeal beings rendered imperative some means of securing our stability and continuity a part of the human condition. That need may be described as constitutive. It followed from the inherent tensions and contradictions of the intersecting relationships that comprise any being. However, how that need is met—the terms of the ideas and practices, the mode of life, that provide that sense of continuity—is not predetermined, and involves some degree of negotiability (depending on, amongst other things, the state of nature).

Marx anticipated that alienation would influence a growing number of people in such a pervasive, primal and painful way, as to provide an experience of corporeal/non-corporeal contradiction that could not be made sense of in terms of separation. He seems to have expected that the pain of alienated labour would reveal the free, separate liberal individual as a non-sense and a form of self-mockery: a concept and aspiration that bore no resemblance to the labourers’ lives. He anticipated that same

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52 The reference to continuity and not a continuous self is intended to acknowledge that the modern emphasis upon the separate self is only one such regulative idea. Other anthropologies and ontologies—such as those of the early and pre-industrial societies referred to by Marx and Engels (1988), have served (and can serve) to provide this sense of continuity.
experience, given its corporeal and social character, to provide an experience of limitation and interdependence—to provide the prompt and materials from which to make a different sense of their selves. Marx imagined the pain of alienated labour undertaken within the capitalist mode of production to be transformative.

**THE PROMISE OF ALIENATION – THE MASTER/SERVANT DIALECTIC**

In so doing, Marx drew heavily upon Hegel’s discussion of the process of testing and revising one’s concept of one’s self in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially the section entitled ‘Lordship and Bondage’. For Marx (1975e, 382-3, 385-6), the *Phenomenology* was the “true birthplace and secret” of Hegel’s works:

The *Phenomenology* is...concealed and mystifying criticism, criticism which has not attained self-clarity; but in so far as it grasps the *estrangement* of man – even though man appears only in the form of mind – *all* the elements of criticism are concealed within it, and often *prepared* and *worked out* in a way that goes far beyond Hegel’s own point of view. The ‘unhappy consciousness’, the ‘honest consciousness’, the struggle of the ‘noble and the base consciousness’, etc etc, these separate sections contain the *critical* elements – but still in estranged form – of entire spheres, such as religion, the state, civil life and so forth...he...grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man – true, because real, man – as the result of his *own labour*. The real, active relation of himself as a real species-being, is only possible if he really employs all his *species-powers*...and treats them as objects, which is at first only possible in the form of estrangement.
It was only when one treats part of one’s self as separate—treats a ‘power’ as an ‘object’—and attempts to put that partition into practice, that one is forced to discover the flaw in that treatment. One is forced to discover that part cannot be separated, subordinated and neglected, but remains part of one’s being.

As I have already shown, Hegel explored the manner in which one sense of self might be surrendered for another through the dialectic of the Master/Servant: Chris Arthur (1983) reminds us that Hegel distinguished between ‘slave’ (sklave) and ‘servant’ (knecht). Marx drew heavily on that account, although his materialist ‘inversion’ of it led to consciousness of a different universal, namely ‘species being’. This difference between their accounts is well known, but their mutual reliance upon the corporeal as central to the change in consciousness is not.

Hegel’s famous Master/Servant discussion is an account of the process by which a sense of self as separate and independent is revised. It provides an account that respects the attraction and resilience of this sense of self, but suggests the circumstances in which change might still occur. For Hegel, several elements were essential to enable that change. These included the consciousness of the other, and dependence upon that other to secure a sense of self (mutual recognition); the need for some profoundly traumatic experience to negate one’s sense of self as separate, independent and capable of domination; the need for prolonged servitude to thoroughly effect that negation; and the resistance of the corporeal to prompt the development of a new sense of self.
Hegel's account stresses the way in which alienated corporeal labour, in extremity, subverts the idea of the separate, independent self, and prompts recognition of more dependent sense of being. 'Prompt' is used deliberately here to suggest a catalyst or possibility, but not a certainty. Hegel's account recognises both the ambiguity of those prompts, and the capacity of ideas of separation to resist the contradictions they provide (it is this continuing attraction that leads to the 'Unhappy Consciousness'). This account also demonstrates how the very character of self-consciousness repeatedly produces those prompts—how a human existence is necessarily one where our concepts of independence are regularly contradicted. In short, a human existence is one in which the potential to realise our interdependence is immanent.

It is easy to see the parallels between Marx's account of alienation and Hegel's treatment and, from there, to understand the manner in which Marx expected species consciousness to arise. It is also easy to see some surprising parallels in their mutual reliance upon the contradictions provided by the corporeal and how Marx's reliance upon Hegel was closer to an adjustment than the radical revision suggested by his references to 'inversion'. This reliance was so close, in fact, as to suggest Marx did not need to provide an account of the emergence of 'species being' for Hegel had, in large part, already done so.

This is even more likely when the breadth of discussion, both within the Idealist tradition and elsewhere, concerning the conflict between concepts or consciousnesses of the self and their practical enactment, is considered. This conflict or tension was seen as the driver of change in both the Idealist and Romantic traditions. Fichte, for example,
exemplified the Idealist perspective in his characterisation of the struggle of the self to fully express itself. Hegel captured the extremity of this conflict in the confrontations with death that figured so prominently in his *Phenomenology*. The concept of ‘expression’, as used by rationalists like Spinoza and Leibniz, and in the works of the Romantics, similarly grappled with the tensions between different states of enactment of being. These tensions, and their capacity to promote change, were central to debates within Marx’s time: so much so as to require no repetition by him.

Marx did, however, reverse some aspects of Hegel’s account. Rather than initiate the change in consciousness with a life and death struggle, Marx ended with it. Following Hegel, Marx treated the experience of servitude, even within alienated relations, as initially experienced as one of independence—that of the ‘free’ labourer. Having been born into a capitalist mode of production, participation in its relations involved no change in status for a worker. Rather, the extremity of alienation, over time, worked to undermine her or his self-image as an independent individual. The process of alienation, rather than confirming the previous shock to consciousness, became the means of its undoing. However, rather like Hegel’s Servant, a person experiencing alienation within the capitalist system could resist its prompts to change by re-discovering, re-interpreting and re-inventing a sense of independence. Here, like Hegel’s Servant, Marx imagined that this resilience could only be overcome in the face of extreme and inescapable corporeal deprivation. Marx expected this to follow from capitalism’s inevitable and escalating drive for surplus value and, with that, its increasing encroachment upon the private sphere and upon the person’s health, wellbeing and capacity for reproduction.
Marx understood capitalism's extremities of alienation—its extreme application of the fantasy of freedom and separation—as the forge within which we could encounter the substance of our humanity. It was the delusional, anorexic, excessive shedding of our objective (or corporeal) selves that would push us towards the precipice of recognition. In short, he expected that the capitalist system would, ultimately, to remain its self—the system that grows through the accumulation of capital—devour its self, its very means of production. The relations of production, in other words, would confront the dilemma of Hegel’s ascetic consciousness, driven to try to deny its very bodily functions. In order to ‘be’, capitalism relies upon its relations of production to create surplus value. These relations, in turn, are reliant upon wage earners surviving on the lowest possible level of subsistence wages. Absent the expansion of new markets, new profits would be produced by greater efficiencies, which would often extract more from existing workers or replace them altogether. Marx imagined that, as capitalism became a world system, it would approach the exhaustion of those growth opportunities and, with that, eventually, confront the limitations of the corporeal.

Marx’s confidence in the transformative potential of the corporeal is rooted in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. It was the failure, in practice, in living out the denial of desire, and of our corporeality, having done all that was possible to give effect to those denials. The concept of the independent, non-corporeal self, founded as it is in experience, cannot be readily dispelled by logic. To attempt to do so is to remain, most often, within the self-supporting, and blinding, confines of that logic. It is to remain mired in the deceits of ideology. It was only through praxis—a praxis grounded only in extremity—that so central and profound a belief could be challenged.
THE PROMISE OF ALIENATION – PAIN

The promise of alienation ironically acknowledges the character of corporeal being as both a way of being within an intersection of relationships, and as the push/pull and limitations of those relationships. Mortality, as the absolute limit of being in individual terms was, in Feuerbach’s eyes, the catalyst by which we discover that our substance did not reside in our separate selves, but in the species. In confronting death—that is, the realisation that there is no individual infinity—an individual was also confronted with the experience of continuity, of infinity, in the species (1980, 17). For Feuerbach (1980, 132), in confronting death, a person faced absolute, undeniable limitation and that his “true being” was “determination”. Moreover, this revelation was not limited to the time of death, but could follow from the experience of limitation and of pain (1980, 126). For Feuerbach, pain was the means by which we moved to realise our character as ‘species beings’ because it produced a confrontation with being or substance itself:

…you experience limit and absolute, not-being and being all at once...you possess at once the feeling of the nothingness of the totality of your single being on its own and the feeling of sole lordship and reality of the substance that is perfect in itself (1980, 95).

Feuerbach, however, did not clearly say how this experience of pain effected the change in the sense of self. Having located the potential for transformation in the experience of pain and separation, it was but a small step for Marx to return to Hegel and draw on his dialectic of consciousness. This return, however, involved Marx’s most
pointed divergence from Hegel’s account. The invasive and destabilising effects of the corporeal—desire—faded from prominence in the *Phenomenology* with the emergence of modern society. It had been surpassed, sublated—still present and preserved—but was no longer a significant influence. Hegel assumed a certain economic efficacy and equity within the modern state—expecting that the majority of people would have their corporeal needs met, at least enough as to end the common experience of corporeal insecurity. Marx squarely contradicted this assumption. In his view, the processes of the modern state worked to the opposite effect, dramatically heightening the impact of the corporeal and the experience of an insecure, unstable self. Moreover, his materialist ‘inversion’ suggests another dimension to his critique: that, irrespective of the bounty of the state, irrespective of the mode of production, the corporeal (Hegel’s Desire) remained a continuing source of instability and insecurity—a continued prompt towards a different sense of self.

Marx’s theories of alienation, derived from Hegel’s reflections on the ‘Master/Servant relationship’ and the ‘Unhappy Consciousness’, developed Feuerbach’s insights into the importance of corporeal activity and resistance and the primacy of that experience as our anchor, axis and portal into the world. Corporeal labour, at the extremity of enslavement or alienation, has the potential to directly challenge the idea of the independent self by forcing a confrontation with limitation and pain. Hegel (2003, 124-5) held that it had this potential, even in the absence of life-threatening circumstances, as:

> The unhappy consciousness...finds itself merely desiring and toiling; it is not consciously and directly aware that so to find itself rests upon the inner certainty
of its self, and that its feeling of real being is this self-feeling. Since it does not in its own view have that certainty, its inner life really remains still a shattered certainty of itself; that confirmation of its own existence that it would receive through work and enjoyment is, therefore, just as tottering and insecure.

In forcing a confrontation of labourer and object within alienated conditions, the labour process forces a confrontation with the contradictions of the modern idea of the self. Labour is the process—the action or praxis—of the unification of being and object, of the appropriation of the object, in which we confront and express our humanity. This is the strength of the central emphasis placed by Hegel and then Marx upon activity. Corporeal activity—labour—provides for this confrontation, and for the conflict of the experience of alienation, of having the object of one’s expression torn away. The subsistence wages proffered in place of the objects of labour are no real substitute. Offered at minimal levels, they provide limited capacity to secure one’s needed objects. Moreover, the appropriation effected by means of that ‘pimp’, money, as Marx described it in the *1844 Manuscripts* (1975e, 375), is never the equivalent for the expressive act of appropriation. Labour, as daily experienced in a capitalist mode of production, potentially provided the extremity of objectification—of alienation from one’s necessary objects—that Marx saw as the ‘secret’ of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF PAIN**

In his early work Marx (1975e, 389-90) described the human condition as both “passionate” and “suffering”. Those experiences were of the human essence, as our
corporeality made a person dependent upon certain objects and painfully incomplete without them. To live without them, to live in separation from one’s necessary objects, was to experience alienation. The prolonged experience of that pain was, for Marx, potentially transformative. However, Marx did not explain why corporeal pain had that potential or why it could overcome the resilient belief in an independent, non-corporeal self.

Some insight is suggested by the works of Epicurus and Lucretius. They held that, in extremity, sensation served to disrupt the circularity of rationalisation. Sensation could force us to *make* a different sense of our experiences and overcome false, distorting, unsettling social beliefs. As Nussbaum (2009, 199) has pointed out, their argument is that an event can have such dramatic impact as to completely disrupt established ways of thinking and acting, when “the soul is left raw and unprotected, simply perceiving itself”. That is, such an event can render our pre-existing concepts so inadequate to explain that experience as to force their surrender and the search for new meaning.

Epicurus’ (and Lucretius’) accounts of sensation enabling access to the real, even when distorted by false beliefs, suggest some grounds for Marx’s confidence in the revelatory character of material labour and his recognition of those sensations’ mediation and distortion by false beliefs (together with the difficulty of altering those beliefs). Marx’s (2006b, 43, 98) emphasis on praxis echoes his description of Epicurus’ treatment of the senses as “heralds of the [truth]”. This suggestion gains further weight when Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is considered, given the catalytic function that corporeal pain served in those accounts.
Scarry’s book, *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), directly considers the transformative potential of pain. Fracchia (2008, 38) identified her as “one of the few critics…whose work follows Marx in his corporeal turn”. Beginning with the frequently challenged production of pain through processes of destruction (torture and war), Scarry (1985, 22) proceeded to consider the neglected moral significance of creative processes. In doing so, she provided some further insight into the intimate relation between alienation and pain, and to the centrality of “expression”, to a corporeal, objective being:

> All intentional states…take intentional objects: the more completely the object expresses and fulfils (objectifies) the state, the more it permits a self-transformation…conversely the more the state is deprived of an adequate object, the more it approaches the condition of physical pain (1985, 261).

Scarry (1985, 171) explored the connections between labour and pain: in her view, “work [was]…a diminution of pain: the aversive intensity of pain becomes in work controlled discomfort”. This diminution, however, is dependent upon the person being able to appropriate that object or to enable what Scarry described as a “referentiality” or reciprocity between creator and object. Within alienated relations of labour, however, that reciprocity is absent, and work is painful. It is this aspect of Scarry’s work that grounds the intimate connection between her reflections and those of Marx. As Scarry (1985, 258) herself put it:

> If the monumentally complex substance of *Capital* were to be described in a single sentence, it could be described as an exhausting analysis of the steps and
stages by which the obligatory referentiality of fictions ceases to be obligatory: it is an elaborate retracing of the path along which the reciprocity of artifice has lost its way back to its human source.

Both Marx and Scarry were deeply engaged with elucidating the circumstances in which that reciprocity could be re-established. Alienation and its pain were central to their thought. These experiences provided the catalyst for the concept of the independent, non-corporeal self to ‘totter’ and fall. Scarry went further than Marx, though. She argued that it was in the extremity of pain or alienation that the corporeal ‘betrayed’ the separate sense of the self:

The ceaseless, self-announcing signal of the body in pain, at once so empty and undifferentiated and so full of blaring adversity, contains not only the feeling ‘my body hurts’ but the feeling ‘my body hurts me’…Pain is a pure physical experience of negation, an immediate sensory rendering of ‘against’, of something being against one, and of something one must be against (1985, 47, 52)

In pain, the corporeal betrays our sense of self. In pain, just as Hegel imagined, two senses of the self clash ‘internally’. Whilst corporeal pain can be ambiguous and reconciled with a dual sense of self in many situations, in extremity, however, it has the capacity to overwhelm the distance and sense of separation on which that understanding relies.
Above all, in Scarry’s view, the extremity of pain dissolves the boundary between inner and outer senses of the self by overwhelming our sense of boundaries and separation (1985, 53). She saw pain as overwhelming and extracting the self from the privacy and security of the ‘internal’, notwithstanding its determined resistance. Pain reversed the dualist hierarchy, compromised our abstracted individuated independence, and undid our sense of self. In doing so, it returns us to the ‘original’ experience of the clash between the unlimited, non-corporeal with the limitations of the corporeal. However, in that extremity, we do without the ready resolution provided by the dominant model of the self. Pain overthrows, disrupts and destroys the common-sense, unquestioned status of that perspective on the world. It does so to such an extent that Scarry describes it as overwhelming and obliterating language. Its rawness renders previous ways of making sense of the corporeal obsolete:

Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned (1985, 4).

Extreme pain gives us access to our prelinguistic state. It denies us the capacity to speak in terms of our former concepts. It tears and strips away the layers we have constructed for our selves until all that remains is a remnant, an abstraction. In Feuerbach’s words (1980, 95), “in [our] pain, [we] assent to and affirm the essence, the species, the absolutely perfect universal, the actuality of which [we] deny in [our] understanding”.

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For Marx, the extremity of alienation also reduces us to an acute human abstraction; a person deprived of objects, with little left to give (only her or his labour). With that labour alienated—given over to another’s control—it strips us of that remaining sense of separation. In extremity, it returns us to the state in which we first made sense of painful contradiction (the ‘original’ experience), but stripped of the capacity to draw comfort from the dominant way of making sense of that experience. Kojeve, in his lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (1980, 22 and 47-8), emphasised just this point:

There is nothing fixed in him. He is ready for change; in his very being, he is change, transcendence, transformation, ‘education’; he is historically becoming at its origin, in his essence, in his very existence...Through animal fear of death (angst) the [Servant] experienced the dread or the Terror...of Nothingness, of his nothingness. He caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness, he understood that his whole existence was but a ‘surpassed’...a Nothingness in Being. Now...the profound basis of Hegelian anthropology is formed by this idea that Man is not a Being that *is* an eternal identity...Hence the [Servant], who – through fear of death – grasps the (human) Nothingness that is at the foundation of his (natural) Being, understands himself, understands Man better than the Master does.

This is the contradiction Marx relied upon as the catalyst for a different consciousness. Whilst Marx concentrated on economic cycles—booms and busts—without detailing their connection to a revolutionary consciousness, that consciousness rested on the non-negotiable demands of the corporeal. In an economic crisis, the capacity to ensure the subsistence of all people, and not just the proletariat, was put in jeopardy. In such a
crisis, the potential to confront the demands of the corporeal becomes much greater and, with it, a greater capacity for a new way of thought.

This extreme experience does not, however, simply produce a blank slate. Hegel's dialectic of the master/servant and the 'unhappy consciousness' suggests that the experience not only denies the capacity to adhere to the notion of the abstract, independent self, but drives a recognition of one's dependence on others or, as Hegel (2003, 109) put it, we get “a gift from above” that leads us to acknowledge that we owe our life to others. The development of consciousness charted in the Phenomenology as mutual recognition suggests that it is the “ego that is ‘we’, a plurality of egos and ‘we’ that is a single ego” (Hegel 2003, 103, 104). This provides the foundation of consciousness as part of, and dependent upon, one’s species. It is the argument of this thesis that it is equally the foundation for Marx’s description of communist humanity in the Grundrisse (1973, 242-3):

...they are not indifferent to one another, but integrate with one another, have need of one another; so that individual B, as objectified in the commodity, is a need of individual A, and vice versa; so that they stand not only in an equal, but also in a social, relation to one another. This is not all. The fact that this need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other, and vice versa, and that one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other’s need, this proves that each of them reach beyond his own particular need etc, as a human being,
and that they relate to one another as human beings; that their common species being is acknowledged by all.

**CONCLUSION**

For Marx, the long-standing idea of the self as independent and free of corporeal limitation was both flawed and oppressive. It presented alienation as a virtue and expression of the human essence. Its flaws and inadequacies, as a descriptor of the human condition, destined it to fail. He recognised, however, that this concept, and its consequential oppressions, would not be readily overturned as they are founded in the human condition. They are founded in the tensions, conflicts and pains that are inherent to an interdependent or intersectual corporeal being. They are founded in the daily experience of contradiction and resistance and effort—in the common experience or sensation of life. As such, Marx recognised that these beliefs and oppressive practices are not based on logic, and will not be responsive to it. Those beliefs were, for Marx, and those he drew on, so deeply founded, that only death or severe pain could undo them. For Marx, the transformative potential of pain—or alienation—lay within their oppressive extremities. Whilst not explained by him, the works of Epicurus, Lucretius, Hegel and others suggest that this ‘twin edged’ potential lies in the capacity of pain to overwhelm us and to deny, without limitation, our capacity to master and ‘make’ sense of ourselves. It lies in the loss of capacity to extricate ourselves from, and hence our forced confrontation with, the corporeal or material world.
CHAPTER NINE – A More Human Language

This thesis is borne of everyday experience, and seeks to respond to the pain, joy and promise of that experience. Through it, I seek to respect that pain, which has so often been dismissed as unspeakable, at least in polite company. I seek to promote a language, a way of speaking of a human life, and of human dignity, that does not brand that pain as negligible or bearable without the simple decency of acknowledging its presence, and its difficulties. More than this, I seek to celebrate those joys and moments of exuberance that are too often trivialised as leisure or relief, and as shallow and unrevealing. I seek a language that values that pleasure and does not dismiss its promise. To that end, I have explored both the meaning and the potential of Marx’s theory of ‘species being’.

In doing so, perhaps inevitably, a larger discussion has been entered: one that finds, in the expanse of human experience in the world, surprising resonances between the anxiety and pain of nineteenth-century factory workers and the aches and efforts of artisans and artists. Whilst the arc between them might appear long and wide—to adopt the words of Martin Luther King (in Washington 1986, 52)—it shares the common trajectory of repetition and of an absorbing, transforming immersion: a sense of unity within, and expansion beyond, the boundaries of previous experience. I argue that corporeal experience, whether in extremity or exhilaration, has the potential to take us beyond our current understanding of our selves. It has the potential—even in its more ordinary daily repetitive rhythms and prompts—to suggest a different way to make
sense of our selves: a way to embrace that part of our selves we call the corporeal and restore it to a full human dignity, and to end the schism that has divided the Western sense of the self. A ‘more human language’ will not only be inclusive of the corporeal, but borne of experience within it.

For all the pains, anxieties and difficulties that follow from our intersectual, interdependent being, there lies, by virtue of the same vulnerability, the capacity to exceed our limited understandings of our selves. There is the potential to experience a sense of unity, of immersion and expansion, of “ontological synchronicity” (Howe, 2003, 99), as the corporeal is of the essence of our being.

That, essentially, was the key claim made by Marx. The foundation of our selves, of our actions, and our pains and our joys, resides in our unity with the world and in a knowing or conscious engagement in that unity. To be human is not to be separate, independent or self-reliant. It is not to be distinct from the world—however described—but intimately bound up with it.

So intimate was this connection for Marx that he regarded the world as our inorganic body. So deeply dependent are we on that body that it makes us a ‘suffering’, ‘passionate’, vulnerable being, one that can only enjoy stability and security through the social interaction Marx described as the mode of production. Moreover, this open, involved character of being makes the experience of interdependence and of limitation—of always being bound up in others and the world, rather than free of all constraint—an ongoing one, and a repetitive goad to action. It has driven an effort to
subdue the world and free us from the pangs and punishments of desire and of vulnerability.

So successful has this social ordering of nature become that it is easy to overlook—or reject as pathologies or minor exceptions—its ongoing resistance, and the ebb and flow, clash and contradiction of those various relations or forces that comprise a society and its members. Like a consistent rhythm, the profound influence of our corporeal character is easily forgotten in the face of the melodies played out within its frame, yet the corporeal remains a defining feature of the human condition.

In this thesis, Marx’s theory has been explored, given its focus on inverting the privilege that has long been given to the location of our identity in the non-corporeal, and as separate from the world about us. It has been used to immerse our selves in our world and in those around us, in the hope that we recognise that nothing—not a human or any other being—exists independently in this world, but only in an ever increasingly complex, fragile, and extraordinary interdependence. It has been explored in order to promote a better recognition of the essentiality, diversity and promise of the corporeal, and an acceptance that it is not some burden upon, or contamination of, our essence, but central to it, and to its richest realisation. Looking to the future, and in response to debts present and past, it is hoped these explorations will help promote welfare policies that recognise both our interdependence and our corporeality and the influence both have on any person’s capacity to act. In particular, I hope this thesis demonstrates that the ideals of independence and self-reliance do not serve to promote human welfare or
wellbeing. All of these hopes rely upon making a new sense of our being—a sense which, for most, will seem non-sense.

The realisation of these hopes turns upon changing the way we think, speak and act concerning the corporeal. It requires a more corporeal, and, thereby, ‘more human language’. This development of “a human understanding, and human language” was the task Feuerbach (cited in Wartofsky 1977, 196) asserted in 1843. Marx (1975d, 276-7) took up that task, appreciating that:

We would not understand a human language and it would remain ineffectual. From the one side, such a language would be felt to be begging, imploring and hence humiliating. It could be used only with feelings of shame or debasement. From the other side, it would be received as an impertinence or insanity and so rejected. We are so estranged from our human essence that the direct language of man strikes us as an offence against the dignity of man, whereas the estranged language of objective values appears as the justified, self confident and self-acknowledged dignity of man incarnate (emphasis in original).

Marx, drawing on Hegel and others, appreciated that our activity in the world, as driven by a fundamental, constitutional lack or incompleteness—a dependence—made the corporeal inescapable, and essential, to all that we are, and can be. He appreciated that the scale of the corporeal’s resistance had shaped all previous human experience in its demands—a resistance that required the capitalist marshalling of human activity and resources on an unprecedented scale. Marx appreciated the uneasy, deep-seated instability of the relations between our organic and inorganic natures. It is the same
unease that is central to the long tradition of debate concerning ‘substance’. Marx’s works hint at the depth of that dis-ease or anxiety that is characteristic of the human condition and the way in which a valorisation of the corporeal “would be received as an impertinence or insanity and so rejected” (1975d, 276-7).

Through this thesis, I seek to progress that same task—the promotion of ‘a more human language’—and mindful of those difficulties described above. I am mindful that it contests a way of ‘making sense’ of our selves—and of our experiences of conflict and contradiction—that is well founded in our experience as corporeal creatures, and from which many take great comfort.

Yet this thesis is founded in hope drawn from the very source of those difficulties—the shared pains and anxieties of our existence. Drawing on Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx’s legacy, and on the insights of feminist and existentialist works, I believe there is hope for a different and better sense of our selves from what we have, so often, valued least and avoided so diligently. In those times in which our sense of our selves as embodied minds, as minds dominating bodies, is overwhelmed through pain, illness or injury, we are forced to confront our limitations. We find ourselves out-of-step, outside the ordinary rhythms in which we are our known selves, those rhythms with which we ordinarily experience the relations between our corporeal and non-corporeal selves, and between our organic and inorganic bodies. We find a sense of self for which we have no words (or none that preserve a sense of our full, dignified humanity). In those spaces—in those extremes—Hegel, Marx, and others such as Scarry, have found the opportunity to
make a new sense of our sensations of self. They found promise in limitation and failure.

In this chapter, I look to build on the foundations laid by Marx. I argue that the potential of corporeal experience to prompt a different understanding of our selves is far more immanent and promising than Marx realised. Drawing on feminist, existentialist and, to a lesser degree, postmodern and post-humanist scholarship, I argue that the experience of corporeal instability and anxiety is a much more everyday experience, and offers a greater opportunity for change, than Marx allowed for, given his emphasis on extreme conditions. This is not to ignore the intensity with which the corporeal is now disciplined. The same literature highlights the manner in which the discipline of the body has become one of the most prominent features of contemporary Western society. It is, however, to argue that the openness and vulnerability of our bodies to discipline is also the site from which we can experience our selves in ways that contradict the Liberal view, with its foundations in the traditional debates about substance. I argue that those corporeal contradictions continue to provide prompts towards transformation and that those prompts, if combined with a different way of making sense of them—a more human language—hold the promise of the development of a more just and interdependent way of life.

AN INHUMAN LANGUAGE

Marx viewed the proletariat as the class that could—and would—speak for all. He anticipated the extremity of alienation as providing them with an awareness of their
essential (inter)dependency. He anticipated this consciousness not just as a class consciousness, but as a truly human or species consciousness. Western society, however, has not reached the extremity of alienation anticipated by Marx, at least not to that extent necessary to secure species consciousness. The emergence of the modern welfare state and consumer society has served to blunt (for most) the extremity of deprivation anticipated by Marx. This is not to say, however, that Marx’s confidence was misplaced. The prompts provided by the corporeal, as relied upon by Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx, remain. Moreover, I argue that those prompts, if considered in light of other schools of thought, particularly feminist, existentialist and post-humanist thought, are far more frequent and immanent than Marx realised. The promise of transformation is not limited to extreme circumstances, but is also present in other places and practices of corporeal repetition. There is, in those places and practices, a surprising beauty to be seen and explored within the trajectory, if not the actual terms, of Marx’s theory. There the promise of the open, fragile, character of our being and of the beauty of the full realisation of our interconnections is suggested.

The corporeal prompts towards a different sense of self are not limited to the proletariat or to the relations highlighted by Hegel, Marx and Scarry. The roots of those prompts in desire (in a sense of incompleteness and of inadequacy to independently salve that desire) are paralleled by other experiences of the corporeal, such as illness and disability. Those suffering from chronic illnesses report similar reactions to those experiencing betrayal and disruption in extremity. Kleinman (cited in Shildrick 1997, 168) considered how serious illness challenges our unconscious reliance on the “fidelity of our bodies”, so much so that illness seems a “betrayal” placing us “under siege”. Margrit Shildrick
(1997, 168-9), drawing on Drew Leder’s work, similarly described the body as ordinarily invisible to us—an “absence”—with illness “forcing” a new awareness of the body, “…but that new awareness is not integrated into the sense of self; rather, the body is perceived, but remains other: ‘The body is no longer alien-as-forgotten, but precisely as-remembered, a sharp and searing presence threatening the self’…”. The experience of disabling or limiting pain or illness betrays our belief and experience of the corporeal as a mechanism subject to the non-corporeal’s ‘beck and call’. It betrays the separation and freedom of the non-corporeal self. Havi Carel (2008, 7, 38), in recounting the onset of lymphangioleiomyomatosis, a rare disease that progressively reduces lung functions with fatal effect, described how she “relinquished the sense of control over [her] life that [she] previously had” and how she “lament[ed] [her] helplessness, [her] body’s betrayal”.

Disabling pain and illness reveals our unity and interdependence—the incapacity of the non-corporeal to be realised in the absence of the corporeal. They reveal the intimate involvement of the corporeal in the non-corporeal, breaching the imagined boundaries, and highlighting the immanence of non-being within being. They demonstrate that our non-corporeal character does not meet the traditional insistence on separation. The corporeal, in its dysfunction, “totters and shakes” (Hegel 2003, 111-2) the independent sense of self, in a manner comparable to that suffered by Hegel’s Servant and Marx’s proletariat.

Accounts of others who do not conform to the traditional debate about substance speak of a similar experience of difference and resistance. Their experiences range from chronic illness, disability, old age and poverty, to women’s experiences of menstruation.
and menopause. Each involves a grinding, continuing confrontation with the resistant rhythms of our corporeality. Each speaks of the volatility of the body and its betrayal of the traditional debate about substance. Each speaks of a different way of making sense of our selves, and of a more promising, more humane, experience of that corporeality.

Many women have written of experiences of their bodies that canvass a different sense of the corporeal and of the self. Most women, from a young age, are regularly reminded of the assertiveness of their body, and the need for its maintenance and care. They experience a life in which the cycles of fertility assert themselves and regularly (absent intervention) contravene the imagined barrier of mind and matter, non-corporeal and corporeal, of dominator and dominated. For example, Martin (2001, 93) points out that:

> problems arise precisely where menstruation does not belong, according to our cultural categories: in the realms of work and school outside the home…[Many women find this a “hassle”.] The “hassle” refers to the host of practical difficulties involved in getting through the day of menstruating, given the way our time and space are organised in schools and places of work.

It is also, often, the experience of menopause. Here Martin (2001, 177) again points out that:

> The general cultural ideology of separation of home and work appears…when women are embarrassed at having their menopausal state revealed publicly through hot flashes. As with the hassle of menstruation, women are asked to do
what is nearly impossible: keep secret a part of their selves that they cannot help but carry into the public realm and that they often wear blatantly on their faces.

Their is an experience, if aired and considered, that richly contrasts the assumptions of non-corporeal freedom and independence, and demonstrates that lives of expression, meaning and worth do not have to be founded in domination of the body and the corporeal world. Women’s experiences provide for an alternative sense of substance. As Martin (2001, 197 and 200) has argued:

women…have it literally within them to confront the story [society] tells us with another story, based in their own experience…Because of the nature of their bodies, women far more than men cannot help but confound [the] distinctions [of nature versus culture] every day…Women interpenetrate what were never really separate realms. They literally embody the opposition, or contradiction, between the worlds…Because their bodily processes go with them everywhere, forcing them to juxtapose biology and culture, women glimpse every day a conception of another sort of social order.

Bordo (2003, 36) makes a similar point. It is an experience of limitation that has too often been unjustly amplified by the imposition of labours of corporeal care on women – of cooking, cleaning and caring for others. It is, however, that same immersion in the demands of the corporeal that has enabled so many women to make a different sense of their selves. It has, as Carol Gilligan (1993) has explored, enabled some women to experience and explore a mode of being based upon care, rather than domination – a
mode that promises a more representative image of our humanity and a sense of self founded in interdependence.

To consider, even briefly, women’s experience of corporeality is to glimpse the poverty of the ideal of independence that founds the traditional debate about substance. If we expand that consideration to the diverse experiences of the aged, those with disabilities, and those in poverty, for example, it reveals how few lives the equation of the human substance with the non-corporeal represents. Moreover, it is to appreciate that this definition of the human substance involves an act of profound cruelty, as it denies most people of the respect and dignity that follows from embodying the ideals of our truest humanity.

This was Marx’s objection to the liberal foundations of political economy. As canvassed in previous chapters, Marx objected to an abstract definition of our humanity—one that focussed on the non-corporeal, such as the will, and treated it as independent of the corporeal. As such, his objection was to the liberal conception of humanity, and its foundations in the traditional debates about substance. This “language of objective values” reflects our alienation from “our human essence” (1975d, 276-7), and does not describe the majority of humanity. It sets a standard for recognition that most cannot comply with. The failure to recognise this, notwithstanding that these people contribute to a shared life through the dominant mode of production, makes for an unequal burden. It makes for an oppressive, inhuman language and oppressive way of life. This was the core of Marx’s criticism, and a language he was confident would, in time, given the experience of the pain of alienation, be abandoned.
AN IMMANENT POTENTIAL

Marx’s dialectical model of the self emphasises the ‘needy’ character of humanity and describes that character as ‘passionate’, so as to highlight the extent it is shaped by need. In Marx’s view, the corporeal was always incomplete, always in the process of change. Whilst the mode by which that character’s demands are met might change, those demands remained immanent. Whilst they could be subordinated, postponed and distorted, the material character of the human condition limited the extent of any such negotiation. At base, the corporeal sought to realise its potential, even when opposed by the non-corporeal.

Marx’s descriptions of the working class bore out that underlying resistance. Whether through his descriptions of the deformities following from alienated labour or the chronic illness and malnutrition following from inadequate wages, the underlying critique was that capitalist practices did not meet the foundational needs of the human condition. Those descriptions documented the resistance of the corporeal to early capitalism.

My argument is that the experience of extreme corporeal pain, and thereby the potential to realise a different sense of self, is a far more common experience than Marx acknowledged. Moreover, I argue that potential can be realised outside the extremities imagined by Marx. The volatility of the corporeal means that it challenges the borders and disciplines that found the traditional approach to substance every day. Notwithstanding the demands of our will, the resistance of the corporeal is commonplace, ongoing and effective. We awake to its demands for expulsion (urination
and defecation) and incorporation (eating), which are repeated throughout the day. Throughout the day we experience its demands for rest, which we often combat in varied ways, only to ultimately succumb to them as the day nears its end. The corporeal sets the limits of our days and our activities—not our will.

The immanence and impact of the resistance of the corporeal is evidenced by the great range of social prohibitions and expectations that deny dignity and acceptance to those who expose the body’s unruly character before others. Cregan (2006, 30-1) emphasises these restrictions wide and powerful application:

The fact that people feel so ashamed of incontinence, uncontrolled flatulence, and any of the other infirmities of ageing or disability, is a direct product of the internalisation of…civilizing standards…This kind of dictum…leads to the pathologisation of what are essentially natural bodily functions. Incontinence, impotence and even pregnancy thereby become…conditions to be treated and contained.

This discipline or domestication of the body is a key fixture of modern society, as illustrated by Foucault’s work (1980, 1990a, 1990b, 1995). As Susan Bordo (2003, 149) has argued, our “contemporary culture appears more obsessed than previous eras with the control of the unruly body”. In these times:

preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness are not abnormal…[and] may function as one of the most powerful normalising mechanisms of our century, ensuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining “docile bodies”
sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of those norms (2003, 186).

The centrality of this discipline reflects Foucault's (1990, 94-96) recognition of the presence of resistance, or at least its potential, however muted, wherever power is exercised. Considering feminist perspectives, Shildrick (1997, 16) observed that the discipline of the body may "evidence detachment, even indifference", yet it equally reflects "a persisting anxiety posed by the threat of corporeal engulfment". So pre-occupied have the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries been with the discipline of the body, Bordo (2003, 150, 153) characterises that concern as "a central modus operandi for the control of contemporary bourgeois anxiety…".

This is, as Cerni (2007) points out, a function of the mode of production that now dominates in Western societies. With much of the direct or productive labour now undertaken outside of the West, the mode of production that Cerni describes as service capitalism remains profoundly disturbed by the corporeal, notwithstanding the supposed freedom gained through that form of production:

Their power [that of ‘the unproductive body and the objects it consumes’], although reduced to that of banal, familiar and immediate objects, is much more close and suffocating…even as it feels liberated from formal social sanctions, the unproductive self is continually assailed by feelings of personal anxiety, by insecurities about its own, most intimate personal existence…The body, the object, has become prison and limit to our experience (2007, paragraph 43).
To be accorded dignity in our society is then dependent on a person’s ability “to hide organic [or corporeal] processes” (Douglas cited in Cregan 2006, 105). However, feminist writers, such as Grosz (1994), Shildrick (1997) and Bordo (2003), have pointed out how precarious that dignity is, given how little the corporeal reflects the traditional debate about substance. Far from being controlled and not influencing or challenging our will:

Bodily fluids flow, they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed. In this sense, they betray a certain irreducible materiality; they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity...They are undignified, nonpoetic, daily attributes of existence...that all must...face, live with, reconcile themselves to (Grosz 1994, 195).

The everyday challenge presented by the corporeal has been extensively explored by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva (Cregan 2006, 96) describes the pre-linguistic (and underlying) state of the subject as the ‘Chora’, which is chaotic and involves no sense of the separate, independent self. That self is a cultural acquisition, and follows the process of learning a culture of “distance and detachment”—an acceptance and discipline of what is “good” and what is seen as “bad”:

That rejection is played out through abjection. Abjection is a semiotic (linguistic), but also an embodied, phenomenon. It is the rejection of and revulsion at what both is and is not the body. This largely centres on bodily wastes because this is a point at which the infant understands that those products are not “me”. Blood, bile, phlegm, faeces, mucus, etc, are both of the body and not the body. They are
abject and abjected. Dealing with this evidence of the body’s boundaries is both necessary and dangerous to the self-constituting subject. One must abject (expel) the waste and enter the clean and ordered symbolic state to function effectively as a social being. But at the same time, the abject hovers at the margins of life, never fully abolished: one bleeds, one is sick, one shits. Abjected matter is a remnant of the uncontrollably chaotic Chora, which threatens to “irrupt” into (disrupt) the symbolic order (Cregan 2006, 96).

The corporeal consistently challenges the independent, non-corporeal self. It constantly sheds, leaks, expels and demands our attention. It constantly contravenes the boundary upon which that sense of self is founded. Inevitably, regularly, the corporeal overwhelms the boundaries we imagine for it. It makes the threat of non-being, of not being the free imagined self, immanent:

The indeterminacy of body boundaries challenges that most fundamental dichotomy between self and other, unsettling ontological certainty and threatening to undermine the basis on which the knowing self establishes control (Shildrick 1997, 34).

Existentialist writers, such as Sartre (2003, 2007), considered the threat to a dignified or “authentic” human life in very similar terms. For the Existentialists, a dignified human life demanded a life lived with an awareness of the “radical duality between the human and the non-human” (Olson 1962, 135). That is, one that asserts the freedom of the human from the balance of the world. It is a life that conforms to the demands of the traditional debate about substance. Sartre saw this “authentic” existence as threatened by an
unameable, potentially overwhelming presence. Olson (1962, 39) summed up Sartre’s view of the in-itself, Being:

as a soft, shapeless dough or paste, something ugly and even obscene which threatens to engulf us...a solid and impervious mass, something hard and impenetrable before which we can only stand agape

Olson (1962, 39) emphasised that, for Sartre:

the in-itself is not a neutral something...from which man has nothing to fear. It is rather an absurd or contingent being of which we are constantly aware...and which poisons our existence, as Sartre’s choice of the word “nausea”...sufficiently indicates. The hero of the novel *Nausea* is made to say of this experience: “It took my breath...At one blow it was there...The diversity of things, their individuality, was nothing but an appearance, a varnish. The varnish had melted. What was left were monstrous soft masses in disorder, naked in frightening nudity”.

Sartre’s language bears a marked resemblance to that used by some feminists, such as Elizabeth Grosz, to describe the leaky, disorderly body. My argument is that this similarity brings out the ground of the threat perceived by the Existentialists. It is the threat posed by the corporeal to the independent sense of the self, which contradicts the traditional approach to substance. It is the underlying, pervasive sense of “radical insecurity” Heidegger described (Barrett 1990, 136). Sartre’s language suggests the corporeal and its excess beyond the concepts we invent for it, its excess over the limits
our concepts imagine apply to it, and its threat to the imagined primacy of the non-
corporeal. This similarity is readily apparent in Grosz’s (1994, 194, 195) explanation that
corporeal anxiety involves a “horror of submersion, the fear of being absorbed into
something which has no boundaries of its own”—the disturbance and threat provoked
by the corporeal because it refuses to conform to “the notion of an entity”.

This is the anxiety explored by the Existentialists—the fear of that which cannot be
named or categorised, which cannot be known and thereby made subject to control. It is
the fear of that which is not a being within the Western tradition of substance. As Tillich
(2000, 36-7) put it:

…anxiety has no object, or rather, in a paradoxical phrase, its object is the
negation of every object…He who is in anxiety is, insofar as it is mere anxiety,
delivered to it without help…The only object is the threat itself, but not the source
of the threat, because the source of the threat is nothingness…

It is the threat posed by the corporeal to the independent concept of the self; a threat
that cannot be readily located within the terms of a separatist, or substantive, ontology;
a threat for which we have no concept.

Once the threat of engulfment is understood in this way—as the threat posed by the
corporeal to the independent self—Existentialist thought, with its emphasis on the
immanence and potential of anxiety and anguish, reinforces my argument that the
catalyst for a more human, or authentic, life may not be so remote nor extreme as
death, extreme pain or extreme alienation. It may be immanent in life and far more
Contrary to their focus on exceptional situations, I argue that the experience of corporeal resistance and limitation is no farther away than the kitchen sink or toilet. It is the constitutional experience, which is born of the need to re-constitute or reproduce our being—our independence in the traditional sense of substance—every day.

This emphasis on the immanent, everyday influence of the material world is a central feature of recent post-humanist scholarship. Post-humanism presents the corporeal as active and resistant. It highlights the 'stand-in-the-wayness' of matter (Hodder 2012, L515) or the 'negative power...of things' (Bennett 2010, 190) and their 'intransigent' (Coole and Frost 2010, 1), 'resistant' and 'recalcitrant' (Bennett 2010, 190) character. This scholarship presents matter's 'positive, productive power' (Bennett 2010: L191) and vitality (Bennett 2010, L21, Fraser et al 2005, Thrift 2008, 67). Matter is treated 'as a transformative force in itself' (Tuin and Dophyn 2010, 164) and 'as a moving force, as push' (Thrift 2008: 67). It is not merely resistant, but 'dynamic', 'exuberant', and 'effervescent' (Barad 2007, 170, 177). For post-humanist writers, such as Coole and Frost (2010, 10), matter is engaged in 'choreographies of becoming' in which "matter becomes" rather than..."matter is". So prominent and pervasive is the influence of

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53 The Existentialists emphasise the experience of finitude and instability as a catalyst for the realisation of a more human life. They argue that this experience is necessary to distinguish one’s self from the inauthenticity of habit—to distinguish one’s self from the relationships that, in their view, framed and deadened it. Grounded in an emphasis on anxiety and anguish, they asserted that the realisation of the independent self relied upon the anticipation—or imagination—of the one experience of pain and limitation, of non-being, that they saw as truly individual: one’s own death. However, one does not have to consider so abstract an experience—so unimaginable an experience—as one’s own death. Whilst the Existentialists justifiably understood the imagination of one’s own death as a catalyst for passion, they did not need to rely upon so abstract an experience. In part, they focus on the extraordinary event of death because they overemphasise the anaesthetising effects of habit upon the ordinary course of life. It is also because their Cartesian emphasis—with the exception of Heidegger—blinded them to the basis of the fear of death, which I argue, drawing on Marx and Feuerbach, is our corporeal experience. It blinded them to the proximity of other catalysts for a more human existence.
matter, that Elizabeth Grosz (cited in Hodder 2012: 1538) observed that ‘we need to accommodate things more than they accommodate us. Life is…the adaptation…to the exigencies of matter’.

Whilst, absent extremity, the resistance of the corporeal may not produce the raw prelinguistic state Epicurus or Scarry imagined, my argument is that it will, through its volatility and instability, repeatedly provide prompts for a new understanding of the corporeal and, thereby, of the self. Grosz (1994, 118, 119) described this immanent potential in the course of criticising approaches that treat the body as a passive text, in referring to:

- a certain resistance of the flesh, a residue of its materiality left untouched by the body’s textualization…a [causality] or flesh outside of or prior to inscription,
- something which somehow, being unthought, resists determinate production.

The experience of limitation and contradiction is commonplace. It is a part of our constitutive or reproductive processes and is not limited to the extremities discussed by Marx. The flowing, becoming character of our bodies repeatedly contradicts the idea of ‘substance’ and prompts us towards a different language. The corporeal, as expressed in all the complexities of a mode of production, a way of life, provides prompts towards a different sense of self. Those prompts, whilst not so ready a catalyst as the extremities imagined by Hegel, Marx and Scarry, are part of the everyday experience of our corporeality. They make the potential for transformation—for a challenge to our current way of life—immanent, so much so that the discipline of the corporeal is likewise necessarily asserted and re-asserted every day.
Having regard to Marx’s works, and those he drew on, I have argued that our corporeal, intersectual character makes anxiety an endemic feature of the human condition. The instability of our bodies repeatedly challenges their treatment in terms of ‘substance’. They demand a constant discipline. In all cases, however, the permanent, comprehensive suppression of our corporeality is an impossible task. The corporeal is volatile. It is ever and always on the point of, and in the process of, transformation. It is always in the process of becoming. The body is not the passive, mechanical instrument of the separatist imagination, but the product of life-long vigilance and discipline. It is not the imagined domination of the non-corporeal, but a life-long losing battle, a condition of endemic anxiety. For the independent self, for that sense or concept of being, it is a life that is always under threat of disproof and annihilation, of non-being. It is a life of anxiety but, for that reason, also one of promise.

**THE OPENNESS OF HABIT**

This is not to claim some irresistible or irreversible effect for the prompt provided by the corporeal. That could only be seen as misconceived and naïve, considering the longevity of the capitalist system, and of patriarchy, amongst other oppressive social relations, which clearly demonstrate that the prompt has not realised its potential. Habit—ways of living and producing—has clearly resisted the promptings of the corporeal, at least in terms of any fundamental change to the outcomes of those relations.
As intersectual beings, we gain our continuity and apparent substance, in the traditional sense, from the discipline and support of habit. As explored above, Marx, drawing on Hegel, understood the essence of any being to be externally located in its objects, and the becoming—the activity and agency—of that being turning on unification with those objects. Hegel called the regular ways in which that process of unification occurred ‘habit’.

Marx, drawing on Hegel, pointed out that this process of unifying essence comprised activity, and that this activity was characterised by a particular style of action, a way of life or a mode of production into which each human being was born and lived. It was this mode of activity that provided the continuity in the self from the ‘outside’. The strength and momentum of habit—of a mode of production—is why Marx’s reference to a particular society as an ‘ensemble of relations’ was so apt: so steadying are its rhythms that participating members work together, producing a co-ordinated performance, one that tends to overshadow any individual discord.

Habit could then be seen to deaden the sensitivity to opportunities for change. Habit, by its nature as repeated activity, can be seen to continue to discipline the individual.

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bending the potential for change emerging from corporeal contradiction back towards
the mould and mentality of the dominant way of life. In this sense, Malabou (2005, 75)
drew on Hegel to conclude that:

The Hegelian man is above all a man of habits, and that means, paradoxically, a
disappearing subject. The more closely habit is studied, the more it becomes
clear that human subjectivity is constituted in self-forgetting; consciousness and
will, under the influence of repeated practice, win their force through a kind of
self-absenting.

The Existentialists describe this in terms of lifelessness or inauthenticity. For those who
imagine a person conscious of, and resenting, these restrictions, but overwhelmed by
them, the repetition of habit, of a mode of production, of alienated labour, might better
resemble the punishment of Sisyphus. It might resemble the imposition, by forces
beyond contest, of a tortured life of pointless effort.

In those circumstances, it is easy to imagine that the sparks of initiative and resistance
that are inherent in becoming will ordinarily be blown out by the sheer weight or
momentum of habit. However, the influence of habit, or a mode of production, is not so
comprehensive. It does not determine and still every tension and every contradiction in
every individual. Moreover, a habit—or a mode of production—only has a stabilising or
limiting effect because of the openness of individual beings (their openness to ‘external’
influences), which also involves openness to contrary influences, and thereby change. A
habit or mode is not just the punishment of Sisyphus: a fruitless, painful repetition.
There is promise and beauty in repetition. Alienated, repetitive labour is not just
comprehensive lifelessness or resignation, but an arena of potential transformation. This is a key suggestion from Hegel’s Master/Servant dialectic. There, repetition, the subjection to ongoing labour, enabled transformation and was of equal import to the ‘shock’ of subordination in effecting that change.

Richard Sennett (2008, 175) has aptly named the comfort and productivity of repetition as “rhythm”. As in music or dance, rhythm provides the basis upon which we construct the melody of our lives. It provides the stability from which we can identify and engage in our chosen projects and activities. It is the basis for the experience that Scarry described, and many experience, as disembodiment, of being relieved of what Bordo (2003) has called the “unbearable weight of being”. It provides relief and enables some agency. Moreover, as each endeavour succeeds, it has a highly productive effect on agency. As Scarry (1985, 262) has emphasised, it is “self-amplifying”.

The intersection of structural relations in each unique individual space makes that space not only a site of continuity and consistency with its broader, constituting, social relations, but also the site of their potential contradiction. Whilst habits—or modes of life—tend to provide stability and consistency on the scale of the social, their intersection in each individual self can tend to the opposite effect, making the self the site of contradiction. As I have argued, once this interaction of constituent relations is contemplated, the potential for those interactions to support some (and interfere with other) relations within the self can be allowed for. The spaces opened up by the interference—or contradiction—of those relations can then be understood as the spaces in which possibilities for change exist. For those reasons, I have suggested that the self
is better understood as an ‘intersection’ of relations, rather than Marx’s ‘ensemble’, with its connotations of comprehensive coordination. I have also suggested that an even better metaphor might be that of a road intersection: at intersections, delays, interference, damage and sometimes destruction are experienced; hence ‘intersectual’, rather than ‘ensemble’, being emerges as a more effective metaphor.

That said, the larger social structures and processes of habit, the subject of much of Marx’s later work, are also unstable. Rather than endless, inescapable, uninterrupted repetition, Marx saw the larger ‘ensemble of relations’ constituted by the capitalist system as characterised by a tendency to crisis. The consequences of any such crisis—the ‘booms’ and ‘busts’ of the capitalist system—would then (and do) reverberate through the various participants (to varying degrees), amplifying the ‘fault lines’ upon which those intersectual selves stand.

**THE PROMISE OF HABIT**

A life of habit, of living within a particular mode of living, of production, is not a rigid or static existence. Not only can one not step in the same river twice, as Heraclitus maintained, one cannot maintain a habit. Like a spinning top, absent renewal, its balance and speed are destined to decay, degrade and change, and, with them, the influence they exert upon us. The strength and promise of habit is then, surprisingly, its finitude.
In the midst of its discipline and restraint, a habit is also an opening up. For habit to exert its influence, its objects must be open to the ‘external’, and so capable of profound change. This makes the experience of repetition not that of absolute fixation or limitation, but an arena of transformation, even if the pace of that transformation is as slow as a seaside’s erosion. The experience of repetitive labour is, likewise, not a place of comprehensive alienation, lifelessness or resignation. In the midst of oppression, the tinder and spark of creativity and resistance remain. It was this combustible potential that Marx comprehended in identifying the transformative potential of alienated labour.

This potential is the product of the ongoing, unavoidable friction between a worker and his or her object. Both Marx and Hegel relied upon that experience of resistance to ground the process for a new consciousness, but its promise is not limited to the extremity of threat or oppression they relied upon. It is, as Richard Sennett suggests in *The Craftsman*, a product of the condition of *homo faber*—humanity as a being that makes artefacts. That is, it is a potential of interdependent, corporeal being.

Sennett (2008, 227-8) makes a useful distinction between a boundary and a border. The former is intended to exclude; the latter to, selectively, permit exchange. Moreover, what appear to be boundaries—distinct, unchangeable separations—are often transformed into borders, simply by virtue of the encounter between the differences they embody. Sennett (2008, 228) illustrates this by reference to the walls of medieval cities. Built to mark the extreme periphery of what was treated as the essence of the city—its central buildings and spaces—the medieval city wall became the place where those not of the city interacted with those entitled to reside within it. Moreover, this encounter was
inevitable: a city was dependent upon those outside it to provide so much of its corporeal necessities. Hence, an imagined absolute boundary setting the ‘substance’ of the city always tended to be porous and partake in the nature of a border.

Habit is a means of imposing continuity upon the changeable, and discipline upon the free: it is a process of boundary making and keeping. As such, its being—like the medieval wall—is comprised of the relation of difference: it draws on both the characters of continuity and change, discipline and freedom.

Building on this distinction, Sennett (2008, 209) suggests that a site of corporeal resistance could be understood as a boundary or border. In his view, such a site, like a boundary, was a place of contradiction—of the adjacent positioning of two unlike domains and, hence, a site of potential transformation (2008, 210). It is not a great leap to draw a comparison with corporeal labour: it is the encounter of the ever-adjacent domains of the corporeal and non-corporeal. In facing the resistance of an object, and our limited ability to shape it to our desires, we dwell in that border zone, or “working space” considered by Sennett. It is the same zone in which Hegel has the servant, after his initial subordination, dwell. For Sennett (2008, 211), it is this dwelling in contradiction and resistance that provides the potential for knowledge of one to affect the other; for knowledge of limitation within the corporeal to leak and move through the porous border of dualism to affect the way we consider our humanity.
However, Sennett (2008, 160-1) argues that this productivity is dependent upon a capacity to accept, and dwell patiently in, error—a capacity to accept limitation. For Sennett, this capacity is a consequence of the positive engagement of the craftsman—the unalienated character of her or his labour provides the commitment to overcome frustration and persevere. However, the obligation to work, even in alienated conditions, does not render Sennett’s reflection irrelevant: even for an alienated worker, the commitment to persevere towards a resolution remains, notwithstanding it is, in part, imposed from without. This issue provides even less difficulty when one accepts that alienation is rarely exhaustive, but leaves some, often much, room for positive investment in work. It is the manner in which this capacity to work with resistance develops and succeeds—transforms the boundary into a border—that speaks of potential for knowledge of the corporeal to shift domain and undermine the dominance of the traditional approach to substance.

The craft of glassblowing served as Sennett's illustration. Drawing on the experience of Erin O'Connor, he described how, in order to make a more complex wineglass, she had to change her awareness of her body in relation to the materials she worked on. O'Connor found that she had to experience a “continuity between flesh and glass”, to become “absorbed in” it, to “become the thing on which [she was] working” (Sennett, 2008, 173, 174). She had to lose awareness of her body as separate to the glass and “be in the thing”. It was also critical that she did not focus on the material as it then was,

55 Here, too, one can recognise echoes of the strategies proposed by Epicurus and Lucretius, as discussed in chapter two
56 In fairness to Sennett, it must be emphasised that he argued that the contemporary work practices of separating “head and hand”, that is, design and labour, harmed the “head” (the development of skill). Sennett does not go so far as to assert that the separation leaves no room for mental engagement (2008, 45).
but to anticipate what it was becoming—she had to engage in “corporeal anticipation” (2008, 174-5). This capacity to become actively absorbed in the changing material was, moreover, dependent upon repetition.

Repetition enabled a transformation, a boundary crossing-conversion. Sennett’s argument (2008, 175) reveals that repetition, far from being the punishment of Sisyphus, can be more than an instrumental good:

We might think, as did Adam Smith describing industrial labour, of routine as mindless, that a person doing something over and over goes missing mentally; we might equate routine and boredom. For people who develop sophisticated hand skills, it’s nothing like this. Doing something over and over is stimulating when organised as looking ahead [in the sense of corporeal anticipation]. The substance of the routine may change, metamorphose, improve, but the emotional payoff is one’s experience of doing it again. There’s nothing strange about this experience. We all know it; it is rhythm.

Rhythm has a beauty of its own, and it is a beauty that is enjoyed and accessed on an everyday basis by many people. This is not an exceptional experience, but an everyday immersion and prompt. This is the ‘human life’ Lucretius urged us to ‘yield’ to.

I differ from Sennett in one respect, however. His work suggests the domination of matter by thought—the manipulation of the ingredients for a glass into the intended form. Implicit in this effort, however, is a recognition of the resistance provided by those raw materials. Absent a surrender of the abstract idea of the glass and immersion in the
sensation of the material, the glassblower failed to achieve her ends. It was only in her yielding to, and being informed by, the resistance of those materials—that is, through a form of praxis—that she was able to successfully manipulate them. She had to enter into an interdependent relationship.

**THE PROMISE IN PLEASURE**

I have argued that the experience of corporeal pain has the potential to prompt a different understanding of our substance and selves. In experiencing our absolute dependence on others to sustain our selves, extreme pain forces home the interdependence of bodies we previously believed were independent of each other. Moreover, I have argued that this pain need not be as extreme as suggested by Marx’s work, and that the prompts towards that sense of self are far more everyday and immanent. I also want to suggest that something of that potential also resides in our experiences of corporeal joy and pleasure. Indeed, I want to suggest that those experiences may give us a glimpse of the exhilaration that a fully interdependent life, and one that values and embraces our corporeality, might provide.

Much of Sennett’s insight into the corporeal reflects his experience as a musician. His work as a philosopher has drawn much from the adjacent presence of those two domains within his life. Similar insights come from the life of a person who studies both philosophy and dance. The experience of the joy and beauty of dwelling, and working,
with resistance, is a common exhilaration for both a musician and dancer\(^{57}\) (and, as Howe indicates, for many involved in like activities, including sports). In both music and dance, there is the experience of a “physical boundary” (Howe 2003, 100). In both, the acquisition of skill involves repeatedly reaching for a particular resonance—the effort to bridge that boundary. For a dancer, it is often the capacity to draw a particular line from finger to toe, to rotate through one’s hips whilst preserving that line, or trace the perfect arc across a floor. Undertaken to become a particular image or ideal, repetition is, however, not merely a process of learning or discipline, but, once at a certain level of skill, a pleasure in itself. It is the pleasure of immersion and losing the sense of separation of mind from body and body from floor (or partner) that Sennett (2008, 173, 174) described as the “continuity between [one’s own] flesh”, and that of one’s partner and the floor. It is that sense of expansion and presence across the extent of the dance floor that flows from this corporeal immersion and ceasing to treat that floor as ‘other’. Howe (2003, 93), in considering the experience of professional athletes, called this “the experience of reaching the self out beyond its apparent boundaries”. It is the pleasure of feeling simultaneously deeply ‘in’ one’s body and expanding well beyond it. It is an experience of limitation and repetition that is equally one of expansion and escape.

Martha Graham, in her film *A Dancer’s World*, spoke of this promise—and the beauty—of working with corporeal limitation and resistance as a freedom achieved through rhythm, repetition or discipline:

\(^{57}\) The consideration of dancers’ experiences seems even more appropriate when the parallels within Greek ontology are drawn. Stone points out the manner in which they equated form and rhythm, with the former passing and decaying, and that Plato expressly used dancing as an illustration of their relationship (2006, 100–1).
It is here in the studio that the dancer learns his craft...The dancer is realistic. His craft teaches him to be. Either the foot is pointed or it is not. No amount of dreaming will point it for you. This requires discipline. Not drill, not something imposed from without. But discipline imposed by you on you yourself. Your goal is freedom, but freedom may only be achieved through discipline. In the studio you learn to conform, to submit yourself to the demands of your craft so that you may finally be free (cited in Morris 1996, 35).

It is an experience that suggests a different description to Sennett’s ‘stimulation’, although equally positive. Howe (2003, 99) points out that the goal is not a crude discipline or domination, with its emphasis on separation. Rather:

The goal...is not victory over one’s body at all...It is unity: the regaining, for those brief moments for which it lasts, of perfect immediacy between body and mind.
The point...is to limit, and even to close, the distance between self and body...[and to enjoy] that absolute freeing sense of ontological unity that can only occur when mind and body are wholly in sync with each other, when intention is translated into effect seemingly without effort or intervening formulation of means or method...moments of ontological synchronization.

This sensation of being ‘in’ one’s body, and of the expanse of being it invites, can be understood as another experience of the “opening” described by Heidegger (1996). This is the opening of the clearing Heidegger spoke of, prompted by the experience of the dysfunctional tool. Here, the body is an instrument that resists and creates the opportunity to better perceive that tool, an opportunity for a better sense of Da-sein, for
a more human language. Whether a craftsman working with wood, clay or glass, a musician working with, and against, the resistance of her fingers, or the dancer seeking a particular movement of his leg, in each case the corporeal prompts the opening of a different world in the same way as an ill-suited tool.

This is not to say that replacing the independent, non-corporeal sense of self is within as easy a reach as Heidegger’s hammer. It is to say that the prompt—the catalyst—provided by the corporeal is. It is to say that it is as commonplace as our daily corporeal activity and that we need not look for it solely in those places dominated by pain or oppression. It is to say that some shapes and forms and suggestions of the full beauty of our humanity, and the tender, expressive, fragility of our interdependence, is also expressed in other relations that comprise us. It extends to the pleasure of the craftsman, lost in concentration on his task. It includes the discipline of the dancer, immersed in the perfection of a movement. It is as everyday and familiar to us as the pleasure of our stride. It is, as Sennett, pointed out, the pleasure we find in rhythm. It is the process, the rhythm, by which we stabilise and unify our selves.

**A MULTIPLICITY OF RHYTHMS**

I look to build upon Marx’s insights into the implications of our corporeality: in particular, Marx’s realisation of the unavoidable, pervasive and profound influence of the mode of production as the mode or rhythm by which we stabilise our being. That mode of production sounds a rhythm that permeates an entire society. Its influence, however, still allows for the co-existence of other modes of being, other forms of engagement
between our organic and inorganic bodies. It allows for the recognition that different human capacities and characteristics may be created and maintained in a different mode, thus stabilising a particular society. In fact, the greater the success of a particular society’s stabilisation of its inorganic body, the greater that capacity for diversity will be.

Lukacs (1978, 96-7) also saw this as following from the increasing power and complexity of capitalist system. In his view:

It is…not difficult to see that, the more developed a society is, the broader and more ramified are the mediations that link the teleological project of labour with its actual accomplishment, and the role of chance must correspondingly increase. The chance relationship between natural material and its socially determined working-up often fades, and even seems to disappear in very far-reaching mediations…yet the element of chance still increases in the individual alternatives; and this is all the more so, the more ramified these become, the more removed they are from labour itself, and the more their content is oriented to inducing men to a further mediation by way of a mediating act.58

I have used the image of rhythm to convey the pervasive influence of a mode of production. Within Marx’s ‘sphere of freedom’—and in lesser spheres of freedom, in those less alienated aspects of other societies—that metaphor allows the imagination of a less urgent, slower paced rhythm, resembling the drawn out swings of a great pendulum. Once established, its momentum—its habit—demands less discipline, and

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58 This experience of ‘fading’ following from the distance between volatile nature and lived experience in capitalism might explain the emphasis on the autonomy of different ‘levels’ or spheres of activity that appears in Althusser and Balibar’s (1997) work.
allows a longer interval of time between its soundings. It provides the space for other
rhythms, other sounds, other modes of being, much like the manner in which two
separate recordings of music are often mixed or ‘mashed up’ so as to make one piece
of different rhythms and melodies. It provides the space for a more complex ‘ensemble’.

It provides a frame within which to understand the experience of gender, race, or
disability, for example, as each involving particular forms of access to inorganic
nature—forms that, in some instances, have a far greater influence upon a particular
individual or group than that characterising the society in which they live. Here,
corporeality continues to found the human condition, including the interdependence of
our organic and inorganic bodies, yet allows room for different modes of the two
relating, depending on the different ways in which different peoples, with different life
experiences, have learned to make sense of their selves.

It allows for the recognition of the existence of different sensations of the self—and
different ways of then making sense of one’s self—and, with those, a range of other
contradictions to that sense of self based on separation, independence and self-
reliance. It enables an appreciation that, for many, that mode of being most influencing
their life—such as traditional ideas of femininity and the resulting obstacles confronting
women in paid employment—involves a very different experience of being, of making
sense of their selves, and a substantial experience of prompts towards a different sense
of self than that founded in alienated labour as imagined by Marx.

This reading of Marx’s legacy may suggest a postmodern or poststructural approach.
However, it is, in part, intended as a corrective to the manner in which too many within
that school of thought have neglected the centrality of the corporeal. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* exemplifies this difficulty, with her emphasis upon performativity and treatment of the body as the passive and completely plastic means for the staging of those performances. Whilst much attention has been given to embodiment and its variations in postmodern literature, too often, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, the effect of postmodern thought has been to treat the body as so plastic as to effectively erase it. As Fracchia (2005, 57) emphasised in his review of the literature, they have “[tended] to dissolve the materiality of the body”. In some senses, Bauman’s postmodern nomad (1993, 240) exemplifies this neglect:

Pulled forward by hope untested, pushed from behind by hope frustrated…The vagabond is a pilgrim without destination; a nomad without an itinerary. The vagabond journeys through an unstructured space; like a wanderer in the desert, who knows only of such trails as are marked with his own footprints, and blown off again by the wind the moment he passes, the vagabond structures the site he happens to occupy at the moment, only to dismantle the structure again as he leaves.

The nomad only appears to engage with the paths he makes himself without reference to the world, despite the power of the metaphor critically being dependent upon the radical alterity and resistance of the desert. His image ignores the dramatic influence of the desert itself on the nomad’s choices. This is the attraction of a corporeal or

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59 Although, it appears that Butler’s more recent works (*Bodies That Matter*, 1993) have responded to this critique and recognised the influence of the corporeal through the use of Aristotelian concepts (Stone 2006, 61-4).
materialist dialectic, much of which is now being revisited and revived by post-humanist writers: it does not forget from whence we come, and the means by which we become. It does not neglect the essence of our being.

As such, an open dialectic—‘a more human language’—depends upon a consideration of those various eddies and variations within any society. It demands a consideration of how we have come to live and move and be as a woman and a man, as people of different ages, races, sexualities, and abilities, and the manner in which those particular rhythms interact with those of the principal mode of production. These experiences—all too often shaped by oppressive relationships—involves different sensations of, and different senses made of, our corporeality. They each involve different prompts towards a different sense of self. Many reflect a less than humane experience, and yet suggest some aspect of ‘a more human language’, a sense of self that is profoundly involved with, and dependent upon, others, often because, like Hegel’s slave, the very terms of oppression deny them the ability to evade the essential openness and vulnerability of our being. There is potential in, as Foucault has expressed it, an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” of the body (cited in Pease 2002, 135, 141).

**A MORE HUMAN LANGUAGE**

The discovery of a more human language, and a more human way of life, demands that we engage with the fundamental task described by Epicurus, Lucretius, Feuerbach and Marx. It challenges us to explore a human-centred, rather than a religious, view of the world. It demands the end of thoughts of escape from finitude and, with that, a much
more humble, less certain approach to the world, to ourselves, and to others. In
Feuerbach’s words, it demands an abandonment of abstract ideas of reason in favour of
“reason saturated with the blood of man” (1986, 67). It demands, and depends upon, a
confrontation with our corporeality.

Our corporeality has the potential to be our great leveller, reminding us of our common
limitations and anxieties, and yet give expression to the hope Sennett alluded to in
Flesh and Stone (1994, 370, 375, 376):

For people…to care about one another…we have to change the understanding
we have of our own bodies. We will never experience the difference of others
until we acknowledge the bodily insufficiencies in ourselves. Civic compassion
issues from that physical awareness of a lack in ourselves, not from sheer
goodwill or political rectitude…If there is a place for faith in mobilising the powers
of civilisation against those of domination, it lies exactly in accepting what [the]
solitude [or separation and passivity of the body] seeks to avoid: pain…lived pain
witnesses the body moving beyond the power of society to define; the meanings
of pain are always incomplete in the world. The acceptance of pain lies within a
realm outside the order human beings make in the world…Such pain has a
trajectory in human experience. It disorients and makes incomplete the self,
defeats the desire for coherence; the body accepting pain is ready to become a
civic body, sensible to the pain of another person, pains present together on the
street, at last endurable.
I have argued that this potential, in the form of repeated ‘prompts’ by the corporeal, is an everyday experience and not limited to the extremities imagined by Marx. However, absent those extreme conditions, this sensibility or consciousness needs more to realise its potential. To contemplate its realisation, the distinction drawn by Margaret Archer (2000, 124), as discussed above, remains useful. Archer distinguished the common experience, or sensation of corporeality, from the sense or meaning we made of it, which can be, and has been, diverse. In a society saturated with the traditional language of substance and its application in liberal thought, one is primed to pathologise or diminish any experience of dependence or pain that comprises the freedom of one’s will. For the potential of the prompts provided by the corporeal to be realised, an alternative way to ‘make’ sense of them needs to be available. I have argued that Marx’s materialist, ‘ensemble’ conception of our humanity, with its emphasis on our interdependence, provides that better sense.

In the absence of extremity where lived experience would overwhelm our ideas of independence and force some recognition of our interdependence, that ‘more human language’ needs to be promoted and publicised, whether by a specific party or by a combination of actors, such as the Fabian Society of the nineteenth century or the Mont Pelerin Society of the twentieth century, as documented by McKenzie (1997) and Cockett (1994). The Fabian Society, over a period of thirty years, succeeded in promoting the adoption of a more socialist perspective through its strategic commitment to “permeate, postulate and perorate” (McKenzie 1997, 162). Similarly, the Mont Pelerin Society, by virtue of its and its allies’ efforts over approximately forty years, made a substantial contribution to the revival of neo-liberal ideas in the 1970s and 1980s. Both
societies sought the adoption of a new language. Both recognised the current hegemony of an opposing view and worked to achieve their objective over the longer term. Their work saw them engage a wide range of leaders and educators, publish their ideas and illustrations of their operation in both popular, affordable media and in formal academic and government arenas, and maintain their commitment over decades of derision and resistance. Over the longer term, however, their efforts made their alternative perspectives widely accepted and, in the face of new policy challenges, embraced.

The experience described by Sennett is the common, everyday experience of pain and contradiction that grounds our sense of our selves as separate. That same experience, encountered with a different means to make sense of it, has the potential to promote a sense of limitation and interdependence: an expansion of that sense we have of our selves to include others, to that sense Marx understood as species consciousness, that Hegel described as understanding we owe our existence to others, and as Bakhtin (1993, 40, 80, 95) imagined, we would assert no “alibi in being”.

The shared experience of our corporeality might provide the best reminder of our humanity, rather than distracting from it, as so many have insisted. Sennett (2008, 292, 296) drew inspiration from the Greek god Hephaestus, who, like humanity, was the builder of great artefacts—a transformer of the natural world—yet one, because of his physical limitation, who was not accorded full dignity. The shared embrace of our corporeality, with all its pains and joys, has the potential to reveal, like Hephaestus, with
his imperfect, painful clubfoot, that accepting our limitations may make us “the most
dignified person we can become”.
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