**German Idealism and Marx**

Douglas Moggach

The concept of labour provides a key to understanding Marx’s complex relations to his German idealist precursors. Through it, he appropriates and transforms the idealist concept of spontaneity, develops his critique of heteronomy and alienation under capitalism, and envisages the attainment of genuine autonomy in socialism. We can thus connect Marx with Hegel, but also more broadly to German thought since Kant, indeed since Leibniz.

**The Left Hegelian Programme**

In the works of Kant, Fichte, Schiller, and Hegel, the effects of the European Enlightenment and indigenous theoretical traditions stemming from Leibniz were distilled into a philosophical revolution, elaborating new conceptions of theoretical and practical reason, and of reason’s legislative authority in morality and politics. The essence of this revolution was an engagement with modern society: an extended reflection on individuality, autonomy, and freedom. The fundamental issue of German idealism is not to impugn the external world, but to ask how we can rationally and freely relate to it, and act in it. A resolute yet critical modernism imbues German idealism with its particular characteristics: for all its inner divergences, it is a *practical* idealistic approach, a brilliant vindication of freedom. It develops ideas of practical reason as the capacity to be self-legislating and autonomous, and it stresses the self-causing, spontaneous quality of human action. The world as it appears to the senses is not metaphysically unreal or illusory, but derivative; German idealism directs our attention to
the formative activity which underlies the objects of experience, and to processes of subjective self-shaping.

The central claim of Hegel’s idealism is the unity of thought and being, effected by the historical realisation of reason in the world. In his *Philosophy of Right* (1820-21), Hegel affirms the identity of the real and the rational; but this claim is a technical, speculative proposition, asserting both identity and non-identity, or a processual synthesis wherein being does not evaporate, but is progressively made consonant with reason. Its interpretation, in its positive and negative moments, provides one of the keys to the subsequent history of Hegelianism. The reality or effectiveness of reason (its *Wirklichkeit*, homologous with Aristotle’s *energeia*) might refer to an ongoing, dynamic historical process, with the unity of being and thought, the accord of the external world with the evolving demands of rationality, as its still unachieved *telos*; alternatively, if the positive moment is stressed, the principle might imply that the existing order already satisfies the requirements of rational legitimacy. On this issue the Hegelian school fractured.

From the 1820’s onward, German conservatives excoriated Hegel for his conception of evolving reason, as undermining the traditional political order and religious orthodoxy. In response, some of his followers expressed their own support for the existing authorities (although most of these accommodationists still advocated reform). Others adopted more radical conclusions, defending the achievements of the European Enlightenment against Restoration retrenchment, and pressing beyond these, and beyond Hegel’s own express commitments, to envisage new forms of liberty and political association. Hegelians of all camps were quickly at the centre of political contestation in
the period known as the Vormärz, the prelude to the German Revolutions of March 1848. As conservative opposition hardened, the process of extracting a openly critical and revolutionary orientation from Hegel became the common task of the Hegelian Left, including the young Karl Marx.

The immediate objective for these Left Hegelians was the defence and extension of Enlightenment rationality, with its critique of traditional political and social forms. The Left stressed the historical openness and critical character of Hegel’s thought. The category of spirit (Geist) did not invoke a transcendent power, as some on the Hegelian Right maintained, but was an anthropological and historical project, a process of emancipation, propelled by contradiction and struggle, by clearer and fuller ideas of reason and freedom. Regressions and failures cannot be precluded, and the outcome has no metaphysical guarantee. In combating Restoration orthodoxy, the Left Hegelians defined religion as a form of alienated spirit, or the human consciousness unaware of its own self-abnegating activity. The incompatibility of religion and philosophy is a Leitmotif of this thinking.

Left Hegelian criticism is not exhausted in the critique of religion, but encompasses social and political forms which fail the test of advancing reason. The attack on privilege and hierarchy, the defence of popular sovereignty, and the achievement of a republican constitution based upon the recognition of universal interests animated the Vormärz works of Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) and Arnold Ruge (1802-80). Envisaging new, emancipated forms of social life, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and Max Stirner (1806-56) diagnosed problems of alienation and isolating egoism, though their solutions, solidarity or detachment, were antithetically opposed.4
The fulfilment of the Enlightenment programme of emancipation also meant confronting unprecedented social and economic problems. For the Hegelian Left, the social question, the rise of capitalism and the appearance of new forms of urban poverty, signalled in especially acute form the _incomplete_ rationality of modern society. Revising Hegel’s account of poverty and of political and social exclusion the _Philosophy of Right_, Eduard Gans (1797-1839) described the concentration of economic power as a determinate negation, the decisive problem which had to be addressed if there were to be further progress in freedom.\(^5\) Hegel had identified the problem, but not the elements of its resolution. The lineaments of a solution were now, however, becoming visible, according to Gans, in some currents of French social thought, particularly in St.-Simon’s ideas of association (an early version of trade unionism). For Gans this position involved no illicit utopian projection of the future, but was a reflection on real historical tendencies which were making themselves manifest in the present. According to these principles, poverty, exclusion, and oppression occurred in the modern labour market because of a structural imbalance in bargaining power: the isolation of the individual worker on the one hand, and the monopolistic advantages accruing to capital owners on the other. A more just distribution of wealth could be secured if workers associated and bargained collectively; yet, unlike his student Karl Marx (at least as the latter’s position had crystallised by late 1843), Gans repudiated collective _property_ as inimical to freedom and individuality. Despite fundamental differences, the young Marx shared with other Left Hegelians the view that the social question and urban poverty made it necessary to rethink the relations between the state and civil society, as these had been developed in German idealism.
The Resources of Idealism

To confront these issues, the Hegelian Left, including Marx, availed themselves of the rich resources developed by their idealist precursors. For Hegel, the great merit of the Enlightenment is its discovery that everything exists for the subject, whether in the form of utility, or as matter for the expression of freedom. Before him, Kant, acknowledging his debt to the Enlightenment, describes this period as an epochal turning point: the shaking off of self-imposed tutelage, marking the historical maturation of the species. Subjects now seek to give a rational account of themselves and of the maxims which are to govern their activities, independent of external authorities. Freedom becomes the primary value, not as antinomian denial of law, but as an inquiry into what the self may rightfully claim and do.

Building on Enlightenment conceptions, the Kantian tradition also undertakes a critique of these ideas. Empiricist and materialist theorists in the Enlightenment (Helvetius and Holbach, for example, with Hobbes as an early progenitor) had understood the centrality of the modern subject through categories like utility and its cognates; the world existed as material for the satisfaction of need, and the maximisation of happiness. On the Kantian account, however, these currents had failed to grasp adequately the nature of subjectivity. Enlightenment materialists had over-naturalised the subject, subsuming its activities completely under natural necessity; they had produced a reductionist account of agency, in which subjects were largely determined in their desires by the effects of sensibility or of nature upon them. While the Enlightenment divests nature of its earlier meaning as a normative order, thus opening the possibility of the emancipation and self-definition of subjects, it proceeds immediately to constrict these
subjects anew: natural necessity continues to control them through the mechanisms of their needs and desires, conceived deterministically. Such subjects (as Marx, too, later observed) are essentially passive, merely responding to natural imperatives, and fully integrated within the causal nexus of the natural order. For Kant and the idealists, the error of the materialists is to minimise the capacity of subjects to abstract from motives of sensibility and immediate interest, and to submit these to rational examination and critique. The error is to deny to subjects their intrinsic spontaneity. So too Marx will contend.

In response to this picture of the passive self, German idealism draws on indigenous traditions stemming from Leibniz to attribute a greater spontaneity and self-determination to subjective action. Leibniz conceives of subjects as inwardly self-determining centres of force and change, or monads. For Leibniz, spontaneity means constant change in response to an internal imperative. Each monad is unique in its perspective on the world. Each is active and self-directing, revealing in its actions an inner content. The activity of monads can be explained from their own intrinsic properties, not from external natural causality (though Leibniz does not deny mechanist causal laws; they have their legitimate sphere of operation in the derivative, phenomenal world which the monads structure in their purposive, self-directed movements). Action is revelation or exhibition of a spontaneous force. Leibniz distinguishes primary and derivative forces: the grounding level of activity, and the grounded level of phenomenal expression (Marx’s distinction between the sphere of production and that of circulation and exchange is a variant of this idea). Perceptible appearances are a result, the
consequence of the diffusion of forces which stem from the spontaneous activities of subjects.\textsuperscript{12}

Consequently, the relation of subject and object achieves a new salience. How is the subject to be conceived as the active source of form in the world? What reflexive, self-conscious relations do subjects take up in respect to their products or manifestations? Do subjects find themselves confirmed in their externalisations, or distorted and truncated in them? The various schools of German Romanticism arise in response to such questions: the particularism of Herder, with his expressivist view of freedom (thought and being correspond from the unique perspective proper to each subject, deploying its own powers to manifest its particular content in the world); or the ironic detachment of Friedrich Schlegel, where the self in its infinite creative potentiality cannot recognise itself in its fragmentary deed, and knows its freedom precisely in this diremption.\textsuperscript{13} Most significantly, the central idea of German Idealism, in opposition to Romanticism, emerges in this context: to the extent that subject and object, reason and objectivity, diverge, this disjunction is not taken to be an absolute barrier to the self, but sets a task for rational activity: to secure the correspondence of thought and being, to realise reason in the world of the senses. Marx is an inheritor of this approach, and undertakes the task in his own distinctive way.

Spontaneity is a central and distinctive concept of German philosophy since Leibniz,\textsuperscript{14} and while the Leibnizian and Kantian versions differ significantly, the core idea is the ability not to be ruled from without, but to be actively self-determining. This idea underlies the imperative to bring the external and internal world under rational direction, which is the hallmark of German idealism in its development of the
Enlightenment project. Theoretically, Kant characterises spontaneity as the mind’s power of producing representations out of itself. Practically, it refers to the will’s capacity to exempt itself in significant respects from external causal determination; to direct its course according to self-imposed rules or maxims which are themselves not causally derived; and to initiate changes in the external world and the self which are not uniquely or exhaustively prescribed by causal mechanisms. This implies that subjects are able to admit causes selectively over a significant range, according to some criterion or norm. Negative freedom in Kant’s sense is precisely this independence of the will from desires, and the capacity to adjudicate among them; the will is not directly determined by objects of desire, but by causes which it itself admits, or allows to operate. From spontaneity flow the other concepts which Kant adduces in his account of agency: autonomy or self-legislation; heteronomy (determination from without, but with the self’s active compliance); and determinability (the self’s capacity to determine a range of its empirical properties, by selecting among options, in accord with an evaluative standard). Kant further distinguishes pure practical reason, or rational autonomy, with its categorically binding maxims, from the domain of instrumental and hypothetical reasonings oriented toward need fulfilment (empirical practical reason); and thus establishes a key distinction between right and morality, on the one hand, and welfare or happiness, on the other. These notions will prove central to post-Kantian political thinking.

Hegel further enriches these conceptions with his idea of ethical life, where autonomy becomes concrete in institutions and intersubjective relations. Hegel himself provides two distinct images of modern culture, as a culture of diremption, fragmentation, and alienation; and as the potential realisation of rational autonomy.
These images are not merely externally opposed, but are aspects of the same processes of modernity. Alienation and emancipation are rooted in the same ground.

The latter image is that of the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel designates the ‘free and infinite personality’ as the decisive political accomplishment of modernity. He describes two complementary movements which together constitute the modern self: outward expansion of particularity, and inner reflection into unity, or universality. The attainment of rational freedom requires both the vigorous outpouring of particularity, in the growing differentiation of needs and functions, and demands for subjective recognition; and a counterbalancing movement, or a self-aware return to unity in political institutions and ethical relations. The unprecedented expansion of the scope of interests and activities, the increasing division of labour, the right to satisfy private purposes, and the autonomous moral conscience characterise the new affirmative self-consciousness of modern subjects. But, according to Hegel, not only particularity, but universality, is recast. Modern solidarities are also constituted by acts of freedom and recognition, synthesising the multiple into a unity, not through imposed homogeneity, but in mutual affirmation. This unity is achieved in political institutions in which subjects recognise each other as amplifying, and not only limiting, one another’s freedom. For Hegel, the rational state, the *telos* toward which modernity tends, combines spontaneity or freedom, with autonomy or self-legislation. It engenders a unity consistent with the underlying diversity of particular aims and quests for satisfaction.

Yet Hegel also offers a contrasting image of the modern world and its developmental trajectory. Following Schiller, he describes modernity as a culture of rigid opposition, fragmentation, or diremption, an assertion of unbridled particularity. In
this image, the expansive and the reflexive motions initiated by modern subjectivity fail to harmonise with each other. The moment of particularisation gains predominance over recursive unity. Thus particular interests remain locked in stubborn opposition, and the centrifugal forces threaten to overwhelm the integrative capacities of modern institutions. This image is one of mutual antagonism between subject and subject, subject and object.\textsuperscript{24} Hegel locates these intractable contradictions in his own Romantic contemporaries,\textsuperscript{25} who irresponsibly extol the tensions and conflicts of the modern world: for them, diremption is a state of freedom, once it is consciously embraced. Hegel’s contrasting visions of modernity anticipate, in part, Marx’s own view of the inner dialectic of capitalism. This culture of diremption \textit{par excellence} expands the productive forces immeasurably, while generating class antagonism, but also creates in the same movement the conditions for its own transcendence in a new rational community, now situated beyond the political state.

The tensions between universality and particularity are incorporated into Hegel’s analysis of modern ethical life. Fundamental to this conception is the distinction between state and civil society, which Hegel, adopting the findings of political economy from Smith to Ricardo, theorises in the \textit{Philosophy of Right}. Civil society is redefined as the realm of market transactions, while the state stands outside it, not only as its guardian, but as a higher ethical domain, enabling a distinct kind of freedom as citizenship, and a more conscious universality as membership in a rationally ordered community.\textsuperscript{26} Elaborating Kantian practical reason, Hegel seeks to accommodate both the spontaneity and the autonomy of the will. He recognises the market as a legitimate expression of particularity: of modern juridical right, of the modern division of labour, and of material
satisfactions. To this extent the market realises the claims to spontaneity. If it is a condition of possibility of an alienated culture, it is also an essential moment of the free and infinite personality. The result depends on how the market is contained and governed by the state, the realm where fuller and more concrete autonomy can be practised; but the relation between these spheres remains problematic. Though each has a valid range of application, the two identities inscribed in modern conceptual schemes, as citizen and as member of civil-economic society, can come into sharp opposition.

Viewing property as an important expression of the will and an objectification of freedom, Hegel also recognises that modern civil society or the market contains negations, which limit its full rationality, or its adequacy to the concept of freedom: exclusions from satisfaction and subjective right based upon poverty, growing polarisation between rich and poor, and endemic tendencies toward overproduction and crisis. Though acknowledging the intractability of these problems, and refusing on principled grounds to anticipate the future, whose course is open to free intervention, Hegel seeks mediating institutions whereby the market might be contained, but not suppressed, so that its logic does not pervade and dominate the political sphere, and so that its dissolving effects can be mitigated. This question and its possible resolution remain at the centre of post-Hegelian reflection.

For the Left Hegelians, the existence of the proletariat represented a standing challenge to the rationality of the existing political and social order. Addressing the new problems of urban poverty and exclusion, Vormärz Hegelians such as Bruno Bauer and Arnold Ruge argued that the future republican state was to maintain its role as the forum for the representation of rational freedom and general interests, while promoting
conditions in which self-determination in other spheres of social life. Modern atomised civil society, with its incumbent dangers of particularism and diremption, was not to be abolished, because to do so would also abolish the conditions of rightful spontaneous action; but the market was to be politically contained, directed, and reformed. Claiming that Hegel’s state theory represented an untenable compromise between two incompatible principles, of monarchical and popular sovereignty, they urged a more radical formulation of the nature and basis of the state in the recognition of the supremacy of the people, and its capacity to be rationally autonomous, prescribing for itself its own political constitution.²⁹

Like Gans before them, Vormärz republicans maintained, against Hegel's more sceptical assessment, that the solution of the social question was now a concrete possibility.³⁰ The achievement of the rational state which Hegel had theorised, but which remained an ideal, an object of struggle, entailed the education of workers, the humanisation of their living conditions, and the promotion of new types of self-consciousness: reforms which not only would eliminate pauperism, but would permeate all social relations with justice, and stimulate new forms of social and cultural creation.³¹ Bauer’s critique of particularism stresses the need to reconceive labour not as a mere means to egoistic need fulfilment, but as a vehicle of creativity, a manifestation of pure practical reason, expressing spontaneity. Freedom is won in struggle. No state, not even the republican state, can grant emancipation; freedom is no gift from above, but must be won by conscious effort.³²

From autumn 1843, Marx takes the self-emancipation of the working class to be the hallmark of his own specific form of socialism. Echoing a phrase of Schiller’s,³³
Marx claims that theory becomes a material force when it arouses the masses to political action. Marx’s polemics with Hegelian republicans help to define the character of his socialist project. For Marx, republicanism consolidates but does not transform bourgeois civil society. Marx describes the fetish character of the republican state, suspended above civil society but unable to create a genuine common interest where the economy remains divided by class. By setting up a sphere of spurious political universality, an illusory community, republicanism leaves intact the individualistic and egoistic strivings of civil society, thus confirming and masking rather than challenging the hegemony of capital.

For Marx, under socialism, the universality which the state represents only abstractly is to become effective and concrete by penetrating and transforming the relations which sustain and reproduce material social life. Thus, from its inception, Marx’s theory of socialism is inspired by the idea of a universal which is not separated off into its own quasi-celestial political sphere, but which infuses the material realities of labour. In working out these ideas, Marx refashions the Kantian antinomies of autonomy and heteronomy, and of spontaneity and receptivity.

**Labour and Spontaneity**

Like Kant, Marx too observes the essentially passive character of Enlightenment materialism, its tendency to subordinate individuals to natural impulses, and, in Marx’s formulation, its privileging of consumption over production. He sees his own version of materialism, based on labour, as indebted (though problematically) to the activist notions of his idealist precursors. Labour is Marx’s version of spontaneity. Just as Kant’s concept is not identical to Leibniz’s, so Marx’s is distinct but related to both. In the ways
that it connects teleology with the causal nexus, Marx’s conception is more compatibilist than the stricter rendering of Kantian negative freedom. But it avoids the defects of previous materialism by retaining the core idealistic meaning of spontaneity as (potentially) self-directed and self-causing activity. Labour involves the engagement of subjective teleology with objective causal mechanisms, both natural and social-historical. Working subjects are not mere bearers of an engulfing natural necessity, but originate their projects, either freely or under social compulsion, in ways which are not uniquely causally prescribed.38 Their activity in taking up and transforming a given manifold in work is guided by a concept, whose origin is no longer a priori but contextual and historical. The range of available ends in labour is always constrained by historically evolving technical possibilities, but also by the social form of labour (organising co-operation in various ways, even in antithetical form as atomised) and by the prevailing relations of appropriation of its instrumental conditions and its product.

In the active transformation of nature according to a concept or rule, the scope of labour is not exhausted in the satisfaction of material need. Labour is not merely the expression of empirical practical reason, or of the quest for happiness; it overlaps with the domain of pure practical reason (though Marx dispenses with that term as unnecessary idealist baggage). Labour is an expression of freedom, even when that expression assumes negative form in the denial of freedom, as under the prevailing capitalist relations of production. Because labour manifests freedom as well as necessity, its centrality avoids the defects which Marx uncovers in previous materialism, the denial of subjective spontaneity. The intrinsic connection of labour and freedom recurs in Marx’s notion of alienation, as the suppression not just of material satisfaction, but of
free self-expression;\textsuperscript{39} and in the notion of the proletariat, not only as the exploited, suffering class, but as an active, formative power, revolutionary in its capacity as the determinate negation of existing productive relations.\textsuperscript{40} The defining feature or ground of existence of capitalism, the separation of the workers from the means of production, is also its limit, marking out the conditions and the agency of its possible overthrow. Marx’s repudiation of the sentimental socialisms of his day, which stress the misery imposed on workers by the inhumanity of capitalistically structured life,\textsuperscript{41} represents his acknowledgement of labour as a spontaneous, creative force, even in conditions of its estrangement. His insistence that the exploitation of labour cannot be remedied merely by a more favourable distribution of consumption goods, but only the transformation of productive relations, underlines the same point (though struggles over distribution are strategically far from negligible, as they \textit{can} lead to deepening consciousness of antagonistic interests). Marx transforms Kant’s moral ideas by defining the alienation of labour as heteronomous determination by alien wills, and by conceiving socialism, the emancipation of labour from its capitalist constraints, as autonomy made concrete.

The subject of labour had been addressed explicitly by Kant and the idealists. In ‘Ideas for a Universal History’,\textsuperscript{42} Kant defined labour as breaking the inertia and passive satisfaction of the self, which finds in work a means of its own liberation from heteronomous determination by sensuous impulses. The first movement of freedom lies in the discipline and training of these impulses, and the development of subjective capacities to formulate and secure ends. Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology} elaborates this insight through the incipient and defective intersubjectivity of the master-slave relation.\textsuperscript{43}
Marx’s understanding of labour is also nourished by Fichte, who makes the link between labour and spontaneity thematic. The *Closed Commercial State*\(^4^4\) is intended to secure not primarily the happiness of subjects but their freedom, that is, to maintain the conditions for the exercise of the free causality of each individual in the world, and to assure a just system of distribution, in which none can rightfully enjoy luxuries until all are able to provide themselves with necessities.\(^4^5\) Fichte argues that the sphere of right can be illegitimately constricted by economic institutions when, as a result of inequality in civil society, some individuals are deprived of access to the means of activity in the objective world, and thus are denied freedom. Despite its problematic controls and regulations, Fichte’s interventionist state is designed to preserve the possibility of free causality and spontaneity for all subjects, consistent with the basic principles of Kantian juridical thought. In contrast to Wilhelm von Humboldt, for example, who had derived from his reading of Kant the idea of extremely circumscribed state action,\(^4^6\) Fichte’s attention to the material conditions of freedom marks him as a precursor to Marx’s own view of labour. Both *The Foundations of Natural Right*\(^4^7\) and the *Closed Commercial State* focus on freedom and action in their juridical aspects as the right of spontaneity, the right to initiate changes in the world of the senses in accord with our concepts and purposes, and to bring these processes to fruition. The right to labour is the fundamental juridical principle: to be a cause of change in the material world, and to be recognized as this cause. An *ought* governs the moral and juridical spheres, enjoining subjects to processes of social creation, extending the scope of rightful action, and gradually perfecting intersubjective relations under the command of morality.
Yet the connection between Marx and post-Kantian idealism lies at an even deeper level. Fichte's and Hegel's elaborations of the Kantian account of experience offer insight into the passage from Kant to Marx. As the post-Kantians perceived, the defence of the activity and spontaneity of the self, its freedom in the world of objectivity, can be developed from resources internal to Kant’s *First Critique*. It is possible to show, on Kantian grounds, that the cognising subject is at least partly self-determining in relating to the objects of experience. The spontaneous activities involved in the cognitive appropriation of a given manifold, and their analogues in practical action, are central idealist discoveries.

Kant defines experience as the unification of an intuited sensory manifold according to the *a priori* rules or concepts prescribed by the understanding. The distinction between concept and intuition, central to the critical project (Kant had censured Leibniz for conflating these terms), is however not to be understood as the distinction between activity on the one hand, and mere passive reception on the other. The pure forms of intuition (space and time) are the medium by which an external content is given to consciousness, and they already involve for Kant himself a degree of activity and spontaneity, even though he reserves the latter term for the synthesizing acts of the understanding. The intuitive moment, the appropriation of an external content within consciousness, is never a matter of simple determination from without. Intuition refers to the *active* reception of a given content, a positing or taking up, by which the knowing subject assumes a relation to that which is external to it. This is not the assertion of an unbounded freedom or complete exemption from any external constraints, but rather an activist idea that the objective world is present for the self only through the
self’s own exertions. This activity, already implicit in Kant’s pure forms of intuition, is expressly thematised in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. The intuited content, next, is subject to further active transformation, as matter to be shaped, determinable in the light of concepts or ends. The historicisation of these concepts and the changing shapes of their articulation (as modes of experience of self and world) are traced in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.

For the post-Kantians, the activity implicit in the cognitive synthesis of a given manifold in pure reason offers important analogies with the *material* synthesis effected in the sphere of practical reason. The relation between concept and intuition not only establishes the activity of the self in its epistemic relations, but also opens upon distinct models of labour.

In ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, Marx criticises the bifurcation of modern philosophy into (mechanistic) materialist and (subjective) idealist currents. The former defends receptivity but denies spontaneity, whereas the latter (on Marx’s account) confines activity to intellectual labour or goal-setting, but abstracts from the processes of realisation. In its central concept of labour, Marx’s new, activist materialism synthesises teleology and causality, purpose and process, integrating subjective and objective dimensions which, he argues, modern philosophy has sundered.

While, in light of the foregoing, this criticism seems spurious in respect to Fichte and Hegel, Marx’s argument against Feuerbach carries greater weight. The relative independence of the given manifold to be synthesised, and the priority of that matter to its subsequent conceptualisation, are the central claims of Feuerbachian naturalism. Stressing the immersedness of human beings in their natural milieu, Feuerbach seeks to block the more activist readings of intuition, retaining instead precisely the sense of
passivity and receptiveness against which the post-Kantian idealists had contended.

Feuerbach's critique of Hegel is an attempt to restore the independence of the moment of intuition which, he claims, had been assimilated by the Hegelian concept. In essence, he maintains that Hegel effaces the concept/intuition distinction, falling back on a Leibnizian, pre-critical position. Feuerbach stresses instead the priority and irreducibility of the material element to thought. Marx agrees with Feuerbach that idealism inverts the relation of subject and predicate when it hy postatizes thought as the genuine subject, and reduces concrete individuals to its bearers. This reversal also accounts for the false positivism which permeates Hegel’s accounts of state and society, his tendency to seek arbitrary exemplifications of pre-existing logical categories, from which ensues his apparent accommodation with the existing order. While criticising the passivity of Feuerbach's materialism, its preference for perception over action and for sentiment over robust self-determination, Marx continues to stress the independence of the natural substrate within the newly conceived labour process. This is Marx's materialist rendering of Kantian intuition. Correlative to intuition, the concept now refers to the transformation of this given material according to rules, which are not a priori in the Kantian sense, but are empirical and historical, governing how purposes can be realised through objective causal connections. Two models of labour can be distinguished in Marx’s work, one beginning with the concept or purpose of action, the other with the reception of a given manifold. The Kantian concept and intuition are thus reconfigured in Marx’s account of labour.

Marx's theory of labour in the 1844 Paris Manuscripts implicitly reproduces the threefold form of (external) teleology in Hegel's Science of Logic. As intentional action,
the labour process consists in three moments: subjective end, means, and objective or realised end. The alienation of labour is the subversion of the connection between active subjects and the purposes they pursue in their activity. The imposition of ends by the owners of the productive apparatus prevents the self-determination of subjects in work. Prescribed by an alien subjectivity, these ends are heteronomous, and violate the principle of self-activity which Marx takes to be the essence of freedom. Here Marx critically extends to the labour process the Kantian idea of autonomy and its opposite. Similarly, active subjects are deprived of control over the instruments and processes of their labour, and are themselves reduced to the status of instruments of another's will, for the duration of their working time. They also forfeit the results of their labour to the proprietors of the productive apparatus; and their activity reproduces the very conditions of their own subjugation. The autonomy of labour, the overcoming of alienation, implies that workers gain control over the forms and purposes of the material interchange which they conduct with nature. This requires, for Marx, collective property in the means of production.

In *Capital*, Marx will invoke the same teleological structure to describe the qualitative character of concrete labour. Its qualitative aspect or determinacy is derived from the particular result which is aimed at, from the specific purpose which initiates the labour process. Here is an important revision of the Kantian account. For Kant, it is intuition, not the concept, which provides determinacy to experience. The generality of the concept is rendered specific and endowed with content by the specific features of the intuited material, determining which of the realm of abstract possibilities is realised in experience; hence Kant’s famous phrase that the concept without intuition is empty. In
the analysis of labour as teleological action, however, Marx appears to be attributing to
the concept the role of specification and determination, insofar as labours are
distinguished by the particular needs toward which their products are directed. This is to
inflect Kant in a Fichtean direction, where the concept becomes the condition of
possibility for any particular intuition. Marx’s later account of concrete labour maintains
this orientation. Such an intentional account can be distinguished from one in which the
purpose does not precede the act of labouring, but is intrinsic to it. Marx's work contains
both perspectives.  

_The German Ideology_ of 1845-6 introduces the second model, which abstracts
from subjective purpose as its initial moment, and focuses instead on the structural
determinants of labour. This model begins not with the determinacy of a particular goal,
but with the given objective contents to be synthesised. By shifting emphasis away from
the initiatory moment as teleological, the new model begins to conceive labour in
abstraction from its specific goal-directed forms. Now, the first moment is the conditions
of labour, both natural and instrumental, which are given independently of volition, and
must be taken up in conscious action. The second moment is activity itself, understood in
its duality as goal setting and execution (thus not dismissing teleology, but construing
purpose as intrinsic to the action). The third moment is the product, not as the
crystallisation of a particular goal, but as the transformation of the given manifold.
Labouring subjects confront conditions independent of their wills which they must
reproduce and transform. As a facet of this activity, goal formation refers to the ways in
which the given manifold can be modified; its range is circumscribed by the objective
possibilities contained in that manifold. These material constraints are to be sharply
distinguished from the heteronomous imposition of ends through social relations of subordination. Through this conception Marx recasts the Kantian idea of intuition as the reception of a given manifold, and focuses on the *material* synthesis of the given. Later, in *Capital*, Marx's analysis of social reproduction, where products reappear as conditions of new production, demonstrates that the conditions of activity, which initially appear as a given starting point, are the *result* of past labour. The given reveals itself, upon analysis, to be highly mediated. The intuition of the sensory manifold is thus historicised, opening access to the historical process as the systematic and cumulative history of labour, and to the idea of modes of production as different ways of organising the reproductive cycle, the recurrent relation between activity, preconditions, and product.

Despite its antispeculative intentions, *The German Ideology* manifests its Hegelian roots in describing the culture of diremption in the sphere of circulation and the market, where workers compete against each other for employment; and in its contention that this culture of division and fragmentation exists in tension with another reality, that of processes of integration and fusion of interest. Marx reads these processes as the creation of a new revolutionary subject within the sphere of production, forged under the constraints of capitalist accumulation. This subject is uniquely equipped to realise the Hegelian ideal of the free and infinite personality, once it is no longer hampered by the division of labour in its capitalist guise. In stressing the active, transformative historical role of the working class, and not primarily its suffering or immiseration, Marx again takes up the legacy of idealism, where empirical practical reason and happiness are ancillary to the idea of freedom prescribed by pure practical reason. For Marx, the idealists had failed to think through the principle of autonomy to its radical conclusions,
but had rightly stressed the primacy of activity. This activity now needs to be re-interpreted as the social and material interplay with nature. Collective control of the means of production liberates individuals from their subordination to the division of labour, and overcomes the opposition of particular and general interest rooted in private property. The corresponding realisation of the right to work (though Marx rejects this term as merely legalistic) is the establishment of a free, conscious, and willed connection between labour and its preconditions, the material basis for autonomy.

*The German Ideology*, moreover, displays a certain Hegelian logic in the opposing dialectical syllogisms of class formation of the bourgeoisie and proletariat (the many ones, and the many coalesced as one), but the stress on the concrete immediacy of premises in *The German Ideology* - on their intuitional givenness - cedes to a dialectic of the abstract and the concrete in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, by which concrete labours can also be depicted as quantitative variations in the formally undifferentiated expenditure of labour power. Both teleological and structural models together are necessary for Marx's decipherment of surplus value and of capitalist dynamics.

Marx's description of two discrete models of activity heralds a distinction fundamental to *Capital*, between concrete labour, and formally undifferentiated social labour (appearing in capitalism as abstract labour). In the 1840's, Marx does not yet formulate this distinction, but the identification, through the second, structural model, of a common essence of labour, irrespective of its concrete forms, is an important step in its direction. The duality of labour, teleological and structural, in Marx's work before 1848 does not imply an 'epistemological break' between an early philosophical and a later scientific Marx, since he does not abandon the teleological model as a humanistic
deviation, but reintegrates it decisively. In the dialectic of abstract and concrete labour, from which the theory of surplus value derives, *Capital* effects the theoretical synthesis of the two models.

Concrete labour is qualitatively determined, and it is so in virtue of its concept (and not, as in Kantian experience, by its intuitive content); it produces use values to serve a specific end, whether of consumption or further production. As concrete, labour is conceived according to the teleological model, as the realisation of a particular directive purpose.\(^{68}\) *Abstract* labour, on the other hand, allows for only quantitative variations as expressions of a common substance. It reduces all labour to an identical essence, the expenditure of human formative energy, distinguished only in its duration and intensity, but not by the specific products which it yields. It generates value, whose measure is the amount of labour time socially necessary to reproduce the product.\(^{69}\) In capitalism, products appear as commodities for exchange on the market, and these commodities can be conceived under both vantage points, as use-values directed to some specific end, and as exchange values or quanta of labour time, manifesting in their very structure the duality of labour which produces them.

Surplus value, the secret of the capitalist exploitation of labour, originates in the disparity between the *value* of the commodity labour power (the wage as the measure of the consumption package necessary, at a particular historic time and place, for the workers to reproduce themselves, and to be able to work again) and the *use value* of that same labour power, its capacity to produce goods whose value exceeds its own cost of reproduction. Unlike previous social forms where those who laboured retained a more direct connection with the instruments and conditions of their work,\(^{70}\) the defining
character of capitalism is the creation of the proletariat as a propertyless class, or the
sundering/alienation of the workers from their means of production. Now monopolised
by the capitalist class, the productive apparatus is accessible to the workers only through
the sale of their capacity to work. Labour power has itself become a commodity under
capitalism, bought and sold at its value; once the workers in their daily activities have
reproduced the value-equivalent of their wage in the form of new products destined for
the market, they then furnish essentially unpaid labour to the capitalist for the remainder
of their working day.\textsuperscript{71} The source of capitalist profit is not that labour is paid less than its
value, as Gans had believed; it lies rather in the dialectic of use value and exchange
value, and beneath that in the duality of labour as both teleologically directed and
formally indeterminate.

In \textit{Capital}, and its preliminary studies entitled the \textit{Grundrisse}, Marx effects what
has been described as a second appropriation of Hegel.\textsuperscript{72} He identifies a homology
between the abstractive processes of capital (the universality of the commodity form
which, under the concept of exchange value, homogenises the products of concrete
labour), and the abstractions of Hegelian logic, which seeks to identify pure essences
devoid of contingencies.\textsuperscript{73} On the basis of this homology, Marx depicts the \textit{alienated}
forms of mediation among individual and classes through the fetishism of commodities.
He deciphers the logic of capital as analogous to that of a self-organising concept,
distinguishing itself in its movement into various spheres of activity (production,
circulation, distribution). He examines the relations which sustain the reproductive
process of capitalist society, relations both within the labour process, and among various
economic actors and classes in respect to ownership and control of means of production.
He offers a historical account of emergence of capitalism from preceding forms through expropriation of the direct producers, and a study of its determinate negations, derived from the defining feature of the system, the divorce of workers from their means of production. The essential logical operation is that of mediation, which involves neither mere inert thinghood on the side of objectivity, nor the mere aggregation of subjects, but relational processes in which apparently fixed and stable realities are shown to emerge from processes of activity, transformation, and change. As in Leibniz, the level of phenomenal appearance (now the market, profit, or the commodity itself) derives from a more fundamental level of active deployment of force: now production, surplus value, labour. The result is not an undifferentiated Spinozist whole, but an articulated totality of relations and spheres of activity. This is a decisive Hegelian moment in Marx’s work.

If Capital is a work of science, it is so not in the positivist sense in which it was later interpreted by official Marxism, with its deterministic programme of dialectical materialism. Marx’s scientific approach is analogous to Hegel’s critique of the abstract Kantian ought, but this does not mean that it is devoid of normative elements. Hegel’s insistence on the rationality of the real is the recognition of objective contradictions and processes of development, the identification of determinate negations which condition and limit possible development. Marx’s science remains opposed to the abstract subjective fancies of utopian socialism, but it is also irreducible to natural scientific methods. It intends to trace the logic of development immanent to the capitalist mode of production, to find the law defining the production of the specific phenomena of social life, and to do this by laying bare the processes of determinate negation.
Post-Kantian Perfectionism

Despite his critique of moralism, Marx’s programme of emancipation retains ethical elements of post-Kantian perfectionism typical of the Hegelian Left. Marx’s position has been described as a self-realisation account of freedom, or as an account of expansive non-volitional needs (independent of subjective preferences, and containing both fixed and historically variable components). It is perfectionist in holding that the development of certain capabilities is of intrinsic and not merely instrumental value. For Marx, these include basic physical needs, but also, expansively, intellectual and cultural development, the exercise of labour as spontaneous creativity, and membership in a community.

Prior to Kant, perfectionist theories (ultimately Aristotelian in origin, with Christian Wolff as a significant Enlightenment proponent) had invoked a fixed human nature, and sought the conditions for its material, mental, and spiritual thriving. In affinity with cameralist economics (which Marx would encounter in his own university studies), Wolff espoused an interventionist enlightened absolutism, whose objective was to guarantee adequate living standards, education, housing, and environment, to promote the happiness of the population through the development of the local productive forces: a tutelary state which Kant would repudiate in “Theory and Practice” as the paternalistic denial of freedom qua spontaneity. Marx’s own perfectionism, in its account of standard and non-standard needs, risks appearing as a self-managing variant of Wolffianism, unless we understand its expressly post-Kantian character, that is, its endorsement of spontaneity and freedom, and not only need satisfaction. But it is precisely here that an important ambiguity lies.
Post-Kantian perfectionists from Schiller and Fichte onwards, through the Hegelian School, repudiated that view of predetermined natural ends, and predicated their theories instead on spontaneity and self-creation. They also rejected the Leibnizian idea of a pre-established harmony of interests, in favour of the view that harmony is a (problematic) result to be achieved, through conscious and concerted effort. These theories accommodated in different ways the Kantian distinction between empirical and pure practical reason, happiness and freedom. Freedom requires that each individual be enabled to pursue particular conceptions of happiness, without authoritative imposition. The perfectionist character of this approach lies in its commitment to ‘social creation,’ to securing and enhancing the practices of freedom, and eliminating obstacles to it: actions are validated by their contributions to these ends.

Two central theoretical issues can be distinguished in post-Kantian perfectionism: relations between happiness and right, and conceptions of happiness or thriving itself. In a Kantian register, the pursuit of happiness or need fulfilment is subtended by a juridical order of right which circumscribes the legitimate sphere of each subject, and simultaneously enables the practice of freedom. Marx’s early polemic with the republicans leads to a dismissal of this problem, since he conceives the idea of right as a principle of bourgeois ideology, dispensable under the socialist organisation of production. Republican perfectionists, however, maintain there must be a mechanism for the enforcement of right, not the presumption of common interests, to guarantee the grounds of freedom. A system of juridical rights is not necessarily equivalent to a regime of private property, but a means of co-ordinating individual teleological acts, even if these are no longer animated by irreconcilable interests. It is to offer mutual guarantees of
freedom, while permitting each to define the particular ends of happiness or satisfaction. Otherwise the distinction between happiness and freedom dissipates, and the result resembles a Wolffian perfectionism.

Secondly, are the ends of happiness the result of the mechanism of nature (the causal problem of Enlightenment materialism), or the ancient sense of nature as a system of fixed ends, as in Aristotle; or are these ends products of spontaneity, open to variation by the will of active subjects? Concepts of determinability, as self-shaping, figure in Schiller and other post-Kantians; so also in Marx, when he stresses the historical variability of social characteristics. A defining feature of Marx’s early thought, however, is the combination of such Kantian ideas (often understressed in the literature\textsuperscript{84}), and a substantive good reminiscent of Aristotle,\textsuperscript{85} mediated through the Feuerbachian idea of species-being and the postulated conditions of thriving.\textsuperscript{86} The latter subsume the subject under predetermined ends (even if these are conceived as historical rather than as permanently fixed), in unresolved tension with the Kantian sense of free self-determining spontaneous action.\textsuperscript{87} While Aristotelian \textit{eudaimonia} is not to be equated with subsequent naturalistic and scientific accounts, Marx’s incomplete assimilation of Kant left open a theoretical space to be filled by heterogeneous ideas. Marx connects labour both to need-satisfaction and to freedom, but the Kantian distinction between empirical and pure practical reason may have been, partly, effaced in his turn to materialism.

\textbf{Aftermath}

Following the scientistic turn in European social thought after 1850,\textsuperscript{88} Engels develops a dialectics of nature, a naturalistic materialism whereby human consciousness
and activity could be explained through the laws governing material interactions, yielding a determinist and technicist reading of history. This tendency crystallised as official Marxist doctrine in debates about the international workers’ movement in the late nineteenth century, and was formalised in Soviet readings of Marx. Lenin’s early work evinced this mechanistic materialism, but his 1914 study of Hegel’s *Logic* modified his understanding of economic processes and revolutionary subjectivity. He recognised self-movement or spontaneity as the central dialectical category, but now inflected in a voluntarist direction. Debates with Rosa Luxemburg and other communists explicitly concerned spontaneity in the organisational forms of the workers’ movement. For Lenin, the spontaneous class consciousness of the workers could not achieve revolutionary clarity without the direction of a vanguard party. The paternalistic perfectionism of Christian Wolff might be reflected in these developments: in the theory of the party, and in the Soviet state’s privileging of need-satisfaction over freedom.

Deriving from linguistic structuralism, Althusserian Marxism of the 1960’s and 1970’s attempted to expunge Marx’s idealist heritage by insisting on the scientificity of his work, after the ‘epistemological break’ of 1845-46. Here scientificity is equated with the denial of spontaneity, and the depiction of actions (and of ideologically-conditioned thought) as causal effects of variously articulated structures. Hegel was unfavourably contrasted with Spinoza, because of the inadmissibility of teleology as a scientific principle.

In opposition to scientism, and influenced by Marx, members of the Frankfurt School criticised Enlightenment rationality for thwarting its own emancipatory promise by subsuming subjects under new technical imperatives, underscored the technocratic
and oppressive character of Soviet Marxism, and endorsed against Hegel the irreducibility of being to thought. In Habermas’ lengthy dialogue with Marx, the retrieval of certain Kantian elements remains partial and problematic, insofar as the concept of spontaneity is undertheorised. Habermas rejects the theoretical and practical centrality of labour, construed as dramaturgical or instrumental action, presupposing a monological or self-referential subject. Reviving the classical distinction of praxis and poiesis, Habermas roots intersubjectivity in communicative action, and normativity in the rationality of discourse. He divests labour of its capacity to sustain and orient social life. In recent work by Axel Honneth, the naturalised and needy subject, damaged by misrecognition, assumes the central role.

The development of Marxism and Marx-inspired thought is thus characterised by the marginalising or repudiation of spontaneity in favour of scientistic accounts of history and agency, and by the conceptual divorce between spontaneity and labour. Both these movements sacrifice Marx’s key insights and his intimate connections with German idealism.
The theoretical relationships are analysed in Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).


21 Hegel, Philosophy of Right, §260, 282-83.

22 For various perspectives, see Ludwig Siep (ed.), G.W.F. Hegel, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997).


24 Hegel, Ästhetik, 88-91.

25 Hegel, Philosophy of Right, §140.


34 Karl Marx, ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of Law. Introduction’, 175-87.


36 Marx, ‘On the Jewish Question’, 164-68.

37 Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, 3-5.


46 W. von Humboldt [1792], *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen. Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Reimer, 1903), Bd. I.


51 Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, 3-5.

52 Ludwig Feuerbach [1839], ‘Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie’, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. II (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1904).


54 Karl Marx, ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law,’ *Collected Works*, vol.3 (New York, 1975), 3-130.


60 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 193 (A51/B75).


Jacques D'Hondt, ‘Marx en het Hegeliaanse arbeidsbegrip’, in Kruithof and Mortier (eds.), *De arbeid*, 74-93, derives the idea of the generality of labour, independent of its form, from Hegel's distinction of *an sich* and *für sich*.


Marx, *Capital I*, 35.

Marx, *Capital I*, 36, 46.

Marx contends that earlier social forms like slavery and feudalism were highly exploitative, but lacked the dynamic features of capitalism, which make possible a communist future of abundance and freedom: Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 219-34, 245-57.

Marx *Capital I*, 233-46.


Leopold, *Young Karl Marx*, 224.

Leopold, *Young Karl Marx*, 185.


Immanuel Kant [1793], ‘On the Common Saying: “This may be true in theory, but it does not apply in practice”’, in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Reiss, 74.


Leopold, *Young Karl Marx*, 154.


For permutations of this idea, see Quante, ‘Kommentar’, 264-8.


Marx himself is not immune to this tendency. On the more naturalised account of labour, see Michael Quante, ‘Kommentar’, 305-9. See also Norman Levine, *Divergent Paths: Hegel in Marx and Engels* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).


