

From Modes of Production to the Resurrection of the Body: A Labor Theory of Revolutionary Subjectivity & Religious Ideas

Benjamin Suriano
Marquette University

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FROM MODES OF PRODUCTION TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY:
A LABOR THEORY OF REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY
& RELIGIOUS IDEAS

by

Ben Suriano

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ABSTRACT
FROM MODES OF PRODUCTION TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY:
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Ben Suriano

Marquette University, 2016

In this dissertation I attempt two needed tasks within historical materialism: first, to reestablish the standpoint of labor as the normative basis for critical theory beyond irrational bourgeois categories, and second, to show that labor's own self-mediating rationalization, if it is to move beyond these contradictory categories, necessarily requires a certain religious-utopian consciousness. The dominant Weberian and Marxist paradigms for understanding labor and its relation to the religious variously perpetuated irrational bourgeois conceptions of labor as a bare efficient cause, with religion paternalistically positioned as an inherently idealist or mystifying external form. I argue, however, that the concrete rationality of labor's revolutionary nature necessarily hinges on a ratio to emergent final causes for which consciousness of such is itself the rational kernel of the religious. Thus I retain the historical materialist primacy of the modes of production as an organizing concept but with a more comprehensive account of its self-transcending movement. Herein the religious arises internally as a non-reductive function of labor's self-understanding as more than a disposable instrument. I claim any materialist critique of alienated labor implies this religious-utopian consciousness, and therefore any critique of religion must presuppose the normative form of the religious as revolutionary rather than reactionary, reflecting ideal trajectories generated from the productive forces in their basic revolutionizing transformation of nature.

More specifically, I argue that theoretically the one religious-utopian ideal transcendently necessary for grasping the normative standpoint of the laboring body as its own emergent final cause, without external mediation, is the resurrection of the body. I then substantiate this historically. The comprehensive rationality of the modes of production demands that the Marxist distinction between historical periods of formal and real subsumptions yield new assessments of pre-capitalist religious ideology as positively integral to labor's self-mediating history. I then genealogically trace a Hebraic discourse on bodily resurrection whose revolutionarily demythologized form emerged directly from and for social consciousness of its communal mode of production. I further demonstrate historically that prior to capitalism the laboring body became intelligible to itself as constitutively active without idealist inversions under this certain Judeo-Christian articulation of the resurrection of the body.

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Introduction

“Every history of religion ... that fails to take account of this materialist basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one.”

–Karl Marx¹

“Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”

–Walter Benjamin²

In this dissertation I make an argument within historical materialism for a renewed critical theory that begins once again with the revolutionary standpoint of labor. In making this argument for labor as the universal standpoint for humanity, I will be doing so by appealing to the self-transcending nature of the laboring body and its reflection in thought concerning those necessary final causes or perfective ideals that render its material and historical standpoint intelligible to itself as normative. This will require the much-needed task of rethinking both the nature of labor and the religious from within materialism and yet in a non-reductive way. With the aftermath from the unfortunate turn of the socialist project into state communism, which actually represented only state *monopoly capitalism* (STAMOCAP) rather than an advance toward true socialism, organized labor lost sight of its final cause, being reduced within an austere

¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), p. 352.

² Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 255.

economistic ideology that rendered laboring bodies mere batteries for the state machinery. Within the West, organized labor outside of the organs of the state has dwindled, with the machinery of the state used by capital to erase gains won by unionization, funneling the labor movement exclusively into the narrow game of collective bargaining at the table of capital according to its own rules. And with the hegemonic advent of Western cultural postmodernism as the ideological reflex of late capitalism, the standpoint of labor has simply been abruptly and arbitrarily abandoned altogether within any radical leftist consciousness, with the laboring body reduced to a mere void of flesh subtending the semiotic flux and its cultural analyses that no longer touch the ground, nor rise to the stars.

Caught up in the linguistic idealisms of postmodernity and its language games, caught up in the multiculturalist turns and its identity politics, there is no longer consciousness of why and how our bodies are fundamentally producing such realities, but only endless analyses of the coherent or incoherent web of products being exchanged and consumed. Subjectivity has been increasingly analyzed and discussed as an epiphenomenon from the web of these exchanges between things; or, if affirmed at all, as merely an ethical compartment within this already produced and inalterable world, an ethical compartment that accepts the given and instead seeks only a respect for the “other”, or whatever other political liberal banalities are helpful in keeping the modes of producing economic liberalism from being more critically engaged. Every attempt to identify a universal or normative standpoint for humanity has been deemed passé, every attempt to articulate a substantive relation to the eternal or infinite by which subjectivity is constituted has been reduced to a negative theology or a fideistic leap that does nothing

to substantively challenge the present. Even Marxist inspired critical theory has largely rejected the attempt to think from and through the standpoint of labor, moving into post-Marxist forms that instead embrace discourses that revolve exclusively around the thematics of faith, the event, the void, etc.³

Yet the one universal unconsciously accepted and allowed to continue organizing our social reality is that of the money form. Regardless of what we think, our laboring bodies continue to produce commodities and capital, but it is a contingent production and does not need to be so. Yet because of the growing illiteracy in critically reading and engaging the modes of production we no longer see labor as able to produce otherwise, simply accepting its contingent commodification as if a necessary or absolute fact that cannot be changed otherwise. While we are busy merely trying to better tolerate cultural differences, therefore, the universal hegemony of the capitalist world of global commodity production and exchange is still being produced by the exploitation of our more profoundly shared universal reality, which is the fact of our subsisting through the collective and creative capacity of labor. With the decomposition of organized labor the gap between the wealthy and the working class is growing ever more widely, wages are falling at an increasing rate, sweatshops are still proliferating, and nature is still being rapped for non-renewable resources. That is, we are mindlessly letting our productive bodies produce a world that is contradictorily consuming the producer as well as its conditions of production—turning our socially creative potentials into contradictory

³ For a post-Marxist shift beyond the standpoint of labor and toward the thematics of the event and its fidelity see Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); For similar emphases but in relation to the negativity of the void, Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Preverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); For a different post-Marxist angle more indebted to Heidegger, and revolving more around the void of bare life see, Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

forces of destroying both ourselves as well as the earth. But it is only in changing our modes of production, reorienting the very means by which we appropriate and cultivate the creative potentials in nature and society toward their own internal ends of more perfectly creating, that we might have a chance at making a real change, producing a world otherwise.

Moreover, what complicates the matter is that we have come to accept the minimal essence of humanity implied by commodity production and exchange, as it is further promulgated by political liberalism. Political liberalism has taken as its fundamental fact what economic liberalism gives to it: “man as he really is”, man as nothing more than a mortal animal, man whose only distinctive capacity is his capacity to destructively consume himself.⁴ Any attempt to articulate a more substantive and determinative essence of the human that might otherwise transcend the mortal structures of the given present is deemed too “metaphysical” for our supposedly rationally scientific “post-metaphysical” times. This leaves any such articulations of a self-transcending capacity to the chaff of the religious, now shunted into its most extreme fideistic forms of fundamentalism. And yet this alleged post-metaphysically “secular” society, which once trumpeted that its “rationalization” of society would lead to the disappearance of the religious, wonders why there has been a so-called “return of the religious”. Of course their typical explanation is that the “return” of the religious merely shows the enduring irrationality in the heart of humanity.⁵ But it makes more sense to argue that the continuation of the religious in relation to its feverish growth of fundamentalisms, is

⁴ On the emergence of modern political “science” as beginning from this foundationally bracketed view of human nature, especially as it was initiated by Machiavelli and Hobbes, see Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁵ See any number of the so-called “new” atheists.

merely the expression of humanity's rational desire for change, for newness, for perfection, for meaning, expressed now in the irrational forms that its society has given it. That is, if anything, this enduring expression and its vociferous forms now given to growing irrationality, is simply evidence of a more fundamentally irrational social body that does not know how to organize its labor toward its own ends of creative and collective self-mediation with nature.

One cannot, therefore, simply reject the religious as such—which has been humanity's enduring cultural expression of consciousness concerning the whole, the perfect, the potential for more and new life—by reducing it entirely to its irrational fundamentalist expressions. Rather we must look more closely at the diminishment of the standpoint of labor in its coinciding with the growth of religious fundamentalisms in the present. This is to suggest that the failure to think through and cultivate labor, as the material capacity for socially creating radical change, leaves the religious, as the cultural expression of real desires and intentions for radical change, to its most repressively alienating and distorting forms. If the disappearance of the standpoint of labor has coincided with the return of the religious in the form of radical fundamentalisms, might the return of the standpoint of labor, in a new more holistic way, coincide, not with the disappearance of the religious, but its return to a more rational form?

Marxists, in militantly attacking the religious or simply ignoring it altogether have thereby failed to follow Marx's own directive to scientifically explain the religious by beginning with its modes of production. *That* the religious is a material production is itself a banal observation and can therefore suggest nothing yet of its critique; and disclosing *why* it is materially produced cannot be the basis of its rejection but only the

critical beginning of the historical realization of its material truth. Again, if the religious is the expression in thought of humanity's deepest intuitions and intentions for new and more life, then the historical materialist cannot flatly reject it but rather must own it and reappropriate it—that is, if they are to hold a corresponding view of labor as already the revolutionizing material force in nature generating from the ground up those intuitions and intentions for qualitatively perfecting more and new life. If the modes of production in their truly rational form are simply the transformation of nature toward new creative potentialities serving qualitatively social values, then seeing how this produces the material and social conditions for change could help explain the religious as to its true form of expressing and articulating utopian ideas about change. What is needed, and what I attempt to think through within this dissertation, is then a return to labor as a self-transcending activity. This is nothing short of resurrecting a revolutionary sense of labor as itself an act of resurrection, a fundamentally social and creative activity whose final cause is to raise humanity into a new historical body beyond any reduction to the merely mortal flesh prescribed by the present. Thus, the laboring body qua labor always already harbors all the seeds for its immortality, for producing the perfection of life for itself, which is the qualitative perfection of eternal life. The task, then, is not to eliminate its religious consciousness, but to develop it from the true rationalization of labor according to its own ratio of perfection, i.e. to therein find its corresponding religious forms of thought that illuminate and reinvest in its capacities for the infinite and eternal.

But, this is to speak too soon about the transformative capacities internal to labor since there is much mist to be evaporated before this can be more clearly seen and adequately discussed. To speak of the laboring body as harboring the revolutionary seeds

of its potential immortality and then to claim a kind of scientific explanation of the religious on this basis, of course, could only be an outlandish claim violating all the supposed modesty of critical theory whose currently accepted role is more often as policing metaphysical claims so as to protect our cherished “post-metaphysical” society. My suggestions then seem to have violated C. W. Mills’s call in his “Letter to the New Left” to abandon any and every attempt to render labor the normatively universal standpoint for change, attempts which he labeled as simply an unrealistic “labor metaphysic”.⁶ But I argue that this account of the self-transcending potentials of labor is not naively metaphysical, but the more realist foundation, even providing a better critical explanation of the comprehensive production of metaphysical discourses that makes no naïve claim to actually going beyond metaphysics. Here we need to ask ourselves just how we are, or in what way we are, “post-metaphysical”.

Political liberals will of course argue that their “man as he really is” is the most realist option since it is based on the one and only unquestionably certain fact, confirmed by scientific objectivity, of humanity as absolutely and essentially mortal. To suggest anything more to the human essence, especially to suggest that it is in some way naturally oriented to or capable of producing the perfection of eternal life, is to not only impose metaphysics, but its fantastically fideistic forms, which could only be ideals of perfection derived from outside our material life in its solid terra firma. But let us critically examine, on the very basis of science, the so-called “science” of the matter here concerning the “discovery” of “man as he really is,” critically discerning in what way this is a scientifically objective description.

⁶ C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review* I (Sept–Oct. 1960): pp. 18–23.

Deconstructing the “Science” of the so called “Man as He Really is”

Here we need to begin with the founding methodological *epoche* of modern science, applied both in mechanistic physics and subsequent life sciences, that brackets out any notion of teleology and final cause within nature and instead adopts a purely mechanized image of bare efficient causation. As an axiomatic decision for a supposedly more objective look at things as they really are, this methodical bracketing analytically breaks down every whole, stripping all aspects of life and living self-organization from matter in order to pare matter down to the smallest indivisible unit. The image of reality at base then becomes that of a space-time void filled with lifeless particles externally related to each other.

Within an order of science as pursuing knowledge of the whole, however, this mechanistic picture could only provide a highly qualified description of reality, a partial viewpoint from a narrow formal abstraction. Yet this is not how such a mechanistic outlook has come to understand itself. Rather than critique, refine and expand upon preceding views of the cosmos as a living organic whole, wherein life was understood as necessarily transcendently oriented to its own qualitative perfection in some sense, and death a contingent accident answerable to life's movement, modern science reverses this image. Mesmerized by its self-evident principles of calculability as well as its criteria of formal self-consistency and predictability, mechanistic science blindly accepted the presuppositions of its methodological *epoche* as if now the true results discovered by this method, so that the mechanistic paradigm had come to stand as the explanatory framework for the universe as such: any intrinsically qualitative movement of

organization toward a more perfectible whole is reductively *explained* as merely a functional sum of its indifferent, quantifiable parts.

As Hans Jonas has pointed out, this leads modern science to uncritically accept a “universal ontology of death”.⁷ As Jonas further states, all of life is now to be explained in terms of “death as the natural and intelligible condition” so that “nonlife becomes the rule, life the puzzling exception”.⁸ For Jonas this is to sacrifice the evidence of purposiveness and final causality, which is found everywhere that organic life is found, to the theorem of an exclusively efficient causality, thus highlighting the non-empirical nature of this scientific view. Thus, by subtracting from the movement of life and its creative organizations, this view freezes isolated frames drained of all living qualities, accepts only general quantitative aspects predetermined by its methodological presuppositions, and then retrojects this deadened airless frame of reference back into the primordial and natural condition from and for which life arises.⁹ That is, for this version of science death becomes a transcendental standpoint in the modern sense: it now operates as the absolute ontological condition of possibility under which the being of life is made to appear to the knower as an isolated and accidental phenomenon, with no explanatory power in itself.

Under this view, especially as framed by classical physics’ First Law of Motion, biology’s mechanically agonistic construal of natural selection, and the Second Law of

⁷ Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹ For Jonas this is to sacrifice the evidence of purposiveness and final causality, which is found everywhere that organic life is found, to the theorem of an exclusively efficient causality, thus highlighting the non-empirical nature of this scientific view. *Ibid.*, 90.

Thermodynamics, life can only be the odd spectacle of a temporary, meaningless blip:¹⁰ a mysterious appearance inexplicably thrown from deadened, inert matter, into the brief illusion of creative self-organizing activity that is nevertheless reducible to defensive and reactionary lower functions, which are themselves ultimately the ephemeral expression of convoluted processes of dying and disintegrating. Life then is understood as an entirely reactive phenomenon determined both externally and internally by a force alien to life, thus presenting an image of life as absolutely death-bound. Yet this image of life as absolutely and necessarily mortal is self-contradictory because life itself appears without a *necessary* or *absolute* relation to death.

To begin with, we can briefly note that the primal stuff from which life emerges can no longer be viewed according to the idealized conception of inert matter as propounded by classical physics' First Law of Motion. Newton's coherent articulations of mechanically and mathematically grounded laws of motion nevertheless were non-empirically deduced from the ideal image of matter as completely inert and fixed within an absolute space-time vacuum. The vibrancy of matter's motion, by which matter only ever appears, is then bracketed out as a mode accidental to the idealization of an inert state of absolute rest. General relativity beginning with Einstein has challenged this founding view of inert matter and an absolute space filled with externally related

¹⁰ For the inertia of matter as the First Law of Motion for modern science see, of course, Isaac Newton, *The 'Principia': Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, a New Translation*, trans. I. Bernard Cohen and Anne Whitman, with Julia Budenz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). The agonistic construal of evolution as mechanically ordered around a narrow and violent form of natural selection began in earnest only after Darwin with the work of August Weismann and Alfred Russel Wallace, as Stephen Jay Gould suggests in *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2002). See A. R. Wallace, "The Origin of the Theory of Natural Selection," *Popular Science Monthly* 72 (1909): 396–400; and A. Weismann, "Allsufficiency of Natural Selection," *Contemporary Review* 64 (1893): 309–338. For the Second Law of Thermodynamics, especially as the basis for predicting a universal thermal equilibrium and thus cosmic heat death see Hermann von Helmholtz, "On the Interaction of Natural Forces," in *Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Cahan (University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 18–47.

particles, by a unified field theory of matter, gravitational force and space-time. Quantum mechanics beginning with Max Planck also provides a significant break with the atomistic picture of classical mechanics, helpfully moving instead in the direction of what seems to be an irreducible subatomic field of energy relations, referred to as a wave-particle duality and its quanta of energy.¹¹

Physics as the laws of motion of matter cannot then stop short with only the most basic and irreducible movement since this abstract movement still needs to be explained as to why it shows up, why its essence appears in a vast complexity of movements toward new wholes, which in turn show themselves to be ordered by principles not reducible to the motion of the smallest quanta. That is, matter is not only irreducibly in motion according to webs of relational fields, but it also organizes itself into new unities with new properties and can only be known in its most basic forms insofar as it has been organized into higher order modes of material becoming. Quantum mechanics indicates this issue in terms of the wave function collapse due to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle of measuring the probable states of the wave-particle duality. The wave nature of quantum objects in themselves, according to their duality between position and velocity, can never be statically reduced to an absolutely certain measurement, but also because the observer's position and movement in relation to such participates in the very movement of the wave function to be measured. In other words, the essence of matter cannot be determined by the downward reduction into its smallest forms since movements into higher formations continually reveal more of the bottom, revealing also that the essence is in the whole continually pushed forth at the top. For theoretical physics

¹¹ For an accessible guide to this shift see John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

this is the difficulty of finding a unified theory of motion, which is a matter of unifying the macro-scale motions of general relativity with the micro or nanoscopic scale of quantum mechanics.¹²

Without suggesting a nonphysical vitalistic force that externally moves matter as such, subatomic, atomic and inorganic matter can therefore be better described from the standpoint of engaging with it as a part of its self-surpassing continuation, since we are material beings whose fundamental desire to perfectly know and be is itself the outworking of matter actively coming to know itself, so to speak, in the creation of higher forms (lest we reductively explain away this intention as an inadvertent byproduct of dead nature, or mystifyingly constituted outside our material nature altogether, both being unverifiable postulates).¹³ The motion of matter is then a movement that presents itself to be known not simply for a controlled analytical reduction, but only insofar as any such

¹² Superstring theory is one recent attempt to provide a “theory of everything”, that is, to unify the four fundamental forces of strong and weak nuclear, electromagnetic and gravity within a field of vibrational patterns and their string loops. Yet this is still an attempt at measuring the most basic motions at the smallest subatomic level and according to a criterion solely of formal consistency for computational predictions, and therefore could not yet be an explanatory principle of the whole. As the philosopher of science, Salvatore Cannavo notes, “there seems to be no broadly acceptable manner of resolving the measurement problem, that is, of reconciling the indefinite cluster of informational possibilities that the core quantum formalism delivers with the phenomenological definiteness of actual observational experience and, derivatively, of the entire macroscopic world.” *Quantum Theory: A Philosopher’s Overview* (State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 122. On Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and related issues see his *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2000). This is not to fetishize uncertainty itself but rather to emphasize its enduring and seemingly insurmountable problematic within a narrow focus of physics on its partial microscopic quantifications.

¹³ This is to say, as an engaged continuation of matter’s self-surpassing emergence into new ordering principles and properties, unpredictably revealed at higher levels of organized complexity rather than as reducible to a singular immaterial principle of an *élan vital* running throughout the entire process as a sort of ghost in the machine. As Hans Driesch, the father of biological vitalism, construes this vitalistic dualism, something is either an extended reality and mechanical, or the subject of a non-energetic, non-physical entelechy as an “intensive manifoldness”: thus the vitalistic entelechy is not a new physical organization of energy and its distribution, but rather more like a non-causal principle that suspends prior physical and chemical laws since it is a principle that uses no energy whatsoever. But this then relegates causation simply to the static laws of blind mechanical efficiency while subjectivity and its entelechy hover above or outside causality altogether rather than transforming causal relations into higher forms. See Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism: The Gifford Lectures Delivered Before the University of Aberdeen in the Year 1907* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), pp. 142–150.

bracketed reduction is also comprehended back within its larger participation in unfolding and integrating complex relations. A holistic science that seeks to comprehend the totality of material relations then must also understand our engaged participatory standpoint as a continuation of this prior movement of emergent self-organization toward integrated complexity, a movement that is in some anticipatory sense always already creatively “alive” and active rather than lifeless and inert as the First Law of Motion in classical physics presumes.¹⁴ But emergence is the key in order to explain that subatomic and inorganic matter are not yet exactly “living”, and that organic matter is not yet a “knowing” and “making” subject, but that their principles of organization can be better explained by emergent principles of higher organization, rather than vice versa.

If matter is in no way dead but is a self-organizing dynamism that has allowed for the evolution of organic matter and life, it is then also not self-evident that death is an absolute or necessary fact within the organic realm since the creative self-organizing drive toward more complex wholes, within which life shows up, is not constitutively called into being by mere survival or an antagonistic struggle against death. Regardless of

¹⁴ The development of subjectivity as self-consciously creative must be a point of ingress into the meaning of matter as an *active* substance otherwise we run the risk of understanding subjectivity as something wholly other than nature and matter, an immaterial active principle alien to the passive substance of life. This would leave nature inexplicable except as an inert thing as well as explain away subjectivity as an occult force or random accident over against such. Speaking of the inadequacy of describing material development as random especially in relation to the emergence of subjectivity, Murray Bookchin writes, “To invoke mere fortuity as the *deus ex machina* of a sweeping, superbly organized development that lends itself to concise mathematical explanation is to use the accidental as a tomb for the explanatory ... This much is clear: we can no longer be satisfied with a passive ‘dead’ matter that fortuitously collects into living substance. The universe bears witness to an ever-striving, *developing*—not merely a ‘moving’—substance, whose most dynamic and creative attribute is its ceaseless capacity for self-organization into increasingly complex forms.” *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, CA: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 355–357. And, Teilhard de Chardin: “From the lowest and least stable nuclear elements up to the highest living beings, we now realize, nothing exists, nothing in nature can be an object of scientific thought except as a function of a vast and single combined process of ‘corpusculization’ and ‘complexification’, in the course of which can be distinguished the phases of a gradual and irreversible ‘interiorization’ (development of consciousness) of what we call (without knowing what it is) matter.” From “The God of Evolution,” in *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1971), p. 238.

how quickly death subsequently appeared on the biological scene of higher functioning organisms, life nevertheless arose from complex molecular and chemical relations in the first instance without the sign of death. The organic form of life's first appearance occurred within single-celled organisms that are quite adept at persisting on their own without a relation to mortality, infinitely dividing and self-replicating without perishing, and yet these organisms evolved and differentiated into more precarious forms of multicellular organisms.¹⁵ The contingent threat of death and mere survival therefore cannot explain this experimental process and its advanced leap toward complexification, suggesting that the drive toward organized complexity is more fundamentally for the sake of its own creative perfection at higher levels than as a function of lower processes.¹⁶

¹⁵ “Surprisingly, the study of evolutionarily older single-cell organisms suggests that cell aging and death is *not* an obligatory attribute of life on earth. Obligatory death as a result of *senescence*—natural aging—may not have come into existence for more than a billion years after life first appeared. This form of *programmed death* seems to have arisen at about the same time that cells began experimenting with sex in connection with reproduction.” William R. Clark, *Sex and the Origins of Death* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xi. The big question is of course why these primordial cells, such as bacteria, which given adequate conditions could eternally divide themselves without the original individual cell passing away, would nevertheless risk assembling themselves into complex multicellular organisms. This also challenges whether one can accurately speak of a “programmed death” as a necessity within the development of multicellular organisms that sexually reproduce, rather than as an experimental accident possibly surmounted in the long run under new forms reproduction.

¹⁶ The developed capacities for seeing, thinking and creative making however are not just random variations for localized struggles but rather born out under the contingent conditions of these struggles nonetheless for the purpose of seeing, thinking and creative making—that is, as emergent activities to be perfected in themselves beyond the local conditions of their development and for ordering this development beyond its particular functional struggles. Moreover, the dogma of a totally and violently determinative process of natural selection is now coming into serious question within biology. Lynn Margulis's groundbreaking work on the foundations of organic complexification within the ordinary symbiotic relationship between prokaryotic cells and colonies of bacteria suggests mutualism and cooperation as more fundamental to the evolution of complexity than predation and violent competition. See *Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). She incisively describes (without explicitly recalling that Darwin drew upon Malthus) the dogmatic Neodarwinian view that regards natural selection through competitive predation and single gene mutations, as if the very source of novel complexity, as a “minor twentieth century religious sect within the sprawling religious persuasion of Anglo-Saxon Biology”, a religious dogma that “projects ... cost-benefit analysis ... or other terms reminiscent of Western economic conditions.” See, “Kingdom Animalia: The Zoological Malaise from a Microbial Perspective,” *American Zoologist*, 30.4 (1990), p. 869. The drive toward complexification is even found to occur more significantly at higher levels with the absence of natural selection, as found amongst lab-raised fruit flies, again suggesting that the context of predatory struggle for survival amongst scarce resources is not the absolute author or even the sole necessary editing condition for evolutionary innovation. See Leonore Fleming and Daniel McShea, “*Drosophila* Mutants Suggest a Strong Drive Toward Complexity in

While this is to suggest that life is nothing other than creative becoming for its own sake, this does not imply a backwards-utopian appeal to a prelapsarian golden age prior to death, as if there was an original prokaryotic Garden of Eden whose reclined state was somehow disturbed into an evolution toward complexity. Rather it is to argue that life, like matter, is always already creative becoming as complexification, a process that is neither called into being by death nor calls death into being out of necessity. That living beings are mortal can only be scientifically explained then as a contingent accident resulting from the risks of complexification, the historical mishap and fall into contradictory mortal mechanisms with the provisional experiments of reproduction, which are only then precariously and temporarily put to use until another form of becoming emerges without need of death.

Thus to argue that death is nevertheless employed by evolution at higher levels as a kind of planned obsolescence to ensure room for further evolutionary development is to prematurely limit and explain away the creative potential within the movement toward complexity by fixating on death as an inescapable necessity, mechanically employed by a deterministic generic process.¹⁷ The empirical problem of death in its vexing appearance

Evolution,” *Evolution and Development* 15.1 (2013): 53–62. In many ways biology is here confirming what the Russian anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin put forward at the turn of the century in his theories of mutualism as a motor of evolution.

¹⁷ August Weismann, in the late nineteenth century, was one of the first scientist to give death a necessary meaning within evolutionary development, as a preprogrammed end to make room for more developed generations. See *Essays Upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*, trans. and eds. Edward B. Poulton, Selmar Schonland and Arthur E. Shipley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889). Remarkably this view gained orthodoxy, despite the difficulties in explaining why and how this death program could arise in the first place within perceivably non-scarce conditions and genetically take root as an advantageous development where there is no competitive requirement for such a trait. Moreover, it perpetrates a “strange parody of the Cartesian model of two noncommunicating substances” as Jonas describes it, *The Phenomenon of Life*, p. 52. This is because Weismann held to a biological dualism between germ cells and somatic cells where the automatism of the germ blindly uses somatic cells as collected in individual bodies to merely reproduce the germ cells in new ways and then die off. For Weismann there is an explicit immortality of the germ perpetuated by its epiphenomenal history of sacrificed bodies; and embodiment must be necessarily mortal since anything else would be a detrimental rival to the continuation of a species’

as currently assimilated provisionally within life's ongoing development—a mode of becoming whose form is not yet settled—would here be allowed to rashly insinuate itself as an inviolable law within the very essence of creative self-organization as such. Not only does this overdetermine the open dynamisms of nature by suturing them eternally to a contingently given form of becoming, but more troubling is the fact that any idea of necessary obsolescence—implying as it does a providential sacrificing mechanism that has its own cosmic purposes—lends itself all too easily to ideological justifications for giving death and letting die in any claimed pursuit of the perfection of life for itself (for instance, Social Darwinism).

Therefore the emergence of life from inorganic matter can be non-deterministically explained, not as sheer randomness, but as experimental creativity, and thus as a movement becoming intelligible to itself by the empirically observed final cause of emergent self-organizing complexity for which death is only a contingent and potentially surmountable surd. Lastly, then, the belief that all of these preceding points will ultimately mean nothing in the face of the eventual and inescapable disintegration and death of the universe, misapplies the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This law is indeed sovereign over any isolated mechanical system with absolute finite limits such as

germ. All embodied beings must then accept their role of dying as an absolute and necessary requirement of its species membership, Weismann, *Essays Upon Heredity*, p. 24. Thus with this notion of germ cells and his crude view of natural selection as authorizing a narrow process there was very little, if any, room in Weismann's thought for an organism's active contribution to making novel complexity. See Thomas B. L. Kirkwood and Thomas Cremer, "Cytogerontology Since 1881: A Reappraisal of August Weismann and a Review of Modern Progress," *Human Genetics* 60 (1982): 101–121. In the end then we have a very extravagant theory here that contradicts and obscures what it is attempting to explain. Planned obsolescence as a theory for the sake of explaining naturally developed complexity, therefore, is an astoundingly unnatural idea that leads to the understanding of no actual complexity at all since it would all just be an expensive illusion of trees, bodies, and persons thrown up for the sake of maintaining the immortality of the generic and immutable seed in itself.

a steam engine.¹⁸ Yet there is no definitive evidence that the universe is totally enclosed like a gigantic yet finite combustion engine, especially since material self-organization exhibits an infinite capacity to leap toward new wholes that open up what seemed to be previously isolated systems of energetic relations. Human labor (and its social extension into culture) marks at a microcosmic level an especially intense and highly complex form of this transformative leap into new forms of energy use. As I will discuss in chapter 2, productive activity is fundamentally an attempt to organize a system of energy so as to open it toward greater forms of life and increased capacities for creative development that not only reduce but reverse entropy. But to hold to the Second Law as the absolute fate of the universe is to already deny the meaning of all our organized labors before they are finished in their scientific investigations, since it would amount to predetermining the meaning of the universe and its open movements as necessarily ending in the negation of organization as such and thus contradictorily given to a final unintelligibility.¹⁹

¹⁸ There is no doubt that the law of entropy applies to any finite system and thus it contingently applies to our known terrestrial and solar system insofar as these are relatively isolated within the cosmos. But strictly speaking, our terrestrial and solar system are not totally isolated systems closed off from the rest of the cosmos and nor is the cosmos as a whole an enclosed, isolatable set. How we answer the question of whether our universe is a closed finite system altogether determines the extent to which this law is applied. And as Stephen Toulmin argues, the only way to extrapolate this law from its particular systems to the “universe-as-whole” is to know precisely the boundaries of the universe as such that would make it an absolutely isolated and closed system. Toulmin therefore rightly concludes, “the conditions necessary for us to apply the Second Law of Thermodynamics to the universe-as-whole are such as cannot be satisfied.” See *The Return to Cosmology: Postmodern Science and the Theology of Nature* (University of California Press, 1985), p. 43.

¹⁹ As I will discuss in chapter 2 Friedrich Engels already provided an insightful critique of the Second Law along these lines, without denying that it exists, but rather denying its construal solely within classical mechanistic physics wherein nature’s open evolving dynamisms toward anti-entropic motion, especially at the cosmic level, are incoherently excluded. Therefore, the denial of the Second Law as *universal* is not predicated solely upon epistemological limits as suggested by Toulmin above but rather more fundamentally by appeal to known dynamisms of matter’s qualitative transformation and gravity’s continual concentration of energy sources which evince a trajectory beyond the maximization of entropy. What this law overlooks is the primary fact that nature produces high levels of organization, a process which cannot be ruled primarily by the forces of dissipation and disintegration; that is, creative organization must hold open the possibility of reconcentrated energy through its increasing capacities for doing higher forms of work, since the very being of material development and life is already this anti-entropic work. “The very basis of life is dependent on a counter tendency to the second law, otherwise

Within the mechanistic paradigm, life is denied its perfectibility as anything more than cycles of dynamic equilibrium, thus denying from its creative self-perfection the introduction of novelty, of real *historical* development and change by which something like an actively knowing subject as a new addition to nature could arise in the first place. Death as a transcendental condition of possibility therefore cannot account for the creative movement of matter and life without self-contradiction. Since these movements are not determined in their *essence* by a *fixed* relation to death and dead mechanisms, transcendentalizing death to account for life and its creative novelties can only be a reification par excellence.²⁰ That is, dead matter and death are only relative privations and distorted occurrences produced from contingent relations within life, as byproducts somehow of damaged life and yet they are here projected into the inverse position of allegedly producing the conditions for life as such. It is a reification, then, because it is a bracketed conceptuality that arbitrarily confines the creative self-surpassing movement of life to one of its own contingent moments and privative limits, mystifying life's own perfective self-relation by rendering it answerable to its unrecognizably alienated form

complex life-forms could not exist. If entropy were truly the overriding logic of reality, development of the basic building blocks of life would have been impossible because the law of entropy would demand that matter, organic or otherwise, become less complex, not more. In order to evolve and survive, living organisms must find a way to combat entropic forces that would break them down before development and organization could take place." Paul Prew, "The 21st Century World-Ecosystem: Systemic Collapse or Transition to a New Dissipative Structure?" in *New Theoretical Directions for the 21st Century World-System*, ed. Wilma A. Dunaway (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 2003), p. 205. See also Jean-Paul Deleage, "Eco-Marxist Critique of Political Economy," in *Is Capitalism Sustainable?: Political Economy and the Politics of Ecology*, ed. Martin O'Connor (New York: Guilford, 1994). "Human labor runs against this tendency toward increasing disorder of the physical world. It sets into motion the energy sleeping within nature, converts 'wild' energy into 'domesticated,' useful energy." p. 42.

²⁰ Reification is the abstraction of something from its relative context, which is forgotten or concealed, so that the thing abstracted becomes treated as if a fixed "eternal law" that exists separately and absolutely, thus accounting for and regulating the very reality that produced it. The claim here is that once death is abstracted from its privative relation within the contingent movement of the finite toward the infinite and eternal and is instead treated as the absolute ontological reality definitive of life, it therein becomes the quintessential reification since its essential nothingness is arbitrarily held as a substantive reality. On a general theory of reification see Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

accepted as a mythical fate. The contingent appearance of death then could only be presented as a mythologized transcendental condition to a consciousness willfully divorced from, or forgetful of, its active standpoint within the creative movement of life.²¹ Indeed the development and movement of life can only be intelligibly accounted for by way of its own increasingly perfected self-relation, whose qualitative movements cannot be a priori limited, so that life is explainable only as a creative movement toward its own transcendental perfection of eternal life.²²

But if this reification of death within science is so patently contradictory and non-empirically metaphysical how then could such a detached, reified view arise, conceal its constructed partiality, and unproblematically settle into common sense? Jonas suggests the emergence of the ontology of death was in a certain way a resigned capitulation to the corpse, allowing its presence—“a relentless pressure on thought”—to define material development according to its capacity for decay and its seemingly necessary fall back into deadened mechanisms, rather than according to matter’s transformative potential for creative self-organization. “Only when a corpse is the body plainly intelligible,” he writes, since “then it returns from its puzzling and unorthodox behavior of aliveness to

²¹ As Theodore Adorno says: “It is rationally knowable where an unleashed, self-escaping rationality goes wrong, where it becomes true mythology. The ratio recoils into irrationality as soon as in its necessary course it fails to grasp that the disappearance of its substrate—however diluted—is its own work, the product of its own abstraction.” *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 148–149.

²² As Jonas says, “Life can be known only by life”, *Phenomenon of Life*, p. 91. Or as Theodosius Dobzhansky states, “The evolution of life has only one discernible goal, and that is life itself”, *Genetics and the Origin of Species*, (Columbia University Press, 1982). Life then can only be known as a movement toward the transcendental perfection of eternal life and by way of participation since every labor, every activity of knowing, as living acts, anticipates a future whole of perfect organization, as will be further elaborated in chapter 2. And if knowing is a perfective activity of life for itself, then the neutrality of science cannot be conceived in terms of an objectivity that correlates to an alleged reality of indifferent facts devoid of internal values. That is, the labor of science, its organization of matter in an analytical and experimental manner, is always a part of a purposive labor toward perfecting knowledge of the whole. It is therefore not a value-free pursuit and nor is it an indifferent gaze upon a value-free reality: the construction itself of a “value-free reality” is itself always already a construction derivative of a fundamentally value-laden reality and mediated by way of fundamentally value-laden activities.

the unambiguous, ‘familiar’ state of a body within the world of bodies, whose general laws provide the canon of all comprehensibility.”²³

Yet, Jonas does not venture into investigating the social conditions that gave rise to this peculiar view. Why such a historically unprecedented decision was made for these narrow canons of comprehensibility oriented around death still remains unclear and unanswered. Why the corpse as transcendental condition of intelligibility for the entire body? Of course, the ancients experienced their share of corpses and yet the whole cosmos was treated as alive and the body was alive with it. And while they disparaged the lower elements of the body and its labor along with it, as those heavier earthen elements as necessarily mortal, they nevertheless understood the body’s perceiving and thinking form as its active principle of intelligibility insofar as these related to the eternal perfection of nature. One cannot then appeal to the sight of actual corpses as if they made a greater appearance at the dawn of modernity or their fact alone presented a newer revelation than in other times.²⁴ Therefore, since no inexorable logic of a holistic scientific method, or new discovery of nature, necessitated transcendentalizing death, it problematically remains as a concept without intuitions and thus more like a regulative ideal for a certain kind of distorted reasoning that prematurely refuses any final causes, denying the very ratio of any comprehensive rationality by which science truly understands. We must then inquire into the specific social conditions that not only generated, but seemingly required, an abstract consciousness divorced from its actively

²³ Jonas, *Phenomenon of Life*, p. 19; p. 12.

²⁴ Of course the Great Famine, the Black Death, the Hundred Years’ War and the later so called “Wars of Religion” play a significant factor in the late Medieval and early Modern European experience and conceptualizing of death. But every historical epoch has suffered its share of famines, plagues, and wars. The question is, then, what caused thinkers within early modernity to build from and mobilize upon a common experience of death in the unique way that they did?

engaged body, thus leading to discursive formations that privileged the corpse as the intelligible form of the body.

Jeffrey Bishop's apt description of the meaning of the body presupposed in the development of modern medical science as an "anticipatory corpse," begins to shed more light on the social reasons for this turn toward transcendentalizing death.²⁵ He argues that replacing every other final cause with the anticipatory image of the corpse for determining the normative intelligibility of the living body allowed the controlled gaze of modern science to contain the movement of the living body within a paradigm of bare efficient causality. The living body was thus reduced to bare flesh whose functions were definable exclusively by its efficient mechanisms of resisting death as its absolute final end. As Bishop explains, this medical view of the body eventually gained hegemony once it was employed within the broader sociopolitical interests emerging throughout the late 17th and 18th century within the new science of political arithmetic.²⁶ Thus a body was already being socially produced in such a way that its reproduction came to require a special form of politics and its science as strategies for maintaining and containing the living body within this constricted image of its final cause as the corpse.

With the normative sense of the body's intelligibility being socially produced and politically reproduced only according to the final image of an anticipatory corpse, we now have the clue to its social conditions of production since it is precisely the body's

²⁵ Jeffrey P. Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse: Medicine, Power, and the Care of the Dying* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). Bishop provides a helpful corrective to Foucault's analyses of biopolitics by pinpointing the metaphysics of this discursive formation around death. This indicates that rendering mortal finitude ontologically and epistemologically normative is in no real way a more clear-sighted turn away from metaphysics, but only an adjustment within a certain impoverished form of metaphysics.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81. Charles Wilson aptly describes William Petty's founding purpose for developing political arithmetic: "His central idea was an imaginative marriage between medicine and mathematics, his subject for anatomy being the body politic, his surgeon's knife the 'algorithm'." *England's Apprenticeship: 1603–1763* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 227.

living labor as a creative ongoing work of organizing reality that is bracketed out from determining its meaning and value. The key, as Paolo Virilo has suggested, is that the body here reflected in science and politics as mere mortal flesh is the abstracted sense of the body already being socially presupposed in the sale of labor power, the body as the mere physical housing of an abstractly saleable capacity that can be separated from the living body's own essential value and intelligibility.²⁷ To more thoroughly explain this process as already reflexively determined by ubiquitously underlying socioeconomic forces and relations of production we must turn to a brief analysis of how bourgeois sociality arose.

Exposing the Social Production of the Reified Bourgeois Body

To grasp the reactive and parasitic form of bourgeois sociality as decomposing the laboring body, insinuating itself deep within the social body of production and thus generating the reifications in question, it is important to emphasize that the fall of feudalism was not due to contradictions at the level of productive forces, as so often thought. This interpretation sets up the idea that a new class of capitalists arose as that progressive agent who alone resolved feudal contradictions of production through an elevated rationalization of the labor process and its resulting social synthesis, while the laboring class was merely a passive object.²⁸ Yet this fails to consider how capitalists only emerged late as ultimately derivative of the rising laboring classes, and not as an organic extension of artisans and craftsmen rationally organizing their own productive

²⁷ Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), pp. 81–84.

²⁸ Claudio Katz, “Karl Marx on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism,” *Theory and Society* 22 (1993): 363–389.

forces but as their mutated faction once the movement of labor began to fragment into new sectors of commerce and finance that eventually, and only secondarily, began to extend their influence upon the sphere of production.²⁹

Rather it was precisely the historical movement of the laboring class as a progressive productive force that provided the relief against which the contradictions within the feudal modes of exploitation were exposed and exacerbated. As I will discuss in chapter 1, towards the late Middle Ages the laboring class began to comprehend its constitutive value within a whole for which it was perfecting/being perfected. The development of productive forces coupled with the laboring body's growing self-understanding as homo artifex, that active internal power of perfection, further incentivized the development of its own productive powers, leading to a real rise in social position for the laboring classes, as well as their growing ability to organize resistance against the feudal structures of exploitation. Thus, by the 14th century, growing class power began pressuring feudal lords to the extent that their extra-economic means of exploitation were no longer strong enough to maintain the extracting mechanisms of serfdom.³⁰ With the increase of organized worker and peasant resistance, the lords were impelled to grant the laboring classes greater amounts of landholdings and independence in production, as well as to settle for a commutation of dues in the form of money rent—a settlement that dissolved the tight chains of the manorial system yet left a highly ambiguous opening.³¹ This meant that the source of revenue for the manor began to

²⁹ Henryk Grossmann, trans. Gabriella Shalit, "The Social Foundations of the Mechanistic Philosophy and Manufacture," *Science in Context* 1.1 (1987): 129–180.

³⁰ Rodney Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History* (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 219.

³¹ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004), p. 31.

inevitably dry up as more products went to the laboring classes' own subsistence and development, as well as to the growing petty commodity market for their own gain. But with the rise of a petty commodity market and the money form for exchange, there also arose within the ranks of the working class a new class of merchants.

As the commutation of dues meant a greater need for money, and the increased landholdings of small peasant producers meant more produce for the market where money could be obtained, the growth of petty commodity markets slowly began to reorient social formations around exchange relations. Through market exchanges, with new forms of wealth amassing in the money form rather than primarily in land and goods, the laboring classes began witnessing a trend toward divisive social stratification. With the breakdown of serfdom and the dividing up of land amongst small producers, absentee landlords, and the Crown and its court nobility, a large mass of landless peasant laborers emerged throughout the countryside as well as overflowing into urban centers. Money-rent seeking landlords often employed at a competitive rate wealthy peasant farmers, successful in petty commodity production, to farm their lands. These tenant farmers operated as proto-capitalist managers, efficiently utilizing landless wage laborers in order to produce a higher yield from the lord's land for the market.³²

A similar tendency was taking place within the growing urban centers of trade, as master craftsmen sought to submit some of their own journeymen and apprentices to increasingly deregulated wage contracts. Successful craftsmen often became middlemen buying and selling goods from other craftsmen for the market and long distance trade. Through exercising their monopolistic controls on buying cheap and selling high, and

³² Terence J. Byres, "The Landlord Class, Peasant Differentiation, Class Struggle and the Transition to Capitalism: England, France and Prussia Compared," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36 (January 2009): p. 51.

therein accumulating money for which there was a growing demand in terms of loans, these middlemen rose from the upper strata of the laboring class to that of wealthy merchants, investors and bankers. This new class soon found itself in an opportunistic position by which to easily strike up alliances with either artisans or patricians and landlords against one another, while subjecting all to new forms of usury in money loans.³³ And when urban guilds began to resist merchant prices and deregulation, merchants quickly found a pool of landless wage laborers within the town or nearby countryside to put out more goods at lower costs.³⁴

The proto-bourgeois faction of tenant farmers, merchants, investors, and bankers did not emerge as a progressive productive force as much as an effective parasite and manipulator, through the newly growing avenues of exchange and finance, of the contingently developing stratification within its social body of producers. As this new strata rose in its social position it became better suited to gain from and further manipulate certain reactionary measures of the waning feudal consolidations into Absolutist states, just as the state began to recognize and further facilitate these growing forms of moneyed wealth. The state's preoccupation with war-making relied on heavily taxing the peasantry.³⁵ This often hampered the laboring classes' productive development

³³ In Speaking of the opportunistic position that the merchant class found itself, Immanuel Wallerstein states: "A merchant class came from two sources: On the one hand, agents of the landlords who sometimes became independent, as well as intermediate size peasants who retained enough surplus after payments to the lord to sell it on the market; on the other hand, resident agents of long-distance merchants (based often in northern Italian city-states and later in the Hanseatic cities) who capitalized on poor communications and hence high disparities of prices from one area to another, especially when certain areas suffered natural calamities." *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 19.

³⁴ Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, vol. 1, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), pp. 110–117.

³⁵ Perry Anderson describes the reactionary nature of the Absolutist State in terms of "a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination, designed to clamp the peasant masses back into their traditional social position – despite and against the gains they had won by the widespread commutation of dues. ... With the generalized commutation of dues into money rents, the cellular unity of political and economic

and organization of resistance, rendering them more pliable to the growing institution of wage labor. But more importantly, war-making as a state economic strategy for obtaining surplus began colonization and the import of slave labor in earnest, thus driving down the local demand of labor, a demand which up to the 15th century had marked a so-called “golden age” of empowerment for the laboring classes.³⁶ Colonization also provided more markets, land, resources, and especially mines for extracting precious metals, which led to an influx of coinage into circulation so as to catch up with the demands of an increasingly monetized economy as well as depositing more wealth into the hands of merchant capital.³⁷ The Absolutist state not only helped open new opportunities for trade and investment by which the sector of finance could burgeon, but it also provided much needed protection for merchants raiding these foreign lands and securing monopolies upon their new trade routes and resources.³⁸

At the same time, at home within the politico-legal structures throughout much of Western Europe, there was a revival of Roman civil law to meet the changing needs of market exchanges.³⁹ This legal structure not only legitimated the absolute power of the Crown and its imperialist program, but it also allowed for the mirrored institution of

oppression of the peasantry was gravely weakened, and threatened to become dissociated (the end of this road was ‘free labour’ and the ‘wage contract’). The class power of the feudal lords was thus directly at stake with the gradual disappearance of serfdom. The result was a *displacement* of politico-legal coercion upwards towards a centralized, militarized summit – the Absolutist State. Diluted at the village level, it became concentrated at ‘national’ level. The result was a reinforced apparatus of royal power, whose permanent political function was the repression of the peasant and plebian masses at the foot of the social hierarchy.” *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 18–19.

³⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 510. “Only in the period of the decline and fall of the feudal system, but where it still struggles internally—as in England in the fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth centuries—is there a golden age for labour in the process of becoming emancipated.”

³⁷ Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, pp. 106–107.

³⁸ Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 41.

³⁹ The renaissance in studying Roman law began around the 12th century in Italy before it eventually went into large scale practice in the 14th century, taking hold especially in France, the Netherlands and Prussia, while having less of an effect on England due to their already developed legal system. See Peter Stein, *Roman Law in European History* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

absolute private property rights without need for guarantees from customary feudal attachments.⁴⁰ The Roman politico-legal codes were restructured in such a way so as to encourage, at the socioeconomic level, the enclosure of common lands for private profit, as well as at the political level, the purchasing of bureaucratic positions through money. Thus, the private economic interests of the proto-bourgeoisie would eventually be able to infiltrate and slowly hollow out the state politico-legislative body of its feudal organs. With the privatized enclosure of the commons as well as the confiscation of monastery lands and their funds, the mass of laborers already evicted from manors, soon were also deprived of common lands and rights, as well as the protective charity of monasteries.⁴¹ The development of Poor Laws, Laws of Settlement and Game Laws, among others, took away the last resort of begging, migrating, self-organizing and hunting for these now pauperized laborers, thus compelling the laboring body, out of its newfound necessity, to comprehend its worth entirely through the external form of its exchange value.⁴²

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 25.

⁴¹ “The process of forcible expropriation of the people received a new and terrible impulse in the sixteenth century from the Reformation, and the consequent colossal spoliation of church property. The Catholic church was, at the time of the Reformation, the feudal proprietor of a great part of the soil of England. The dissolution of the monasteries, etc., hurled their inmates into the proletariat. The estates of the church were to a large extent given away to rapacious royal favourites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating farmers and townsmen, who drove out the old-established hereditary sub-tenants in great numbers, and threw their holdings together. The legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the church’s tithes was quietly confiscated.” Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 881–882.

⁴² With no monastic institution by which to care for the poor, English Parliament in 1531 set up a meager system of collecting relief and decreed that only those officially determined to be infirm were authorized to beg and receive almsgiving from this national fund as well as from designated local parishes. Almsgiving was outlawed to anyone unauthorized and begging was punishable by whipping, and, later in 1536, decreed to be punishable by branding and even execution. This was followed by statutes of Settlement that fixed wages at a low rate, prohibited the unemployed from turning down any form of work as well as prohibited the poor from migrating from their place of birth in search of higher wages. As summed up by Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, by 1601 the Laws of Settlement in combination with the Poor Laws effectively ensured that “laborers could not organize, they could not refuse work, they could not exploit labor shortages to demand higher wages, and they could not move to new localities to find better working conditions.” *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 37. This is to not even mention the dwindling diets of the masses in the 16th century as famines and food shortages amongst the peasantry, exacerbated by the enclosure of the commons and the rise of commercial

What we see here is the movement of primitive accumulation by which capital arose from within and began to amass abstract value through a violent and reactionary decomposition of the social body of labor, laying it naked before its command. Yet, while capital initially gained leverage by utilizing the death-dealing force of Absolutism in extracting and accumulating surplus land, resources, peoples, and money—consolidated in its private ownership of the means of production—its essence lies in its radical reformulation of these overt modes of exploitation. Any attempt to continually discipline and appropriate goods from a laboring body that is relatively independent in its means of production and thus can see something of its constitutive value within its own creative means of self-organization, will ultimately prove inefficient and self-negating for the expropriator. In feudal modes of exploitation, the transparency of their arbitrary and overt extractions, as well as the real limits of their object of appropriation and their own consumptive capacity, rendered feudalism internally cumbersome, contradictory, and easily challenged by organized labor. The proto-bourgeoisie, however, arose from within the laboring class's resistance, riding it against feudal conventions while nevertheless using the hollowed out feudal structures against the laboring class. Therefore they ultimately settled into their prominent position not simply through forcibly extracting surplus product from a recalcitrant body, but rather by taking up and transforming the mode of production whereby surplus value is subtly extracted from now landless labor "freely" exchanged for a wage.

farming, marked a further regression in developing their productive powers. See Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1974). On the Game Laws in England as a means of denying subsistence to the laboring class and thereby aiding primitive accumulation of capital, see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 38–58.

The distinctiveness of this new totality of exchange relations predicated on the private ownership of the means of production, once it shifts from petty to generalized commodity exchange through the ubiquity of the wage form, is that the act of exchange is no longer comprehended as a part within the productive activity of the social body, but rather the social body as such is comprehended entirely by and for the activity of commodity exchange. This shift effectively hides the constitutive value of the laboring body from itself since the social whole of production, whereby reality is fundamentally organized and experienced, is no longer felt and known through its basic activity of labor's creative and collective interchange with nature. Instead the new social synthesis of experience is felt and known most directly through the individual act of exchanging labor as a commodity, so that sociality now only *appears* precisely as the creative and collective powers of the laboring body *disappear* behind the opaqueness of the commodity form as it is exchanged for private interests.⁴³

The social whole, then, is not effected through some form of collectively creative activity within the prior social body of production, but rather all creative activity is privatized and exchange is the only thing public.⁴⁴ As Alfred Sohn-Rethel has argued, in *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, when the only public point of contact synthesizing the collective sense of a social whole is the act of exchanging under the universal commodity form of money, then a new "social nexus" emerges from a "real abstraction."⁴⁵ That this

⁴³ "The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home." Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 74.

⁴⁴ As Adam Smith aptly described this new sense of reality: "Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society." *Wealth of the Nations*, book I, ch. 4, 37.

⁴⁵ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: MacMillan Press, 1978). His analysis is an extension of Marx's insight from *Grundrisse*: "The mutual and universal dependence of individuals who remain indifferent to one another constitutes the

exchange abstraction is “real” indicates for Sohn-Rethel that it is not an abstraction within conceptual thought or first consciously produced by intellectual activity.⁴⁶ Instead it is an abstraction unconsciously concretized within social reality already at the level of commodity production, and effectively reproduced through the dominant social practice of private individuals routinely exchanging commodities under the abstract principle of equivalence. While the basic interactions of exchange society physically take place within time and space and are conditioned by the need for use-values like any other social nexus, the constitution of its specific social form operates through the practical necessity of emptying out time and space of any intrinsic axiological sense.⁴⁷ That is, the process of exchange undergoes an unnoticed but stringently applied bracketing of every substantive value embodied within the things exchanged as well as the actions of exchange so that the rarefied symbol of exchange value can hold absolute sway in rendering incommensurables commensurable, since the money form can have no other rivals to its flattening determination of value.⁴⁸ Though Sohn-Rethel does not describe it as such, the real abstraction (despite the banal everyday appearance of its activity) functions as a form of mystifying religious devotion; or as Marx calls it, “this religion of everyday life,” since the practice of generalized commodity exchange involves an irrational transfer of pious

social network that binds them together. This social coherence is expressed in exchange value, in which alone each individual’s activity or his product becomes an activity or a product for him.”

⁴⁶ Similarly, Georg Lukács’s, *Ontology of Social Being: Marx*, (London: Merlin Press, 1978), p.40: “If this process is considered free from the toils of idealist metaphysics, we must take note of the fact that this process of abstraction is a real process in the real social world . . . this abstraction has the same ontological rigour of facticity as a car that runs you over.”

⁴⁷ “Thus the negation of the natural and material physicality constitutes the positive reality of the abstract social physicality of the exchange processes from which the network of society is woven.” *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, p. 56.

⁴⁸ Hence, Marx’s famous line: “Money is therefore the god among the commodities.” *Grundrisse*, p. 221.

attention away from intrinsic values within the world, to those that are wholly and idealistically set apart within the sacredness of the abstracted money form.⁴⁹

Thus, the very substance of nature, under the powerful habit of commodity exchange and its view of calculability, becomes treated as if emptily homogenized within a space and time assumed as an indifferent void rather than a creative movement of self-organization (for which the privileged access point to its knowledge would be in the standpoint of labor's transformative activity).⁵⁰ Here motion is no longer perceived according to its qualitative degrees and incommensurable movements, but leveled to an undifferentiated linearity of bare quanta.⁵¹ Matter regarded within the practice of exchange abstraction is only known and treated in terms of primary qualities of size, weight, shape and hardness so that the differences in kind and magnitudes can be reducible to flat numerical comparisons as comprehended under the monetary price.⁵² And labor exchanged as a commodity for a wage begins to comprehend itself, not as the privileged movement of constituting humanity by socially intuiting and raising the perfective drive of nature into new wholes, but rather as divisible units of motion whose time is commensurable with all other bodies in motion (and eventually measured against the motion of the machine). When all of reality is funneled through the exchange

⁴⁹ See Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, accessed online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>. Religious piety has more to do with the habitual practice of binding oneself to certain objects of devotion, than to the conscious proclamation of discursively formed "beliefs". Thus the fact that no one actually "believes" in the physical object of money is beside the point, and this admission often leads to a greater blindness of and habituation to the actual devotion to money as the sole measure of reality. On the pious nature of devotion to commodity exchange within capitalism see Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁰ "For the non-empirical real abstraction is evident in commodity exchange only because through it a social synthesis becomes possible which is in strict spatio-temporal separation from all acts of man's material interchange with nature." Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, p. 67.

⁵¹ "As use-values, commodities differ above all in quality, while as exchange-values they can only differ in quantity, and therefore do not contain an atom of use-value." Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 128.

⁵² Richard Hadden, *On the Shoulders of Merchants: Exchange and the Mathematical Conception of Nature in Early Modern Europe* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 19.

abstraction, reducing all entities to bare quantifiable objects as comprehended by the money form, it then becomes a tacit yet socially valid axiom that “nothing regarding the essence of things need be communicated,” thus implying the arrested and contradictory nature of bourgeois society since its most basic social relation must bracket out the social nature of reality.⁵³

Unlike certain classical societies where the sociopolitical nexus is explicitly constituted by excluding the subhuman laboring body from membership, the bourgeois social nexus of exchange involves the practical inclusion, subconsciously internalized within every member, of its laboring body but as a deadened object of exchange. And with the laboring body seemingly entering the social totality only as a commodity owned and exchanged between externally related individuals, an illusory and repressive form of abstract consciousness, imperceptive to the normative standpoint of its active body, is automatically perpetuated: what Sohn-Rethel laments as the severance of head from hand, intellectual from manual labor. The real abstraction effected through the practice of generalized commodity exchange, then, is that fundamental social condition that both separates consciousness from its body as well as presents the body back to it according to a reified content—a process of reification anchored more deeply within material life not simply because labor is exchanged as a commodity, but because this already implies its subsumption under the wage as nothing but a commodity for producing commodities.

⁵³ “Commodity exchange impels solipsism between its participants. Accordingly commodity exchange does not depend on language, on what we communicate to each other. Nothing regarding the essence of things need be communicated.” Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, p. 41. Commenting on the assumed image of nature emerging from within the exchange abstraction, Sohn-Rethel comments: “This conception of nature is unmistakably at odds with the nature experienced by man in the labour process of which Marx says that man, when he acts upon nature, is a force of nature himself. As an agent of the market, man is hardly less divided from nature than the value of the commodities themselves.” *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Prior to any allegedly unified theory of motion within mathematical physics, therefore, the form and content of labor, its motion and matter, are already socially experienced, preconceived and practically engaged according to a single unified picture of purposeless nature as comprehended by the false consciousness of the commodity form.⁵⁴ Here then is the basis in experience for intellectually reflecting upon and conceptualizing the laboring body, and all of reality with it, as if normatively dead matter in motion, so that the real abstraction of exchange relations can be said to generate the ideal abstractions of modern mechanistic science.⁵⁵

It is therefore no coincidence that during the 16th and 17th centuries, as bourgeois society began sweeping through Western Europe and extending a global network, there was also a new preoccupation with establishing algebraic notation as a kind of universal language along with the hegemonic rise of purely mathematical physics, thus entrenching

⁵⁴ The proto-bourgeois exchange abstraction was already taking root long before capitalism would fully realize its commodification of productive forces to the fullest extent in industrialization. Joel Kaye claims that we find a conceptual difference already occurring between the 13th and 14th centuries in the turn toward nominalism and univocity of being that itself was a reflection of transferring over the emerging proto-market monetary principle of equivalence into a metaphysical and natural principle. He notes that Duns Scotus and Peter Olivi both began to carry over a concept of monetized exchange value into metaphysics insofar as they saw value as an extended continuum whose measurement by money in the economic sphere provides a formal method for quantifying qualities in general. Nature was no longer considered teleologically as ordered to qualitative perfections but increasingly viewed under market concepts such as the quantification of qualities, geometrical proportions beginning from a zero degree, and the impersonal mechanisms of cyclical equilibrium. He cites prominent natural philosophers from the University of Paris such as Jean de Ripa, Peter Ceffons, John of Mirecourt, and Jacob of Naples as notable exemplars of carrying this project beyond even the Oxford Calculators in its universal application. But it is Jean Buridan and Nicole Oresme who demonstrate its fullest form. Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 126; p. 235.

⁵⁵ Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, p. 28. Sohn-Rethel however argues that wherever there is commodity exchange of any degree through the money form there is an inevitable engendering of a false consciousness and its ideal abstractions whose highest form will eventually be realized in modern science. Thus he claims that Greek philosophy initiated the basic proto-modern ideal of abstraction because of its new social conditions of commodity exchange and the circulation of coinage within the polis. As will be evident from the analyses in chapter 3, this is too simple of a comparison since the form and content of both the Greek social conditions and metaphysical abstractions differ in several significant ways from bourgeois society and its thought-forms, as the latter are oriented around an unprecedented generalization of commodity exchange and production. The key to look for in the ideological representations is the classical notion of transcendental perfection and the modern notion of empty transcendental conditions of possibility.

a mechanistic paradigm for modern science by which all qualitative and causal relations could be reductively explained by appeal to quantification and efficient causation. But to see more directly how the laboring body as an ontological and epistemological standpoint is systematically excluded in the transition from the real abstraction to the ideal abstraction, we must further elaborate the seemingly self-reproducing character of exchange value. The predominance of the abstract money form within generalized commodity exchange not only demands the leveling of reality so as to convert it into the monetized commodity form, but it also begins to generate its own independent noetic form and content. That is, reality as reflected in thought, becomes transposed into purely symbolic values, and since their numerical equations and calculations by which to provide a self-consistent measure of all things require no empirical reference to nature except as an indifferently homogenized substance, its formally empty universality appears independent of all sense experience. The effective self-reproducing and self-referential quality of purely formalized symbolic values thus projects an autonomous, eternal character while concealing its relative nature as a historically contingent activity of abstracting from sensible matter, thereby further suppressing from view the social a priori of productive activity in knowing reality.⁵⁶ The corresponding mathematical concepts of value are then no longer thought of as contingent products of experience, as many ancient and medieval thinkers held, but now the a priori conditions for experience as such.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The ability of the commodity form of money to appear as transcendent of sensuous reality is described by Marx as, “a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties,” thus further suggesting its sacred character and required pious devotion. See *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 163–167.

⁵⁷ For the modern 16th century change in the concept of number as no longer holding ontological meaning by reference to sensible reality but rather exclusively through its self-referring symbolic abstraction, see Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra*, trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1969).

When modern scientific and philosophical thought begins to reflect upon the nature of reality exclusively from within *this* exchange abstraction and its social imaginary, they do so by presupposing its given abstracted view of a homogenized, purposeless nature while considering its intelligible conditions of possibility solely from within the inner laws of the already given numerical symbolizations: hence, despite the differing philosophical outlooks between the likes of Galileo, Descartes, or Hobbes we find overlapping conceptions of a deadened nature as inert, indifferently extended, and mechanically ordered within an abstract space-time devoid of any sense of final causes, wherein qualia are entirely explicable in terms of quantity.⁵⁸ Newton's more systematic representation is merely the refinement of these presuppositions.⁵⁹ Within this framework the body is then far removed from any normative sense determined by its active and

⁵⁸ "There is indeed no quality in the realm of number, and therefore Galileo—and for the same reason Descartes—is obliged to renounce it, to renounce the variegated, qualitative world of sense-perception and common experience and substitute for it the colorless, abstract Archimedian world. And as for motion ... there is, quite certainly, no motion in numbers. But motion—at least the motion of Archimedian bodies in the infinite homogeneous space of the new science—is governed by number. By the *leges et rationes numerorum*. Motion is subjected to number." Alexandre Koyre, "Galileo and the Scientific Revolution of the Seventeenth Century," *Philosophical Review* 52.4 (July 1943): p. 347. For the influence of Galileo on modern thought at the beginning of the emerging mechanistic science see *The Reception of the Galilean Science of Motion in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, eds. Carla Rita Palmerino and J. M. M. H. Thijssen (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004). Here with these thinkers we are highlighting how the money abstraction in exchange relations influenced the conceptual formations regarding nature as well as the self-understanding of cognition by which nature is known. But it should also be noted that the physical content of nature given to modern science under its cognition by the commodity form is often that framed solely by mechanical problems and technical logistics for trade: how to move greater amounts of raw materials, how to break open and mine nature, and especially how to more efficiently weaponize the endowments of nature within firearms, making ballistics a major preoccupation at the foundation of modern physics. On these issues see Boris Hessen, "The Social and Economic Roots of Newton's *Principia*," trans. Phillipa Shimrat in *The Social and Economic Roots of the Scientific Revolution: Texts by Boris Hessen and Henryk Grossmann*, eds. G. Freudenthal and P. McLaughlin (Boston, MA: Springer, 2009), p. 52.

⁵⁹ Thus, as Gideon Freudenthal has claimed, it is the cemented social imaginary of bourgeois practice and its abstractly individualistic exchange relations developing prior to Newton that allowed for the scientific mechanistic picture of nature, as conceived within an absolute space (conquering Leibniz's alternative conceptuality of the relativity of space-time), to arise as legitimate and unproblematically endure within intellectual thought, since it reconfirmed what was already being experienced. Freudenthal, *Atom and Individual in the Age of Newton: On the Genesis of the Mechanistic World View* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 173–188. For an illuminating comparison and contrasting of Descartes and Newton's physics, who both hold to the absolute inertia of matter, see Hessen, "The Social and Economic Roots of Newton's *Principia*."

perfective social engagement with nature as a creative movement. Instead, the body, like matter, is now detached from any whole and rendered completely inert, as a mere collection of parts, an “automaton,” a passive “machine,” full of “springs,” “hinges,” and “wheels,” and wound like a regimented watch, whose function is by no means to actively think and willfully create—since it has no self-motion—but to only do work as externally commanded (by a mind or will wholly other than it).⁶⁰ Thus the laboring body is no longer intelligible to itself as a creative self-mediating act of both knowing and making, an act to be perfected for itself precisely in its perfection of nature, but instead a mere instrument whose essence is simply the generic capacity for disposability to indifferent ends.

Such partial science that relies on reductive non-empirical idealities can then only be qualified as “bourgeois” science. But now we see the true nature of our so-called “post-metaphysical” secular society. We only believe we are “post-metaphysical” because our most basic form of constituting social reality in the real abstraction has already unconsciously accepted and concretized the most bare form of metaphysical

⁶⁰ As Descartes says: “by a body I understand whatever has determinable shape and a definable location and can occupy a space in such a way as to exclude any other body; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever else comes into contact with it. For, according to my judgment, the power of self-movement, like the power of sensation or of thought, was quite foreign to the nature of a body.” *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17. For Descartes’s other explications of the body as a machine, an instrumental automaton and a collection of members externally related to the active principle of the soul, see *Discourse on Method*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, Co., 1998), and “Treatise on Man,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Douglas Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 99–108. For Hobbes’s conception of the body as a collection of mechanically ordered motions like a watch with its components of springs and hinges, etc., see *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 9–46. In a more extreme echo of Descartes’s *ego cogito*, which already had begun expropriating acting and thinking from the living body, Nicolas Malebranche has Theodore emphatically state to his interlocutor, Aristes, that a body cannot think and nor does it properly have perceptions, since bodies are merely extended realities with spatial relations only, so that it follows “therefore this *I* that thinks, my own substance, is not a body, since my perceptions, which surely belong to me, are something entirely different from relations of distance.” *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, trans. David Scott (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 6.

abstractions within the heart of living social praxis. That is, we do not *think* we are metaphysical because we already habitually *practice* the material manifestations of its most abstractly formalized rendition. Through the pieties of exchange relations and their arch-fidelity to the metaphysics of the money form from which the whole of reality is idealistically measured and then reflexively represented and reconfirmed in scientific and philosophical pictures of nature as such, we accept that we live within bodies without their own qualitative final causes, as merely anticipatory corpses.

All such modern Cartesian and subjective idealist philosophies as well as their corresponding Protestant spirituality that focus exclusively on an inner consciousness or will alone, abstractly set over against what their natural bodies are doing in material socioeconomic practice, is an attempt to merely think in terms of what the conventions of bourgeois sociality are giving to it: to think the active principle of the subject only according to a purely formal freedom within an abstract sense of self-reflexive consciousness required as the bare minimum presupposition behind exchange relations. Just as Hobbes will begin modern liberal political theory by basing it in the material correlate of an alleged “physics” of bare mortal bodies without internal perfective ends, the idealized image of a vacuum with pre-social, pre-productive bodies externally and antagonistically related because oriented first and only by an ontological being-from-and-for-death.⁶¹

⁶¹ *Leviathan*, p. 15, 70, 89–90. Beginning with the Galilean principle of inertia, Hobbes conceives of living bodies in a presocial natural state as deadened objects, externally related and in constant conflict. But what distinguishes the human within this natural state of conflict, what indicates its aliveness, is the consciousness of its own death as absolute. Thus, faced with the political task of directing the directionless dead matter in motion of bare life, Hobbes marks the beginning of a specifically bourgeois form of reifying death, calling upon death as a final cause (or regulative ideal) in order to charge purposeless life with a modicum of direction according to an inalterable drive of merely preserving one’s given individual form against death. On Hobbes’s use of Galileo’s mechanics Amos Funkenstein states, “his concept of the state of nature is nothing but a limiting case analogous to the inertial principle. Both are derived by severing a

Moreover, the object of material life as now the sole concern of modern politics, which Foucault pointed to as the phenomenon of “biopolitics,”⁶² will simply extend and build on this fiction of bare flesh disposable to the external will of exchange, even as its more liberal forms will shed Hobbes’s residual absolutism.⁶³ Life is not here both the object *and subject* of politics as a perfective movement toward its own qualitative ends, but exclusively a deadened object of exchange, so that modern “biopolitics” is a misnomer that should be more adequately described as a *necropolitics*. This is because its sole focus is to reproduce and maintain the social body already being produced by the real abstraction as the living dead of commodity production and exchange—a social body of labor no longer conscious of its own collective and creative potentials to make history and thus no longer able to link up its intuitions and intentions of self-transcendence with substantive utopian ideals. But this means then that the anti-utopian “man as he really is”, i.e. humanity as nothing other than a mortal animal, is precisely and only a non-empirical

phenomenon (body, society) from its actual context and seeing it ‘in itself.’” *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 337.

⁶² Michel Foucault first mentions “biopolitics” in his lecture *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). But see especially *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009); and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

⁶³ That Hobbes’s reduction to bare life, while given in the explicitly political context of his new form of sovereignty, is nevertheless conditioned by the emerging sovereignty of the commodity form in the exchange abstraction, can be seen throughout the *Leviathan*: “The *Value*, or Worth of a man is his Price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his Power ... a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another ... And as in other things, so in men, not the seller, but the buyer determines the Price. For let a man (as most men do,) rate themselves at the highest Value they can; yet their true Value is no more than it is esteemed by others.” And, “The value of all things contracted for, is measured by the Appetite of the Contractors: and therefore the just value, is that which they be contented to give ... For a mans Labour also, is a commodity exchangeable for benefit, as well as any other thing.” *Leviathan*, p. 105; p. 171. That Hobbes, despite writing more directly on political matters than economic ones, is the “father of political economy”, especially for beginning the shift to *homo economicus* and a theory of valuation anticipating the later 19th and 20th century theories of marginalism see Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good*, trans. J. F. Huntington (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 239–240; On his overall proto-bourgeois thought despite being a member of the landed gentry, see Jesus M. Zaratiegui Labiano, “A Reading of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* with Economists’ Glasses,” *International Journal of Social Economics*, 27.2 (2000): 134–146; and of course C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford University Press, 1962).

political myth prescribing what the human *should be* for the proper functioning of the pseudo-religiosity of economic liberalism. If the immortal maxim handed down from antiquity was “know thyself”, it has now become, “unknow thyself, become mortal”.

Challenging Marxism to Rethink Labor and the Religious

In this dissertation I therefore take up a more realist attempt at articulating how the laboring body is a truly creative force in nature, and from this, I will present an alternative genealogy of how labor came to know itself within certain pre-capitalist religious thought forms that began to directly grasp the laboring body as more than the abstraction of mere disposable mortal flesh. My argument rests on the basis of the modes of production as the fundamental organizing concept, but understood in a new way according to an opening, implied by the forgoing analysis, that has yet to be more fully exposed and logically worked out within historical materialism. This opening is provided by Marx’s own distinction between the “formal subsumption” of labor and its “real subsumption”.⁶⁴ As highlighted with the work of Sohn-Rethel, capitalism is so effective because its concretized real abstraction is based on the “real subsumption” of labor under the commodity form. The commodification of the labor process thus more effectively hides labor from itself within its own mode of production, whereas in pre-capitalist societies the mode of production was materially free in its communal mode, while only formally subsumed, i.e. partially directed externally by ideological and political machinations. Without the commodification of the modes of production for an external market the laboring body was therefore able to more directly mediate itself according to

⁶⁴ Marx, “Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” in *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 975–1059.

its own communal ends of production. But this means that pre-capitalist ideology should be examined more closely as to potentially harboring organic ideals more truly reflective of the laboring body's rational ends than any ideological projections stemming from the capitalist era of the real subsumption.

Early in Marx's career he made a statement whose insight demanded greater attention to the assessment of pre-capitalist ideology in relation to its material conditions of production, but it was never more fully developed: "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it."⁶⁵ This implies that Marxists cannot be so entirely suspicious of pre-capitalist religious and metaphysical thought, insofar as without a real subsumption these ideologies were then in some manner being more significantly and directly controlled from the ground up by a social body of labor in its independent modes of communal production, rather than solely by an exploiting class. This is in no way to imply that Marxists should be uncritically appreciative of pre-capitalist ideology, but rather that the difference between periods of formal and real subsumptions of labor demand a more adequate critical reevaluation of pre-capitalist ideology in relation to its modes of production as both negative *and positive*, rather than exclusively the former. Indeed prior to its bourgeois commodification, the laboring body within its formal subsumption must have been able to gain positive insight into its own constitutive value in such a way that would allow it to eventually recognize and critically expose its capitalist commodification as a contradictory subsumption that must be overcome. In other words, the formation of class-consciousness within the proletariat could not have been

⁶⁵ Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 67.

exclusively constituted within and by its bourgeois exploitation alone, but rather already made possible as a progressive extension of past pre-capitalist cultural memories of a laboring body formally subsumed but materially free and thus still becoming conscious of itself to some degree through its own labor and its organically projected futures. I attempt to fill this gap as to how certain pre-capitalist religious ideologies helped to positively cultivate this growing awareness of the laboring body that stands behind the modern labor movement.

Yet Marxists have at times hailed the bourgeois concept of labor power as an advance that beneficially breaks with the limits of previous eras, negatively liberating the laboring body by “rationalizing” the labor process within capitalist industry in a way that opens labor to consciousness of its universal and infinite power: hence, the acceptance by certain Marxists of the “Bourgeois Revolution” as both truly revolutionary, as well as absolutely necessary, for class consciousness to eventually develop within the proletariat.⁶⁶ But, as we have already highlighted the derivative and reactionary nature of the emerging bourgeoisie, this can only be a mistaken assessment for anyone concerned with a historical materialist position centered on the concretely universal and self-mediating act of labor. It is mistaken, however, not because labor does not hold such infinite potentials, but rather because the very concept of abstract labor power does not indicate the infinite power of *production* per se, but only its parasitical form, signifying only the negative infinity of labor’s *consumption* since it is a view of labor exclusively

⁶⁶ Rejecting his earlier populism, Georgi V. Plekhanov gave the classical Marxist account of the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism as a deterministically necessary stage for socialism. See especially his “Socialism and Political Struggle,” and “Our Differences”, in *Selected Philosophical Works*, v. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961). For a more recent Marxist defense of the “bourgeois revolution”, though against Plekhanov’s stadial determinism, see Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012). I am not here denying the bourgeois nature of the English and French political revolutions, nor certain benefits thereby gained, but only the claim that capitalism is an ontologically and epistemologically necessary stage for the labor movement.

from the standpoint of its commodified exchange. It is then a viewing not of labor's substantive infinity but its infinite disposability to the external will of capital. Therefore the infinite variety of products within capitalism do not show a real view of the infinite qualitative perfection within labor's creative power since labor is here uncreatively producing only one thing, over and over again, and that is the commodity form (or, the abstraction of surplus value, whatever the contents of commodities) for the single end of being consumed by the private will. There is, therefore, no new creating such as the creation of higher forms of historically organizing a social body without contradictions.

Thus the infinity of labor power is not only envisioned from and for the alien standpoint of a purely consumptive private will behind exchange relations, and not from and for labor's own internal end, but in this it is therefore also a self-contradictory bad infinity. This is because there is a limit to maximizing productive output for an external market of exchange, since commodified productive forces without qualitative orientation will simply run up against entropy within a closed system, depleting resources as it tries single-mindedly to drive down production costs for the production of abstract surplus value, which then demands that one either move to another system or die; such an infinite orientation therefore implies a perfection that solely revolves around the unnatural *maximization* of consuming available energy for producing immediate exchange values, a purely quantifying process that invests in simply displacing entropy for a time and thus, however inconspicuously or not, ends up multiplying its overall effect within a given environment ... the effects of which we now know all too well in the problem of climate change. Here the problem is not the forces of production per se, since these are not truly

cultivated in their socially creative potentials, but only the bad infinity of arbitrarily imposed external ends for production.

But if labor is more basically a creative act for socially subsisting in new qualitative ways, rather than primarily an instrument for consumption, there is then no limit to creatively reorganizing labor's more fundamental social appropriation of matter around qualitatively new relations: this latter orientation is not to a quantifying negative infinity, but toward an actual infinity of positive self-subsistence. Therefore, labor's more fundamental and natural relation to the infinite and eternal by which it perfects itself, pertains to a qualitative perfection that requires the *optimization* of labor's socially creative capacity to create higher forms of organization that reduce and reverse entropy. Cultivating labor's own infinite power then, is *not a matter of blindly maximizing output*, but a matter of creating open systems of relations further removed from entropic enclosures, by continually reinvesting in the socially creative capacities around new qualitative use values, something which capital, by nature, cannot reinvest in without undoing itself.

Therefore the infinity and its perfection within the bourgeois conception of labor power is diametrically opposed to the actual infinity that orients real bodies of labor in their most basic social and creative engagement with nature. Since labor's own exceeding essence is not recognized in this concept of labor power, it is then the case that labor should not require a passage through this contradictory commodification for its essential self-mediation and self-understanding. Though the commodification of the forces of production has occurred with the contingent arrival of capitalism, and labor must contingently organize itself in relation to such, this does not mean it is an ontological and

epistemological necessity, as if an automatic teleological passage to be traversed at all costs for labor's progress.⁶⁷

With the autonomist thesis that labor creates history while the exploiting class has only ever negatively reacted against this positive act, Marxism is then exposed to its own inner contradictions whenever it accepts the alleged dialectical necessity of a bourgeois revolution, in particular, as well as the notion of any dialectical necessity of negation, more generally.⁶⁸ Not only is the concept of labor power contradictory to labor's own self-conscious orientation to its actual infinity of positive self-subsistence, but also labor's supposedly necessary passage through this form for self-recognition and realization reifies the dialectical necessity of negation in a mythical and paternalistic manner. It denies the insights of the historical distinction between labor's formal and real subsumption by negating the history of labor's self-organizing autonomy, subjecting labor to the paternalistic myth of its redemptive negation according to its external mediation through the allegedly secularizing "maturation" process of a bourgeois revolution—a purgative transition burning away all of labor's supposed pre-capitalist religious fantasies. In this scenario, capital is therefore positioned as a kind of priestly mediator required to reveal to labor what labor could not reveal to itself, and it reveals labor to itself by bringing labor to a point of its near death. Labor must approach, then, an imagined relation to its death, giving away its labor as a self-perfective activity to now the commodity form in order to see that it is really living; but what is the difference if this

⁶⁷ The ruinous effects of trying to force labor through this supposed dialectical necessity of a bourgeois revolution is of course readily evident in history, such as with the Soviet STAMOCAP campaign to hasten the "advance" of its independent rural peasantry through a forced industrial capitalization, which brought only extreme destruction to its agricultural base both in terms of its land and laboring bodies.

⁶⁸ Autonomism is a form of Marxism that, among other things, emphasizes working class autonomy against statist interpretations of communism and that capital is not a creative force. The most popular example of autonomism is in the work of Antonio Negri. See especially Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

imaginary relation to death is actually killing the laboring body, revealing it to itself only in the concretized abstraction of the living dead or a dying bare flesh?⁶⁹

This identification of labor's historical movement with the dialectical necessity of negation, of course, still stands on, and leaps from, Hegel's head, even perpetuating something of a myth of necessary redemptive sacrifice as given by his theology of the cross. Therefore it is an account of the laboring body becoming conscious of itself that is not yet fully material and historical but mediated through an idealist myth. The conundrum is therefore that historical materialism must take pre-capitalist religious ideologies more seriously as to their positive value in the laboring body's material and historical development of critical self-consciousness if it wants to avoid idealistically fetishizing the dialectical necessity of labor's external mediation. The task here is then to critically search out those pre-capitalist religious ideals insofar as they are rationalized around a final cause that more directly reflected and grasped the revolutionary potential of its laboring body over against any necessity of its dialectical negation. Labor is more than what the capitalist epoch says it is, but this means presenting a history again of what the laboring body itself says it was and is and will be.

Overview of this Work

In beginning the critical presentation of such a history, the first chapter will set the historical stage by elaborating a trajectory of labor's rationalization within medieval society and thought that broke from the classical disparagement of labor by valorizing

⁶⁹ This is not mere rhetorical flare, since the concept of labor power presupposes the body that houses this abstract capacity not only in the conceptual abstraction of mere indifferent flesh, as indicated above, but already in actual practice, expropriating this body's labor in a way that exports its value to some other entity, while hastening entropy within the body itself, since it is supposedly only an anticipatory corpse, rather than labor perfecting the body itself by cultivating its truly anti-entropic creative qualities.

labor as holding constitutive value in relation to the whole—perfecting itself in perfecting nature—without thereby anticipating a bourgeois ethos. This sets on the table a medieval movement of labor becoming conscious of itself and breaking with its feudal structures, while nevertheless expressing and reflecting upon itself in certain religious forms that are in no way reducible to a proto-Protestant lineage such as that bourgeois trajectory identified by Max Weber.

After challenging Weber's dominant non-Marxist paternalistic reading of labor's rationalization, I then show in chapter 2 that this medieval rationalization of labor also challenges the dominant Marxist readings insofar as Marxists exclusively define religious consciousness as mistily expressing only alienation from its laboring body. I argue there must be a more adequate accounting of this historical phenomenon and that theoretically, within historical materialism, the religious need not be defined exclusively in negative terms. But this requires returning to a science of labor's self-transcendence, as a revolutionizing of nature in its anti-entropic activity. In rethinking the nature of labor beyond any reduction to a bare efficient cause, we can then see how the religious is a positive moment internal to the mode of production, as its fundamentally utopian-directed consciousness of new perfectible horizons of change opened by labor, rather than primarily a conservative fixation on stasis. I then argue that the one religious ideal that especially expresses and grasps its own concrete fact of material production as its final cause according to its emergent trajectories is the ideal of the resurrection of the body, since labor is itself a partial work of resurrecting the body beyond any abstracted image of mortal flesh. Here I argue that this ideal is transcendentally necessary for the laboring body if it is to realistically understand its revolutionary nature without mythically

appealing to a dialectical necessity of its negation. I critically engage with Friedrich Engels and Theodor Adorno who both, in dimly suggesting a dialectics of resurrection, evidenced the importance of this ideal and yet failed to develop it properly in relation to the concrete act of labor. This chapter is by far the longest and most theoretical because there is so much ground clearing that needs to be done (extending the clearing into Marxism and sociology that has already begun in this introduction with bourgeois thought) in order to materialistically explain, from the ground up, the normative production of the religious as a functional yet non-reductive extension of the revolutionizing aspects of the labor process.

After making the theoretical case for a positive non-alienating sense of the religious in relation to the mode of production and its necessary ideal for thought, I then begin the historical substantiation of this in chapter 3 by beginning a broad genealogical account of the normative emergence of the religious within the first historical revolution of productive forces in the rise of the Neolithic village commune. Here I bring the distinction between the formal and real subsumption to the fore in order to then more critically engage with the religious and metaphysical ideologies that emerge in the Ancient Near East and the Classical age in relation to their productive base of the enduring village commune. The methodology for determining more adequately where the laboring body is both reflected and concealed in ancient ideology, hinges on identifying ideological distortion in terms of their imaginary representation of the contradictory fact of death. I then move on in chapter 4 to make an argument for the distinctiveness of the Hebraic notion of the resurrection of the body within its ANE context. Here I show how this ideal emerges early within the biblical text, prior to later apocalyptic distortions, as a

more direct, demythologized reflection of the concrete fact of its social body of production prior to its state form. That it is demythologized means that it still intends the perfection of eternal life but it is more directly intuited and expressed according to the creative potentials of the productive act, whereby the social body of production is itself the final cause, without reifying death as necessary or absolute.

This genealogical trajectory of the Hebraic ideal is then traced through Christianity in chapter 5, following its development within Jesus and Paul insofar as through it they raised consciousness of the active body of labor as harboring its own seeds in relation to the perfection of eternal life. Yet, with Paul's articulation of the cross of Christ as integrally salvific the body is reflected from an emerging standpoint of its exchangeability, rather than its concretely creative act, and thereby placed within a new myth of the dialectical necessity of its negation. I suggest certain late-imperial socioeconomic transitions for which Paul's theology of the cross is an ideological reflex, providing some possible explanations as to why the sacred economy of the cross uniquely yet unfortunately began to express a sense of the body outside of both its classical captivity as well as its materialist Hebraic affirmation. In the final chapter I follow an underlying ascendant materialism in Origen and especially John Scotus Eriugena that challenges the idealist dialectical necessity of the body's negation by articulating a sense of the spiritual body as the internal spirit of the active material body itself. This underlying trajectory is developed in these thinkers, I claim, precisely because of the pressure of properly working out the ideal of bodily resurrection as more adequately reflecting the concrete becoming of the historically active body.

This last chapter brings the genealogy back to where we began in the first chapter, identifying the development of this ideal as in the background of the medieval labor movement's critical social consciousness of its constitutive value. It also suggests that with the modern account of bodily resurrection as an idealist metaphor for the spirit of self-consciousness over against its physical body, we find only a remythologization of the resurrection that loses any distinctive reference to the material and historical becoming of its laboring body. If the distinction between the formal and real subsumption requires Marxism to take pre-capitalist ideology more seriously, then I suggest it also requires Christian theology to examine more closely the remythologization of the resurrection of the body within the rise and reassertion of theologies of the cross insofar as these correspond to particular historical periods of encroaching real subsumptions of the laboring body.

At least one contemporary Marxist has recognized something of the positive value of the resurrection of the body for labor's self-understanding. In a recent interview Antonio Negri speaks of a possible "rediscovery of a material religion" for which there is no longer a separation between the corporeal and spiritual. In passing he says, "the resurrection of the body is obviously the most important thing from the point of view of physical materialism. Perhaps I will wind up one day working on this problem."⁷⁰ Neither he, nor any other thinker, has yet begun substantive work on this problem within materialism. In what follows I will be commencing this needed work.

⁷⁰ Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri: In Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 182.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: The New Valorization of Labor in the Middle Ages

“the producer actually producing is in some way the work produced”

—Aquinas⁷¹

To understand the essence and value of labor as other than bare labor power is to understand it neither simply in practical terms, nor simply in theoretical terms, but rather historically, as to how it emerged according to its self-understanding both practically and intellectually—in terms of its own practical activity and ideal forms generated within a unified movement. If the laboring body is to be understood according to its own constitutive value instead of being mediated through the bourgeois abstraction of an empty capacity, then the historical context immediately prior to capitalism must provide a backdrop against which the concept of labor power is indicated as a reactionary response to the deeper movement of labor for itself. Yet to see the medieval rise of labor as it becomes historically valorized in a substantial way, both socially and intellectually prior to the institution of capitalism, requires reading against the grain of the dominant intellectual periodization of the Middle Ages in relation to modernity. Here Manfred Riedel speaks for an entire epoch of modern scholars who overlook the unique medieval valorization of labor when he writes: “[Hegel] lays out the basis for a theory of work and thereby gives proper stress to that portion of philosophy called poietics, *whose discussion*

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O.P. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), IX, 7, 1846. Italics mine.

had not advanced a step since Aristotle".⁷² The assumption operative here in Riedel and others is that antiquity already developed and said everything that could be said about labor before the arrival of a "bourgeois revolution" and its grasp within modern philosophy.

The analysis in this chapter, however, endeavors to show just how medieval practice and thought had indeed advanced a step between the times of Aristotle and Hegel. But this will require challenging another dominant academic view. This is the view predominantly influenced by Max Weber, who rightly saw a surpassing of the classical view of labor within the Middle Ages, but understood this advancement only in terms of an anticipation of a bourgeois ethos and its values around instrumentality. My task in this chapter, then, is to bring to light a novel medieval valorization of labor, both in its practical and intellectual recognition, as a constitutive perfective activity that both surpassed antiquity as well as already exceeded any simple reduction to bourgeois categories by pointing in the direction of a socialist movement. This endeavor however is not out of some nostalgic longing to save and return to medieval times, as the trajectory I point to neither represents the whole of medieval thought and practice, nor requires a repristination of this past world for its enduring intelligibility. Rather I am here only pointing to a significant line of development that contextualizes, and so problematizes, the predominant bourgeois periodization of the modern over against the medieval; more specifically, this contextualizing is to provide a starting point by which to begin deconstructing the notion of a *necessary* "bourgeois revolution" and its concept of "labor power" within the epoch of capitalism. In other words, this chapter marks only a brief

⁷² See Manfred Riedel, *Between Tradition and Revolution: The Hegelian Transformation of Political Philosophy*, trans. Walter Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 17, italics mine.

point of departure in the larger task of reclaiming an understanding of labor according to its own progressive ideals against which the capitalist period could only be parasitic.

Of course, to carry forward a valorization of labor from the middle ages is to reckon with the fact that this valorization was fundamentally articulated within certain religious and metaphysical discourses. Yet, the religious/metaphysical forms of these discourses around the constitutive value of labor were neither reducible to antiquity, nor straightforward precursors of bourgeois ideology, but as such offered something progressive in indicating a more comprehensive consciousness of the inextricable unity of salvific and material economies within the integrative act of labor. Therefore, the progressive quality of their religious form cannot be easily explained away as a disposable vehicle in relation to a supposedly incipient secularization of labor—unless one is willing to assume that the conceptual abstraction of labor power forged by capital, over against the determinate qualities of the laboring body, ultimately provides the true view into labor's irreducible essence as if a bare instrument. Marking out the distinctive medieval view of labor emerging here, as it challenges the dominant Weberian consensus, therefore, will require showing how labor came to understand itself within a religious consciousness precisely in a more comprehensive way, as knowing the whole by making whole, and thus intrinsically a work of redemption. In the next chapter I will then show how this holistic religious view into the normative standpoint of labor also demands a more adequate account of the totality of labor's creative relations and its self-understanding, than those typically given by Marxists, before ultimately providing an alternative genealogical account of the intrinsic religious ideals that orient this valorization in the following chapters.

The Weberian Influence

In retrieving from the Middle Ages a social and intellectual trajectory that suggests an ontologically and epistemologically normative standpoint for labor—as knowing the whole by making whole—a prominent social theory to be countered is that given by Max Weber. His work has exercised considerable influence on the historical understanding of religion and economic activity, yet his paradigm leaves little room for seeing such possibilities for labor’s substantive meaning and constitutive value. This is because for Weber, insofar as labor broke free from classical and feudal bondage, both in terms of their ideology and practice, and contributed to the constitution of the modern world, this is to be attributed solely to a line of industriousness that leads to the bourgeois ethos, a line he claims was cultivated within the monasteries of the Middle Ages. But in this chapter I will argue that the medieval valorization of labor that breaks with antiquity and feudalism, and thus made modern society possible, certainly originated, in large part, from monastic institutions, but in a manner and according to a trajectory that cannot be easily assimilated into Weber’s bourgeois narrative. This is because a certain trajectory of monastic development and its intellectual valorization of labor came about from something closer to a communism of production and its new consciousness of labor as holding constitutive value, rather than a mere object of value instrumentalized for spiritual practices. Labor’s valorization thus emerged from recognition precisely in and through a religious form that implied labor was itself an intrinsic salvific act. Yet this valorization retained its religious form precisely in referring to a this-worldly movement without this content being reduced to some secular datum, since it referred to labor as an

ontologically perfective activity in relation to nature, and thus not a mere instrument used as a means of accruing abstract spiritual or commercial value outside the laboring body.

Before I venture into this alternative historical account we must first elaborate some of the main details of Weber's reading. In his influential work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber famously spells out how the modern valorization of labor was made possible by a unique belief system around predestination peculiar to Calvinism and its 18th century Puritanical forms of religious asceticism.⁷³ For Calvinism the idea that God has already predetermined within his inscrutable will the eternal fate of every member of humanity left the religious believer with an anxious psychological state of uncertainty. Rather than waiver in their faith and despair over unknowing, Calvinists sought to divert the turmoil of their inner spirit and its unproductive energies through an obsessive asceticism of hard work, diligence, and abstemiousness. Refocusing the inner spirit toward a greater interest in and valuation of the external world of work, these virtues of dutifulness not only helped avoid the sins of slothfulness and idleness wherein doubts and anxieties often needlessly fester, but through their frugality and orderliness they also helped yield great commercial profit. Labor then was not only valorized as an arena for keeping the inner spirit preoccupied with methodical activity, but its methodically organized form, which efficiently brought about commercially successful results, now supplied the inner spirit with a tangible means of proving one's salvation.⁷⁴

⁷³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121. See also, Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978): "But an unbroken unity integrating in systematic fashion an ethic of vocation in the world with assurance of religious salvation was the unique creation of ascetic Protestantism alone. . . . when success crowns rational, sober, purposive behavior of the sort not oriented to worldly acquisition, such success is construed as a sign that god's blessing rests upon such behavior." p. 556

For Weber, however, this inner spirituality, which manifested itself outwardly through a methodical control of its laboring body toward rigorously efficient applications, was not unprecedented within Western civilization. He finds a precedent within the medieval monastic institutions of Western Christianity insofar as they developed successful commercial practices according to a conception of “*industria*” oriented around “a systematic method of rational conduct with the purpose of overcoming the *status naturae*, to free man from the power of irrational impulses and his dependence on the world and on nature.”⁷⁵ With the arrival of modernity, however, and the dissolution of the social import of monastic institutions, “the Reformation took rational Christian asceticism and its methodical habits out of the monasteries and placed them in the service of active life in the world.”⁷⁶ Thus the transference of labor’s rationalization from monasticism to its wider social import through Calvinism took place at the level of transferring a spirituality of “innerworldly asceticism,” once practiced only by a narrow segment of the population for otherworldly ends, to now its practice by an entire lay population within and for everyday life.⁷⁷

While Weber was never able to provide a more complete assessment of the medieval valorization itself he nonetheless provided an influential lens by which later interpreters extended his analysis. Characteristic of these extensions is a tendency to read a modern Puritanical asceticism back into the monastic asceticism of the Middle Ages and thus to read every possible valorization of labor’s rationality as leading to and

⁷⁵ *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 119. See also p. 196: “In the conception of *industria*, which comes from monastic asceticism and which was developed by monastic writers, lies the seed of an *ethos* which was fully developed later in the Protestant worldly asceticism.”

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

culminating in the modern bourgeois ethos of capitalism.⁷⁸ Hence Lynn White Jr. can read the Christian belief system and its ascetic practices manifest in Western medieval monasticism as simply authorizing and implementing a proto-capitalist rationalization of the labor process for the domination and exploitation of nature.⁷⁹ The problem here is not simply that a Protestant and bourgeois ethos is anachronistically read into medieval asceticism, but more so that the meaning of labor in itself is predetermined as a brute secular fact whose valorization can only be commanded from and for a detached spirit as it exploits nature. For the Weberian, therefore, insofar as labor is rationally valorized within the medieval West, this is always to be attributed to a line of ancestry culminating in the bourgeois entrepreneur who effectively commands labor as a tool of mastery over nature.

While there are of course bourgeois threads that extend back into the medieval period, showing up even within certain monastic organizations, the point is that these are neither total nor the dominant form by which the rationality internal to labor itself was distinctively understood and valued. The rationalization assumed within the Weberian understanding of the valorization of labor, which retrojects its bourgeois assumptions and their Calvinist reflex, is one that exclusively regards only the efficient means by which labor can be instrumentally disposed to external ends set by an alien will—labor is not then understood as the creator of value but only an object of values set arbitrarily

⁷⁸ Alfred Keiser working within an explicitly Weberian framework, for example, claims that monks within medieval monasteries “created” a “puritan work ethic” in their rational organization of work, which inevitably led to an “iron cage of bureaucracies” prior to the capitalist age of bureaucratization. See “From Asceticism to Administration of Wealth: Medieval Monasteries and the Pitfalls of Rationalization,” in *Organization Studies*, 8.2 (1987): 103–123.

⁷⁹ Lynn White Jr., “What Accelerated Technological Progress in the Western Middle Ages?” in *Scientific Change. Historical Studies in the Intellectual, Social and Technical Conditions for Scientific Discovery and Technical Invention from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Alistair C. Crombie (London: Heinemann, 1963), pp. 272–91.

outside of its own good. The worldly application of a methodical instrumentalism given from a certain religious asceticism, which Weber is so keen to describe as a “rationalization” of labor, is therefore only a partial form of rationality being reified as rationality itself. Thus, in rightly seeing a connection between Protestant spirituality and the rise of capitalism, he is nevertheless only describing a process and ideology that serves the irrational subsumption of labor to arbitrarily external ends. This is a fundamentally irrationalizing process because a real rationalization process implies a ratio to a final cause that substantively perfects the thing being rationally ordered; but here in Weber’s instrumental rationality, there is only the bare efficient causality of ordering an object to be disposable to whatever external end, even if this end destroys rather than comprehends and perfects the thing being materially organized and so ordered.

The Weberian valorization therefore speaks not of an emancipatory change in the forces and conditions of labor, or of a radical reorientation of the ends for which the laboring body’s activity might be perfected according to its own creative potentials, but only an irrational process of decomposing the laboring body’s orientation to its own perfection so as to make it more available to an external spirit. He thus describes primarily a change in attitude toward the given bourgeois institution of wage labor, an ethos to remain in one’s vocation but to work harder and more efficiently. The partial and thus distorted rationality behind this valorization is organized around reconciling contradictions only within the inner volition of spirit, to unify and purify spirit in its self-consciousness and prove this interior reconciliation outwardly through efficient ordering, but not according to a more holistic rationality for reconciling real material contradictions

and thus perfecting the totality of social and natural relations within the laboring body. Indeed, the very notion of substantive ends intrinsic to the laboring body and its active self-mediation with the totality of its relations must be denied within this narrow framework of distorted rationalization, since labor is not viewed here as a substantive standpoint by which the whole of reality could be accessed and changed in a new way.

For the Weberian, therefore, it is an a priori consciousness and its inner drama of spirit's volition guided by the priority of ideas, discursive formations, belief systems and their cultural dictates, that causally determine the history of labor's supposed rationalization and material development in a unilateral way, while the laboring body's own activity in appropriating material reality is left unintelligible except as a passive object within an alien whole. While Weber thinks he is distinguishing a medieval valorization of labor as an anticipation of bourgeois values over against antiquity whereby labor is more than a passive instrument, his irrational framework nonetheless points to no real difference within the ontological and epistemological assumptions of antiquity. The larger problem within this interpretive approach, then, is its idealist paradigm whereby religious ideas refer only to an abstract spirit of self-consciousness external to labor, which comes to more or less assign prior values to labor from outside its own material being. It thus remains an idealism whose imposition as an explanatory framework upon the historical development of productive activity often lacks dialectical nuance.⁸⁰ Since it fails to grasp how ideas might also express more directly and

⁸⁰ Of course, Weber warned of attributing too much causation to ideas, beliefs and spirit. Yet, despite his insistence at the end of *The Protestant Ethic*, that he did not "aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history" this does not square well with the focus of his entire analyses and his explications of historical development. This incongruence is seen also in Weber's other works, especially when he emphasizes over against socioeconomic contexts that the rise of pre-monarchic Israel was "determined by quite concrete religious historical and often highly personal circumstances and vicissitudes," and also in his view on the origin of Christianity, explicitly

organically the prior development of productive forces according to their own internal ordering and the emerging consciousness unique to such, it therefore remains unable to see the determinate rationality in which labor was more substantively valorized for itself as the normative standpoint from which body and spirit can begin to be comprehended according to a single movement. Thus, in rightly focusing on a certain integral connection between Protestantism and capitalism, but remaining within their assumptions of labor as only an instrument to be externally commanded, the Weberian position fails to see that the material and intellectual processes glimpsed here are actually the irrational decomposition of the real religious rationalization of labor in itself already taking place within the Middle Ages.

Thus, contrary to the Weberian tendency I will present a more substantive medieval valorization of labor in itself, tracing its dialectical emergence through a panoramic sweep from monastic asceticism to its larger social influence and cultural recognition within the Carolingian period, to the 12th century renaissance with its new conceptions of nature and *homo artifex*, through to late medieval thought and sociopolitical movements amongst the rising laboring classes. This presentation aims to

denying any social or material cause to its emergence as if it were above any sense of class struggle, attributing its emergence instead entirely to mentalities and beliefs about a transcendent God. In both cases his one-sided idealist claims are situated explicitly in opposition to, and thus overdetermined by, what he considered historical materialist reductions. See, respectively, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: Free Press, 1967), p. 80, and *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, trans. R. I. Frank (London: Verso, 2013), p. 258. Ernst Troeltsch was the leading religious thinker who parrots Weber's views here. He begins his major work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, with a proclamation that Christianity began as a spiritual ethos concerned with "values of pure spirituality" that had nothing to do with social problems and were in no way the "product of a class struggle of any kind", although, in a top down manner, they did foster habits of "sobriety and industry" which concerned the "usefulness of the Christian as a citizen." *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, vol. I, trans. Olive Wyon (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 39–40. Lynn White's work, as mentioned above, also tends to give religious *beliefs*, especially the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation and its injunction for human dominion over nature, an almost unilateral role in causing the exploitative and domineering use of technology and productive forces. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, v.155, no.3767 (Mar. 10, 1967): 1203–1207

briefly show that the new valuation of labor did not come about strictly from the religious/moral need for an external occasion to display and prepare an innerworldly asceticism or as its spirituality was parlayed into strictly commercial interests; instead labor's recognized significance emerged more directly from within the rational development of the creative forces of production themselves as perfectible ends, a development of productive activity that opened up new views into the meaning of the whole of nature and society, while these new visions of the whole were in turn beginning to be adequately grasped within more comprehensive cultural expressions of labor's internal meaning and value. That is, the growing recognition of labor's ability to transform nature into a social body, rather than merely adapt to it, generated a new intuition of reality as a creatively emerging whole, which was then conceptualized more comprehensively so as to grasp the perfection of the laboring body as its internal good. Thus labor became valorized as a normative standpoint for knowing and being by way of a recognition that was at once generated from the modes of production while also positively grasped and furthered within a religious form. Coming to know itself as a real creative participation in transcendental perfection and thus a subject of salvific work, labor's medieval valorization therefore resists any simple reduction to an instrumentalized object as the Weberian can only see it.

Antiquity and Labor

To elaborate a medieval valorization of labor that is not simply an anticipation of bourgeois values requires tracing a certain trajectory in which labor increasingly came to the fore as a perfective activity whose perfection is an internal good and normative

standpoint for knowing and pursuing the whole. That labor came to be valorized as a perfective activity, however, stands in marked contrast with the sociopolitical world of antiquity and its classical philosophical expression. Within the ancient world, whether speaking of the Greek *polis* or the Roman Empire, sociopolitical reality was determined by those who owned land and expropriated slave labor through private land ownership worked by slave labor. The great masses constituting almost the entirety of the social whole were not slaves, however, but peasants, artisans, shopkeepers and hired laborers who lived mainly at subsistence levels with little or no property and thus scant opportunities for social mobility or political membership. Because the property and wealth of the social whole—especially with the development of the Roman *latifundia*—was consolidated within the hands of a few through their advantageous exploitation of slave labor, the mass of “free” laborers therefore held no real leverage in determining their sociopolitical reality and were often slavishly subordinated to aristocratic interests, especially through debt bondage.⁸¹ The social body was thus marked by a severe and tightly maintained division between a small fraction of a propertied class free from the need to labor and the rest, “free” or unfree, whose lives were consumed by laboring for another.⁸²

⁸¹ G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 169. In other words, even though slaves represented a minority of the total population, the use of slave labor to produce and concentrate wealth only for a few was nevertheless a dominant means of extracting surplus that allowed for the ruling class to gain hegemony in the sociopolitical realm.

⁸² The Greco-Roman world, at least up until the late Roman Empire, contained virtually no middle class since it was divided almost exclusively by those who owned property and the means of production and those who did not. Yet the ranks of the aristocracy, especially in the Roman Empire, expanded somewhat into intermediate levels of wealth amongst small farm owners and the Decurion who functioned as something like an emerging middle class. Yet this still represented only a tiny fraction of the population, and as Ramsay Macmullen warns, “in a given city, however, the aristocracy nevertheless stood upon the summit of a very steep social pyramid.” *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 89–90.

Because the substantial surplus expropriated by the few allowed them to invest their time into developing a state, military, and cultural apparatus that reproduced their exploitative position of privilege, the collective consciousness ruling this sociopolitical body tended to comprehend its free citizenship abstractly, as if a natural given, with little consciousness of the contribution of the laboring body.⁸³ As the constitutive value of labor to the social totality was concealed and left largely uncomprehended, there was then little incentive to develop and better organize productive forces or relations of production beyond their reproduction of the status quo.⁸⁴ With this relatively low level of productive development there was a corresponding ideological conception of labor lowly construed as mere toil, bound within the transitory realm of necessity as an involuntary process of reproducing certain nutritive and sensate functions of base animal nature. That is, productive activity was understood in no way to perfect, change, transform or actively contribute to making and knowing the social and natural whole since its socially contingent degradation and diminishment as a lowly biological function was obscured and instead viewed and legitimated as if a natural fact. Labor's meaning came to be accepted as nothing more than an inevitable and inescapable mortal process within base nature, a symbol of enslavement.

The constituent elements of both individual and social bodies were thus conceptualized as microcosmically mirroring nature's own graded hierarchical ordering to a fixed celestial sphere above the base elements of earth. Moreover, celestial

⁸³ That this period represents only a tributary mode of exploitation rather than a primary mode of production will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3 where I will elaborate a more nuanced account of the ideological entwinements with modes of production within antiquity. Thus in what follows in this chapter, the main negative ideological import within Plato and Aristotle will be briefly given here as a backdrop by which to measure the distinctiveness of the medieval valorization, whereas in chapter 3 I will more thoroughly discuss how their thought dialectically harbors positive traces in relation to the primary modes of production.

⁸⁴ Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (New York: Verso, 1996), p. 26.

perfection, not coincidentally, was privileged according to a statically and eternally given circular form that could only be accessed through the backward glance of a purely contemplative act, freed from those ephemeral and temporal aspects of the mortal laboring body. Thus, reflecting the diminished view from these hierarchically distorted productive relations, Plato held that the “base” mechanical arts provide no means of transcending the state of the beasts and therefore contribute nothing to the intuition and production of ideas but are simply commanded by and for them; in fact, the nature of productive activity “mutilates” the soul since its preoccupation with producing what could only be material simulacra detracts from intellectually seeing the true eternal forms as predetermined behind the production process.⁸⁵ Therefore, blinded to the historically contingent production of society’s class structure, the laboring body was inversely framed within the dominant ideology as a cumbersome set of appendages given only temporarily from and for an eternal head during its stay amongst the lower elements.⁸⁶ The laboring body, both individually and as a class, was therefore counseled to passively give up its own vision and accept its objectified placement and lowly status within the predetermined and hierarchically balanced harmony of the cosmos, as understood and maintained by upper class intellectuals and politicians.

⁸⁵ *The Republic*, 495d, 522b, 590c, 596. See especially 495d where Plato chastises any laborer or craftsmen, who in perfecting their craft, thinks they have a basis from the standpoint of the mechanical arts to participate in philosophy and thus the art of ruling. They fail to see that by virtue of their very labor they are “pretenders unfit by nature” because their souls are “mutilated”. See also the *Phaedo* 80a where soul is to body what a ruler or master is to a slave, precisely because the body is strictly mortal and thus bears no relation to the divine.

⁸⁶ Thus, for Plato, in *Timaeus* 44d, the head was formed first and self-contained, like the divine spherical objects of the heavens, but later given a body so that it had terrestrial transport and would not go rolling around across the rough ground. So there is pure thought as the a priori master first and foremost, who then needs manual laborers as blind instruments to facilitate his vision. Thus, in an idealist inversion of actual physiological evolution, the limbs evolve out of the head rather than the head evolving from the movement of bodies in their development of new relations and material sensate potentials. Manual labor and the social forms of production are therefore in no sense constitutive of the consciousness or intellect of the social body, but are instead unilaterally constituted by such.

Within classical culture, especially as inherited from Attic Greek, there was then no language for articulating “labor” as anything other than a blind adaptation to nature, a subhuman involvement deemed unfit as a constitutive standpoint for participating in the eternal perfection of the Idea.⁸⁷ The assumptions within this reflexive ideology of the upper class find their most rational and enduring philosophical expression in Aristotle’s hierarchical ordering of activity despite the fact that labor here importantly finds its first explicit discursive presentation. For Aristotle all “action” (*praxis*) aims at some good and is therefore ultimately drawn by a final cause in which it is perfected. Thus “action” is a term reserved for those activities that perfect the actor in the pursuit of his own excellence and which are architectonically ordered by approximation to eternal truth as unchanging and unconditioned. The productive movement (*poiesis*) of labor, however, is not a proper “action” because it is a necessity conditioned by the corruptible elements of matter and thus concerned only with producing consumables, contingent objects as external goods. That is, labor does not perfect the subject because it is only a technical adaptation to and reproduction of changeable processes already immanent to nature’s lower realms. Strictly an instrumental process whose intelligibility and value are determined outside itself, labor therefore contributes no knowledge of the eternal and is not an internal good to the human essence since it contains no degree of self-transcendence by which a view of the whole could be presented. Hence, the life of the laborer qua labor disqualifies him from actively participating in or knowing the whole, and only those few who are able to altogether transcend labor toward the leisure time of moral practice and self-knowledge for its own sake can become ruling citizens of the

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Passages*, p. 28.

polis.⁸⁸ Thus the perfect whole is one whose unity provides reconciliation only for the purely intellectual activity of a contemplative subject (*theoria*). Yet this concept of the whole remains partial (even by the criterion of metaphysics itself since it is that attempt to fully comprehend the totality of relations according to their principle of organization) because, like Plato, its unity remains hung up on a purely imaginary or abstractly intellectual reconciliation unable to comprehend the meaning of its own prior bodily activity in its natural processes and historical development as *internally constitutive* goods.

Monasticism, The Middle Ages, and the Valorization of Labor

Of course the usual picture of the Middle Ages as dominated by a severe otherworldly asceticism and backwards feudal structures does not readily admit to an intellectual and social appreciation of labor that uniquely departs from antiquity.⁸⁹ Early Christian culture vacillated between two conflicting images of labor, as portrayed by the ambivalent views within the scriptural tradition. In Genesis labor is depicted as both a primordial good, given to the joyful task of keeping and cultivating creation, and as a cursed affair, the toilsome consequence of the Fall. As Jacques Le Goff notes, within the early Middle Ages Christianity tended toward the latter interpretation as it culturally retained the aristocratic Greco-Roman disdain for labor, compounded also by similar disparagements within the warrior ethos that came with the infusion of the Germanic

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1328a21–1328b24. Aristotle grants that laborers, such as craftsmen, traders and slaves, are “indispensable” to the *polis*, but not as essential acting members. They are not proper parts of the whole, but only basic tools, however necessary, for the real members to “act upon” in order to maintain the conditions of the whole.

⁸⁹ Hence Manfred Riedel’s representative view given above.

peoples. Society was thus ruled largely through a bipartite structure of *oratores* and *bellatores*, clerics and warriors, with little place for the lot of ordinary workers.⁹⁰

In many ways, however, it is through the ascetic formations of monasticism that an opening was made for reevaluating labor positively rather than negatively. As the early monastics retreated into a life entirely devoted to spiritual exercise they nevertheless took up manual labor to provide a withdrawal not lacking in self-sufficiency. While the monk's physical labors initially were deemed a matter of penitence and a means of resisting *acedia*, the fact that the significance of work was already integrated into the very practice of spiritual life evinced a consciousness of the laboring body far removed from the commonplace Neoplatonic asceticisms of late antiquity. Still conditioned by the upper-class ethos of a slave-based society, ancient pagan ascetics, especially with the arrival of Gnosticism, typically protested the present social body out of contempt for the lower body of economic activity itself. Retreat from society was often in order to escape into an elite enclave of pure intellectual contemplation without regard for the material contradictions that continually confronted individual and social bodies. Christian asceticism, however, from the so-called "desert Fathers" to especially the larger scale, coenobitic mobilizations that led to Western medieval monasticism proper, began to express and understand the body as the concentrated site of society's contradictions.⁹¹ In protesting and renouncing the dominant social structures, their task was not primarily to escape material contradictions through self-mortification, but more often to build an

⁹⁰ Jacques Le Goff, "Labor, Techniques, and Craftsmen in the Value Systems of the Early Middle Ages (Fifth to Tenth Centuries)," trans. Arthur Goldhammer in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 71–86.

⁹¹ On the difference with Neoplatonist asceticism see, John G. Gager, "Body-symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12.4 (1982): 345–363. But especially see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, (Columbia University Press, 1988).

alternative communal embodiment of unity within the whole body itself, reconciling its lower with its higher elements. As Peter Brown states, the active physical body became not merely an instrument to be tolerated and efficiently used as in the ancient ascetic separation of spirit, but rather a “field to cultivate” holistically for a unified material and spiritual transformation.⁹²

Brown’s quotation marks out a key for understanding the monastic valorization as it began to recognize the laboring body’s constitutive value for actively integrating and reconciling the material and spiritual. Referring to the body and its work as a “field to cultivate” comes from Horsiesius (d. 400 CE), an early founder of communally organized monasticism that had begun with Pachomius.⁹³ It at once reflects the communal mode of production that monasticism was taking up and its sociocultural consciousness of a more comprehensive spirituality reflectively emerging from this base. Despite the literature surrounding the legend of Antony and the exaggerated sense of monasticism as initially a retreat to the isolated desert, most of Western monasticism grew out of an urban asceticism whose movement found perfection not in the desert but rather in revivifying deserted villages.⁹⁴ With the decline of the Roman Empire, in the 3rd and 4th centuries, the

⁹² Peter Brown states: “Seldom, in ancient thought, had the body been seen as more deeply implicated in the transformation of the soul; and never was it made to bear so heavy a burden. For the Desert Fathers, the body was not an irrelevant part of the human person, that could, as it were, be ‘put in brackets.’ It could not enjoy the distant tolerance that Plotinus and many pagan sages were prepared to accord it, as a transient and accidental adjunct to the self. It was, rather, grippingly present to the monk: he was to speak of it as ‘this body, that God has afforded me, as a field to cultivate, where I might work and become rich.’” Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 235–236.

⁹³ Peter Brown refers to the 4th century Pachomius and the monastic movement he started as establishing “alternative villages in miniature”, *The Body and Society*, p. 217.

⁹⁴ James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 94. “Unlike Antony, Pachomius’s ascetic vocation was not fulfilled by withdrawing further into the desert. He did not move from his initial location near his village deeper into the desert to distance himself further from society. His ascetic career moved him in exactly the opposite direction. Pachomius finds ascetic perfection in his return to the village, albeit a deserted village on the shore of the Nile.” On the papyrological evidence that monasticism had its origins in urban asceticism rather than in the remote desert, see pp. 78–79.

village life of communal production became increasingly pressed into, not only heavy taxation, but crushing debt bondage. This entailed a process that effectively hollowed out much of Rome's rural agrarian base, setting the stage for its eventual refilling by manorial conduits toward feudal serfdom.⁹⁵ With many villages abandoned, Pachomian monasticism occupied these depopulated rural villages by way of reclaiming their agricultural production. In reentering village production back into viable economic life this village monasticism had begun providing a kind of alternative socioeconomic organization to the emerging feudal relations of production, a movement that had begun to draw the people back to village life, beginning with Pachomius's original successes in the deserted villages of Tabannese and Pbow.⁹⁶ As James Goehring states, "Its leaders were the new holy men of antiquity, but its institutions were also among the new purveyors of social and economic power in the hinterland. Its success in Egypt was dependent on both elements."⁹⁷

From the constitutive involvement of coenobitic monasticism with organized communal production the notion of manual labor came to be understood not only as necessary for the maintenance of the body but also for the salvation of the soul.⁹⁸ This

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 47. In noting these changes in the late Empire, Goehring points to the socioeconomic analysis of M. Rostovtzeff in his *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*. However, for a more thorough and contemporary analysis of these emerging contradictions within the Empire, especially according to an explanation of modes of exploitation that would allow these early monastic forms to more clearly stand out in their alternative socioeconomic organization, see Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*; Jairus Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance* (Oxford University Press, 2001); as well as Chris Wickham, "The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism," *Past and Present*, 103 (May, 1984): pp. 3–36. I will elaborate more of the details around this socioeconomic transition in chapter 5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 46–47. Goehring notes that their social organization both of their spiritual community and the village life of the peasantry, by the 4th and 5th centuries, had come to rival "the great Egyptian Byzantine estates" (p. 49).

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁹⁸ George Ovitt, Jr. cites one of Jerome's letters as describing the Pachomian monastics as those "who allow no one [into the monastery] who is unwilling to work, for they think labor is necessary not only for

form of communal production and its affirmation of labor as constitutive for the life of the spirit spread quickly from Pachomius into the West, with the Pachomian rule for planned living directly influencing the rise of the Benedictine community.⁹⁹ For Benedictine monks manual labor was also understood essentially as a constitutive aspect of spirituality, to be practiced and improved upon daily, along with prayer and contemplation.¹⁰⁰ The rise of this figure of saintly perfection amongst the *oratores* permitted, in a way unimaginable to the contemplative life of the Greek elite and the heroic life of the Germanic warrior, a more honorable view of work. This not only raised the consciousness of productive activity within the spiritual practitioner, who increasingly came to reflect upon the spiritual meaning and value of labor as more than merely a useful tool, but it also raised popular consciousness to the dignity of labor because of its integral association with the ideal life of the saints.¹⁰¹

Yet, more importantly, the ongoing development of monasteries as societies of economic and spiritual flourishing led to increased technological innovations in the forces of production that facilitated their unified embodiment and spiritual growth. As René Dubos states, “for the first time in the history of human institutions, the Benedictine abbey created a way of life in which practical and theoretical skills could be embodied in

supporting the body but also for the salvation of the soul.” Ovitt, “Manual Labor and Early Medieval Monasticism,” *Viator* v. 17 (1986), p. 9.

⁹⁹ “The organization of religious life into a productive organic whole by Pachomius must surely stand as the most significant social innovation in early Christian history. St. Benedict’s contribution to Western Monasticism is incomprehensible without the Pachomian achievement.” George Ovitt, Jr. *The Restoration of Perfection: Labor and Technology in Medieval Culture* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 94. On the influence of St. Basil’s rule on Benedict, which had similarly upheld labor especially agricultural labor as constitutive to the spiritual life of the community, see Rembert Sorg, *Holy Work: Towards a Benedictine Theology of Manual Labor* (St. Louis, MO: Pio Decimo Press, 1953).

¹⁰⁰ “When they live by the labor of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks.” *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981), p. 69. See also Terry S. Reynolds, *Stronger Than a Hundred Men: A History of the Vertical Water Wheel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 109

¹⁰¹ Le Goff, “Labor, Techniques, and Craftsmen,” pp. 80–81.

the same person. ... they destroyed the old artificial barrier between the empirical and the speculative, the manual and the liberal arts.” The increased organization of productive activity meant the increased experience of the transformative power of labor as well as a surplus of intellectual labor for reflecting upon the meaning, value, and use of work.¹⁰² Such surplus labor led to a greater experimentation with the forces of production in themselves, a tendency that led toward vast innovative leaps beyond antiquity in the development of productive technologies, a transformation whose inventive scale has been estimated on par with the nineteenth century industrial revolution.¹⁰³ With new developments in mills and machinery among other technologies, the Middle Ages saw productive yields, especially in agriculture, grow at unprecedented rates.¹⁰⁴

Thus, as the practices of manual labor increased and developed in their communal organization, creating a monastic social formation more complex in its forces and

¹⁰² “This new atmosphere proved of enormous importance for the development of European technology and science. The Benedictine abbeys did not immediately launch into scientific investigations, but by encouraging the combination of physical and intellectual work they destroyed the old artificial barrier between the empirical and the speculative, the manual and the liberal arts. This created an atmosphere favourable for the development of knowledge based on experimentation.” René Dubos, “Franciscan Conservation versus Benedictine Stewardship,” in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives—Past and Present*, ed. R. J. Berry (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), p. 57.

¹⁰³ Jean Gimpel argues that the Middle Ages introduced a technological boom that should be known as the first European industrial revolution. *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977). As Lewis Mumford argues, the influence of medieval monasteries on the social whole were “largely responsible for the fact that Western civilization caught up with, and then surpassed, the technical inventiveness of China, Korea, Persia, and India.” *The Myth of the Machine: Technics of Human Development* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. 263.

¹⁰⁴ Monasteries were some of the first European communities to develop and implement the watermill. Almost every Benedictine and Cistercian community owned and operated one or more mills for various purposes. As Terry S. Reynolds, *Stronger Than a Hundred Men*, p. 110, states, “The earliest water-powered hemp mills, beer mills, tanning mills, hammer mills, and ore stamps of which we have knowledge were monastic mills, and the Cistercians, in particular, played a very active role in the medieval iron industry.” Within the early Middle Ages there was also a significant leap in agricultural production, in terms of both quantitative and qualitative yields, through the new developments of the heavy plow, the padded horse collar, and the three-field system along with the use of water-powered mills. See Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966). For Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 15, the Benedictines are significant precursors to the modern integration of science and technology. Their practical bent and the maintaining of a common life of artists, craftsmen, agriculturists and saints provided a context for “a more effective scientific mentality than that of the ancient world.”

relations of production, there was also a greater development of intellectual and spiritual labors, which led to a greater appreciation of physical labor as an internal good to the totality of social and natural relations. This trajectory positively incorporated labor into a spirituality that was increasingly given not to a separation of the inner spirit, but to a higher cultivation of the unifying potentials of nature and humanity.¹⁰⁵ The closeness of the community to subsistence production and the reallocation of surplus goods and surplus labor for perfecting and transforming productive activity into higher forms of communal self-organization allowed for a new view of labor as not merely a means of self-preservation but a transformation of subsisting according to new forms of creative development. This new view upon labor as integrating material and salvific economies was being opened, then, precisely because the mode of production did not primarily serve to produce commodities solely for trade and acquisition of wealth, but rather served to perfect the community of primary producers itself in their creative activity. As George Ovitt states in opposing Weber’s retrojection of a capitalist ethos on monastic *industria*: “Monasticism, as shaped by the early history of asceticism and by the earliest monastic Rules, saw significance in the process of labor, not its products; it was centripetal and socialistic in its pursuit of communal self-sufficiency.”¹⁰⁶

The Marxist Karl Kautsky’s earlier identification of the monastic movement here with a truly progressive “communism of production”, rather than remaining in a primitive

¹⁰⁵ The claim that monasteries valorized labor only according to virtues of self-discipline to avoid idleness and provide self-subsistence leaves unexplained the great leap from antiquity in productive technologies initiated by the monastic movement. The virtue of self-sufficiency alone does not necessarily lead to a greater appreciation for labor in its productive forces and its development into higher cultural and social forms of organization. This is to suggest that there was something more like a growing consciousness of the constitutive value of labor to the social whole and thus its cultivation as an internal good—a whole for which otherworldly aims begin to refocus on and materially lift up this world.

¹⁰⁶ Ovitt, *Restoration of Perfection*, p. 106.

and moralizing “communism of consumption”, retains its penetrating insight.¹⁰⁷ The point here is that this line of monastic development marked a significant advance not merely in the practice of spiritual life and its self-understanding that required the external occasion of methodically ordered labor, but precisely in developing and grasping the mode of production as itself a spiritual practice. In taking up a spiritual life constituted from and for a communal mode of production that reinvested surplus in and thus revived the rural base and village life of direct producers, it distinguished itself from existing slave, tributary, or feudal modes of production without in any way being a simple precursor to a capitalist mode of generalized commodity production. This trajectory was therefore the incubation of a certain development and arrangement of productive forces and their cultural expression that allowed both a social break with the dominant modes of exploitation as well as an ideological break with the notion of labor as toil, curse, and a general symbol of enslavement.

While many monasteries remained isolated and aloof, the trajectory of village monasticism being traced here increasingly engaged with, rather than retreated from, lay society, spreading and sharing not merely goods, but its cultural, productive and technological advances, as well as positively contributing to the construction and maintenance of various public institutions.¹⁰⁸ That techniques and skills were more

¹⁰⁷ Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity* (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007), p. 240. “When the supply of slaves dwindled [within the late Roman Empire], the latifundia had to disappear. The monasteries picked up this large-scale production and developed it further, since free brothers replaced slaves in the work. Because of the general decline of society, the monasteries ended up by being the only places in the Empire where some remnants of ancient technology persisted and were preserved through the tempests of the great migrations, and even perfected in many points.” pp. 239–240.

¹⁰⁸ “Throughout the early Middle Ages the monastics performed a wide variety of work that brought them into contact with the laity. They ran hospices and *xenodochia* for travellers and pilgrims, cared for the sick, distributed food to the poor at the *porta* or gate of the monastery, educated the young and advised and assisted laypeople in many other ways.” Giles Constable, *Monks, Hermits, and Crusaders in Medieval Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), p. 353. These forms of social programs are in addition to the

broadly developed and shared meant the emerging valorization of labor within monasticism extended to the totality of socioeconomic relations, thus marking a significant worldly influence already emerging historically prior to the modern collapse of monastic walls and effecting an influence beyond simply exporting a narrow ethics of self-discipline conducive to orderly labor. Rather the monastic development of productive forces was already disseminating, explicitly but more often implicit within its organizing actions, the notion of labor in its self-organizing capacities as productive of the good.

The incorporation of ordinary workers into the project of the monastery, as well as the incorporation of monastic relations and forces of production into society, meant that the purely negative idea of manual labor as penitence or avoiding idleness began to make way for a more positive account of labor closer in meaning to *opus* and art, and as holding a fundamentally constitutive value in producing the social whole as a creatively collective work. Therefore, by the time of the Carolingian renaissance greater amounts of land in and outside the monastery were cultivated and labor processes within the general populace of the emerging cities were more thoroughly organized, which allowed for a broad “awakening of labor values”—an exalted valuation which was as much a product of growing “worker pressure” on cultural forms for their intelligible recognition, as it was internal to those very cultural forms.¹⁰⁹

The religious symbolism of the Carolingian period began to portray laboring saints for the first time along with an emerging notion of the saintly laborer. Developing a series on the seasons of labor, the representation of labor processes and tools began to

technological forces of production that monasteries had already developed and shared with the wider society, not to mention the work done in clearing lands and creating new roads.

¹⁰⁹ Le Goff, “Labor, Techniques, and Craftsmen,” p. 83–86.

make their way into iconography, and patron saints came to represent the sanctity of various crafts. Literature progressively came to treat more technical concerns, and poetry started to express the good of labor more regularly in the manner of the positive, joyful scriptural tradition. In speaking of the Carolingian cultural revaluing of labor made possible by the elevated level of productive development, Le Goff writes, “For the first time in cultural history, moreover, the notion and the expression *artes mechanicae* appeared in the commentary by Johannes Scotus Erigena (c859) on the *De nuptiis philologiae et mercurii* by Martianus Capella. Technical and artisanal activities attained an equal footing with the *artes liberales*.”¹¹⁰ Capella’s *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* was an influential allegory on the arts and sciences from late antiquity.

Repeating the classical disdain for manual labor, Capella omits the mechanical arts from Mercury’s gift of liberal arts to his bride Philology. The basis for their omission is that they are simply “mortal subjects” that “have nothing in common with the celestial deities” and therefore should “keep silent”.¹¹¹ Eriugena’s commentary, however, signals the growing impression of labor’s empowerment by rewriting the script, remarking that Philology’s complementary return gift was that of the mechanical arts, suggesting that they do indeed share something in common with the divine. Eriugena thus carried the movement of labor and craft into the realm of knowledge for the first time in intellectual culture, and as John Contreni comments, the mechanical and liberal arts are now

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

¹¹¹ Martianus Capella, “The Marriage of Philology and Mercury,” in *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, vol. II* eds. William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 346.

understood to be included as “a constituent part of nature. No longer simply a tool, the arts are man’s link with the Divine, their cultivation a means to salvation.”¹¹²

While the Carolingian period had especially valorized agricultural labor as the primary productive activity upon which the social whole was organized, the emphasis on the respectability of the mechanical arts in general indicates a greater development and diversity of laborers at all levels of urban craft and artisanal activity. Most significantly, with the development and empowerment of labor, we find in this period the opening of a previously closed rural and military society and its bipartite structure to a tripartite schema that now included those who worked, *laboratores*, as a relevant class. As Le Goff states, the appearance and intellectual recognition of *laboratores* as a social good in relation to the *oratores* and *bellatores*, served to “consecrate the ideological breakthrough of laborers, who had already become established in the economy and society.”¹¹³ This marks a groundbreaking historical arrival of the laboring class gaining consciousness more directly of its productive activity as positively shaping the social body.¹¹⁴

In the twelfth century the development of productive forces, the laboring class’s elevation to a greater socio-political standing, and the cultural renaissance of the Carolingian period all began to undeniably impress itself upon intellectual recognition, breaking through whatever wooden barrier scholasticism may have tried to erect. Such a trajectory of breakthrough is signified especially by a greater preoccupation—following

¹¹² John Contreni, “John Scottus, Martin Hiberniensis, The Liberal Arts, and Teaching,” in *Insular Latin Studies: Papers on Latin Texts and Manuscripts of the British Isles: 550–1066* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), p. 25.

¹¹³ Le Goff, “Labor, Techniques, and Craftsmen,” p. 86.

¹¹⁴ As George Duby has estimated the extent of progressive material forces behind this arrival, which he attributes to the growing development of organized labor amongst the peasants: “A great change in productivity, the only one in history until the great advances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, occurred in the countryside of Western Europe between the Carolingian period and the dawn of the thirteenth century.” *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 103.

from Eriugena's work, which was, among others, being importantly revived at this time—with revaluing productive activity beyond its classical captivity.¹¹⁵ Within the monastery, a striking example of the continued yet heightening cultural and intellectual appreciation of the productive arts can be found in Theophilus's *De diversis artibus*. Reflecting the new perspectives opened up through the increasing experimentation with and transformative power of technical arts, Theophilus articulated a fundamental sense of labor as neither reducible to subsistence and a static nature, nor confined to an ascetic instrument for subordinating the penitent's will to the divine will.¹¹⁶ Through novel productions of beauty, Theophilus was rather marked by how the self-transcending nature of labor, its production of new objects for new needs, shows itself to be a fundamental site of participation in divine creativity, a creative act where intelligence and skill are uniquely integrated.¹¹⁷

Outside the monastery, the theologian Hugh of St. Victor likewise continued Eriugena's dignifying of the mechanical arts, but by more systematically working out their philosophical status in relation to the liberal arts. With Hugh the mechanical arts approached a more explicit identification with that same class of discourse as practical and theoretical knowledge.¹¹⁸ That the development of the creative self-surpassing nature of labor provided Hugh's thought with insight into this revaluation is evident in his

¹¹⁵ On the influence of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and his expansive concept of nature see Peter Dronke, "Introduction", and Winthrop Wetherbee, "Philosophy, Cosmology, and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance," in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge University Press, 1988); and on the influence of Eriugena's commentaries on Dionysius see Paul Rorem, "The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor," *Modern Theology* v. 24, issue 4 (October, 2008): pp. 601–614.

¹¹⁶ Theophilus, *On Divers Arts: The Foremost Medieval Treatise on Painting, Glassmaking and Metalwork*, trans. John G. Hawthorne, Cyril S. Smith (New York: Dover, 1979).

¹¹⁷ George Ovitt, *Restoration of Perfection*, p. 169.

¹¹⁸ Cary J. Nederman, "Men at Work: Poesis, Politics and Labor in Aristotle and Some Aristotelians," *Analyse & Kritik* 30 (2008): 27.

Didascalicon: “man’s reason shines forth much more brilliantly in inventing these very things than ever it would have, had man naturally possessed them. . . . From this the infinite varieties of painting, weaving, carving, and founding have arisen, so that we look with wonder not at nature alone but at the artificer as well.”¹¹⁹ Reason shines not against or outside productive activity but more so through it. And this because the mechanical arts are no longer simply a crude imitation of nature, as so commonly believed in Platonic and Aristotelian thought, but now more clearly distinguished, as experienced through new social forms of organized labor and the significant rise in productive forces, as a transformative rejoining and raising of nature toward a higher perfection. *Poiesis*, in providing its own unique view into the whole of reality, thus began to attain an intelligibility and value no longer determined by a complete subordination to *praxis* and *theoria*.

From the experienced development of productive forces the distinctive essence of humanity was becoming identified less in intellectual discourse with the ability of mind alone to contemplatively transcend earthly nature than it was with the ability of the hands and mind to work toward nature’s own perfective transformation. Present with the elevation of the mechanical arts was also the emergence of a uniquely nuanced anthropology and cosmology that lent itself to a greater appreciation of artifice in contributing to the realization of nature, rather than simply dominating it. Thus, with the development of productive forces a new view of nature and the eternal began to emerge beyond the conceptual strictures of antiquity, as the twelfth century renaissance came to understand “Nature” as a personified, vital cosmic force that strived toward a new

¹¹⁹ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* 1.9, quoted in Elspeth Whitney, *Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1990), p. 91.

perfection.¹²⁰ A privileged linkage of *nasci* with *natura* began to imply the idea of matter and nature as pregnant with potentials for perfection, rather than a strictly corruptible, passive or static reality.¹²¹ In Bernard Silvester's *Cosmographia* the primordial elements of chaos yearn for their shaping and elaboration into complex forms, and it is nature, viewed as *mater generationis*, that brings about the universe by progressively raising matter into more developed essences.¹²² But it is humanity whose embodied labor plays the privileged role of microcosmically mediating the movement of the *megacosmos* through its uniting the diverse physical and celestial realities into a rational whole.¹²³ John of Salisbury speaks of nature as "a certain genitive force, implanted in all things" to be cultivated in use and practice, and as "the mother of all the arts, to which she has given reason as their nurse for their improvement and perfection".¹²⁴ In his poem, *De planctu naturae*, Alan of Lille praises nature as both a divine "Child" as well as the "Mother of things" who reveals the divine precisely through the creative unfolding of her own power

¹²⁰ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 18, remarks about this period that "*Nature* existed—and one must take care to spell the word with a capital letter, for Nature became personified and as such, by a fashionable literary fiction of the time, became a goddess. But the fiction in this case had real philosophical worth." This capital sense of nature will be influenced by Eriugena's expansive concept of Nature, as I will highlight in chapter 6. See also Gerhart Ladner, "Terms and Ideas of Renewal", in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991).

¹²¹ Ladner, "Terms and Ideas of Renewal," p. 10.

¹²² *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 40; p. 68: "The elements come before you, demanding forms, qualities, and functions appropriate to their causal roles, and seek those stations to which they are almost spontaneously borne, drawn by a common sympathy: lively fire to the height, heavy earth downward, moisture and air abroad through the middle region."

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 122. For the influence on Bernard of Eriugena's anthropology and cosmology as it develops around human activity as uniting practice and theory, see Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton University Press, 1972).

¹²⁴ *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. Daniel D. McGarry (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), 1.8 , p. 28; 1.11, p. 34. The use of "genitive" in 1.8 is a translation of the Latin *genitivus*, which suggests a generative or an innate, dynamically productive source.

and beauty.¹²⁵ And the influence of Hugh of St. Victor, as evidenced in the thought of Andrew of St. Victor, suggested the imagery of a slow creative evolution of the cosmos actualizing its own material potentials over time.¹²⁶

The point here is that nature was no longer exclusively seen as a static or passive reality whose harmony and perfection were in the past and whose ultimate end at the earthly embodied level was simply necessary decay and corruption. Instead nature's essence was itself understood as a continuing dynamic work that participated in the divine precisely through the perfection of its own creative power.¹²⁷ The space and time of the entire cosmos started to be perceived as and measured by this perfective motion toward overcoming divisions through more diverse but integrated forms, rather than as a deviation strictly against the backdrop of eternally preset spherical forms. Here, then, a degree of creative openness and forward progression was beginning to be introduced into the concept of nature, whereby its perfection was perceived as ahead of it rather than behind it, and conceptualized as a work to do be done.

This theoretical context, wherein nature was beginning to be conceptualized anew as a dynamic movement toward a future perfection, was itself made possible by a new anthropology being discovered according to the transformative powers of productive activity, conceptualized now more directly as an original and internal good to the perfection of creation. Marie-Dominique Chenu emphasizes the fundamental role the

¹²⁵ *The Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), p. 128–148. Humanity is presented in this cosmic poem as called forth to continue the artisanal work of writing Nature's script, and the fall is characterized as humanity becoming a "sophistic pseudographer" that divides and destroys the creative workings of Nature, disordering its script.

¹²⁶ Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, pp. 17–19.

¹²⁷ As Chenu claims, in this period, to exalt the powers of Nature was not at all to diminish the power of God. For these thinkers, simply collapsing everything in Nature immediately to God as Supreme Cause could not possibly honor God as Creator. As William of Conches would be echoed later by Aquinas: "To slight the perfection of created things is to slight the perfection of the divine power." *Ibid.*, p. 11.

development of productive forces played in opening up this new consciousness:

“Encouraged by the breakup of the feudal monopoly of the soil, by the economic and political emancipation of urban artisans organized into guilds, and by the active mobility of men and goods in a market economy, the use and spread of new techniques of production and commerce profoundly altered not only the material side of life but also the modes of perception, sensibility, and representation that pertain to the life of the spirit.”¹²⁸

Characterized by a growing sense of humanity’s labors actively participating in and contributing to the movement of cosmic perfection, productive activity was now understood not only according to its joyful vocation prior to the fall but, as a continuation of creation, it was now also a positive good within the economy of salvation.¹²⁹ Gerhoh of Reichersberg, in ardent opposition to the growing practice of simony in the Church, spoke of humanity in the active terms of “the great factory of the universe, a sort of universal workshop” by which labor is understood as a means to salvation and assessed according to its participation within the common good.¹³⁰ Gerhoh was here building upon that older conceptuality originating in Maximus the Confessor, but developed further and brought to prominence with Eriugena: humanity as a microcosmic “workshop” (*ergasterion, officina*) that creatively raises nature toward the divine through its synthesizing work. This Eriugenian conceptuality, as Remi Brague highlights, marked not only a new valuation of work beyond the aristocratic sensibilities of antiquity but also

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 39. “The rise of new techniques both betokened and promoted a true discovery, an active discovery of nature.”

¹²⁹ Le Goff, “Trades and Professions as Represented in Medieval Confessor’s Manuals,” in *Time, Work, and Culture*, p. 115.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 116–117. On Gerhoh’s critique of simony in light of his views regarding a historicized eschatology, see Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 103–107.

provided an “implicit redefinition of man’s essence ... in a dynamic perspective, an activity, a task, a job ... in which the synthesis of the opposites that divide creation is effected.”¹³¹

This new view of humanity as microcosm presents a momentous shift in the laboring body’s emerging consciousness. In antiquity, as we saw above, the heavy reliance on slaves and the diminished mode of village production concealed the transformative potential of laboring bodies in relation to nature, so that individual and social bodies were thought of as microcosms only insofar as they passively mirrored within themselves the inalterable hierarchical divisions that allegedly marked the cosmos. It was a mirrored reflection of a whole whose intelligible form as a reconciled unity was only available as an abstraction for the standpoint of contemplative thought amongst the propertied class, thus leaving the earthly body of labor riddled with its divisive material and social contradictions as if necessary facts of nature’s order. With the emerging Eriugenian notion of the constitutive value of humanity as workshop, as carried forward in the 12th century renaissance, however, humanity begins to be understood as a microcosm not by passively mirroring but rather actively carrying the creative cosmic movement toward new wholes, sensing and conceiving eternal life as something to be made; and this view could only become available, as Chenu indicated above, insofar as nature’s open movement was intuited and grasped from within the standpoint of labor’s transformative activity in confronting material contradictions and raising nature toward newly integrated individual and social bodies.

¹³¹ Remi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 170.

Building upon this anthropology, humanity came to be understood fundamentally as an artisan situated between *opus Creatoris* and *opus naturae*, thus giving birth to the new concept of “*homo artifex*” in the twelfth century.¹³² In his suggestive *Theology of Work*, Chenu characterizes *homo artifex* by a heightened consciousness of material reality within the meaning of the whole, “calculating the significance of matter not only in his body but in the fabric of the universe,” in order to discover the ways in which matter, in all of its physical processes, is necessary to “the truth of human nature.”¹³³ While the meaning of nature was couched in personified images during this period, this did not lead to a subjugation of humanity to mythical animistic forces. Instead, this “new breed of medieval man,” was stirred by an enlightened consciousness of human productive power in pursuing truth as no longer simply an abstract conceptual unification in thought alone, but truth as a more comprehensive reconciliation of material contradictions in the totality of social and natural relations.¹³⁴

Because this new appreciation for the standpoint of labor recognized its constitutive value within a salvific economy that sought reconciliation precisely through new material productions of the good, beautiful and true, it is difficult to explain this valorization according to a proto-bourgeoisie attempt at dominating nature for an abstract will and its purely secular commercial interests around generating exchange values.¹³⁵ As

¹³² Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, pp. 40–45; cf. Whitney, *Paradise Restored*.

¹³³ Chenu, *The Theology of Work: An Exploration*, trans. Lilian Soiron (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1966), pp. 19–20.

¹³⁴ Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, p. 45.

¹³⁵ As George Duby writes of this period: “the value attached to *operatio*—the efforts devoted to making the garden of Eden bloom and bear fruit—was rising steadily, and the attention of intellectuals was slowly turning toward the nature of things, toward physics; the idea that the kingdom of God might also be of this world was taking shape. What this meant was that men were emerging from the world of fantasy, that they were more openly than before repudiating the temptations of other-worldliness, and manifesting a new impatience with analogies and symbols. They were opening their eyes, comprehending that man worked in

Chenu comments, for *homo artifex*, labor precisely as productive activity was revalued according to its transformative capacity to raise matter “into an economy which, at its final term of development in the ‘new heavens and new earth’ promised after the last judgment, would confer divinity upon the natural universe, this time for good.”¹³⁶ Here the ideal or final cause of historically raising matter into a new economy is not in order to convert the materials of nature into abstracted values, as if to dissolve all things of their concreteness; rather the final cause is that of a new whole in which divinity is redistributed to and conferred upon the natural material movement of making whole. History was then increasingly conceived as the progressive perfection of nature in its creative capacities, as embodied in human labor—a productive act whose ideal approximation was to its own perfection as art rather than simply as procurement of bare subsistence or disposability to mechanical efficiency according to the external ends of acquiring abstract wealth. The notion of time, moreover, far from an indifferent quantitative mechanism of measurement, was conceived as qualitatively internal to this perfective activity, as “effectively the field and measure of its transformations, its efficacy, its purposes.”¹³⁷

Homo artifex was not only characterized by a raised consciousness of the productive power of labor to transform and perfect nature, but, moreover, of this transformative activity as essential to the constitution of the subject. As Jean Lacroix comments of this period of *homo artifex*: “To work is to make oneself while producing an achievement, to perfect oneself while perfecting the world. Consequently the aim of work

God’s employ, and that procreation and manual labor were less degrading than had been said.” *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 211.

¹³⁶ Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, p. 45.

¹³⁷ Chenu, *The Theology of Work*, p. 18.

is dual, said scholastic philosophers: *perfectio operis* and *perfectio operantis*, perfection of the work and perfection of the worker.”¹³⁸ Thus within this trajectory we even find Aquinas, that faithful Aristotelian scholastic, later admitting productive activity within the meaning of being. Commenting on Aristotle’s claim in Book 9 of the *Ethics* that craftsmen love their own productions because they love their own existence, Aquinas elaborates that “to exist is to live and consequently to operate ... *the producer actually producing is in some way the work produced.*”¹³⁹ As Kelvin Knight rightly points out, productive activity is presented here in Aquinas as essential to actualizing the subject’s participation in *esse*, of bringing forth the subject into being.¹⁴⁰ Labor then is not an extraneously mechanical and local motion commanded by and for the purification of a detached inner spirit. Rather than identified with mortal or mortifying processes, labor is measured in metaphysical terms as a perfective act in itself, bringing into being and raising to life what was only in potential. This implies that participation in the transcendental perfection of pure act cannot be the exclusive domain of an abstracted intellectual activity leaving behind its laboring body for the contemplation of a pure stasis; rather, participation is better comprehended through the creative act of self-mediating production, in approximating to the eternal life of pure act by materially

¹³⁸ Jean Lacroix, “The Concept of Work,” *Cross Currents* 4 (Spring-Summer 1994): 239.

¹³⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 7, 1846. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁰ Knight, *Aristotelian Philosophy: Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), p. 56, quotes Aquinas’ further elaboration in his *Commentary on Nichomachean Ethics*, IX, 7, 1847: “Man’s first *esse* consists in the fact that he has the capacity for vital actions. And the handiwork that a man produces in the actual exercise of vital activity indicates the reduction of this potentiality to actuality.” He then suggests that Aquinas’ important critiques of commerce and usury (two forms of pursuing profit without productive activity) should be more closely read in light of these passages on the ontological meaning of production than has been done throughout the past century of Catholic commentaries (p. 57). See also Whitney, *Paradise Restored*, p. 79, who comments on *Summa Theologica* 1a.91, 3.2, that, “For Thomas Aquinas an essential part of human excellence is not man’s rational nature alone but also his ability, using both his reason and his hands, to equip himself with an endless catalogue of tools.”

actualizing new forms of being in, through, and for the laboring body's creative becoming.

What we've begun to approach then is not a valorization of labor according to its capacity for being methodically instrumentalized, which would leave essentially unchanged the classical ontological and epistemological presuppositions about labor; rather we've approached that substantive insight—often attributed only to Hegel and Marx¹⁴¹—into the ontological meaning and value of labor as fundamentally self-actualizing: that the end of human labor is humanity itself. What began with a communal mode of production whose views of unifying body and spirit and led to an unfolding of the meaning and value of the mechanical arts beyond blind efficient processes, has now led to recognition of the substantive end of production as producing the producer.

The laboring body, however, began to express its development in a way that required its conceptual grasp as an end in itself without reducing it to either a reproduction of the given or a secular essence around an empty capacity, since both notions would mean that the laboring body is never an end in itself but an efficient means for whatever. Rather, in the trajectory traced here, the development of productive activity brought forth an awareness of its capacity as internally directed for creatively transforming the whole of reality toward a greater participation in creation. That is, labor's self-actualizing essence in producing the human came to recognize itself as also a continuation of nature's creative self-organization into more perfectly intelligible forms

¹⁴¹ Indeed, some have found an implied "labor theory of value" along Marxist lines in Aquinas' treatment of just price and Aristotelian "proportions of exchange" since he places greater emphasis on the amount of labor involved rather than the subjective needs of the consumer satisfied in determining economic value. See Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory, vol. II*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Merlin Press, 1968), p. 696. Hence, the insight of R. H. Tawney's claim: "The true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labor theory of value. The last of the Schoolmen was Karl Marx." *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 36.

of embodiment—that standpoint for increasingly comprehending nature’s creative movement through the rising perfection of the consciously creating body.

Thus labor as a self-transcending perfective activity in its own right was now radically transgressing the limits imposed upon *poiesis* within antiquity, since it was not only understood as a perfection of the subject or society over against an intractable and unyielding nature but rather the perfection of nature in a new social body. Because the classical depreciation of labor consigned its meaning to the fatedly decaying elements within a fixed cosmos, the laboring body was thought of and treated as merely a mortal process destined solely for the corpse. Yet, the trajectory highlighted thus far signifies a resurrection of the laboring body from its classical captivity precisely by cultivating its creative capacities and allowing it to become intelligible to itself through its own newly generated visions of the whole. Moreover the laboring body is resurrected as a normative site not by virtue of a passive mirroring, but rather through recognition of its essential operation as itself a kind of resurrection. Labor here fundamentally comes to know itself as a life-giving act in relation to the eternal, rather than a blind mortal process, through a growing recognition of its basic ability to resolve life’s contradictions by creatively integrating nature’s objective and subjective motions into new unities, rather than taking leave of material contradictions through a purely intellectual contemplation of abstracted formal unities.

This development and self-understanding of labor generated a new view into a future oriented, rather than solely a past recollected, form of transcendental perfection, whose actuality partially hinged upon the historical mediation of carrying forward nature’s capacities for novelty into creatively and consciously organized social

formations. This suggested that there is no operative salvific economy without it being a transformative material economy of creating rather than primarily for consuming—an implication that would be increasingly brought to the fore within the 14th to 17th century Renaissance. It is then no coincidence that a certain apocalyptic millenarian consciousness became more explicit in the 13th and 14th centuries, expressing an imminently historical sense of salvation as a this-worldly process of radical transformation.¹⁴²

Therefore, as *poiesis* became understood as a perfective act of being and knowing precisely in its capacity for producing newly unified bodies, this meant that the classical ideological basis for politically excluding the *laboratores* was no longer available.¹⁴³ One pronounced attempt to draw out these sociopolitical implications of *homo artifex* can be found in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, where he seeks to newly elaborate an inclusive

¹⁴² For a major study of the millenarian consciousness arising from this period see Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End*. See also the work of Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1970). The chief shortcoming of Norman Cohn's important study of millenarian revolutionary movements of this period is that while referring to prominent social forces, he nevertheless does not adequately see the overall influence from the changes in productive forces and relations and their corresponding views of nature as open to change through human activity. This leads his explanatory analysis to rely too heavily on both a cyclical interpretation of history as well as a psychologistic reduction to charismatic personalities. The overriding assumption is that "the usual desire of the poor to improve the material conditions of their lives" is simply a banal interest that should pertain only to bare subsistence, and yet during this period the poor often let these secular interests become "transfused with phantasies" about an apocalyptic kingdom, as propagated by "some millenarian prophet" (p. 16). It then becomes difficult to explain this tide of social unrest as more than the arbitrary machinations of individual swindlers whose manipulative distortion of populist struggles is precisely in suggesting that their meaning was more than their supposedly modest essence requires them to be. But in explaining these movements through the more comprehensive account of developing social forces of production and their corresponding cultural reflection of new views into the perfectible whole allows one to see within the very linkage of a salvific economy with the desire for improved material conditions, not a psychotic fantasy, but the natural intuition and intention of a more comprehensive whole around perfecting creative becoming.

¹⁴³ As Cary J. Nederman points out the growing consciousness of the significance of labor and its distinctive influence on socio-political thought: "Aristotle's notion of citizenship in the *Politics* required revision, at least for some authors, because of a very prominent predilection in favor of the mechanical arts that became evident among philosophers from the middle of the twelfth century onward. In other words, the positive valuation of labor and artisanship that had been endorsed by thinkers well before the recovery of Aristotle's corpus helps to account for the readiness of certain theorists to promote a more inclusive vision of citizenship than one finds in the *Politics*." "Mechanics and Citizens: The Reception of the Aristotelian Idea of Citizenship in Late Medieval Europe," *Vivarium* 40 (2002): p. 77.

res publica for which the laboring class was a real participant.¹⁴⁴ The *laboratores* became a political class precisely by virtue of the standpoint of labor, since labor as a perfective act could no longer be excluded from participation on the alleged claim that it was simply a function of and adaptation to lower processes of brute nature outside the sociopolitical whole. Indeed for John, labor is intelligible to itself as essentially productive of the social whole, an internal good not only to its basic sustenance and preservation but also to the self-surpassing elevation of society in its common pursuit of excellence – “it is they who raise, sustain, and move forward the weight of the entire body”. Labor’s perfection of the socio-political body was then not simply a matter of maintaining an already given organic form, but rather based in labor’s capacity to raise nature into new levels of complex organization. Moreover, perfecting the social whole meant also continually perfecting and raising up the laboring class into greater forms of conscious and creative participation.¹⁴⁵ Thus, John’s organic metaphors for the sociopolitical body did not rehearse the usual hierarchical account of physiological subordinations, with their vertically prominent cephalic commandeering of mindless and blind appendages; instead, his account distinctively emphasized newly fluid and metamorphic bodies of interdependence guided within a cooperative project, whose end is determined by no order of rank.¹⁴⁶

With John we then see a continuation of the idea of labor’s constitutive meaning as a raising of new bodies of integrated complexity from nature, though now this

¹⁴⁴ *John of Salisbury: Policraticus*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁶ Thus the growing complexity of the body politic for John was likened to “not only the eight-footed crab, but even a centipede”, *Ibid.*, p. 126. And as Nederman states: “Unlike most preceding thinkers, for whom organic images of public life were simply a way of emphasizing political hierarchy and subordination, John holds that all parts must consciously work together in order to achieve a common good that none of them can attain independently.” Cary J. Nederman, “The Virtues of Necessity: Labor, Money, and Corruption in John of Salisbury’s Thought,” *Viator* 33 (2002): p. 58

movement is more comprehensively recognized as a normative standpoint from which the motions of nature, self and society are politically drawn together toward the production of newly inclusive wholes. And John is explicit that because labor is an internal good to the production and perfection of the sociopolitical body, productive activity could not then be given over to generalized commodity production without violating its own internal meaning, value and intelligibility.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the position of labor gained recognition not by bracketing its substantive ends in order to unleash pure efficient forces for exchange relations, but rather by way of its own developing views into creating a more comprehensive whole: a whole whose final cause draws up politics through labor as a creative and collective project toward universally realizing the common good.¹⁴⁸

The Late Medieval Uprisings

This understanding of labor as invested with the means of producing the common good through an organically complex and dynamically evolving sociopolitical body further implied that the seemingly cemented tripartite medieval order was no longer incontestable.¹⁴⁹ The new sense of the *res publica* as a collective and creative project with its valorized position of the laboring class was expressed intellectually because it

¹⁴⁷ In speaking of a parable in which labor was no longer valued according to its production of the common good but broken up, divided and diminished in its innovative capacities simply for making money, John says: "I consider that the devotion of a most able craftsman was ill requited, and that it is a barren prospect for the human race when an excellent art is wiped out in order that money and the material of money—the fuel of avarice, the food of death, and the cause of battles and quarrels—may be held in high value." From *Policraticus* book 4, quoted in Nederman, "The Virtues of Necessity," p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Of course this sense of politics as an organic and collective project will lose out to the political science emerging in the 16th and 17th century which becomes preoccupied with legitimating the external power of the state to contain what can only be seemingly conceptualized as a factious, atomized whole. See Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250–1600* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁹ Giles Constable's *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 325–326.

was already unfolding into real political power, which began to challenge and transform the old structures.¹⁵⁰ That is, the discursive formation of *homo artifex* was an articulation of the laboring body as it gained consciousness of itself as a political class, composing itself concretely through guild systems and corporatist formations that began a tide of peasant and artisan uprisings throughout late medieval Europe. These were not disparately isolated and spontaneous agitations, and nor was their anti-feudal nature a rejection of all things medieval or the sign of a necessary secularizing transition to capitalism.¹⁵¹ From what John Najemy has called “popular guild republicanism” developing in 13th and 14th century Italy, to the English Peasant’s Rising, and culminating in what Peter Blickle aptly calls the “revolution of the common man” in 16th century Germany,¹⁵² these were most often communalistic struggles, organized around

¹⁵⁰ See Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, pp. 211–212.

¹⁵¹ Speaking of the period between 1100 and 1340 Prosper Boissonnade states: “Masters and workmen had acquired the virtues of freedom. ... Their common organization in the crafts, no less than the simplicity of the material conditions of existence, brought them close together. In general neither capitalists nor proletarians were to be found among them. In those days harmony reigned within the world of labour, which had no other enemies than the feudal powers and the patriciate. Artisans were conscious of their individuality and of their value as workmen; ... For the first time labour took a leading place in society, and made its power recognized. ... not only had the working masses succeeded in the conquest of civil and political liberties, but they had also, by the voluntary discipline which they had imposed upon themselves in their associations, created a tradition of the honesty and dignity of labour.” *Life and Work in Medieval Europe*, trans. Eileen Power (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 223–224.

¹⁵² Of course one should also mention the uprising during this time in Flanders, Ghent, and throughout France. On the *ciompi* (wool carders) revolt in Florence as representative of popular guild republicanism and organized prior to the incursion of bourgeois interests see Najemy, “Civic humanism and Florentine politics,” in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. J. Hankins (Cambridge UP, 2000). He argues that only later in the 14th century do the elite major guildsmen such as merchants, money changers, notaries, retailers break away from and react over-against the minor guildsmen, aligning themselves with the patrician fathers and suppressing the standpoint of the laboring class under the guise of “civic humanism”, which diminished participatory politics. Cf., Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), who argues that deeply medieval socio-political and judicial structures enabled the self-organization of the *ciompi* into a cohesive corporatist form of class struggle which was greatly attenuated from the 14th and 15th centuries with the rise of the modern state and its mechanisms of control directed by patrician interests. On the so-called “English Peasant’s Revolt”, this appellation has been questioned and reconsidered, using the term “rising” rather than revolt to indicate the prolonged movement from which it was a result. And it should be noted that the rural peasant’s only made up a small percentage of those actively revolting, since many were workers and artisans at the point of production within urban centers, see Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., *Popular Protest in Late Medieval English Towns* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval*

revolutionary demands on the whole by right of the position of labor;¹⁵³ and they were demands for the radical transformation of the social body, demands articulated in terms of a belief that the kingdom of God was beginning to wholly transform the present toward a new heaven and earth through these historical movements, rather than simply repair a pre-given harmony.

Indeed, prior to the crushing authoritarian blow to the “common man” in 1525 and the hegemonic institution of the magisterial Reformers thereafter, these risings (so often hastily characterized as radical “Reformation” movements) nevertheless carried forth socially progressive claims born from the emerging medieval insight that the material economy and the salvific economy were inextricably linked; and these economies were believed to be linked up in a common movement that did not terminate in some celestial beyond, nor in simply maintaining feudal Christendom’s static equilibrium between the given spiritual and material realms, but rather in the historical implementation of new heavenly dimensions here on earth through more equitable distributions of social surplus.¹⁵⁴

Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381 (New York: Routledge, 2003). For similar reasons Peter Blickle has chosen to rename the “German Peasants’ War” of 1525, a pejorative term which he finds originating with the nobility. He instead argues for “the revolution of the common man” in order to more closely capture its subjects who were both rural and urban workers rising up in the name of communal interests. See his *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants’ War from a New Perspective*, trans. Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H. C. Erik Midelfort (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), and *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man*, trans. Beat Kümin (Boston: Brill, 1998).

¹⁵³ John Ball’s famous phrase, “when Adam devled and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?” sums up the driving religious view of labor as a positive good even within paradise, the normative standpoint within a divine whole for which those who live off the exploitation and exclusion of labor—such as the gentry of his time—have no place.

¹⁵⁴ See especially the sermons of Thomas Münzer in *Revelation and Revolution: Basic Writings of Thomas Müntzer*, trans. Michael G. Baylor (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh University Press, 1993). As Münzer proclaims, “we must hold to it that we carnal, earthly men shall become gods ... so that earthly life revolves around into the heavenly” (p. 121), and one “cannot attain heaven with their heads” (p. 104) but only through a comprehensive transformation of body and soul, society and nature. Münzer also openly condemns Luther for failing to see the common source of all theft: “Behold, the basic source of usury, theft, and robbery is our lords and princes, who take all creatures for their private property. The fish in the water, the birds in the

Thus the common millenarian and apocalyptic form of these protests were undoubtedly the effervescence of the active laboring body becoming socially conscious of the historical possibilities for real change opened by its transformative capacities. The this-worldly, historical, and social expressions of transforming present reality into a new heaven-on-earth—the emerging belief in the perfectibility of the material world in itself stemming from a conscious resolving of material contradictions confronted by the social body of labor, rather than deflecting them in imaginary resolutions on an abstracted spiritual plane—were therefore closer expressions of the comprehensive salvific economy bound up with the monastic valorization of labor as a perfective activity, than those articulated within the early modern theology of the magisterial Reformers. The Reformed salvific economy privileged by the Weberian as if the single interpretive key for identifying a form of religious rationalization of labor, will eventually decouple the material and salvific economies within this unifying trajectory by placing the future oriented and historically mediated transcendental perfection of eternal life back into an inaccessible timeless past, predetermined and locked up within the absolute decree of a hidden divine will. In relation to this irrational form of eternal life, labor therefore once again has no constitutive value but is only an object of value for spiritual subservience to the deity's hidden will. In this, what Weber described within the Protestant Reformation, while rightly identified as complicit with capitalist forces, nevertheless operated

air, the animals of the earth must all be their property" (p. 144). The remedy for Münzer was that "All property should be held in common" (*Omnia sunt communia*) and should be distributed to each according to his needs, as the occasion required" (p. 200). Moving away from Norman Cohn's psychologistic reading that tends to portray Münzer solely as a bloodthirsty psychopath, Frank and Fritzie Manuel provide a more balanced assessment: "Müntzer's promise of a heaven on earth, which he tied to the peasants' clamor for land, involved a complete transformation of religious consciousness, the positive recognition by the ordinary man of his own unique spiritual worth." *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 193. In the next chapter I will argue that this religious consciousness of Münzer's, however, was not comprehensive enough because it also marks a distancing from the original trajectory of valorizing labor that influenced it.

historically as an irrational reaction against labor's conscious recognition of its own rationally emerging self-organization, shunting its meaning and value back into something akin to its classical passivity. It thus marks an idealist reflex of irrational social forces opposed to the real revolutionary forces that were rationally breaking with feudal contradictions, helping to reverse rather than extend what medieval monasticism had practically and intellectually initiated and helped foster.

Conclusion

In exclusively highlighting the late medieval social uprisings of the *laboratores* as the specific extension of that monastic trajectory of valorizing labor as a perfective activity, I have traced a religious view that intimates the divine nature of labor for which no real distinction between a spiritual and material economy could be maintained. It is an emerging religious vision from the development of labor's internal rationality as a perfective act. And from this standpoint it thus evinced a vision of a new whole whose perfected reconciliation requires the most comprehensive resolution of the totality of material contradictions within and for raising up the natural and the social, the spiritual and the material, into a new body of higher unities without division. This more comprehensive religious vision was thus in a certain way born *as the spirit itself* of the communal mode of production, arising from and for the integrating perfection of this social body of labor, rather than born from a separable spirit in accidental conjunction with this productive force and its social form as its external occasion.

It is then a religious vision of a perfectible whole in which the producer actually producing is the work produced, and thus a vision of a whole that comprehends its

laboring body according to its constitutive value as its normative standpoint. In extending yet exceeding this original monastic context, the expanding social movements identified here therefore organized their protests around an emerging consciousness of labor as a substantive end itself whose enlightening religious forms conditioning such, nevertheless remained indispensable. Their forms of social protest could be called a “right to work” strategy whose right was established by virtue of its religious vision of the new whole for which it is the normative standpoint, rather than exclusively a “refusal to work” strategy as found in the Franciscan vow of poverty.¹⁵⁵

The Franciscan alternative provides here an instructive juxtaposition. The Franciscans and the later Spiritual Franciscans, who indeed offered an important protest against the distorted institutions associated with the spiritual economy, nevertheless marked a lack of consciousness concerning the modes of production since they met secular intrusions into spiritual life with a retreat from this-worldly economic activity altogether—a retreat into voluntary poverty that was itself usually afforded by their noble or upper merchant-class background for which the position of labor was already foreign.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the strategy of refusal was oriented to a religious vision of an ideal whole for which all would be united in mystical practices of prayer, contemplation and the spirit of voluntary poverty. This meant that the normative standpoint in knowing the whole was not through actively resolving real material contradictions and thus making

¹⁵⁵ These differing strategies emerging in this period have been suggested by Silvia Federici, *The Caliban and the Witch* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2009), p. 42: “On one side, we have a ‘refusal to work’ strategy, such as that adopted by the French Waldenses (the Poor of Lyon), and the members of some conventual orders (Franciscans, Spirituals), who, wishing to be free from mundane cares, relied on begging and community support for their survival. On the other, we have a new valorization of work, particularly manual labor, that achieved its most conscious formulations in the propaganda of the English Lollards, who reminded their followers that ‘The nobles have beautiful houses, we have only work and hardships, but it is from our work that everything comes’.

¹⁵⁶ Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 16.

whole, but rather in passive contemplation of an already perfected whole. In this light, one could say that Franciscan mendicancy and its communism of consumption is a moral asceticism somewhat closer to the classical Neoplatonic ascetic ideals mentioned earlier. Rendering poverty a virtue and respecting nature as simply autonomously other—rather than seeing the totality of connections within the body’s creative interchange with nature—are merely reforms of consciousness within an abstract contemplative stance that still maintains a rigid division between salvific and material economies.¹⁵⁷ It can thus be characterized as a certain reflex of outmoded feudal structures, since its reactionary retreat from new secular intrusions is conditioned wholly by the feudal inability to grasp the constitutive value of the laboring body as it emerged in its capacity to transform the social whole into higher levels of organized complexity.

This narrow asceticism and its religious vision remain then as a partial consciousness unable to comprehend its own body in its basic social interchange with nature. Thus we find Lollards critiquing this vow of poverty, even in its more socially minded Wycliffite forms, denying that poverty is a virtue yet without denying almsgiving, or intimating anything of the later narrow Puritanical obsession with a blind ascetics of hard work and its bromides against begging that fueled the travesty of English

¹⁵⁷ This is by no means to deny St. Francis’s vision of a perfect whole of peaceable relations within nature, where the wolf and the lamb will lay together, but rather to emphasize that if this ideal is thought to be a matter of voluntary poverty then it remains divorced from its original source in the body’s active interchange with nature. It is only through the body’s labor that it comes to first see that transcending a predatory economy is desirable and true to its fulfillment in its own creative activity, and it is only possible if the modes of production in their transformation of nature are rightly oriented to the ideal of life for itself flourishing as a whole of more perfectly integrated complexity. More will be discussed in the next chapter regarding these ideals as internal to the act of labor. This is why the environmentalist and microbiologist, René Dubos, can say: “Throughout the history of the Benedictine order, its monks have actively intervened in nature as farmers, builders and scholars. They have brought about profound transformations of soil, water, fauna and flora, but in such a manner that their management of nature has proved compatible in most cases with the maintenance of environmental quality. To this extent, Saint Benedict is much more relevant than Saint Francis to human life in the modern world, and to the human condition in general.” “Franciscan Conservation versus Benedictine Stewardship,” pp. 57–58.

poor laws.¹⁵⁸ William Taylor (d. 1423), implicitly echoing Aquinas, argued that labor is a primary virtue precisely because of its capacity to transform necessity, and thus has a right to the whole because it is the constitutive activity for unifying socioeconomic and spiritual reality. Those who gain their wealth without labor but rather through its expropriation are condemned (he was viewing the noble class and clergy here), while the poor should be lifted up into work in which they are more holistically perfected in their socially creative abilities.¹⁵⁹

Within the “right to work” strategies, in the uprising of the common man, we then see the unfolding of a trajectory, beginning with the monastic communal mode of production, whose religious vision and social standpoint is neither that of the Calvinist/Puritan nor the Franciscan—which is another way of saying that it anticipates neither the bourgeoisie, nor their negative moralistic flipside. Both of these pious forms and their religious visions are oriented around the partial viewpoint of an ascetics of purifying an inner spirit, for which labor is simply an external occasion to be either methodically used for whatever, or refused altogether. Since they show no comprehension of perfecting the principal activity of the laboring body, perfecting the laborer herself in her labor as also a perfection of nature, they both equally mark a falling away from the virtue of monastic *industria* as it emerged from and for developing its communal modes of production.

¹⁵⁸ Kate Crassons, “‘The Workman is Worth his Mede’: Poverty, Labor, and Charity in the Sermon of William Taylor,” in *The Middle Ages at Work*, eds. Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp. 67–90. In analyzing Taylor’s various sermons Crassons shows that his critique of begging was a critique of an institution of almsgiving that had begun to ground down the poor rather than redistribute social surplus back into humanizing their laboring activity.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75. In Taylor’s sermons he argues that this was the purpose of Christ’s charity and miraculous works rather than the latter being simply an occasion to display his incarnated divinity (pp. 79–80).

In arguing this point, I have not sought to speak for the whole of the Middle Ages or to identify its definitive essence, though I have sought to identify the progressive essence of the substantively rational medieval valorization of labor. Moreover, reclaiming this thread does not require a return to the medieval, since taking up the progressive movement highlighted here is precisely to extend its self-surpassing trajectory toward new wholes. Therefore, I have marked out a major thread of practical and intellectual development by which the social body of labor began to rise up and become rationally intelligible to itself, as a normative standpoint and thus perfectible end for knowing and being—a work of labor’s self-actualization and self-understanding, which is, of course, a process still not complete. This reading of labor’s medieval valorization according to its own rationalization process and the field of ideas it opened up, activating the rise of the laboring class and the discursive formations of *homo artifex*, therefore denies to Weberian Protestantism its supposedly radical causative role in rationalizing labor over against the backwardness of feudalism. Instead, while accepting with Weber only the mere fact that there was a mutually benefitting relation between capitalism and the Protestant ethos, this historical phenomenon must be repositioned as a later cultural accommodation called forth by the growth of parasitical capitalist relations of production. It is thus more appropriately to be understood as a reflexive counterrevolutionary spirit of the barren *homo economicus* and its irrational consumption of labor against the progressive potentials of *homo artifex*, which as we saw above, already harbored the seeds for surpassing feudal society in a proto-socialist manner. But in identifying this religious trajectory of valorizing labor, as a perfective activity in itself that raises society and nature toward new wholes, a certain line of Marxist interpretations regarding the

ideological forms of labor's self-consciousness are likewise challenged, which we will take up in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Resurrecting Labor as Resurrection: Rethinking Labor and the Religious from within Historical Materialism

“At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit.”

–Theodor Adorno¹⁶⁰

The previous chapter broadly traced out a trajectory of the development of productive forces, as well as the subsequent social and intellectual recognition of labor, under a religious vision of the whole, that grasped it as a perfective activity with constitutive value in its own right. This trajectory challenged the Weberian reading by presenting a medieval valorization whose treatment and understanding of labor as a constitutive perfective activity moved beyond antiquity by anticipating a socialist movement rather than a bourgeois ethos, precisely insofar as it viewed within labor an integral unity between salvific and material economies. Yet, the new view that emerged here also challenges historical materialists to rethink the relation between labor and the religious, not in order to save the religious as such, but precisely in order to reclaim a more comprehensive sense of the normative standpoint of labor and its own concrete spirit as a creative and revolutionary subjectivity.

The medieval notion of labor as a perfective activity that is neither a bare instrument directed by a detached spirit, nor a means of bare subsistence for which the

¹⁶⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 207.

religious and its spiritual values are an epiphenomenal reflex, but at once a salvific and material activity toward producing higher unities, implies a religious form that grasped, as its own content, the spirit internal to its mode of production. It is a view that then demands a different genealogy of those religious ideas and tropes that play a part within the historical materialist interpretation of developing class-consciousness. This is because Marxists, beginning with Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky and then Ernst Bloch, as I will briefly elaborate, all held that religious ideas are only ideological shells, at best advocating a moral critique of inequalities, but never an essential aspect of the laboring body's self-understanding. Moreover, these thinkers have often hastily consigned the entire content of medieval social practice and its religious thought to the given feudal conditions and their tributary ideologies, which allegedly offer only an inverted picture of the real world. They then privilege only the apocalyptic thought forms from certain late medieval upheavals, insofar as they can be understood as negative expressions from cracks within the medieval inversions, cracks through which the emerging bourgeois secularity of economic reality is glimpsed.

As I argued in the previous chapter, however, the late medieval revolutionary movements of the rising *laboratores* should be seen as an extension of the monastic development of the communal mode of production and its corresponding religious vision of a new whole. Nevertheless, one should not uncritically give absolute priority to their form of apocalyptic theology, as if by default of its extremism it were the highest medieval waxing of the laboring body's self-comprehension within religious consciousness.

The tendency of the religious forms within these apocalyptic discourses, especially as exemplified in Thomas Münzer (who did accurately assess the social contradictions emerging around private property), was to immediately oppose the present with the cataclysmic inbreaking of an ideal future. Moreover, the invasive arrival of this wholly disjunctive reality could only be initiated by the external agency of the Holy Spirit, a hidden movement that is directly accessed and internalized only through a purified inner spirit.¹⁶¹ Therefore, insofar as these discourses desired change but appealed to a necessary catastrophe wrought by an external agency and known only through spiritual introspection, they indicate both a waxing and a waning of the original trajectory I brought to the fore in the first chapter. That is, they represent both the intuitions of a novel, perfectible whole previously being generated from within the growing forces of production and the social recognition of labor's perfective activity, and yet the waning of a more materialist religious consciousness and its concretely determined ideal forms pertaining to labor's constitutive agency in the social transformation of nature. Thus, I will argue against the dominant Marxist line, which privileges only these negative apocalyptic expressions of the religious, that it is better to understand these religious forms as displaying a decline from a certain materialist religious trajectory into an alienated spirit, a decline conditioned precisely by the encroaching proto-bourgeois sociality that was beginning to divorce the laboring body from its distinctive religious vision.

Yet before I present, in the following chapters, this alternative historical genealogy of a religious expression that arose more directly from and for the laboring

¹⁶¹ For concise example of all of these themes see especially Thomas Münzer's "Sermon to the Princes," in *Revelation and Revolution: Basic Writings of Thomas Müntzer*, trans. Michael G. Baylor (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh University Press, 1993), pp. 98–114.

body, and within which the monastic trajectory is to be more fully situated, I will here need to first provide a more adequate theoretical foundation for which the very notion of a “materialist religious trajectory” intelligibly makes sense. This is to challenge the underlying theoretical assumptions within the historical materialist view that labor is a purely secular phenomenon, with no sensible intuitions of, internal orientation to, or natural interests in producing something like religious projections of the eternal and infinite, and that in turn religion is only an alienated inversion of reality that in no way grasps the essence of labor. The essence of labor’s socioeconomic activity, of course, has never historically manifested itself in a pure and simple secular way against which religious consciousness and its practices could be clearly demarcated as something accidentally external to it. Nor can the complexity of medieval religious consciousness, not to mention the ubiquity of religio-cultural expressions throughout human history in general, be reduced entirely to epiphenomena without insight into their objective socioeconomic forces. The problem with the assumptions in question, however, is not simply that the religious is reductively explained away, but more drastically, the nature of labor along with it. Assigning a strictly secular essence to labor limits its transformative nature as well as diminishes its consciousness of totality, thus prematurely exiling away to the religious, understood as pure ideological distortion, any of labor’s generated intuitions and intentions of qualitative perfections whose ideals and higher order values transcend the present in a critical way. The problem, in other words, is that Marxists have not been materialist enough, unable or unwilling to take up a more comprehensive consciousness of totality from within the self-transcending nature of labor, as a

transformative activity whose qualitative perfection and infinite value cannot be a priori limited.

Within this chapter I will argue that starting from (and without venturing outside of) historical materialist presuppositions about the act of labor—especially those delineated by Engels—requires seeing that the laboring body's self-consciousness always already arises according to a certain positive religious sight of transcendental perfections generated from within the labor process; only later does the religious become contingently, and not essentially, alienated into inverted forms. The key then is not simply to negate the alienated forms of religious expression, but to locate, prior to their distortion, the positive moment and their genuine ideals born within the revolutionary transformation of necessity, those ideals by which the laboring body can once again recognize itself in moving toward a perfectible whole where the producer actually producing is more truly the work produced. Indeed, at its most materialist, the revolutionary subjectivity of labor must come to grasp itself in the religious idea of the resurrection of the body, to see this as its own ideally intended future if it wants to avoid viewing itself under the subsumption of an idealist inversion.

Although Theodor Adorno intimated such an insight in passing, he never substantiated it according to its rational imperative for the laboring body's self-understanding. Indeed Adorno, and Engels before him, followed Marx's own insights into a certain ideal of resurrection, but they nevertheless retained its inverted form because it was not critically thought through from and for the concrete act of the laboring body. It is surprising that amidst the historical materialist engagements with the inverted idealities of apocalypticism, messianism, and mysticism, there is no truly substantive

treatment of the religious ideal of bodily resurrection, which, unlike these other tropes, was more often an ideal articulated precisely against idealist inversions. To begin fleshing out this insight, in this chapter I will put forth a critical labor theory of religion based on two key claims that challenge the limited historical materialist engagements of labor and the religious from within: 1). That the religious is born from a positive moment internal to the self-transcending nature of the mode of production as it always already raises up a new body, and so it is naturally organic to the advancement of labor's transformative social interchange with nature, 2). The religious idea that necessarily grasps this essential relation and thus comprehends the constitutive value and self-transcending nature of its laboring body in a non-inverted way is a certain ideal of eternal life represented as bodily resurrection. After laying out this theoretical groundwork I will then substantiate these claims in the following chapters by presenting a genealogical account of the emerging ideal of bodily resurrection, insofar as it grasps its mode of production.

Historical Materialist Treatments of Religion

Beginning with Friedrich Engels's treatment of the religious in Münzer's activism, in his *The Peasant War in Germany*, the common Marxist move has been to skip over much of the Middle Ages and instead exclusively privilege the apocalyptic millenarianism from the late medieval era as the highest and most genuine expression of protest possible from within religious consciousness.¹⁶² Of course for Engels any theological discourse, apocalyptic or not, was nonetheless cumbersome and

¹⁶² Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, trans. Moissaye J. Olgin (New York: International Publishers Co., 2006).

anachronistic, a limited species of muddled medieval thought that needed to be expunged more completely in order to grasp the new conditions of the secularizing bourgeois revolution. Looking completely past the novel medieval significance given to the mechanical arts and productive technologies as well as the religious expression more integrally grasping their constitutive value, Engels deemed all medieval religious consciousness as ideological distortion. He thus applied that dated judgment of a dark age to the whole of the medieval era, exaggeratedly condemning it as a regressive epoch whose totalizing ideological religiosity contributed nothing to general knowledge and social progress.¹⁶³

For Engels, then, Münzer's apocalyptic form is a mystification, but its mythical shell is affirmed because it serves as a "biblical cloak" for forwarding a still undeveloped class-consciousness that had no other means by which to express itself, a cloak becoming so tailored to its revolutionary socioeconomic content that it even "approached atheism".¹⁶⁴ Hence for Engels the mythical shell here is privileged because it transparently allows itself to be resolved into a purely secularized economic content

¹⁶³ In tracing the genealogy behind the rise of modern science and its materialist mindset he states: "Antiquity had bequeathed Euclid and the Ptolemaic solar system; the Arabs had left behind the decimal notion, the beginnings of algebra, modern numerals, and alchemy; the Christian Middle Ages nothing at all." *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), pp. 32–33. He also provides a paradigmatic assessment of the religious consciousness of the Middle Ages as expressing nothing other than its own abstract ideological distortion: "Even in regard to Christianity the religious stamp in revolutions of really universal significance is restricted to the first stages of the struggle for the emancipation of the bourgeoisie—from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries—and is to be accounted for ... by the entire previous history of the Middle Ages which knew no other form of ideology than religion and theology." Moreover, "The Middle Ages had attached to theology all the other forms of ideology – philosophy, politics, jurisprudence – and made them subdivisions of theology. It thereby constrained every social and political movement to take on a theological form. The sentiments of the masses were fed with religion to the exclusion of all else; it was therefore necessary to put forward their own interests in a religious guise in order to produce a great tempest." *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1941), pp. 35, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Engels, *The Peasant War*, p. 23. As Engel's describes it, "concealed in Christian phraseology" and "biblical cloaks", Münzer hid his real message, which "approached atheism". Of course, apocalyptic discourse has often relied on using coded language to cloak its concepts, but the issue here is whether religious consciousness as such can be critical in its own right, directly grasping a normative standpoint, rather than being either delusional thinking or a critically appropriated cloak for purely secular interests.

behind the emerging class-consciousness. Indeed Engels's presentation of Münzer's theological views at times implies that Münzer alone understood the base material forces at play but ingeniously deployed peasant's religious language for effectively mobilizing the masses.¹⁶⁵

Karl Kautsky provided the first significant Marxist continuation of Engels's assessment in his *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*.¹⁶⁶ Kautsky here ratified Engels's privileging of Münzer's religious rhetoric, likewise upholding it as representing the highest expression of medieval religious consciousness because it begins to represent secular interests. Yet Kautsky provided a more thorough and appreciative treatment, than Engels, of Münzer as a political organizer whose theological discourse was no mere code but intricately interwoven with his social aims around the ideal of communally held property.¹⁶⁷ Münzer's religious ideas, however, in no way grasped the meaning of labor or the forces of production but were merely limited expressions of the age for which Münzer did the best he could. Kautsky then privileges Münzer's gospel message insofar as it is paired down to a limited articulation of a communism of consumption.¹⁶⁸ The rest of his apocalypticism remains simply a

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 27. Münzer, in speaking to the peasants, "addressed in the only language they could then comprehend, that of religious prophecy." But Münzer revealed his real intent to the "initiated to whom he could disclose his ultimate aims."

¹⁶⁶ Karl Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation*, trans. J. L. and E. G. Mulliken (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), pp. 90–154.

¹⁶⁷ For an affirmative account of Kautsky's treatment of Münzer over against Engel's see, Roland Boer, "'All Things are in Common': Theology and Politics in Luther Blissett's *Q*," *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory*, v. 141 (Winter): pp. 139–159. Available online: <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=938&issue=141>. Although Boer might be somewhat overstating his case that Kautsky didn't interpret Münzer's religious discourse as an external shell, since for Kautsky this discourse is ultimately superfluous in any form once the secularized form of historical materialism arrives.

¹⁶⁸ Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe*, p. 130. In the previous chapter we noted Kautsky's penetrating insight into early monasticism as revivification of rural agricultural production and so oriented around a communism of production. Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity* (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007), p. 240. Yet his insight is only briefly made without more thoroughly identifying this

“mystical enthusiasm” externally related to his practical and revolutionary “knowledge of the existing situation.”¹⁶⁹ Like Engels the assessment remains the same, that religious ideas are ultimately superfluous once the secular discourse of historical materialism comes on the scene.

Ernst Bloch, in seeking to push Marxism beyond any reductive economism, carried Engels’s and Kautsky’s reading toward a more substantive assessment and nuanced endorsement of the theological ideas as sources of inspiration within Münzer’s revolutionary spirit. Thus one of the primary medieval figures he traces behind Münzer’s apocalyptic millenarianism is the 13th century Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore, who brought into prominence the millenarian idea of the kingdom of God as an imminently instituted historical reign.¹⁷⁰ Joachim’s dialectical mysticism of graduated spiritual development, according to Bloch, drew from a notion of salvation history as it came from Origen’s hermeneutics and especially through Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, whose theories of psychological development, he notes, come near a proto *Phenomenology of Mind*.¹⁷¹ The key for Bloch, however, is that Joachim dynamically transposed this spiritual movement from individual psychology to a social history of the universal development of objective spirit. Joachim’s eschatology holds that humanity’s development of self-consciousness will unfold through three stages of sublation, with

trajectory and its specific religious forms of thought, especially as to their medieval development and thus their waxing and waning within late medieval apocalypticism.

¹⁶⁹ Kautsky, *Communism in Central Europe*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁰ For Bloch’s relevant and substantive treatments of Joachim of Fiore see, “On the Original History of the Third Reich,” in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990), pp. 117–144. *The Principle of Hope*, v.2, trans. Paul Knight, Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 509–515. For his full length treatment of Münzer see, *Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution* (München: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1921).

¹⁷¹ Bloch, “On the Original History,” p. 123. “The Victorines thus provided a salvation-based view of history through and through, a mystical novel of development of stages and realms—it could almost be said, a first Phenomenology of Mind.”

history having passed through two stages already: the first being the stage of the Father with humanity's self-knowledge mediated through the external authority of the abstract law, and the second stage being the age of the Son and the clerical mediation of grace. The third stage, which Joachim believed would imminently occur in his lifetime, would be the age of the Holy Spirit breaking with these prior institutions and emptying itself universally into every believer without need of mediation through the law or clerics, ushering in a new era of common property within a global monastery without abbots.¹⁷²

The significance for Bloch is that while theology supposedly refers only to hypostatized otherworldly realities and entities, Joachim of Fiore represents an intense mystical internalization of these theological forms to the point of identifying the Holy Spirit now as the proto-atheistic spirit of independence within humanity's self-reflexive interiority.¹⁷³ Thus, this indwelling will push the inner spirit into new outward expressions of a kind of mystical democracy since it forces every believer to break out from their externalized mediations with alien authorities. During the Middle Ages this apocalyptic form and its inner spiritual sense, Bloch argues, was less a cunning propagandistic clothing than a genuine spirit of protest from the lowly and oppressed whose suffering and groping could find no other avenues of expression.¹⁷⁴ However, as Bloch intimates, once spirituality is pushed outwardly into certain social movements, the historical materialist pollen from these spiritual cones will eventually find fertile secular soil to grow according to the dictates of class-consciousness without need any longer of

¹⁷² On the theology of Joachim see Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future: A Study in Medieval Millennialism* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999).

¹⁷³ For Bloch's larger project of utopian hope as it corresponds to an atheistic spirit, and in which Joachim is situated though only mentioned briefly, see *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. Peter Thompson (New York: Verso, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ Thus in "On the Original History" (p. 131), Bloch claims: "No economic consciousness existed at the time purely for economic reasons, and if chiliasm had not existed, no revolutionary consciousness would have existed either, and therefore no revolution whatsoever."

the religious seed casings. Thus for Bloch a certain internalization of apocalyptic thought throws the inward spirit outward into an historical materialist trajectory, which is then caught and deciphered by Marxism as to the secular socioeconomic content behind its utopian projections.¹⁷⁵

What is peculiar about Bloch's "historical materialist" interpretation is that it remains at the level of an intellectual history of ideas and so largely traces only the inner drama of spirit's development of self-consciousness through a certain dialectical idealism. He rightly focuses on the active side of subjectivity developed by idealism but rarely treats the question of how this sense of a dynamically unfolding spirit within the apocalyptic trajectory could have arisen from the material life of labor in the first place, except as a vague utopian longing that emerges as an aspect of self-consciousness in its alienated form.¹⁷⁶ Of course, Bloch wants to find within idealism a subjective spirit that begins to actively break with its inverted forms, but in overstressing the mystical trajectory against Weber's identification of asceticism with a bourgeois ancestry, he fails to see those other valences within ascetic beliefs and material practices around transforming nature. Thus the materialist trajectory of valorizing labor and its theological articulation prior to the late Middle Ages, which I outlined in the first chapter, is almost entirely overlooked by Bloch, choosing as he does to focus instead on a certain genealogy

¹⁷⁵ "The contents of modern socialism, of that in the process of being implemented, are no longer the theological ones, in class terms not even any longer the theologically disguised ones of those days. Nevertheless socialism may pay respect to the dreams of its youth, it sheds their illusion but it fulfills their promises." "On the Original History," p. 118.

¹⁷⁶ In his major work, *The Principle of Hope*, his primary concern is to ground utopian hope in consciousness and subconsciousness, inner preconscious vital drives such as hunger, and then he moves to the conscious projections of misty daydreams, fantasies etc. His focus on the content of utopian ideals hovers around the abstract void, the missing, the hidden, or the negative of the "Not-Yet-Conscious" rather than focusing on the trajectory of labor and its transformative organization of both the material and its biological needs into new forms that allows this "Not-Yet" to be seen in the first place. For this grounding in consciousness and pre-conscious drives, see *The Principle of Hope*, v.1, trans. Paul Knight, Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986). Bloch's point of emphases are not misplaced as much as lack a more direct connection to labor's transformative act.

of dialectical idealism especially as it leads to and runs through German mysticism. This focus is evidenced by his continual preoccupation throughout his works with Fiore's influence leading to Münzer, as well as other mystical presentations of inner spirit such as those given by Eckhart, Paracelsus, Boehme, Baader, and Schelling¹⁷⁷—hence, his attempt to even situate the Victorines as precursors of a phenomenology of spirit rather than emphasizing their understanding of the mechanical arts in constitutive relation to spirit and the changeable dynamisms of nature.

Viewing the religious only in terms of inverted ideas around an abstractly transcendent entity, Bloch's focus on mysticism tends to one-sidedly look for those concepts that negate themselves, thus remaining within the reform of consciousness as it continues to be mediated, though negatively, with its inverted ideas. Following an idealist dialectics of negation such as within Joachim, whereby one tracks how the inverted idea of the transcendent dialectically unfolds through its self-negating kenosis, from the father, through the son, and into the universal spirit of interiority, perpetuates a notion of an a priori spirit that must condescendingly enter into and authorize an affirmation of the material only as its occasion of self-consciousness. The problem is not the endpoint of affirming a universal democratic spirit of independence or communal sharing of property, such as one finds in Joachim, but rather how one gets there. In other words, while Bloch's emphases on apocalyptic mystics and a certain spirit of atheistic revolt within Christianity might express something of a detached religious spirit coming down to earth and partially becoming conscious of itself within intellectual reflection and even political will, they do not yet express positively and more holistically the laboring body becoming

¹⁷⁷ For these figures see especially Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, v.2.

conscious of its own revolutionary self-transcending nature in raising up the latent potentials for the divine within the material.¹⁷⁸

The foundational figures of Engels, Kautsky and Bloch then similarly see religious consciousness per se as something external to the laboring body, always the later byproduct from divisive class relations, and thus a phenomenon of labor's alienated reproduction within false consciousness itself. The religious is then in no way positively understood as an internal expression of the laboring body's own ascendant movement, since it is deemed to harbor no kernels of truth which might actually correspond directly to the laboring body's sensible intuitions and intentions generated from its own material engagements. If the Weberians grasp a certain positive significance of religious consciousness in labor's valorization, yet valorize labor only as an instrumental object of value external to spirit, rather than an internal creator of value itself, Marxists rightly grasp labor as the internal creator of value, while nevertheless failing to grasp the significance of the religious as generated from labor, except as a symptom of labor's alienation from itself. The assumption in both is that labor is a purely secular reality to which the spirit of religious consciousness is externally and accidentally related, either through an arbitrary command, or as a mystifying reflex.

But then this leaves labor in the lurch, a priori limiting its creative essence to an efficient causality of reproducing only given secular values, since the production of qualitative values that in any way appear to transcend the present could only be deemed distortions from a will alien to labor's own supposedly profanely banal interests. This

¹⁷⁸ Our task is to argue an alternative trajectory of internal utopian consciousness for historical materialism without simply following Bloch's Lutheran idealist mysticism—that is, to explicate a different genesis of religious consciousness from within the labor process and bring out the nuances in certain forms of theological thinking that historical materialism typically misses because of its blind spots to the relation of modes of production with religio-cultural production.

would mean that labor's ubiquitous pre-capitalist self-understanding within religious forms is simply a sign of an immaturity that must await bourgeois secularity to paternalistically provide it with its real constitutive conditions for recognizing and realizing itself. Moreover, this simultaneously leaves the best of religio-cultural production—with its more comprehensive consciousness of the whole beyond the narrow present, and its higher ordering of universal ethical ideals and values beyond particular interests—materially unaccounted for, simply ceding its origins to later superstructural moments and their ideological terrain of inverted idealisms.¹⁷⁹ Thus the aspects of the eternal and infinite are seen only as abstractions referring to the alienated intellectual realm of the concept's own formal ideality, rather than in some way internally signifying potentials within the material itself, referring to the infinite value of the laboring body rising up in its own creative production of eternal life. Both views are then unable to adequately explain the reality of projected religious values and labor's continual reproduction of their conditions of projection, except by sweeping away the significance from one side of the relation.

¹⁷⁹ For a recent form of Marxism that has abandoned the modes of production altogether to an indifferent sphere of the profane, while trying to employ the idealist sphere of exchange for providing ethical values, see the Kantian Marxism of Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, trans. Michael K. Bourdaghs (Duke University Press, 2014). Karatani explicitly represents a resignation of the modes of production to a banal secularity that I am challenging when he says: "The problem is, insofar as you look at the material processes or economic substructures from the perspective of modes of production, you will never find the moral moment. For this reason, the moral moment must be sought not in economic structure but in the idealistic dimension ... If we rethink the economic base from the perspective of exchange, broadly defined, then there is no need to posit a moral dimension exterior to 'economy'. The moral moment is included within the modes of exchange" (p. xix). This is a view of the economy and morality, however, that is overly conditioned by bourgeois exchange relations as I will emphasize in later chapters. It does not adequately account for the fact that every mode of exchange presupposes the ontological priority of the mode of production, thus entailing that production is never simply for exchange. Rather exchange is for production, and its moral aspect follows from the fact that what is being exchanged is something that someone produced. The "moral moment" is therefore already included in the modes of production since it is not the modes of exchange that make the human distinctive in its sociality but rather the fact that they've created new forms of subsistence and thus something new to use and possibly exchange for further creative acts. If exchange does not facilitate the socially creative process, being from and for it, then it is to be deemed unjust.

What is lacking here is a more comprehensive consciousness of totality articulated from within the creative material attempts at higher organizations of reality by the laboring body—i.e., there is a need for a critical theory in which labor and religious consciousness can be understood as organically and mutually determining aspects within the same creative movement. This requires more thoroughly challenging the modern rigid compartmentalizing of distinct sacred and profane spheres, exposing this dichotomy as an abstracted separation within consciousness alone, which the self-transcending integrative work of the laboring body always already unconsciously rejects, without implying a simple elimination of one term in light of the other. Weberians and Marxists fail to challenge these dichotomies, therefore, because neither adequately thinks through the nature of labor as a self-transcending movement, which in no way could be adequately described as secular tout court.

Yet, a certain construal of the Marxist notion of productive activity in its metabolic relation to nature does not inherently preclude seeing the more materialist and rational form of a religious consciousness internal to labor, and behind the apocalyptic drapery, but rather presupposes and necessitates it. If labor is the constitutive standpoint of creating value, and its essential act of doing so always adds something new or more to nature, revealing the emergent qualities of nature as it revolutionizes the conditions and forms of subsisting in surprising ways, then the priority of the modes of production in accounting for religious consciousness and its ideas must provide a more nuanced and comprehensive assessment of their negatively external, *but more so*, positively intrinsic, involvement in grasping and extending the novel trajectories generated from the creative process. What is thus needed within historical materialism is a critical labor theory of

religion in which the positive aspect of the religious is located as a functional, yet non-reductive, moment internal to production, so as to provide a normative material base by which to more discerningly engage and appropriate its truly creative forms, as well as more acutely critique its distortions. Therefore, I will now clarify such a theoretical paradigm concerning the priority of the transformative nature of labor and its intrinsic religious consciousness, before going on to suggest those religious ideas necessary for labor's self-understanding. Our point of departure will here begin with an immanent critique of Engels's own understanding of the novelty of labor in its historical emergence, as well as his construal of its participation in the perfection of nature.

The Self-Transcendence of Labor as a New Creative Act

Engels provided the first sustained theoretical analysis and extension of Marx's concept of labor as it related to religion as well as nature and historical development. While Marx and other Marxists will be engaged in what follows, Engels's own construal is given a prominent place here because the road he paved for subsequent Marxist thought exemplifies some of the key insights, as well as problems, that have since affected critical thinking around historical materialism and religious consciousness.¹⁸⁰ His version of dialectical materialism thus offers a foundational materialist vision of the whole, and elaborating his views will provide an occasion for thoroughly clarifying an

¹⁸⁰ Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* was the first systematic Marxist attempt at integrating a philosophy of nature with the natural sciences. His work here positively influenced Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which eventually devolved into a crude mechanical materialism within its orthodox codification as Diamat under Stalin. The latter failed to follow the emergent movement of labor and its history in relation to nature, instead swallowing everything up in the rigid mechanics of dialectical necessity. This failure of the Party to push dialectical materialism toward an open historical materialism, then negatively conditioned Western Marxism with its overreactions to dialectical thought, especially as seen in the early members of the Frankfurt School who became all too anxious to expunge any notion of totality, including rejecting the comprehensive standpoint of labor.

ontology of labor that reveals its concrete relation to consciousness in its necessarily religious, yet rationally critical, form and content. Yet, because he insightfully highlights the distinctive self-transcending essence of human productive activity in its historical relation to nature but wrongly assesses the relation of religious consciousness to such and thereby misidentifies the whole within which labor participates, his thought is marked by self-contradictions that instructively provide a kind of case study in the “return of the repressed”: one cannot demythologize the contents of religious consciousness without presupposing its true form in relation to the laboring body’s activity that generates it, otherwise consciousness will always return with another mythical content unable to locate its originating intuitions.¹⁸¹

To understand the origins of this self-contradiction we must first begin with an appreciative account of Engels’s understanding of nature as a dynamically evolving totality and his conception of labor’s unique relation to such. In his major, yet unfinished, work, *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels’s sought to present a more adequately unified theory of matter in motion than that formulated by the old paradigm of mechanical materialism. Beginning with an affirmation of the law of conservation of matter Engels challenged its dominant conceptualization in terms of quantitative constancy, which reduced matter to its mechanical form of motion as simple displacement in space. He rightly saw that when extending this mechanistic paradigm to exclusively account for the cosmic totality of matter’s varied relations, the law of conservation falls into self-contradiction.¹⁸² This was becoming evident during the mid nineteenth century with the emerging science of thermodynamics. Reasoning solely within the mechanistic paradigm, Rudolf Clausius

¹⁸¹ But, in emphasizing such a theme, I am of course not arguing that the religious as such is a kind of unconscious impulse that simultaneously must be repressed while always also returning in other forms.

¹⁸² Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 92–136, pp. 145–150.

formulated the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, which stated that every mechanical conversion of energy into the capacity for work, which is the capacity to create an organized system, will lead to a greater dissipation of energy and thus an eventual and irreversible loss of the capacity for maintaining this organization—i.e. the order of every closed mechanistic system tends irretrievably toward absolute disorder, decay, and death, or maximum “entropy” as Clausius coined this term. Soon the entire universe was seen as bound to this law and given to the inevitable fate of cosmic heat death.¹⁸³

Yet, this claim presupposed the reduction of the motion of the universe to that of a closed system modeled after the finite machine of a heat engine.¹⁸⁴ This paradigm of combustion operates, however, with the assumption that the only form of work is that of the mechanical displacement of heat, with created organization being only the arbitrary and contingent product of the mechanical coherence of matter. Such a framework therefore could not account for the creation of highly organized relations and activities but could only claim that any closed system of purely quantifiable mechanistic relations, if left to its given mechanism without any further innovations or outside interventions, will eventually fall apart.¹⁸⁵ The reduction of nature to a closed finite system therefore

¹⁸³ For an account of the rise of thermodynamics along with the needs of the industrial revolution as well as the corresponding reflexes of a Protestant cosmology see, Crosbie Smith, *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain* (London: Athlone, 1998).

¹⁸⁴ Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 375. As Engels knew all too well, it was no coincidence that this law developed during the rise of industrial capitalism and was promulgated by religiously Protestant social conservatives to counter evolutionary theory. The science of thermodynamics was modeled on the technology of the steam engine and the forces of combustion therein, especially as developed from the studies of Sadi Carnot. With the alchemical dreams of a perpetual motion machine fading, capital’s new dream was to efficiently order the labor process as a mechanism of forcible combustion, transferring the body’s dissipating heat into usable energy for producing surplus value, before it passes away. On this connection between Clausius’s and Carnot’s physics of thermodynamics, the development of machinery and the regulation of the labor process, see George Caffentzis, *In Letters of Blood and Fire: Work, Machines, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ The 2nd Law of thermodynamics is not an absolute law in itself, as Erwin Marquit aptly sums it up: “The law of increasing entropy, when based on the concept of states accessible to a system, expresses a statistical tendency, rather than an absolute necessity.” Marquit, “Stability and Development in Physical Science,” in

necessarily excluded precisely the fact of creative development that adds new forms and qualities of motion. Thus it suppressed the innovative qualities found in the creative act of labor, whose changeable forms are continually revealing that matter's mechanical motion is never an absolutely closed system of strict quantitative limits, as if energy use always and only means irretrievable energy loss.¹⁸⁶ That is, the 2nd law conceals another view of the law of conservation of matter whereby energy, in being converted into the production of increasingly organized relations, is not simply lost but rather opened for its qualitative transformation into new and higher forms of activity. Thus Engels rightly emphasized mechanical motion in itself is not actual "work" but only a certain form of energy potential for the higher motion of work.¹⁸⁷ No mechanism or machine creates but is simply a basic form of motion available for transformation into a greater creative process toward new forms of energy and its use.¹⁸⁸

Marxism, Science, and the Movement of History, eds. Alan R. Burger, Hyman R. Cohen, and David H. DeGroot (Amsterdam: B. R. Gruner Publishing Co., 1980), p. 101.

¹⁸⁶ Modern physics speaks of either an "open" or "closed" universe. The open universe is one that will expand indefinitely until all nuclear energy has been spent thus leading to death by heat loss. The closed universe is one that has a limit to its expansion whereby the universe then bounces back upon itself, becoming increasingly concentrated into a crushing and disintegrating ball of fire. When I refer to a "closed system" I am referring to both scenarios, however, in that they both imply the laws of motion are absolutely and immutably determined by the mechanistic law of thermodynamics for which no evolution of matter and the conversion of its energy could disclose a new form of motion with emergent laws. The expansion of the universe does not necessarily mean energy will be eventually depleted since new forms of organization are evolving—such as life itself—that might possibly reconcentrate and convert energy into new sources and higher capacities; and the emerging possibility of reconcentration here, since it has to do with emergent forms of organization, does not necessarily imply only a return of the cosmos to a fiery big bang.

¹⁸⁷ As Engels critically notes the lacunae within the science of thermodynamics: "The concept of work is neither developed, nor even defined. ... so Helmholtz can go so far as to assert that 'friction and inelastic impact are processes in which *mechanical work is destroyed* and heat is produced instead.' Just the contrary. Here mechanical work is not *destroyed*, here mechanical work is *performed*. It is mechanical *motion* that is *apparently* destroyed. But mechanical motion *can* never perform even a millionth part of a kilogram-metre of work, without apparently being destroyed as such, without becoming converted into another form of motion." *Dialectics*, pp. 133–134.

¹⁸⁸ Thus John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett are right to emphasize that Engels did not reject the 2nd Law of thermodynamics as such, but rather rejected its totalizing application to the entire universe in a way that would necessitate its ultimate heat death, (*Dialectics of Nature*, p. 375). See Foster and Burkett, "Classical Marxism and the Second Law of Thermodynamics: Marx/Engels, the Heat Death of the Universe Hypothesis, and the Origins of Ecological Economics," *Organization Environment*, v. 21, no.1 (March, 2008): pp. 3–37. But they fail to more adequately emphasize the fact for Engels that any generalization of

A more coherent account of matter therefore needed to consider the entire wealth of its *qualitative* differentiations wherein mechanical displacement is not only one form among others but also constantly converted into higher forms of motion in which entropy is increasingly reduced. Thus for Engels matter's motion cannot be solely explained by mechanical displacement in space because mechanical combinations of atoms are only revealed insofar as they also form new molecular unities. Molecules in turn convert energy into qualitatively new forms of motion characterized by chemical bonds whose qualities are not simply explicable by reference to prior mechanical states. Likewise, the quantitative aggregations and newly unified interconnections of chemical forms of matter subsequently condition a further qualitative leap into organic relations. And organic forms of matter further organize energy into more complex forms of motion that begin to react upon and transform the prior movement, developing into a diversity of living beings with higher capacities for entropy reducing activities through new forms of organization.¹⁸⁹

With each transformative leap toward more complexly organized material wholes, the new forms of motion and their syntheses are not reducible to previous states but add to what matter is, while opening up previously unknown potentials for creating further qualitative relations. Matter then, for Engels, does not subsist in and as a basic

thermodynamics to the universe as a whole would then make any form of creative work not reducible to the motion of a combustion machine a sheer inexplicable miracle. As Robert Biel points out, their reading is too preoccupied with proving that Engels accepted the science of thermodynamics to the point that they forget "that thermodynamics is not the whole of systems theory: we also have to understand the principle of emergence and the crucial role of information." Biel, *The Entropy of Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), p. 47.

¹⁸⁹ Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 51. "To say that matter during the whole unlimited time of its existence has only once, and for what is an infinitesimally short period in comparison to its eternity, found itself able to differentiate its motion and thereby to unfold the whole wealth of this motion, and that before and after this it remains restricted for eternity to mere change of place—this is equivalent to maintaining that matter is mortal and motion transient."

quantitative constancy of mechanical relations, for which all other forms of matter in motion would be mere accidental appendages disclosing nothing of its essence. Rather matter in motion conserves itself by becoming more than itself, so to speak, revealing nature as an open system for increasingly innovative organization.¹⁹⁰ Matter therefore subsists as a development of complexification, an ascendant movement toward new wholes of creative and conscious self-organization that transcends, by transforming, the external mediations of mere mechanical displacement.¹⁹¹ As a transformative movement toward qualitatively new forms of self-organization, each form of motion is therefore a kind of perfective drive. Nature as the totality of this still unfolding perfection of self-organizing complexity therefore finds its highest development in the social form of matter, insofar as the social body grasps and transforms this entire movement within a new whole that begins to comprehend itself through its own unique qualities of conscious and creative activity.¹⁹² Here, it is labor that distinguishes the human from all other animals—though never as other than an animal itself—since it raises nature into this new social body that constitutes itself beyond the blind mediations of inorganic and organic systems.

¹⁹⁰ Or, as Engels succinctly states it, “there is no leap in nature, *precisely because* nature is composed entirely of leaps.” Engels, “Appendix: Notes on Anti-Dühring” accessed online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/appendix1.htm>.

¹⁹¹ Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 29–54.

¹⁹² In summing up this movement that reveals the social not as distinct from matter but rather as a new form and property of matter, the Marxist physicist Erwin Maquit explains that, “dialectical materialism ... regards society as a form of matter, namely social matter. It is material, since human beings are material objects; it is social, as distinct, say, from physical, because the significant properties of such matter for the social sciences are social relations, rather than the physical properties of mass, volume, temperature, and the like.” Maquit, “A Dialectical-Materialist View of Progressive Development in the Physical World,” *Political Affairs* 85, no. 5 (May 2006): 36–38.

The distinctiveness of human labor, for Engels, “begins with the making of tools.”¹⁹³ Of course animals, especially highly social primates, ants and bees, have the capacity to use found objects as tools in more efficiently producing and storing surplus goods. But animal labor and its use of tools is always immediately determined by both their given biological form and their environmental milieu. That is, since most species do not create new tools, these animals do not then produce or reproduce their species otherwise than as an adaptive form of entropic resistance within the relatively closed systems of local “predatory economies”.¹⁹⁴ Human labor, however, in refining its capacity for tool use, eventually developed a new creative capacity for inventing not only new tools for productive activities not formerly known within nature, but also tools for more perfectly creating tools. This reflexive self-organization begins the process of producing and reproducing humanity through the transformation of, rather than adaptation to, nature.¹⁹⁵

The invention of tools does not indicate simply a refinement for more efficiently producing a given means of basic subsistence but rather indicates the creation of a new form of subsisting beyond mere entropic resistance, taking on the expanding qualities of what some have more recently termed “negentropy”, or the negation of entropic forces.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Engels, *Dialectical Materialism*, p. 236.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49. Cf., “By the co-operation of hands, organs of speech, and brain, not only in each individual, but also in society, human beings became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and of setting themselves, and achieving higher and higher aims. From generation to generation, labour itself became different, more perfect, more diversified. ... Along with trade and industry, there appeared finally art and science.” *Ibid.*, p. 238; this echoes Marx’s more famous line about freedom as the transformation of necessity: “that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.” *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, v. 3, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 959.

¹⁹⁶ This term was coined by the physicist Erwin Schrodinger to emphasize the new movement of life as a process that reduces entropy and thus runs counter to the tendency of any strictly closed system to increase

Through its inventiveness labor begins to negate or reverse entropy by opening closed systems to new forms of energy not given by an immediate environment, converting such energy potentials into higher levels of organizing activity that require less energy exchange.¹⁹⁷ This anti-entropic capacity for higher organization discloses an invariant direction orienting the emergent qualities of labor toward the optimization of more life. It is a directionality that is not reducible to a bare indifferent capacity but that by which all conceptions of abstract capacity are contingently derivable. Thus the unfolding of labor's anti-entropic direction introduces into nature new relations around qualitative perfections such as art, science, and ethics, all of which open up a new social body capable of reproducing itself around non-predatory forms of subsistence that begin to reduce the pressures of energy needs on its environment.¹⁹⁸ That is, human labor constitutes a new social body, naturally revealing new laws of nature beyond its biological drives and strictly physical properties, by taking up and comprehending within its productive

entropy. See Schrodinger, *What is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* (Cambridge University Press, 1967). Schrodinger only describes the basic movement of organic matter in its entropy negating subsisting, that is, through "eating, drinking, breathing and (in the case of plants) assimilating", (p. 70). Thus he only describes basic biological metabolic processes that not only negate entropy but also in the process displace entropy to other forms and places. It is labor however that begins to develop ways of subsisting beyond simple displacement of entropy, transforming the strictly biological modes of resistance into creative social forms of being that accumulate new values around information and knowledge—such provides new forms of order that begin to be maintained and advanced without remaining in mere equilibrium with given entropic forces.

¹⁹⁷ As Robert Biel has argued, the social body of labor harbors within its creative capacity a potential "to substitute for *physical energy*" since "capacity can in a certain sense be seen as a free resource because it is not dissipative." This infinite quality of "capacity" which for Biel is the innovative and experimental quality of labor in its emergent forms of self-organization, is not invested in by capitalism since capital is more heavily invested in top-down mechanisms for ensuring the bare maximized quantity of output from labor power. Thus instead of developing labor's socially creative capacities for negating entropy from the ground up, capital invests in modes of production whose entropy-hastening maximization of output uncreatively deals with entropy by simply exporting it somewhere else.

¹⁹⁸ "Darwin did not know what a bitter satire he wrote on mankind, and especially on his countrymen, when he showed that free competition, the struggle for existence, which the economists celebrate as the highest historical achievement, is the normal state of the animal kingdom." *Ibid.*, p. 49. Paul Burkett speaks of this extension of labor into the production of a social whole for which producers use their expansion of the social surplus to further accumulate productive, aesthetic and scientific knowledge as a "de-entropification of human needs and human development"—it is a movement of creative becoming that begins to reduce the pressures of energy needs on the environment. Burkett, *Marxism and Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 329

activity the totality of nature's relations according to new qualities and values, new ways of being that aim to further release previously unknown potentials for universally perfecting life's own creative self-mediation.¹⁹⁹

The human thus begins to evolve in ever new ways through its production of tools to perfect tools, language to coordinate use, and culture to coordinate social relations that advance the creative organizing of higher productive aims. Such novel evolutionary additions were not anticipatable within the empirically given milieu of humanity's immediate environment or from within the limited structure of its biological endowments, but through their novel transformation toward higher functions of socially creative self-organization. Indeed it is from the creation of tools that the refinement of the laboring body leaped into increasingly higher levels of evolutionary development that reflexively reproduced innovations in its own biological form: whereas we can look at any other animal species and trace its evolution entirely from a history of its biological remains and their associated modes of immediate energy exchange with its given environment, to understand the evolution of the human animal we must necessarily look at its cultural artifacts as they both transformed environments and even determined the distinctiveness

¹⁹⁹ As Marx had nicely expressed this reality of labor creating new values and orders of activity: "An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, while man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. Man therefore also forms things in accordance with the laws of beauty." *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 77. What often is not recognized is that Engels and Marx were seeking to articulate the distinctively social form of matter that no longer was beholden to biologicistic reductions, such as in social Darwinism which reduces the social to the biological laws of survival, idealizing predatory drives and capacities. Actually, for Engels it was more accurate to say that Darwinians and Malthusians retrojected antagonistic bourgeois sociality back into nature as the law of struggle for survival, and then transferred these theories back to legitimating the social form (*Dialectics of Nature*, p. 404). But for Marx and Engels, they fail to see that the capacity of labor opens up the social as an emergent transformation of biological laws beyond blind necessity because its creative capacities born around increasingly universal knowledge are able to produce a mode of subsisting that approaches the flexibility of art and the development of new needs and sensibilities around beauty rather than strict utility: the ability to transform spears into ploughshares ... but also whips into paint brushes.

of human physiology as an adaptation to culture, rather than solely vice versa.²⁰⁰ A fixed biological adaptation sutured to a given environment therefore does not determine the reproduction of the human, since unlike every other animal its basic subsistence is itself necessarily determined only through its higher sociocultural mediation in an infinitely plastic way, which is to say it is necessarily determined through a kind of emerging gratuitousness or surplus within nature. The meaning of the human, and thus of nature (since the human is a distinctive movement within nature revealing nature's self-surpassing capacities) is thereby a kind of determinate openness. Labor constitutes humanity as an open project in light of an emergent totality whose only determinable goal is that of perfecting a whole comprehended through the multiplication of life's creative power of self-organization.

What human labor in its anti-entropic essence, then, adds to nature is a new social body that reproduces itself by universally reproducing the whole of nature toward higher forms of creative organization. For Engels this is a process that sets in train the pursuit of the highest forms of creative development without limits to its qualitative ends, increasingly submitting nature to greater levels of planned organization by which the entropic forces of contradictory reversals and deprivations are to be overcome through new integrative unities. The integrative direction of labor's anti-entropic nature therefore entails perfecting the whole of nature's relations within a new sociality rather than simply dominating the chain of predatory relations. Labor's initial production of surplus product as used for the surplus activity of self-perfection thus implies a fundamental process

²⁰⁰ Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 46–47. On the reflexive change in human physiology, from the hand to the brain and the erect gait, by way of tool use and cultural formation see Charles Woolfson, *The Labour Theory of Culture: A Re-examination of Engels's Theory of Human Origins* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

around perfecting the nurturing, cooperative, and creative capacity of the hands rather than simply fulfilling the devouring capacity of the stomach.²⁰¹

From the beginning of its distinctive human form, therefore, labor never solely concerns itself with the reproduction of bare subsistence for immediate needs, but rather reproduces itself in light of an emerging need to perfect the integration of knowing and being; that is, labor comes into being and knows itself as always already a participation in a perfectible whole whose totality of relations and creative potentials could only be known by being further made.²⁰² Thus, as Georg Lukács emphasizes in extending Engels's insights, human labor always already contains in nuce the form of all higher order activities. This is because its most basic act already singularly distinguishes the social form of being from the given immediacies of nature by taking up and transforming the previous causal chains of inorganic and organic motion into the "teleological positing" of its own conscious creative activity as an end in itself.²⁰³ And as inherently purposive, labor's creative positing shows itself to be also essentially, if only inchoately at first, an intellectual act. As Engels states: "The mastery over nature, which begins with

²⁰¹ Engels states: "the more that human beings become removed from animals in the narrower sense of the word, the more they make their history themselves, consciously, the less becomes the influence of unforeseen effects and uncontrolled forces on this history, and the more accurately does the historical result correspond to the aim laid down in advance." And, "Only conscious organization of social production, in which production and distribution are carried on in a planned way, can lift mankind above the rest of the animal world ... Historical evolution makes such an organization daily more indispensable, but also with every day more possible." *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

²⁰² Engels does not imply that more effectively controlling history is simply a matter of lifting the human above nature, but rather he sees it as the raising of nature into a more perfect unity within humanity and vice versa—thus the idea of a new whole in which nature and humanity are not antagonistically divided but reconciled: "the more will men once more not only feel, but also know, themselves to be one with nature, and thus the more impossible will become the senseless and anti-natural idea of a contradiction between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body." *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁰³ Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Labour*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1980).

the development of the hand, with labour, widened man's horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown, properties of natural objects."²⁰⁴

By its refinement of dexterity and its evolving facility in producing more complex tools and their corresponding organizations of surplus activity, manual labor begins to shape the material in a way that generates new views of an intelligible and perfectible whole from which consciousness emerges as its reflection. That is, it is the laboring hand, which in creating, first thinks and posits and thus constitutes the head since with its first instance of using surplus activity to perfect itself it begins knowledge of the causal relations within nature. By engaging and recombining causal connections toward higher syntheses, labor simultaneously begins the process of opening nature beyond its immediately determined causal laws while investigating the latent potentials in nature for qualitatively new movements of purposive activity. The laboring body in its essential act, therefore, implies an embryonic intellectual capacity to already read and grasp purposive ideals from the material as they emerge from its transformative interchange with nature, thus making possible the higher intellectual labors of abstracting and articulating new ideas of higher organization. This assessment implies that any sense of a perfectible telos essentially arises not aprioristically within the mind's own unifying self-consciousness, but rather in the laboring body's most fundamental interactions with nature's latent objective tendencies toward emergent self-organization. And it is only through perfected relations of integrated complexity already partially glimpsed and realized with the first arrival of surplus product and surplus labor that the laboring body begins to intuit any sense of a future perfected totality of relations for higher activity without entropic privations.

²⁰⁴ Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 232.

Yet, while manual labor begins to newly shape nature in a way that meaningful wholes can be sensibly intuited, reflected and further intended, Engels also emphasizes the dialectical relationship in which the head, in turn, acts upon and better directs the hand. The development of consciousness and its conceptual facility for grasping and better articulating the emergent trajectories of creative movement and their universal implications, is itself a new qualitative distinction in nature, providing a greater vision that actively guides the transformative power of the laboring body: “the eagle sees much farther than man, but the human eye sees considerably more in things than does the eye of the eagle.”²⁰⁵ Thus intellectual activity is primordially called forth, in the first instance, from and as a higher form of surplus labor in light of new possibilities opened within nature by labor. And as a form of surplus labor itself, carrying forward labor’s self-surpassing activity into its own distinct forms of organizing reality, the intellect principally reflects upon and raises intuitions of a perfectible whole into theoretically synthesized ideals and concepts by which to further plan and direct the use of surplus product and cultivate ever higher forms of self-organizing labor. The very thought of complexity, therefore, and the ideal of its perfect organization—the analytic and synthetic work of *theoria* oriented to the concepts of qualitative perfections viewed under the aspect of the eternal and the infinite—is itself organically born from, for and as a variation of the *poiesis* of the laboring body and its concrete intuitions as it organizes matter toward new wholes of increasingly integrated complexity.

Because labor is a self-transcending act that advances nature’s own transcending movement, its social development of ideals is not then an essentially arbitrary projection of foreign categories upon a passive matter. Yet, Lukács implies such in that he

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233–4.

overemphasizes a disjunctive relation between teleology, as a merely social category, and nature, as blind causality, as if humanity perfects itself in opposition to an immutably indifferent nature. But Engels's work can be suggestively read as leaving open the sense in which labor's positing of its own perfection is a higher participation in, because new perfection of, the emergent movement of matter itself. The difference here is between, on the one hand, an affirmation of the novelty of labor only by conceptualizing its history-making as a singular break over against nature in-itself, to which it would then add nothing since nature's causal laws would be already predetermined and complete; and on the other hand, a notion of labor as knowing nature through its history as making nature, since nature's in-itself is nothing other than the unfinished process toward higher qualitative leaps in self-organization for which the social body of labor is the leading edge in revealing new properties of creative relationality.

The issue at hand is then how to understand labor as both a new creative and intellectual act, that is, as the normative standpoint of knowing and being and thus of class consciousness: is the innovative aspect of labor merely that it provides an added capacity of conscious reflection regarding the already given laws of natural causality in allegedly predetermined fixity, laws which would then function as an absolute limit to labor's qualitative transformation of necessity? Or does the consciousness of intellectual activity know natural causality only insofar as it is already taken up into the material praxis of producing new wholes that have begun changing causal relations and transforming necessity, a change not as the transgression of natural laws but their realization as the emergent laws of creative development?

It might seem that Lukács's position is the more modest one with its supposedly realist restrictions on labor's transformative activity in relation to the limit of nature's in-itself, which is not a historically contingent limit to be creatively approached, engaged and reorganized in new ways but only lawfully observed. Yet, this supposed modesty of preserving nature as such is precisely the problem. His conception not only loses the novel creativity of labor, consigning it to another pocket of entropic resistance, but it is also closer to a Kantian idealist conception of the whole as a noumenal beyond, the consciousness of which could only be possible outside the bounds of our active involvement with nature as project, thus circumventing and denying the concrete epistemological standpoint of labor. That is, positing such an immutable limit can only be the overreaching of an abstract contemplation, since the whole of nature in-itself would then be prematurely defined as closed to its creative transformation without further investigation. Such a definitive conceptualization is not drawn from the sensible intuitions generated within labor's open interchange of making whole, but from a mystified abstraction conjectured over against this ongoing participative activity.²⁰⁶ Moreover, this position stands too close to the crude productivism that exclusively views the perfection of labor according to narrow human interests set over against an indifferent nature whose noumenal essence is equivalent to uninteresting stuff simply there for exploitation.

²⁰⁶ Antonio Gramsci had similarly noted these tendencies in Lukács: "It would appear that Lukács maintains that one can speak of the dialectic only for the history of men and not for nature. he might be right and he might be wrong. If his assertion presupposes a dualism between nature and man he is wrong because he is falling into a conception of nature proper to religion and to Graeco-Christian philosophy and also to idealism which does not in reality succeed in unifying and relating man and nature to each other except verbally. But if human history should be conceived also as the history of nature (also by means of the history of science) how can the dialectic be separated from nature? Perhaps Lukács, in reaction to the baroque theories of the *Popular Manual*, has fallen into the opposite error, into a form of idealism." See, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: ElecBook, 1999), p. 811.

But Engels's understanding, insofar as it suggests a conception of labor as a participation in perfecting nature by making nature, implies a more concrete and radical grounding for affirming the normative standpoint of labor according to the comprehensive sense of its new social body precisely as nature's revolutionary front. Labor is not set over against nature but a piece of nature, bound to its movement of emergence and tasked with its perfection of creative self-mediation only because this is also its own most interest. To reiterate, this is because the laboring body perfects nature's emergent movement as its highest form, knowing this movement only by raising it into the new body of a self-comprehending creative agency beyond entropic forces. The anti-entropic movement of labor, as knowing the whole by making whole, therefore intuits and intends a creative self-organizing totality whose universal aim cannot be a priori limited because the creative forces of nature that it is advancing have yet no discernible limit as to their *qualitative* transformation.²⁰⁷ The fundamental economic activity of labor is therefore already a self-transcending movement, perfectly taking up nature's creative process into a self-comprehending act whose intelligible form implies and requires ideals beyond any secular given. But here we come upon the necessarily presupposed religious consciousness and its ideas pertaining to eternal life, which Engels inadequately recognized.

²⁰⁷ There is a limit to maximizing productive output for an external market, since commodified productive forces without qualitative orientation will simply run up against entropy within a closed system, depleting resources as it tries single-mindedly to drive down production costs for the production of abstract surplus value, which then demands that one either move to another system or die; but there is no limit to creatively reorganizing the social appropriation of matter around qualitatively new relations: this latter orientation is the natural *optimization* of labor to reduce and reverse entropy, to create open systems of relations further removed from entropic enclosures by continually reinvesting in the socially creative capacities around new qualitative use values, while the former is the unnatural *maximization* of consuming available energy for producing immediate exchange values, a purely quantifying process that invests in simply displacing entropy for a time and thus, however inconspicuously or not, ends up multiplying its overall effect within a given environment ... the effects of which we now know all too well in the problem of climate change. Cf., fn. 38 above.

Labor's Intrinsic Religious Consciousness

What comes to light between the different positions suggested by Lukács and Engels, therefore, is that the consciousness internal to labor as a new creative and intellectual act, is always already a consciousness with a certain intrinsically religious element. This claim however needs to be thoroughly clarified as to the meaning of “religious” used here, in order to emphasize its rational form rather than suggesting an irrationally mystical element at the heart of conscious being. Unlike the biologically and environmentally conditioned reactive reflexes of animal consciousness, human consciousness arises with its unique capacity of self-reflexivity precisely by beginning to see within natural causality the potentials for more and new connections and their emergent qualities.²⁰⁸ Because labor’s anti-entropic activity is never first disclosed as a bare capacity according to a negative infinity but as a concrete movement of transforming nature so as to perfect life for itself, its self-transcending direction moves toward an actual infinity of positive self-subsistence. That is, as the foregoing analysis has indicated, this means that the distinctive form of human consciousness, emerging from this perfective anti-entropic directionality of labor, never emerges then as simply an indifferent mirroring capacity corresponding to a negative infinity of empty capacity. Rather it is always a mirroring reflection of labor’s directed movement, and self-reflexively for better directing and organizing efficient causality insofar as it glimpses final causes around the substantive perfection of an actual infinity. It therefore

²⁰⁸ As Lukács aptly states: “human consciousness, called into being in labour, for labour, and by labour, intervenes in the activity of man’s own reproduction.” *Ontology of Social Being*, p. 52. Of course, Lukács plays down the necessary religious quality we are here indicating as that orientation of consciousness to transcendental perfection.

specifically comes to reflect upon more or less efficient methods only in light of a new sense of perfectible qualities and their final causes for which alternate means can then be discerned, elected and developed in furthering this integrative praxis of production.²⁰⁹

Thus self-reflexivity always already emerges with a dawning vision of a future perfectible whole by which reflection upon any given action is made possible in the first place, and from which the concept of bare capacity or labor power in the abstract is derivable as only a partial view presented within thought. Or, in other words, consciousness's capacity for reflexively "seeing" that necessary whole by which labor is perfected according to its own creative laws, is constituted in light of an emerging intuition of those transcendental perfections which partially arise from, and are implied by, the ontological and historical priority of labor's transformative interchange with nature, even though the intuited emergent qualities are never reducible entirely to the present.

As soon as there is surplus labor and its reflexive consciousness, then, there is simultaneously a presupposed horizon of transcendental perfection around the perfected use of surplus for further creating, that must be further worked out, even if the productive and discursive means are not there yet to adequately implement or conceptualize it. The horizon is transcendental in that the perfective trajectories sensed and expressed in the ideal of an actual infinity of positive self-subsistence, emerge from the surplus of physical motion taken up into higher forms of organized labor—the emerging general laws of historical movement—and yet find their reality and intelligibility only insofar as

²⁰⁹ Indeed, the very capacity for an "indifferent" reflection is itself only possible within a perfective attempt to either get a better look at something or to better organize one's own activity of viewing, that is, to more clearly organize a certain compartment of knowing and being so as to approximate certain qualitative perfections such as "truth".

they point beyond the given physical laws or categories of the present. This indication of excess however is not to something outside the physical, but to the more of the physical as an open movement of creative organization that has yet to be fully actualized in its capacity for new relations of subsisting. That is, the transcendental horizons are not merely subjective categories of thought but projected horizons reflecting objective tendencies and their imperatives within the organization of the material. Marx early on seemed to recognize something of this fact when he intimated in one of his notes, without further elaboration: “Religion is from the outset consciousness of the transcendental arising from the actually existing forces.”²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 102. An atheist such as Bertrand Russell would also claim that religion arises from the project of making ourselves at home in the world. But he explains the projections of transcendental realities as subjectively drawn from and for comforting psychological anxieties in the face of nature’s supposedly immutable indifference; in other words, they are only projected mental fictions “to make men feel that physical forces are really their allies.” Bertrand Russell, “What I Believe,” in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, eds. Lester E. Denonn and Robert E. Egner (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 347. This however fails to see that the mere fact of such projections, despite their oft-fantastical content, is nevertheless not wholly explicable as sheer psychological fictions for easing emotions. Rather, psychological needs and desires shift with historical becoming and gain new responsiveness to reality only insofar as they are materially developed in certain directions. That is, the very possibility of a certain psychological awareness and its use of directed projections arise precisely because matter is already being objectively organized according to new trajectories that open up the possibility for new subjective comportments. As much as the projections can then become fantastical according to distorted psychological perceptions and fixations, the fact of their projected form is nevertheless drawn from the objective tendencies already set in train by labor’s creative organization of physical forces—the labor of mental projection is itself a creative extension of labor’s materially transformative activity, since to project the ideal of a perfect home is to already have organized the material into something of a real home. Additionally, as was emphasized above, within labor, the more it is organized, the more physical forces really do show themselves as allies to historical becoming, since labor as humanity’s constitutively allied power is itself also a force of nature and nothing more. That physical reality can be not only organized into a world of meaning, but also increasingly transformed by labor into the household of a higher social body and its qualitative values beyond a simple predatory economy, does show forth an exceeding trajectory of qualitative perfections around love, goodness, beauty, truth and justice latent within nature and embodied in labor. That is, such new values in relation to nature are not social fictions overlaid on top of indifferent nature, but a newly natural way of subsisting in the social form of matter. They are qualities that arise as able to be perfected in some concrete way in relation to the whole of nature, by and for the continued efforts of labor, rather than exclusively perfected within individual psychological attitudes over against deterministic nature. This is not to deny that there is obvious recalcitrance and thus hostile forces throughout nature, but rather to claim that this cannot be nature’s defining essence if nature is an emergent movement rather than a flat mechanism. This is because labor is not only a force of nature itself, but more importantly, it has thus far emerged—even though now in such a miniscule proportion—as the definitive measure of force, that capacity within nature able to comprehend,

The rational core of the religious is then that intrinsic capacity of consciousness to see the “transcendental arising” from the forces of labor. If the religious is nothing more than this consciousness, then it is equally the case that this consciousness is in no simple way of an awareness of a basically irreligious secular essence, since it essentially arises as bound to a vision of the necessary whole for perfecting the totality of labor’s self-organizing relations. Consciousness is then intrinsically religious, or reveals the rational nature of the religious in itself, insofar as it is born from insight into the newly emerging ratio to a new whole and its transcendental qualities that runs ahead of the parts, adumbrating a sense of their true ordering beyond the categorical limits of the presently given. Moreover, this anticipatory vision of the whole is no mere superfluous quality, but makes possible greater forms of rational social organization, its grasp and guidance by higher intellectual activities, calling into service philosophy, as the conceptual clarification, unification and refinement of its intuitions, in light of science, as the investigation of the available means for practically ordering the parts in relation to new wholes.

Thus the religious quality of consciousness is involved in a dialectical feedback loop whereby it evolves in light of new practical discoveries and conceptual paradigms; but it also maintains a critical sense of the emerging new horizons for further socially creative acts over against the tendency of science and theory to become enmeshed in the positivism of a given present. Because the laboring body will always generate sensible intuitions of new wholes and their emergent social properties that nevertheless outpace the science of physics, there must be a discourse and practice for rationally articulating,

organize, and apply force in new ways toward higher forms of organization, and thus that ordering force able to “define” what anything is at all.

grasping and directing these intuitions and their newly emerging common sense, integrating them with known sciences while opening these to the new possibilities being glimpsed through labor. Otherwise there will only be scientific positivism in vacillation with fideism: a discourse on given causal determinacy and another on a sheer indeterminate leap or wholly otherness without any understanding of how to open causality to new qualitative motions.²¹¹ That is, labor opens up the need for a discourse that is not simply inductive but begins deductively reasoning from the emergent principles of its open perfective movement of creating.²¹² Indeed, there can be no critical

²¹¹ The point here is not to emphasize how flights of speculation can simply outstrip the current modes of production in their fantasies, which is all too evident throughout the history of religious discourse, but rather how labor generates new visions of the whole that transcend the given and yet still intimate their perfectible trajectory around the newly emergent properties of creative social development. That is, I am articulating a normative sense of the religious as it is rationally connected to the movement of labor and not the purely imaginary whims of consciousness insofar as they can become far removed from their material context. This is why the notion of transcendental perfections are emphasized since they are drawn from perfectible qualities in the present according to their excessive potentials whose trajectory of development and right ordering is glimpsed, even if the means for transition toward its final cause is not yet wholly discernible. When visions of the new become entirely abstracted around a wholly disjunctive *novum* that has nothing to do with perfecting the forces of production in their socializing trajectory from which it is generated, then it becomes a fantastical outstripping of both the present and future, given then to self-contradictory otherworldliness as Engels rightly saw in Münzer's use of "the chiliastic dream-visions of early Christianity." Here he notes how such projections no longer grounded in any intuitions from the present socioeconomic forces are fantasies whose "sally beyond the present and even the future could be nothing but violent and fantastic, and was bound to slide back at its first practical application to within the narrow limits set by the contemporary situation." Engels, *The Peasant War*, p. 16.

²¹² In light of the preceding footnote, it should be emphasized that even the sheer fantastical content of mythical visions that outstrip any material sense of labor and history itself, nevertheless are not wholly devoid of their originating intuitions in labor's creative unifying work insofar as they project to and reason from perfected unities. Thus the mythical representations of primitive religious forms already began a proto-rational articulation of visions of a perfectible whole that were being generated from the transformation of nature. The key is to look, amongst the colorings of irrational flights into fantastical objects and characters, for the beginning of deductive reasoning from final causes within the narrational structures of unifying reality in light of ideal unities. I am here partially drawing on Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their claim that the reflective capacities embedded within the projection of mythical unities is always already a proto-enlightenment, without yet implying their sense of "enlightenment" as essentially ending in the abstract unity of a separated reflective consciousness over against nature, whose deductive calculative rationality takes on a solely domineering stance of instrumental control. See, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002). Enlightenment as pursuing knowledge of reality in terms of a consciousness of the totality of relations through rational participation in their organizing principle does not necessarily lead to the narrow, historically contingent version of instrumental rationality of the 18th century Europe, with its exclusive emphasis on efficient causality and its presupposition of a meaningless nature against which reflective consciousness is abstractly opposed.

consciousness without such an intrinsic religious quality of seeing something of the whole ahead of the parts (along with its proper ordering intellectually and back to the concrete through the organizing work of philosophy and science), otherwise consciousness would have no means of *critique*, that is, of locating the crisis point of contradictions, their non-necessity, and how they might be creatively reconciled in a new whole—it would lose its critical sense of totality.

It must be emphasized here that to highlight a religious quality intrinsic to consciousness in no way necessarily implies the primacy of a fundamental *homo religiosus*. The intrinsically religious quality of consciousness that I am here articulating is in no way a mystical capacity of consciousness in itself, as if humanity is uniquely constituted by an a priori, unmediated experience of the whole, whether in terms of an immemorial past, a sense of wholly otherness, the *mysterium tremendum*, the numinous beyond, a pre-cognitive feeling of absolute dependence, or any other thematized non-sense. Such post-Kantian forms of *homo religiosus*, from Schleiermacher to Mircea Eliade, imply that the human is passively distinguished by nothing other than an innately given awareness for certain ineffable experiences of existence as such, before any creative interchange with nature takes place.²¹³ The tendency in this discourse is to correspondingly define religion as symbolically expressing the religious experience of conditions of existence precisely as an unchangeable transcendental condition—the

²¹³ For a notion of the religious as pre-cognitive feeling of absolute dependence to a transcendent ground see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928); On the ineffable sense of the numinous as a wholly otherness and *mysterium tremendum* see Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923); Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Reflection and Mystery*, v. 1, trans. G. S. Fraser (London: Harvill Press, 1951); for an innate experience only of the negative sense of the wholly other, the early Karl Barth should also be included here, see Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford University Press, 1968); on the notion of religion as awareness of an immemorial past see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1987).

assumption being that manifestations of religion might change throughout time but the given existential condition of humanity generating it does not. Thus the notion of transcendental, within this discourse, for which the religious consciousness is supposedly innately attuned, refers to a recollection by consciousness alone of a priori immutable conditions which contain the categories of experience, rather than the transcendental as that perfectible final cause that draws forth new ways of being and new forms of experience from the historical movement of already changing the conditions of existence.

The religious in this paradigm of *homo religiosus* therefore pertains to an intuition yet without sensible objects, realities to which the material activity of labor could add nothing. Here the religious is predetermined by that sweeping post-Kantian presupposition that the material realm of appearances, especially the socioeconomic sphere of organizing material relations, is absolutely profane, a purely secular realm without intimations of the sacred except in a negative way. Religious notions of perfection or holiness can then only refer to a symbolically mediated relation of consciousness to its immutably given noumenal conditions of existence, a notion of perfection around passive qualities expressing nothing of the intuitions and intentions born from the human as an historical work of materially perfecting nature within the production of a new whole.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ For Eliade the different manifestations of religion are attempts to get back to the eternal as absolute past: the eternal as what was originally experienced within primordial unconsciousness, those “immemorial existential situations”, a foundational “existential crisis” by which all conscious expression is then transcendently conditioned. The religious experience of the sacred is then of the transcendental as an a priori limit to experience—that is, the sacred is an invariant *structure* both outside of and yet conditioning the experience of nature and history rather than an invariant *direction* or movement within history and nature; and religion as a “paradigmatic solution for every existential crisis” is such ultimately by way of its symbolically mediated psychological resolution, providing a new way of inhabiting the same structures of being, rather than generated from and for a new way of becoming that creatively and thus materially changes existential conditions and their crises. Moreover, for Eliade this latter emphasis on a diachronic nature of the religious could only really be a modern secularizing acquiescence to the profane, thus

What makes the human distinctive in a historical materialist paradigm, however, is not the religious quality of consciousness per se but rather its productive activity that first materially produces its distinction as a new project, adding to nature a new way of existing through new objects, qualitative forms and activities, hence a new social body of complex organization.²¹⁵ But it is precisely from and for this transformative movement that consciousness arises in its religious quality, a religious utopian sense constituted precisely in intuiting and abstracting from real material movements and objective tendencies of making whole. The religious here within a historical materialist register aware of its emergent trajectories, therefore, does not pertain to what simply evades sense or conceptual articulation as if the movement of the sensible material and its economic engagement could be flatly predetermined and totalized as a profane homogeneity. The notion of the sacred or holy associated with the religious nature of consciousness, as internal to the creative movement of the laboring body, is not then a *noumenal* beyond negatively set apart from material reality to which one could only submit. Rather, because labor's transformative interchange with nature breaks forth toward new wholes of increasingly creative organization, its socioeconomic movement resists any rigid sacred/profane dichotomy, indicating instead something closer to the original etymological notion of the holy as a comprehensive wholeness. That is, its movement is

implying that religion as such can only be a deeply conservative affair. Yet he fails to recognize just how much his *homo religiosus* and its ahistorical notion of the sacred is itself constituted as the modern spiritual flipside of the profane secularity he castigates. See his, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), pp. 202–10.

²¹⁵ “Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. ... 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.” Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 37.

only known by producing a whole whose transcendental perfections are to be approximated by materially producing more perfect unities related to qualitative perfections of health, goodness, beauty and the true—hence the original sense of *salvare* as making whole according to the act of resolving real material forces of destruction and deprivation in relation to life’s creative development.

This sense of the religious consciousness as originating from and for the material transformation of nature, therefore, also challenges the Marxist tendency to similarly reduce religion to an uncritical reflex of given limits, as if exclusively projecting to inverted agencies and realities conditioned by fear, ignorance and impotence as experienced by underdeveloped and alienated labor. Such a partial view is suggested by Marx himself when he describes religion as “conditioned by a low stage of development of the productive powers of labour and correspondingly limited relations between men within the process of creating and reproducing their material life ... these real limitations are reflected in the ancient worship of nature, and in other elements of tribal religions.”²¹⁶ Yet, this contingent form of religion can only be critically exposed as a distortion by rightly seeing within “the process of creating and reproducing” the self-transcending movement of labor in its novel perfective activity, a consciousness, as I have been emphasizing, which is itself religious, or contains its true essence, in that it requires a vision of trajectories whose perfectible horizons transcend and thus require the transformation, rather than maintenance, of the given limits. Moreover, while it is certainly true that religious ideas and practices can be, and are often, limited insofar as they narrowly reflect and legitimate only the limits rather than excessive potentials of productive activity, the various forms of ancient religion were not entirely reducible to

²¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 173.

conservative worship of given nature or tribal particularities.²¹⁷ As we will explore in the next chapter, ancient religion in certain ways also already transcended these conservative forms, reflecting instead from creative trajectories and their potentials for new movements and relations in the transformation of nature, evincing a more basic progressive trajectory even if they were obviously not yet fully demythologized in their metaphorical content.

What needs to be understood, therefore, is that the very process of creating and reproducing material life in a distinctive way—the development and evolution of humanity into a new social being—requires the continued production and allocation of a social surplus, which itself can only be successfully reproduced through the mediations of a religio-cultural sense of a new whole of higher social organization that further directs the labor process.²¹⁸ If labor produces or generates the positive conditions for religious utopian views of a new whole, this is not simply an epiphenomenon of a secular labor process, but rather a positive extension of labor’s own transcending trajectories into new

²¹⁷ As Bronislaw Malinowski noted from his own anthropological studies: “[The religious] includes animism, animatism, totemism, and fetishism, but it is not any one of them exclusively. The *ism* definition of religion in its origins must be given up, for religion does not cling to any one object or class of objects, though incidentally it can touch and hallow all.” Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1948), p. 19. Malinowski rightly sees that the religious is more broadly bound up with the creative material process of transitioning the natural given into the social and so is not simply reducible to a particular “sacralizing of a crisis of life”, as if the religious were only the deployment of narrow occult rituals for maintaining a given order that has been interrupted. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹⁸ The anthropologist, Eugene E. Ruyle, coming from a Marxist perspective, recognizes the necessity of religion in the unique sociocultural mediation of humanity’s reproduction, even critiquing the general tendency of Marxism to overlook how religion has been positively involved as a creative response in transforming biological needs. But then he claims that religion only traffics in the “non-sensory” realm, aiding the reproduction of humanity by projecting a supernatural reality that serves as a coping mechanism for the trials within the labor process, making humans more productive in their current task. This implies, however, that the essential importance of religion is to serve as a noble lie at the level of social relations for reproducing the given social and natural milieu, a false consciousness without real relation to productive forces, and to be necessarily eradicated with the eventual secularization of the labor process and its social body. How and why humans, in distinguishing themselves from all other primates, begin to creatively and necessarily project new wholes around perfectible qualities is never explored other than as a mechanism of fear and ignorance. Ruyle, “Labor, People, Culture: A Labor Theory of Human Origins,” *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology*, 20 (1976): p. 153.

forms of subsisting reflected into the higher forms of religio-cultural surplus activity that then dialectically helps direct and reproduce labor at a higher level of social being. And, as essentially a vision of a new whole rather than reproducing the given, the religious orders up those cultural practices in which the social body of labor can begin evolving ever more according to its own foresight and its higher sociocultural self-mediation of creativity, rather than merely through environmental predatory economies and genetic selection. Thus the religious and its cultural formation is positively central to humanity's own distinctive self-mediating reproduction, directing the transformation of the given biological form of matter according to its potentials for new forms of social being.²¹⁹ This is why the religious has played such a significant historical role in both elevating, as well as being manipulated into repressing, humanity's development of productive forces and its use of social surplus, a socially productive role that is not always adequately assessed when religion is reduced to an intellectual history of otherworldly ideas and beliefs as if indicating only a spiritual movement of speculative thought and contemplative self-consciousness over against the material realm.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Hence, Thomas Luckmann: "It is in keeping with an elementary sense of the concept of religion to call the transcendence of biological nature by the human organism a religious phenomenon." *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, (London: MacMillan Publishing, 1967), p. 49.

²²⁰ Robert Bellah has recently presented an expansive and positive assessment of the integral role of religion within human evolution, in his magnum opus, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011). Bellah's work is an ambitious and refreshing attempt to show how religion has played a fundamental role within human evolution, as a kind of sociocultural mediation of nature, especially in transforming given biological selection pressures. Yet, his premise that religion is a necessary part of human evolution is not because it is bound up with the transformative engagement with nature's own emergent movement; rather, the religious is integral because it is bound up with social structures and linguistic representation that generate meaning for humanity over against what he takes to be the essential meaninglessness of ordinary everyday life in its "mechanical necessity" insofar as it is given to natural selection (p. 9): there is ordinary life, and then there is the emergent capacity to play or go "off-line" and reflect, through language, "non-ordinary" meanings, constructing symbolic representations of another imaginary world—progressively developing mimetic, mythic and theoretical representational systems of symbolic cognition around what is and what should be—that then allows us to somewhat transcend and take refuge in something other than our raw episodic experience of bare survival. But this fails to see that the development of language, the playful creation of a surplus of symbolic meanings and the surplus time of linguistic reflection upon the surplus of meanings, is

Thus, without labor's transformative interchange with nature in the first place there would be no sense of the emergent possibilities within nature, and yet without consciously grasping this sense of a new whole and its further cultivation within religio-cultural surplus activity, there would be no reproduction of labor according to higher levels of its surplus potential. But labor internally and interestedly generates the religious here as its own extension rather than the religious arising and reacting back upon labor as merely an accident of cultural and psychological whims. It is in this sense then that the religious is both a function of the labor process and yet also non-reductively so because it is the extension of labor precisely insofar as labor just is a fundamentally self-transcending movement, actualizing its latent potentials within its own extended and semi-autonomous surplus activity for higher forms of socially creative self-organization already incipiently intuited and intended in the basic productive act. The religious nature of consciousness as an extension of the creative process indicates, then, that the religious and its cultural expression, if not always in practice, are nevertheless in essence a progressive movement for developing creative potentials within the social body of labor.

That the religious originates more fundamentally from and for the development of productive forces in transforming nature, as their extension into the surplus labors of cultural and intellectual activity, is especially demonstrated by the deep and intimate historical connection between religion and ritual magic, as that alternative technology

itself a product of labor already organizing nature in such a way that its latent potentials for more meaningful wholes can be perceived and further constructed, rather than meaningfulness being a construction of self-referential symbolic values without percepts and thus imposed back on the experience of a supposedly indifferent nature. That is, it fails to see how religion is both a construction and a perception of meaning, the attunement of perception to latent potentials for meaning within nature by already participating in creatively organizing nature in new ways—or, religion as a constructive perception for new ways of meaningfully *changing* nature, rather than a way of symbolically inhabiting given nature. Thus in this ultimately Durkheimian construal, even with Bellah's more nuanced account of evolutionary development, religion expresses only changes within social structures of collective consciousness and not the social as the transformation of nature itself.

deployed for augmenting labor and coaxing nature. This connection however has been obscured by the modern sacred/profane dichotomy, especially as it has been employed by the largely Protestant attempt to cleanse religion of all economic ties to utility and production. Thus rather than seeing magic and alchemy as irrational species of religion, partially signifying something of its essence, if nevertheless wrongly grasping its meaning, the modern dichotomy distinguishes religion from magic altogether by rendering the essence of the religious according to an economic ethical principles. That is, it sets up a definition of magic as irrational precisely because of its material involvement with productive forces as such, thereby setting apart “true” religion as an inner ethical matter purified from all material interests; but this could only entail a sense of the religious as removed from, and no longer conscious of, its laboring body’s creative interchange with nature.²²¹

Ritual magic is then a cultural expression of the religious, though the religious is not reducible to magic. This is because magic is brought forth by a desperate sensibility of attempting to know the whole without passing through the historical labor of making whole. This occurs insofar as imaginative foresight hastily and distortedly confronts pressing material problems with real intuitions of new creative possibilities that nonetheless lack conceptual clarification and practical means from within the present productive technologies and scientific practices. Ritual magic, therefore, as an irrational mediation of supposed external powers outside the labor process, contradicts the rational form of the religious vision internal to productive activity not because it is a speculative

²²¹On the modern discourse about the irrationality of magic and its distinctness from religious as a means of separating religion and science into respective and mutually exclusive spheres regarding the sacred and profane, whose compartmentalization can then be more readily policed, see Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

involvement with forms of economic utility and technology as such; instead it contradicts that vision of a perfectible whole for which it is the laboring body in its own socially creative and intellectual self-mediating activity with nature that is to be increasingly perfected, rather than a narrow formulaic commerce in occult forces accessed by the few. As scientific progress in knowledge of practical means eliminates the need for magic, this in no way, then, also necessitates the elimination of the religious nature of consciousness or its cultural expressions tout court, since the vision of an emergent whole and pursuit of its meaningful organization calls into being science and its advancement over temporary remedies in the first place.

Lastly, understanding the nature of the religious as initially born within the modes of production must be further clarified over against another variation of the modern sacred/profane dichotomy as it is more subtly applied in Durkheim's ostensibly similar conception of the religious emerging positively as a social construction. While Durkheim, more than Weber, grasps the dialectical constitution of religion from within and for the social, he nevertheless similarly sees economic activity as a secular given without a self-transcending telos in its own right, thus generating no intuitions of higher values around qualitative perfections. That is, the economic is not the sphere of already transforming nature into higher forms of novel subsisting and its ideal trajectories. Rather it remains as a given biological sphere of survival to be regulated by the social as a later kind of superimposed intervention, a collective entity which develops its own complexly structured set of relations from which intuitions around sentimental bonds are generated and projected as universal. Thus, the religious phenomenon arrives not primordially with the creative socioeconomic transformation of nature *into a new social body*, but only later

within the interchange of a given set of social relations with itself, according to its own hall of mirrors, and as an essentially conservative function of protection against what he considers the primarily profane, because private and individualistic, material sphere of economic activity.²²²

Since the religious for Durkheim is then fundamentally a moral reflex solely from and for an already given social cohesion and its formed consciousness, without any fundamental insight into the qualitative perfective trajectories of the productive forces, it therefore lacks a critical consciousness into those transformative possibilities for materially producing more comprehensively organized wholes.²²³ We might then sum up the difference being spelled out here accordingly: while the Durkheimian approach understands the religious as due to the tendency of social relations to become wrapped up in sophisticated forms of fellow-feeling, which then deify over against themselves the common force that binds them, so remaining at the level of a conformist social ethics, our conception draws the religious more fundamentally from labor's transformation of

²²² Durkheim does see some of the progressive aspects of religion according to a unifying drive, cultivating new ideas and more expansive social relations around such, but religious consciousness and its ideas always emerge at the level of social relations, as if on top of the laboring body, and pertain only to relations of social dependency, primarily conserving values that foster obedience to the dominant group bonds. The sacred for Durkheim is a collective expression of solidarity but always as projected on to an object set apart and forbidden, as if an external power, over against the economic as essentially profane. The religious therefore serves first and foremost publically "to bring individuals together, to multiply the relations between them and to make them more intimate with one another. By this very fact, the contents of their consciousness is changed. On ordinary days, it is utilitarian and individual avocations which take the greater part of the attention. Everyone attends to his own personal business; for most men, this primarily consists in satisfying the exigencies of material life, and the *principal incentive to economic activity has always been private interest.*" Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph W. Swain (New York: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1976), p. 348. When he declares the principle incentive of the economy to be private interest in the last line quoted here he forgot to add the only caveat possible that would allow him to make such a declaration: "only within exchange relations of bourgeois society".

²²³ Malinowski rightly notes that Durkheim's notion of "collective effervescence", which generates the religious exclusively at the level of social gatherings and public ceremonies, is more basically felt already in prior labor processes that materially produce the social. Yet, he then uses this argument to deny the Durkheimian thesis that the social is coextensive with the religious by emphasizing the equally Durkheimian notion that the economic sphere, while more profoundly and intimately social than Durkheim suggests, is nevertheless essentially profane (*Magic, Science and Religion*, p. 40).

necessity and so it originates from within the creative force from which the social is constituted in the first place as a new addition to the perfection of nature.

Thus whereas Durkheim's functionalism reduces the religious to maintaining given social relations, I am articulating the nature of the religious as a function of labor's most fundamental act of transformation, emerging at the moment of creating the very thing called the social, which is why the religious is not, and cannot be, strictly reducible to any given form of social relations nor to a strict role of ethical custodian for preserving such later relations. This is then what I mean by the religious being a non-reductive function internal to labor. The religious as this primordially emerging vision of new creative acts most fundamentally expresses the revolutionary freedom of labor in its emerging excess potentialities of creating, and therein harbors all the seeds for cultivating revolutionary consciousness around changing reality from the productive forces up; yet this potent capacity of creative vision and critical consciousness can also easily turn into, through cultural manipulations, one of the most effective instruments of repression, playing the role of an internalized policing against change. Thus, theoretically, the normative cultural expression of the religious has primarily to do with the action and vision of changing reality, and only secondarily with preserving this change. In light of this originary directionality, its normative cultural development should be more profoundly involved in determining the material objects of social production and the allocations of resources for furthering creative acts of more perfect organization, than with exclusively cementing social bonds and behaviors, since the latter is only possible as

an extension of the former if it is not to be an idealization divorced from its constitutive social body of labor.²²⁴

The materialist understanding of the religious vision of the whole internal to labor's creative interchange with nature is therefore neither a vision of the whole abstractly accessed through a mystical prehension, nor a vision ordered exclusively around supposed external forces, divine revelations, and their irrational occult mediations. Nor is it simply an ethical matter of fellow-feeling and its spiritualizing deification of social bonds. These types of the religious pertain to the social insofar as it feels and knows itself only in its later alienated form, glimpsing intuitions of a perfectible whole but failing to grasp their original generation from within its own most basic transformative acts of the laboring body. Because of the anticipatory nature of religious vision as running ahead and the corresponding semi-autonomous plasticity of its cultural expression, which does indeed get more fully worked out mostly in later moments of accrued social relations (both the running ahead and semi-autonomy being essential elements in creatively developing the social body of labor), its native intuitions from the productive act nevertheless can become easily forgotten, concealed, repressed and distorted as if coming from an external agency or alien reality. The nub is that these later forms of the religious as subordination to externalities and otherworldly abstractions cannot be adequately critiqued without lapsing into another form of external mediation, unless one has recourse to the more originary sense of the religious utopian vision of a

²²⁴ Thus the non-reductive function of the religious suggested here is grounded in a broadly anthropological need and thus distinguished from Durkheimian functionalisms that tend to reduce the religious to a function of particular social forms at the level of their specific institutions. By arguing instead for the religious function as more broadly and primordially grounded as an essential part of the human species in its needs for reproduction through creative evolution, this is, nevertheless, not to deny that religious forms will come out into full articulation only within the constellation of various social institutions, but rather to relativize the latter.

perfectible whole by which the laboring body's transformative activity becomes fully intelligible to itself. One cannot deny the religious altogether without denying an essential element of labor's self-transcending nature.

This is implied in Marx's own answer to religious distortions when, immediately following the quote given above, he concludes that, "the religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, only vanish when relations between man and man, and man and nature, present themselves in a transparent and rational form".²²⁵ But what is the ideal end implied by the movement of labor for which it can recognize its rational form?

The Religious Ideals Necessary for Labor's Self-Understanding

What then are those more specific religious ideals that are transparent to their material origins, expressing the whole from the laboring body's own creative activity and by which it then begins to recognize itself according to its own rational form and constitutive value? Before humanity cultivated an enduring fetish for sacrifice in its more sophisticated cultural distortions, it did not yet consciously produce objects it intended to die for as part of its own supposed abstract perfection by other means. Human labor first began to produce objects for transforming necessity as well as for transforming the means of production for perfecting the former aim, and so labor sought, through its self-reflexive perfection of the productive act, an increase in the creative power of life for itself as concentrated within the self-organizing capacity of the labor body. Therefore, in

²²⁵ Marx, *Capital*, v. 1, p. 173. That the elimination of false forms of religion can only be done through realizing the truth of the religious vision in practice is already intimated by the young Marx: "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness. The call to abandon illusions about their condition is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions. ... Thus, the critique of heaven is transformed into the critique of the earth." Marx, "A Contribution to the 'Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*,': Introduction," in *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right*,' trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 131–132.

its most basic activity, labor's reflexive self-perfection of its productive means intends to produce a product that more completely perfects the producer without limits in its qualitative perfections of self-organization. Labor thus incipiently intends the material perfection of eternal life, but always as perfection in and for the historical productive body intending it, so that the idea of the resurrection of the body is its organic expression of eternal life. That is, in itself human labor is always already a partial anticipation of resurrecting the body for the simple reason that the ends of production in their rational form can only be the historical laboring body itself in rising into greater actualizations of its socially creative capacities.

Every rational act of producing a product for perfecting the producer producing, is therefore a material approximation to the end (if not always explicitly and directly articulated, still nevertheless intended in principle) of concretely raising the producer beyond death's destructive forces of reversal, attempting not only to overcome but also to reverse the entropic reversals of the creative act within the entire social body of producers, rather than producing a product that stifles creativity and hastens the contradiction of death in the producer. Of course throughout its history labor has produced in too many distorted ways and produced too many distorted products that have hastened destructiveness. But this only shows that labor's free creative act and its surplus potentials develop unevenly, can thereby become easily disordered into irrational motions, and that these irrational forms throughout history are not labor's definitive historical essence and truly basic form, but only derivative, since if this were otherwise there would be no historical laboring body left to speak of.

The resurrection of the body is an anticipated and required end for the labor process therefore because it is already a work partially set in motion within the basic activity of labor. Every productive act in its rational form is not only raising nature into a new whole as a body increasingly comprehending itself through creative self-organization, but also in this, implicitly raising the totality of past labors that have already contributed to and remain appropriated within nature's becoming a body, revivifying the dead labor of the past, so to speak, into a more comprehensive whole that recognizes their constitutive value.²²⁶ The ends of the social production process, therefore, if it is to be the fulfillment of knowing nature through creatively and socially making nature, must then be the perfection of nature in a higher social body of self-comprehending creative activity, returning at a higher level the historical totality of the social body of producers from their finished product. Anything else would be the completion of labor's historical movement in something other than its own rational end. It would not end in labor's highest embodied form of creative self-subsistence, that is, not in raising up a new social body whose surplus product is redistributed more fully back into the historical totality of its social body of producers—the fruits of producing history shared fully with the historical totality of laborers—but rather history would end with the value of production concentrated within one of its abstracted products of dead labor standing in for the history of living producers, thus denying the very notion of knowing and making as historical processes.

²²⁶ Hence Walter Benjamin glimpses this imperative when he writes, “only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.” See, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 254.

Therefore, if knowing the whole is only in making the whole, a whole in which the producer actually producing will be comprehended not in consciousness alone but as the work produced, then the perfect whole historically produced must be one in which the worker receives back their own productive bodies as more fully creating. Otherwise the whole will not be perfect but partial, with past and present labors sacrificially appropriated exclusively by a future generation for which it will still be the case that “all dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”²²⁷ Moreover, this intended trajectory of labor’s self-perfection not only naturally pursues an irreversible totality of life for itself, but in this, the irreversibility of life is not intended through the elimination of its capacities for change, but rather logically implies the perfection of change as a free act of creating without necessary corruption. That is, the perfection of life for itself in labor does not imply fixing mutability per se into frozen immutability, which would simply throw out the capacity for creating along with this elimination of change, but only to make immortal the free creative form of change—a body whose concentration of value in its creative self-organization is no longer necessarily expropriated by an allegedly essentialized corruption in the heart of change, because it is

²²⁷ Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), p. 595. It is to Walter Benjamin’s credit that in “Theses on the Philosophy of History” he already saw something of this problem. He recognized that the Social Democrats watered down the communistic ideal and thus had negated the standpoint of the working class when they assigned to it exclusively the role of contributing to the liberation of a future generation. It narrows the integrative re-membering work of labor to simply that of the ideal of “liberated grandchildren” rather than also “liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden ... and enslaved ancestors” whose past labors have a claim to the present creative power of the laborer. He finds that such a partial assignment therefore perpetuates the sacrificial cycles by which labor continues to be expropriated for an abstract product, even though now it is the abstract utopian image of a future humanity that demands the sacrifice of present and past labors (p. 260). Thus Benjamin’s thesis that “Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (p. 255). It is no coincidence that thinkers such Benjamin and Adorno who gave intimations of the necessity of bodily resurrection were also knowledgeable of their Jewish heritage, which as I will highlight in chapter 4 is the source of this ideal. Whether they adequately articulate this ideal in a non-inverted way that truly grasps its laboring body will be discussed shortly in Adorno.

corruption itself that is to be removed from the creatively changing body, rather than creative value removed from the body by corruption.²²⁸

Marx glimpsed something of this ideal of resurrecting the body as an imperative for completing the historical labor process, when he stated that, “society is the consummated oneness in substance of man and nature—the true resurrection of nature—the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature both brought to fulfillment.”²²⁹ Within organized labor for Marx nature is presented as humanity’s common “inorganic body” and thus not as something it confronts as if an alien other or an indifferent substance for which individuals should race against one another to appropriate as their private possession.²³⁰ Nature is thus disclosed as an emergent movement that is materially realized and intelligibly determined the more it is qualitatively appropriated into a newly unified social body of creative self-organization.²³¹ As its inorganic body, labor then does not raise nature into higher forms of embodiment by the simple negation of what nature is in itself: there is no real negation of nature in labor but only the negation of entropic forces that contradict the fulfillment of nature becoming a body, both in the individual and corporate bodies of a complexly integrated social body.

Thus for Marx the perfection of the social body of labor is one in which the individual body also comes into the full realization of its own body, fully participating in the whole as both its subject and object of production, a social whole whose productive process then requires neither a sacrifice of nature, nor of its own individual laboring

²²⁸ The productive act of transforming necessity can then only intend its ideal perfection as that of a work of art.

²²⁹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 104.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²³¹ Or what Marx would later call the fundamental activity of historical production as becoming a body that realizes and knows the “potentialities slumbering within nature”. Marx, *Capital*, v. 1, p. 283.

bodies, but continually perfects both within the new unities of the productive act. Though in certain places Marx speaks as if the individual were merely to be sacrificed to the reproduction of the species, he nevertheless also recognized the inadequacy of this static biologicistic view in relation to the normative standpoint of the laboring body as a socially creative act.²³² Instead, arguing more fully from the capacity of labor's social transformation of nature which produces and reproduces the whole of nature toward higher levels of creative sociality, he saw that the perfective trajectories emerging from the organization of the social labor process must entail in some way eliminating also the antagonism between individual and species: "[communism] is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species."²³³ Labor's resurrection of nature is therefore a matter of resurrecting a body, in its truly social and thus fully individual forms, against every one of its contradictory antagonisms and deprivations that continue to force this social body of production into its alienating external mediation. This movement then requires the elimination of every apparent need for sacrificial negations of the laboring bodies in their production of the whole, which could be nothing other than the removal from the social process of creating that last contradictory antagonism that generates all other antagonisms, which is death.

This means that the rational movement of the laboring body, in its most comprehensive sense, does not perfect production in order to know nature abstractly as a

²³² Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 106: "Death seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the definite individual and to contradict their unity. But the determinate individual is only a determinate species being, and as such mortal."

²³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

generic idea of the species, which is a concept in thought alone, nor does it produce privately and competitively for immediate needs only to return itself eventually to a supposed a priori perfection already in the stasis of inorganic nature. That is, the logic of perfection drawn from the historical movement of labor and signified by the materialist ideal of eternal life is not that of a formal identity in contemplative thought that negates its materiality, nor a oneness within a primordially undifferentiated nature that negates the body's becoming, but that of historically becoming a concretely and complexly integrated material body of self-comprehending creativity—a movement toward fulfilling the organizational potentialities of the material in a body without its entropic negations. Therefore the historical movement of labor in its basic interchange with nature reflected in thought, as it intellectually formulates its ideals of perfection, is the emergent movement of nature creatively and newly *becoming a body and knowing itself as a body in labor*, and not nature rising *through a laboring body* and into the abstraction of thought thinking thought as if its end point. The first movement requires only the negation of contingent contradictions to material becoming—the determinate negation of entropic negations—while the second requires necessary contradiction within the essence of material movement itself, as its necessary law for transcending materiality into a more transparent view within consciousness—the dialectical necessity of negation.

To better clarify the issues here surrounding historical movement, especially pertaining to its reflected meaning in ideals, their objective necessity, and the contingency of their inverted forms of dialectical necessity, it is helpful to present certain aspects of Marx's critical engagement with Hegel's absolute idealism. In contrasting himself from Hegel, Marx claimed that for Hegel the real world is perfectly known only

in the formal conceptual identity of the ideal within thought alone for which the material world is a mere external occasion, whereas Marx himself believed “the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.”²³⁴ The problem for Marx is that Hegel stops halfway within the totality of the body’s historical production process, falling “into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself”.²³⁵

That Hegel stops halfway within the totality of the production process can be seen in his *Science of Logic* where he begins his presentation of perfect knowing. Yet he begins not with the concrete historical body organizing reality, but rather with what he takes to be the absolute presuppositionless ideal of being as such. The idea of pure being for Hegel presupposes nothing, and is therefore convertible with absolute nothingness.²³⁶ Thus he takes this concept only as it appears abstractly for thought in terms of an absolutely empty and univocally zero starting point. Of course “to be” already presupposes a concretely organized reality and its becoming a body. This is the ontological precondition that renders any experience of, and reflection on, the meaning of being possible in the first place. To render the concept of being absolutely empty could then only be a highly contingent historical product in the abstracting activity of a thought that has somehow come to take its intellectually accrued meaning as itself the real thing. That is, such a privileged abstraction could only be generated under certain material and social conditions already being organized by its prior laboring body in such a way that

²³⁴ Marx, “1873 Afterword.” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm>.

²³⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 100–101.

²³⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969), pp. 82–83.

makes the abstractly intellectual bracketing out of this body seem to be a necessity for objectively knowing reality.

To take this concept as presuppositionless, as if an external objectivity just so in thought, and not itself a historically contingent product, is therefore to reify a product of dead labor as if the thing itself, already prejudging the meaning of the historical laboring body who generated its conditions of thinkability as simply an empty supposition for the truth of perfect knowing and being. Thus for Hegel, the very logic of the real already predetermines the historical movement of perfection as that for which the laboring body plays no constitutive role or end point, since knowing the whole is no longer a creative matter of historically making whole, but rather a matter of thought concentrating exclusively on its own inner workings, watching the alleged absolute logic of the formal ideal in itself, unfold in and for its abstracted consciousness. This means he inverts the position of the laboring body as no longer the first and last term of the production process for which ideals serve as products of theory and thus transitional aspects in the body's material becoming, but as now the middle term, as itself a transitional aspect necessarily negated for the mediation of two abstractions, a dialectic represented by the sequence: Idea–body–Idea, or I–b–I rather than Body–idea–Body, or B–i–B.

Hegel's beginning point therefore implies a movement of reality as if it were legally bound to automatically negate its material body. This is because beginning with the concept of absolute being as totally empty of content, presupposing no body, requires then that this concept, if it is to be known in thought, as for thought, must come into relation with bodies but only as an occasion for its own manifestation. That is, the ideal of pure being in itself, if it is to be manifestly known for itself, cannot help but to pass

away from its transcendently objective form due to its own internal logic as it searches for a mediating body in order to reveal itself. But for consciousness to recognize itself in the idea, as its own product of thinking itself according to its own highest form of perfection in purely transparent self-reflexivity, the idea's manifestation cannot be equated with the particularity of any mediating finite body. Rather the material body could only represent the emptiness of the abstract ideal as such in its own mirrored passing away, in order for thought thinking itself to be left in the infinite subsisting of its own self-reflexivity. In beginning with a reified empty abstraction and adhering to an ideal of perfection completed only in the abstract unity of a transparent thought thinking itself, Hegel is then led to conclude that the meaning and value of the finite laboring body of history is only that it must die, since this is what the finitude of any material thing must be: "its ceasing to be is not merely a possibility, so that it could be without ceasing to be, but the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of decease as their being-within-itself: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death."²³⁷

As often noted, Hegel was one of the first modern philosophers to significantly place the historical laboring body at the center of becoming a subject, but it is only the crucible by which subjectivity reflects itself as other than its laboring body, rather than seeing itself as the transforming body of labor. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the historical manifestation of absolute spirit's own logic is traced out phenomenologically as being won through labor. But this is a movement whose negation of negation is first articulated as the necessary negation of blind and dumb nature as an external occasion against which labor constructs an organized world for self-reflection; and then, secondarily, the necessary negation of the laboring body as it realizes its own expenditure

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

in its mere animal flesh as what must be disposed of in the process.²³⁸ The fact that the laboring body is expended in the process of production, for Hegel, is not a contradictory material problem to be countered and transformed, but now equated with its essence, as that which must be expended—“sacrificed”—in the process in order to concentrate its organizing value in thought alone.²³⁹ Spirit therefore arises from this more abstractly necessitated negation of negation insofar as it appears as the reflexive capacity able to see its own flesh as purely and thus necessarily mortal, and so in turn recognizes its own conscious recognition of such as an infinite capacity essentially other than the blind perishing of its finite animal flesh. It is not humanity’s labor that makes it an animal whose essence exceeds its purely mortal flesh, but only its self-reflexivity in consciousness that can anticipate and know the mortality of its laboring body as its necessary material end.

The spirit of subjectivity does not then emerge in and as labor adding to nature a new body that works toward transforming the contradictory conditions of its existence, but only in the added abstract capacity of consciousness in viewing and grasping that such contradictions are immutably the necessary essence of its laboring body. Hence Hegel’s reference to the “speculative Good Friday” indicating the body’s mortality as its figurative crucifixion, that is, the good occasion whereby spirit gains a chance *to see* itself transparently from and for its own eternal reflexive capacity over against material nature.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ For the most succinct treatment of this dialectical necessity of negation see his master and slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 118. On the notion of Nature as “dead objectivity” and the laborer qua labor as being sacrificed to the whole and thereby receiving their self back as being recognized as a necessary part for the whole, see (pp. 210–213).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁴⁰ Hegel early on expressed this notion in terms of modernity coming to recognize not only its finite bodies but nature on the whole as dead, but that this is its necessary crux, its crucial moment to also recognize its

Thus Hegel identifies historical movement as that of an the empty idea rising from thought, through a body, and into thought more transparently thinking itself, whereby its perfection in the absolute spirit of self-consciousness is precisely a matter of becoming absolved of a historical body. The historical contingency of the laboring body qua embodied labor is not then an aspect of its creative emergence into new acts and so also its possibility for historically and materially realizing its infinite and eternal value by overcoming its own contradictory negation, but contradictorily predetermined as a necessarily essentialized passing away, its death as its only chance for contributing to the eternal life of Spirit.²⁴¹ Here we see that Hegel, while still wanting to retain the classical image of circular perfection in thought thinking itself, nevertheless newly thinks the needed passage of abstract thought through a body, though a bodily movement reflexively viewed only from the standpoint of its abstract exchange value. That is, his dialectic is reflexively expressing classical ideals of perfection that have now become oriented more closely to the emerging dreams of incipient capital, its desired realization within the abstraction of surplus value, extracted from the concentrations of the laboring body viewed only as the bare flesh of labor power. It is that dream of capital born from the material conditions already turning the mere ideological representations of I-b-I into a concrete life-world of M-C-M, with the body in its own praxis finding it increasingly

freedom of consciousness. “It existed as the feeling that “God godself is dead,” upon which the religion of more recent times rests—the same feeling that Pascal expressed in, so to speak sheerly empirical form: *‘la nature est telle qu’ elle marque partout un Dieu perdu et dans l’homme et hors de l’homme’* ... By marking this feeling as a moment of the supreme idea, the pure concept ... must reestablish for philosophy the idea of absolute freedom and along with it the absolute passion, the speculative Good Friday in place of the historical Good Friday. Good Friday must be speculatively re-established in the whole truth and harshness of its Godforsakenness.” “Faith and Knowledge,” in *G. W. F. Hegel: Theologian of Spirit*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 84.

²⁴¹ On Hegel’s bourgeois reification of death as needed to keep individual bodies subordinated to the state through market mechanisms and war-making, see Michael Gillespie, “Death and Desire: War and Bourgeoisification in the Thought of Hegel,” in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, ed. Catherine H. Zuckert (Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 153–179.

difficult to see its own ideals of qualitative perfection, comprehending its worth instead as only a commodity mediating the generation of that most abstract rendition of exchange value in the god of the commodities—money.²⁴²

The supposedly objective dialectical necessity of incarnating the abstract ideal's negation through the negation of the active body's own meaning and value, its necessary death on the cross to concentrate abstract value to the spirit of consciousness alone, is only an imagined objective necessity for a fictional drama within that consciousness that has almost nearly lost complete sight of its own prior laboring body's constitutive value. That is, only when one starts with a reified empty concept as if the thing itself, then is there a seeming dialectical necessity of negation. It is a false consciousness that contradictorily views its body, due to the unconsciously habituated prejudice of its social exchange relations, only as the precondition of bare flesh, nothing in itself that could be the presupposed content for the ideal, but rather a crucified cipher for abstractly mediating consciousness to itself in the formal unity of the ideal in itself. Therefore, every death of the divine ideal in order for it to be incarnationally emptied into a purely mortal body for the sake of consciousness, as well every so-called radical death-of-god theology that seeks to implode this logic of idealism itself, halting its upward spiritual movement by resolving it into its presupposed body as unsurpassable mortal flesh, will simply be another mythical drama played out within the idealist fictions already being socially given by capital, accepting the human just as capital demands that it should be

²⁴² As already briefly adumbrated in the introduction, in capitalism every term in I–b–I becomes an *almost totally* commodified object as the idealist inversion becomes instituted in everyday life, through exchange relations as a real concretized abstraction. The commodification of bodies under the wage form gets wedged between the abstract commodity of the money form, hence Marx's formula M–C–M, and capital's subsequent dream of eliminating the body altogether from the production process of generating abstract surplus value in order seeks to effect in its financialization an M–M. I say only *almost totally*, because if it were a total commodification of labor then labor would no longer be able to recognize anything of its own creative power by which to critically expose the commodity form as false.

and as the commodity form already claims it is—as purely mortal flesh and nothing more.

As Marx says, for Hegel, “the philosophical task is not the embodiment of thought in determinate political realities, but the evaporation of these realities in abstract thought. The philosophical moment is not the logic of fact but the fact of logic.”²⁴³ Hegel then forgot that the historical production of ideals, indeed the generation of thought’s self-reflexivity itself, is only a surplus activity of reflexively extending labor’s anti-entropic transformation of necessity toward its own embodied resolutions. He thus wrongly understood the intellectual activity of concept formation—the “fact of logic”—as if it were a movement of completing the body’s organizing labors by other means, as a compensation within abstract consciousness for what the laboring body supposedly cannot itself do or think, concentrating value exclusively in thought alone while surrendering the laboring body as if simply a sink for dumping entropy.

But for Marx, overcoming the idealist inversion by reducing ideals to historical constructs is not itself a matter of one-sidedly exposing all ideals as arbitrary fantasies tout court. Such would be to negate the empty idealist vision by merely blinding the material body from its objective self-organizing trajectories. Historicizing ideals, properly understood, is then not a matter of negating their objective reference, since this would be to already close the meaning of history as nothing concretely perfectible by and for its productive bodies, but only a random blip in the given flux, which of course would not even be a history yet that one could historicize from. But if history is the fact of becoming a body through transforming the objective conditions of existence toward more perfectly embodied unities, then historicizing can only mean ensuring that ideals,

²⁴³ Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right,’* p. 18.

precisely as historically contingent products, thereby reflect the objective tendencies for concrete perfection in the production of a historical body itself. It is to bring ideals back to reflecting those creative perfective trajectories in which the producers actually producing them can recognize themselves in them.

Therefore, if the “fact of logic” is not to be reified in itself, it must then be resituated within the “logic of fact,” which is the world organized and intelligibly experienced because it is already being organized by the objective tendencies of becoming a body through the anti-entropic transformation of necessity. This means the logic of fact revolves around the movement of investing organization and thus value in the concrete fact of the active body itself and not abstractly in thought alone. Ideals as products do not then serve the fact of formal logic in itself, as if signifying a perfection whose terminus is abstractly set over against its body’s facticity, but rather must reflect and return to the embodied concrete fact of the productive act, intellectually conceptualizing values and their perfectible horizons only as they are being generated and accrued to this body and its organized totality. And since this movement of labor, from and for which ideals emerge, is always already an objective movement of determinately negating the body’s entropic negation, then in the most general sense ideals are not for resurrecting an abstracted spirit over against its body, *but ultimately serve no other purpose than the resurrection of its laboring body*—the historical materialist completion of the determinate negation of negation can mean nothing else, since anything else would be the external mediation of the body through its negation.

In other words, the laboring body was not made for the ideals of being, truth, goodness, love, beauty and justice, but rather these ideals emerge in the production of

theory, generated from and for reflecting and guiding the praxis of perfecting the creative self-organizing capacities of this body as it objectively transforms nature into higher embodied unities. In this way, then, all ideals serve in some manner that perfectible end of resolving and removing the material contradictions within this emerging body, and so cannot justify the contradictory negation of its body for their own completion. Indeed the ideal perfection of eternal life articulated under the explicit form of the resurrection of the body signifies that transcendental perfection or final cause presupposed in all other ideals of perfection, since there must be a perfectible body already emerging as that real horizon of possibility for which any ideal could arise in the first place and find its completion. Or, in other words, as we spelled out above, it signifies the one objective necessity presupposed for any historical materialist utopian ideal: that if there is to be a perfected whole, then there must be material bodies receiving it as the ones also producing it. As this transcendental presupposition within any ideal, the resurrection of the body is then that materialist arch-utopian form by which all other utopian ideals are to be critically engaged, since it is that regulative ideal binding and judging the formation of ideals as to whether they fulfill their historical function as drawn from and for the objective anti-entropic movement of labor rising into its own materially embodied perfection.

In this way, the resurrection of the body is thus the utopian ideal implied in every critique of alienated labor that remains based in the normative standpoint of the historical laboring body, since it is that sole ideal of perfection whose end is the historical body itself without its alienated subsumption. It is that ideal in which the laboring body directly expresses and grasps itself as the emergent final cause. Therefore it is that utopian ideal for which the paradoxical necessity of historical contingency is no longer

understood as contradictorily equated with the laboring body's necessary or absolute corruption, which itself would eliminate any meaningful sense to historical contingency as a capacity for real change, but precisely its objective revolutionary chance, as a directed capacity of creative change, to overcome the material corruption of its body. This is in no way to suggest that the resurrection of the body will be an inevitable or automatic outcome, but only to say that it is that necessary utopian projection for labor's own self-understanding, the only transcendental ideal whereby the creative activity of labor's historically contingent body can become intelligible to itself as something other than a necessary or absolute passing away for some other cause.

It is to Adorno's credit that he saw something of the transcendental ideal of resurrection as presupposed in every materialist intention, indeed as its only logically intended end by which the inverted consciousness of idealism could be overcome. But Adorno suggests the importance of this intention only in terms of a difference in desiderata without explaining how and why it is necessarily desirable for historical materialism. That is, he failed to explain why it is the true object of desire for the historical materialist subject of desire, according to the imperatives of perfecting this subject's own concretely rational activity. This then left him unable to explain whether a materialism oriented transcendently to such an end shows its truth to be really a theological mystification at heart, or whether this transcendental ideal of resurrection shows its inner logic to be really a historical materialist imperative of labor's concrete act.

This failure on Adorno's part is the result of an inadequate grasp of the whole historical production process in its self-transcending nature, from and for which the

laboring body necessarily produces ideals. Instead of grasping the formation of concepts and ideals according to the logic of fact, that is, as serving the emergent anti-entropic becoming of a body, Adorno leaves these intellectual productions consigned to the reified realm of absolute spirit and its fact of logic. Because they could only serve the false perfection of formal identity in a transparent self-consciousness for Adorno, he is left attempting to resurrect the body through the endless negation of conceptual formations—hence the bad infinity of his “negative dialectics”.²⁴⁴ Thus Adorno articulates this utopian ideal exclusively and explicitly in the negative form of the “theological ban” on graven images, an ideal of resurrection whose objective content cannot be represented in any ideal form, but only negatively in terms of the imageless flesh: “to comprehend the thing ... the full object could only be thought devoid of images.”²⁴⁵

But this means that Adorno also remains within the realm of absolute spirit, since the only ideal of perfection still implied in the background here for perfectly comprehending the body is that of its transparency in and for abstract consciousness alone, as if it could be intuitively grasped as a bare object in its identical immediacy within thought’s own bracketing of itself, rather than known only through the perfection of the material body’s concrete act of creating history as a unified natural and social body of integrated complexity.²⁴⁶ If Hegel negates the body in light of the ideal’s own formal

²⁴⁴ As Adorno himself states, “Negative dialectics is thus tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure.” At times Adorno also seems to think that thought itself is driven by its “guilt” as if it can only function as absolute spirit and yet also know that this essence is false. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 147; p. 5.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 207. “The materialistic longing, to comprehend the thing, wishes the opposite; the full object could only be thought devoid of images. Such imagelessness converges with the theological ban on the graven image.”

²⁴⁶ Both Albrecht Wellmer and Jurgen Habermas have also claimed that Adorno remained within the idealism he sought to get out of, promoting only an irrational negative theology of indeterminacy in relation to the dialectic of absolute spirit. They are not concerned however with a more materialistically comprehensive account of reason from the standpoint of labor but only with elaborating the formal

completion in consciousness, then Adorno negates the conceptual content of consciousness in light of its desire for a pure intuitive gaze at the pre-conceptual, pre-productive body. Or, in other words, if Hegel wanted to start with the bare ideal of empty being without presuppositions, Adorno merely wants to bring this reified ideal back to its own minimally presupposed condition of what he takes as the imageless, passively naked flesh.²⁴⁷ Adorno's objective is therefore not to provide a historical materialist account of producing perfection that would expropriate the expropriators, taking back the material perfective movement from absolute spirit and showing it to be more truly the flesh actively in motion, which is always and only the becoming of a body. Rather he remains exclusively within absolute spirit's own self-contradiction and simply tries to indirectly mediate its flesh through the necessary fall of every ideal in consciousness alone. Hence Adorno's telling privileging of the locution "resurrection of the *flesh*" rather than of the "body", which historically, as I will show in chapter 5, was the more conservatively loaded theological locution, counter-intuitively signifying a more idealized and ahistorical conception of the body as passively exposed to an external will precisely in its reduction to the image of bare naked flesh.

deliberative procedures for regulating the contestation of knowledge claims. See Albrecht Wellmer, "Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity," *Telos* 62 (1984-5): 94. And also, Jurgen Habermas, *Post Metaphysical Thinking*, trans. W. M. Hohengarten (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995), 37.

²⁴⁷ A negative dialectics would reverse the movement of dialectical conceptuality, and instead of moving toward identity in the conceptual form of the object it would stay with and seek to follow after the "remainder," the left over, that element of the purely "transitory and insignificant" for absolute spirit, which cannot be assimilated to its conceptual unity—what he also termed the "non-conceptual" or "nonidentical." Thus Adorno is not pursuing a better materialist account of the perfective drive annexed by absolute spirit, but only reflecting on absolute spirit's own underside, and especially remaining in its concept of finitude as nothing other than a ceasing to be. Yet, he wants to tarry with finitude in order to claim that there is no absolute sublation of this in thought, since thought itself is finite. Though Adorno never identified with death-of-god theologies, his negative dialectics lives from the reified negativity of finitude so defined by absolute idealism, and so he is only able to think the body by way of the necessary fall of the ideal in consciousness alone. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 8, 12.

The object of resurrection as the “flesh” is then only the body represented *as the exterior for* absolute spirit, that is, still imagined as an exteriority negatively determined from the standpoint of spirit’s reified fact of logic. It forgets that the concretely material body of living labor is neither pure thought nor bare flesh, both of which are equally fictional images abstractly produced late in thought alone, the flipsides of the same reified idealist coin that represses its own prior living body. It is therefore absolute spirit who remains constitutively operative here, tasked with resurrecting its own hidden, though distortedly conceived, presupposed body of the bare flesh, and morally commanded to arbitrarily tarry with it. Such is a condescending affirmation of the body as a bare passive object therefore that does not yet think from and for the historical body of production, thinking its ideals as the body theorizing and planning its own self-creation in actively becoming a historical body. Such an ideal of resurrection, then, is simply empty since it is an imperative linked up to no concrete intuitions and intentions from within the actual material work of a living body.

The inner self-contradiction here is that any attempt at a purely negative utopian ideal, whose supposedly radical intentions would have only the negation of every ideal image for their content, so that only a supposedly “imageless” flesh, or an abstract *novum* convertible with a pure void stands at the end, is nevertheless an idealized image itself that conceals the concrete act of its prior laboring body in its historical interchange with nature.²⁴⁸ What Adorno then failed to see because of his reified idealism is that every act of negating is not the work of consciousness alone in its own reflexive conceptual mediation, but a part of the holistic perfective act of the material body. That is, the

²⁴⁸ Ernst Bloch also often fell into this trap with his negative expressions of utopia as only a “Novum Ultimum” without any minimally concrete form. Idem, *The Principle of Hope*.

idealist view obscures the laboring body's own consciousness of itself by forgetting that the negations of critical theory are always born from and for serving the contingent determinate negations of concretely becoming a body against its entropic contradictions. Therefore Adorno forgets that the critical work of negation in thought is born from and for those ideals serving to perfect the laboring body's concrete material act which always already intends minimally that it is some positive form of its own historical embodiment, and not its abstract imageless image formed in thought around a purely disjunctive object, that will stand at the end of the historical labor process. All else would be the mythically transfigured perfection of the laboring body as externally mediated through some ahistorical form and alien agency.

Therefore, Adorno rightly saw something important in the memory of the religious ideal of the resurrection, but he failed to think this ideal more directly from the intuitions and intentions of the anti-entropic activity of labor, as it reflects its own concrete creative self-organizing trajectories in that most basic image of a unifying movement presupposed for any perfection of creative organization as such: a body. If he had done so he would have seen then that the one minimally positive and thus transcendently necessary image of perfection that cannot itself be negated, except by committing a performative contradiction, is that of the resurrection of the *body*, since this is what the body is historically striving to become, and recognize itself as, in material reality, and not the static content of the "imageless" flesh imagined in thought alone. Within the epoch of late capitalism his ideal of resurrection resigned to the negative utopianism of the bare flesh therefore does not think the normatively active body in any way beyond the image of indigestible excrement left over from the laboring body's

subsumption by the commodity form—or, that is, the body’s ideal form is represented in no way distinct from an anticipatory corpse.²⁴⁹

Jurgen Habermas has a certain point, then, when he declares that the “resurrection of nature cannot be logically conceived within materialism, no matter how much the early Marx and the speculative minds in the Marxist tradition (Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno) find themselves attracted by this heritage of mysticism.”²⁵⁰ Agreed. If Marx’s early conception of the resurrection of nature signified nothing more than a heritage of mysticism, as is evidenced in Bloch’s lineage of idealist mystics or Adorno’s negative theology of absolute spirit, then, indeed it could not be logically conceived within materialism. For Habermas all these articulations of a resurrection are simply the idealist attempt to win perfected identity abstractly in consciousness, that is, some version of raising nature as object into the subject as thought thinking itself. But, as I have argued and will further substantiate in the following chapters, another interpretation can be given for this ideal as fulfilling not the mystical idealist perfection of formal logic over against material becoming, but rather perfecting

²⁴⁹ Much of the problem with Adorno’s analysis is that it is driven by his resignation to what he claims is an age that is the manifestation of “radical evil,” whereby commodification and its reified consciousness “has become total,” (*Negative Dialectics*, p. 346). Such an age of radical evil, which he also characterizes as the “wrong life” which offers no right way to live, is marked by the complete unavailability of the good. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1999), 15-19. Such a totalization is of course self-contradictory, since it would allow no avenues by which Adorno could even glimpse his own minimal redemptive intentions. This resignation is why the laboring body is in no way affirmed for him according to its creative capacities but rather affirmed only according to its unusable and ephemerally insignificant portion as bare flesh.

²⁵⁰ Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 32–33. But Habermas, like Lukács, also prohibits any thought of labor’s historical addition to any such notion of an “emergent” nature, as he prematurely determines the essence of nature in its objectivity as that static “noumenal” secret that does not, and will not, “reveal itself” to human activity. He recognizes that the “noumenal” is only a product of conceptual thought but claims that observing it is the only way to respect the “immovable facticity” of nature in itself (pp. 33, 34). Here, again, we could ask, is an idealist conceptual reification being countered by another conceptual reification of idealism? An appeal to a noumenal core that does not intelligibly reveal itself to us is similar to the strategy of negative theology in its mystical approach to the ineffable Real behind the phenomena; but it is also a handy conceptual image often used as a mystifying justification for bourgeois indifference to nature as if this were simply mirroring nature’s own allegedly absolute indifference to human interests.

the logic of historically making a concrete body of creative self-organization in the social form of matter.

Engels himself had partly seen this way out of the idealist inversion in that he articulated a notion of a perfectible whole of history around a certain implied dialectics of resurrection in which the social body of primitive communism would be returned and raised at a higher level.²⁵¹ Yet, whereas Adorno could behold something important in the religious ideal itself but fail to give it concrete intuitions, Engels more adequately began to think from and for labor's intuitions, but misidentifies the ideal of perfection that they logically intend. That is, Engels fails to follow the concrete act of labor's self-transcending standpoint all the way through to its intended ideal form of the determinate negation of negation, which Marx rightly glimpsed as the resurrection of nature in its becoming a social body of labor without entropic contradictions and their sacrificial antagonisms.

Since Engels uncritically considered all religious ideals as mere fabrications of alienating class divisions, he was thus already predisposed to write off any suggestion of the transcendental necessity of the ideal of bodily resurrection for historical materialism. But because Engels did not critically analyze and assess the production of religious ideals in relation to the self-transcendence of labor, he was also left unable to conceptualize his insight into a perfectible whole without contradicting the intuitions and intentions of productive activity, even as he rightly sought to counter the nihilism of the cosmic heat death hypothesis. Immediately after proclaiming that humanity in its "historical evolution will experience ... an advance that will put everything preceding it in the deepest shade,"

²⁵¹ Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, trans. Alick West (New York: International Publishers, 1942).

Engels abruptly opposes this movement in declaring, “Nevertheless, ‘All that comes into being deserves to perish.’”²⁵² Engels’s statement that it is necessary for all that becomes to pass away, of course, shares something of the dialectical necessity of negation as seen already in Hegel’s absolute spirit. But, in explicitly quoting Mephistopheles from Goethe’s *Faust*, a quote that expressly echoes the Milesian philosopher, Anaximander, Engels simply pushes this dialectical movement away from the modern direction of absolute spirit and back into a classical form of nature. Here Alfred Schmidt lauds Engels for “quite correctly” protecting an immutable objectivity of nature against the subjectivism of absolute spirit.²⁵³ But this fails to see that Engels merely rehashes an older idealist form of an inverted consciousness that has the specific markings of tributary ideology from Greco-Roman antiquity, whose historical context I will elaborate in the next chapter.²⁵⁴

Engels appeals to this phrase, therefore, not to attribute the perfection of the eternal to absolute spirit, but rather to matter as such, referring to its motion as an eternal cyclical movement that cannot be exhausted in any form of thermodynamic exchange but will continually resurrect the whole chain of its development through what he had described elsewhere as an infinitely extended and “uninterrupted process of becoming and passing away.”²⁵⁵ In other words, matter in-itself requires both the emergence of life

²⁵² Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, p. 49.

²⁵³ Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Verso, 2014), p. 160.

²⁵⁴ According to the fragment transmitted by Simplicius, Anaximander (610–546 BC) is said to have claimed that “the *arkhe* is neither water nor any of the other things called elements, but some other nature which is *apeiron* [a boundless eternal motion], out of which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them. The things that are, perish into the things from which they come to be, according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time.” *A Presocratic Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, ed. Patricia Curd, trans. Richard D. McKirahan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2011), pp. 16–17.

²⁵⁵ Engels, *Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, trans. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1941), p. 12.

and its termination so that matter can continually cycle through and display the full wealth of its forms according to the “iron necessity” of its already predetermined image of a perfectly closed circle. Thus, matter in-itself, which continually overcomes entropy through its perpetual motion, is nevertheless reduced to the likeness of a static substratum in its classical form, an abstract concept of being as an unchangeable essence from and for which the living body of labor in its creative historical becoming is now denied and displaced to a middle term that must necessarily be sacrificed. Indeed, this view could only imply that the body must accept its mortal sentence since it is necessarily in a fallen state that “deserves” to die in relation to the sacred order of eternal matter; and any attempt of living labor to rise out of its necessary position and triumphantly transform matter’s cyclical motion could only be a transgression against this abstract holy.

To simplistically charge Engels here with doing “metaphysics,” as if this mere fact alone could condemn someone of ideological distortion, fails to see that he rightly takes up a materialist intuition of eternal life in the form of resurrection, glimpsing it as an imperative of both history and nature as they draw from latent possibilities for new creative acts harbored in matter that cannot be exhausted by death. The problem is that Engels misunderstands this intuition, failing to adequately conceptualize the perfection of nature according to the logic of that concrete fact of nature’s becoming a body in labor. As he had already intimated, such a view of nature from within labor’s participatory standpoint implies a somewhat aleatory, emergent movement of creative leaps whereby life in its higher social form begins to evince the necessary horizon of possibility for transforming matter beyond any closed circular motion altogether, tending instead toward a potential transformation over blind necessity. Indeed, life emerges in living labor as this

chance to spring nature toward a system definitively opened beyond the form of a circle or receding line. That is, after initially glimpsing this fact he eventually forgets that this latent possibility of eternal life is originally actualized by, and thus the intuition arises only within, the negentropic quality of labor as it newly transforms nature into the emergent laws around the social form of matter.²⁵⁶

The perfection of the eternal and the idea of resurrection, for Engels, are then abstractly conceptualized instead as an imperative not of the advancement of matter's highest form, which he had previously indicated as life for itself in the laboring body, but through the perpetual reversal of the highest for the sake of generic matter in-itself. Thus, in fixating on matter's own circular movement, projecting its contingent form as an "iron necessity," the dialectical negation of negation is no longer seen as a contingent aspect of labor's anti-entropic perfective quality in attempting to finally negate and reverse entropy, but now reified in a bad infinity of an eternal essence and telos for motion as such. Here the realities of entropy and death are mystifyingly represented in the

²⁵⁶ The rogue Soviet Marxist, Evald Ilyenkov, in taking up Engels's dialectical materialism rightly recognized, more than Engels, that resurrection is an imperative of life's anti-entropic movement in coming to know itself through creating itself, and therefore must be a product of human agency, and more specifically of mind as actively directing matter. But while seeing resurrection as an act of human production as it reverses entropy, it is nevertheless only possible according to Ilyenkov by the mind's ability to accumulate the information required for reconcentrating the cosmos's energy, after it has apparently exhausted itself in dispersal, consolidating it back into its primal fiery ball that must be retriggered once again. Thus the highest form of conscious creation is a self-sacrificial release of another big bang, an explosion whose initial force and heat no life can endure, but it will nevertheless restart cosmic evolution all over again so that life can once again emerge and tend toward its same sacrificial vocation. Matter needs to evolve into mind so that it can figure out how to recycle itself in cycle fashion. Thus the work of resurrection is for resurrecting matter as such at the sacrifice of the human who will be reconstituted again from primordial fire, ad infinitum. The possibility of a new creative act is therefore simultaneous with the necessity for death, eternally perpetuated. This adds no real change to nature, therefore, since entropy is not overcome so much as continually redeployed for matter's perfect circle—a resolution, ultimately no different than Engels's, that can only be known and participated by a contemplative mind and its sacrifice of the body. But if the laboring body's capacity for new creative and intellectual acts could ever achieve such a reconcentration of energy there is nothing barring it from then also possibly harboring the ingenuity and thus chance to pull nature beyond this deathly circle altogether. For a summary and assessment of Ilyenkov's untranslated *Cosmology of Mind*, see Sergei Mareyev, "Cosmology of Mind," *Studies in East European Thought*, v. 57 (2005): pp. 249–259.

imaginary relation of a necessary employment by some generic process, justifying these negations as if the necessary motors of real change, rather than the things to be negated in truly making change—all in order to maintain the sacred prerogative of matter's generic and indifferent process.

If the 2nd law of thermodynamics envisioned the motion of the universe as closed up within a finite combustion machine, Engels simply absorbs this view as a required moment within a cosmic perpetual motion machine, an eternal automaton whose fixed general laws equally close off the possibility for new creative acts in the laboring body. Thus the whole is abstractly known as already completed, in an imaginary resolution of a perfectly circular form available only for a contemplative consciousness outside the labor process: a partial view for which Engels can only remain in self-contradiction, since his own understanding of labor does not itself imply this view as total but demonstrated something more comprehensive newly emerging from its own concrete acts; and labor could only remain within this partial vision by sacrificing its essence as a new creative and intellectual act. Yet, to extend Engels's earlier insights, nature not only produces circular forms, but also laboring bodies that produce and reproduce nature's motions as now the possibility of history, that movement of an ascending helix that just might spiral out of any supposedly closed circles, while recapturing the past at a higher level within a novel future.

If the ideal for Adorno had no concrete intuitions and so remained an empty offer to the laboring body subsumed under the commodity form, for Engels the ideal of resurrection is distortedly conceived in such a way that the laboring body's intuitions are blinded to its subsumption under the state form. It will be no coincidence that Soviet

STAMOCAP will make the mechanical form of Engels's dialectics of nature its official state orthodoxy, with the state claiming to mirror the generic form of eternal life in nature's dialectics. Thus, the state will rashly and rigorously seek to eliminate any organic religious/utopian ideals and praxis expressed from the social body of labor, positioning this body instead as mediating the production and reproduction of the state institution as the end itself of the production process. Yet, at least in Engels's dialectics of nature the laboring body can still intuit something of its own material perfection in the inverted vision of a naturally perfectible whole, possibly seeing through its state annexation to the real constitutive origin of this perfectibility in its own concrete acts as itself the rational end; whereas Adorno's ideal emptied of any perfectible form holds very little in it for which the laboring body could rationally recognize itself as a matter of perfection. But they both show, in their positive emphases and yet inadequate analyses, the imperative to critically think through this ideal as the body thinking itself: that the laboring body, without a proper conception of the ideal of the resurrection of body, is blind, unable to see itself as the true end of history, and the ideal of resurrection without reference to its historical laboring body is empty, unable to feel itself in the concrete act of producing history and thus unable to offer any substance to historical bodies. Working out the form of this ideal is then a matter of working out the very possibility of class consciousness based in a truly universal standpoint of labor, since it is that one ideal that expresses labor's own self-comprehension as the constitutive source and end point of making history without alienation, and so signifies its essence as in no way necessarily tied to the particular interests of commodity production or its state monopoly.

The problem here in Engels and Adorno, therefore, is not in the mere fact that they appeal to metaphysics or religious ideals as such, but that they unwittingly preserve their classically or idealistically inverted form without a more rational attempt to think these ideals otherwise, materialistically from and for the laboring body's transformative activity as their originary point of access. Indeed, for Engels especially, he is unable to think the ideal of resurrection otherwise according to labor's transcending because he cuts off the branch he is standing on. Because the religious is reductively determined as a pure illusion generated from class society, providing no positive insight into labor, Engels groundlessly excludes from view a positive sense of religious consciousness and its past pre-capitalist cultural repertoire of ideas and practices that had already begun challenging this inverted state and its ideological mystifications from within a proto historical-materialist trajectory. This challenge can be seen in a certain genealogy of religious discourses, which we will turn to in the following chapters, which historically developed around the idea of bodily resurrection. Within this trajectory there arose a concept of the whole that was more transparently articulated from and for the laboring body becoming conscious of its constitutive activity, thus evincing a critical consciousness that began to resist every inverted subsumption of its active body.

To refuse to think these ideals altogether, however, in any positive relation to labor's self-understanding is to simply eliminate the chance for labor to take back its own ideals of perfection by which it could recognize its own self-transcending nature. It would then be to refuse to acknowledge that the laboring body can think for itself. The only way forward is to think from and through labor to its own ideals of making whole. And here we might suggest, from the foregoing analysis, a definition of inverted ideology. Any

representation of ideals as no longer primarily referring to the laboring body's creative activity of determinately negating the body's entropic negations is an ideological distortion. The telltale sign is the representation of the ideal in terms of an imaginary relation to the material contradiction of death and its entropic negations as if non-contradictions, now conceived as either necessary or absolutely immutable fates for the meaning of the historical body.²⁵⁷ Thus any idealist image of perfection in the circular form, whereby death is confronted as simply necessary for the body to complete the circle in consciousness, or the secular negation of objective ideals of perfection in light of the ideal image of death as an absolute nihil, whereby the laboring body is already destined to be nothing more than its mortal flesh, are both mystifications of the concrete fact of the laboring body's emergently creative self-organizing activity. Thus we can now see how an ideological inversion need not be an explicit idealism. Both idealism and any reductively secular materialism operate by delimiting the sense in which the laboring body can understand its self-transcending nature, repressing the historical experience of the fundamental contingency in the contradictions of existence, within what Frederic Jameson has termed "strategies of containment".²⁵⁸ Such strategies only prepare the laboring body for accepting its inability to change existence, thus inuring it to its alienating expropriations as if these are merely the natural expressions of its true being as made for passing away. But as Jameson further writes, such ideological strategies of

²⁵⁷ This is to draw loosely on Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 109–112. His summary presentation of ideology is as such: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 109).

²⁵⁸ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 37.

containment “can be unmasked only by confrontation with the ideal of totality which they at once imply and repress.”²⁵⁹

In other words, the totalizing ideal absoluteness of death’s nihil is just as inverted of a projection as the ideal necessity of the circle since both are projected mythical ideals or fates that similarly repress the logic of fact. They repress the fact that they are contingent historical productions from within the creative engagement with nature as an open movement whose meaning is not yet determined, conceptual products that now arbitrarily dominate their producer as if external containers or limits to be uncritically accepted as the condition for the laboring body’s own critique. Neither ideal image of the whole contemplated within consciousness alone, then, grasps its own historical emergence from within the transformation of necessity, just as the creative act of the laboring body that generated their conditions of production cannot recognize itself within them. But as ideals of totality themselves, their partial form and harbored intentions nevertheless must show themselves as historically contingent products of a body still newly organizing reality, and therein they must be confronted with that transcendental ideal of totality for perfecting the self-organizing potentials of the productive act, that is, brought back to history and reemployed for the task of resurrecting the revolutionary nature of the productive body.

Conclusion

In developing a normative standpoint of labor as a self-transcending perfective activity, which intuits and intends new wholes of higher self-organization, I have argued for a rational notion of the religious as intrinsic to labor’s self-understanding in its

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 37–38.

radically novel transformation of nature and society. I have thus theoretically maintained the notion of modes of production as a basic organizing concept for understanding the religious, without reducing religion to a mere epiphenomenal reflex of a secularly given material base. The assumption within historical materialism that has been challenged from within is, therefore, that the laboring body becomes increasingly conscious of itself only as an increasingly irreligious secular essence, as if all of its eternal ideals must fall away into a bare consciousness of itself as a purely mortal body. Such is always an idealist thesis, however, that always has the body negatively mediated to itself through the conceptual negations in consciousness alone. A purely secular body of the mortal flesh fails to see that labor itself is always already a revolution in nature, rebelling against every material contradiction to its perfection of life for itself, and thus rejecting every mythically imposed meaning of its finitude as if sentenced to necessary or absolute corruption. And it is the ideal of the resurrection of the body that is the only ideal of perfection for which this revolution is organically and intelligibly expressed in thought. What the ideal has forced upon critical thought, as it reflects what labor is already doing, therefore, is the task of thinking the ascending movement of becoming a body without the dialectical necessity of its negation nor the necessary negation of ideals as such.

The birth of the human, then, as we will see, does not, and did not, historically require a *necessary* death of god or the absolute negation of any other ideals of eternal perfection, but rather their critical materialist reappropriation for divinely becoming a body, which only requires the death of death.²⁶⁰ More than Adorno understood,

²⁶⁰ In his more insightful moments Bloch realized this, claiming: “And genuine materialism, dialectical materialism, cancels out precisely the transcendence and reality of every god-hypostasis, but without removing that which is intended by the *ens perfectissimum* from the last quality-contents of the process, from the real utopia of a realm of freedom. Something fulfillable, something expectable by virtue of the

materialism at its most materialist comes to agree with the theological ideal of bodily resurrection because it comes to see that this is properly its own ideal, arising as logically internal to the concrete act of labor becoming conscious of its own rising. Now that I have made such theoretical claims, it is time to historically demonstrate them with a new genealogical substantiation of this religious ideal's emergence.

process is certainly not denied in dialectical materialism; on the contrary, its place is held and kept open more than anywhere else." Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, v.3, trans. Paul Knight, Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p. 1200. This canceling of a hypostasis only shows that while certain reified ideals of perfection must be critically negated as to their *reified form in thought*, such negations are only contingently required insofar as humanity contingently falls into such contradictory reifications, which means failing to see the truly divine ideal implied in becoming. Therefore any so-called *necessary* atheism, as Bloch himself was in the habit of proclaiming, or *necessary* death-of-god theses that would require humanity to become itself by learning to live without ideals of transcendental perfection, is itself a false conception of humanity that forgets its laboring body's perfective movement. The claim that God must die is only rhetorical if materialism truly believes that the divine is only an ideal to become, the ideal still being historically born in labor.

Chapter 3

The Emergence of the Social Body of Production and the Ideal of Eternal life: Reconstructing a Historical Relation

“We shall never know what was the nectar of the gods until we learn what was the daily bread of the people.”

–Ignace J. Gelb²⁶¹

In the previous chapter I argued that the religious, understood in a certain rational sense, is an intrinsic quality of labor’s consciousness and thus positively necessary for the laboring body’s self-mediating production and reproduction of itself in its transformative interchange with nature. After locating the religious as a fundamental aspect of the modes of production I then put forward the theoretical claim that the laboring body cannot grasp its meaning and value without a concept of eternal life. More specifically, the ineliminable form and content of the idea of eternal life that grasps its laboring body in an organic and non-inverted way is that of the ideal of the resurrection of the body, a necessarily religious utopian form through which the normative perfective activity of the laboring body becomes intelligible to itself. To fully make this claim however requires further specifying this non-inverted notion of resurrection in its actual historical

²⁶¹ I. J. Gelb, “The Philadelphia Onion Archive,” *Assyriological Studies*, no. 16 (1965), p. 62. “I have chosen this lowly topic [the consumption of onions in ancient Mesopotamia] as a modest expression of protest against esoteric and, in the present state of our knowledge, seemingly fruitless pursuits as those devoted to the study of the resurrection of Tanmuz and of the Sumerian beliefs in afterlife. This is not a question of the relative importance of studies devoted to grammar, lexicon, or material culture as against those dealing with theological and metaphysical matters. The question is simply that of priorities. As all man’s ideas about things divine are human, it is my firm belief that we shall never know what was the nectar of the gods until we learn what was the daily bread of the people.”

emergence as a more direct expression of the intuitions and intentions being internally generated from its prior mode of production.

How, then, did the Jewish idea of bodily resurrection, which is a concept often strongly associated with notions of an afterlife and otherworldly agents, nevertheless emerge as a demythologization of the idealist inversion? And what were the trajectories of its discursive development by which the laboring body was increasingly becoming conscious of its active essence? More importantly, if the appearance of ideas of eternal life in their explicitly intelligible cultural and literary form were made possible by the rise of the ancient and classical tributary state, as is often claimed, how is it, then, that any such notions could be other than merely the ideas of the ruling class? Before addressing the specific rise of the ideal of bodily resurrection in the next chapter, we must first answer this last question by thoroughly contextualizing the sociopolitical culture of the Ancient Near Eastern state within which some of the first concepts of eternal life were articulated.

In this chapter we will therefore back up to the dawn of the agricultural revolution and take a long historical view of the arrival of the pre-state social body of labor as it developed prior to and provided the conditions of possibility for the ANE state. This historical account serves to establish how the intuitions and intentions behind the ANE and classical religious consciousness of eternal life were already being positively and necessarily generated within the pre-state communal mode of production of village life. This account will serve to challenge the dominant assumptions around village life as mired in rural idiocy and ignorance, as if it held only limited aspirations and visions of the whole—an assumption correlative to those presuppositions that the laboring body has

no internal self-transcending capacities nor would it have the ability to reflect upon such if it did, since it supposedly only thinks in terms of efficient causality around immediate subsistence needs. Contrary to these presumptions, I will argue that the intuitions and intentions behind later ideas of eternal life originally arose as a communal imperative of rationally developing and directing the production and redistribution of a new social body of surplus life. That is, as village life began culturally mediating its production and redistribution of social surplus it did so in light of developing new visions of the perfectible whole in which human creative activity was increasingly recognized as to its constitutive value. Insofar as any state originally arose from and as a certain extension of these communal redistributive structures of social surplus and their religio-cultural mediation, it necessarily continued, to a certain degree, the religious visions from village life.

From here I will then critically analyze how notions of eternal life organic to the vision of this pre-state social body of labor were both harbored and extended within certain ANE and classical age visions of creative activity in light of nature's transcendental perfection, while also obscured by the tributary state's ideological strategies of containment insofar as they rendered death naturally necessary for the perfected order of the cosmos. It is through this ideological representation of a "debt to death" that the state inveigles the social use of surplus toward a feigned state priority over its productive base. Moving forward in the following chapters, the task will be to elaborate how the emergence of a certain ideal of eternal life in the form of bodily resurrection critically reverses the idealist inversions of the state by more directly recalling, at a higher level, the formative context and perfective trajectory of the pre-state

social body of labor—that is, to locate an ideal of eternal life in which it is the laboring body, and not the abstracted state-form, becoming conscious of its transformative, self-transcending potentials.

Setting the Socioeconomic Base for the Concept of Eternal Life

The Marxist economist Samir Amin has noted that the concept of eternal life first appeared, in its literary development, within ancient Egyptian thought and was later progressively worked out within Greek philosophical notions of immortality. This trajectory articulated a new consciousness of a shared universality in which humanity's actions took on eternal significance. According to Amin this was a “breakthrough” in humanity's self-understanding beyond particular mythical representations, providing a basis for all subsequent thought about humanity as more than a mortal animal of solely local and temporary interests. Yet Amin emphasizes that such concepts were formulated within tributary regimes and according to their ideological need for legitimating the consolidation of power in the state as universal. That is, this religious idea and its conceptualization in classical metaphysics arose as “the ideology par excellence of the tributary mode of production”, a role especially evidenced from metaphysics' non-empirical mode of reasoning as a pure theoretical deduction from a priori ideals, a mode of imposing upon reality top down principles that are nevertheless “fatally imaginary”.²⁶² The question remains, then, as to how such ideological reasoning from imaginary principles could nonetheless provide insightful breakthroughs in humanity's self-understanding. If so fatally flawed, then from and for what essential human activity are

²⁶² Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism—Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, 2nd edition, trans. Russell Moore and James Membrez, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), pp. 107–108.

these emerging concepts possibly illuminating, other than the ability to fabricate baseless abstractions? The key here, in order to more clearly and critically separate genuinely concrete insight from ideological distortion, is to more adequately distinguish the nature of tributary regimes as something other than an actual mode of production, a distinction that Amin intimates toward but does not clarify.

Amin rejects the term “Asiatic mode of production”, which describes antiquity as if all producers were enslaved to a despot, because he rightly sees that the most commonly encountered unit of production was not dependent labor but relatively free, small producers who were nevertheless subjected to some form of external tributary extraction, i.e., being taxed in surplus goods and labor by a sociopolitical unit that does not reallocate to its social body of production.²⁶³ He emphasizes that tributary regimes within antiquity had no direct economic means of exploiting the productive forces internally and therefore had to do so through political force and, more importantly, through compelling ideological justification because the exploitation was so transparent, hence the swell of more abstract religious and metaphysical discourses throughout antiquity. But these facts imply that one cannot technically call the tributary form a mode of *production*. Rather it is a mode of *external extraction*: a mechanism of political and sociocultural relations, mainly concentrated in a state-form, that collects tributes from a prior social body of production already generating enough surplus to sustain itself and

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 224. “What does exist and, moreover, is much more frequently encountered than slavery or serfdom, is the labor of the small producer (peasant), neither completely free and market oriented nor strictly enclosed in communal property, but nevertheless subjected to tributary extraction. It is, thus, necessary to give a name to this type, and I do not see anything more appropriate than the tributary mode.”

this non-productive class.²⁶⁴ Emphasizing this distinction is important for understanding cultural production and the nature of ideology within antiquity.

Despite the fact that most extant written documents and literature from the ANE came from urban civilizations oriented around imperial states such as Egypt, Sumeria, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and the Greco-Roman empires of classical antiquity, these state formations were not the original or normative form of socioeconomic organization throughout ancient history.²⁶⁵ Their hegemonic position in cultural production was rather made possible by siphoning surplus from the more stable material base of the rural village commune where over 80 % of the ANE population lived and worked.²⁶⁶ That is, the primary socioeconomic body of production prior to, presupposed by, perduring within, as well as outliving, the rise and fall of every ANE state was constituted through a

²⁶⁴ This is a way of demarcating all pre-capitalist modes of production as at least sharing the common fact that there was not yet a strictly economic means of expropriation, such as capitalism's generalization of commodity production and exchange under the wage-form, but only political and ideological means, as in the form of tax and/or rent and their necessary ideological justifications. Thus the tributary mode better denotes the common fact of an external "mode of surplus appropriation" over against a relatively independent peasant producer as the main unit of production. On this sense of the tributary mode as designating all pre-capitalist modes of production as "modes of surplus appropriation" primarily through "social formations" around centralized tax or rent see John Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode* (New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 75–109. He does not deny that states or landlords intervene into the productive process and alter it significantly to some degree, but the point is that both pre-capitalist forms do not uproot the peasant production process and its means altogether and change it into something wholly different, largely because there is yet no generalized global commodity market.

²⁶⁵ Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Structure of Near Eastern Society before the Middle of the Second Millennium B.C." *Oikumene* 3 (1982): pp. 7–100.

²⁶⁶ Despite the fact that the urban revolution, around 3,500BCE, saw cities take off into a semi-autonomous social sphere of their own that greatly transformed the political organization of society throughout the rest of history, the city throughout the ANE was nevertheless itself always economically dependent upon village life and its surplus in goods and labor. As Mario Liverani notes, primary food producers constituted more than 80% of the ANE population. Liverani, *Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. Soraia Tabatabai (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 62. A basic definition and distinction of village from town or city is provided by Brian Roberts, *Landscapes of Settlement: Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 19: "A farmstead is an assemblage of agricultural buildings from which the land is worked; a hamlet is a small cluster of farmsteads; a village is a clustered assembly of dwellings and farmsteads, larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town; a town is a relatively large concentration of people possessing rights and skills which separate them from direct food production."

communal mode of direct subsistence production within the village life of the peasantry.²⁶⁷

Moreover, states emerged and developed throughout antiquity as political formations without the ability to internally reorder production as such because there was no global commodity market yet by which a national economy strictly oriented to commerce could commandeer the basic mode of production.²⁶⁸ This fact is important because it follows that if the tributary form had no means of internally uprooting and redirecting modes of production it therefore also had no means of internally reordering the intuitions of the whole being generated at the level of material production. This is not to claim that the tributary forms of extraction, with their dominant political force and ideology did not significantly impact and threaten the economic and cultural formations of village life. It is, however, to emphasize that tributary forms did not own and could not monopolize the means of production by which its independent village productive base could be dissolved and externally mediated altogether, as if to fundamentally reorder its

²⁶⁷ Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Rural Community in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 18.2, (June 1975): pp. 121–133. In speaking of direct subsistence mode and in highlighting that there was no global commodity market, this does not imply that the direct producers of the communal village did not produce things to be exchanged or engage in trade. It is rather to emphasize that the purpose of the overall production process was not for exchange as such.

²⁶⁸ The Greco-Roman empires were somewhat exceptional in this aspect insofar as the state formed a kind of near-global, petty commodity market and its own semi-commercial coinage, which I will discuss below. This is especially seen in the middle to late Roman Empire as it became oriented around largely private latifundia, which were themselves profiting from a type of slave mode of production for commerce. The emphasis on the "slave mode" however should not suggest that private landholders were able to convert the mass of direct producers into slaves, but rather that they were able to squeeze their small portion of slave labor into enough leverage by which to put a significant portion of the small farmers and free laborers into debt bondage and political domination. Thus, despite the unique Roman situation of an emerging petty commodity market and its corresponding institution of private ownership of land distinct from temple and palatine ownership, the most common form of exploitation linking the history of ANE states up through the classical period of Greco-Roman empires remains that of the tributary regime. Peter Bedford thus rightly challenges any categorical distinction between Ancient Near East and Greco-Roman socioeconomic forms: "Near Eastern forms of socioeconomic organization are far from being completely different from the Greco-Roman world in the first millennium BC; they are typologically connected and so can be studied in an integrated fashion." "The Economy of the Near East in the First Millennium BC," in *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, eds. Joseph G. Manning and Ian Morris (Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 68.

basic self-mediating interchange with nature and thus its forms of sensible perception from the ground up.

In Marx's terms, then, the tributary form could only effect a "formal subsumption" of the existing labor process, unable to really subsume the productive base by which it could reorder both labor's means and objectives entirely for external ends.²⁶⁹ This consequently entails that the primary object of production in all such pre-capitalist societies, as Marx noted, is still in some way humanity itself *in its self-surpassing qualities*, and not yet the abstract commodity as such.²⁷⁰ Moreover, if we follow through on an early insight by Marx that was never fully worked out, it must be that the production in thought of humanity's eternal value within this situation of formal subsumption was in some way produced positively and more primarily from the laboring body itself, with hegemonic metaphysics and religious discourse only responding to these forms of thought: "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it."²⁷¹ Yet, Marxists contradict this insight by exclusively focusing on the lack of direct socioeconomic mechanisms of exploitation in order to emphasize that religious and metaphysical ideology was therefore necessarily pervasive because it was one of the few available cultural mechanisms for exploiters. The fact that the aim of pre-capitalist modes of

²⁶⁹ For Marx's notion of "formal" and "real subsumption" in relation to capitalist modes of production see, "Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production," in *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 975–1059.

²⁷⁰ As Marx writes, "the old view, in which the human being appears as the aim of production, *regardless of his limited national, religious, political character*, seems to be very lofty when contrasted to the modern world, where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production." *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 487–488. Italics mine.

²⁷¹ Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 67.

production was humanity itself, whose self-surpassing nature was articulated as it was in religious and metaphysical terms, is often immediately qualified as merely a projection *from* the low development of productive forces and their limited capacities, and thus a projection by the ruling class only *for* reproducing an immaturely given form of humanity solely for exploitative interests. This however perpetuates the paternalistic notion that the laboring body does not naturally intuit and intend a surpassing of limits in its production of surplus, or come to ably reflect from and on such positive transcending trajectories, at least not until the capitalist mode of production enables it to do so.²⁷²

In other words, Marxism has often failed to more fully deduce from the fact of formal subsumption the other side of its equation which Marx previously glimpsed, if the priority of labor's autonomous self-transcending capacities are to be maintained: that the necessity for ideology in religious and metaphysical terms was pervasive precisely because the laboring body was already freely generating its own positive vision of humanity beyond limits rather than impotently and ignorantly reflecting the acceptance of certain limits. Because the productive base was independent in its ownership of the means of production and the social organization of its own objects of production, it organically generated not only a social surplus for its own subsisting and beyond, but with it, an excess of intuitions and intentions from its own still dimly recognized self-

²⁷² Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 488. Marx himself will fail to see through his previous insight. Hence after presenting the lofty ideal of humanity as the aim of production in antiquity Marx then chastens this ideal as still too limited in relation to the capitalist mode of production which finally reveals to the human its creative potential, though in the alienated form of an empty negative infinity. The capitalist production of abstract commodities is a negative moment which humanity must necessarily pass through in its maturation process of rightly seeing its infinite creative potential: "This is why the childish world of antiquity appears on one side as loftier. On the other side, it really is loftier in all matters where closed shapes, forms and given limits are sought for." In what follows I will largely be in agreement with the assessment of antiquity's preoccupation with closed forms and given limits, but I will instead seek to draw out the ways that it harbors the excesses of its productive base, thus indirectly showing the ways that the village commune put pressure on its thought forms in order to exceed limits and think the new from the creative act.

mediation with nature. This generated excess from the laboring body and its reflected perfectible trajectories, thus required that any ideological response would need to both partially acknowledge something of labor's self-surpassing nature while also attempting to displace these trajectories by defining for labor its allegedly unsurpassable limits—to try to think otherwise what labor was already incipiently thinking.

This other fact of formal subsumption therefore necessitates an assessment of the pervasiveness of religious and metaphysical ideology as not just a top down fabrication made up from nowhere, so to speak, but a required response to emerging intuitions, insights, and intentions around unlimited qualitative perfections emerging from the bottom up, so that *to some degree* the transcendental qualities of the ideological metaphysical vision does positively refer to, and is an imperative of, the self-transcending production of humanity's creative potentials. That is, the tributary cultural hegemony could only successfully function insofar as it modified intuitions and intentions already being given from its pre-state social body of labor, entailing that no matter how abstractly ideological classical metaphysics became, it nevertheless retained—and necessarily so—traces of material intuitions around excessive potentials organic to those creative qualities from within the communal mode of production. This qualifies and thus saves something progressive from both metaphysics, as a discourse that cannot be entirely reducible to its ideological distortions, as well as of the village commune, as a social body of production that cannot be reducible entirely to local backwardness and an inescapable primitiveness.

Such an argument needs to be made in order to also challenge another narrow and more influential view of the “Axial Age” that attributes a progressive value to its metaphysics as a kind of proto-secularizing overcoming of the pre-state village's

religious mindset, which is seen as essentially mired in an irrational conservatism. Marcel Gauchet, in *The Disenchantment of the World*, provides an especially problematic version of this thesis when he reduces all pre-state religions of village life—indeed the “religious” as such—to an irrational fetishization of the “reign of the absolute past”.²⁷³ His guiding presupposition is that very modern binary opposition of religion as separated over against the supposed profane nature of productive activity. He imposes a bourgeois view upon the self-transcendence of labor, construing it as nothing other than a bald capacity to negate given nature, casting the human will into a purely negative freedom, which for him could only be the inherently secularizing movement of productive forces themselves.²⁷⁴ According to Gauchet’s story, the emergence of humanity’s new sense of agency around the negative freedom obtained from developed tool use somehow immediately proved to be unbearable to primeval humans, with allegedly new tensions and anxieties perplexingly introduced into the collective psyche (the puzzle of how these alienations entered a social consciousness that had not yet experienced the antagonisms of class division is not discussed by Gauchet). Religion was then subsequently invented, as Gauchet claims, from a fear of change and thus as a sociopolitical repressive mechanism in order to avoid the new freedoms involved in the transcendence of the given and their penchant for instigating group conflict and dissent. This leads him to single out the essential preoccupation of pre-state religion with returning humanity’s emerging self-understanding back to its passive immersion in a leveling sense of opaque nature, through

²⁷³ Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of The World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 23–32.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27. “Something in their organization—something inherent to tools and language—removes humans from nature. Religion, in its original pure state, is the desire to merge with nature.” It would be one thing if Gauchet allowed a sense of “merging” as a production of a higher unity with nature, but he exclusively means a regressive reabsorption back into nature here.

myths of immemorial and unchangeable origins and their ritual conjuring through identical repetitions. The normative sense of the religious in relation to the modes of production is then always a negative one, stifling its creative forces.²⁷⁵

Yet, with the eventual Iron Age emergence of the state—which is the major historical event in human civilization for Gauchet—and its monopolizing of the divine, as well as the development of corresponding metaphysical thought-forms during the Axial Age, there was a progressive eroding of the religious.²⁷⁶ This erosion took place through a process of removing religious authority from its inaccessible primordial past and concentrating it into the present-time figures of kings and bureaucratic institutions, as well as articulating religious concepts in a more abstract yet rational and discursively mediated register. Once the power of the religious was pulled into present political forms and accessed through rational discourse—a process which both incarnated and abstracted the divine to the greatest possible extent—its inner self-contradictions were more clearly exposed, making it more publically questionable and inadvertently setting the worldly time of the present on course toward its own secular authority.²⁷⁷ That is, this trajectory of political manifestation and its abstract metaphysical discourse therein unexpectedly disembedded the sociopolitical consciousness of village life from its sacred order and toward a proto-secular trajectory.

Such a view, however, in assigning everything progressive to a negative secularizing drive, must deny the rich historical diversity of pre-state religious practices

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 28. “Everything is thus related back to the core elements of customary *permanence* and sacral *dependence*, which is the primordial essence of the religious. ... the real kernel of religious attitudes and thought lies in accepting the *external as the originating source and the unchangeable as law*.” Italics are Gauchet’s.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 43–46.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 130–161. Hence his emphasis on Christianity and the God-man conception of Jesus as the “religion for departing from religion.”

and views (not to mention the various forms of classical metaphysics as well), especially insofar as religions evinced a progressive orientation to horizons of agency other than ritualistic mimicry of an immemorial past. Moreover, in accounting for progress by recourse to a purely negative will, this account of historical movement rests content at the level of political voluntarism, thus mystifying a more dialectical and comprehensive view of the material interchange between society and nature.²⁷⁸ Religion is left unexplained since it is born inexplicably out of fear and expresses nothing other than an arbitrary political decision for illusion and repression, just as its political overcoming is equally unexplained as anything more than an unintended consequence of the arbitrary consolidation of political power in the state—but if humanity’s transformative relation to nature is set only in terms of negation then no sociocultural or political mediation is more valid than the other. Thus the account of metaphysics as a secularizing deconstruction of the allegedly inherent backwardness of religion, like the construal of metaphysics as pure ideology, remains a partial understanding that cannot account for the historical totality of material relations from which it was generated and by which it can be critically assessed. A progressively holistic trend toward universality within the metaphysical concepts of eternal life, however, is better explained as an extension of certain qualities advanced by the village commune’s social organization of labor and its religious consciousness, rather than always indiscriminately and arbitrarily deemed antithetical to such.

²⁷⁸ Thus in explaining why such a sweeping symbolic metamorphoses took place in religious life with the rise of the axial state, aside from his aforementioned descriptions above, Gauchet ultimately rests content with answering, “their sudden appearance remains a mystery”, hinging as it does on the imposed will of a despot. *Ibid.*, p. 44,

The Emergence of the Village Commune

Therefore, if the so-called “Axial” age, or the age of the “State’s emergence” within the ANE, was an attempt to reorganize society around new “transcendental visions” of the whole, as some recent accounts describe it, this then requires elaborating some basic features of the village commune’s self-transcending trajectories that both enabled, and were distorted by, such shifts.²⁷⁹ Three progressive qualities here must then be pointed out with regard to the village commune in its Near Eastern pre-state origins. Firstly, it is with the rise of the village commune that humanity not only emerged from the prehistory of the Paleolithic era and into the Neolithic era, but also began to surpass this latter age. The revolutionizing of horticulture and the domestication of animals within the village commune provided a permanent food source and freed up surplus labor for developing new productive and information technologies that would anticipate the advances of the Bronze and Iron Ages. With nature being transformed in new ways beyond anything possible by bands of hunters and gatherers, the village, then, brought to the fore labor’s anti-entropic essence—in subsisting through the village form as both a newly stable household and laboratory of innovation, humanity was now beginning to reproduce itself through the reproduction of the whole of nature in a new way, rather than

²⁷⁹ For those who have taken up Karl Jasper’s idea of the “Axial age” in terms of both the origination of the very institution of the state, as well as around corresponding “transcendental visions” see S. N. Eisenstadt, “The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics,” *European Journal of Sociology* 23.2 (1982): pp. 294–314; Robert Bellah, “What is Axial about the Axial Age?” *European Journal of Sociology* 46.1 (2005): pp. 69–87; and Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*. This discourse on the Axial age continues to suffer, among other things, from an inadequate, and almost absent, analysis of the socioeconomic sphere and class divisions, which emerged in striking form with the emergence of the state and its urban centers. Instead the axial shift is focused around intellectual ideas, which are often seen, if not as a free-floating cultural phenomenon, then only in relation to the sociopolitical arena, without seeing the constitutive factors at the level of the socioeconomic base. There is then a blindness to the extent in which some of the significant intellectual breakthroughs were conditioned by a certain emerging class-consciousness within the tributary formations as I will soon discuss.

surviving episodically from the flux of a given environment.²⁸⁰ This stability and inventiveness enabled, for the first time in history, enough social surplus product not only for advanced craft specialization but also for developing progressive social capacities by which to reorganize society itself toward higher levels of integrated complexity.

Secondly, the radical nature of this new social body in its integrated complexity was based in the development of new institutions of allocation and redistribution, yet without any political structures of top-down sovereignty.²⁸¹ The emergence of the village formation was brought forth through developing structures of communal ownership of the land and its periodic reallocation, collective organization of labor, the centralization of surplus and its redistribution, new storage systems as communal banks, and ceremonies around harvest seasons for more directly celebrating and sharing the fruits of labor.²⁸² Thus the village commune not only newly produced a significant social surplus but it also reproduced itself primarily as a new social system of rational allocation that reinvested this surplus back into cultivating the social capacities of its body of producers and their optimal relation to transforming nature.²⁸³ These are then the two major progressive qualities by which the village materially emerged as an enduring social formation, since without the production of social surplus or the ability to centralize and

²⁸⁰ V. Gordon Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), pp. 59–88. See also, Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, vol. 1, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), pp. 28–30.

²⁸¹ Marshall D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 95. In speaking of primitive “society without a Sovereign,” Sahlins however tends to suggest it is simply because the domestic mode of production is at a low level of organized development.

²⁸² Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, pp. 30–37.

²⁸³ It is with these innovations in productive relations around broadening institutions of redistribution that the village commune began to politically organize its socioeconomic body beyond the confines of strict kinship ties within small clan-based groups. See Igor M. Diakonoff, *The Paths of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 14.

rationally redistribute it back into reproducing the social body of labor, there could be no sustained creation of organized complexity.

The third quality pertains to how these revolutions in the forces and relations of production not only opened a radically new religious consciousness of human agency, but also how this new view dialectically mediated the rise and endurance of the village. To better understand this progressive religious involvement, however, we must first get a better idea of what compelled the shift toward a production of social surplus in the first place. Here, as elsewhere, the common assumption about labor as a bare efficient cause, which we have been challenging, continues its distorting influence within the literature on the Neolithic age. Thus in much of the discussion on the rise of the agricultural revolution and the village commune, the mode of subsistence production is assumed to be essentially bound to a path of least resistance, lacking an internal orientation toward producing for anything more than immediate needs, unless externally and irrationally compelled. The question then as to why relatively well-fed and leisured hunters and gatherers would take up the labor-intensive pursuit of agricultural production, as well as radically reorganize society, becomes an enigma. This assumption regarding productive activity has then led to reductive explanations of the original production of social surplus as an accident to human nature, either provoked solely by external environmental pressures or by an arbitrary ideological consciousness, thus obscuring any intelligible relation between religion and its material origins in the modes of production.

The standard theory of environmental pressure, which views the transition to agriculture as pushed externally by a late Paleolithic era dry period, was given a place of prominence by V. Gordon Childe. Childe claimed that this period of desiccation forced

mobile populations to settle down in Near Eastern areas concentrated around significant water sources. With other animals likewise congregating at these oases, and human populations subsequently growing, there was then a need to modify subsistence strategies according to a sedentary adaptation to the given environment, leading to the domestication of the nearby plants and animals.²⁸⁴ With this model the natural environment becomes the primary causal agent in forcing what is assumed to be static productive activity to meet its basic biological needs in another way. Religion, and culture in general, appear within this paradigm only to play a secondary role as reflexively and somewhat superfluously augmenting a functional adaptation to the environment.²⁸⁵ Yet, the main problem with this theory is that it cannot explain why earlier periods of similar environmental stress did not induce a similar response from affected human populations, as well as the fact that most early Neolithic village settlements initially took root in the hills of the Near East rather than primarily around the major water sources Childe identified. Such problems suggest that a certain cultural aptitude might have contributed more than originally thought to the change in the modes of production.

In the face of these difficulties and in light of the suggestion of cultural readiness, there has been a reactive tendency to swing the pendulum away from reductive materialist explanations and instead toward the opposite end of an equally reductive idealism along Weberian lines. This can be seen in the work of Jacques Cauvin who has

²⁸⁴ V. Gordon Childe, *The Most Ancient Near East: The Oriental Prelude to European Prehistory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), pp. 46–77.

²⁸⁵ Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, p. 179: “It is quite obvious that science did not, and could not, spring directly from either magic or religion. We have shown in detail that it originated in, and was at first identical with, the practical crafts. In so far as craft like that of healing or astronomy was annexed to religion it was sterilized of scientific value.”

put forward the thesis that culture, and religious consciousness more specifically, was the prime mover in the transition to agriculture and village life.²⁸⁶ Cauvin rightly highlights the rupture in the symbolic world at the beginning of the Neolithic age, a radical change in the form and content of art, architecture, and religious forms. No longer preoccupied with merely representing animals the religious symbols now take on the appearance of personified divinities that began to supersede local totemic and ancestral imagery still immersed in opaque nature—new creator goddesses and bull-shaped deities that transcend the rest of the animal hordes.²⁸⁷ This marks out a new consciousness of the whole in which humanity began to think of itself as in some way distinctively set in relation to a more perfect transcendent order organized around a projected “divine force”.²⁸⁸ Thus he points to a progressive value at the heart of pre-state religion that begins to newly express and encourage conscious cultivation of a distinctive human agency in transforming nature, moving humanity from “spectators of the natural cycles” and toward unique agents who “intervene as active producers”.²⁸⁹ Here we see Gauchet’s simplistic picture already being upset.

Yet, while Cauvin is right to highlight the transformative rather than adaptive nature of pre-state religion, and thus to emphasize its semi-autonomy in radically directing the reproduction of pre-state society, this autonomy gets stretched into a

²⁸⁶ Jacques Cauvin, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*, trans. Trevor Watkins (Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a good overview not only of Cauvin but of the various theories concerning the causality of the agricultural revolution see, M. A. Zeder, “Religion and the Revolution: The Legacy of Jacques Cauvin,” *Paleorient*, vol. 37.1 (2011), pp. 39–60.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* He points to the change from circular huts to square structures showing a new mindset around imposing order upon nature (p. 132). He also highlights the change in the art of the Fertile Crescent from no longer depictions of animal hordes such as gazelles and deer, but to animals that begin to take on human form (p. 17). And from this transformation, dating from around 9,500 to 9,000 BC, he finds the beginnings of the exalted mother goddess in clay figurines coupled with a prominent bull figure that eventually morphs into a masculine human form, anticipating the divine principles within later Iron and Axial age monotheisms (pp. 25–31).

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

rarefied a priori. Overly eager to avoid all crudely reductive materialisms, the religious for him expresses “a purely mental development” around a symbolic imagination that lacks any utility and is in no way a function of economic activity, though it orders the production and use of surplus for its non-economic aims.²⁹⁰ The new religio-cultural shift, in representing nature as that which should be transformed by human agency, is not then an expression originating in any way from the actual socioeconomic transformation of matter, but rather the development of a certain ideological mentality prior to such economic engagement. Thus the agricultural revolution was not a revolution born from an intentional economic strategy for transforming necessity, but a byproduct of a cultural “revolution in symbols”.²⁹¹ But unilaterally anchoring this material change as an accident to the development of humanity’s symbolic self-representation, which is itself materially

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 32. “This change, whose historical importance has been underlined because of the germ of all the later constructions of mythic thought of the Near East and the east Mediterranean that it contained, occurs at this initial stage as a purely mental development. It is out of the question to seek to derive it from some transformation of the material infrastructure, following a line of reasoning that has become too classical.” In fact, the religious in certain archaeological circles is defined precisely according to that modern prejudice as that which has no economic function, which also implies that the economic has no self-transcending orientation. Thus at prominent Neolithic sites in Southern Anatolia, such as Çatalhöyük and Göbekli Tepe, if an architectural structure or artifact seems to have no apparent material function it is immediately assigned a religious value as if the original inhabitants operated already with the clear division between their economic activity as if understood to be secular and a sacred religious activity, with the latter somehow referring to a symbolic and spiritual realm apart from the material. For a paradigm similar to Cauvin’s, as applied specifically to Göbekli Tepe, see Klaus Schmidt, “Göbekli Tepe—The Stone Age Sanctuaries: New Results of Ongoing Excavations with a Special Focus on Sculptures and High Reliefs,” *Documenta Praehistorica* XXXVII (2010): pp. 239–256. According to Schmidt, because the massive and unparalleled t-shaped pillars discovered there have yet no discernible domestic purpose they must have therefore served religious rituals, with an “overwhelming probability” that they were the first “monumental depiction of gods” (p. 254). Thus, it is from the religious desire for non-economic ritual ceremonies and their corresponding monuments and structures that social surplus was originally commanded and wild nature domesticated to provide for such. But the explanation of the agricultural revolution as an unintended consequence of religious pursuits, abstractly defined in a non-economic manner, leaves the original production of surplus as something completely irrational. Indeed those not inclined to see a progressive cultural value to the religious, but nevertheless accept its causal priority, will simply explain the agricultural revolution as nothing other than the machinations of proto-priestcraft and thus the beginnings of primitive accumulation. For a critique of imposing such a modern category of the abstractly religious, especially in assessing Çatalhöyük, see Webb Keane, “Marked, Absent, Habitual: Approaches to Neolithic Religion at Çatalhöyük,” *In the Emergence of Civilization: Çatalhöyük as a Case Study*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge University Press, 2010)

²⁹¹ Cauvin, *Birth of the Gods*, pp. 22–34.

inexplicable, leaves historical development as such to the mysterious comings and goings of an abstract spirit and its cultural whims.

A more plausible explanation, however, must take into account both environmental and cultural factors as equally at play within a dialectical movement toward integrated complexity. Here Robert Braidwood's thesis remains most commendable. Noting the emergence of village life within the hills that border the Fertile Crescent where climatic change was less severe, and wild cereals as well as domesticable animals were in abundance, he finds the main causal source of the agricultural revolution within the internal perfective dynamisms of productive activity and its opportunistic nature.²⁹² Given suitable and relatively stable natural conditions, human labor tends toward greater knowledge of its own capacities in perfecting its relation to its environment, thus suggesting that settlement and domestication were the natural outgrowth of self-transcending economic strategies toward a more optimally organized environment—i.e. the natural perfective outworking of simply seeking to make a better life in which humanity's creative powers can be multiplied and diversified. But for Braidwood the development of productive forces also necessarily entails a corresponding cultural evolution that fosters its innovative drive, so that the revolution could have occurred only when the developed complexity of productive activity met up with the right environment and cultural mediation.²⁹³

Here no stilted modern dichotomy between religion and economy is needed to make sense of the phenomenon. Rather, the new religious expressions are both an

²⁹² Robert Braidwood, "The Agricultural Revolution," *Scientific American* 203 (1960): pp. 130–148.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 134: "The food-producing revolution seems to have occurred as the culmination of the ever increasing cultural differentiation and specialization of human communities. Around 8000 BCE the inhabitants of the hills around the Fertile Crescent had come to know their habitat so well that they were beginning to domesticate the plants and animals they had been collecting and hunting."

outgrowth of the socioeconomic transformation of necessity as well as their required sociocultural mediation for extending and further cultivating the new sense of agency. Because the socioeconomic activity in question is already understood as a dialectical movement of self-transcendence, which is not explicable simply by appeal to environmental impacts on the biological needs of the stomach, the religio-cultural revolution that Cauvin highlights is then materially situated within a historical movement that relativizes its autonomy, yet without rejecting its semi-independence or denying its significantly active influence.

The normative sense of the religious can then be said to have originated as a revolutionary expression of the raised consciousness from labor's revolutionary transformation of nature. Marxists should therefore give pause to the fact that with the first revolution of the modes of production upon which the rest of human history is an outworking, there also arrives a revolution in human consciousness and self-expression within that new cultural expression called the religious. The religious here arrives precisely as marking out the human on its trajectory of rising distinctly to the eternal, rather than sinking it back into an eternally subsuming past, remaining within and as a homogenized horde. This is then to reverse Gauchet's thesis, suggesting instead that the normative relationship of the religious to its modes of production is that of facilitating its transformative power, envisioning a whole in which human creative agency begins to more clearly recognize itself.

Thus with the emergence of the village, a new form of the religious appeared more directly from and for the progressive socioeconomic transformation of necessity. Though its connections were originally articulated somewhat obliquely around the newly

discovered powers of fertility and organic growth, this religious vision nevertheless took off from a growing consciousness of the distinctive transformative capacities of labor in cultivating and perfecting the organic motions of nature. With its remaking of the environment around new natures and organized surplus, the social body of the village allowed humanity to begin defining itself in concrete practice, and thus in subsequent symbolic thought forms, as more than a mortal animal of only local and particular concerns. The basis in experience was thus provided in this material development by which humanity could begin to see and relate to the excess potentialities of life as other than dark uncontrollable forces, relating itself to the eternal in new symbolic and mythical notions of an attainable future perfection around the qualities of a positive self-subsistence, rather than the eternal being locked up in an immemorial past, murky chthonic realm, or shadowy ancestral power (even though these images will never absolutely disappear).²⁹⁴ Thus, it is no coincidence or great mystery of spirit that with the establishment of the village commune there appeared for the first time in history symbolic projections of human activity around new ideal forms of divine creators, forms that more directly personified creative qualities in transforming and transcending given nature.

Moreover, these visions of human agency actively involved within a new whole, ordered and oriented the institution of the sanctuary or proto-temple as it arose primarily from the establishment of communal storage and surplus granaries and their need to be

²⁹⁴ The point here is not to deny that both primitive religious forms as well as contemporary manifestations do indeed occupy themselves only with an eternal past and its conservative or repressive communal outworking. Rather it is to challenge Gauchet's interpretation of the "kernel" of the religious as essentially regressive, which cannot account for its own conditions of possibility, by situating it in light of the kernel as a progressive extension of creativity and its opening visions of the new, a fundamentally positive and semi-autonomous movement as that kernel or core condition in the first place from which any other form can possibly regress.

more rationally organized.²⁹⁵ The temple complex eventually emerged as a site not only for cultic activities around protecting and regulating surplus allocation, but for producing knowledge, technological advance, and a greater consciousness of the totality of qualitative activities by which to develop higher social forms of organization. The pursuit of rational allocation of social surplus within the emerging temple complex led to the development of writing and set the way toward the abstract thinking of mathematics.²⁹⁶ Empirical observations of the seasons and celestial movements initiated a proto-astronomy that not only introduced calendric systems by which to optimally organize the social relation to nature, especially in cultivating crops, but also prompted wider questions of humanity's involvement in relation to the cosmic whole and its motions.²⁹⁷ Had the corresponding religious consciousness and its cultural practices not been an originally constructive force that both expressed and actively organized relations of production around more closely extending the forces of production, the village form would not have been able to advance toward greater forms of organized social

²⁹⁵ "The amount of foodstuff needed for the subsistence of the community and the surplus used as an exchange commodity in various transactions was stored in community granaries and was most probably protected by various religious ordinances and rites. These were prescribed and performed by the sanctuary. Foundation deposits, the annual ritual cleaning and the symbolic protection of the storerooms can probably be regarded as such practices. One site which should definitely be mentioned in this respect is Yarim Tepe where ritual practices were documented by the presence of red-painted quern-stones, foundation deposits (vessels) and sacrificial pits ... Similar evidence has been reported from Tell es-Sawean and Catal Huyuk, where figurines, interpreted as foundation deposits were found in the granaries. This implies that a sacral organization undertook the protection of the community granaries and the commodities stored therein ... temples appear to have become a centre for the accumulation of the social surplus." J. Makkay, "The Origins of the 'Temple-Economy' as Seen in the Light of Prehistoric Evidence," *Iraq*, vol. 45, no. 1, (Spring, 1983), p. 3.

²⁹⁶ With the growth of the village and eventually of cities, temples required a system of accounting for better regulating its centralizing organization and redistribution of social surplus. See A. Bernard Knapp, *The History and Culture of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988).

²⁹⁷ Childe, *Man Makes Himself*, pp. 143–179. In discussing the connection within ancient Mayan religion and astronomy, Evan Hadingham notes that the older prejudice of scholars that religion held back the development of astronomy is no longer tenable. Rather the religious served not only as an impetus for developing the science of astronomy but the development of religious dogmas in many ways facilitated more precise methods of astronomical observation and recording of data. Hadingham, *Early Man and the Cosmos* (New York: Walker, 1984), p. 231.

complexity, let alone sustain its initial form. Accordingly, as Childe admits, “The accumulation of a substantial social surplus in the temple treasuries – or rather granaries – was actually the occasion of the cultural advance that we have taken as the criterion of civilization.”²⁹⁸

Thus the village commune’s production and reproduction of a social surplus is the basis for developing any higher social formation. But the key to further compelling and organizing the social surplus of the village is within its religio-cultural mediation, since it is with the developing religious vision of, and practice around, the new sense of the whole and its emergent qualities that the progressively rational germ of organized redistribution originally began to develop. This is not to romanticize a specific institutional and ideological form of religion per se within pre-state village life, as if right from the start the religious, redistributive, and productive forces were at once perfectly and self-reflexively aligned in their social aims. Rather I would like to single out only the incipient progressive trajectory or directionality toward their potential unity within the original religious form of social consciousness: an initial arc, set out from the new social transformation of nature, toward increasingly grasping that perfectible whole by which the constitutive value of the social body of labor begins to be more transparently and directly comprehended as the object of production and redistribution.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that this growing consciousness of totality around a transformative agency first emerged from the communal mode of subsistence production according to its own internal self-transcending drive and religious vision, without necessarily anticipating or being ineluctably drawn toward the state-form as its

²⁹⁸ V. Gordon Childe, *Social Evolution*, (London: Collins, 1963), pp.155-156.

final cause.²⁹⁹ That is, as an emergent form of self-reflexivity within a pre-class social body, this consciousness could in no way be attributed yet to the machinations of class antagonism. The new sense of the whole arising around village structures of production, centralization and allocation, therefore, required no inevitable outworking within the later deformations of statecraft and its more specific tailoring of a priestly class to serve its interests. But every subsequent social formation made possible by the village commune will need to extend, modify or manipulate this expanding consciousness and its evolving sense of the whole in order to provide a rationale for its share of the social surplus.

The Tributary State and its Ideological Metaphysics

As mentioned above, the emergence of the state should not be seen as a necessary completion of the communal mode of production, as if it were the inevitable outgrowth of its progressive structures of production, centralized redistribution, and their new sense of the whole.³⁰⁰ The later formation of the tributary state within the ANE Iron and Axial Ages is rather the contingent outgrowth of class conflict that devolved from the original allocative trajectories.³⁰¹ With the growth of temple estates as increasingly semi-

²⁹⁹ As Makkay aptly sums up: “The other debatable issue is why the state, an organization existing already at the close of the fourth millennium, did not gain total control over economic activities. This latter can perhaps be resolved by assuming that sanctuaries, i.e. some sort of religious organization, had already existed prior to the emergence of the state. It would appear that the temple organization was the continuation of the religious organization or organizations of the tribal system. The centralized state, a radically different organization as compared to the earlier tribal system based on kinship, probably emerged as a result of various crises. The continuous existence of sanctuaries and temples since the Early Neolithic thus afforded them a priority in economic matters over the state organization. This would imply that certain characteristic features of the temple economy must already have existed before the formation of the state.” “The Origins of the ‘Temple-Economy’”, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ But nor should it be seen simply as essentially the function of exploitation. See, Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode*, p. 34.

³⁰¹ The following very brief account of the rise of the ANE tributary state draws heavily on Roland Boer’s assessment in *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), pp. 132–145. Points of difference in my assessment of the role of religio-cultural mediation and their ideological forms will be spelled out below.

autonomous centers of power there emerged a greater division of labor that also allowed for those regulating the social surplus to become further removed from the social body of production. This increasing separation eventually led to the appearance of a non-productive class that commanded social surplus without reinvesting within the body of production. Newly divided social formations arose around class interests, with temple estates soon becoming identified with royal palatine estates and their concentration within city fortifications.

The greatest need in maintaining the estates of the non-productive class, so that they could continue to invest free time in reproducing their cultural and military hegemony, was surplus labor to work their lands, which could only be extracted from the village commune and facilitated through debt bondage. Governing mechanisms were developed to arbitrate the divisive conflicts between the city's temple and palatine estates and their productive base in the village. However, the more powerful class eventually usurped these mechanisms, giving rise to greater consolidations of political and military power in what would eventually become the tributary form of the state.³⁰² Yet, because the state, like the temple and palace, was always dependent upon the social surplus generated from the village commune it had to always draw from and mimic the religio-cultural mediation of their redistributive structures to justify its existence. Thus to round out our initial claim that the tributary state was not a mode of production, we have now more fully situated it as an accident in relation to the priority of the village commune.

³⁰² As Roland Boer emphasizes, the emergence of the state, especially here in its ANE tributary form, is not simply the evolutionary outgrowth of prestate mechanisms of centralization and distribution or the organic culmination of stages in the evolution of group leadership and authority. Rather, he argues, the state emerges from institutional mechanisms deployed for reconciling social conflicts concerning centralization and distribution. The state mechanisms as such, then, are not necessarily coterminous with the exploiting class, but rather a tool that is only later forcibly seized and developed by and for a ruling class once the conflicts seem to be irresolvable by other means. Boer, *Sacred Economy*, pp. 134–136.

Understanding the ideological aspect of tributary metaphysics will require tracing out how it reforms the religious consciousness around concealing and inverting this accidental relation so as to justify its expropriations, especially of surplus labor.

That tributary states within the ANE remained contingent upon both the village commune and its religio-cultural mediation of production is aptly captured by Roland Boer when he defines the basic mode of production of this period as a “sacred economy”.³⁰³ This term distinguishes the mode of production within the Iron and Axial Ages of the ANE from any anachronistic sense of a purely secular market and its generalization of commodity production, which nowhere existed at this time.³⁰⁴ Rather, the notion of the “sacred economy” confirms our foregoing analysis, signifying that the ends of production continued to be embedded within communal needs which were basically ordered in some sense around perfecting the community itself as to higher forms of subsisting. Thus the ends of producing and reproducing the community were articulated and comprehended through a projected sense of a perfect whole, a sacred order oriented around ideal agencies and cosmic final causes in which the community to some degree shared.

Boer, however, highlights the notion of “sacred economy” more so to signal this projection of a perfectible whole or, what he calls the “theological metaphorization of

³⁰³ Boer, *Sacred Economy*, p. 5.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–27. Boer rightly emphasizes that there was indeed commercial trade to some degree at this time, over against the tendency he sees in Karl Polanyi to deny any trace of a market within the ANE. But his larger point is to emphasize that trade and markets were nowhere established and functioning in the capitalist sense that Adam Smith had ascribed to them: as if the desire for commodity exchange were the most basic, natural and neutral fact of the economic as such, and markets were set up purely to facilitate this individualistic entrepreneurial spirit of exchange. Rather, ANE local markets were always embedded within and determined by communal needs. Even the emerging petty commodity markets around the Greco-Roman empires were always products of these imperial states and their communal interests rather than something developed around a spirit of commerce prior to the state and for which the state subsequently arose to help facilitate. Therefore, to reiterate points made above, while trade obviously took place, production was always predominantly organized around communal reproduction and its redistributive structures.

allocation”, as an internal cultural mechanism by which production and redistribution were nevertheless determined in an ideological way. The key function of these “theological metaphorizations” within the sacred economy was to render intelligible, through their projected imaginary resolutions, those material contradictions met within the socioeconomic body.³⁰⁵ That is, if one wants to understand the structures of redistribution at play within any ANE social formation, one must then follow how the ideological representations of the sacred comprehend material contradictions so as to subtly (or not so subtly) justify its regime of either allocation or extraction. This helpfully shows the significance of the emerging concepts of eternal life, which were initially highlighted above with Amin, by more thoroughly contextualizing their integral function within the sacred economy’s necessary mediation of production. Yet Boer, like Amin, does not provide substantive criteria by which to critically assess the various “theological metaphorizations” as to why they were so pervasively internalized and how they might have also functioned as other than purely ideas of the ruling class—i.e. he gives no grounds as to why they were necessarily, even if only partially, generated from within the independent productive base in the first place.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Roland Boer, “The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel,” *SJOT*, 21.1 (2007): p. 43. See also *Sacred Economy*, p. 51, where he also refers to these projections as a “responsive metaphorization”, signifying its role within any cultural response to socioeconomic tensions.

³⁰⁶ He does suggest that this theological metaphorization is also a creative response to real contradictions, thus emphasizing its inherent ambiguities and ambivalences. Moreover, he privileges those responsive metaphors used for allocative regimes within the village commune. Therefore, he wants to affirm something of those imaginary projections that are transparent to the pre-state social body of labor. But Boer nowhere critically engages with questions about the necessity of such ideal projections, whether they are always purely metaphors and imaginary in a baseless way, or whether, in some manner or to a certain degree, they draw from real intuitions and objective tendencies within labor’s movement toward a whole that can be more or less signified in a non-metaphorical ideal. The assumption seems to be that all theological metaphorizations are ultimately dispensable imagery, religious projections conditioned by the collective ignorance or fear of a previous era, if not entirely the fabrications of the ruling class. But, identifying ruling ideas as from the ruling class whose success relies on their internalization within the social body of labor does not explain why some ideas are more easily internalized than others. That some ruling ideas are deeply internalized suggests that ruling ideas are only efficacious insofar as they partially

As I laid out above, the village communal mode of subsistence production and its religio-cultural mediation, in their self-transcending thrust, provided the initial intuitions of humanity's relation to the eternal: a relation born out from the transformation of necessity by the creative movements of a new social body of production. Therefore, referring to modes of production as a "sacred economy" involving some form of "theological metaphorization" for its rationalization of production and allocation, simply reflects the fact that the production of surplus is here already generating qualitatively new ideals for its use in overcoming material contradictions, thus disclosing more of labor's anti-entropic essence and its perfective trajectory to be further articulated and cultivated. Any regime of extraction, in ideologically reforming the religio-cultural mediation of surplus, must then appeal in some way to this objective trajectory and its felt intuitions already generated from the mode of production in order to make a more convincing claim for their appropriate realization within the aims of its non-productive class. The criteria, then, by which to critically analyze the projected ideals of any sacred economy as true is the extent to which their discursive formations continue toward a more self-reflexive grasp of the social body of labor, rendering more visible its creative negentropic trajectories as the constitutive site of participation in the eternal. The overarching question to be asked of the sacred economies should then be, in what projected ideal of the eternal are the material contradictions to life—most importantly, the fact of death—

articulate objective intuitions already being generated within labor. Indeed, Boer's whole project seems to be oriented around continually reiterating the facile fact that religion can be both deeply revolutionary as well as extremely reactionary, simply stating the given fact that it can be a *pharmakon*. But doing no more than banally concluding from these differing valences that "the two are inseparable" negates any attempt to actually explain why some religious forms are more revolutionary than others which would require making a claim to a normative connection between religion and modes of production. That is, it lacks a critical labor theory of religion, merely content with describing how religion has been used. See Boer's series on Marxism and Religion, but especially his *Criticism of Earth: On Marxism and Theology*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), p. 322.

comprehended in a non-imaginary way by which the self-transcending movement of the laboring body becomes intelligible to itself?

That traces of the original intuitions from the prior social body of labor are necessarily harbored within the sacred economies of ancient Egypt and Greece can be seen in their identification of the eternal with the qualitative perfection of life in itself, rather than something wholly outside natural life. Thus within the Egyptian idea of eternal life we find immortality coupled with one of the first appearances of the notion of resurrection, here signifying the creative power of life to perpetually renew itself and rise again. Osiris, as the resurrected one, is the god who was dismembered and yet raised whole again by Isis, the goddess of fertility (a mythical plot that will later be repeated in similar form within the Canaanite myth of Baal's resurrection by his cohort, Anath). This mythical drama signified the birth of Egypt, which itself was perpetually played out within the well-known cycles of the agricultural seasons as they depended upon the predictable rising floods of the Nile River.³⁰⁷ Thus the concept of eternal life reflected the intuitions of its agrarian base in referring to life's wholeness and continuation despite the fact of death; and more specifically, the identification of resurrection with the organic motions of nature appealed to the productive knowledge of life's inexhaustible creative potency fostered within village life.

Within Greek thought the traces are both more varied as well as more substantive. Of course, it is within Greek philosophy that we find the first systematic assessment and exclusion of the activity of actual laborers in relation to the eternal.³⁰⁸ That Greek

³⁰⁷ Alan Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), pp. 39–43.

³⁰⁸ The classical form of this ideological exclusion as represented in the thought of Plato and Aristotle was briefly spelled out in chapter 1.

philosophers felt the need to directly respond to and define the reality of physical labor is itself a trace of the social body of labor coming to recognize the contributions of its craft specialization to a widening cultural knowledge base, and thus of its nature as a constitutive class as well. Yet, while openly excluding physical labor as a perfective standpoint, which we will soon discuss in more detail, Greek thinkers nevertheless could not stop talking about the positive qualities intuited from labor, though displacing its intuitions by a more abstract conceptualization. The substantive trace of labor's intuitions of eternal life from its transformative engagement with nature can be seen in the retention, within major forms of Greek thought, of its anti-entropic values around the creative act as the very principle of the cosmos.

This is especially clear with Plato and Aristotle who variously identified the divine with craftsmanship itself as the ordering principle of the cosmos. The motion of the cosmos is understood on the basis of a living being ordered to its own eternal self-organizing perfection, emphasizing that wherever and whenever possible its nature will create order according to the principle of its own beneficent artistry. Thus in the *Timaeus* Plato refers back to the cause of the cosmos as a creative act itself, brought about by the demiurge as that perfect craftsman, "the best of ever-existing intelligibles".³⁰⁹ Here the creative anti-entropic movement of life for itself through labor is reflected back into the work of a demiurge, identifying the capacity for creative organization as an eternal form in which all reality is grounded. In this way Plato's divine architect hardly conceals the fact that the idea of the transcendental perfection of eternal life, which brings into being

³⁰⁹ *Timaeus* 37a. For a fine analysis of Plato's *Timaeus* that elaborates a teleological orientation similar to Aristotle's physics, thus showing the centrality of craftsmanship for both thinkers despite the common assumption of their greater contrast, see Thomas Kjeller Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy: A Study of the Timaeus-Critias* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

and renders the world intelligible, is projected from the perfective movements of craft in organizing a whole. Neoplatonism will later make this connection more evident in notions of the active side of the intellect in coming to know the whole as a kind of participating in the creative movement of the whole.

This projection from craft is even more evident with Aristotle in that the ideal of craftsmanship is understood more explicitly and extensively as a final cause internally ordering the whole of nature. The order of being is drawn into its completion by the self-perfection of life for itself, that final cause for which all things participate in their own way, according to their own characteristic activity. The intelligibility of things, therefore, is situated within the trajectory of their drive toward self-perfection determined according to their specific *ergon* (i.e. function, work, task); and the understanding only acquires concepts of anything by actively abstracting from their evolving operative movements to their perfectible form.³¹⁰ That is, knowledge of anything is produced only through actively participating in its perfective work and in some sense cooperatively raising that thing toward its completion, so that the trace of the hands in continuing the emergent movement of nature by organizing a more perfectly intelligible order comes into view here.³¹¹ Thus Aristotle's entire thought-world, oriented as it is around act and potency explicated by the concepts of *telos*, *dunamis*, *kinesis*, *entelecheia*, *energeia*, *morphe*,

³¹⁰ See especially *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b–1098b. Hence Aquinas's previously quoted paraphrase of Aristotle's thought in his *Ethics*: "the producer actually producing is in some way the work produced."

³¹¹ The Aristotelian notion of the active intellect, which produces intelligible content approximating to perfection only by materially engaging and abstracting forms from sensible reality, can be seen as a displaced talk of the basic organizing motions of manual labor with its material reality now in terms of mental activity.

ergon, etc., evinces more directly its foundational basis in the experience of labor's active cultivation of nature's latent potentials for perfection.³¹²

The mere fact that these mythologies and metaphysics abstract to a vision of a perfect whole in part from the new qualitative trajectories generated by the prior laboring body is not ideological as such. It simply indicates their reliance upon the village mode of production.³¹³ The ideological aspect rather resides in the fact that the intuitions of a perfectible whole are extracted from the social body of labor in such a way that its priority is concealed rather than further disclosed. We must then look more closely at the common ideals of perfection insofar as they are represented within a cyclical or circular form, a closed figure that necessarily denies the active material additions of the laboring body and instead suggests its essential mediation through the priority of the state and the non-productive activities of its ruling class.

The key mechanism upon which these figures of inversion turn, however, can be seen more clearly in how the material contradiction of death is ideologically represented according to the non-productive class' imaginary relation to such as if death were a non-contradictory necessity to perfecting life in itself. This is the ideological element of giving death a meaning that in turn legitimates a social form. It is thus that ideological

³¹² Aristotle does not hesitate to use the labor process, especially in terms of craft and architectural building, as an example for accessing questions of not only value and meaning, but the actuality of being itself, especially as elaborated throughout *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*.

³¹³ Thus for the Egyptians and especially the Greeks, ends of production were always thought in terms of reproducing a community of excellence. Indeed, Aristotle will at least pay lip service to the idea of a polity that includes the total social body. Thus he rightly recognizes that a polis so ordered around the empty universality of commercial exchange would no longer be ruled by the pursuit of perfected communal whole but rather by those with property and their ability to purchase power, thus excluding the right of the multitude to participation in communal life (*Politics* 1283b13, b27). While Aristotle of course narrowed the sense of the perfect whole around his aristocratic interests, he at least entertained a theory of a mixed-constitution democracy whereby the whole social body, including those with no property, is empowered at the legal, deliberative level in determining the reproduction of the polis. For a critical yet balanced account of Aristotle's democratic politics as still marked by a dim recognition of the class struggle for justice, see De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, pp. 69–75.

element from which class position is more clearly exposed, since the conceptually impoverished and narrow form of their projected ideal of perfection, insofar as it is conceived of as needing death, indicates a widening detachment from the productive base wherein the basic confrontation of death within the social body is felt and known as a real contradiction to life's perfection that could only be resolved in a material and social way. Moreover, this imaginary relation is also the fulcrum that discloses the state interests in reforming the representation of eternal life in a way that deactivates the emerging agential standpoint of productive activity in its negentropic qualities while nevertheless retaining something of their perfective ideals. Once the relation to death is no longer represented as a contingent contradiction opposing the perfection of life for itself in its social transformation, an ideal of perfection then remains but as a formal abstraction without any reference to the constitutive value of its social body of labor. The fundamental value of this prior body in its constitutive relation to the eternal instead gets displaced to some other agent, activity, or process outside the productive act. Now redefined as a necessarily mortal functionary, peripheral to some other sacred mediator, the laboring body's intuitions of eternal life then become rearticulated in such a way that it can no longer comprehend itself as the central site for overcoming the obstacles to this perfection, and thus no longer the principle object of reinvesting the social surplus.

Hence, for the Egyptian vision of the perfect whole the point was to find within death the opportunity to more fully fit back into the cycles of nature. The resurrection of Osiris signified not the overcoming of death as such but a remaining in balance with death. He was a symbol projected from a static representation of nature's given cycles eternalized to the point in which life and death are viewed as one and the same.

Moreover, since Osiris remained in the underworld as a kind of everlasting inorganic bedrock upon which all organic cycles of change were made possible and regulated, the aim was to identify in death with his royal body. This static representation of eternal life was therefore a theological metaphorization that confirmed the royal house of the state in its supposed permanence as the prior and ultimate basis upon which all village life and its dependent seasonal fluxes are predictably given.³¹⁴ Indeed it was Osiris who provided new vegetation and taught the Egyptians agriculture, thus constituting their social body in its given civilized form.³¹⁵

Moreover, attaining eternal life through identification with Osiris meant achieving a perfect imitation of his foundational inorganic stasis, which is why the dead body provided not an obstacle to the perfection of life for itself but the greatest occasion to return to immortality from the realm of change. Death meant rising again with Osiris, but only in the underworld; that is, as long as the dead body could be thoroughly embalmed by state-sponsored Osirian priests, as well as ritualistically and monumentally entombed in the airtight chambers of pyramids.³¹⁶ This of course meant that the Pharaoh, and only those wealthy enough to be similarly embalmed and buried within his Necropolis, achieved immortality.³¹⁷ For the rest, a chance to relate temporarily to eternal life in the

³¹⁴ Segal, *Life After Death*, pp. 54–55. Although, in the Middle Kingdom this eternal stasis will become identified more with the stars than bedrock, a celestial theme that will eventually endure throughout Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman thought.

³¹⁵ In life the Pharaoh was identified with the god Horus who was the son of Osiris and Isis, but in death he became identified with Osiris. Jason Thompson, *A History of Egypt: From Earliest Times to Present*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), p. 33. Also, Osiris's resurrection recurs only in the underworld, while it is the grain that rises again within the material world as a result of his resurrection. Segal, *Life After Death*, p. 43.

³¹⁶ Egyptians did not have a lust for the event of death, nor sought to hasten its arrival. Rather they saw death as a natural extension of life, another form of life in which a transition occurs toward a more glorified existence no longer subjected to the vagaries of organic changes. See Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity*, (London: Routledge, 1999): "Death was an opportunity to reassemble life, with all of the threatening elements removed, in unity with Osiris" p. 29.

³¹⁷ Segal, *Life After Death*, pp. 55–56. While eligibility for eternal life eventually opened to the masses, which some have called a "democratization of the afterlife" this was still based upon application with the

person of royal divinity was simply provided through the institution of the *corvée*, a forced tax in labor necessary for the state to extract the massive amounts of social surplus for building the Necropolis.³¹⁸

This vision of the perfectible whole, for which the living body is only fully intelligible in relation to the eternal as a passively mummified body, was not simply a peripheral matter of funerary practices and afterlife speculations. The construction of the Necropolis was not just a monument of massive proportions for memorializing kings, but more so the very means of physically establishing the symbolically retrojected priority and ontological absoluteness of the state as manifested in the Pharaoh's eternally fixed body. Thus it was a more fundamental attempt to reconstruct the social totality around a reformed cultural memory that suppressed and concealed any sense of historical agency within its prior social body of labor. Consequently, for Egyptian ideology, as Jon Davies succinctly states, "there was no eschatology, no apocalypse, no collective cataclysm, because there was no crisis. Death was life."³¹⁹ It is because the sacred economy hinged as it did on the imaginary relation to death as a non-contradiction, that flows of social surplus could then be ideologically rationalized away from reinvesting within the socially creative qualities of living labor, and instead toward reproducing and maintaining the

state and by purchase and observance of its proper funerary practices. The assumption was still the same that the embodiment of eternal life was in the embalmed body. It was only after the royal funerary rites were made all too commonplace through entrepreneurial pressures in reducing its costs, with the underworld of immortality apparently becoming too crowded by the average sort, that Egyptian literature took on the idea of a postmortem judgment to assess eternal life also according to moral achievement throughout a lifetime.

³¹⁸ Much of the surplus labor was that of the peasantry from the village, extracted during the flooding season, when agricultural production slowed. Because of the ability to enforce such great amounts of compulsory labor as a national tax, ancient Egypt did not contain a strong institution of slave labor where labor was entirely the property of a master, except in the case of war captives. For greater technical details of the temporary, though long-term, worker villages set up around the Necropolis for pyramid construction see, Morris L. Bierbrier, *Tomb-Builders of the Pharaohs*, (Cairo, Egypt: The American University Press, 1982).

³¹⁹ Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, p. 29.

feigned priority and façade of eternal stasis within the state-form.³²⁰ How else could such enormous amounts of surplus labor be conscripted and allocated toward the non-productive aims of building a society around an elitist Necropolis, if the stasis of death was no longer imagined as an opportunity for perfecting life but a contradiction to be socially overcome?

Thus in Pharaonic Egypt the non-productive class's far-removed and imaginary relation to death is given such an obvious ideological representation, and so overtly used without subtlety, in submitting living labor to reproducing the sacred as a fetishized object of dead labor. Yet, Mesopotamian kingdoms contemporaneous with ancient Egypt also upheld the ontological priority of the state and justified its tributary mechanisms through similarly conspicuous ideological attempts at reforming cultural memory so as to conceal its constitutive dependence upon the village base. Creation accounts, such as the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, depict gods with whom the kings are associated, continually at war with personified forces of death and chaos. Such a cosmic struggle describes no overcoming of death, but rather a cyclical pattern that continually requires divine violence in balancing the countervailing forces of death, to the point where the forces of life and death become indistinguishable. It is through this perpetual war that various gods, through the sacrifice of other gods, came to clear, cultivate, and make habitable all agricultural lands, providing the foundational labor upon which present civilization is

³²⁰ “The fact that the king and an exploitative elite could command nearly all the available surplus resources of Egypt through taxation and assembly of royal corvée labor and apply it to pyramid building is testimony not just to the power of the central government and the efficiency of its highly developed bureaucracy but also to a widely shared ideology about the nature of society and how it should function.” Thompson, *A History of Egypt*, p. 34.

based.³²¹ Weary of continual toil and conflict, however, these deities eventually reached a compromise in some primordial past by creating humanity as mortal servants to continue their labor and provide them with food. Thus humanity in its capacity as a social body of labor can only comprehend itself as a disposable food producer for royal/divine beings.³²²

This Mesopotamian identification of labor with a servile nature thus marks the initial development of a common tributary ideology around labor as an essentially cursed affair, containing in no way the means of approximating to the perfection of eternal life—which was reserved for the luxurious estates of kings and gods—since it was strictly the function of a fallen mortal world. The best one could do is work dutifully for an estate and thus gain some of its protection. Sacrificial offerings of surplus to the gods, residing exclusively in the palatine-temple complex, were therefore not only justified on the basis of this ideological inversion, but consumed whole by their representatives without redistribution to the productive class.³²³ Like the myth of Osiris, therefore, the social body outside the state is ideologically represented as a necessarily mortal product that can find its only source of life and protection in the state. Rendering death a natural and normative necessity to be accepted in light of the whole thus provided a common Egyptian and Mesopotamian ideological hinge by which to reorder the religio-cultural

³²¹ Within the Mesopotamian period gods were increasingly depicted along the lines of a consolidated absolute power to be feared. See A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 176.

³²² W. G. Lambert, “Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jan Quaegebeur (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1994): pp. 191–201. Lambert emphasizes that in Sumerian and Babylonian literature in general, humanity is portrayed as being created to feed the gods, and even their blood rightly belongs to these deities.

³²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200. This unproductive use of sacrificial offerings under the guise of a projected deity is exposed in the extended Book of Daniel 14:1–22 in which Daniel critically inquires as to whether it is the deity Bel who is really eating the food whole, and subsequently sets a trap to identify the real culprits within the priestly class.

mediation of social surplus away from perfecting the community of producers and toward sustaining the non-productive class of rulers.³²⁴

Moving beyond the archaic state and its divine kings, and into the later imperial states of the Axial Age, we find that Greco-Roman thought shares no preoccupation with the static dead body as the site of eternal life. And gone are overt appeals to myths of anthropomorphic gods creating humanity as servants.³²⁵ Greek philosophy, of course, often had recourse to Homeric gods, but in critically analyzing these myths it ushered in a new theoretical consciousness, with its more nuanced and abstract categories, as well as more developed hierarchical divisions within its conceptualizations of nature. Yet, the themes of creation as a fall and the curse of labor as toil, and necessarily servile, will gain a systematic articulation that perpetuates, at a more sophisticated level, the elision of the pre-state social body of labor from cultural memory.

As was mentioned above, Greek thinkers understood something of the creative act as the perfective principle of the cosmos. Nonetheless, insofar as this was articulated

³²⁴ Referring to the Early Dynastic period of the Sumerian city-states, Liverani states: “Redistribution was now too unbalanced to be a mere centralization of reciprocal relations (such as the exchange of gifts and services). Therefore, it was conceptualized as an investment of present commodities for a future return (which is also the main aim of offerings and sacrifices to the gods). The community, believing that it was supporting the gods to its own advantage, then applied the same ideology to support the ruling elite.” *Ancient Near East*, p. 108. See also, J.N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1992). In referring to this devolution of redistributive structures within the Old Babylonia temple-palatine complex, Postgate writes, “as in the temples of contemporary Egypt, many of these posts became sinecures, the tenure of which could be passed on, whether by inheritance, sale or even rental. Borrowing a term from medieval Europe, Assyriologists refer to such offices with their perquisites as ‘prebends’.” p. 125.

³²⁵ Homeric myths still claimed that some gods birthed humans, and while Plato will still make reference to such myths in accounting for the creation of humans as a concession from the gods to mix elements, we are referring here to the Axial Age philosophers who began to theoretically abstract from these mythic gods to rational principles and orders. Moreover, as Richard Seaford points out, the Homeric myths themselves were substantially different from the Mesopotamian epics in that the gods did not simply produce humans for brute service nor demanded much in terms of sacrifice. He thus suggests their more nuanced interactions and conflicts within the divine pantheon as well as with humans disclose a greater transparency to their originating social consciousness, rather than as strictly an attempt to conceal social dilemmas and justify the status quo. See, Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind: Homer, Philosophy, Tragedy* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 70–74.

strictly as a reflection of the aristocratic position within the city-state, the tributary view of creation was retained as a top-down imposition of form upon passive matter, a creative act whose cause remained in the past without possibility for additions. What emanates as created, especially as conceptualized by Plato and later Neoplatonic thought, is itself a kind of fall away from the original principle understood as an unchangeable permanence.³²⁶ Something of the original principle is manifest in creation's own ongoing reproduction, but in falling into matter, whose passive mutability is equated with corruptibility, this is strictly a degenerative motion into lower elements, as if created matter itself expropriates what is exclusively owned by the formal principle. Creation as a mixture of corruptible material elements must, therefore by its very definition, eventually disintegrate so that the formal aspect can return to its origin.³²⁷ Even with Aristotle's conception of nature, the formal perfection of the species as a predetermined static kind is that *telos* which must be continually reproduced through the flux of material bodies.³²⁸ Thus the form and content of the physical laboring body—time and matter—are simply fallen elements of corruption by virtue of the fact that they are able to change. Labor's capacity to change is then not comprehended as a transformative potential to be cultivated for further creative acts in approximating perfection, but as a mere adaptation to nature's corruptible processes. The intelligibility of labor by way of its own motion, is nothing other than a mortal process destined also to pass away.

³²⁶ For the Neoplatonic continuation of Plato see Proclus's *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*: Book 3, Part I, trans. Dirk Baltzly (Cambridge University Press, 2007): "The universe is perfect in as much as it has always reverted upon its first principle and has imitated the Demiurgic reversion." p. 124.

³²⁷ See for example Plato's *Timaeus*, 81a: "For the bodies which surround us without are always dissolving us and sending off and distributing to each species of substance what is akin thereto."

³²⁸ See Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, bk. 2, where he speaks of the eternity of the species maintained over against the individual. Here the species is both an efficient and final cause, and its form (the male principle) is more perfect than its material contamination (the female part) whereby it generates differentiated individuals.

Nothing in the laboring body itself is then responsible for putting humanity in touch with the perfection of eternal life, and indeed its predetermined dissolution is the indifferent occasion by which a formal unity can once again be achieved. This did not mean that the reality of death was entirely unproblematic or cheerfully embraced for most Greek philosophers. In clearer moments they wrestled with its meaning in light of the perfectible whole, seeing an ambiguous tension in how the fact of death can impact an attempt to live the virtuous life.³²⁹ But in disregarding productive activity as the primary site of its overcoming, death was not conceptualized as a social problem, an obstacle to its creative becoming which could only be materially resolved through reinvesting in higher forms of socially transforming nature and necessity, but a problem only rectified through and at the level of correct intellectual vision. That is, death presents itself as a vexing problem only to an inordinate reliance on the faculties of sense perception within the mere flesh; hence, Socrates can note that the masses are fearful of death, but not the philosophers because they see its true necessity in the order of things and therein

³²⁹ Greek philosophers were preoccupied with the very human question of how to live a life without being determined by a fear of death and it is in this context that the meaning of death is also seemingly interrogated. In pursuing truth Socrates at times seems to question whether death is a point of transition for this pursuit or its annihilation altogether: “For, if pure knowledge is impossible while the body is with us, one of two things must follow, either it cannot be acquired at all or only when we are dead.” *Phaedo*, 66e. See also *Apology* 29a: “no one knows whether death does not even happen to be the greatest of all goods for the human being.” That death is met within the laboring body as a contradiction to perfecting life is therefore a perception and insight still present, though only ever faintly so, that is, until Socrates, teetering back and forth, ultimately decides that in any form death cannot be bad but rather is a good, either ending the body altogether in a final night’s sleep or providing the conditions of transmigration for the soul away from the body to a better place, *Apology*, 40c–41c. The materialist Epicurus will follow this line of reasoning to a degree, in seeking to overcome the fear of death, by also accepting death as a good, or at least never a bad since it is literally nothing in terms of sensible experience (*Letters to Menoeceus*, 124–125). This is of course to argue only on the individual basis of personal self-consciousness, and so fails to account for death as a social reality, experienced in the *social* body: that is, that death is experienced by others of others and so contradicts communal life precisely in its constitution as a creative project of cooperative becoming.

contemplatively anticipate their own soul's release from the body and return to its formal principle.³³⁰

Death is then an inherent necessity in matter, its fundamental disposability inescapably employed by the perfection of form. That is, the perfection of eternal life, its a priori formal sphere, employs death so as to recoup what it loans out. It is a necessity, then, for redistributing the elements away from material development and back into formal order. This reflects the transition away from the specific focus of the archaic royal household with its divinized body and toward the new impersonal bureaucratic and structural mechanisms of the imperial states of Greece and Rome, with their more abstract sense of a perfectly ordered whole. The order of this imperial whole was maintained through a large military complex, whose expansion required both an institutionalization of state coinage for its provisioning and taxing purposes as well as an emerging petty commodity market for their circulation and recuperation back into the state.

Both Greek and Roman empires arose amidst growing social unrest and turbulent upheavals due primarily to the factions developing from crushing debt bondage to the propertied classes.³³¹ Moreover with increasing amounts of labor bonded to local estates,

³³⁰ Socrates's whole argument in the *Apology* seems to run on this thread: the politicians, poets and craftsmen all appear to be better than Socrates because they possess practical knowledge whereas Socrates remains without such; yet their knowledge is only of mortal subjects and conditioned by the fear of death, so that the lot of ordinary men think they are wise in their fear of death, but this is only an appearance of wisdom (29a); but Socrates the philosopher is better than the mass of men (29b) because he knows only of eternal things for which death serves as a good not to be feared (41c). In no way, then, is the rational life of spirit actualized and fulfilled through the perfection of productive activity, such as in the insight we saw coming to the fore with Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor valorizing the mechanical arts as a form of knowing. Instead the rational spirit draws its sustenance from intellectual contemplation of the celestial forms, which is fully actualized after the death of the body, since the body contaminates the intellectual vision with its material needs and sense diversions and distractions. See Socrates's dialogue in Plato, *Phaedo* 65e–66.

³³¹ G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 162–165. Hence for Ste. Croix, the early

consuming the free time of the village peasantry, there was a dearth of bodies to fill the growing needs of the state military. With the institution of state coinage,³³² however, a new means of dealing with debt bondage emerged by which village life could be relieved from estate debts through money without securing their person, thus making their time and energy more available for a general submission to the broader needs of the state.

Villages were freed up to provision traveling bands of soldiers with food and shelter, and in doing so were given state coins in return, which were then paid back to the state as a form of tax. This form of tribute also freed up the peasantry as a standing reserve for the army, rendering farmer's sons, who were no longer bonded to land, now disposable to imperial military interests.³³³

With the institution of this new form of state coinage entering into and beginning to mediate social relations, struck as it was with the imperial image and circulated for its interests, a more fittingly abstract medium presented itself by which to conceptualize

push toward democracy in Athens of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE is a result of class struggles exacerbated especially by debt bondage. However, the democracy of early Athens was still only an incipient and narrow form whose legacy only weakly carried on into the Roman period before it was extinguished due to pressures from both the propertied classes and the Roman Imperial needs (Ibid., pp. 283–315). See also David Graeber's reference to the democratic reforms by Solon in 594 BCE and the similar instigating movements in Rome with the "secession of the plebs", in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (London: Melville House, 2014), pp. 228–230.

³³² The first forms of coinage, in terms of being a state institution and thus struck with a conventional symbol of a ruler, thereby given added value, are generally thought to arise with the Lydian kings around the 7th century BCE and then spread quickly into the Greek coastal city-states of Ionia. See Philip Grierson, "The Origins of Money," *Research in Economic Anthropology* 1 (1978), pp. 4–5.

³³³ On this process of the state instituting money both as a response to debt bondage and to finance and provision its expanding and traveling military, see David Graeber, *Debt*, pp. 223–232. Graeber is here elaborating this original form of money in terms of Geoffrey Ingham's reference to its system as a "military-coinage-complex". See, Ingham, *The Nature of Money* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), p. 99. They point to the first order of business in Alexander the Great's conquests as raiding both the conquered mines and treasuries in order to devalue any local currency, remind their own to payback the soldiers, and thus reorganize the local credit and debt systems around the new state money as the only acceptable payment. Moreover, in speaking of this institution and use of state money by the ruling class to both relieve pressures within its own borders from below, but in a manner that fulfills the needs of the state to reinvest social surplus in its military industry, Graeber writes that the ruling class "could use agricultural loans to gradually turn the plebian population into a class of bonded laborers on their estates, or they could accede to popular demands for debt protection, preserve a free peasantry, and employ the younger sons of free farm families as soldiers," (*Debt*, p. 230).

participation in the perfected whole. With this coinage we have the first appearance of a proto-modern form of symbolic money by which to universally represent value in the abstract. Yet, it is important to distinguish state coinage here from the commodity form of modern money, since there was no such thing yet as an arbitrarily subjective exchange value determined by a generalized commodity market. In other words, the symbolism of the circulated coinage was not a purely abstract means of measuring equivalence between quantified values for commercial convenience, but rather struck according to sociopolitical administrative and military needs for reproducing the state. The value of money was therefore still bound up and embedded within the qualitative symbolism of the perfectible whole of the community represented by the order of the state.³³⁴

The classics scholar Richard Seaford points to the unprecedented nature of this invention of state coinage, in that it marked “a substance given extra and uniform value by its sign,” which he also argues was a significant factor in the unprecedented development of abstract conceptual thought within Greece.³³⁵ The new coinage marked a novel process of transferring value upon substance through a conventional symbol of state rule stamped upon precious metals. Thus value was determinable neither as a

³³⁴ Thus as Richard Seaford emphasizes, the physical accumulation of coinage as well as its values determined by state order, emerged from the earlier systems of temple redistribution and its values of what he terms collective “fiduciarity”, see, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, pp. 48–77. In other words, Greco-Roman state coinage is made possible by the earlier religio-cultural structures of communal redistribution so that this particular money form, despite its compromised entwinement here with the military-coinage-complex and the narrow forms of perfection maintained by the tributary state, nevertheless discloses itself as a distortion of a more fundamental sense of money as simply serving the communication and reproduction of communal perfection. This emphasis is merely to show that the essence of money as a formal medium and sign system for exchange is in no way reducible to its modern forms; in other words, there is no historical evidence that would suggest money necessarily began from a convention of convenience around purely abstract equivalence devised solely by individual merchants, who then entered free-standing markets out of purely private interests (See Graeber, *Debt*, pp. 49–50, for a challenge to this dominant neoliberal narrative). Seaford also notes that this form of Greco-Roman state coinage will also spin itself out of state control and lead more toward the modern commercial sense, but this is not an inevitable destiny (*Money and the Early Greek Mind*, p. 124).

³³⁵ Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, p. 6.

particular quality or use value of a thing as in earlier bartering systems, nor a pure token like modern money, but an abstract qualitative sign of a perfected order imposed upon concrete substance, insofar as this substance could be melted down and receptive; hence, a notion of value whose sign itself attaches to concrete substance a formal quality that is greater than, because it does not inhere within, the intrinsic value of the material itself. This new sense eventually became conceptually reflected in the later philosophical notions of meaning and value as determined by active form imposed upon passive matter.³³⁶ Like physical coins and their signs, the particular materiality of things are thus viewed in relation to the formal order of value insofar as they are made pliable to and receptive of external form, that is, dissoluble in their particularity in order to always give way and return to this formal order of perfection.

Whether through provisioning troops, rendering tribute and tax, or military service, all parts must repay the imperial center as their constitutive source of value. The invention of state coinage comes into the relation as a fundamental medium for dissolving and displacing the more personal or localized forms of private debt bondage to now a more generalized and abstract sense of debt to the impersonal order of the state. As a more impersonal mediation of social relations within the system of distribution it

³³⁶ Seaford draws out reflections of this new money form in the thought of the pre-Socratics, Thales and Anaximander leading through Parmenides' and Heraclitus' purely empty universality of being and into Pythagoreanism (Ibid., pp. 190–291). He further suggests their influence upon later Attic Greek philosophers but leaves the connection for the rest of Greek philosophy ultimately ambivalent. Moreover, in his assessment, Seaford often stresses too much the proto-modern abstractness of this new coinage in correlation with the formal emptiness of the new abstract sense of being. This is at the expense of emphasizing how this more formally abstract sense is still bound up in a sense and vision of a perfectible order, since, as he had already recognized, money no where at this time reductively served something like purely commercial interests, but always served a conjunction of socioeconomic and sociopolitical needs. That is, while he is right to emphasize the emerging priority of impersonal exchange relations within money, it must also be emphasized that this is still considered a medium for participating in the priority of the state, and its alleged perfected order, as an indebted part. This better accounts for why the Greco-Roman thought world still revolved around qualitative notions of being as a transcendental perfection, for which death remains only a necessity, in a way that is not easily the precedent of modern notions of transcendental conditions without qualitative perfection for which death becomes absolutized.

thereby enters into and shifts the religio-cultural vision and mediation of the sacred economy toward the idea of a more formal cosmic order and its indifferent necessity. The means by which one participates in the whole, to which they are indebted for their existence, through the circulation and return of coinage to its formal origin of value, then newly provided a basis in experience from which to project, as a cosmic principle, the interpretation of death as an inalterable natural necessity by which individuated materiality pays its debt to the priority of its formal origin of meaning and value.

Thus, Anaximander, appearing in Ionia at the same time and place that state coinage first appeared, will say: “Things perish into those things out of which they have their birth, according to that which is ordained; for they give reparation to one another and pay the penalty of their injustice according to the disposition of time.”³³⁷ As Francis Cornford comments, these “words imply that injustice was committed in the very fact of their birth into separate existence. The manifold world, in Anaximander’s view, can arise only by robbery and misappropriation.”³³⁸ This notion of death as a necessary payment exacted from material life by an abstract formal order will become commonplace throughout the Axial Age, making its way into more popular poetic statements such as Pindar’s—“Our bodies all must follow death’s supreme behest”³³⁹—or as phrased by Simonides—“We are all debts owed to Death”³⁴⁰—as well as in the more developed

³³⁷ Quoted in Francis M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), p. 8.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³⁹ Pindar, Fragment 131 as quoted by Plutarch in *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914), p. 181.

³⁴⁰ Simonides from *Palatine Anthology*, quoted in Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost* (Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 80. Carson notes that this was a common gravestone epitaph throughout the Greco-Roman world, thus suggesting its popular enculturation. For the commonplace assumption that death is a debt that material life must repay within its native culture of the ruling elite, see Plutarch’s “Letter of Condolence to Apollonius,” where he quotes Pindar, Sophocles, and Euripides as all echoing Simonides, but most importantly confirming Socrates, on the nature of death as a foreordained debt. For Plutarch this is

systems of thought such as Plato's, who accounts for humanity's mortality as due to its being created from "borrowed" material elements, "on condition that these loans should be repaid" to the cosmic order.³⁴¹ The Stoic Epictetus, however, will provide the most blunt summation of this line of thinking and its connection to legitimating the priority of the state: "Therefore the philosophers say well, that if the good man had foreknowledge of what would happen, he would cooperate toward his own sickness and death and mutilation, since he knows that these things are assigned to him according to the universal arrangement, and that the whole is superior to the part and the state to the citizen."³⁴² For a Roman leader like Cicero, therefore, the fact that a debt to death has been universally arranged is easier to accept when the good statesman has the knowledge that "it is from heaven that the rulers and preservers of the cities come, and it is to heaven that they eventually return."³⁴³ Indeed, if one is luckily wellborn and thus privileged enough to leave behind physical labor for a full leisurely life of contemplative reflection, they would even come to see, along with Seneca, that death is the "birthday" of one's eternity.³⁴⁴

Projecting this vision of an already perfected natural whole that constitutively orders its parts to dissolve into their formal origins thus legitimates the image of the state as constitutively ordering its social body as an ephemeral medium for circulating its

reason to celebrate death since it finally releases one to be with the stars, that is, for those who were good statesmen. *Plutarch: Moralia*, v. II, trans. Frank C. Babbitt (Harvard University Press, 1928).

³⁴¹ Quoted from *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, translated with commentary by Francis M. Cornford (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997). See also Paul Millett, *Lending and Borrowing in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), who links Simonides and Plato's *Timaeus* within its larger socioeconomic context within Greece: "The sentiment that life was a loan to be repaid by death was an almost proverbial saying, appearing in many periods and places, not least on the Athenian stage. ... The gods could apparently call in their loans at will" (p.6).

³⁴² Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.10

³⁴³ Cicero, *De Republica*, 6.13

³⁴⁴ "That day which you fear as if it were your last is the birthday of your eternity." Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, 102.26.

eternal value. What then gives this image of the perfectly circular whole its effective centripetal force is the interpretation of the ubiquitously felt fact of death as a necessary repayment to the whole to be accepted. This representation of the whole, whose redistribution hinges on death's apportioning, renders the means of producing the perfection of eternal life within the social body of labor wholly unintelligible to itself. The imaginary relation to death is therefore represented to essentially mark this body's physical activity as necessarily for some other end outside its own internal perfection, making its inverted meaning and value appear indifferently to itself as a matter of nature's immutably completed form. Therefore, such a vision of the whole not only deactivates the laboring body in relation to the eternal but also justifies the expropriation of its surplus, as if a matter of righting a wrong by necessity of the balancing perfection of eternal life and its sociopolitical mediation. Indeed, a fundamental characteristic of the invertedness of all idealisms is this notion that death is a central mechanism employed by the a priori ideal in rightly taking back what matter is thought to have improperly taken or kept—hence the idea of creation as a necessary fall is always coupled with the idea of death as part of its necessary correction. The expropriations of the state are simply mirroring what death has already naturally consigned to necessary and legitimate expropriation.

What is evident in the Axial reordering of society around new “transcendental visions” is the need to gather up the emerging intuitions of eternal life within a reformulation according to the collective consciousness, now developing from the new state-form and its more abstract and expansive order. In a certain sense its corresponding developments of theoretical consciousness did indeed progressively demythologize

archaic myths of origins, rethinking the creative act as a universal principle of organization, a transcendental perfection in which all things participate, thus marking the rising pressure from the social body of labor; but in another sense its vision of the whole as a perfectly circular present simply retained the emphasis on the absoluteness of the past within a more abstract and conceptually nuanced rendition. The projection to eternal life was nevertheless still ordered to reproducing a more perfect communal form, but its imaginary relation to death betrayed a class position barely conscious of the priority of its social body of labor, thus further betraying a class interest in ideologically representing the eternal priority of the state's formal order. With its notion of death as a necessity for the perfectly circular whole, the laboring class could be included as a fitting piece whose constitutive value and capacity for the new is nevertheless concealed, a placating inclusion that simultaneously excludes the laboring body's fundamental demands on the whole by right of their basic activity. Thus, there is here no secularized disembedding of the economy, society or politics from the sacred economy; rather, in their theological metaphorization of the perfected whole the imaginary relation to death is represented in such a way that there is only the partial disembedding of the sacred economy from the progressive ends of perfecting its social body of labor in its historical becoming toward the eternal. The Axial state and its metaphysics, then, did not usher in a proto-secularizing death of God, but rather captured the ideology organic to its tributary form within a more abstractly rendered god of death.

Conclusion

States and empires came and went throughout the Iron and classical age, but there was always a social body of production that continued to produce and reproduce the conditions of existence from which another national state formation might arise. Yet this relation of priority is precisely what statist cosmogonies sought to reverse. Projecting a picture of the whole within which death's necessity rendered the essence of the social body of production as merely an ephemeral coming and going, allowed the state to reposition itself in relation to the eternality of nature, representing itself as that steady and permanent bedrock by which social bodies might be newly appropriated and formed. The site of the creative act as relating to the perfection of eternal life was only partially reflected, but now swung into the past as a finalized act for which historical productive activity held no real value. The intuitions and intentions of classical metaphysics were not off base in reflecting on the meaning of the whole and projecting qualitative pursuits to their assumed transcendental perfections by which progress could be measured. The body's intuited and intended grasp of the whole however was betrayed by a fixation on a partial whole that could not, or would not, grasp the whole of its social body in its process of making whole, except insofar as the measurement for progress required the death of this prior body.

In the next chapter I will trace out a genealogy of the resurrection of the body as a form of eternal life that began to signify a reversal of these statist cosmogonies in order to raise up the prior productive base in relation to the eternal. This form of eternal life, no longer hinging on any debt to death, will mark a more direct recognition and higher conceptualization of those sensible intuitions and intentions true to the prior social body

of production. That is, the sacred economy around this Jewish ideal will mark a greater recognition of the salvific and material economies as one and the same, no longer conceived as ordering the material to obey the holy, but instead realized through creatively and collectively organizing production around producing a new whole. In this it will therefore mark the beginnings of a more comprehensive consciousness of the whole, and thus a more rational vision of perfection than any offered by classical metaphysics.

Chapter 4

The Emergence of the Hebraic Idea of the Bodily Resurrection from the Social Body of Production

“The backdrop ... is dominated by the great forces of destruction and death. But man reorganizes himself so as to resist this disease. Creation is the going beyond death. Creation is the content of the vision of God. Creation is the meaning of life.”

- Antonio Negri³⁴⁵

The idea of bodily resurrection in the Hebrew bible marks a major break with tributary ideology by presenting a vision of the perfect whole in which the social body of labor is no longer ideologically concealed from itself. Indeed, under this ideal the social body of labor stands more directly as the object of perfection, a view afforded by an incipient recognition also of its constitutive value as the subject of perfection. Making this claim, however, requires a substantive argument that can adequately explain the historical emergence of this idea in its Hebraic form as expressing a counter to tributary ideology. Of course the very idea of resurrection—as the rising of a dead body to life again—did not originate from Hebrew thought. Prior to the development of Israelite religion, both Egyptian and Canaanite religious mythologies, as was mentioned in the last chapter, revolved around the idea. Yet the idea in these contexts was associated with a prior dying and rising god whose mythical projection from the generic cycles of nature symbolically served to legitimate the alleged priority and permanence of the state.

³⁴⁵ Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 97.

Further complicating the matter, the notion of resurrection within Jewish thought does not explicitly appear in the Torah, but only comes to the fore within prophetic and later apocalyptic writings, with the book of Daniel generally recognized as its chief literary appearance. This has led some to claim that any Jewish idea of resurrection is simply a post-exilic borrowing of a “ready-made” idea from newfound foreign contexts, especially those contexts of Persian exile and its Zoroastrian version of the idea, coupled with a post-exilic Hellenistic synthesis within more abstract forms of thought.³⁴⁶ Therefore, since it seems to have emerged only late within the formation of Israel’s religious literature, whose prior content was allegedly marked by a conspicuous paucity of concepts regarding eternal life, it is often deemed an alien ideal abruptly tacked on to spiritually supplement a waning material hope.

The typical argument here is that Israel’s properly materialist thought-forms, oriented as they were around national cultic centralization, began to lose their hold in direct correlation with the physical dismantling of its geopolitical reality by foreign domination and exile. The fragmenting and alienating contexts thus compelled Israelite religious culture toward a reactive appropriation of alien concepts pressed into serving new, abstractly spiritualized concerns with an afterlife. Others who argue that Judaism’s idea of resurrection was not a wholesale borrowing of foreign elements, but added a distinctive Hebraic voice of future justice to its appropriation, nevertheless also tend to

³⁴⁶ Weber for instance argues that the idea of resurrection is taken not only from Egyptian sources but more from a Zoroastrian influence as well. He claims it “appears suddenly in the book of Daniel as a ready-made conception” and that prior to this, the official priestly and prophetic religion of Israel “never employed the idea of compensation in the hereafter, an idea native to Egyptian and Zoroastrian religion.” The two major claims of Weber’s that need to be challenged here are that it “suddenly appeared ready-made”, and that it is a concept that primarily signifies “compensation in the hereafter”. See *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 144–145. This commonplace view is seen more recently in Alan Segal who claims the Jews took the idea from Persian notions and then refitted it according to later Hellenized ideas of the afterlife. See Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*, (New York: Doubleday, 2004), p. 394.

agree that this concept is a negatively conditioned and somewhat disjunctive addition to Israel's cultural repertoire of past religious themes.³⁴⁷ In both claims that resurrection was a late arrival, the dominant assumption is that the idea of resurrection marks a discursive sigh of oppression that could only signify individual dreams of otherworldly compensation. The idea is thus an alien concept received only by an utterly alienated consciousness.

These assumptions, both that resurrection could only disjunctively arrive late in an exilic or post-exilic context under foreign influence, and that this idea could only possibly signify an inverted otherworldly hope, also betrays another common assumption that pre-state village life could never have aspired to, or conditioned a reflection upon, such lofty ideals. This is especially evident in explicit social scientific readings with historical materialist sympathies. One would hope from such readings more dialectical nuance in treating the creative historical emergence of an idea, especially one that reflexively refers back to its productive body, as well as greater appreciation for the progressive qualities of the village commune. Yet, the distinctiveness of Israel's thought in its materialist and historical orientation, emanating from its communal origins, is often highlighted and valued according to a sober realism whose virtue is that it supposedly lacked an idea of eternal life. The idea of bodily resurrection can then only be an

³⁴⁷ Thus Walter Brueggemann, wanting to salvage the ethical ideals around affirming creation and embodied personhood as they are associated with the Hebrew idea of bodily resurrection, nevertheless is eager to emphasize that the "Old Testament hope for the human person never flies off into spiritualizing fantasy," and that resurrection themes only show up in two places "at the edge of the Old Testament", and that "too much should not be made of these texts". *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 482–484. As indicative of this general tendency see also John J. Collins's comments that "bodily resurrection was never a necessary element in apocalyptic eschatology and appears consistently only in a few later apocalypses." Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 71 (1978), p. 188. More conservative commentators will instead call its appearance in Daniel a "flash of inspired insight" thus also failing to explain how it appears as more than a negatively conditioned and disjunctive insight. See N. Porteus, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 171.

embarrassment, or a code for principles of social justice that could be articulated otherwise. Thus, in seeking to purge what is claimed to be solely otherworldly references from Jewish discourses of apocalyptic protest, affirming these as only hyperbolic expressions of this-worldly desires, Richard Horsley declares, “the resurrection was not a distinctively apocalyptic expectation.”³⁴⁸

What these readings fail to see, however, is that the Hebraic idea of bodily resurrection is not a distinctively apocalyptic expectation precisely because it is an earlier prophetic eschatological projection from the cultural memory of the pre-state social body. Though the idea did not gain pervasive appeal until late within apocalyptic sects and the emergence of Judaism, it was nevertheless adumbrated early on as an expression internal to Israel’s this-worldly self-understanding, which already implied a materialist sense of eternal life. It first emerged, then, not in the context of exilic and post-exilic expectations, but in the pre-exilic context of concerns over the transition to statehood and its failure to break with the tributary past from which the Hebrews had emerged. The key is to see how a certain critical thread harboring the cultural memory of the pre-state social body runs throughout the Hebrew bible in challenging the state and reversing its mythical cosmogonies. I will argue that it is from this pre-exilic understanding of its social body, as a new creative act in its transformation of nature and society, prior to its transition to

³⁴⁸ Horsley, *After Apocalyptic and Wisdom: Rethinking Texts in Context* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), p. 234. In this hasty sweep Horsley therefore fails to see how within the development of the idea itself there was an emerging consciousness that referred to more in the material than is allowed to be seen by the modern literalistic interpretations of afterlife imagery as merely reflexive collective or individual psychological fantasies. That is, he fails to heed his own earlier advice: “The scholarly concept of ‘resurrection’ is another synthetic construct badly in need of critical analysis of particular sources, accompanied by critical analysis of modern habits of thought.” Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), p. 251. In what follows, while assuming much of the social scientific methodology and interpretation, I will attempt to provide some of this needed critical analysis of the neglected idea of resurrection as an idea of eternal life that nevertheless more directly grasps its social body.

the monarchy, that the ideal of bodily resurrection will logically unfold as necessary for rendering this body intelligible to itself. One place in the text where a critical grasp of the pre-state communal mode of production is especially evident is in the popular oracle shared by proto-Isaiah and Micah concerning the transformation of swords-to-plowshares. It is here, specifically in proto-Isaiah, that I claim a democratized and historicized eschatological trajectory toward eternal life emerges from a recognition of the creative, anti-entropic capacities of the pre-state social body of production. And it is from this trajectory that the ideal inversions of tributary ideology are reversed and reappropriated for the social body of production, as most manifest in the Isaianic negation of death's negation and its demythologized ideal of bodily resurrection.

Another key, however, in understanding the emergence of this idea from the cultural memory of the pre-state social body is to see how the text reveals more than mere thematic resemblances to village concerns. What also must be considered is that the language and narrative structure in which the Hebraic form of the idea is first presented, in proto-Isaiah and earlier Hosea, shows a substantive borrowing not from later apocalyptic literary forms, but from an older Ugaritic language and its Canaanite mythologies. I argue that this pre-exilic borrowing from, and reversal of, the Canaanite Baal myth, further confirms that this ideal emerged as an extension of the populist oracle's sociopolitical critique of the Hebrew people's early transition to statehood and its continuing internal complicity with a politics modeled after Egyptian and Canaanite tributary formations.

The formation of this ideal of eternal life, therefore, originated from consciousness of an early break with tributary forms and took shape as an imperative of

the critique of a sociopolitical regression to these forms, rather than exclusively conditioned by, and created from, a later absorption into the foreign tributary rule of late antiquity. The main thrust of this chapter is therefore concerned with showing that the Hebrew text articulates the resurrection of the body, not as an incongruent flight of speculation nor as a comforting homiletics for abject despondency; rather it was articulated as a distinctively populist vision of a perfectible whole, whose ideal of perfection was brought back to, by recalling at a higher level, its originating modes of production. It therefore uniquely stands within the ANE context as the redistributive ideal par excellence, reorienting the sacred economy away from every “theological metaphorization of allocation,” yet without abandoning the perfection of eternal life. Establishing this Hebraic line of development will then allow us to see more clearly that the idea of resurrection indeed “was not a distinctively apocalyptic expectation” precisely because it was more closely and inextricably connected to the founding materiality of prophetic eschatology, from which later apocalyptic appropriations were in part derived; but this also entails that this earlier sense of resurrection is that demythologized principle of perfection by which all fantastical apocalyptic distortions are to be critiqued as ahistorical and immaterial.

The Cultural Memory of the Prior Social Body of Production

To present the first buds of this idea we must begin with elaborating certain threads within the Hebrew Bible by which a distinctive sense of eternal life developed from out of a more direct cultural memory of its pre-state social body’s progressive trajectories. Raising up this memory, however, will require reading against much of the

grain of the text's statist narrative. The Hebrew Bible is, in many ways, largely the product of tributary formations, being written almost entirely during Israel's own monarchical and post-monarchical experience. Thus like the archaic and classical ideological representations, its literature often reflects a concern with defending state priority, legitimated by the projection of a national deity, who commands its social surplus around protecting a temple or statist center through sacrifices and swords.

Yet Israel was a small client state whose independent state-form marked only a brief period of its sociopolitical development, as it emerged late within the tributary field of the Iron age largely from village tribal associations that had themselves previously broken away from tributary oppression—a break of which it retained a strong memory. The exact nature of the pre-state social experience that feeds this cultural memory, however, remains somewhat elusive. Whether the Israelites began specifically as a peasant's revolt directly organized from within the subaltern peoples of Canaanite society, as Norman Gottwald had earlier argued, is debatable.³⁴⁹ But Gottwald's more general claim that the Hebrews began as a loose tribal confederation around a distinctive “communitarian mode of production” that broke away from Canaanite culture in

³⁴⁹ For the standard sociological account of the emergence of Ancient Israel from a Canaanite peasant's revolt see Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). Of course, the meaning of the people described as the ‘*Apiru*’ in the ANE is not easily discernible and much of Gottwald's peasant revolt thesis has been challenged, with even Gottwald moving on to a more modest proposal. Nevertheless, the importance of this original work has been its archaeological and sociological support of a critical thread that runs through the entire Hebrew bible, not just amongst prophets, but even amongst scribes, priests, sages and political agents, that constantly brings the text into conflict with itself wherever it seems to uphold the ideology of the dominant tributary states of its era. Unless we are willing to accept that this critical thread is entirely a late literary fiction without basis in concrete reality, its founding memory must have had a prior anchoring in experience to some degree no matter how minimal or fragmented that social experience might have been. It is to Gottwald's credit to have established this argument on a viable social theory and firm archaeological grounding.

particular and tributary regimes more generally, has gained scholarly traction.³⁵⁰ This position is aided by the archaeological data of the Palestinian hill country of the late second and early first millennium BCE, which strongly suggests that the original inhabitants were given to village life rather than either palatine estates or rootless wandering nomads.³⁵¹

The innovative and optimizing qualities of the communal mode of subsistence production can be seen especially in considering the new proliferation of non-riverine settlements in the Canaanite highlands from the early Iron Age (11th to 9th centuries BCE) when Israel as a social entity began to emerge.³⁵² Here settlement patterns indicate what Mario Liverani calls “colonization from below” in contrast from state colonization—pastoral-agrarian villages whose land development and use, with its small irregular shaped fields, lack of public quarters for managers and overseers, and absence of fortifications, signifies organization around anti-entropic household demands rather than the entropy hastening military and luxury demands characteristic of state planning from

³⁵⁰ For Gottwald’s later modification of his original thesis and his presentation of what he would call a “communitarian mode of production” see, “Social Class as an Analytic and Hermeneutical Category in Biblical Studies,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 112, no. 1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 3–22.

³⁵¹ On the evidence of the village tribal origins of Ancient Israel as not a mere literary construct of a later age but evidenced in late Iron Age archaeological sites, especially regarding the footprints of domiciles in the area and the agricultural activity, see, L. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 260, autumn (1985): pp. 1–35; cf. David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985); William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

³⁵² Israel Finkelstein notes a population boom in this area in the 11th century onward, a process he considers as organic to internal village growth, though he will also argue that it necessarily entailed a state formation for its eventual protection, coordination and administration. See Finkelstein, “The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millennia BCE,” in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, eds. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na’aman (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994), pp. 150–178. On attributing the ethnic label of “Israelites” to this new population of village settlement, without simply appealing to the Hebrew bible but rather to the study of the material cultural continuity of this period with later Israelite culture, see Robert D. Miller II, “Identifying Earliest Israel,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 333 (2003): pp. 55–68.

above.³⁵³ The rugged terrain, with its small seasonal window of highly variable rainfall, was far from an ideal location for a settlement, especially with regard to sustaining any significant agriculture. Yet the village communes of this area effectively subsisted and successfully grew through their optimal use of land, tools and labor. Thus there is evidence of herding smaller, more versatile and less water-consuming animals such as sheep and goats, while also optimally utilizing the available technology and transforming the land through risk spreading strategies to support stable food production.³⁵⁴ This included strategies of crop diversification, cultivating cereals, vegetables, vines and trees insofar as they were suitable to the landscape and did not have overlapping seasonal labor requirements. Moreover, beginning with techniques of fallowing and staggered sowing, soil fertility was more or less effectively maintained while also implementing certain advances in iron technology and terracing techniques.³⁵⁵ Storage buildings were erected as communal banks of shared surplus, with olives, grapes, oil and wine stored and preserved in collared rim jars, while large amounts of grain were stored in pit silos. The innovative use of lime plaster cisterns allowed for a reserve of rainwater in addition to the efficient use of springs and wells; and beyond mere food production there is also some

³⁵³ Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 53. Household fields were irregular in shape and quite small compared to the state planned fields. Liverani's study of Mesopotamian field maps from the state surveys of Neo-Sumerians to the Neo-Babylonians (ca. 2000–500 BCE) found that state planned fields for maintaining its class of non-producers as well as exports for trade, were commonly divided into regular elongated strips and exceeded household field sizes by a magnitude of 10 to 1. Liverani, "Reconstructing the Rural Landscape of the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 39.1 (1996): pp. 1–41.

³⁵⁴ On the consistent use of goats and sheep in village life see Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), pp. 60–61

³⁵⁵ David C. Hopkins expresses some reservations about the implementation of terracing during the early stages of settlement due to the large labor requirements, and therefore suggests that it did not come into prominence until later in the Iron Age when population growth in the village commune provided a sufficient labor force. It may have also become more prominently used under royal regimes for producing cash crops. See Hopkins, "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggles of Early Israel," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 50 (September, 1987): pp. 178–191.

evidence of copper slag from specialized copper smelting activities, as well as writing and modification of the Canaanite alphabet.³⁵⁶

From these advanced qualities that characterize the pre-state social body's optimizing of the communal mode of production, we find within the Hebrew bible a corresponding communal ethos of redistribution around legally codifying a more equitable social relation to the land, to labor and its social surplus. Hence the distinctive emphasis on the remission of debts (Deut. 15:1–3), manumission of Hebrew slaves (Exod. 21:2–3; Deut. 15:12–18), certain protections for fugitive slaves (Deut. 23:15–16) and against new Hebrew enslavement (Lev. 25:39–46), restoration of lands (Lev. 25:8–17), fallowing of land and letting the poor eat from it on that year (Exod. 23:10–11), provisioning harvest gleanings for widows, orphans, and resident aliens (Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:19–22) and guarantee of loans to the needy (Deut. 15:7–11). Certainly, many of these laws contained an idealized sense and possibly were never implemented in full within later Israelite society. Yet, as Douglas Knight has argued, while this body of laws, which run counter to state interests, may have been overly idealized and even used later by the ruling class as dangling ideals to placate the masses, nevertheless, the “roots for their empathetic concern run deeply into the subsistence living in the villages.”³⁵⁷ They are thus memories of the communal mode of production and its reflected intuitions and

³⁵⁶ Liverani, *Israel's History*, p. 55. Thus while tool making was limited, there is nevertheless some evidence that it was as innovative as possible with new metals and techniques available for their extracting and smelting; moreover, tools were primarily made and shared as communal property invested with social relations that optimized their use.

³⁵⁷ As Knight has elaborated, their implementation would have radically altered and possibly undone any tributary regime. He suggests that the ruling classes of the cities who wrote and maintained the texts would therefore probably have no organic interests for keeping this body of laws within its narrative, except to placate the masses with their occasional implementation, especially during regime changes. Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), pp. 220–224.

intentions of a perfectible whole that are retained in the text because of the social pressures and demands by this prior body for such organically fitting laws.

Moreover, the Hebrew bible reflects the evolving forms of pre-state tribal governance within an ambivalent narrative regarding the emergence of its own monarchical state. While the predominant political formation at the village level, even into the late Iron Age, is described as tribal in terms of revolving around the household and primitive kinship patterns, this did not simply denote strict nuclear familial ties. More often the boundaries of tribe were continually redrawn to include a greater array of social relations, constituting itself as a loose confederation of kinsmen integrated with others who had similar agricultural, pastoral, commercial and craft interests. Land was held in common ownership and continually redistributed for cultivation purposes and to those in need, with cultivation oriented around usufruct rights amongst all communal members. Furthermore, tribal leadership most often developed through elected councils whose acephalic structure was without inherent mechanisms for extreme centralizations of political power, flexibly involving both men and women, who were already mutually participating in the labor process and the sharing of surplus.³⁵⁸

These progressive qualities of a tribal association oriented around the communal mode of production are especially reflected in the books of Joshua and Judges in that their representation of sociopolitical organization largely avoids a rigid hierarchical structure of governance in favor of decentralized cooperatives.³⁵⁹ Throughout these texts tribal officials are described in terms of elected elders or chieftains—with women such as

³⁵⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 158–172.

³⁵⁹ On the ambivalence of these texts as for or against the state within the differing compositional layers and their sociopolitical contexts, see *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

Deborah taking up prominent leadership roles (Judg. 4–5)³⁶⁰—who travel to judge in local open forums rather than as appointed kings with a fixed centralized court. Moreover, there is a common theme of refusing kingship, such as Gideon’s refusal (Judg. 8), followed by a critical portrayal of Abimelech’s fratricidal seizing of rule, which subsequently divides the household of Israel. What marks the text here is a concern over the transition to statehood as expressed from the vantage of the Iron Age village commune. Thus we have the significant parable of the bramble (Judg. 9:8–15) from an older popular origin, even if its final compositional form is established later in date, which critiques the non-productive, self-contradictory position of kingship as derivative and even parasitical in relation to the priority of the social body of production. The “fig tree,” “olive tree” and “grapevine,” are in turn each offered kingship over all other trees, and each subsequently rejects this position on grounds that it would diminish their production of social surplus. Yet, it is the impotent and fruitless bramble that absurdly takes up the offer to kingship, making empty claims to social usefulness over all other trees as well as volatile threats of their fiery destruction if they don’t heed these ridiculous claims.³⁶¹

Thus it is from proximity to developing the communitarian mode of production within village life that a cultural memory of the priority of the social body of labor was retained in the text whereby the institution of state royalty is relativized. Not only do the

³⁶⁰ There is evidence from the older language and style that the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 might have been actually written in pre-monarchical times, though this is contested.

³⁶¹ The parable seems to be more than a critique of Abimelech’s illegitimacy but rather of the social destructiveness of kingship in general. For the bramble to say, “take shelter under my shade” would have been absurd to all those listening since brambles in this context offered no such shade. On this reading of Jotham’s fable about the trees as from the standpoint of the people and deeply anti-monarchical see David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible*, v. 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 71–86; cf. Norman Gottwald, “Early Israel as an Anti-Imperial Community,” in *Liberating Biblical Study: Scholarship, Art and Action in Honor of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice*, eds. Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 15.

first seven books of the bible concern themselves directly with a premonarchical past that cannot easily be made into a seamless apology for the eventual coming of the state, but reference to this past as well as its projected future are set against the idea of the state at various points throughout the remainder of the text. While the post-exilic hands of compilers, editors, and their additions, more often written from an urban and nationalist position, significantly shaped every feature of the extant texts, it is nevertheless remarkable that the text remains saturated from the ground up with not only ubiquitous agrarian themes of pre-state village life, but also substantive critiques of the monarchical state on the basis of this.³⁶²

What marks out the difference of the Hebrew text in the ANE context, therefore, is that unlike all other literature of this period, the statist narrative enjoys no uncontested hegemony but is rather directly countered within the text by explicit reference to the priority of its originating pre-state social body of agricultural production.³⁶³ Thus what distinguishes a certain critical thread of religious consciousness within Hebraic self-understanding is how it is articulated more expressly from and for the social body of production as itself standing as that normative relation to the eternal without needed mediation by the state. More specifically, as I will now elaborate, this grasp of the constitutive value of the prior social body in relation to a sense of eternal life is evinced in its representation as a new creative act that reverses statist cosmogonies. I will then show that it is from grasping this creative trajectory according to the anti-entropic

³⁶² As Ellen Davis states, “the very pervasiveness of agrarian thinking in the Bible challenges the common assumption that those who composed or edited the writings were members of an urban elite whose perspectives ‘distort or ignore the everyday reality of [villagers’] lives.” Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 5.

³⁶³ “One respect in which Israel and Judah are distinctive is the extent to which they preserved traditions about their prestate society and the steps that led to the formation of a state. This sort of information is notoriously lacking in other ancient Near Eastern states ... they are either vaguely mythological or are cast so as to give heroic prominence to the state founder.” Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, p. 152.

imperatives of the labor process that a perfectible whole will be articulated which requires deconstructing every tributary debt to death in order to raise up nature into a new social body. It is precisely this aspect of religious consciousness that funds, if not always explicitly, the anti-imperial resistance running throughout the text.

The Social Body as a New Creative Act

The book of Exodus is significant amongst ANE literature in marking out the priority of the pre-state social body within a demythologized register that begins to express labor's self-transcending trajectory. What is unique to the book is that its portrayal of the social body's founding struggle does not remain at the mythical level of a primordial arena involving gods and spirits, but rather more directly articulates a historical setting involving a social struggle over the creative forces of production (Exod. 1:11–14, 2:23). The tribal confederation of Israel is understood as consolidating and unifying its social body in a significant socioeconomic as well as political distinction from tributary regimes, which are here symbolically represented under the image of Pharaonic Egypt and its slave-based construction of storage houses (Exod. 1:11).³⁶⁴ Thus, significantly evincing the pre-state cultural memory of the constitutive value of productive forces, the Exodus account speaks of the expropriation of forced labor as a futile anti-creative attempt to stifle the fundamental forces of creation, whose excesses overflow the tributary boundaries (Exod. 1:7). The liberation of this social body of labor

³⁶⁴ There is scant evidence of the actual presence of an ancient Israelite people within Egypt. But there is an Egyptian stela from 1200 BCE that says a people named "Israel", who were neither city nor country but a "tribe," were defeated in Canaan by Egyptian forces led under king Merneptah of the nineteenth dynasty. This could imply that the small tribal confederation situated within the main corridor of trade routes between imperial powers was subjected early on to Egyptian exploits. Of course while Exodus was written later, between 600 and 400 BCE, Egypt was no longer the major imperial power, suggesting that Pharaonic Egypt stands in the book of Exodus as a symbol for tributary oppression in general, but as such it would also imply a strong cultural memory of ancient Egyptian power over village life.

is also expressed in terms of a taking back what has been expropriated (Exod. 3:22) as well as a new creation symbolically portrayed as emerging from the waters that engulf the forces of chaos and disorder (Exod. 14–15).³⁶⁵ Moreover, the text speaks of making a new social body whose collective and creative organization is articulated in the same language used in Genesis around the original act of creation.³⁶⁶ That is, the prior social body was recalled at a higher level directly over against the tributary state through associating its movements with the original creation of the world—a determined twist on the priority of statist cosmogonies in which it is the state that mediates the original act of creation and maintains its fixed order.

Certainly, the monotheistic idea of a creator God and reference to its prior creative act as the founding principle of the world are not in themselves unique to Hebrew thought, since similar notions were likewise held by tributary formations. Yet the Hebrew association shows something more than simply another nostalgic recollection of a formal origin. It makes a claim that the very essence of the pre-state social body is itself a creative continuation of the original novelty of the world's founding creative act. The distinctiveness of the Hebrew notion of the principle creative act, therefore, is that it was grasped as ongoing and thus grasped from and for the progressively forward

³⁶⁵ On the themes of creation in Exodus see Terence E. Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Oct. 1991): pp. 354–365. As Fretheim emphasizes, whoever put together, and at whatever later date, the final canonical form of the book of Exodus following Genesis, they “were certainly reflecting existing community perspectives rather than promoting an innovative theological strategy. This is evident from the fact that two traditions (J and P) preface specifically Israelite texts with creation materials. If the Yahwist is given its usual tenth-century dating, such a perspective would have been in place through much of Israel's history and would have informed its most basic theological developments, implicitly and explicitly.” (p. 355)

³⁶⁶ Most directly, the reference to the new social body to be organized around building a new tabernacle is articulated according to similar literary conventions as the creation account in Genesis, with seven speeches beginning with “and the Lord said” (Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12). That there is reference to the Lord as Creator is unremarkable, but the difference in referring to the emerging social body as a new creation will be spelled out below.

directionality of its pre-state social body understood as a new creative act; hence the many biblical references of turning to Yahweh as simultaneously referring to the progressive potentials for new creation *within* history. This shows an active relation to the perfection of creation that is entirely other than that of turning to a statically given a priori cosmogonic order or divine principle through a contemplative recollection that simultaneously anticipates one's eventual abstracted return to such an order outside history. Thus, throughout prophetic literature Yahweh is continually referred to as the principle for new creative acts in relation to the anti-creative forces of death, often represented as a potter in rebuilding destroyed vessels (Isa. 45:9; Jer. 18:3–6), a gardener planting and building within barren and desolate situations (Isa. 5:1–2), a mother providing sustenance (Num. 11:12), or a healer over against terminal illnesses (Exod. 15:2–6; Jer. 30:17)—that is, Yahweh in a certain sense signifies that perfect whole that can be known only by being progressively made into a new whole. As Walter Brueggemann aptly states: “Yahweh becomes, by the reality of Israel’s insistence, as Yahweh had not yet been.”³⁶⁷

Historical consciousness here emerges as linked to a consciousness of the totality of creation’s movement toward a new whole. This consciousness represents, as Michael Fishbane has suggested, a dialectical advance from a “mythicization of history” to a “historicization of myth.”³⁶⁸ Yet the demythologization of “cosmogonic combat imagery”

³⁶⁷ Thus as will be discussed below, throughout prophetic literature Yahweh is continually referred to as the principle for new creative acts in relation to the forces of death, often referred to as a potter in relation to destroyed vessels, a gardener planting and building within barren and desolate situations, a mother providing sustenance, or a healer over against terminal illnesses—that is, Yahweh in a certain sense represents that perfect whole that can be known only by being progressively made. As Brueggemann states: “Yahweh becomes, by the reality of Israel’s insistence, as Yahweh had not yet been.” See, Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 277–279.

³⁶⁸ Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), p. 136

as no longer a primordial event outside and prior to history, but a projected horizon from within historical struggles and their actors, does not mean that the Israelites reduced the values and intentions of mythical projections to a purely secular sense of historical struggle enclosed within a totalizing of mortal conditions and its perpetual cycles of violence. Rather the view of history as a new creative act retained a sense of cosmogonic originality, comprehensiveness, transcendent perfection in that history as an addition to creation was thereby linked up with a process of renewing the totality of creation through the novel transformations of its present conditions of existence.³⁶⁹ That is, the fixed transcendent perfection of a primordial past is now the transcendental horizon of perfecting a new creative act in the future.

From proximity to the pre-state social body, a robust cultural memory was therefore able to recall the experience of socially transforming nature, drawing from that agrarian and communal insight into the very mutability of nature and society as not in itself a mortal function of a fall away from an immutably given order, but the conditions of its perfection through continued participation.³⁷⁰ The founding creative act was thus understood as a kind of perpetual revolution disclosed through the historical novelty of

³⁶⁹ Ibid. As Fishbane further elaborates, “For to the extent that biblical historical descriptions are rhetorically transposed by the infusion of paradigmatic mythic structures, the result of which is the very transvaluation of the events so described, it is equally significant that the biblical reuse of cosmogonic combat imagery does not simply serve to describe primordial events, but primarily underpins those whose locus is historical existence. In a culture like ancient Israel’s, cognizant of the theological imperatives of a once-for-all creation, world renewal would logically and necessarily be envisioned in terms of historical renewal. But the inverse proposition is equally valid; namely, that the historical representation of past and future in terms of cosmogonic paradigms discloses the deep biblical presentiment that all historical renewal is fundamentally a species of world renewal.”

³⁷⁰ See Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, p. 701: “The uniqueness of the Israelite religious perception lay in its discovery through social struggle that the concrete conditions of human existence are modifiable rather than immutable conditions. . . . The cosmic religiopolitical charters of social life elsewhere in the ancient Near East mirrored and legitimated submission to the stratified world of class inequality, to dependence of the many on the few for physical sustenance and for human identity. The covenant charter of early Israel mirrored and legitimated commitment in struggle toward the intentional ‘destratification’ of the human world, to the elevation of all Israelites to the status of free producers—both of their physical lives and their religiocultural identities.”

higher forms of social organization, creative movements that are no mere identical repetition, but a real contribution to the perfection of creation. This emerging consciousness was then able to see that the creative act was not essentially enclosed within the circles of necessary death and expropriation in relation to an a priori eternity as mediated by their state proxies; rather in being understood as an ongoing development of higher forms of creative organization, its movement then was only intelligible by its tendency toward a future horizon in which the extractive disorganizing forces of death are to be eliminated altogether.

Such references to the social body of production as a new creative act enabled an open critique of any external mediation of this social body, not simply by foreign nations but also from Israel's own regression into a tributary temple and royal estate: hence, the founding critical insight behind the popular parable of the unproductive bramble given above. From this insight prominent aim is taken throughout the text at the internal religio-cultural mediation of redistribution for the entropy hastening and thus anti-creative expropriations of a non-productive class—those cities whose centralizations extract from the village surroundings rather than reallocate (Gen. 11, 18–19), those kings who consume their social body for the pursuit of luxury and war (1 Samuel 8:11–18), those rich who enslave the poor through debt, those estate managers monopolizing landholdings and grounding down peasant labor (Amos 8:4–6; Isa. 5:8–23, 10:1–3), those “rulers of the ground” who misuse the soil and destroy its creative potentials, thus reversing the process of creation (Isa. 24:4–8, 21; cf. Jer. 4:26).³⁷¹

³⁷¹ Commenting on Isa. 24:21 Robert Murray highlights the idiosyncratic language used for describing kings as rulers “of the ground on the ground”, which is the only place in the Hebrew bible where kings are associated with the term *adamah*. He suggests that it represents a breaking of the covenant of the land through exploitative agricultural practices, whereby it is the kings as caretakers of the land who are guilty

This cultural memory of village life and the social consciousness of its creative potentials fostered a sense of the sacred economy whose perfected production and use of social surplus required an overcoming of the very notion of sacrifice as it had devolved into its inverted tributary form. Thus within the text an alternative trajectory on the meaning of sacrifice, especially stemming from the 8th century farmer prophets, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and their continuation in Isaiah of Jerusalem, unfolded around a pre-exilic critique of the transition to the state-form. This prophetic critique of the redistributive sacrificial institution increasingly came to understand a vision of the perfect whole around a divine creative principle that no longer demanded the first born, or their animal substitute, or even the ceremonial blood and smoke of these animals, but only greater forms of just social organization that eliminates the anti-creative forces of exploitation and poverty (Gen. 22:12; Jer. 19:5; Isa. 1:11, 16–17; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21; Micah 6:6–8).³⁷²

From the Modes of Production to the Perfection of Eternal Life

Suggesting that the critique of sacrifice is grounded in proximity to the communal imperatives of perfecting the creative act is thus to claim more specifically that it emerged from a growing recognition of that perfectible whole whose resolution could only be won through perfecting the modes of production and their historical processes of socially transforming necessity. To see more directly the distinctive Hebraic notion of

of its lost fertility as indicated earlier, vv. 4, 7–9. See, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), pp. 19–21.

³⁷² For the village standpoint within the earliest Hebrew prophets of Amos, Hosea, Micah, and even Isaiah of Jerusalem as a kind of “urban agrarian”, see Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel*, pp. 119, 156–158.

eternal life as bound up in this vision and eventually entailing the resurrection of the body, I would like to now focus on how this ideal logically unfolds from consciousness of the imperatives in perfecting the communal mode of production as a true creative act without expropriation.

The key passages indicating a conscious grasp of the anti-entropic nature of the labor process as the normative standpoint from which the critical ideal of eternal life will be born out, can be found in one of the earliest prophetic images of an ideal end to history given in the swords-to-plowshares passages of Isa. 2:3–4 and Micah 4:2–3:

Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa. 2:3–4)³⁷³

This vision of universal peace within the passages of Isaiah and Micah is distinctive within the Hebrew bible and without parallel in the ANE context.³⁷⁴ Here we thus have, as Michael Walzer rightly recognizes, “a first account, not wholly fantastic, of post-imperial international politics.”³⁷⁵ But determining what makes this post-imperial

³⁷³ I will use and refer to primarily Isaiah since there is general agreement that his presentation most likely predates Micah’s, and that Micah later adds a few embellishments, such as in v.4, as I will discuss later. Mic. 4:2–4: “and many nations shall come and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.” Although, Norman Gottwald argues that this longer version in Micah is older, with v.4 later being dropped in Isaiah. See, Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 196.

³⁷⁴ Thomas Krüger, “‘They Shall Beat Their Swords into Plowshares’: A Vision of Peace through Justice and its Background in the Hebrew Bible,” in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), p. 163.

³⁷⁵ Michael Walzer, *In God’s Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Yale University Press, 2012), p. 94.

internationalist vision distinctive requires some unpacking of this passage beyond its usual reading as a “politics”. More specifically, what needs to be challenged here are those political readings typified by Walzer when he further adds that the “prophet seems to envisage a federation of peoples, each one free from all the others, united only by their mutual recognition of divine sovereignty.”³⁷⁶ The universal federation of peoples represented here, however, is not simply a political unity effected through the conscious recognition of divine sovereignty. Such a view not only represents a narrowed vision that obscures the social context and the reflection of the village standpoint in the text, but it thereby muddles the alternative social logic of internationalism within the text and its intertextual thematic that runs through the prophetic critique of the dominant sociopolitical order.

With Isaiah and Micah retaining nearly identical content and style in their vision of that perfect whole it is likely that they were similarly drawing on an older popular oracle.³⁷⁷ Indeed an argument can be made that this popular vision—especially as it gives such a prominent place to proper tool use—is drawn from, and thus provides a significant

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 94–95.

³⁷⁷ If the final form of these statements took shape in an early post-exilic period, they nevertheless are taking up an old, commonly known oracle. As Wolff suggests, “there was a lively oral tradition which handed on this great prophetic promise.” Hans Walter Wolff, “Swords into Plowshares: Misuse of a Word of Prophecy?” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 12.3 (June, 1985) p. 141. See also Gottwald, “aside from the spacious thought of the oracle it has no marked affinities with exilic and post-exilic prophecies,” *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, p. 196. There is a consensus of scholars who see the redactional layers, regardless of their post-exilic conditioning, as drawing on an older, pre-exilic and commonly known independent oracle. See Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 244; James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 119–122; Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, pp. 196–202; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 52; John Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 95; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), p. 115; Gerhard von Rad, “The City on the Hill,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. T. Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 232–242. Even Marvin Sweeney who gives this text a later date nevertheless also agrees that the nearly identical renderings in Isaiah and Micah suggest a prior oral tradition that both they and later scribes were relying upon. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), p. 212.

view into, the pre-exilic cultural memory of the early Iron Age village mode of production in which the metals used in the plow and pruning hooks of the independent peasant producers were not yet plentiful and thus an expensive resource communally shared. If war-making was to take place it required a statist attempt at something close to expropriating the means of production, halting and redirecting labor so that the very tools of production could be commandeered, smelted down, and remade into weaponry.³⁷⁸ Hence the account in 1 Samuel 13:19 of the Philistines taking over the means to blacksmithing as an attempt to deny to Israel a military and thus statehood; but this also meant that Israel's own transition to statehood would internally require an intensified push toward expropriating the available farm tools for its makeshift military. Moreover, as Marvin Chaney has argued, the emergence of Israel as a nation-state, especially as it was fledgling under Solomon's supposed grandness, meant no relief for its agrarian base of independent producers but rather increased exploitation. This was due to the growing competition between the state and farmers over the appropriation of limited metals for the state's expanding military, denying to farmers certain tools and innovations in productive technology while nevertheless also demanding a greater productive output of cash crops for the state's additional trade in armaments.³⁷⁹

With this social context for the popular oracle it thus represents a strong critique of the state form as a non-productive endeavor that destructively consumes its social body, much like the populist parable of the bramble. Its content implies that the statist

³⁷⁸ Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah: An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), p. 113.

³⁷⁹ Marvin L. Chaney, "Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy," *Semeia* 37 (1986): pp. 68–69. Chaney also notes that the production of chariots not only requires a massive amount of metal but the import of horses procured through trade of foodstuffs, and then their maintenance which also begins another competition with farmers over the use of grain for feed, especially detracting from the maintenance of the more socially useful oxen; cf. David Hopkins, "Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel," in *Society of Biblical Literature, 1983 Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 22, Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 177–202.

project requires diminishing the optimization of labor and its risk spreading strategies, as it denies reinvesting in the creative capacities of land and labor instead for the entropy hastening enterprise of war-making. Thus the oracle evinces a concern with the transition to statehood precisely as a conflict over the true use of the modes of production and their social surplus. The pre-monarchic voice of the village commune in this popular oracle can be heard in the text, especially if we look at the surrounding context of proto-Isaiah's concrete as well as generalized critique of politics in its tributary form.

The concrete sociopolitical context of the 8th century mainly revolved around the impending onslaught of the Assyrian empire as it threatened Israel (Isa. 7:1). This initially led Judah into hastily making a military pact with the Assyrians, who would soon turn against them, forcing a heavy extraction of tribute to which King Ahaz easily capitulated by accommodatingly reorganizing the religio-cultural mediation of Judah's social surplus (7:1–17; 8:1–22). Judah's subsequent revolt against Assyrian rule would next lead to Hezekiah's military pact with Egypt, who would also betray Judah (Isa. 36–37).³⁸⁰ In both cases Isaiah is critical of these military alliances with imperial powers precisely because they are politics of the sword, which he will later suggest is merely a “covenant with death” since it can only perpetuate the cycles of violence and its ruinous effects on the entire social body (Isa. 28:15, 18–19).

Yet, the concrete critique of these particular military alliances is situated within the more general critique of the impotence not only of the politics of statecraft that lives by the sword, but its social conditioning within the tributary regime of extraction and its totalizing effects. Thus Isaiah's critical focus is not exclusively on international political

³⁸⁰ For the critique of Ahaz, Isa. 7:1–17; 8:1–22; and the critique of Hezekiah, Isa. 30:1–7; 31:1–3; 36:6. See Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, pp. 118–122.

relations but on their material conditions of possibility within the modes of exploiting the productive base. First and foremost then he is focused internally on the “thieving” ruling class of Judah that consumes the social surplus for their unproductive interests (Isa. 1:23; 3:12, 14; Isa. 22:15–18; cf. Mic. 3:11), leaving the people empty like a “booth in the vineyard” (Isa. 1:8; cf. Mic. 3:1, 9). The violent politics of the state is thus a product of failing to invest in the creative powers of the social body, instead exploiting land and labor by “joining house to house, and field to field,” as a kind of monopolizing proto-latifundia around cash crops (Isa. 5:8; Isa. 22:9–11; cf. Mic. 2:2) for funding the luxury consumption and its perpetual need for war-making by the few (filling themselves with “silver and gold” and “horses and chariots,” Isa. 2:7–8).³⁸¹ Hence the song about the vineyard that once offered subsistence and joy to the people but now, under its expropriation by the ruling class, crushes the poor and produces hardly anything, except continued bloodshed (Isa. 5:1–7, 10; cf. Isa. 3:13–15; Mic. 3:10).³⁸² Placing trust in the alienating power of the sword—that “covenant with death”—is thus the destructive result of the ruling class’s regressive “cities of chaos” that “prostitute” themselves through their extractive regimes (Isa. 1:21; 24:10; 25:2; 26:5–6; 27:10).

Proto-Isaiah thus views statecraft and its war-making—breaking “down houses to fortify a wall” (Isa. 22:10)—from the angle of its internal competition over the means of production and use of social surplus. He is preoccupied with exposing the bare power politics of statecraft, then, as utterly futile because it is a consequence of uncreatively

³⁸¹ On Isaiah’s reference in 5:8 to social contradictions that anticipate the later forms of Roman latifundia, see Knight, *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel*, p. 202. On a sociological reading of the eighth century in general and the eighth century prophets in particular, in terms of a process of “latifundialization” see D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003).

³⁸² On this song’s reference to contradictory social forces of the ruling class exploiting land and labor see Marvin L. Chaney, “Whose Sour Grapes? The Addressees of Isaiah 5:1–7 in the Light of Political Economy,” *Semeia*, 87 (1999), pp. 105–122.

attempting to order the productive forces in a way that forgets its prior social body and its constitutive value—“You made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to him who did it, or have regard for him who planned it long ago” (Isa. 22:11).³⁸³ Within the critical context surrounding the oracle of Isa. 2:3–4, therefore, Isaiah recognizes that any purely political resolution will not advance society beyond destructive forces since statist politics as such is the problem, demanding as it does that its social body continually reproduce its own contradiction rather than invest in its creative power of overcoming material contradictions. Thus to make this entire passage revolve around a purely political resolution runs counter to a major thrust of the text’s sociopolitical critique.

In reading the oracle in this socioeconomic context, two points should be made about its content concerning first, the role of Yahweh, and then that of the people and the nations. Firstly, contrary to the nationalist enthronement traditions (Ps. 47, 93, 96–99), which use similar language of turning to Yahweh, there is here no emphasis on Yahweh as holy warrior. Unlike other visions in which it is Yahweh who is the active agent, directly judging the nations (Joel 3:12)³⁸⁴ and violently destroying other armies and their weaponry (Ps. 2:9, 46:9, 47:3, 97:3, 110:1–6), here Yahweh’s agency recedes into the background, represented rather as a peaceful arbitrator between peoples who voluntarily turn to him (Isa. 2:2–3).³⁸⁵ As Francis Landy has pointed out the turn to Yahweh here is

³⁸³ On this verse as a criticism of Hezekiah’s building policies see Liverani, *Israel’s History and the History of Israel*, p. 158.

³⁸⁴ Joel appropriates this oracle in the opposite direction of Micah and Isaiah, as a nationalist call to arms according to the violent enthronement tradition of Yahweh as holy warrior (4:10). Most scholars agree that Joel was written later during the Persian exile and as combining a host of earlier prophetic oracles for nationalist purposes.

³⁸⁵ Peter D. Miscall states that the subject of the unifying action is here not specifically identified, and could reside in Yahweh, his words, his instruction or through the many instruments that carry it on. See, Miscall, *Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), p. 35. For this ambiguity in relation to the less

identified in the feminine voice as the turn to the wisdom of Torah for the people (Isa. 2:3c), over against the masculine voice of the nationalistic holy warrior tradition and its perpetuation of phallic rivalries.³⁸⁶ Moreover, in coupling the turn to Yahweh with the turn to mount Zion from which this maternal wisdom will “flow forth,” there is an allusion to the Edenic ideal of original creation as a universal life giving force, though now ideal creation is situated as the final cause that draws all peoples forth into a higher unity.³⁸⁷ Indeed, the turn to this Torah anticipates the turn to the “eternal covenant” in Isa. 24:5, as that general cosmic principle of creation regarding the cultivation of the land in contradistinction to the statist “covenant with death” forged from the barren, anti-creational cities of chaos.³⁸⁸ In light of the above reference to that prophetic trajectory for which turning to Yahweh as the ongoing principle of creation always meant the possibility of new creation, with its corresponding legal ethos centered around just redistribution, the turn to Yahweh then, seen in relation to this notion of Torah flowing from the mountain, suggests that the common standard binding all peoples is that of a progression toward true creating.

ambiguous attribution within the enthronement passages, see also Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, pp. 121–128.

³⁸⁶ Landy sees a tension within the text between the masculine language of the God of Jacob juxtaposed with the maternal qualities of the mount of Zion from which the nurturing waters of Torah’s universal wisdom will flow beyond its Mosaic provenance. Landy, “Torah and Anti-Torah: Isaiah 2:2–4 and 1:10–26,” *Biblical Interpretation*, 11 (2003), pp. 317–334.

³⁸⁷ Ulrich Berges suggests Isa. 2:3 can also be rendered as: “‘for out of Zion flows forth the Torah’ as life giving force at whose water the just send forth their roots and yield fruit in season.” See Berges, “Personifications and Prophetic Voices of Zion in Isaiah and Beyond,” in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist*, ed. Johannes C. De Moor (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2002), p. 59. Richard J. Clifford points to this connection of Zion with Eden, but as the end process that draws the liberative movement from Sinai to completion. See Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 156–160.

³⁸⁸ As Marvin A. Sweeney notes regarding Isa. 24:5, “The term *tôrôt* ... refers to the violation of the ‘laws’ or ‘norms’ that constitute the ‘eternal covenant’ (*bêrit ôlām*) by which the earth’s ‘inhabitants’ dwell on the land. This appears to be a reference to the laws that govern the structure of creation rather than to any given body of divine teachings. The term *tôrâ* (*tôrôt*) then refers to a cosmic principle of order in the world.” Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, p. 23.

Secondly, the internationalism under this criterion is therefore not determined in its unity by a common allegiance to an authority in the political sense of an absolute sovereign will, but rather comes together according to the common standards of cultivating the life-giving potentials of creation within the collective social body of production. In other words, the reason for a newly expansive internationalism of peaceful interaction cannot be left at the surface level of mere politics or religious beliefs, as if it is because all nations come to recognize Yahweh as their true king. Walzer's political interpretation given above is symptomatic of a common flat reading of the text throughout much biblical studies.³⁸⁹ This emphasis on a purely political consciousness of sovereignty and its resultant submission of the will simply has things backwards. It is a reading of the text in the manner of a Hobbesian war of all against all that can only be temporarily suspended by proper recognition and fear of that true sovereign power who owns the exclusive means to violence and death. This logic is an unconscious assumption that also besets almost all conservative religious readings of the text as promoting an apolitical fideism to Yahweh defined in this sovereign register. Such a modern religio-political logic is closer to the violent enthronement tradition, which is, however, precisely that logic that is challenged by this oracle.

Such a reading imposes modern divisions between the religious, political and socioeconomic spheres upon a Hebraic world for which no such divisions cleanly existed. This dichotomizing religio-political reading makes the salvific economy of the oracle then hinge on an abstractly political or religious reform of consciousness without

³⁸⁹ This logic is typified by Joseph Jensen: "It is because the nations are willing to receive judgment and correction from the one they now acknowledge as king that war is no longer the means of settling disputes." Jensen, *The Use of tora in Isaiah: His Debate with the Wisdom Tradition*, CBQMS 3 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1973), pp. 90–91.

recognizing the oracle's emphasis on changing the material and social conditions required for a real resolution of the political problem. There is thus a failure to adequately account for the fact within the oracle that both Yahweh, as mentioned above, as well as the nations, are demoted in their active agency of unification in relation to the more basic agency of the whole social body encompassing all peoples, prior to national associations. As the passage emphasizes, the common bond turns on and is made by, not the nations, but the "many people" who already "come" and "walk" together (Isa. 2:3), and thereby actively appropriate the means of production according to its transformative capacities for reversing entropy (Isa. 2:4a); whereas the nations only arrive in a peripherally contingent role at the end of the oracle, after all the people collectively and creatively transform the forces of production according to the internal laws of creating. More importantly, the nations are not distinguished by anything they do, but rather by what they will not do—"they shall not lift swords, they shall not learn war" (Isa. 2:4b). Thus they are described as shell-like entities standing on the sidelines without a supply of swords and thus no means of employing death against one another; hence their legitimacy is short-circuited precisely because they are rendered materially impotent. The salvific economy therefore primarily turns, not on correct obedience of the political will or its corresponding correct religious beliefs and fidelities to abstract power, but on perfecting the forces of production, according to its internal collective and creative capacities, so as to create the material conditions and its new social body by which the contradictory imperial politics of the sword are no longer a possibility.

It is precisely in grasping the anti-entropic qualities of labor and thus articulating a perfectible whole organic to the standpoint of the communal mode of production that

proto-Isaiah is able to relativize the supposedly necessary statist monopoly on the forces of death. Thus he is able to deconstruct the apparently natural inevitableness of war, reified as it is in statist cosmogonies, as nothing more than a contingently learned habit (Isa. 2:4) whose non-necessity and eliminable reality is concealed precisely from failing to invest in the creative capacities of the social body's productive activity.³⁹⁰ That proto-Isaiah begins the passage with the vision of a return to the temple of Yahweh at Zion, then, cannot be easily read as signifying a naively nationalist hope for a militaristic return to the supposedly halcyon days of a Solomonic temple/palatine complex. Nor does it demonstrate that this Isaianic text was apolitically concerned only with proper religious worship for its own sake. The mere fact that he appeals to a temple institution as the center of arbitration simply signifies the ubiquitous centrality of the religio-cultural mediation of social surplus within the sacred economies of the ANE, an institution that has its social provenance prior to the institution of the late Iron age imperial states. But proto-Isaiah's vision is unique in that his use of this oracle within his broader critical context suggests not a return to the Solomonic temple but a return of this temple away from its distorted statist orientation and back to the people—the return of the sacred economy's religio-cultural mediation to serving, at a higher level, its prior social body of production for truly creative and universally collective ends. Thus we find a subtle de-metaphorization of the sacred economy's theological metaphorization of allocation at work here, since the vision of the perfectible whole no longer hinges on the fantastical projection of a national deity or its state representatives as the primary agential standpoint

³⁹⁰ “Not of least interest in the oracle is the conception of Isaiah that war is ‘learned.’ War is not an unalterable institution in human life but can be replaced by another set of habits better serving the interests of nations.” Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, p. 202.

that commands the use of social surplus, but rather the totality of peoples unified in their constitutive productive activity.³⁹¹

What makes the oracle distinctive, therefore, is its distinctive account of the internal laws of making and its subsequent vision of a more inclusive whole participated by the producer. It is a vision of the perfect whole signified from the cultural memory of village life, which will continue to be echoed and more clearly articulated as that in which the producer actually producing will be the work produced rather than a kingdom won through the political expropriations for war-making and its extractive regimes: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall ... long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:21–22; cf. Amos 9:14–15).³⁹²

Unlike any other ANE sacred economy and its ideological representation, we have then a demythologized presentation of socially producing the perfectible whole more directly *from* the universal standpoint of the pre-state social body of production.³⁹³ What is especially remarkable is that Isaiah’s use of the oracle (and likewise Micah’s) draws out of the village standpoint its progressive qualities that exceed any miring in rural idiocy or nostalgia: it is a forward-looking vision of a perfectible whole whose post-imperial internationalism, born as it is from perfecting the communal mode of production in its transformation of necessity, reveals universal human interests. Moreover, in its

³⁹¹ The Micah addition to the oracle is especially indicative of this universal end of unity beyond nationalism: “they shall sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Mic. 4:4)

³⁹² This ideal in Amos is articulated in light of the social contradictions in which peasants are crushed under the foot of landowners (8:4–6). Claiming that Amos 9 is purely a post-exilic tack on because of its abrupt optimism seems too easy of a judgment. Regardless of its possible later date, much like the passage of trito-Isaiah, the ideal fits with the socioeconomic critique in the rest of the prophetic text.

³⁹³ Mays, *Micah*, p. 98, is closer to the point when he emphasizes that “people will use the scarce and valuable materials of earth to cultivate life instead of crafting death.”

universalist thrust we have the incipient eschatological trajectory organic to the emerging consciousness of the standpoint of labor, which nevertheless does not abandon the orientation to eternal life but brings it down to earth. Since the vision points to the open-ended process of perfecting the creative self-mediation of life for itself without the necessity of employing death, it therefore provides the this-worldly, historicist logic of eternal life that will subsequently unfold into a non-inverted conception of the resurrection of the body.

This sense of eternal life as the imperative of perfecting a material and historical process was not simply about an increased consciousness of *history* as a distinct movement over against opaque and deterministic *nature*, but rather was drawn in a transparent way from the emergent tendencies within the village commune's reproduction of the whole of nature at a higher level.³⁹⁴ Thus, continuing the imagery of the mountain and flowing waters of universal wisdom around creation (a trope which remains in tension with any later interpolations about restoring the monarchically fortified cities) there is an extension of the vision of universal peace to the whole of nature, in which the wolf and the lamb live together (Isa. 11:6–9; cf. Isa. 65:25). This is an image whose ideal,

³⁹⁴ This is to read against the nineteenth century Protestant tendency, especially as exemplified in Julius Wellhausen who perpetuated a certain kind of Hegelian logic against dead nature in his reading of Israelite culture evolving into a religion of Yahweh's self-revelation against primitive nature religion. Often this sense of ethical revelatory religion over against nature is also read from the assumption that ancient Israel was an originally nomadic people. See, Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. John S. Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), p. 308. But the Hebrew sense of history—if we are going to consider it as born out under the imperatives of the *village* mode of production—indicates the social transformation of nature in a more comprehensive sense, as the organizing of its material otherwise according to its novel creative potentials, and thus not just a history signifying an ethical break of interiorization and self-consciousness that sets the human apart from nature (which was also perpetuated by J. G. Frazer's influential reading of sacrifice in *The Golden Bough*). For a reading against these narrowing tendencies, which emphasizes instead the differing economies of the village and state underlying the cultic mediations of sacrificial practices, see Gary Anderson, "Sacrifice and Offerings in Ancient Israel: An Introduction," in *Community, Identity, and Ideology: Social Science Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Charles E. Carter and Carol Meyers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 182–200.

whether taken metaphorically, with the wild animals representing other nations, or literally, with it representing the whole of nature, nevertheless suggests a holistic sociality without predatory relations. Even if it is metaphorical, the vision implies that the elimination of the self-devouring relations amongst the nations can only occur as a realization of the trajectory given in Isa. 2:4, which itself cannot be fully actualized without significantly changing the social appropriation of nature and thus, dialectically, nature itself. What is notable about this vision, therefore, is that it not only emphasizes that the “wolf shall live with the lamb,” but more importantly that the “cow and the bear shall graze, and their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (Isa. 11:6–7). In other words, it offers no simplistic liberal picture of merely living with and tolerating antagonistic divisions within supposedly unchangeable mortal conditions of nature.³⁹⁵ Instead the vision continues to articulate those intuitions and intentions from the laboring body’s creative anti-entropic movement toward transforming the totality of nature and its given mortal conditions of scarcity and necessity, thus relativizing and eventually eliminating the very material conditions in which any predatory economy would appear necessary.

Furthermore, though this imagery also depicts a child leading the way (Isa. 11:6), this need not suggest a romantic return to childhood. Rather the anti-entropic qualities of social labor are projected toward organizing a whole for which creative activity is perfected, further indicating an emphasis on transforming nature into a sociality more fully determined around art and play, yet at a higher level of integrated complexity

³⁹⁵ Drawing on Robert Murray’s distinction, in his *Cosmic Covenant*, between notions of peace as either *from* or *with* the rest of the animal kingdom, Richard Bauckham rightly notes that these Isaianic images offer a more positive and comprehensive notion of reconciliation with the whole of nature, rather than a mere pragmatic toleration of nature’s wildness. Bauckham, *Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), p. 75.

amongst created differences (Isa. 11:8–9). The perfection of life for itself is projected, therefore, as no simple return to a changeless self-identity, as if the negation of necessity and predatory relations meant also the elimination of change and difference so as to revert creation in its evolved variations back to an originally homogenizing stasis. This vision of a new whole therefore indicates a higher level of subsisting precisely through revolutionizing the very modes of appropriating and sharing the material beyond any supposed dialectical necessity of suffering and death, without also representing a regression to an undifferentiated stasis.³⁹⁶

The thematic movement of Isaiah 2:4 to 11:6–9 therefore presents a comprehensive, this-worldly vision of the social body raised to a higher level, raising the whole of nature with it into a kind of cosmic communism of perfected mutualism no longer blocked by the enclosure of death and the divisions and fragmentation it spawns. It is from this memory of a pre-exilic social body of labor and its self-transcending capacities, therefore, that we find a subtler yet more comprehensive idea of eternal life emerging that grasps the social body of labor according to the historical requirements for perfecting its creative and collective essence. It is a vision of the perfection of life for itself, consequently, whose resolution in and for the totality of the social body explicitly demystifies the notion of death as a necessity. Death is thus no longer viewed as a natural requirement in order to complete the redistributive circuit, but rather comprehended instead as a contingent contradiction to the material and social forces of creation and thus

³⁹⁶ Moreover, if the vision is taken literally it implies that the domestication of animals begun in earnest with the village agricultural revolution has its *telos* not in their exploitation and domination but in a new whole of communion and mutual flourishing without predation. Thus, no simple line can be drawn from the dawn of domestication to the current state of agribusiness and their mistreatment of both domesticated animals and their consequent decimation of wild populations, as if this were the logical conclusion of developing the agricultural revolution's essence.

a barrier to perfecting production and redistribution. As an organic outworking of the agrarian insight into the anti-entropic ends of productive activity we find, then, yet another reference not to Jerusalem or a nation but to the realization of the creative life-giving forces flowing from the “mountain” by which death itself, as “the shroud that is cast over all peoples,” is now interrogated and relativized as a contingent condition to be completely “destroyed” (Isa. 25:7). The negation of death here is conceptualized not as an eternally replayed struggle, but rather a negation of its negation, “swallowed up forever,” thus implying a real transformation of nature beyond its cyclical sameness (Isa. 25:8). Moreover, this is an imperative to be met if the communal form of production and redistribution are to be perfected in their further creating a more inclusive whole of positive self-subsistence in which “all peoples” might come to share in its banquet (Isa. 25:6–8).

The Non-Inverted Idea of Eternal Life as the Resurrection of the Body

Thus beginning with Isa. 2:4 in which all peoples are the constitutive agents for perfecting the whole through cultivating the anti-entropic essence of the productive forces, transforming the whole of nature into a more comprehensive social body (Isa. 11:6–9), we have now all peoples as the ends of production and redistribution, to be perfected by and as full participants in the whole so produced (25:6–8). And it is here, from this vision of the perfectible whole whose resolution requires that the prior social body is recalled and raised up by its production beyond all extractive forces and material contradictions, that one of the first explicit Hebraic references to bodily resurrection emerges as the vision’s logical conclusion: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise.

O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is radiant dew, and the earth shall give birth to those long dead” (Isa. 26:19).

While the overall composition of Isaiah has a long history of redacted layers, it is still generally considered that proto-Isaiah (Isa. 1–39) has its original social setting within the eighth century BCE.³⁹⁷ Yet the section of proto-Isaiah being considered here (Isa. 24–27) has often been read exclusively as a disjunctive addition in no way native to the original composition. This reading of the section was largely the result of that scholarly prejudice which assigned anything with a progressively universalist, futuristic and cosmic thrust necessarily to a late post-exilic origin. The over-determining assumption was not only that such ideals must be ahistorical projections, but also that extreme despair over the fading hopes for national restoration conditioned within an alien Hellenistic culture of abstract reflection could be the only conditions of possibility for such expansive projections (an assumption consistent with the intellectualist prejudice against the laboring body’s ability to reflect upon its self-transcending trajectories in their ideal form). Thus Isa. 24–27 was read as a late invention of apocalyptic literature—deeming it the “apocalypse of Isaiah”—largely on the basis of its similar thematic interests to that of the apocalyptic genre in moving beyond local concerns of a narrow political nature.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ On the supporting archaeological evidence for this dating see William Dever, “Archaeology and the Social World of Isaiah,” in *To Break Every Yoke: Essays in Honor of Marvin L. Chaney*, eds. Robert B. Coote and Norman K. Gottwald (Sheffield Phoenix Press, Ltd., 2007), pp. 82–96. For recent arguments, from within the historical-critical method, for the eighth century origins of proto-Isaiah see, John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987).

³⁹⁸ For the original postexilic dating and determination of this section as apocalyptic following the nineteenth century work of Bernhard Duhm and Rudolph Smend, in which it was first proposed, see Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jesaja 24–27* (BWANT 62; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933); Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974); Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997); Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). For a discussion of the context and assumptions of Duhm, Smend and the subsequent line of interpretation see, William R. Millar, *Isaiah 24–27 and the Origin of the Apocalyptic* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

Such an account, however, attenuates the connection that I've been drawing between the emergence of the idea of resurrection as conditioned by the cultural memory of the pre-state social body rather than solely by the post-exilic despondency generated from a lost materiality.

Yet, as recent scholars have increasingly argued there is no tenable reason, besides some broadly overlapping thematic strokes, for considering this section as an invention of a later apocalyptic genre. Firstly, John Collins argues that this is not an apocalyptic redaction but a prior prophetic eschatology within its own earlier tradition, from which the later apocalyptic literature drew. He notes that the differences between this more realist eschatology and those of later apocalyptic embellishments disallow any facile attempt to reduce the former to the latter.³⁹⁹ For Collins the apocalyptic genre of late Antiquity is “revelatory literature ... mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”⁴⁰⁰ Thus while apocalyptic literature revolves around a future salvation, which marks only a loose similarity of thematic content with the Isaianic section, the specificities of apocalyptic content and its form hinge on the claim that they are externally mediated by both an alien knowing and being outside material history. This runs counter to Isa. 24–27, which remains a popular prophetic oracle communicated from and for the people without making any claim to external mediations of an otherworldly revelatory agent delivering the message. Moreover, the implied salvific economies are completely different in that the logic in Isaiah 24–27 continues to revolve around the created order and its material

³⁹⁹ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), pp. 24–25.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

fulfillment, a perfection that requires not the employment of death in order to remove life to another plane, but rather the removal of death itself from the creative power and historical life of this world.⁴⁰¹

Secondly, there is greater recognition that Isa. 24–27 not only functions coherently as an internal unit, but also in an organic way with the rest of Isa. 1–39.⁴⁰² This acknowledged coherence with the rest of proto-Isaiah coincides with the increasing recognition by biblical scholars that the tradition of the oracle and its eschatology are also more closely related in its thematic content, narrative structures, and linguistic forms to older Ugaritic and its West Semitic myths than anything of a post-exilic origin.⁴⁰³ This relation can especially be seen in the extensive similarities between the Ugaritic Baal Cycle and the narrative movement of Isa. 24–27. Indeed there is now a growing scholarly consensus that this section critically appropriates the Baal myth as part of proto-Isaiah's

⁴⁰¹ As William Barker has likewise argued in reference to Collins's definition, Isaiah 24–27 cannot be deemed an "apocalyptic" genre: "First, there is no 'otherworldly being' (nor is there an assumption of one) communicating the message to a human recipient. Rather, there is a prophetic oracle communicated from the prophet to an ethnic/national group ... Secondly, Isaiah 24–27 does not include references to 'another, supernatural world' in the way that such terminology is usually applied to indicate a more celestial or otherwise spiritualized domain." But then Barker goes on to contradictorily say that it is an "oracle about a future divine in-breaking into human history, not a vision of a reality outside of human existence", which is nevertheless to say that it remains in the form of an apocalyptic communication insofar as knowledge and actualization of this future would be mediated by an otherworldly being outside human history that invades it externally. See William D. Barker, *Isaiah's Kingship Polemic: An Exegetical Study in Isaiah 24–27* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁰² Peter Stromberg gives a balanced assessment in stating that there is too much that can be traced back to the traditions of the prophet himself for this section to be seen entirely as an exilic or postexilic invention, even though it is thoroughly edited by these later additions. Thus he argues for a more organic process of composition building on the original prophet's pre-exilic insights. Stromberg, *An Introduction to the Study of Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), pp. 7–26. For an earlier dating see also Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative reading of Isaiah 24–27* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2009).

⁴⁰³ On a summary of the lexical studies of Isa. 24–27 linking it in relation to the older Ugaritic language see Christopher B. Hays, "The Date and Message of Isaiah 24–27 in Light of Hebrew Diachrony," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, ed. J. Todd Hibbard and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), pp. 7–24. William Barker aptly sums up this understanding of Isa. 24–27: "The verbal correspondence, uniquely shared word pairs, parallel ideas and themes, and the nearly identical narrative progression in the first half of the chapters present a strong case for the intentional use and creative adaptation of either the Ba'al Myth itself or a shared tradition between Ugarit and Israel." *Isaiah's Kingship Polemic*, p. 218.

larger polemic against his sociopolitical context.⁴⁰⁴ This critical engagement with the West Semitic myth of Baal can then be consistently read as extending the pre-exilic Israelite concern with the initial transition to statehood insofar as it failed to raise up a new social body beyond its past Canaanite tributary forms. For our purposes what must be especially highlighted is Isaiah's critical appropriation of Canaanite enthronement and royal banqueting traditions that center on the perpetual battle between Baal and Mot. This allows us to see more directly how this section expands the polemic of Isa. 2:4 against tributary politics and their enthronement logic by continuing the critical reversal of statist cosmogonies. Such insight will help better contextualize the demythologized reappropriation of the ideal of bodily resurrection, as both an eschatological projection as well as sociopolitical critique in service to recalling the pre-state social body.

As Mark S. Smith states, the Baal Cycle represents royal society and is primarily concerned with accounting for the precariously won kingship of Baal.⁴⁰⁵ Within this myth, Baal, the storm god, is enthroned king after he violently defeats Yamm, the god of the chaotic seas. Following his victorious enthronement banquet, whose only guests are other deities of the royal pantheon, Baal takes possession of the holy mountain as his exclusive private abode, while also seizing other towns as a display of his new sovereignty.⁴⁰⁶ Yet after these events Baal is brutally killed by the great "swallower"

⁴⁰⁴ Hence, Barker proposes to replace the epithet of "the apocalypse of Isaiah" with "Isaiah's kingship polemic" Ibid. See also John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Christopher B. Hays, *A Covenant with Death: Death in the Iron Age II and its Rhetorical Uses in Proto-Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015); Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration*; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "City, Earth, and Empire in Isaiah 24–27," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*; Beth Steiner, "Food of the Gods: Canaanite Myths of Divine Banquets and Gardens in Connection with Isaiah 25:6," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*.

⁴⁰⁵ Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1994), p. xxiv–xxvi

⁴⁰⁶ Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain*, p. 80.

Mot, who as the personification of death is deemed equal in power to all other deities.⁴⁰⁷

While Baal's warrior companion, Anath, in turn viciously destroys Mot and resurrects Baal, Mot nevertheless also rises to life, but of his own accord, and challenges Baal once again. No god is then able to defeat Mot, but must play out the violent battle with death in perpetuity.

The Baal myth provides another example of legitimating statist priority through the ideological representation of death. Here Mot symbolizes death as an eternal necessity against which life defines itself naturally as a balanced use of deathly force in order to maintain a cosmic equilibrium. In other words, Mot as the mythical personification of death is always needed to represent one half of the equation in the Baal Cycle's enthronement logic. He is that force of ever encroaching chaos and annihilation that must always remain on the horizon so that appeal can be made for the consolidation and continual use of a counter-violence wielded exclusively by a warring principle of life, symbolized by Baal and his royal warrior cohorts. The eternal battle of Baal and Mot is thus the mythical representation of nature in terms of the royal estate's imaginary relation to death, providing the representation of the cosmic whole as a totalized predatory economy with no way out except through a balancing of entropy-hastening forces against themselves. This ideological strategy of containment thus provides an imagined cosmic totality by which the monopolized statist employment of death can then equally appear as a natural necessity.

The resurrection of Baal, of course, like the resurrection of Osiris before it, represents something of the agrarian intuitions and intentions of the perfection of eternal

⁴⁰⁷ Paul Kang-Kul Cho and Janling Fu, "Death and Feasting in the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 25:6–8)," in *Formation and Intertextuality in Isaiah 24–27*, pp. 120–121.

life in nature. But in coupling this ideal with the subsequent resurrection of Mot as well (ad infinitum), these intuitions become narrowly articulated solely around the generic level of nature's given cycles of equilibrium, obscuring the originating context within the social body of labor's creative capacity to transform necessity.⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, death's representation under Mot as a necessarily unchangeable condition sanctions an abstracted consolidation of the theological metaphorization of allocative ends around the perfected figure of nature in Baal's royalty; and so also the Canaanite city-state restricts the perfection of eternal life in humanity to its ruling few as Baal's mediator—death may continually purge and dissolve the social body of labor but it is the ruling estate that allegedly rises again and again in forcefully maintaining order, therefore standing as the privileged site for commanding the reinvestment of social surplus.⁴⁰⁹ In thereby justifying the use of social surplus for state war-making, this projection of a cyclical battle also justifies the consumption of the fruits of its victories at the banquet feasts by the warring few. Thus the social surplus generated from the productive body is sacrificed to the presumed priority of the state, socially preparing the conditions for a banquet in which it is the social body itself that is consumed.

As already highlighted above, proto-Isaiah, especially in Isa. 25–26, also refers to the mountaintop, the vanquishing of the forces of chaos, a banquet feast, and resurrection.⁴¹⁰ Indeed the negation of death's negation described in terms of swallowing

⁴⁰⁸ Of course the appeal to a female deity as the avenging goddess who resurrects Baal also significantly retains agrarian intuitions of nature's creative power but it begins to formulate this figure entirely in the cast of a patriarchal use of force.

⁴⁰⁹ On the social structure of late Bronze and early Iron Age Canaanite city-states see Nadav Na'aman, *Canaan in the 2nd Millennium B.C.E.*, v. 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁴¹⁰ On the connection of these motifs with the Ugaritic tradition see Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), pp. 65–107.

is most probably an allusion to the swallower, Mot (25:8).⁴¹¹ Like Isa. 2:3–4 with its flat religio-political readings, Isa. 25–26 can be similarly read on the surface as concerned merely with a display of Yahweh’s sovereignty over Mot and Baal. However, if this section is interpreted exclusively in terms of a religious critique, concerned primarily with the intrusions of Canaanite religious objects of worship into Hebrew religion, the critical import of the Isaianic demythologization will be missed, not to mention that it would also sit somewhat incoherently with the rest of the text’s sociopolitical critique. This reading would reduce the text to another mythical *chaoskampf*, as if it were solely a matter of establishing Yahweh’s sovereignty over Baal’s, which would be a battle between competing theological metaphorizations rather than a deconstruction of these metaphorizations, as the text implies.

The religio-political critique in this section however evidences an enlightened consciousness of the fact that theological metaphorizations are always in service to the religio-cultural mediation of social surplus, an enlightenment ratified by the demythologized and democratized sense of bodily resurrection standing at the end. Thus while Yahweh is referred to in terms that mimic the Baal enthronement narrative, he is nevertheless signified not as that warrior who will violently conquer all other warriors and nations; rather this signifier of Yahweh stands as that transcendental future horizon of perfected creative power by which nature’s creative potentials flowing from the mountain will be redistributed to all peoples. More importantly, the realization of life’s creative anti-entropic trajectory will eventuate in eliminating the contradiction of death absolutely, which has hitherto been the main extractive contradiction whose manipulated

⁴¹¹ Paul Kang-Kul Cho and Janling Fu, “Death and Feasting in the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isaiah 25:6–8),” pp. 120–122.

hastening and ideological reification sustains the ruling hegemony of the tributary state. With the exposure and intended final erasure of Mot as representing a surmountable contingency, so also disappears Baal's, and thus the state's, power.

Thus the name Yahweh signifies a historical process of deconstructing and undoing the very material contradiction of death, that Ur-contradiction which illegitimately generates the apparent necessity of extractive regimes and their theological metaphorizations in the first place. What keeps the people from standing at, and as, the perfective end of history is the ubiquitous fact of death, which always extracts the people from their products. Thus the fact of death and its supposed necessity allows the socially produced statist institutions and its theological metaphorizations—those produced images that remain in place of the negated producer—to both continue semi-independently, as well as appear as the thing itself. But Isaiah's demythologization of death as no longer a personified force, its demystification as no longer a natural necessity or absolute power on par with life, but a contingent contradiction to be eventually eliminated from life once and for all, results precisely in deconstructing any theological metaphorization of redistribution. Instead redistribution is reoriented to the de-metaphorized ideal of reallocation around bodily resurrection, signifying now the people as such.

Therefore, if this text were merely concerned with Yahweh's sovereignty over Baal, it nevertheless significantly indicates not Yahweh as the possessive withholder of the mountaintop, nor as the main partaker of the victory banquet, nor Yahweh as the more fully and finally resurrected one rather than Baal in overcoming death. There is no salvific economy here that hinges on passing through the mouth of death so that one can abstractly identify with an eternal life concentrated exclusively in a dying and rising

god—a metaphor for legitimating the banquet feast in which the social body’s surplus labor is consumed by the ruling few. Rather the only thing destroyed and swallowed whole is death itself, so that the ideal of eternal life can be returned to, as a raising up of the whole body of its originating sense. This sacred economy then turns on a positive construal of salvation as itself the historical and material process of raising all peoples to new life, the people signified not generically but materially in the concrete body, resolving the extractive contradictions of death in their “corpse” (Isa. 26:18).

In viewing the perfection of eternal life from and for all peoples, as an intuition and intention generated from the pre-state social body of production and its universal interests, the Isaianic text thus indicates that the only meaningful end to history is not one in which a created metaphor inversely stands in. That is, the projected perfection of historical forces as they transform necessity does not here reside in a produced image standing in for the producer, not a nation-state standing in for the people who made it possible, nor any other social parody of death, nor death itself, but the social totality of all peoples themselves partaking to the fullest degree in the fruits of their labor. And from the progression of transforming nature, begun in Isa. 2:4, we now have a vision of eternal life in terms of the “earth” so organized that it “shall give birth to those long dead” (Isa. 26:19).

Therefore, greater light is now shed on the reference to those political leaders making a “covenant with death” (Isa. 28:15), as both a figurative and literal expression. This phrase not only figuratively indicates the inability of Jerusalem’s leaders to break with its tributary past, thus remaining tied to the logic of Mot by its complicity in becoming a state and making its various military alliances; it is also based on the literal

insight that such politics does not invest in the real social forces of life that might overcome the contradictions of death, since in making a pact with the forces of death (Mot) in order to maintain the illusion of its own power (Baal), the state reconciles itself to the material reality of death as something only to be hastened at the expense of its prior social body. This therefore does not suggest that proto-Isaiah's cosmic vision is simply a reflection on human existential conditions, as if its more universal thrust detracts somewhat from a concrete sociopolitical critique. Rather the sociopolitical critique gains a simultaneously universal and concrete bite precisely because it is funded by a more acute eschatological vision drawn from the standpoint of labor whose anti-entropic trajectories necessarily expose the state's imaginary relation to death as a concealment of its social body.⁴¹²

The textual battle lines are then not really drawn in the inverted arena of mythical agents, as if solely between what Yahweh can do that Baal cannot, but rather between what the creative power of the pre-state social body can do that the tributary state cannot. Continuing the concerns of Isa. 2:3–4 we then have the difference here between a religio-cultural mediation of social surplus that requires the sacrifice of the social body to destructive state interests, and a religio-cultural mediation under the sign of a demetaphorized ideal of bodily resurrection, that more fully grasps the historical imperative of redistributing the creative surplus power of life to the whole social body of production,

⁴¹² This is to challenge any supposed mutual exclusion between the eschatological reference of a text and its concrete sociopolitical referent. This rigid separation between texts that are occupied with theological discourse and those that are occupied with historical sociopolitical critique can be seen in Christopher Hays's claim, in commenting on Isa 25:6–8, that "the image of swallowing Death was *not eschatological* in its original composition ... It is very much in line with the images of YHWH overcoming the covenant with Death in Isa. 28:15, 18 (and the swallowing of the elites in Isa. 5:14); as such, its primary reference is to historical/geopolitical events." Hays, *A Covenant with Death*, p. 323. The argument that I am making is that its primary reference is to both, since it is on the basis of the eschatological vision that any critique of tributary political in their concrete historical forms can be made.

reinvesting in its making whole. Yet, Isaiah's reversing reappropriation of the ideal of resurrection from its tributary inversion is not a one-off within the Hebrew bible. As John Day has argued Isaiah is drawing on a precedent already set in Hosea's older appeal to bodily resurrection, thus suggesting its popular circulation prior to being written down in these prophetic texts. It is no surprise then that we find one of the first explicit references to bodily resurrection with not only one of the earliest prophetic writers, but as Ellen Davis claims, possibly one of the "first agrarian writers in history."⁴¹³ Thus prior to Isaiah's reversal of Ugaritic traditions in light of a critique of tributary politics we find already in Hosea the main outlines of this critical course.

As Gale Yee has shown, Hosea's expressed denunciation of Baal worship had to do primarily with Israel's statist attempt to meet external tributary demands by imposing its own internal exploitation of the village mode of production. Thus she points to similar socioeconomic contexts behind Hosea that we observed in Isaiah. In the background of Hosea we have the 8th century Israelite monarchy distributing land grants that consolidated within proto-latifundia, thereby rendering the peasantry's access to agricultural land largely through exorbitant rents and the sizeable relinquishing of surplus goods. This of course served not to optimize labor but rather to exploit its creative capacities toward the quantitative intensification of producing royal cash crops.⁴¹⁴ Hence,

⁴¹³ Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, p. 6. "The eighth-century prophets Amos and Hosea were probably the world's first agrarian writers, followed within a few decades by the Greek farmer-poet Hesiod" (p. 120).

⁴¹⁴ "Under the familial mode of production, highland farmers practiced a mixed, village-based agriculture that distributed risks of crop failure and optimized labor across a diverse spectrum of growing strategies. Most importantly, villagers retained their surplus income and resources. Under the tributary mode of production, land grants in Israel's 'breadbasket' regions became latifundia (large estates), passed on as patrimony in the hands of a few wealthy elites. To gain access to the land, peasants paid enormous rent and/or taxes, turning their surpluses over to the landholders." Gale Yee, *Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 83–84. On the emergence of absentee landlords in this period see also Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, p. 123.

the emphasis in Hosea on the failure of Israel to recognize or honor the productive origins from which came “the grain, the new wine and oil” (Hos. 2:8), a failure due to external ends blindingly imposed upon the production process by which “they gash themselves for new grain and new wine” (7:14).⁴¹⁵

Israel, therefore, had begun to mimic the religio-cultural mediation of the Canaanite tributary regime, with redistribution benefiting primarily the ruling elite in a ruinous way to the social body. Hosea expresses this turning away from the creative principle and toward the destructive entropy-hastening tendencies of the tributary form as an attempt to procreate with Baal (Hos. 2).⁴¹⁶ In turning to the sacred economy under the image of Baal, with his associations as the god of rain and fecundity, Hosea mockingly emphasizes the ironical outcome for the people of Israel who thus “died” in turning to Baal since their own creative source “dried up” (Hos. 13:1–15). In turning their creative powers to the consumptive expediencies of this tributary regime, their own creative source, represented as Yahweh, is thus turned against them in a way that allows their devouring and destruction—thus their own creative power is distorted into deadly self-predation (Hos. 5:14).⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ “Formerly employed in multiple ways to spread risk, the highlands were gradually transformed through enormous peasant investment into terraces of vineyards and olive trees to keep pace with the state’s demand for wine and oil. Because procedures to deal with crop failure were minimized, the highland villagers joined lowland peasantry in being the hardest hit during lean years by economically ruinous cycles of tax and debt.” Yee, *Banished Children of Eve*, p. 84.

⁴¹⁶ On the Baal myth and its cycles of resurrection, in its original context, as not organic agrarian expressions of nature but rather expressions of statist priority in controlling the social body of agricultural labor (much like the Osiris resurrection myth), see Lawrence E. Toombs, “Baal, Lord of the Earth: The Ugaritic Baal Epic,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 613–623.

⁴¹⁷ Despite the fact that Hosea often speaks at the level of theological metaphorizations and ideology critique this does not mean that he is concerned with matters of religious fidelity rather than social issues, as if the two could be clearly demarcated in his day. Ellen Davis sums up the issue here nicely: “Hosea is as much a prophet of social justice as is Amos, and he is equally concerned with the separation of farm families from their land. However, while Amos speaks directly and unmistakably about extortion in the

In taking into consideration the full socioeconomic context and its inextricably intertwined religiocultural mediation, one should not read here the more typical claim that Hosea's sexualized motifs of promiscuity and prostitution indicate a concern solely to critique a supposedly feminized nature religion and its sexualized fertility cult. Rather, in identifying Israel as a woman Hosea is merely continuing a common identification between Israel and its land as its maternal life-giving source, much like the feminine rendering of the Torah flowing from the mount (Isa. 2:3c). Thus the issue is not fundamentally about compromising Israel's distinctive object of worship, but the compromise of Israel's cultivation of the land and the perfection of its pro-creative powers, in the fullest sense of its distinctive production and reproduction of its unique social body in relation to nature. The whores are thus those ruling elites who betray the social body's creative potentials for new wholes when they not only misappropriate its land and labor for the external ends of the tributary form, but conceal this under the façade of a supposedly life-giving religio-cultural mediation that justifies the state (cf. Isa. 1:21).⁴¹⁸

Thus Hosea identifies that Canaanite metaphorization of nature's cycles under the name of Baal, not to purge Israel of nature religion per se, but rather to expose the irony and thus falsity of this religio-cultural mediation insofar as it represents nothing other

marketplace, Hosea focuses more on the way in which the religious establishment lends respectability to the market economy, which sets the state's interests over those of the people. He develops an elaborate metaphorical complex to evoke the multiple ways in which Israelite identity is fundamentally bound up with YHWH and at the same time with the arable land and its produce." Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, p. 131.

⁴¹⁸ Thus as Alice Keefe summarizes Hosea's use of the fornicating wife imagery, "he is not speaking of the landless peasantry or those small landowners who were able to hold out against debt and dispossession. Nor is he speaking of ... patrons and protectors within the village-based economic systems. Rather he is speaking of a class of powerful men aligned with the interests of the monarchical state, whose mercantile dealings threatened ... total destruction. Thus while the profile of the metaphor is female, its point is directed not at women, but at the powerful males of Israel." Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea 1-2* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 199.

than an anti-creative sociopolitical regime that destroys the land and thus the life of living labor. Moreover, it is important to see that Hosea is not simply talking about figurative death, as a kind of spiritual alienation or separation, but the real material forces of death that have been crushing, devouring, and destroying the social body of labor (Hos. 6:1a; 13:14).⁴¹⁹ And it is through a further ironical juxtaposition to this sacred economy of death that we find the first explicit reference to bodily resurrection (Hos. 6:1-3; 13:14) situated within the early pre-exilic compositional layers of the text.⁴²⁰ It is not the mythical figure of Baal, or any other divine replacement, who dies and rises but rather, for Hosea, the people who die from turning away from the principle of creation while submitting to the extractive sacred economy under the name of Baal. But it is only in breaking from this deathly order and returning to the creative source as signified from their village praxis, that the creative act can be unleashed to redistribute new life to what has been destroyed: “Come, let us return to Yahweh ... he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him” (Hos. 6:1–3); and “I will deliver this people from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction” (Hos. 13:14).⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ As John Day notes, Hosea is using metaphors such as the lion carrying off and devouring its prey that almost always refer to literal and certain death within the Hebrew bible. Day, “Resurrection Imagery from Baal to the Book of Daniel,” in *Congress Volume, Cambridge 1995*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pp. 125–127.

⁴²⁰ Of course much of Hosea is heavily redacted, but for those who date these specific passages to the eighth century see Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 68–76; Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, trans. Gary Stansell, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); John Day, “Development of the Belief in Life after Death in Ancient Israel,” in *After Exile: Essays in Honor of Rex Mason*, eds. John Barton and David J. Reimer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), p. 242.

⁴²¹ Thus for John Day Hosea’s polemical message against the Canaanite ideology was that “it is not Baal who dies and rises but Israel that dies for worshipping Baal, followed, if repentant, by resurrection.” Day, “Development of the Belief in Life after Death,” p., p. 245.

That Hosea is referring to a literal resurrection of material bodies from death is substantiated not only by the context in which he is referring to a real material resolution for those who are literally dead and dying, but also by the fact, as John Day points out, that the Hebrew verbs used in these passages for “revive” and “raise up” are used in the Hebrew bible only in relation to actual death, such as in Isa. 26:19, and not in reference to the more common verbs around healing the sick.⁴²² Moreover, as Day further argues, in this context Hosea is explicitly reappropriating the forms and structures of the Baal myth of resurrection in a demythologized and democratizing form, as now representing the resurrection of the people. That is, just as we saw with Isaiah, the objective resolution of Hosea’s resurrection ends not in a mythical Baal or Osirian-like figure who dies and rises, nor a generic sense of nature’s seasons, nor the nation’s kings, ruling elite or other representatives of Yahweh, but the social totality of people so destroyed by the expropriation of their productive power.⁴²³

For Day this is the first explicit presentation of the Hebrew idea of bodily resurrection that Isaiah relies on, and from which apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel, will draw and alter in their own way. The original appearance of bodily resurrection in the Hebrew bible occurs, therefore, long before the exiled and alienating experiences in Persian or Hellenized cultures and their abstract modes of thought, and it takes shape as

⁴²² Day, “Resurrection Imagery,” p. 126. Day also notes that the same verbs are used in Job 14:12, 14. In Hos. 13:14 certain manuscripts begin with a question rather than a stated proclamation, with Yahweh asking, “Shall I deliver? Shall I redeem?” But Day notes that the development of the idea of bodily resurrection as worked out from this passage in Hosea through Isaiah and into the New Testament worked with ancient versions of the text, and then later in the Septuagint, that continually interpreted it as a positive proclamation (p. 130). For further lexical references to older ancient texts see Wolff, *Hosea*, pp. 117–118.

⁴²³ That Hosea is referring to resurrection in a more fundamental and broader sense of the prior social body of producers can be seen in the more specific aim of his critique. As Gale Yee has pointed out, “Hosea singles out the nation’s leaders for rebuke and condemnation. These leaders include the king (5:1; 7:3, 5, 7; 8:4, 10; 10:7, 15; 13:10–11), priest (4:4–10; 5:1; 6:7–10; 7:1–7), prophet (4:5; 6:5; cf. 9:7), and princes (7:3, 5, 16; 8:4, 10; 9:15).” Yee, *Banished Children of Eve*, p. 90.

an internal critique of Israel's own regression to the extractive practices of the early Iron Age tributary regimes and their reflexive ideological projections.⁴²⁴ Moreover, in Hosea and Isaiah, it is a critique by which the projected Canaanite ideals of resurrection are not simply discarded after being mocked, but critically reappropriated in a form that begins to grasp its sense true to the prior social body of its origination.

Thus prior to late exilic and post-exilic experiences, the Israelites already knew of the idea of resurrection and began to critically take back its tributary form in a non-inverted, demythologized way, seeing in its articulation the ideological terrain by which consciousness of history as the transformation of nature is further worked out. Hosea and Isaiah evinced a raised social consciousness that was able to see within the mythical resurrection of Baal displaced talk of the tributary state's feigned priority, as if a matter of maintaining eternal perfection much like the given cycles of nature. With Hosea and Isaiah, then, there is the beginning of an ideal of eternal life that is not only demythologized but also de-metaphorized since it points to the perfection not of a mythical figure nor of its symbolic representation of the state, but the social body of production itself for which these projected myths, symbols and images should serve to raise up. It is thus a new reorienting of the sacred economy not reproducing the priority of the state as mimicking nature's given cycles for which bodies must be returned, but reproducing a more perfect social totality for which the producers actually producing are the work produced. Thus, this trajectory of the Hebraic ideal of bodily resurrection marks the redistributive ideal par excellence.

⁴²⁴ Day, "Resurrection Imagery," p. 133. Thus Day argues that the Israelites knew of and appropriated this idea in their own demythologizing way well before Zoroastrianism. He also emphasizes that Israelites probably did not know much of the Osiris myth except for how it was itself appropriated through the Canaanite Baal myth.

The Apocalyptic Distortion

Under this sign of bodily resurrection, the Hebrew sacred economy is then oriented to productive and redistributive ends in such a way that the very notion of a revolutionary body becomes intelligible. This is because within its vision of the perfectible whole the creative activity of the living body finally begins to recognize more directly its constitutive relation to the perfection of eternal life, thus becoming conscious of its rightful claim to the whole by virtue of its work as a novel addition. Thus the idea of bodily resurrection within this line of thought emerges precisely as what Antonio Gramsci has termed an “organic ideology” since it arises internally to the needs of the pre-state social body of labor, as that necessary idea under which consciousness of this laboring body is raised to a new level, shedding light on and rendering intelligible its trajectory and position as a real historical advance.⁴²⁵

It is no coincidence, then, that the ideal of resurrection makes its most widely recognized appearance in the Books of the Maccabees and of Daniel, as some of the more anti-imperial books of the Axial period, written in the midst of mass uprisings against the exploitation and domination from the new forms of imperial states.⁴²⁶ The book of Daniel draws on this previous demythologizing trajectory of resurrection and its democratizing

⁴²⁵ “One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or “willed”. To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is “psychological”; they “organise” human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual “movements”, polemics and so on (though even these are not completely useless, since they function like an error which by contrasting with truth, demonstrates it).” Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: ElecBook, 1999), p. 707.

⁴²⁶ For the threads of anti-imperial resistance in the Books of the Maccabees and in the Book of Daniel, see Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). For a summary of appeals to the resurrection within intertestamental literature more broadly, see Hermann Lichtenderger, “Resurrection in the Intertestamental Literature and Rabbinic Theology,” trans. J. Bowden, *Concilium* 5 (1993): pp. 24–31.

thrust, so as to identify the active body of resistance as the normative standpoint in relation to eternal life. Here the resurrection of the body continues to signify that telos of history whose resolution only moves through and for the struggle of the living body of the “multitude” against its exploitation, rather than signifying an abstract resolution of the body into myths of given nature or nation (Dan. 12:2). Indeed the author even associates the end of the living body as involving a kind of divinization, with the body itself laying claim to a perfection on par with that celestial realm once reserved only for kings and the abstracted souls of the elite (Dan. 12:3).⁴²⁷ Thus the ideal of bodily resurrection will grow as an ideology organic to the increasing revolutionary fervor of the masses in the late Second Temple period, whose apocalypticism sought to supplant the present state with the kingdom of god and its more universal vision of humanity.

Yet a distinct trajectory set out from the book of Daniel, under the pressure of its apocalyptic forms, also began to remythologize the original Hebrew development of bodily resurrection. If we follow John Day’s interpretation of this remythologization in Daniel it is a matter of moving from what he claims is a demythologized, because strictly metaphorical notion of national restoration in Hosea and Isaiah, to now a literal belief in an afterlife for individual bodies. This interpretation by Day, however, misconstrues the issue here, since the demythologizing thrust that I identified in Hosea and Isaiah is precisely in their appropriation of the ideal in order to recall that more foundational and universal trajectory of the pre-state social body over against the narrowed metaphorical image of the nation state. In relation to the constitutive value of the social body of

⁴²⁷ It is here in Daniel’s celestial imagery of residing with the stars that we find Zoroastrian as well as Hellenistic influences. But, whereas the celestial sphere was reserved for the ruling class in Greek thought, the pressure of the Hebraic idea of resurrection pushes Daniel’s appropriation of Hellenized ideals into a more earthy, democratized form.

production, all other mythical and metaphorical images standing in for this prior and universal body were deemed to be fetishized social products whenever they obscure the perfective aims internal to the producer actually producing. Thus whether resurrection signifies perfection concentrated in the image of a dying and rising god, a natural cycle, or a national power, these are all social constructs that forget their socially produced nature, fixed images that forget their originating sense within the social body's transformative interchange with nature.

Daniel's more universal sense of the individual body as holding eternal value is then a progressive advance over the narrow metaphor of the nation. But insofar as Daniel's end to history resides only in an individual, abstractly conceived without recognition of its social body as the constitutive condition in which any individual can flourish in the first place, then this too is a social construct that has become forgetfully abstracted from its constitutive source. There would here be only a movement from one metaphor to another, from that of a sovereign nation, to the idea of an abstract individual floating independently in space, both equally repressing the social totality of their historical being. But the significance of the emergence of the ideal of bodily resurrection in Hosea and Isaiah is that it began to recognize that only in perfecting the creative and collective body of labor, as it transforms the totality of nature beyond any predatory economy, can there be a social form of nature in which individual bodies are no longer sacrificed to supposedly immutable generic laws of nation or cosmos—the only historical notion of eternal life for the body intuiting and intending it, without simply displacing this resolution to the spiritualized abstraction of an afterlife.

Thus Daniel's remythologization is not due to its forgetfulness of nationalist metaphors, but like the metaphor of the nation it is the result of forgetting this salvific ideal as the perfection of the social body of production in the totality of its historical becoming as it transforms nature (i.e., resurrection as the culmination of that historical progression implied in the movement from Isa. 2:4 to Isa. 11:6–9 to Isa. 25:6–8 and 26:19). This is especially evidenced in that his abstract individual, projected into the celestial sphere, no longer retains the wholly positive sense of bodily resurrection as the salvific thing itself, as in Hosea and Isaiah.⁴²⁸ That is, rather than the positive culmination of a historical process that opens up and actualizes the creative potentials of nature within the social body of labor, bodily resurrection in Daniel becomes the occasion for a courtroom appearance at the end of time, that final disclosure of "everyone who is found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). The raising of the body is needed, not out of its own social imperatives of the creative act, but according to the accounting of the Law, to stand before it so as to receive rewards or punishments—"some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:1–2, 13). The resurrection of the body is thus no longer a good in itself, but occurs as a prerequisite so as to place the body before an external power. If the book of Daniel avoids resolving the living body into myths of nature and nation, it nevertheless tends to resolve the individual body into a judicial decision outside time. Within this telos, history is no longer understood as a creative process to be perfected, but a suspended time of testing in which the ultimate trial by an external power is imminent. This moves the site of participation in the perfection of

⁴²⁸ On the difference from Isaiah's positive sense in terms of Daniel's conception of bodily resurrection as no longer the salvific act itself, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

eternal life away from the social body's distinctive historical interchange with nature and toward the interiorized fidelity of the will.

This distortion of the idea of bodily resurrection under the apocalyptic form can be better understood in light of the distinction the Italian classical historian Furio Jesi made between the different temporalities of revolution and revolt. Organizers of revolution strive to “elaborate their tactical and strategic plans by taking into consideration, in historical time, the relation of cause and effect in the longest possible perspective.” Whereas revolt is characterized by a “suspension of historical time”, which is nevertheless a move entirely “circumscribed by precise boundaries in historical time and space.”⁴²⁹

Thus on the reading I have given of the historical emergence of bodily resurrection, it is an idea that is worked out from and for history, signifying the very possibility of historical becoming without external mediation. It is therefore that ideal of perfection developed according to the experience of historical time within the revolution of the social transformation of nature, considered in its “longest possible perspective”. The importance of this idea, however, as that critical arch-utopian principle, is that it takes up the category of historical transition toward the ideal of new creation and challenges its tendencies toward enclosure within the positivism of the present without simply abandoning this temporal category altogether. If the resurrection of the body in its

⁴²⁹ Furio Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbolology of Revolt*, ed. Andrea Cavalletti, trans. Alberto Toscano (New York: Seagull Books, 2014). “What principally distinguishes revolt from revolution is . . . a different experience of time. If, on the basis of the ordinary meaning of the two words, revolt is a sudden insurrectional explosion, which can be placed within a strategic horizon but which in itself does not imply a long-distance strategy, and revolution is instead a strategic complex of insurrectional movements, coordinated and oriented over the mid- to long-term towards ultimate objectives, then we could say that revolt suspends historical time, suddenly establishing a time in which everything that is done has a value in itself, independently of its consequences and of its relations with the transitory or perennial complex that constitutes history. Revolution would instead be wholly and deliberately immersed in historical time.” P. 46.

initial Hebrew form is that ideal whose sacred economy renders revolution intelligible, it is also the case that the intelligibility of this revolution essentially hinges on the non-necessity of death, implying thus a long historical process of socially perfecting nature beyond its given cycles through developing the creative anti-entropic potentials of collective labor—banging swords into plowshares. Thus the seemingly abstract utopian nature of the idea of bodily resurrection nevertheless concretely presses upon all utopian and apocalyptic projections the very matter of transition, demanding that transition be critically and creatively thought and practiced as from and for the continuity of the historical body, rather than ceding this body all too quickly to hastily conceived sacrificial transitions that essentialize the moment of dialectical negation and its employment of death. Whatever the future novelty may be, it must be one in which the bodies that produced it, recognize themselves in it through their fundamental activity. It thus signifies a future emergence of the historical body whose perfected novelty stretches the potentials of history and nature, their continuity in the present, to the greatest possible degree without simply breaking off into sheer discontinuity, at which point novelty would simply become immaterial.

The apocalyptic, however, as signifying an external agency breaking upon the present, results from the oppressive situation of empire and its abstractly expansive order which conditions a frustrated and impatient experience of time that is more readily concealed from its sense of historical becoming. With a desire for novelty that radically breaks off from all historical continuity, the apocalyptic then takes up the logics of revolt and negative protest that abandons the long-term sense of temporality as a transformative historical project. This is seen with either the Maccabean revolt for national liberation,

or the Essenes retreating into communities that await the coming military takeover: in both cases the logics of revolt follow a tributary form of top-down military-political imposition—the projected return of the priority of the monarchical state in one form or another—and not in revolutionizing the organization of society as a whole in line with the progressive qualities of the pre-state social body of labor.

There is still a real desire for new creation, but its articulation as simply a disjunctive external power is funded precisely by the lost sense of its originating intuitions in the social body of labor and its means of historical transition. Thus, under the scorching, impatient light of apocalyptic heat, the insight of bodily resurrection into the matter of transition gets burnt out. Since the original bodily site of intuiting the new is forgotten while its intended ideals are nonetheless retained, these ideals now appear independently from outside, entailing that the historical process as such and any of its potentials for transition must come under total condemnation from these detached ideals as if it were a transcendent confrontation. In the face of this projection of the abstract eternal, the works of the historical body are therefore nullified, except as the occasion for housing the will's moment of decision and its steadfast resolution through time. Thus, within the apocalyptic the necessity of death returns as a requirement for the new, a closure of history in relation to what is utterly disjunctive, whether this disjunction is represented through a literally required catastrophe or the symbolic portrayal of the negative eternal whose fulfillment of time can only be imagined as an *absolute* break with the historical.

Of course apocalyptic discourses often talk about the eternal entering vertically *into* time, but this is its self-contradiction. For the logics of revolt and its apocalyptic

ideology, time and space are not themselves taken up in the transformative project of history, and thus understood as themselves mutable forms, but rather the unchangeable boundary conditions in which the instant of the eternal abruptly enters. Yet, in entering time as a necessary negation it enters without an ability to change the given in any substantively internal sense. The allegedly radical appearance of the disjunctive new is then betrayed by its immediate dispersal and assimilation back into the given structures of the present, as is all too evident from the history of apocalyptically inspired revolts.⁴³⁰ Indeed it is precisely in this abstract conception of the transcendent as a vertical point outside time that the death-of-god thesis will necessarily appear as the logical fulfillment of transcendent divinity. This is because the conception of a sovereign verticality can only remain as such outside time as absolutely nothing, absolved of all relation, or enter into temporal relation only by a self-emptying into nothingness. What the apocalyptic under the hastening pressures of revolt fails to think through in a more material way, therefore, is the horizontalizing of divinity as seen in prophetic eschatology, that sense of the material progressively rising to the divine as its horizon of fulfillment.

This lack of understanding transition as a material transformation of time and space, through historical development of the social body's creative and collective capacities, thus helps to explain how the idea of bodily resurrection under apocalyptic reformulations can come to unwittingly diffuse the revolutionary materiality of its original sense. In signifying an ideal utterly discontinuous with the present, especially when projected into distinct themes of otherworldly compensation as will become

⁴³⁰ This is not to say that there have been no gains made by apocalyptically inspired protests, but only that their success depends not on their own logic but whether they can be appropriated "within a strategic complex of insurrectional movements," as Jesi says, and so subjected to the long-term historical objectives of revolutionary movement.

prevalent within the emergence of Christianity, a contradictory ambivalence comes to the fore in which both ideals of sacrificial martyrdom as well as complacent absorption into the state can be simultaneously endorsed.

Before we move into the next chapter and discuss the Christian appropriation of this ideal we should note that the idea's revolutionary import was partially forwarded nonetheless through the rabbinical movement. The eventual development of Rabbinical Judaism will doctrinally establish bodily resurrection as a central idea, continuing its democratizing thrust by broadening its scope to the entirety of history understood as moving toward a general resurrection. It too, however, will succumb to distortions similar to the apocalyptic form of its articulation. But it is significant that this guiding ideal in Rabbinical Judaism was brought to the fore with the Pharisees whose movement as a decentralized allocation of cultural production attempted to more concretely recall the trajectories of its pre-state social body through the new social formations of populist synagogues, rather than mediated from the royal seat or a singular temple priesthood.⁴³¹ Moving beyond the Pharisees, the Rabbinical movement thus further brought the Law down from a strict observance of cultic rituals and purity codes that only the central temple and its priests owned the means to mediate. With its understanding of the innovative nature of the embodied oral Torah, the Rabbinic tradition understood salvation through the collective embodiment of the law more closely in line with the creative laws of socially transforming nature.⁴³² Thus, the emerging populist ideal of resurrection,

⁴³¹ Alan Segal notes that the resurrection of the body was common amongst activist groups, and that insofar as Pharisees began to compromise their radical social organizing by comfortably settling into coexistence with the Roman Empire as one of its clients, there was a tendency also to take on beliefs in the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection of the body. Segal, *Life After Death* 379–382.

⁴³² As Martin Jaffee states: “at least in the earliest strata of the rabbinic canon, tradition is conceived as a medium of change. Rabbinic custom is tradition precisely because it is also a departure; not an unchanging thing received for preservation, but a new thing passed on for yet further renewal.” Martin S. Jaffee,

which is reflected in the rabbinical ideal of historically raising up a new social body of justice in which all equally contribute and have a share, did not simply mark an acquiescence to foreign otherworldly hopes. Rather it was a timely expression of the pre-state social body's cultural memory and its original sense of resurrection, as consciousness of its perfective trajectory continued to develop against the new contradictions within the specific tributary forces of empire.

It is also important to note that those Jews who forcefully rejected the idea of bodily resurrection, the Sadducees, did so from the aristocratic vantage of an imaginary relation to death that required a passive body of submission. Hence the Sadducees as an imperial-backed ruling class felt threatened by the growing consciousness of historical movement in the lower classes through this idea, and argued that the idea of resurrection was an oral innovation nowhere implied in the fixed written Law of the Torah. Bodily Resurrection, on their interpretation, thus signified a failure of this social body to conservatively submit to the already perfected form of the Law, which itself is an ideal that comprehends the meaning of physical bodies as simply terminating within the absoluteness of death anyway.⁴³³ Here we find the real meaning of that sober "realism" oriented around a supposed materialism defined by its rejection of eternal life, yet subjecting the body more severely to that foreign invention of a permanently given idealization of the Law. Thus, as the Sadducees exemplified, upholding the Law without innovation, and obeying the absoluteness of death with resigned acceptance, meant

"*Halakhah* in early rabbinic Judaism: Innovation beyond exegesis, tradition before the Oral Torah," in *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, eds. Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, and Martin S. Jaffee (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992), p. 113.

⁴³³ Speaking of the Sadducean cultural position and their rejection of any sense of eternal life, Alan Segal remarks: "They had no need of Platonic afterlives to justify their social positions because the Torah gave them hereditary control of the Temple." Segal, *Life After Death*, p. 367.

passively fitting into the foreign body of empire and enjoying the status quo of a privileged client.⁴³⁴

Lastly, it should also be highlighted that the relativizing of death as a contradiction in light of the perfection of life for itself is not merely an insight given among the early prophetic works and their later extensions, but is also grasped within wisdom literature. The pre-state village sensibility around creative activity is especially evident in the book of Job insofar as Job somewhat innocently rejects every attempt to justify suffering and death as a necessity within the order of creation. Thus he denies that these contingent realities are either a necessary punishment (which was a common claim amongst exilic nationalist discourses), or as absolutely total (such as the pessimistic, post-exilic resignation of the Sadducees, also represented best by Ecclesiastes).⁴³⁵ It is from this insight that Antonio Negri can plausibly identify the references to Wisdom in Job

⁴³⁴ Dispelling any notion that the Sadducees were a progressive faction simply because they limited their religious ideas and speculations, Russell notes: “The Sadducees were represented by the wealthy aristocracy and particularly by the powerful priesthood in Jerusalem. Probably most of the Sadducees were priests, but they are not to be identified with the whole body of priesthood. They numbered in their ranks rich merchants, government officials and others. In origin, therefore, they were not a religious party, although that is what they tended to become; rather were they a body of people sharing a common social standing and loosely bound together by a common determination to maintain the existing regime. . . . the name originates in the Greek word *syndikoi* which in Athenian history signifies those who defend the existing laws against innovation. Moreover, they adopted in religious matters a position of a distinctly conservative kind. . . . their influence had been determined by their position in the state, and when that was lost their influence ceased with it.” D. S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), pp. 51–52.

⁴³⁵ Job is a difficult book to date because of its rich and unique dialect that differs from the rest of the Hebrew bible. There is strong support for both an exilic as well as pre-exilic origin, with an exilic or post-exilic date better accounting for some of the uniqueness of the language and style. Yet the text also retains a strong cultural memory of village life in the sense that its central questions around the contradictions of death and suffering are not easily reducible to metaphors for national exile, whose suffering was often justified in terms of deserved punishment. Rather Job’s questions are asked from a standpoint of rural innocence and could very well be aligned with the pre-exilic plight of the peasant producers in the seventh century, who understood both the arbitrariness of natural catastrophes as well as the injustice of being exploited and oppressed by their own state, a situation we already noted was testified to by Amos and Hosea. On the varied datings see, J. J. M. Roberts, “Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol. 89.1 (Jan., 1977): pp. 107–114. On the late post-exilic and conservative message of Ecclesiastes, representing more of a middle class attempt to cope with the loss of the monarchical holy warrior message, see Mark R. Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

with the standpoint of the creative act. And it is from this standpoint that Negri is not entirely off base in reading Job 19:26–27 as referring to a literal resurrection of the body: “Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold” (Job 19:26–27).⁴³⁶

While this passage enjoys no scholarly consensus as to whether it refers to a literal bodily resurrection, Negri’s point nevertheless remains coherent. He rightly sees that for Job the Wisdom within the forces of creation demands that the forces of death be completely relativized and deconstructed as accidental and surmountable surds. The material forces of creation from which Job aligns himself in interrogating death and demanding its overcoming therefore imply, as Negri says, that “it is through the body that redemption is accomplished, via that body that has been tormented and modified by labor”.⁴³⁷ That is, Negri rightly recognizes within Job’s denial of the extractive forces of death what I’ve identified as that older Hebraic demand for a negation of negation that undoes any dialectical necessity, and whose only meaning could be the resurrection of the body. Far from being a “howler”, then, the claim that the text of Job is referring to the ideal of bodily resurrection is actually plausible if one considers the overall logic of the text’s materialist argument, especially in light of the earlier Hebraic sense of a more materialist notion of bodily resurrection.⁴³⁸ It is on the basis of seeing something of this older sense and logic of resurrection, though without adequately identifying its social and

⁴³⁶ Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Job*, pp. 63–108.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴³⁸ Roland Boer’s dismissal of Negri’s interpretation of resurrection in Job as a “howler” completely misses the point for Negri, as well as the materialist logic in the text. Boer refers to the lack of scholarly consensus over this passage, but his careless dismissal also seems to suggest that commonplace assumption that bodily resurrection could only be a late invention about otherworldly compensation by an external agent. See Boer’s appended “Commentary”, *Ibid.*, p. 109.

biblical genealogy, that Negri is nonetheless able to fittingly call the resurrection of the body that “revolution that traverses real subsumption.”⁴³⁹

Conclusion

The emergence of the idea of resurrection given in this chapter puts forward the claim that this idea was not originally an apocalyptic idea but a more radical populist expression of the laboring body becoming conscious of itself. Before and beyond any expression within the later apocalyptic genre, the Hebraic articulation of bodily resurrection emerged out of a growing consciousness of the original intuitions and intentions of eternal life specific to the pre-state social body of production. Moreover, the way this form of eternal life was articulated more directly for the social totality of all peoples in their creative and collective work began rendering the revolutionary temporality of the communal mode of production more directly intelligible to itself. This not only more adequately fulfills the criteria of self-reflexivity I laid out in the previous chapter, but in doing so, it also shows a thinking and reflecting from within the social body of labor that is able to better fulfill the intentions of metaphysics, by more adequately and comprehensively reconnecting them with their founding intuitions. It is in this sense that we can speak of this specific form of the ideal of eternal life as incipiently the organic ideology of labor that begins to shed intelligible light on its universal standpoint.

Thus, in providing a genealogy of the idea of bodily resurrection in greater detail, we find that the birth of the human does not simultaneously signify a necessarily proto-secularizing death of god, as if this self-understanding takes place through an implied

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

atheistic “exodus from Yahweh” as creator.⁴⁴⁰ Rather, it is more accurate to say that the laboring body becomes conscious of itself insofar as it rises up to eternal and takes back the ideal of perfected creating from statist cosmogonies and their contingent inversions, which were not the rightful owners in the first place. In that it is a movement that begins horizontalizing the ideal of divine creating, it nevertheless projects this ideal as that necessarily objective final cause to be newly realized, if there is to be such a thing as history from and for the social totality of all peoples, indeed from and for all of nature. What historical materialists often miss here, is that it is precisely in reappropriating the ideal of eternal life according to its more comprehensive material intuitions and intentions, rather than flatly rejecting it, that the critique of heaven already shows itself as a critique of the very earthly contradictions that make the realms appear separate and unbridgeable in the first place. It is in exposing the non-necessity of death and its historical deconstructibility, precisely on the basis of grasping the trajectory of true creating as raising the whole of nature and society to a divine ideal of transcendental perfection, that every ideological mythologization and mystification of death are also deconstructed as historically distorted contingencies that obscure the very possibility of history. Therefore, within this Jewish line of thought, the only deaths of god that necessarily come about with humanity’s self-recognition of its constitutive value, are those contingently constructed gods of death who serve death as god.

⁴⁴⁰ For this atheistic reading of an “exodus from Yahweh” see Ernest Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. Peter Thompson (New York: Verso, 2009). Yet even in this book, Bloch’s argument requires and appeals to a necessary transcendental perfection or final cause on the horizon in order for any sense of liberation to be intelligible. Though he often reads this necessary horizon in other terms, it is nevertheless an objective horizon that requires actualized approximations if there is to be real history. Therefore, I would argue that the atheism appealed to by Bloch here is more of a rhetorical device because of the old Marxist hostility to all things religious, a mindset that unfortunately still lingers.

Chapter 5

The Ambivalent Christian Development of Bodily Resurrection: Advancing and Suppressing the Memory of the Laboring Body

“Jesus tells the Sadducees they have asked him that question about resurrection because ‘they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’ It seems to me he’s telling them there that they don’t know the possibilities there are in the cosmos.”

–Ernesto Cardenal⁴⁴¹

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the rise of the ideal of bodily resurrection was the sign of the pre-state social body of labor coming to consciousness of its constitutive value as a historical agent in relation to the eternal. It will thus continue as the discursive mark of the lower body of labor impressing itself upon consciousness, forcing ANE and classical ideology from their narrow focus on how a soul relates to the perfection of the eternal, by demanding that it is the body itself that fundamentally holds the means to, and is also the object of, eternal life. Discoursing on the body of the *future*, holistically rather than in terms of one of its abstracted parts, therefore, meant a new consciousness was growing of the self-transcending qualities within the *present* body. This chapter will follow how Christianity both advanced and obscured this discourse, opening a new consciousness concerning the active body as well as reflecting and promoting new forms of suppressing this body.

⁴⁴¹ Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 524.

If the previous chapter emphasized the historical birth of the idea from its prior social body of labor, this chapter will then emphasize in turn the dialectical role of the idea's discursive development within Christianity. I will begin with an affirmative assessment of the ideal, articulated in Jesus and then Paul, insofar as it implied a grasp and advancement of the original Hebrew idea in its positive construal, connecting it more directly with its sensible intuitions and intentions in the active body. I will focus specifically on how their discourse on the future resurrection began to render the historical body's constitutive value intelligible to itself insofar as its normative sense was understood in the ambivalent notion of a spiritual body. Following Jesus and Paul's use and development of this "spiritual" sense of the body I will argue that it does not denote an immaterial or otherworldly body, but rather signifies the internal self-transcending and progressively evolving spirit of the material body—a discourse on the expansive sense of what the living, breathing body is capable of as a creative act in more fully becoming a body. Thus we will follow, especially in Paul, how the sign of bodily resurrection required taking back the active side of the abstract intellectual principle developed in classical idealism and situated it more comprehensively within the activity of the body itself.

I will therefore begin with an interpretation of Jesus's grasp, under the sign of the resurrection, of the lower body of society and its historical movement as the standpoint for appropriating the kingdom of heaven. From there I will then move to the apostle Paul's distinctive extension of this valorization of the body in his notion of the *pneumatic* body signified according to its own seeds or internal creative potencies under the ideal of

resurrection, which continued the progressive demythologizing trajectory by bringing eternal life back to its founding sensible intuitions.

Yet Paul's thought also shows a contradictory suppression of the active body's rise to consciousness. Rather than more fully working out the sense of the pneumatic body and its internal seeds as what the historical body is itself striving to creatively and historically actualize without sacrifice, the seed metaphor instead takes on the explicit image of its necessary sacrifice, the condition for the body to be given away and sown by another, its value determined in its passing away. This regressive sense of the body is ratified in thought by Paul's simultaneous remythologization of the resurrection within a counter-revolutionary theological metaphorization of the cross. Rather than marking an anti-entropic movement of overcoming any debt to death, Paul's theology of the cross will mark a new ideological appeal to this debt, thus further diminishing the social and historical consciousness being born out under the sign of the resurrection. Instead of understanding Jesus's own salvation as bound up in the historical movement toward a future resurrection of the social whole as the Hebraic ideal intended, Paul consolidated in systematic form the myth of Jesus's death and resurrection as itself the salvific thing, a salvific act hinging on the narrow religio-political notion of sovereignty and completed through a transaction of submission to it on some other plane.

Once reconciliation to the whole rests on Jesus as the singular dying and rising Christ who ascends to the heavens to offer his body to the will of the Father, the ideal of the resurrection of the body no longer expresses the standpoint of the concretely creative act of becoming a historical body, but instead reflects more profoundly a new emerging standpoint of the body's exchangeability in relation to its spiritualized meaning and value

for an abstract will. This sense of the resurrection as representing and confirming the body's subordination to an external will takes on an even more detached ideological form than Paul's conception when the growing church tailors it around the ideal of an inorganic statue whose normative material body is reducible to bare flesh, mere stuff meant to be broken and remade into a statuesque object by and for another. I indicate that the theology of the cross does not so much demand these particular conceptions of the alienated body but is rather projected by and for them, generated from this alienated body's socioeconomic contradictions and articulated in a way that helps to mystifyingly reconcile consciousness to what seems to be an unchangeable social situation. I end by presenting a certain underexplored socioeconomic crisis of labor shortage within the late Roman Empire involving the constriction of the free movement of labor through increased debt bondage, which coincided with the growth of Christianity and the eventual Christianization of Rome. I suggest that waning Rome's labor shortage and its transition to proto-feudalization provides a possible key for better understanding the underlying socioeconomic contradictions from which the sacred economy of the cross reflexively emerged and gained acceptance as a representation of reality, helping Empire manage this transitional crisis through ideologically reproducing a new kind of docile body.

Jesus and the Normative Standpoint of the Rising Lower Body

In his typical undialectical fashion, Max Weber declared that "it is not only mistaken, it is absolute nonsense to maintain theories such as that Christianity was the result of 'social' conditions or was a product of ancient 'socialist' movements." Weber based this judgment on what he considered the "two basic factors which made

Christianity possible: the abandonment of the idea of a national and theocratic Jewish State, and the absence of any ‘social problem’ in the consciousness of its supporters (and in the consciousness of Antiquity). Indeed it was just because of the belief in the permanence of Roman rule until the end of time that men felt it was hopeless to strive for social reform and therefore rejected all class struggles; and this was the source from which flowed Christian love – purely ethical, charitable, and transcendental.”⁴⁴²

Weber’s judgment is an understandable reaction to simplistic theses, such as Friedrich Engels’s, that primitive Christianity was a religion exclusively of the oppressed slave class.⁴⁴³ Of course, the origins were indeed a little more diversely constituted and ambiguous in their socioeconomic and political valence. Thus as is characteristic of any undialectical pronouncement, Weber was at least half right, if not more so. To be clear, Christianity obviously emerged as an alternative to a Jewish theocratic state, and it undoubtedly did come into its own at the time when a new middle class was first appearing as a prominent class within the Roman Empire. And its later success largely revolved around its ability to assimilate to and help shape a new urban middle class ethos, one that Weber rightly saw hinged on increasingly suppressing consciousness of social problems, rejecting class struggle and resigning oneself to the permanence of the empire. But this does not render nonsensical any claim that the first shoots of Palestinian Christianity partially resulted from “ancient ‘socialist’ movements.” Rather, as an offshoot largely of the Pharisaic and Rabbinic movements, especially in their more populist forms (though this does not exclude influence from the Essenes as well),

⁴⁴² Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of the Ancient Civilizations*, p. 258.

⁴⁴³ For Engels’s thesis see, “On the History of Early Christianity,” in Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *On Religion* (New York: Dover, 2008), pp. 316–342. For a balanced assessment of the origins of Christianity from a historical materialist angle that is critical of Engels and other similar Marxist theses, see Dimitris J. Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities* (London: Verso, 1987).

Christianity arose precisely from an older Hebrew consciousness of that social problem around how to recall and raise the pre-state social body to a higher level without lapsing into another tributary formation. Moreover, it is precisely within a development of the sign of future bodily resurrection (among other discursive ideas) that Christianity retained this revolutionary thrust and even further cultivated a certain sense of incipient class-consciousness before contingently regressing into the form that Weber identifies as its essence.

Judaism's cultural memory of that socialism or communitarian ethos from its prior village commune especially comes to the fore in the work and teachings of Jesus. A rural laborer from the Galilean countryside, Jesus gained a following primarily amongst the non-urban lower classes of Galilean peasants, rural day workers, village craftsmen, as well as the infirm, the impure and all others who fell out from social stratification.⁴⁴⁴ Rejecting as he did the easy Sadducean assimilation into empire, Jesus also stretched the Pharisaic rethinking of Judaism's social transformation from below into a more extreme populist and democratized social vision, whose intensified universalism could not be aligned straightforwardly with the predominant models of theocratic nationalism. Indeed, his selection of twelve disciples directly from the social body of laborers as symbolic representatives of the twelve Israelite tribes suggested a kind of "representative popular

⁴⁴⁴ Speaking of the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus, Geza Vermes states: "He is to begin with an appreciative child of the Galilean countryside. The metaphors placed in his mouth are mostly agricultural ones, as would be expected from a man who spent the major part of his life among farmers and peasants. For him the ultimate beauty is that of the lilies of the field, and the paradigm of wickedness the sowing of weeds in a cornfield, even in one belonging to an enemy. The city and its life occupy scarcely any place at all in his teaching." Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historians Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 48. For the generally rural sociopolitical and cultural setting of Jesus and his followers, see also Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978); as well as, G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 427–433. For an analysis of Jesus's social setting primarily in terms of his association with the peasantry, see Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, *Prophets, Bandits, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (New York: Winston Press, 1985).

rule” that would raise up the original social body into a higher form of sociopolitical organization, providing an advance in some way toward the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴⁴⁵

In line with the social uprisings of this period and their common apocalyptic expectations around the imminence of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus continued the Pharisaic demand for a perfectly just social order. His message pointed to this coming kingdom as at hand (Mark 1:15), immanent within history and its emergent powers (Luke 17:21)⁴⁴⁶, and in some sense as already here (Matt. 12:28). That Jesus strongly proclaimed the very imminence of the kingdom, however, was unexceptional as such, since it simply carried forward that emerging Hebrew consciousness of history itself as the locus of a new progression toward eternal life.⁴⁴⁷ But his fundamental reinterpreting and decentralizing of the purity codes and ritual observance away from the Temple complex articulated a sense of the heavenly kingdom more radically participated from below without external mediation.

Thus, in a more direct manner than the Rabbinical movement, Jesus’s message implied that it was the lower social body that universally owned the means to access the kingdom (Matt. 5:3–10). The coming kingdom then was not a restoration of another tributary formation but explicitly the reversal of its very class structure, emerging from a movement that was somehow reversing and removing the entropy hastening classes and

⁴⁴⁵ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 570.

⁴⁴⁶ A compelling case is made by Colin Roberts that the preposition “within” or “among” in Luke 17:21, lent a sense to the phrase in its natural koine Greek that read “the kingdom is within your power.” See, C. Roberts, “The Kingdom of Heaven: Luke xvii.21,” *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948): 1–8.

⁴⁴⁷ The theme of the presence of the kingdom was indeed a central aspect of Jesus’s teachings but it was neither unique to him nor emphasized more strongly than in other forms of Judaism of his day, especially when considering the Pharisees, Essenes and the various national liberation movements. On this see, Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 162. The key is rather in his more thorough decentralization away from the Temple complex, which the Pharisees still had a stake in.

their unproductive priorities (Matt. 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30). Indeed, much of the content of his message and activity was saturated with communal village themes and events around raising up the material body both individually and socially from debt bondage and bondage to death (Matt. 10:7–9; John 11:1–44). In moving from the lower social body as the standpoint for constitutively mediating the perfected eternal life of the kingdom, he thereby also emphasized a progression without requiring a necessary passage through death (Mark 9:1). Hence the populist focus of the Gospel accounts of his religious vision and mission—portraying it as a social movement of physically making whole through healings, miraculous feedings, and resurrections of the dead—show it as at once a material and economic reorienting of the law as from and for raising up the living body to greater life, rather than the idealist inversion of the body as merely the site for a spiritualized submission to Law (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17; Matt. 12:10–13).

Thus, the distinctiveness of the narratives concerning his life provides a marked contrast to classical Greco-Roman literature of its time. The Gospels were preoccupied neither with espousing a wisdom that submitted the body to an eternally fixed Law, nor with counseling the soul to prepare for its formal departure from the body. Closer to the prophetic trajectory emanating from that sense of creation's wisdom, the accounts of Jesus's movement narrated the institution of a new law of social transformation whose movement sought to liberate the maligned physical body from any debt to death and its social parodies in order that it might realize its potentials as a new creative act. It is a movement whose perfectible end is drawn from the imperatives of the village commune's transformation of nature, and thus presented as an internal dynamism progressively

bursting forth toward new surpluses within creation itself (Matt. 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15), just as “the earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head”; and it is those laboring in the fields who are first to harvest and enjoy its fruits (Mark 4:28–29; cf. Mark 4:30–32). Thus unlike the classical image of nature whose perfection resides in its purely cyclical form, the perfection of creation is brought forth in the kingdom according to a social transformation of its internal dynamisms toward new forms of life. It is a transformation of nature that newly produces and redistributes social surplus more directly for raising up the whole of the social body—appropriating a perfectible whole that is a continuous and yet newly emergent form of historical movement (Mark 10:28–31; Luke 18:30).

That the ideal of bodily resurrection for Jesus was an imperative of this internal creative movement of the social body rising up and reversing death’s order—thereby representing the ideological terrain of developing class-consciousness—can be seen in the Sadducees’ question to Jesus about this perfectible ideal (Matt. 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:34–38). The interrogation is posed within a line of confrontations instigated after Jesus had taken physical and symbolic action to overturn the Temple complex and its tributary networks of commerce. In light of this social activism and critique it is then important to see that the issue of the resurrection of the body has little to do here with nicely refining theological doctrines for the sake of their intellectual contemplation. Rather, the discursive issues indicate a concern with social consciousness emerging around the laws of historical movement and its privileged agency for which the use of social surplus is to be commanded. It is a battle over the vision of that perfectible

whole orienting the sacred economy by which reality is materially produced and reproduced.

Because Jesus's movement pointed toward an ideal whose approximation required materially reversing and removing current divisions within the social body, including the founding material contradiction of death, it therefore presented a direct threat to the Sadducean chief priests whose imposition of the Law required keeping the social body passively under the absolutization of death's order. Their question as to what will become of the Law focused specifically on the Levirate command of marriage, which serves only to reproduce the present social body as predetermined by biologically given mortal cycles mediated by a generic sense of the law and its immutable appearance. Such a focus therefore expresses a class anxiety over a movement of history whose social transformation of the conditions of existence implies the outmodedness of their notion of an inalterable Law and thus the uselessness of their own sociopolitical position.⁴⁴⁸ Their confrontation then marks a reactionary attempt to squash the growing consciousness of the social body's self-transcending nature by claiming its guiding ideal rests on the supposed absurdity of transforming the given structures of reproducing the present.

Jesus's response, however, shows that their notion of the Law is meaningless within their enclosed picture of reality. His answer to their question, which the Sadducees began with an appeal to the Mosaic authority of the Law (Mark 12:19), refers directly to

⁴⁴⁸ The Sadducean assumption is that God provided marriage and procreation through the Mosaic Law as the only means of historical development and growth over against death. There are no other provisions or potentials suggested from the Law within these mortal boundaries, so that hope for more life without relation to death is not Lawful, no matter what new possibilities emerge from creation and its social transformation. Which of course then means that the perfection of eternal life is always at a generic and formal level that requires the sacrifice of every particular body for the tribe or species. On the context of Sadducean appeal to Mosaic law and specifically the Levirate marriage command as a way of understanding historical movement see, Gerald J. Janzen, "Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 23 (1985), p. 48.

the creative power of Exodus and its historical trajectory that made Moses and the law possible in the first place (Jesus referenced Ex. 3:6, the creative act of God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37). Therefore, while the Sadducees claim to exhaustively know the Torah allegedly in its pure form without innovations, Jesus claims that their ignorance of the resurrection reveals that they know nothing of the law because they do not know the creative power by and for which it came into being. His answer indicates that their question has to do more specifically with the real meaning of history in the revolutionary social movement carried forward by the exodus: whether the creative acts of exodus were simply to recirculate mortal bodies strictly for the formal perfection of the Law in itself, or whether the law is from and for perfecting the new creative acts of the body's social transformation of necessity.⁴⁴⁹

Within the revolutionary temporality of the latter view, whose historical movement is determined by the emergent possibilities being revealed in creation, its perfectible end cannot therefore be represented by simply freezing the given present within its recurring cycles of motion, as the Sadducees presumed. Such would deny the very historical development of that new social body whose promise Moses helped carry forward, thus denying the original intentions of the Mosaic law as well. History and its laws of movement would here dissolve into Osiris and Baal-like cycles of nature, thus rendering the Hebrew consciousness of god as nothing more than consciousness of an underworld "god of the dead" rather than the creative power of life (Matt. 22: 32; Mark 12:27; Luke

⁴⁴⁹ Exegetes have too often focused on whether Jesus's appeal to Ex. 3:6 is true to the original meaning of that text, thus overlooking the context in which Jesus is using it to counter the Sadducees' use of Mosaic Law and their understanding of history. On this point see Janzen, "Resurrection and Hermeneutics: On Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26."

20:38).⁴⁵⁰ That is, the law would not serve to perfect life in its creative self-mediation, but only to continue its external mediation through death, thus rendering the law itself a subject of death.

Jesus's answer then indicates that the law is only from and for raising up a new social body as this was initiated through the exodus, and yet this initial creative movement is only intelligible in light of its advance toward the ideal of bodily resurrection.⁴⁵¹ That is, the very law that the Sadducees are so keen to uphold is relativized, brought back to its originating social body as its creative laws of development, and therein shown to be ultimately contingent, in its meaning and being, upon the resurrection of the body. Moreover, that this creative movement of producing a new social body involves the reproduction of the whole of nature at a higher level for which the perfection of life is no longer generically mediated through limited biological cycles, does not mean the future end is simply represented as a purely abstract *novum*. Rather for Jesus the ideal that completes the exodus movement can only be that which perfects the same historical bodies, yet according to the emergent laws of their social transformation of creation. This implies a process of refining the material body's creative form to the extent that it will begin to resemble something "*like* angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34–36). That is, as the Gospel narrators emphasize, the perfected body according to Jesus does not attain eternal life by becoming identical to

⁴⁵⁰ It is to Ernst Bloch's credit that he saw this connection with Osiris and exodus in Luke 20:38, though without also mentioning Baal or drawing on the deeper tradition of resurrection in Hebrew thought. See, Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, v.3, trans. Paul Knight, Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 1130.

⁴⁵¹ N.T. Wright has suggested a similar reading of this reference to Exodus 3, whereby Jesus is subversively reinterpreting the meaning of Israel's history. Yet, Wright places more emphasis on the discontinuity of the coming kingdom rather than its continuity with historical movement. See, Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 427. The text however implies a balancing between historical continuity and discontinuity, implying something closer to an emergent end.

angelic beings *in* an otherworldly sphere, as every classical formula would require.

Rather the text suggests appropriating the immortality of heavenly angels within material history, by virtue of what is here implied as a development of new needs because of new forms of producing and reproducing the human as no longer determined by a debt to death.⁴⁵²

Therefore, there is here no reduction of eternal life to the generic level of cyclical nature or to an otherworldly disjunction, but only a signification from and for the historical body becoming conscious of its internal laws of emergent movement. The ideal Jesus draws from intimates a non-inverted grasp of the normative self-transcending movement of the social body from below, its capacity to change as the site of reconciling contradictions in service to its higher order refinement. It is a movement that suggests the need for producing a new social organization of the whole without division and death, breaking down every barrier to creative communal self-mediation. It is then significant that this section presenting Jesus's engagement with the Sadducees about bodily resurrection not only concludes a confrontation occasioned by the symbolic overturning of the mediations of the Temple complex; but also that it ends, after signifying resurrection as a new redistribution of the creative power of life, with a continuation of the progressive prophetic trajectory that requires elimination of sacrifice as such—a kingdom in which social relations will be organized without the entropy-hastening

⁴⁵² Out of all the Gospel writers Luke is most explicit in spelling this out. Marriage is a provision for this given age, but in the age to come, as the emergent fulfillment of this age, there will be no death (“indeed they cannot die anymore” 20:36) and therefore no *necessity* by which marriage will be a requirement of the Law (20:34–36). Moreover, claiming there will be no need for marriage does not suggest an appeal here to a primal androgyne, as if according to the Gnostic tradition whose ideal required returning created differences to a primordial undifferentiated oneness. The emphasis in the Gospels is definitely placed on differentiated bodies progressively moving toward a future transformation that retains the body in its created form and thus its creative capacities. On the differing uses of the androgyne imagery see Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *Journal of the History of Religions* 13 (1973): 165-208.

mediation of “whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). Thus, while Jesus’s thought swam in various apocalyptic waters of his time, his articulation of the ideal of resurrection nevertheless strongly shares that older Hebraic, this-worldly prophetic eschatology of Hosea and Isaiah, since his presentation of the ideal serves to return the religio-cultural mediation of social surplus back to recalling and raising up the pre-state social body.

It was this populist promotion of the social body in its revolutionary movement, directly appropriating the kingdom of heaven here and now without waiting for a passage through death and its temple intermediaries, which cost Jesus his life (John 11:48). Whether Jesus was a part of the so-called “Zealots” and instigated violent revolt of any kind may be doubtful, but he was nonetheless tried and killed as a populist rebel.⁴⁵³ Moreover, his death, tragically occurring as an untimely accident of history which he in no way accepted with a detached Socratic attitude, left much work behind in determining how to build this new communal form and continue the slow revolution from below that would resolve the divisive forces of death and their social contradictions.

Yet, it is significant that Jesus throughout his career was able to emphasize the Hebraic ideal of bodily resurrection in line with its positive sense, without suggesting that there must be a necessary passage through a cross. Jesus’s followers thus saw his own living actions as continuing a material and historical process of resurrection as the salvific work, a movement of perfection that they believed he had already initiated. It is this recognition of Jesus’s own life as profoundly realizing something of the Hebraic

⁴⁵³ Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, p. 50. For a critique of the application of the label “Zealot” as an anachronism to Jesus’ own time (arguing that Zealots proper only arrived 40 years after Jesus), and a subsequent reassessment of Jesus of Nazareth as a peasant leader, see Horsley and Hanson, *Prophets, Bandits, and Messiahs*.

ideal toward the historical movement toward death's overcoming, which allowed the early community to thus reunite and move forward in self-organization beyond the stifling nature of his ignoble and premature death.⁴⁵⁴ In following Paul I will now trace out how he both extends this Hebraic breakthrough by further articulating the ideal of bodily resurrection in a way that sheds light on its active body becoming conscious of itself, while also undoing this trajectory by placing the body within a repressive sacred economy.

Paul's Resurrection of the Pneumatic Body and its Crossing Out

The cultural memory of the social body of labor, with its rising awareness of its constitutive value and revolutionary potential under the sign of bodily resurrection, continued to indicate an ideological terrain of developing class-consciousness in Paul's context. Within his letters the meaning of this ideal comes up for significant questioning, thus indicating a broader social contestation initiated from below that had overflowed its intramural Jewish context, now moving into the social consciousness of Hellenistic cities within the Roman Empire. Thus, in the community of Corinth Paul confronts members who explicitly denied the ideal of bodily resurrection. Like Jesus's debate with the Sadducees, the issue of bodily resurrection in the Corinthian community had to do primarily with the meaning and end of history in relation to the perfection of eternal life and the use of social surplus around material bodies. Those who denied the idea were the elite upper-class members of the community, most likely wealthy merchants and others

⁴⁵⁴ As Alan Segal states, because of Jesus's position within certain Judaic currents, "expectations of his resurrection would have been normal". *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (Yale University Press, 1990), p. 56.

of high social status within the immediate social setting.⁴⁵⁵ The elite in Corinth held a social position that benefited from imperial interests, and their intellectual development relied on those commonplace forms of Greco-Roman philosophy that typically reflected and legitimated the imperial tributary regime and its hierarchical order of class structure.⁴⁵⁶ Thus, within the Corinthian community, those who denied the resurrection of the body also had a difficulty sharing the dinner table with the lower classes of the social body.⁴⁵⁷ Paul's dilemma as Christianity spread into an urban and cosmopolitan reality, made up of a more diverse cross-section of social stratification, was then how to organize and understand the revolutionary movements of the lower social body as it was now becoming conscious of its right to the social surplus.⁴⁵⁸

Within Greco-Roman philosophy of this period the idea of bodily resurrection was gaining wider acknowledgement for its increasingly common consortium amongst the masses, an association that left the ideal to be met with disdain by sophisticated urbanites. It was therefore pilloried as an unrefined idea native to the lower classes, whose affirmation of materiality through the idea emboldened this class toward all kinds

⁴⁵⁵ Analyzing the upper strata of the Corinthian community, Gerd Theissen has substantially argued that the divisions Paul addresses in his first letter have to do primarily with those between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, rather than solely between Gentile and Jew. See Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, trans. John H. Schutz (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), pp. 145–174.

⁴⁵⁶ Richard Horsley has claimed that the elite within the community who denied bodily resurrection did so on the basis of a Platonic dualism, passed on through the Hellenized Judaism of Philo. See, Horsley, “How Can Some of You Say ‘There is no Resurrection of the Dead?’ Spiritual Elitism in Corinth,” *Novum Testamentum* 20 (1978): pp. 203–231. Dale Martin however is right to emphasize that their position need not be directly mediated from Philo since this brand of Greco-Roman dualism “was simply ‘in the air’ of first century popular philosophy.” Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 171–172.

⁴⁵⁷ Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, pp. 151–163.

⁴⁵⁸ Paul's Hellenistic urban communities were made up of a diverse and growing middle class, with a few urban servants, many freedmen and freedwomen, artisans, and wealthy traders. Only the extreme ends of the social scale were missing from these communities, thus leaving out slaves and the poor rural peasantry, as well as the very top of the landed aristocrats, the equestrian class and senators. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 72–75.

of muddled thinking and social aspirations that immoderately refused to accept the divinely given order and its separation of the spheres. As Dale Martin comments: “The mistake of the masses, according to the philosophical view, is not their belief that men may become gods but their unsophisticated notion that the lower-status aspect of human existence, the body, could possibly attain the high status reserved for the more subtle, purer substances of the self.”⁴⁵⁹ Thus, espousing the standard Greco-Roman debt to death, which was spelled out in chapter 3, in the first century Plutarch claims that to see in the strictly corruptible body something that essentially participates in the divine, is nothing other than a fable of the common folk that foolishly tries to “mix heaven with earth.”⁴⁶⁰ It is an idea that violates the alleged natural right that death has to our material bodies, a violation instigated by its claim that the “damp and heavy” earthbound body can somehow transgress its fixed bounds to appropriate that perfection which is reserved only for a purely “fleshless” soul free from the body’s “contamination.”⁴⁶¹ This assessment by Plutarch will be echoed a century later by Celsus, that Greek philosopher staunchly critical of the idea of resurrection and its low class provenance. Thus he rejects this ideal and its network of other related Christian concepts as the idiotic product of “wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters.”⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p. 114.

⁴⁶⁰ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914), p. 181. It is in this context of specifically denying the idea of bodily resurrection that Plutarch quotes Pindar’s statement as support: “Our bodies all must follow death’s supreme behest.”

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Quoted in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 165.

The issue here, in ideologically mixing up heaven and earth, as the philosophers rightly recognized, is that concerning a social consciousness that has begun disturbing the very social orders that the ideological separation of the spheres is supposed to help maintain. It thus has to do with more than speculation about eternal life, but rather about who or what owns the universal means to accessing eternal life and thus commands the use of social surplus from here within the present organization of social reality. Because the ideal presupposes a perfectible whole whose reconciliation of contradictions can only take place within and for raising up the material totality of the “damp and heavy” body itself, it marked a consciousness of the laboring body’s right to appropriate heaven here within its earthly mix by way of a greater share in the social surplus. And the claim that the perfection of eternal life is to be produced in and for advancing the lower body of wool-workers and bucolic yokels, etc., as the constitutive power of society producing the social surplus in the first place, is obviously a demand that requires reversing the determinative hierarchies within the social totality.

But it is also a demand born from a more universal standpoint of the social body of production and thus by way of a more rational consciousness of the social totality, without arbitrarily fixating on a part to the exclusion of the whole. That the ideal of bodily resurrection was a more rationally comprehensive reorienting of the classical transcendental vision, from and for the universality in the prior body of the productive base, therefore, exposed the inverted orders of Greco-Roman society as both materially contradictory as well as intellectually irrational. Of course, Greco-Roman thought had no categories for assessing this social demand and its more comprehensive rationality, since it was not predisposed to understanding the laboring body as something that could

properly think or act for itself in the first place. Hence Celsus's visceral, ill-targeted attack on rural idiocy suggests more of a surprised befuddlement and class embarrassment of being outdone by a tool. The rejection of the ideal by the upper-class within the Corinthian community was therefore not likely based on an intellectual consideration, as much as a reflex of class habits and haughtiness, due to their arbitrary interests, whose legitimation required ideologically keeping the dealings of the flesh and soul separated within a hierarchically divided whole.

Countering their reaction, Paul, like Jesus, implies that they ask the question because they do not understand the creative power of the body. He will therefore redefine the nature of the body for them, as it is illumined under the sign of the resurrection implied as redistribution, thus raising consciousness of the lower body in such a way that would require reorganizing communal life and its reinvestment priorities; and yet he also simultaneously unplugs this material and historical body from such an ideal, contradictorily redefining resurrection in a manner that obviates any need to reinvest in the laboring body here and now. To see this double movement we must first get a sense of what is uniquely progressive underlying Paul's new conception of the body in relation to eternal life.

Answering the upper class's question, 'how are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (I Cor. 15:35), Paul runs through a catalogue of distinctions that seem to perpetuate their commonplace Hellenized dichotomies. Yet there is also much that pushes against these construals within the text. The main thrust of Paul's argument can be interpreted as relativizing their ruling dichotomy between *sarx*, as the mortal flesh, and *psyche*, as the immortal soul, by introducing a third term that incorporates both in

relating to the eternal as the *pneumatic somas* (I Cor. 15:44). *Pneuma*, or spirit, for Paul is not that which stands in contrast to the body like *psyche* but rather he contrasts it to the *psyche* itself, integrally linked as it is with the *soma*, or the body, which itself stands in relation, but is not reducible, to *sarx* (I Cor. 15:44–45).⁴⁶³ Moreover, the integral coupling of *pneuma* and *soma* does not imply a paradox as modern readers are wont to suppose, since *pneuma* is not technically that which is immaterial, incorporeal, or supernatural for Paul, but closer to an active principle of matter.⁴⁶⁴ That is, it is still within the natural realm of material stuff, associated with the finer elements usually assumed as the active substance of the soul, but now closer to the Hebraic sense of *ruach* or creative life-giving “breath” in reference to the original creative act of the body in Gen. 2:7.⁴⁶⁵ *Pneuma* thus serves to identify the creative principle of life within the active body itself—that internal spirit of the body according to its dynamic realization within nature. Thus retaining the term *pneuma* rather than speaking of a spiritual body provides greater accuracy in clarifying its reference to the activity of the living, breathing body, instead of thinking in terms of a Cartesian ghost in the machine.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, v. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), p. 204. See also Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, pp. 127–128.

⁴⁶⁴ M. E. Dahl, *The Resurrection of the Body: A Study of I Corinthians 15* (London: SCM Press, 1962), pp. 48–50.

⁴⁶⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 261.

⁴⁶⁶ This follows some of the lines of Dale Martin’s interpretation of Paul’s *pneumatic somas* as a kind of unifying material substance. Martin is especially helpful insofar as he spells out how Paul was not easily endorsing a dualism as the surface of the text would suggest—especially not a Cartesian dualism between the ontological separation of soul and body into completely different realities, which nowhere yet existed in antiquity. Yet Martin claims that Paul redefines the body too far in the direction of a celestial substance, beginning to render it unrecognizable. I am therefore attempting to pull out the recognizable qualities of the physical body that nevertheless remain in Paul’s account. Moreover, in moving up the body’s essence closer on the hierarchical scale to the celestial realm in antiquity, Paul’s redefinition is showing a consciousness from below of the pliability of the body and its capacity to be progressively refined over time. See, Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, pp. 104–138.

What is important here is that Paul begins a process that implies returning the active side of the intellect, as developed within the inverted classical idealisms, back into the body itself. More importantly, he identifies *sarx* and *psyche* only as relative elements and aspects of the body in its becoming whole, since there is no pure matter or pure mind except within the constitutive activity of the pneumatic body holistically rising up into a greater integration of relations. Another way of stating this is that the pneumatic body is not a different substance from the basic flesh signified in *sarx*, but rather the flesh itself in its active, living mode of creative material appropriation. Flesh is not a body unless it actively organizes the material, just as soul cannot emerge unless flesh in its active bodily self-organization is reflexively directed toward the evolving perfection of life for itself.

Here is the distinctive key to Paul's redefinition of the body in relation to the perfection of eternal life, since he now locates the normative standpoint within the pneumatic body according to its specific "sowing" activity. Of course this sowing can devolve into entropy-hastening processes rather than actualizing its creative potentials (I. Cor. 15:42–43), but Paul implies that the pneumatic body's perfection results from sowing latent seeds, already within the *sarx*, for newly emergent forms (I Cor. 15:37–38). The resurrection of the body is articulated then neither as a symbol referring to the statically continuing given cycles of nature, nor an otherworldly power to which the body has no internal historical relation; but rather signifies an emergent historical process whose perfection results in some way by virtue of the active body's creative capacity of self-organization, the creative process by which "seeds" acquire a "body of its own" (I Cor. 15:38b); or, as Caroline Walker Bynum eloquently describes it, Paul's understanding of the body under the sign of resurrection is that of a dynamic

transformation of the organic, “bursting under its own internal power into the bloom of heaven.”⁴⁶⁷ Thus a vision of the perfectible whole comes through the text that evinces a grasp from and for real material development: it is grasped from a more adequate comprehension, in an original way, of the body’s physical movement as an emergent creative addition in nature. This suggests a notion of the perfection of eternal life around a perfectible whole by which creative power is newly redistributed to these actively sowing bodies, perfecting the self-actualizing spirit of the active body.

The ideal body is thus perfected through the whole of its works, works that do not purge the body for Gnostically undressing a naked soul, but rather both sow seeds as well as progressively “clothe” the body in immortality. This process of actively making and refining the spirit of the body, its heavenly form from its earthly stuff (I Cor. 15:49), is not only described by Paul, following Hosea and Isaiah, as intending a final defeat of the contradiction of death, “swallowed up” *in the body* (I Cor. 15:54–55), but also involves a process of transformation that does not ontologically necessitate a passage through death, though the contingent fact of death may be experienced by many: “not all will sleep, but all will be changed” (I Cor. 15:51). Thus under the pressure of the ideal of bodily resurrection, Paul introduces a significant shift in the classical paradigm—eternal life is not grasped and related to solely under the aspect of the intellectual soul as that exclusive active principle over against the flesh whose mortality is a given necessity; rather it is grasped from the standpoint of the *pneumatic* body unfolding its own seeds as latent potentials of creation actualized in the transformative perfection of the flesh’s mutable capacity. That is, perfection of the flesh as it is raised into a higher level of bodily unity,

⁴⁶⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 72.

entails the elimination of the material contradiction of mortality, rather than the elimination of material mutability per se from the fleshly body.

Paul therefore begins a significant shift away from associating the flesh with its condemnation as a necessarily mortal corruption qua its mutability, by relating it directly to the eternal in its creative capacities of becoming a body. Paul's *pneumatic* body can then be understood as beginning to grasp more directly the body's creative anti-entropic capacity for reversing its tendency toward the stasis of death and decay, thus signifying a subjectivity that is, in a certain sense, subjectivated only through objectively cultivating and thus saving the material potentials for creating from the entropic forces that bind the flesh into a changeless state. This means that the material body, precisely as changeable, is no longer an indicator of its nature as essentially the site of corruption and fallenness, but rather the fundamental site of participating in and advancing toward the perfection of eternal life.

To sum up the underlying progressiveness in Paul, then, the active side of the human is radicalized, not only by being placed in the lower body as such in its capacity for sowing higher levels of self-organization, but also in this being attributed a role of creative addition to nature that constitutes the historical relation to the eternal; whereas in classical thought the active side of the intellect does not change or transform anything but only consciously contemplates its a priori formal nature as already incorruptible, and so leaves material growth and historical development incomprehensible to the divine whole except as consigned to corruption. On this reading of Paul's body, the modern Bultmannian interpretation of *sarx* and *pneuma* as only contrasting inner subjective compartments or attitudes rather than referring to physical bodily substances, capacities,

and activities, completely misses the radicalness here.⁴⁶⁸ Rendering *pneuma* and *sarx* as merely opposing psychological dispositions within a permanently corruptible body simply perpetuates the classical dichotomies around a purely contemplative standpoint, though in a different “existentialist” language. Such a construal elides the real novelty of Paul’s *pneuma* as that which constitutes humanity as more than a *mortal* animal precisely in the active transformation of *sarx* in, by, and for the material body as an ongoing creative work of changing the conditions of its existence. That is, it misses the incipient historical materialist subject in Paul whose relation to the holy is constituted precisely in the process of materially making whole—the pneumatic body as implying something very close to a body constitutively breathed to life by living labor’s reproduction of the whole of nature in a new way.

Moreover, if Paul’s overall sacred economy and salvific act were consistent with his novel emphasis on the pneumatic body and its imperative of resurrection, we would have a very suggestive materialist way of reading his notion of the “Body of Christ” as a metaphor for the real objective trajectory in the collective work of diverse laborers becoming historical subjects (I Cor. 12:12–31). As a continuation of Jesus’ resurrecting work, it could be understood as a new social body emerging whose salvific work is itself the work of raising up past labors into a higher social synthesis: i.e., working toward an

⁴⁶⁸ See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, v. 1, p. 209. He rightly sees that *pneuma* retains a sense of purpose but regards it merely as a matter of the intentionality in consciousness alone, failing to account for its intuitions from the more basic transformative interchange with nature. Thus, he explicitly refers this idea to subjectivity solely understood in terms of self-consciousness while rejecting in any way its reference to the material substance and function of body as such. For a more recent application, within post-Marxist critical theory, of this Bultmannian interpretation in terms of two subjective modes of reasoning, see Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford University Press, 2003). What these interpretations do not consider is that Paul was already intimating a grasp of the constitution of subjectivity more fundamentally in the process of becoming a body through the historical appropriation of the material, rather than thinking subjectivity solely in terms of forms of conscious reflection that presuppose a body as given.

anti-entropic reversal of the extractive orders of death so as to raise the social totality of producers, for whom Jesus represented, into a higher organization of the social body's creative becoming. This would mark out a genuinely novel counter-tributary form of the perfective ideal through an organization of the modes of production from below, rather than remaining a messianic form whose apocalyptic distortions represent just another top-down aping of the tributary ideal to which the prior laboring body would continue to remain suppressed.

Yet this is of course an implication of the pneumatic body that Paul never further develops, instead already cutting off its logical outworking. His implied valorization of the lower body would have certainly mixed up heaven and earth too much for the likings of the Greco-Roman upper class, not least the elite members of his Corinthian community. But Paul simultaneously quells any anxieties by immediately taming this body. Just as he was beginning to reclaim the ideal of perfection for its prior body according to a grasp from the vantage of the village commune, Paul fails to more fully articulate its perfectible whole around the creative act. Whereas his dynamic valences of the seed pointed in the direction of the body's internal spirit of creative becoming, he nevertheless fixes the meaning of the body as *only a passive seed* in itself that must die to become something more (I. Cor. 15:36–37), just as “in Adam all die,” and yet somehow abstractly “in Christ all will be made alive” (I Cor. 15:22).

As highlighted above Paul draws on the language of Isa. 25–26 in speaking of swallowing up death. Yet the allusions to Isa. 25–26 are not presented in light of the demythologizing trajectory emanating from Isa. 2:2–4, whereby the inverted tributary enthronement tradition is returned to its constitutive material conditions in the people as

the true subject and object of historical becoming. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the culmination in Isa. 25–26 of defeating death and resurrecting the body was the non-metaphorical presentation of perfecting the prior social body of production, a result of perfecting its anti-entropic creative potentials in the modes of production. Thus resurrection of the body was a requirement of the vision stemming from Isa. 2:2–4 in which the statist ideologies of royal enthronement are undone more holistically from below, through creatively and collectively reordering the underlying socioeconomic forces otherwise. But Paul, in the midst of drawing out important implications here, nevertheless resorts back to reading Isa. 25–26 according to the logic of a religio-political enthronement tradition from above, forgetting the prior social body of production as the real historical agent. In I Cor. 15:20–28 Paul thus gives us the real order of his sacred economy, placing allusions to Isa. 25–26 within an explicit reference to the violent Davidic enthronement tradition of Psalm 110, whereby it is the singular figure of Jesus as Christ who defeats death according to his sovereign reign for which the Father is submitting every power, and from which general resurrection will result (I Cor. 15:23–28).⁴⁶⁹

In Isa. 2:2–4 we saw Yahweh recede into the background as not so much an active agent as rather the natural principle of true creating by which the agency of the social body will come to measure and develop its work, a work of transforming the very modes

⁴⁶⁹ On Paul's appeal to the enthronement tradition in Psa. 110 in I Cor. 15:25 see the recent work by Matthew Novenson, *Christ Among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 145–146. Novenson provides a robust defense of Paul's use of "Christ" as not an empty placeholder or a conventional title—as modern trends in Pauline scholarship have held over the past century—but an honorific expression drawing on Jewish traditions of messiahship in order to emphasize Jesus's fulfillment of this tradition. Thus he sees Paul's reference to Psa. 110 here as key to his presentation of Jesus as the Christ, the fulfillment of the Davidic lineage. No matter what we want Paul to currently say in our modern times, there can be no doubt that in his own time he was concerned with elaborating the messianic meaning of Jesus as Christ crucified.

of production whose perfection will culminate in “all peoples” enthroned at the end of history, critically displacing the mythical imagery of the dying and rising sovereignty of Baal (Isa. 25–26). But now in I Cor. 15:20–28 it is god as Father actively establishing sovereignty, with his divine agent enthroned in the singular figure of Christ who exercises true sovereignty through his obedience to the Father (I Cor. 15:24). All peoples by virtue of human embodiment (“in Adam”) will necessarily pass away, but insofar as they identify with the sovereign figure of Jesus as the mythical dying and rising Christ, they too will rise again when he returns. Thus while the seed imagery in the pneumatic body harbored the dynamics of the social body newly transforming organic matter, it now becomes subordinated to the narrow religio-political logic of correct fidelity to true sovereignty. Thus what we find is not the Hebraic demythologizing reversal of tributary inversions, but only another mythical representation of sovereignty within tributary enthronement paradigms.

Paul’s unique messianic logic, then, is not given back to a more populist thrust but rather it is presented as already fulfilled by Jesus alone through a partial religio-political act of fidelity perfected on, through, and after the cross. Hence when Paul uses the honorific title of “Christ” for Jesus, it is almost always in conjunction with his dying on the cross.⁴⁷⁰ That implied prophetic conception of socially fulfilling the law of creating—the wisdom of Torah flowing from the creative potentials of nature—is here lost from view. Instead we have at the religio-political level a fulfillment of the Law’s inverted

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 115. Novenson points to the fact that Paul took it as axiomatic that Jesus was the messiah and speaks of the “Christ” especially when he refers to Jesus dying on the cross as a work of obedience to the Father. He points to the following usages in Rom. 5:6 “Christ died for the impious”; Rom. 5:8 “Christ died for us”; Rom. 6:4 “Christ was raised from the dead”; Rom. 6:9 “Christ, raised from the dead, no longer dies”; Rom. 14:9 “Christ died and lived again”; Rom. 14:15 “Christ died”; I Cor. 5:7 “Christ our Passover was sacrificed”; I Cor. 8:11 “Christ died”; I Cor. 15:3 “Christ died for our sins according to scriptures”; I Cor. 15:20 “Christ has been raised from the dead”.

ideality on its own terms, fulfilling its demand for unproductive sacrifice and obedience to an alien sovereign will (Gal. 1:4; 2:19). Indeed, Paul provides a novel way of rearticulating the inverted tributary form. Rather than more fully recalling the ascendant body harbored within the tributary ideal of perfection and thus bringing this ideal back to earth, Paul's messianism remains within the inverted form of tributary ideology, and yet resigned to its failure, he dramatizes the fall of the ideal itself on the cross as the salvific thing (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 3:25).⁴⁷¹ This ultimately gives the messianic movement a completely dematerialized spiritual meaning, thus remaining only another variation of the inverted idealist structure of Ideal-body-Ideal.

The resurrection as a future end for a historical movement that Jesus's own work had anticipated and would be saved by is now repositioned in a sacred economy as ancillary to an imaginary reconciliation already mysteriously perfected in heaven by way of the cross, a sacrifice that was made seemingly to end all sacrifices, and yet imagined only in the symbolic terms of a tributary god of death ordering another death (Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 5:6–8; Cor. 5:21;).⁴⁷² The salvific act then becomes simply a mythical resolution in

⁴⁷¹ That the focus on the cross and its theological meaning remains within a religio-political tributary paradigm need not imply that it is interpreted along the lines of a sacrificial atonement theory. See for example Stanley K. Stowers' religio-political interpretation of Paul's Jesus who is revealed as sovereign "Christ" on the cross not as a sacrifice but as a decision not to fulfill just yet his Davidic messianic mandate to judge the world. Referring to Rom. 3:25 Stowers says that for Paul, "Jesus, however, out of faithfulness to his mandate, chose not to exercise the awesome divine powers available to him. Jesus did not exercise the powers given to him because if he had, much of Israel and most of the gentiles would have been lost. Jesus died and postponed the world's judgment out of love for the ungodly." *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 214.

⁴⁷² This tributary idealist logic is still evident even in supposedly demythologized atonement theories such as Rene Girard's, who sees Jesus's death, insofar as he was an innocent victim, as exposing the unnecessary absurdity of every sacrificial scapegoat, and Jesus's consequent resurrection, as symbolically representing god's authoritative "no" to this practice and its cycles of violence. See, Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Girard's reading nevertheless still locates the meaning of Jesus's life in his dying on the cross, as necessarily a kind of symbolic 'taking one for the team' so to speak, the meaning of which is presented primarily for collective psyche. The resurrection here is not the material triumph of life, its final work of historical self-perfection that results in overcoming death more completely by organizing the material at a higher level, but rather the secondary confirmation not of a historical movement but of a primarily self-sacrificial salvific act and its

the past whose already completed form is available only for a belief in consciousness alone, an act of faith apart from the creative act of the body (Rom. 3:22). Thus participating in Jesus's resurrecting activity no longer intelligibly signifies the positive salvific act itself as a real historical process of transforming the material away from its Osiris-like subjection, since participation in Christ is now regressively construed along the lines of a psychological and fideistic identification with the mythical resolution of a dying and rising god. Of course Paul did not necessarily have in mind, nor did his audience, the image of Baal or Osiris, and he differs in some key ways. But the point here is that Paul's formal structure of salvation does not ultimately transcend in any significant way those tributary forms of disembedding the sacred economy from the progressive ends of perfecting its prior social body of labor in its historical becoming. Moreover, his theology of the cross is not the outworking of an inexorable logic within the religious vision as such toward its own undoing, but, like all tributary ideology, it is simply a contingent distortion of the religious from within the partial view of an unproductive class.⁴⁷³ Thus if there is any proto-secularizing logic in his theology of the cross, this pertains to its contingent ideological reflection of a growing inability to socially grasp the meaning of labor's perfective activity.⁴⁷⁴

symbolically ethical meaning. In other words, the whole logic of Girard's reading requires that the tributary logic of unproductive sacrifice should be undone on its own terms, a drama about exposing its own self-negating inner contradictions, which nevertheless allows this inverted sacred economy to set the terms for its fulfillment, positively or negatively.

⁴⁷³ Hence Marcel Gauchet's thesis, which is merely representative of so many other similar death of god interpretations of the cross, which are themselves symptoms of an idealist failure to assess the creative movement of material history, looking instead for an inexorable logic of consciousness and its ideals abstracted in thought alone. Thus these readings also remain within the tributary logic of a debt to death since the death on the cross is necessary for purging all idealist illusions from humanity's self-mediation, mediating the human to itself solely within self-reflective consciousness in a more transparent way, and solely by seeing the self-negation of the very idea of divinity. See, Gauchet *The Disenchantment of The World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton University Press, 1997),

⁴⁷⁴ I continue to use the phrase, "theology of the cross", for Paul because Paul is the first to systematically theologize the cross as integral to the salvific economy of Jesus as Christ. Because I am tracing the

The novelty of Paul's reinterpretation of the tributary ideal can be suggestively explained in part by more fully considering how he reflexively projects from new forms of experience given by his urban middle class position.⁴⁷⁵ Residing within the empire's urban centers whose social relations were increasingly determined by a growing petty commodity market with expansive and pervasive networks of commerce and coinage, Paul reads the counterintuitive salvific act of Jesus's crucifixion deliberately in metaphorical terms of a commercial transaction of exchange, now paying off a debt to death (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Rom. 5:8–9; 2 Eph. 5:2). Paul thus shows how far removed he is from the village standpoint with his inability to think the ideal from below according to the historical body's new creative acts and their resolving of material contradictions. But nor does he simply conceptualize a reconciliation according to a strict top-down aristocratic view of cosmic order and its idealized circular resolution. Instead, in partially seeing the importance of the historical body in a way that the aristocracy could not, yet unable to comprehend the full historical significance of its productive activity, Paul construes the salvific act as *occurring in* but not *from* or *for* the historical body as a transformative agent. It is an event occasioned by and in a body, but completed only

historical materialist trajectory of the Hebraic ideal of future resurrection, especially as it was drawn forward by Jesus himself in a way, obviously, that did not require him to theologize the cross, the task then of explaining what happened to this ideal in Paul cannot sidestep his own new theology of Jesus's cross that conspicuously marks a new break with the Hebraic ideal—that stumbling block for the Jewish messianic ideal. As Alan Segal says, “although Christianity represents a pure Jewish reaction to a tragic series of events, the reaction was at the same time absolutely novel. . . . the idea of a crucified messiah was unique.” *Paul the Convert*, p. 56. Therefore, in speaking of a “theology of the cross” in Paul as novel this does not mean I am necessarily highlighting something outside Judaism, but only that Paul's theology was a unique interpretation within Judaism. I am therefore not going against what the “New Perspectives” school has sought to emphasize: that Paul obviously was not a Lutheran theologian—though Luther did rightly see something important in Paul's theology of the cross, even if he drew forth implications that Paul would not have drawn.

⁴⁷⁵ This is not to commit a genetic fallacy here, since I am not reducing Paul simply to his class position. Already pointing to how he harbors within his writings more than his immediate social position, I am now highlighting those elements of his thought that reflect such a position in a way that distorts what he previously opened to view. Identifying class position is always only one part in analyzing thought and action. To refer to class position alone as if this in itself indicated a critique is to fail to analyze and explain.

according to its abstract exchange value whose idealized meaning requires subtracting this body from movements internal to the cosmos and history.

In other words, Paul exhibits an incipient middle class mindset that Rome's emerging market relations were only now beginning to make available. It is a proto-commercial mindset that cannot affirm the body's value either in its internal capacity to produce order or in its subtending an intellectual capacity to contemplate order, but only according to its capacity to be exchangeable for a will whose purposes are alien to any such internally perfectible orders of cosmos and history. This allows Paul to mark the body more severely with a debt to death that does not simply justify its expropriation as merely a natural condition, but rather commands it as its essential spiritual value.

When the cross and not the resurrection becomes either the ideal sign or the necessary passage for an ideal transaction by which the active body identifies with a messianic or salvific movement, then its own historical import can only become garbled by a focus on an ideal exchange.⁴⁷⁶ In imitating this messianic debt to or through death, the primary perfective activity by which one grasps their embodiment of the ideal is narrowly and partially conceived around the spiritualized comportment of a self-sacrificing ethos and its religio-political fidelities of the will within the body. The sign of the cross as the condition for displacing the meaning of history within a mythical dying

⁴⁷⁶ The problem here for a materialist account is in any theologizing of the cross as the occasion—whether as starting point, middle point, or end point—for a mythical transaction with the divine outside history. As already suggested in the footnotes above on the very different accounts of the meaning of the cross in Stowers, Girard, and Gauchet, rendering the cross necessary for disclosing a symbolic meaning is to exchange the historical body for an abstracted idealist meaning and value available only for consciousness. Thus even a nuanced reading of the Book of Hebrews, such as that given recently by David Moffitt, whereby it is not the death on the cross that is salvific but the resurrection, yet only as the occasion for the resurrected body of Christ to *ascend into heaven and offer himself as a living sacrifice to the will of the Father*, still shows that passing through the cross here situates the historical body according to its abstracted exchange value within some ahistorical vacuum for an external will. See Moffitt, *Atonement and the Logic of the Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

and rising figure who ascends to some other plane, thus hides more effectively from view the fact that the ideal of resurrection is born from a creative and collective movement of the social body whose historical development requires demythologizing and undoing every imaginary relation to death that would suggest the abstraction of the body's meaning and value to some idealization. As the completion of a dialectical necessity of negation the idea of bodily resurrection is then increasingly divorced from and emptied of its sensible intuitions and intentions from within the material history of the laboring body's determinate negations of its entropic negation.

The seeds of the pneumatic body then are no longer those latent potentials creatively sown by the historical body itself, but rather the body as such is objectified as nothing more than a seed to be given to and sown by another—a thing “buried” with Christ so that the Father can sow his own glory (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21; Rom. 6:3–5; I Cor. 15:36; Col. 2:12). Resurrection of the body thus begins to refer largely to an otherworldly compensation insofar as the body submits its internal creative potencies to a sovereign power external to its own historical development. Whereas the sacred economies within both Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds, which we have already highlighted, at least hinged on a sense of eternal life that still harbored traces of those creative qualities around naturally and socially perfecting life for itself, under the sacred economy of the cross the resurrection's referential arrow becomes more mystifyingly set in the direction of an inverted power, a sower whose glory appears as if wholly outside natural life.

Therefore, in a shift more extreme than anything conceivable in strictly classical terms, the inverted form of the mortal body as alienable becomes the valorized site itself for disclosing the perfection of the divine, recognizing one's very being as not their own

but “bought at a price” (1 Cor. 6:19–20, 7:22–23).⁴⁷⁷ If for Greco-Roman thought the fact that the body is alienable was merely a natural condition of the mutability of lower elements, indifferently and passively recirculating back to their formal origin, and therefore not itself a virtue to be cultivated by the person, now with Paul’s sacred economy and its corresponding ethos the body’s alienable capacity for exchange is precisely its virtue to be developed in some way. That is, the theology of the cross opens up a novel double movement that newly values the material body as active in light of the eternal, yet only insofar as the principle virtue of the body’s pneuma is its capacity to “present its body as a living sacrifice”, to become “an offering,” to be a “slave” for an eternal order alien to its history and materiality (Rom. 12:1–2; Phil. 2:17; I Cor. 7:22b).⁴⁷⁸ Just as soon as the active side of the pneumatic body is affirmed, it is enclosed and buried with Christ on the cross (Rom. 6:3–5, 8; Col. 2:12)—the new ethos of an active passivity.

⁴⁷⁷ Of course conservative commentaries will commonly also see Paul as offering an extreme shift in relation to antiquity, but precisely as something commendable and supposedly “radical” because it is a vision that values the lowly body precisely in its lowliness, and not in terms of anything it can positively do for itself, but by mere assertion of an external agent outside this body. This perplexing logic is given by Anthony Thiselton in claiming that Paul does not offer a Platonism for the masses as Nietzsche thought, because Christ’s lordship over the body, purchasing it at a price, is supposedly more radical than the Greek indifference to the body, simply because it shows a concern for the lowly body—which still remains a condescending affirmation. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), p. 459. The mere fact that there is a new interest in the body alone, however, doesn’t allow one to deem here a progressive advance within antiquity. It would remain a mere assertion without yet making a substantive case for such. Rather, Ernst Bloch’s assessment is closer to the mark when he says that Paul “interprets Christ’s death as a real payment in terms of the Roman commercial code” which he further evaluates as a shift that “belongs to demonic jurisprudence, not religion.” Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, v.3, p. 1266.

⁴⁷⁸ Kyrntatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities*, p. 32. “Paul came very close to Seneca when he said that the slave who was called to be a Christian was the Lord’s freedman and that the free man who received the call was Christ’s slave (I Cor. 7:22); roles, then, were interchangeable. But Paul’s formulation is more absolute, it is not fortune (or Fortune) that is held responsible for a man’s position but God himself. In an epistle which, if not Paul’s own, clearly belongs to his school, not only masters but slaves themselves become the objects of admonition: ‘slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, singlemindedly, as serving Christ’ (Eph. 6:5). Formulas such as this became a cliché in subsequent Christian writings.” That there was no appreciable difference between Paul’s equal admonition of both slaves and masters under the same lordship of Christ and the rhetoric of Roman household manuals to managers and slaves under the lordship of the *pater familias*, see James A. Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), pp. 85–86.

Paul's contradiction of his pneumatic body with this sacred economy of the cross is then no mere oversight but rather both a reflex of his social position and thus an aspect of his counter-revolutionary strategy of social assimilation. One of the well-known schemes used by the late Roman Empire in subduing its subjugated peoples was through a certain sociocultural assimilation, expanding citizenship to the conquered, foreigners, and newly freed slaves, yet while also redefining and delimiting their rights according to fixed social gradations.⁴⁷⁹ This led to an increasing tension in the urban centers with their growing interaction between new hierarchically diverse strata. Paul himself was a beneficiary of Romanization and sought to capitalize upon it in ways that did not challenge this imperial hegemony. His missionary movement endeavored to create a community whose pattern of relations could incorporate certain middle to lower classes within the growing complexity and stratification of Roman urban society in a way that relieved tensions without altering the social structure.

That Paul's new ethos of assimilation wanted no part in raising to a new level Jesus's work of reversal has been captured well in what Gerd Theissen has termed Paul's "love-patriarchalism," which "takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger. From the weaker are required subordination, fidelity, and esteem".⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Theissen, *The Social Setting*, p. 108; see also Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in Ancient Greece*, p. 467.

⁴⁸⁰ "In these congregations there developed an ethos obviously different from that of the synoptic tradition, the ethos of primitive Christian love-patriarchalism. We encounter it particularly in the deuteron-Pauline and pastoral Letters, but it is already evident in Paul (namely, in 1 Cor. 7:21ff.; 11:3–16). This love-patriarchalism takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger. From the weaker are required subordination, fidelity, and esteem. Whatever the intellectual sources feeding into this ethos, with it the great part of Hellenistic primitive Christianity mastered the task of shaping social relations within a community which, on the one hand, demanded of its members a high degree of solidarity and brotherliness and, on the other, encompassed various social strata. This primitive Christian love-patriarchalism, with its moderate social conservatism, made a lasting impact on Christianity." Theissen, *The Social Setting*, p. 107.

Spiritually rendering everyone equally a slave in the eyes of god (Rom. 6:22), purchased as they are by the formal payment of a lord on the cross who will eventually return to implement his kingdom, Paul's community is fundamentally determined by a patient waiting. Within this ethos of waiting upon a time and power outside cosmos and history, the active transformation of social structures is simply unintelligible.⁴⁸¹ The very act of labor loses the essential sense of its revolutionary transformative activity, shorn as it is by Paul of its salvific temporality around making whole. Social structures and their corresponding social positions and statuses are therefore to remain as they are without alteration, seen instead as occasions for displaying a spirit of self-giving, thus providing only a modification of interior attitudes of consciousness behind exchange relations.⁴⁸² History itself therefore simply becomes a time of testing the inner will in its self-sacrificial imitation of Christ on the cross. Indeed Paul directly promotes this active-passivity of waiting and self-offering as a way to occupy one's given station "quietly" and in a "seemly manner" with a more accepting attitude, especially for manual laborers, (1 Thess. 4:10–12; Rom. 13; I Cor. 7:24).⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ This is why, as historians are now recognizing, there was no real social change for the plight of slaves and the peasantry with the rise of Christianity. See, Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*; Kyrtatas, *The Social Structure of the Early Christian Communities*. That the plight of the free peasantry even seemed to worsen with the eventual rise of Christianity, especially under Constantine, will be discussed in the next section.

⁴⁸² Ernst Troeltsch aptly sums up the spirit of this community and its effect only at the level of exchange without altering positions of production in any way: "It was communism composed solely of consumers, a communism based upon the assumption that its members will continue to earn their living by private enterprise, in order to be able to practice generosity and sacrifice. Above all, it has no theory of equality at all, whether it be the absolute equality of sharing possessions, or the relative equality of the contribution of the various members to the life of the whole according to merit and service. All that matters is that all the members shall sacrifice something and that they all have to live; how this is carried out in practice does not matter. There was also no attempt at any organization on business lines such as a joint group of producers would have desired." *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, v.1, p. 62

⁴⁸³ Dale Martin has emphasized that when Paul exercises solidarity, such as in becoming a manual laborer to be all things to all people, this was not to valorize work at all, but to exercise a solidarity that makes every lower station a little more bearable in its acceptance of the status quo. Thus he says, "1 Thessalonians entertains no vision of a classless society. Paul projects no sympathy for laborers who seek a less laborious life. And his advice here works to keep Christianity as a hierarchy-supporting, rather than a hierarchy-

Theissen rightly recognizes it is from the fulcrum of the cross that Paul is able to claim, in principle, that there are no differences in social status, while nevertheless upholding the permanence of their material distinctions in practice.⁴⁸⁴ But Theissen does not fully analyze both how the mechanics of Paul's theology of the cross operated so successfully, as well as how these mechanics might shed greater light on why the Empire itself eventually took up this sacred economy and its ethos. It is precisely the double movement of Paul's theology of the cross, as I have been emphasizing, that allows such an effective counter-revolutionary assimilation of social pressures from below, in a way that no simple regurgitation of classical aristocratic mystifications could, and yet at a time when it was becoming increasingly imperative for the ruling class to do so in a new way. In summing up the mechanics, it is Paul's identification of messianism with Jesus as the Christ that allowed him to uphold the appearance of sympathizing with the lower body's revolutionary aspirations as it was rising up and beginning to recognize itself. Yet under the cross he could also repackage their revolutionary ideal of resurrection in a way that seemingly affirms the internal seeds of the body over against any fixed aristocratic cosmos, while nevertheless disconnecting the body's consciousness from further recognizing its own active participation in sowing/producing a perfectible whole that could no longer demand they bury their seed with a mythical figure of sovereignty.

Yet this makes it sound as if Paul consciously and cunningly calculated his ideology for creating specific effects, when in reality, as I suggested above, Paul's

questioning, movement, at least as far as manual laborers are concerned. Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians keep Christianity conservative in both effect and appearance, whether or not this is Paul's intention. It is clear, at any rate, that Paul wants the Thessalonian converts to remain manual laborers, so much so that he is willing to become a manual laborer himself to provide an example." Martin, *Corinthian Body*, p. 80.

⁴⁸⁴ Theissen, *The Social Setting*, pp. 138–139.

theology of the cross worked so well because it was simply a more adequate reflection of the emerging social contradictions of his time, expressing their felt perplexity while articulating a compelling *imaginary* reconciliation in thought. Thus Paul's theology of the cross articulated a somewhat consistent meaning for the growing alienated sense of the body, conceptualizing the body's material contradictions and their seemingly insurmountable nature precisely as an occasion to be accepted and virtuously channeled into religio-political fidelity to a power whose abstract conception and demand for an active passivity rendered both retreat from, as well as revolt against, any present station meaningless. In this way he was thus able to more effectively continue the already effected social diffusion of the revolutionary potentials of the lower body by mystifyingly funneling their energies for social integration in a way that rendered resignation to the present ethically acceptable.

The growth of the church after Paul will keep metabolizing the meaning of the future resurrection through the necessity of the cross, since it will continue to express the alienated body's historical meaning in terms of its narrowed religio-political fidelity to the will of the Father in identifying with Christ. From the 2nd to the 4th century the ideal of resurrection will remain at the fore of social consciousness, continuing to signify that hotly disputed ideological terrain around the meaning of the historical and material body in relation to the eternal, thus still marking the growing social pressures from below.⁴⁸⁵ Yet the future resurrection will be doctrinally articulated in a way that more severely valorizes the body in its alienated form, dropping the organic themes of Paul's seed

⁴⁸⁵ On the social valence of resistance to the broad sociopolitical pressures of imperial assimilation still harbored within the earliest doctrinal presentations of bodily resurrection, which became a major preoccupation with early church theologians, especially in Justin, Athenagoras and Tertullian, see Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2004), pp. 71–108.

metaphor for the inorganic stasis of statue imagery. Its articulation will thereby continue the counter-revolutionary containment of social consciousness from recognizing the intuitions and intentions of its rising lower body, reworked instead more closely for maintaining an urban consciousness divorced from its own transformative power and the means to change society. It is here that the partial truth of Weber's insight into the early church as a community formed around the absence of any consciousness of a "social problem" begins to show its palpability.

The ideal of resurrection expressed in the early locution, "the resurrection *of the body*", will be polemically altered to refer more specifically to the inert object of the "flesh", further concealing the active participatory side of Paul's pneumatic body by collapsing the meaning of *soma* into *sarx* as strictly a passive mortal substance that must wait upon the machinations of an external will.⁴⁸⁶ With the body normatively reducible to *sarx*, as simply bare life, the ideal body signified by the resurrection will then be mainly formulated along the lines of an inorganic statue whereby the flesh's changeable nature is only valued insofar as it allows itself to be fixed against its material development and organic growth. Presupposing something like the negative necessity of the cross before it can be completed, resurrection therefore began to exclusively represent an ahistorical occasion for the material body, at the end of time, to be stripped down and remade by the

⁴⁸⁶ As Outi Lehtipuu claims, this shift begins with Justin Martyr. She also highlights that Irenaeus, Tertullian and Methodius all eliminate any distinction between Paul's *soma* and *sarx* in 1 Corinthians. But they do so not in the direction of the active trajectory I highlighted above but in collapsing the body into the passive sense of *sarx* as the given mortal bits of flesh. Thus they eliminate any sense of participatory transition in their asserting that it is god alone who will make this essentially corruptible flesh incorruptible. Moreover it is with Jerome that the polemical nature of emphasizing the flesh over the body explicitly comes to the fore. He deliberately contests the Origenist locution *resurrectio corporis* with *resurrectio carnis* so as to ensure that the object of salvation signifies the passive flesh exactly as it is given without its own internal transformation. Lehtipuu, *Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity* (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 148–152. On reading this shift to the phrase "of the flesh" as an attempt by Irenaeus and Tertullian to ward off what they considered Gnostic tendencies in interpreting Paul's *soma* as against *sarx*, see Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "'Caro salutis Cardio': Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought," *History of Religions* 30 (August 1990): pp. 25–50.

sheer fiat of divine will so as to purge the rebel movements of its creative nature.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, unable to recognize one's own ability to actively change material reality, creative agency is projected more severely into its inverted form of an alien will for which the changeable body is merely its passive cipher. If Paul's pneumatic body still harbored within its dynamic seed imagery dim intuitions and intentions of a creative capacity for historically producing eternal life, this view is obscured more drastically from the laboring body with the image of bare flesh represented as its normative essence, the passive medium for being made into a statuesque ideal.

Within this view the reason for resurrection is not then the fulfillment of the perfective activity of creating and organizing nature into the emergent forms of a more perfect social body of creative self-mediation, but a justification of life's judgment by a power outside of it whose agency is indistinguishable from death. Hence the notion of resurrection will be articulated as that required condition for standing before and meeting god's justice and final judgment.⁴⁸⁸ Instead of carrying forward the original Hebrew trajectory around a positive salvific ideal of redistributing creative power whereby the

⁴⁸⁷ Hence Methodius will continually speak of the need for the body to die, that it is God's antidote to sin, a way of dealing with the disfigured temple of the body through the "seasonable application of death", requiring the body to pass "through the fire", to "be broken up and recast", "for the melting down of the statue in the former case corresponds to the death and dissolution of the body in the latter, and the remoulding of the material in the former, the resurrection after death in the latter"; he goes on to quote Jer. 18:3–6 in order to emphasize bodies remade as pots without questioning the potter. All of this is situated within a continual reference to St. Paul's appeal to the obedience of Christ as the supreme guarantee of resurrection. *Discourse on the Resurrection*, 5–6.

⁴⁸⁸ That Tertullian's polemic with those who denied the resurrection of the body, was itself too concerned with ensuring it was the exact same body to be judged, see Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 36–37. In reducing the resurrection to judgment, Tertullian writes: "since the resurrection will bring that judgment into actuality, this will be the whole purpose, yea the necessity, of the resurrection, such a provision of judgment as is most appropriate to God." Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis: Tertullian's Treatise On the Resurrection*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_res/evans_res_04english.htm, chapter 14. Certainly Tertullian wanted to move away from any crude sense of judgment and rather articulate resurrection as a rational requirement of a holistic divine justice, but the problem is that if resurrection is not first an ontological and epistemological requirement of creation itself in coming to know and realize itself through its own creative activity, then the requirement of justice will be arbitrarily hung on an abstract will, with resurrection simply fulfilling a formal right of habeas corpus so that arbitrary power has an object to impose its will upon.

active body of labor began to recognize its constitutive value, resurrection as prerequisite for an afterlife judgment comes to signify the opposite. It is now an ideal bent toward contradictorily signifying the completed deprivation of the body's internal dynamisms of active self-organization in death, so that it might be judged and remade more obediently from and for the hidden hands of omnipotence. The resurrection comes to signify, therefore, a divine that is not so divine, since this god is partial and limited, unable to comprehend the historical body's own perfection through its own historical agency, except by the employment of its death.

The paradigmatic body that continues within the church is then not solely identified as one upon which abstract power can be simply inscribed, but more radically as that one who internalizes and accepts this alienable capacity for subjection as its principle value. Thus Tertullian emphasized that god engraved humanity on to a passive body, and that its flesh is good not because of anything in its material substance or in the way that bodies creatively appropriate it into new syntheses, but rather solely because the divine will decided to use this indifferent stuff for his own purposes.⁴⁸⁹ Because the divine will integrally linked personhood with the body itself, the material body's principle virtue is therefore not that of mere stuff or a blind tool but rather that it can be intimately made into a servant for this divine will, since the paradigmatic body is that of Christ and it is in imitating his offering and sacrifice in the flesh that one comes closest to identifying with the divine intentions.⁴⁹⁰ It is on this basis of valuating the body, not as an

⁴⁸⁹ As Tertullian says of the worth of the body's flesh, "even though some other material had been to hand for sculpting man, it were needful to bear in mind the dignity of the Artificer who both by choosing judged it worthy and by handling made it so". Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, chapter 6.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., chapter 8. "when at length it is destroyed by execution, having striven to pay Christ back by dying for him, often enough by means of the same cross . . . yea, most blessed it is and most glorious, when it is able in the presence of Christ the Lord to meet so great a debt, so as to owe him naught but what it has ceased to owe him, so much the more bound as having been set free."

indifferent instrument in conjunction with a separate substance of personhood, but as the whole embodied person unified around qualities of obediently and sacrificially offering themselves in the flesh, that there is then a rationale for judging the entire material body in an afterlife, which Tertullian finds lacking within classical thought. That is, if classical thought treated the material body qua labor capacity as simply a slave-like tool not worthy of address or responsibility, Tertullian carries forward Paul's double movement by dignifying the lower body with a direct address, yet only in sanctifying it according to a valorized servile nature that exploits its own alienability.⁴⁹¹ Hence, Jerome, anticipating being baked hard as a statue before the divine will, says: "I do not despise the clay which, converted after baking into a vessel without defect, reigns in heaven. . . . I love chaste flesh, virginal and fasting; I love of the flesh *not the works* but the substance; I love a flesh that knows it is going to be judged; I love that flesh which is, for Christ, at the hour of martyrdom, broken, torn to pieces and burned."⁴⁹²

This is certainly a peculiar ethos whose identification with Christ begins to refer too much to the body's image of an anticipatory corpse for its intelligibility and value. While reactively condemning the body's creative activity ("*the works*"), it is not content with a mere antique indifference to the flesh but must rather cultivate a fetishizing love of that corruptible aspect of the flesh, its mortality as that extreme point of alienability, precisely because it allows one to be necessarily expropriated by another. That is, Jerome is proclaiming above that he loves a fetishized object of production standing in for the

⁴⁹¹ "For although in the apostle it is called a vessel, which he commands to be held in honour, yet by the same apostle it is called the outer man, being in fact that clay which first was engraved with the inscription 'man', not 'cup', or 'sword', or any sort of 'receptacle'. For it is called a vessel in view of the containership by which it contains and encloses the soul, but 'man' because of the community of nature which makes it in operations not a tool but a servant." See Tertullian, *De Resurrectione Carnis*, chapter 16.

⁴⁹² From Jerome's letter to Pammachius and Oceanus, quoted in Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 94. Italics mine.

perfection of the producer, a productive body whose idealized and normative sense is its capacity to be subordinate to one of its own objects of production. Such a conception of the normative body as mere flesh, legitimated by an inorganic statuesque ideal of the resurrected body that refers to no sensible intuitions and intentions within embodied creative activity, will all too easily and uncritically float ideological support for both indirectly, as well as directly, accepting the social status quo. Early church fathers such as Tertullian and bishops such as Methodius will uphold this passive statue ideal as a compensatory sign for accepting martyrdom, with the martyred body being privileged as the closest one can come within history to imitating Christ's own embodiment. Later, within the Christianized Empire, the statue ideal will just as easily be made to idealize the passively given body and its acceptance of static social positions by Augustine or Jerome.⁴⁹³ In each case the statue imagery will be used to legitimate the normative form of the body as only and ever bare flesh, indistinguishable from a dead body. Here the contingently contradictory conditions of the social body are reflexively affirmed as if divinely ordained, thus further hiding from an already dimmed social consciousness the physical body's latent potentials for historically removing contradictory obstacles to its material advance upon the kingdom of heaven from within its own earthly mixture.

The Cross, Empire, and the Reproduction of the Docile Body

This body idealized as bare flesh before an external will had a tendency therefore, whether directly or indirectly, to diminish the activist implications of Paul's pneumatic

⁴⁹³ On the use of the statue imagery in the early church around endorsing both martyrdom as well as fitting into social roles, as well as the corresponding shift from Paul's dynamic metaphors of the seed toward the dominance of the early church and beyond with inorganic imagery of atomistic bits of matter reassembled as pots, vessels and statues so as to fulfill the requirements of divine judgment, see Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 43–108.

body and its internal dynamisms, obscuring even further than Paul the consciousness of its constitutive value in relation to the whole that would require transformation of the present social conditions and their redistributive structures.⁴⁹⁴ Of course theologizing the cross does not necessarily privilege one image of the passive body over another since the cross is itself an expression of the alienable body, reflecting an idealization of its exchangeability in thought as to its symbolically abstracted meaning and value. Thus whether as either a bare seed or as bare flesh, the emerging sense of the body as passive object, which seems to require for its perfection a process or agency outside itself, will find in the sacred economy of the cross and its religio-political submission a corresponding imaginary justification of its situation. It is here that we can then better appreciate the socioeconomic valence of this ideological constitution of subjectivity through the double movement of the cross, especially in seeking a clearer explanation of why this ethos of the church became an imperative of the Empire.

Within much of the critical analyses of Constantine's Christianization of Empire, especially from the vantage of religious studies and theology, there is often a tendency to

⁴⁹⁴ The reaction against Paul's pneumatic body with its seed metaphors will largely be against Origen's appropriation of such, which I will briefly outline in the next chapter. Thus Methodius and Jerome will explicitly challenge Origen, or what are more likely caricatures of Origen's position, out of fear that it denies the final judgment and fixed hierarchical moral statuses, which could cause social unrest. Moreover, Jerome is explicit that resurrection will redistribute all of the given bits of matter and their social markings of the present, exactly as they are, hierarchies and all, so as to eternalize the present order as god had ordained it, rather than resurrection signifying a redistribution of creative power toward more and new life. On the social valence of these debates around the resurrection of the body, especially in rightly understanding these discourses as concerning issues of how the person is constituted and how the body is culturally inscribed with meaning and value, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy: Human Embodiment and Ascetic Strategies," *Church History*, v. 59.2 (June 1990): pp. 145–162; idem, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton University Press, 1992); and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, (Columbia University Press, 1988). As Brown adequately sums up the debates here: "In condemning Origen, Greek and Latin Christians, Jerome the most strident among them, turned away forever from the prospect of a limitless fluidity of the human person that they thought they perceived (not always correctly) to have lain at the very heart of Origen's thought. They did not wish their own bodies, and, with their bodies, the landmarks of their own society, to be rendered evanescent by the vertiginous immensity implied in Origen's notion of the slow transformation of all created spirits" p. 380.

remain exclusively on the level of cultural and sociopolitical analysis. The assessment then focuses almost entirely on generic forms of top-down power and contests over pious fealty to religio-political conceptions of sovereignty, without considering more fully the underlying socioeconomic forces remaining in play and generating these contests.⁴⁹⁵ While it is often noted that the growing church's appropriation of Paul's theology and conservative ethic eventually provided Constantine with "solutions to the cultural crisis of the empire", it is more accurate to say that it was not a political or cultural crisis as such but rather a new imperial socioeconomic crisis for which this ethos took reflexive hold as part of a cultural solution.⁴⁹⁶ What often goes unexamined here, therefore, is the possible extent to which the alienable body's reflexive expression within a sacred economy of the cross ideologically mystified a certain socioeconomic contradiction in a readily internalized way that suited the Empire's needs in transitioning the primary mode of exploitation from taxation to debt bondage.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ There is often an exclusive focus on Constantine, the man, as to his motives for becoming a Christian. This often results in viewing his Christianization as solely a top-down political decision imposed by an autocrat, as if Constantine became a Christian and Christianized the Empire out of political imperatives to shore up cultural devotion to his sovereignty. For examples of this analytic focus, yet with completely different judgments of Constantine in terms of Christian 'heresy' or 'orthodoxy', see respectively Alistair Kee, *Constantine Versus Christ: The Triumph of Ideology* (London: SCM Press, 1982), and, Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010). This emphasis however typically considers only political decisions and culture as the primary movers within history; and the resultant theological focus on whether Constantine was orthodox or heretical mystifies the more fundamental socioeconomic realities producing these political and cultural shifts in the first place—hence, the paucity of socioeconomic analysis in these theological studies.

⁴⁹⁶ Anthony E. Mansueto, Jr., *Religion and Dialectics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), p. 89. Mansueto is here drawing on and extending the insights of Theissen.

⁴⁹⁷ Mansueto, in following Theissen, notes the emerging feudalization and the aptness of love-patriarchalism in serving this transition, but neither he nor Theissen spell out the specific dynamics, especially in terms of the transition from tax to debt bondage involved here or the specific reflexive relation of the ideology of the cross to this socioeconomic crisis, how this ideology was largely from and for a laboring body that was undergoing such a subsumption of its freedom. Mansueto will highlight some of the new restrictions placed on labor, but his main emphasis is on the sociopolitical and cultural level, identifying that "Christian messianism paved the way for a new kind of sacral monarchy, as the world-rule of Constantine was represented as the final triumph of the risen Christ." See, Mansueto, *Religion and Dialectics*, pp. 88–91.

In the first century CE the late Roman Empire began experiencing what would eventually become a major crisis around labor shortage. Its internal order became racked by uprisings, civil wars, growing external threats, and the debasement of its currency along with continued spending on military defense and luxury consumption. Moreover, with the decline of its military driven geopolitical expansion, Rome's cheap supply of slave labor began shriveling up, and coupled with its debased money, which was no longer able to attract and compensate labor as it once had, the empire began suffering a major decline in its productive base.⁴⁹⁸ The state's solution was to delimit the movement of free labor, retracting various rights of free association from common laborers by making compulsory certain positions within industry, even fixing craft guilds according to a caste system in which one could not leave or marry outside their orders.⁴⁹⁹ The state also fixed the local administrative and tax collecting positions of the emergent middle class of decurions as now a compulsory and hereditarily fixed station. The exhaustion of slave labor especially hurt the state's rural productive base within the *latifundia*, which had provided major goods for the state as well as a significant source of taxable property. With the steeply rising price of slave labor, the propertied class took aim at new ways of exploiting the free peasantry rather than heavily invest in the reproduction of a dwindling slave class. Here too the state began restricting the movement of free labor by making it easier legally for the propertied class to tie up the free peasantry to its lands, a move ensuring for the state both a stable base of renewed agricultural production as well as a stable census for tax revenues.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (New York: Verso, 1996), p. 93.

⁴⁹⁹ Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 155–157.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. Ste. Croix notes that by 212CE the general extension of citizenship had become meaningless since it was redefined in a way that left all the “constitutional privileges” in the hand of the propertied classes.

We briefly noted in chapter 3 that both Greek and Roman states, in their early development, helped eliminate forms of private debt bondage through the abstract medium of coinage in order to shore up able bodies for broader imperial interests, especially for military involvement and its provisioning. This interest of the state was more easily negotiated when the wealthy landowners still had an abundance of cheap slave labor to turn to. But now, with the decline of the military and slave production, as well as the debasement of coinage, there was a new state interest in returning its formerly free social body of labor to a form of landed debt bondage in order to acquire another exploitable labor force as its productive base.⁵⁰¹ With this need, however, there is then also a new need at the ideological level for an ethos, beyond the abstract confines of an exclusively aristocratic sensibility, which can more adequately address a lower body of labor that had already gained significant freedom. This need requires a nuanced ideology that can simultaneously affirm and yet diffuse the rising movement of free labor according to a spiritual reevaluation of its bodily meaning.

In other words, since the lower body addressed here is not that of a slave, there is then a need for ideologically presenting a modicum of cultural *paideia* to this body of labor, shaping it around accepted non-martial virtues that help justify the expropriation of

While Rome had previously tried to maintain some of the democratic constitutions left over from the Greek poleis, which afforded the lower classes a certain amount of real freedom, especially from mechanisms of debt bondage, there was now a “gradual extinction of the remaining democratic features of the city constitutions.” He concludes that this trend “was because slavery was not now producing as great a surplus as it did in Rome’s palmist days that the propertied classes *needed* to put more pressure on the free poor.” Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, pp. 462–463. See also, Jairus Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 211: “For the state it was essential to have a reliable estimate of the taxable labour capacity of estates, and landowners were thus required to maintain a list of all regular labourers who counted for taxation purposes.”

⁵⁰¹ Chris Wickham, “The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism,” *Past and Present*, 103 (May, 1984), p. 12.

its labors as more than simply a cold aristocratic appeal to the given orders of nature.⁵⁰² When slavery is in abundance and the mass of “free” labor is needed predominantly for provisioning food and bodies to the military, from out of their own independent surplus, with state exploitation primarily using impersonal mechanisms of taxation, there is no social need for directly promoting to the general populace an ethic revolving around virtues of servility; but when the war machine begins to slow down and slavery begins to exhaust itself, so that a return of free labor to the more localized personal relations of debt bondage now becomes a direct state interest, there is then a new need for ideologically instilling a culture in the which servility becomes a valued expression of freedom within the mass of free laborers.⁵⁰³

The state then comes to require a set of virtues and spiritual values that revolve around a sacred economy whose perfectible whole more profoundly affirms an embodied subject in a new way, yet precisely in its alienable form. That is, there is a social need for implementing an ethos that can help reproduce the ideological conditions under which a formally free yet legally bound and exploitable body of labor appears intelligible to itself as its normative being. To be even more exact, what is needed here is a sacred economy supporting the legal invention of a free peasantry whose subjectivity is named “*coloni*

⁵⁰² On the cultural shift of the Empire’s cities in the 2nd century, which still saw themselves as semi-autonomous in terms of their own local religio-cultural mediation, to that of the 4th century in which a greater uniformity was imposed upon the urban centers, see Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 35–70. He discusses the need for a new culture and intellectual class outside classical philosophy, one that was met through the cultural *paideia* of Christian bishops and their new spiritual revaluations that served to modify tributary ideology, making it more amenable to forms of persuasion. Though focusing mainly on the unification of the upper classes through cultural conformity around the need for new sociopolitical loyalties, his analysis nevertheless assumes the socioeconomic conditioning from below for this new response.

⁵⁰³ Speaking of this shift and the different social relations it entails Banaji writes: “Debt was the essential means by which employers enforced control over the supply of labour, fragmenting the solidarity of workers and ‘personalizing’ relations between owners and employees.” Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity*, p. 205.

iuris alieni”—and shortly after Constantine Christianized the Roman Empire, setting in place a more adequate sacred economy and its ethos, this is exactly what he legally instituted for the first time in Roman history (332 CE).⁵⁰⁴ It is therefore at this point, in becoming an imperial requirement, that I suggest the sacred economy of the cross and its ethos of love-patriarchalism, is revealed more distinctly in its essence as a reflexive valorization of the body’s contradictory socioeconomic condition.⁵⁰⁵

Coloni Iuris alieni: a laboring body formally free, and yet physically the property of another.⁵⁰⁶ This legal fiction is a culminating resolution of a certain socioeconomic crisis within the Empire, which appears to have benefited greatly from Christianization around the sacred economy of the cross that Paul had helped systematize for thought.

⁵⁰⁴ *Coloni* is the Roman name for common farm laborers or sharecroppers from the free peasantry who voluntarily took up leases for land tenancy and had the right to move on at the end of a lease. Diocletian laid the groundwork for legal constraints on their freedom prior to Constantine when he considered the *coloni* as tied to its owner’s land for the sake of collecting poll tax. It was Constantine, however, who wrote this subject into legal being, qualifying the *coloni* as *iuris alieni*, tying them legally to the land without freedom of movement and eventually this bond would be made legally a matter of heredity as well. See A.H.M. Jones, “The Roman Colonate,” *Past & Present*, no. 13 (April, 1958), pp. 1–13. Constantine’s law in 332CE runs as follows: “With whomsoever a *colonus* belonging to someone else (*alieni juris*) may be discovered, let the new patron not only restore the *colonus* to the place of his birth (*origini*), but let him also pay the tax for the time of his absence. As for the *coloni* themselves who contemplate flight, let them be put into fetters after the manner of slaves, so that they should perform duties worthy of freemen on the strength of a servile condemnation.” Quoted from Paul Vinogradoff, “Social and Economic Conditions of the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century,” in *The Christian Roman Empire and the Foundation of the Teutonic Kingdoms: Cambridge Medieval History*, v. 1, eds. H.M. Gwatkin and J.P. Whitney (Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 558. Vinogradoff has aptly described the edict: “A law of Constantine dated a.d. 332 gives us the first glimpse of a new order of men standing between the free and the unfree and treated, in fact, as serfs of the glebe”, *Ibid*.

⁵⁰⁵ As I mentioned above Gerd Theissen also notes the usefulness of love-patriarchalism for Constantine especially in dealing with “an impoverishment of the masses and an incipient ‘feudalization’”, but he neither connects its ideology more directly with the Pauline construal of the cross, nor connects this ideological discursive formation as the reflexive consciousness of this emerging contradictory social body. Theissen, *Social Setting*, p. 109.

⁵⁰⁶ In analyzing the changed legal status of the *coloni* beginning with Constantine and its continuation beyond him, Banaji writes: “The fundamental fact about the legal position of the *colonus* is that he or she was *iuris alieni*. Thus the expression *colonus iuris alieni* is used by Constantine in *CTh.* 5.17.1 (332), the famous law commanding slave-like treatment for runaway *coloni*, and also appears in *CTh.* 5.17.2 of 386. The *interpretatio* to *CTh.* 5.18.1 of 419 describes the *mulier originaria* in the text of the law as *mulier alieni iuris*. Now, from a famous passage in the Digest it is clear that persons described as *iuris alieni* were (in the classical law of persons) *personae quae alieno iuri subiectae sunt*, ‘persons subject to the legal control of others’. . . . In each of these passages (*coloni iuris alieni*, etc.) the word *ius* included an unmistakable sense of labour as property”. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity*, pp. 207–208.

This ideological ethos was needed in order to implement more widely a religio-cultural mediation that was already partially managing and reproducing the alienated body's distorted intuitions and intentions from the ground up, a reproduction by which this contradictory legal fiction could be concretely and intelligibly applicable and more readily internalized.⁵⁰⁷ If there is anything subversive about Paul's theology of the cross it is the incidental fact that it contributed an ethos to certain social forces that would eventually help undo the specific tributary form of the Roman Empire only for another regime of exploitation. The developing mechanisms of debt bondage imposed by the state eventually helped hasten its own fall. With these mechanisms, a tighter and more self-sufficient feudal relation developed between private landowners and their bonded laborers, creating a social relation of production that soon became no longer interested in reproducing the top-heavy bureaucratic and military apparatuses of the Empire as they began to crumble.⁵⁰⁸ But this is simply to say that the theology of the cross indirectly facilitated, at the ideological level, only the self-transformation of the tributary mode of exploitation from taxation to rent, helping pave the way by addressing the body of free

⁵⁰⁷ This is to argue against any facile claim that Constantine instituted an "end to sacrifice" with his Christianization of Empire (for such a claim that operates with an unnuanced sense of sacrifice, failing to see its links as a religio-cultural mediation of social surplus, see, Leithart, *Defending Constantine*, pp. 126–146). There was no need for public displays of political sacrifices to projected deities because the sacrificial ethos was already being internalized through the ideology of the cross. The adoption of this ideology and its religio-cultural mediation simply allowed for the less conspicuous and unceremonious sacrifice of the free peasantry to its new serfdom. Because the ideology of the cross can never positively address the salvific value of the body's historical works, it can never articulate an ethos around materially producing (as more than ethically comporting oneself within) the conditions of existence, and thus political life, otherwise. Because it can only signify the bare flesh as the possession of another, it will therefore always aid, whether directly or indirectly, in the reproduction of docile bodies for whatever regime.

⁵⁰⁸ Wickham thus sums up this transition: "What happened in the fifth century, to be schematic, was that the barbarian invasions gave the western aristocracy for the first time this political choice, between the two poles of the contradictions: on the one hand, the Roman state and its patronage, which was becoming more and more expensive as more armies were thrown against the barbarian threat, and less worthwhile as the armies lost ground; on the other hand the possibility of going it alone on the basis of property-owning in the context of the newly forming Germanic successor-states. They chose the latter. These states were cruder, but in that measure less capable of maintaining the financial structure of the empire; aristocrats may also have expected them to interfere less in local affairs." Wickham, "The Other Transition," p. 16.

labor as *iuris alieni*, thus preparing it for its new, more arbitrary, subjugation as a serf under emerging feudal social relations.⁵⁰⁹

It must be reiterated, then, that the ideology of the cross neither just happened to be serviceable to, nor was it cunningly devised for, this newly developing socioeconomic crisis. Instead, I am arguing that it was already reflexively emerging into systematic form a century or more before the advent of Constantinianism, from a growing middle class as well as the free laboring class feeling the encroaching crisis regarding the retraction of their material freedom. As I highlighted above, Paul's use of commercial and debt concepts as central within his sacred economy of the cross indicate, among other things, a consciousness able to partially grasp something important about the body, yet also no longer able to understand its historically constitutive value.⁵¹⁰ It is thus the reflex of a body being both invested in, and yet broken up by, newly emerging and vastly determinative socioeconomic forces—a body feeling, yet unable to identify, the disappearance of its former relative material freedom into now an abstractly symbolic sense of formal freedom, with its impending feudalization. I suggest that here with this confluence of the already emerging restriction of free labor, the rise of a sacred economy of the cross, and its appropriation within Constantine's Christianization and proto-feudalization, we have the first indicators of what will become a more tightly connected

⁵⁰⁹ As Banaji explains it, this marks simply a transition from seeing labor as bonded to land under the state and now more strictly bonded to private ownership: “that the subordination of *coloni* was increasingly conceptualized as subjection to a *ius privatum*, and that the only significant restriction on the aristocracy's control over labour was that, technically, *coloni adscripticii* were not their property but the property of the estate.” Banaji, *Agrarian Change*, p. 212

⁵¹⁰ This is not to say that Paul's theology of the cross was exclusively a reflex of these emerging socioeconomic contradictions. As I briefly mentioned above, he was already predisposed to thinking in terms of the tributary ideal specific to Judaism with its tensions between an older Hebraic trajectory and the later notion of the a priori, top-down idea of Law, even though he recognized something of this Law's endemic futility; but it is his conditioning by new forms of socioeconomic contradictions that significantly contributes to his unique modification of this ideal, reading its sacred economy from views newly presented by the socioeconomic realities emerging within the Empire—a fact of reflexivity that I am claiming the Christianization of the Empire eventually confirmed.

historical nexus between Christianity's theologization of the cross as an ideological reflex of the increasing intensification of labor's formal subsumption toward a real one. This is however only a suggestion of historical connections whose determinate causal relations and directions throughout ancient, medieval, and modern times will require a more thorough examination. But what I am presenting for further examination is how the sign of the cross became ideologically significant for a social body of labor beginning to undergo certain real subsumptions, consolidating for it imaginary reconciliations that mystify its material contradictions within a formal sense of freedom behind a body viewed as exchangeable, its flesh represented as meant to be occupied by voluntarily offering it for an external will.

The merit of classical ideology was that despite its inverted forms, it still upheld ideals of a naturally perfectible whole dimly related to the internal ends of production. Its ideological projections therefore more clearly, though still distortedly, harbored the interests of its prior body because its prior body could only be formally subsumed in its productive activity, and thus was still freely generating the intuitions and intentions of a perfectible whole as an objective reality of its creative act. But with the intensification toward a real subsumption of labor, under the privatizing rent-form of encroaching feudalism (which of course will not become a truly "real" subsumption until the rent form is surpassed in the later modern transition to the capitalist wage-form), the laboring body starts to paradoxically produce a contradictory external world more directly from below, a productive act for which it becomes more difficult to recognize itself.

That is, labor's movement and thus its own intuited and intended ends from within the objective social interchange with nature, are now more effectively being

hidden from itself. The effectiveness of this concealing is precisely because this is no longer merely at the ideological level, but more profoundly within the socioeconomic arrangements themselves, in that they are able to more directly uproot and reorder the very mode and forces of production for ends external to their own perfection. The ideological representation specific to this contradictory condition of an invading real subsumption will thus reflexively come to further view the meaning and value of the alienated body in terms of either a passive seed subtracted from its own internal historical becoming and buried for another order, or subtracted from any perfectible order or whole altogether, and set apart more completely for an abstract will as bare flesh. That is, ideology will further underwrite this contradictory material condition for which the laboring body becomes increasingly intelligible to itself only according to its disposability to an arbitrary will. I have thus suggested that the significance of the sacred economy of the cross for this situation is that it effectively fetishizes this already emerging alienated sense of the historical body, projecting nothing of its own internal material perfection—since the constitutive value of the body's works are already being materially dimmed from view within its own modes of production—but rather imaginarily projecting a mythical drama concerning an obedient will idealized in that it faithfully submits its exchangeable body to a sovereign abstraction. This is not to say that the ideology of the cross causally determines such alienation but only that it reflects it in thought and makes partial, though mystified, sense of it by ideologically articulating it as the necessary condition for relating to the eternal in obscured form.

In summary, then, if the Hebraic ideal of bodily resurrection expressed the free laboring body gaining recognition of its freedom in and through its own material activity,

signifying the body's own active reflection in thought by taking back tributary ideals of perfection to their original sensible intuitions, then with the theology of cross it seems we have an opposite movement. The sacred economy of the cross both reflexively expresses and further engenders a giving up on objective ideas of perfection internal to labor altogether, because they are no longer socially felt and seen there; and with the repositioning of the future resurrection of the body as necessarily following the cross as its supplement and compensation—rather than an imperative of nature's emergent becoming—it therefore becomes an empty concept. But the ideal of bodily resurrection is divorced from its bodily intuitions and emptied of its substance only because it has become the dimmed reflection of a body increasingly blinded to itself under intensified subsumptions, unable to recognize itself except as mere seeds or bare flesh.

Conclusion

The discourse on resurrection within Jesus and Paul significantly indicates an ideology organic to the rise of the social body of labor. More specifically, their articulation of this ideal around the notion of a spiritual body, expressed especially in Paul's identification of the *pneumatic body*, began to express a more direct, and non-inverted, sense of the body's internal self-transcending movement within its own historical and material activity. In this way they forwarded the Hebraic cultural memory of the revolutionary temporality from within the creative activity of the communal mode of production. This interpretation has not only begun challenging the Marxist view of developing class-consciousness, presenting an alternative genealogy around the rise of a positive, rather than inversely negative, religious/utopian idea organic to labor's self-

transcending movement, but it also challenges a commonplace theological assessment of the distinctiveness of the idea of bodily resurrection itself. With the work of Oscar Cullmann the Judeo-Christian idea of bodily resurrection has often been pitted against the Hellenistic idea of the soul's immortality.⁵¹¹ Not only does this assessment in Cullmann, however, remain at the level of a history of ideas pertaining to afterlife beliefs, without linking these views up with the intuitions and intentions of its prior social body, but also it therein fails to truly account for any substantial difference in the ideas themselves regarding the essence and intelligibility of the body.

Indeed, it is exactly where Cullmann sees an absolute difference that I would argue there lays the point of assimilation to, and even regression from, classical tributary ideology. The distinction for Cullmann is predicated on the difference between the soul's natural fittingness for immortality in Hellenistic thought, on the one hand, and the supposed Judeo-Christian idea that the body and soul are absolutely mortal without a natural relation to the eternal, thus rendering any reception of immortality purely as a disjunctive gift, externally mediated from a divine being, on the other hand. Yet in this case the body is not really comprehended, within either idea, according to its own internal perfective activity. What is substituted for classical idealism is merely the positivism of the bare flesh, which is itself really just another imagined abstraction. Moreover, since the body remains positioned, like in Greek views, as a passive substance whose historical meaning is determined by the necessity or absoluteness of death, it thus also has its active principle projected outside of itself. With Cullmann's understanding of the idea of

⁵¹¹ See, Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Westminster John Knox Press, 1964); and especially, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?: The Witness of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publisher, 2000).

resurrection we then have a difference merely at the level of differing mythical entities or processes that bestow eternal life, since the body is revalued only through claiming a top-down assertion by an external deity rather than raised through, and thus rendered intelligible as to, its own active potency. In Cullmann's case, then, the idea still cannot locate its active body of production, and so like the Greek ideal of immortality, remains an empty idealist concept almost without sensible intuitions.⁵¹²

Seeing the real point of difference however requires seeing the similarities between Greek and Hebraic thought before assessing their differences. That is, the difference, as I have argued, is not about rejecting every notion of natural fittingness for the perfection of eternal life, since the difference in ideas has to do instead with a more or less comprehensive consciousness of the material site for historically appropriating eternal life. Therefore the notion of natural fittingness in Greek ideas of immortality harbors more of its laboring body than the idea of immortality as an arbitrary gift from an alien omnipotence. Moreover, the failure to see the unique material appropriation of perfection within the emergence of this ideal of resurrection is a symptom of failing to assess ideals as the historical production of concretely becoming a material and social body itself, failing to trace more fully the socioeconomic, religio-cultural and political connections and valences of any idea's development. If the idea of resurrection (or any ideal of perfection for that matter) is assessed solely within an intellectual history of ideas, according to its inner coherence or incoherence with other ideas in consciousness alone—according only to its fact of logic—then the idea of bodily resurrection will

⁵¹² It is therefore surprising to find Antonio Negri suggesting that Cullman might serve as a fruitful point of departure for rethinking the significance of the resurrection of the body. Negri, *The Labor of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labor*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 76.

always be repositioned and assessed as a lost cause.⁵¹³ Assessed as an empty ideal within consciousness alone, it will lose its distinctive reference back to its prior body—its logic of fact—appearing instead as an oddly counterintuitive ideal. Yet its counterintuitive appearance here is itself only a distorted remnant of the body, contingently left within an abstract consciousness, whose unnaturally detached and thus partial self-reflection itself runs counter to any of its sensible intuitions.

Therefore, in failing to more holistically account for this ideal's reference from and for its prior mode of production, I suggest its real distinction, both in terms of its intellectual and social import, is missed as to how it positively signified the laboring body's emerging break from the unproductive orders of sacrifice. If the discourse of the immortality of the soul was a displaced discourse on legitimating the sacrifice of the social body of labor to the perfectible order of the state, then the sacred economy of the cross with its abstract sense of resurrection offers no substantive break from this order. Rather, as I have suggested, the increasing growth of this new discourse reflexively indicates only the emerging breakdown of such a classical statist order into the more direct socioeconomic sacrifice of the laboring body, as bare flesh, to the arbitrary private will behind the rent-form of embryonic feudalism. In this way, as I have thus argued, the sacred economy of the cross breaks only with the materialist tendency of the ideal of bodily resurrection to more fully rationalize the active body from its partial classical rationalization, by expressing and further underwriting the historical and material body's new irrational containment. Yet, as we've already seen, the Middle Ages also witnessed a continuation of the laboring body's growing self-recognition against its feudal

⁵¹³ An intellectual history of ideas, assessing the inner coherence of ideas and their systems in thought, is an important piece of understanding history, but it is only one piece that should not be divorced from the totality of historical movement.

exploitation. In the next chapter I will argue that this consciousness of the active body's constitutive value was nurtured and kept alive in part by certain articulations of the resurrection of the body that implied a further deconstruction of any sacrificial debt to death, thus extending the Hebraic cultural memory within some unlikely intellectual voices.

Chapter 6

The Emergence of the Idea of Bodily Resurrection for the Rise of the Laboring Body

“if the reappropriation of intellectual force is situated in the body, then the body becomes the unit of production and reproduction. The whole separation between the corporeal and the spiritual, this whole religious view that the body must be made to disappear – all that vanishes. What a clever idea it was, just the same, to say that the soul is eternal and the body mortal! From the point of view of power, it was a stroke of genius. The paradox is that Christianity never said this: the great dogma of the resurrection of the body runs completely contrary to it.”

–Antonio Negri⁵¹⁴

With the mass uprisings of the late Axial age and their expression under the sign of the resurrection of the body, the question came to be more commonly asked as to the normative intelligibility of the material body in relation to eternal life. I explored in the previous chapter how this discourse was advanced in Jesus and Paul, with the active body coming to consciousness of itself under the notion of the pneumatic body, while also simultaneously being suppressed and hidden from view by its subordination within a Pauline sacred economy of the cross. Yet, despite the major reformulations of the resurrection of the body within a counter-revolutionary paradigm and its cementing within official church doctrine, the active side of the pneumatic body was not completely

⁵¹⁴ Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri: In Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 181. Of course, as we pointed out in the previous chapter, unfortunately Christianity actually has said something close to this, but Negri is right that the idea of the resurrection of the body does not in itself say the body is meant to die.

snuffed out—in part because we are still dealing with a formal subsumption here, even though its encroaching real subsumption is felt and seen on the visible horizon.⁵¹⁵

This chapter will follow the progressive kernel of Paul's pneumatic body through Origen's notion of the corporeal *eidos* and then Eriugena's understanding of the active body of artifice whose qualitative movement has no limit save for the convertibility of the transcendentals within the divine attributes of perfect creating. What links these thinkers within this chapter is the way the ideal of bodily resurrection only made intelligible sense if it was an ideal of that perfectible whole whose resolution more comprehensively perfected the material body according to its own essential activity, rather than according to some external power that is unable to comprehend the historical body as such. They carried forward that holistic line in which the activity of spirit is increasingly identified with the totality of the body's activity itself. Thus, while both thinkers were traditional intellectuals privileging Platonic and Neoplatonic forms of thought, their understanding of bodily resurrection nevertheless raised up an organic ideology of the social body of labor at a higher intellectual level that directly pressed these tributary forms into more directly recalling its constitutive body. The reorganization of discursive formations around this ideal necessarily critiqued the projections of alien omnipotence and formal abstractions within tributary ideology by way of refocusing consciousness on the emergent creative potentials for more life within nature itself, as it is opened up and raised by the creative act of the material body.

After briefly discussing Origen I will spend the bulk of the chapter highlighting an ascending materialist dialectic within Eriugena, a movement more thoroughly

⁵¹⁵ Only within capitalism's generalization of production for and as commodity exchange, will there be a real subsumption of the production process that more effectively hides the body's fundamental activity from itself.

inverting idealism and its dialectic of negation, as both required and legitimated by his understanding of bodily resurrection. Another version of inverting the resurrection, however, whereby it loses sight of the objective tendencies and intuitions of its prior body, will appear later in Joachim of Fiore. His inversion will anticipate a particularly modern remythologization of this idea exclusively from within the idealist realm of absolute spirit, thus losing a sense of its ideology organic to the social body of labor. If Antonio Negri overstated the case that Christianity never said the body is meant to die, he is nevertheless right to emphasize that the ideal of bodily resurrection in itself never said this, since properly understood this ideal rails against every attempt by an absolute spirit to say and implement such.

Undoing the Debt to Death: Resurrection and Change without Corruption

Before I spell out these alternative trajectories, let me first clarify more precisely the false ideological component concealing what the resurrection was raising to consciousness. I noted in the previous chapter that with Paul's pneumatic body the changeable nature of the body was not its condition of exclusion to eternal life but now a condition of its participation in the perfection of eternal life. Even thinkers, such as Tertullian, who reduced *soma* to *sarx* as alienable bare life, nevertheless still harbored that bodily intuition, within their mystifying articulations of resurrection, that material mutability is not simply an aspect of blind process in a cyclical cosmic order but in some way essential for freely relating to the eternal—"flesh as the hinge of salvation".⁵¹⁶ Yet,

⁵¹⁶ Tertullian's emphasis on what he claimed to be the "flesh as the hinge of salvation" suggestively still harbors intimations of the body's constitutive active side in turning to and appropriating salvation. He uses this locution primarily in order to combat Gnosticism and Doceticism, but his polemics against such positions were incomplete since, as I noted above, he was more often given to the statue imagery whereby

while the pressure of the resurrection brings to the fore the essential living link between change and creative agency, theologizing the cross as in some way necessary hides this connection. It conceals it precisely by emphasizing the body's mutability, not as bound up in the direction of its own creative capacity to actualize change, but rather as a capacity to be passively changed by another outside history and cosmos. Thus, the very object that the resurrection signified as saving by an already operative creative process of materially becoming a subject—the historical body of living labor—is denied and left unintelligible when pressed through the necessary exchange of the cross.⁵¹⁷ Resurrection loses its critical import against classical ideology by now also coming to ideologically serve another mythos whose imaginary relation to death once again separates heaven and earth, thus reproducing the ideological conditions by which the laboring body understands itself as holding no internal claim to the perfection of eternal life.

Despite the already mentioned differences, the problematic common denominator shared by theologies of the cross and classical ideology in their imaginary relation to death is that both views presuppose mutability and corruptibility as essentially the same, holding to some form of that Aristotelian definition of change as a correlative ceasing to be. Within this equation death is reified in two different ways that nevertheless similarly enclose the creative act and deny the resurrection as an intended redistributive final cause

flesh indicated the frail, mortal body as only the passive object of salvation. Thus, while his notion of the “hinge” pushes the notion of flesh toward its becoming active in the body he did not further spell this out in the direction we are here charting. On the significance of this phrasing around “flesh as the hinge of salvation” in both Irenaeus and Tertullian see, Stroumsa, “*Caro salutis Cardo*”.

⁵¹⁷ It is as though creative agency is crucified so that the bare flesh can be presented as an offering to the Father. Of course, there will be no dearth of theological reflections that will want to claim it is precisely in the self-offering that the meaning of creative agency and activity is revealed. But this is to claim that creativity is only revealed as an ethical act of exchange, and not in a productive act itself around transforming the material and adding something new to creation—that is, through the cross one must still renounce the constitutive value of their labors, hence the inherent polemic against works righteousness within every theology of the cross.

whereby material bodies might fully become historical subjects. On the one hand, as we have already elaborated, in classical ideology death is conceptualized as a necessary internal transition by which the agent of change is displaced to a generic process of cosmic order that must continually use and pass through death; and, on the other hand, in theologies of the cross, death is understood as the absolute fate of all historical change and cosmic order, thus exclusively extracting and consolidating effective power to a more abstract and contradictory exteriority that overcomes death by overcoming change as such in returning everything to something like their inorganic stasis (though retrojected as the primordial and inscrutable will of the father).

Substance then cannot be rethought according to an internal dynamism of emergent transformation, but only as that which continues to maintain itself over against change. Thus, effective substantial change toward newly emergent wholes is experienced and conceptualized as impossible from a suppressed non-productive vantage point, whereby such change seems like nothing more than death, and death seems naturally insurmountable and unchangeable. This mystified view then inversely projects labor's own transformative agency, which it still faintly senses, onto some external agent on a plane other than the embodied material and socio-historical world of productive activity. This conceiving of change according to a debt to death is then the basis by which dialectical movement is inverted into its idealist form, always projecting some other generic process, abstract Spirit, a priori Idea, self-consciousness, or external will to appear as if it were passing through the negation of material bodies for its own formal perfection outside or beyond the changeable material order.

For an active and effective social engagement with nature that begins to gain positive insight into creation's open and alterable dynamisms through its social transformation, however, the intuition and articulation of its perfectible whole—such as given in the original Hebrew idea of resurrection as born out of the pre-state village memory—can only require demythologizing every reification of death that makes it appear ontologically necessary or absolute. This is because real change as a creative transformation of life for itself in its emergent organization of the material, can only intelligibly relate to the fact of death as a contingent, accidental contradiction to the potential for change, (as that arbitrary return and expropriation of the living body by entropic stasis.) Neither given mortal cycles in nature, nor any amount of historically imposed crosses, can then provide in itself an inexorable logic by which to coherently settle and contain the meaning of cosmos and history, nor determine, as a necessary law of passage, their ineluctable path to meaning. And without such reifications of death there can then be no invariable process or boundary by which a binary opposition between this-worldly and otherworldly agencies, and their mutually exclusive distribution of power, would be legitimate.

What neither conceptualization is able to think through beyond the tributary debt to death, therefore, is the idea of change qua change as inessentially linked to corruption, thus marking change as primarily the capacity for new creative acts in the body, whose very dialectical creativity always already intends overcoming the corrupting enclosure of death as such without slavishly employing it, or contradictorily negating itself, which is the same thing. In other words, neither side can think the substance of the body—its definable essence—within and from mutability as the emergent creative materiality of

productive activity, in a way that could challenge the law of necessary negation and therefore move beyond anything but variations of an idealistically inverted dialectics. One cannot then get out of idealist inversions by conceptually fine tuning the theologemes of the incarnation and cross, as if these themes sufficiently pull classical metaphysics down to earth. These concepts are themselves inescapable forms of the top-down idealist dialectic of negation, whereby spirit or pure will condescends into a body as its instrumentalized negative occasion of manifesting a spiritual meaning for consciousness alone.

The progressive conceptual development of bodily resurrection, starting with the Hebrew idea and extended from Jesus and Paul through various undercurrents in late antiquity and the early middle ages, however, raised to consciousness something outside the dialectics of this inverted idealist paradigm. In the trajectory we will now trace through Origen and especially in Eriugena, there emerged under the sign of the resurrection a form of critical thought able to both affirm a material dialectic of embodied change as well as interrogate its tendencies toward obeying a supposedly immutable law of negation.⁵¹⁸ In grasping the ideal of bodily resurrection more clearly *from* the body's material activity, and in articulating this ideal more directly *for* raising this body up into new creative acts without privations and expropriations, and thus for a real historical movement of change beyond predetermined formal circles or strict linearity, it began to project the non-inverted form of eternal life as a this-worldly process of real material resolutions. Thus we will find here a valorization of the active side of the laboring body, not by an atheist movement of secularizing a sacred economy, but by further

⁵¹⁸ Certainly every corruption is a type of change, but the end of corruption as death is no longer change, so that while every corruption feeds on the capacity for change not every change is corruption.

demystifying the mythical form of the sacred economy, approaching instead something of an ascendant materialist dialectic whereby the body rises up to the creative spirit of its own emergent self-organization. Within this trajectory the ideal of perfection projected by classical ideology is thus more completely taken back for the body's own activity, rather than denied altogether for a fetishization of the bare flesh.

Origen and the Corporeal *Eidos*

In many ways this consciousness of the active body, as normative standpoint in relation to the eternal, fed the core of that ascetic body's self-understanding that eventually unfolded into forms of monastic resistance to Empire, a varied movement which could not be classified simply as either retreat or revolt. Indeed it was through consciousness of the active body formed around the ideal of bodily resurrection that a cultural memory of the slow revolutionary movement of the village commune, from and for which the ideal arose in the first place, began to take material root once again, promoting the self-understanding of the active body as "a field to cultivate". Hence, the resurrection ideal's harbored memory of the prior social body can be seen as further developed in those early monastic trajectories that revived depopulated rural villages and their productive modes as an alternative to the Empire's evisceration of the free peasantry through its new rounds of debt bondage and its emerging feudalization. Here we are now able to come full circle in this study, dialectically filling in the social and ideological background to those monastic forces and relations of production, identified in chapter 1, whose valorization of labor eventually gave way to the medieval return of the

laboratores as a relevant class.⁵¹⁹ It was these village or “city” monks—with whom we began our discussion in chapter 1 regarding their resurrection of village communes and cultivating abandoned agricultural lands rather than retreating to the desert—that Jerome found so reprehensible for not being as docile as the anchorites and thus subordinate to church authority. In other words, they were filled with the mind and actions of Origenism.⁵²⁰

Behind this resistant ascetic body’s self-understanding as an active force of reconciling material contradictions in, through, and for the body, stands the controversial influence of the 2nd century Alexandrian, Origen. Critics of Origen condemned him as a gnostic who denied the resurrection of the body, claiming he argued for an immaterial future existence. As Elizabeth Clark has highlighted, these concerns here were not over simple doctrinal articulations of an afterlife, but rather how projected signs of the future body oriented the understanding and cultivation of the present body.⁵²¹ For Jerome, as we intimated above, the problem with Origen is that in supposedly denying any resurrection of the present body, this implied also that the present body with its social hierarchies and statuses, allegedly given once and for all by nature, were meaningless, holding no purchase by which a sovereign will could eventually judge and reward it for its steadfastness. Similarly, for Theophilus and Epiphanius, the problem with Origen’s supposed denial of this present body from the future was that it denied the fixed division

⁵¹⁹ Moreover, this dialectical presentation of both the social and ideological components of the rise of a certain strain of monasticism and its productive forces has now been given without unilaterally privileging the causal priority of either an idealist religious mindset or a bare socioeconomic praxis without religious ideals.

⁵²⁰ James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), p. 22. For more detail on this movement see chapter 1.

⁵²¹ Clark, “New Perspectives on the Origenist Controversy”.

of the sexes and gender roles, indeed rejecting the very idea of reproduction as a beneficent gift given by god for coping with the fall.⁵²²

Yet, with both concerns to uphold the meaning and value of the present body, it is only the body as reducible to bare flesh, identified only as an immutable given and thus valorized by its passive capacity to be judged and its limited biological capacity to sexually reproduce given nature. Accepting and occupying this body without changing its givenness, and even legitimating its current social forms of reproduction as eternally ordained, however, itself implied a denial of the historical body in its transformative capacities. It is then no coincidence that Emperor Justinian, in reasserting the spirit of Constantine, will eventually ratify these critiques of Origen, rendering anathema and censuring Origen's writings precisely on the grounds that they affirm something within the present body that transcends its givenness and thereby implies a limit on god's sovereign will.⁵²³

Origen's critics therefore had a problem with his extreme continuation of the active side of Paul's pneumatic body, stretching the given body allegedly beyond recognition by granting its activity too much transformative power. As an ascetic strategist in touch with the workings of the body and whose continual message was, "resolve to know that in you there is a capacity to be transformed", Origen could not view the body as normatively the flesh in its strictly passive givenness.⁵²⁴ Moreover, as an idealist of a Platonic variety, he nevertheless does not uphold the ideal of an

⁵²² Ibid., pp. 154–159.

⁵²³ For Emperor Justinian's original 10 anathemas against Origen as they are expanded and codified at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (553CE), see "The Anathemas Against Origen," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume XIV: The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, eds. Philip Schaff and Rev. Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), pp. 318–319.

⁵²⁴ Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 162.

immaterial intellectual substance without a material body.⁵²⁵ For Origen all created beings emerge from matter, which in itself is a banal claim within his intellectual context. Yet, he emphasizes that it is through qualitative interchanges with matter that different bodies come into being. Moreover, the substance of matter as such, as well as the bare flesh of the body, only ever come into being as creative movements of qualitative transformation and substantial change. Therefore the positivistic concept of matter as an a priori substance in itself, such as the idea of inert, indivisible and irreducible atoms without qualities or movement, as Origen emphasizes, is simply a later intellectual abstraction from within the emergent flows of creation.⁵²⁶ Thus the materiality of bodies is neither an indifferently static substrate nor itself a product of a fall, but rather the underlying capacity for qualitative change, identified with the creative act.

Origen therefore fully accepted the material body as a river of change, identifying this more with a surplus potentiality for self-surpassing perfection in emergent forms, than with any debt to death such as in a Pre-Socratic flux of decay and dissolution back into an immaterial formal principle.⁵²⁷ He thus situates the person firmly within the mutable body as a corporeal *eidos*, which like Paul's linking of *soma* to *pneuma*, signified not a static image but an internal principle of the body's active relation to

⁵²⁵ Some claimed, such as Justinian, that Origen taught the body would be changed into a perfectly idealized and immaterial spherical form at resurrection. Yet, as Henry Chadwick rightly points out, Origen's two greatest critics who most thoroughly transmitted his ideas to us, Jerome and Methodius, never once attributed this idea to Origen, when they would have had every reason to do so if it were in fact the case. Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 41, No. 2 (April, 1948), p. 97.

⁵²⁶ Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), book IV, ch. 4, especially p. 417.

⁵²⁷ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 66. "By accounting for the permanence of a body through material flux but attributing to that body its own dynamism, Origen's theory recognized that both the natural world and the human person really change. Growth now belonged to a self; process was fully real and could be fully good. The Pauline seed metaphor could therefore refer to fertility rather than to decay; natural changes, such as the development of a fetus or the flowering of a fig tree – both images Origen used – became unambiguously appropriate to describe the journey toward heaven."

eternal life precisely through its transformative activity in relation to nature and matter. That is, while Origen's incontestable idealism often rehearsed the typical privileging of humanity's active principle in terms of the conscious mind alone, he nevertheless construes the constitutive relation to eternal life around the fittingness of the body for such, understood by way of the internally active and not merely passive body. Thus in engaging Celsus's rejection of bodily resurrection Origen corrects his understanding of the nature of the material body, chastising Celsus for not comprehending the depth and direction of the body's own internally dynamic capacities for which the resurrection serves to complete. Origen then elaborates the body's active advance toward eternal life in terms of what seems to already suggest an apt way of grasping the dialectical standpoint of the laboring body: the active body's relation to the perfection of eternal life is approximated through its transformative interchange with its given biological content and its physical environment, so that as one develops new needs and changes an environment, the material content and form of the body is likewise changed in a more perfect fittingness with the new whole, without simply negating the materiality itself of the body.⁵²⁸

As Bynum elaborates, Origen's identification of the person with a corporeal *eidōs* combined that element of active planning in the Platonic form with the internal principle

⁵²⁸ Origen criticizes Celsus for naively claiming that the changing material world of new qualities is in no way a divine work but indifferently meted out by some unknown agency. For Origen it is precisely in the fact that material bodies continually change toward new qualities that we have a perfectible movement that both requires and makes possible the resurrection of the material body in a transformed way, see *Contra Celsum*, p. 231. Of course mutability for him can lead to corruption but it can also equally lead to incorruption. That he ties this transformation more closely to the capacity of the active body for transforming nature and its relation to such, can be seen in his rebuttal of Celsus' charge that resurrection simply was a poor variation of the reincarnation of the soul. See especially Origen's remarks as quoted by Methodius: "if we became aquatic beings, and had to live in the sea, it would no doubt be necessary for us to adopt a different state similar to that of the fish, so if we are to inherit the kingdom of heaven and to exist in superior places, it is essential for us to use spiritual bodies. This does mean that the form of the earlier body disappears, though it may change to a more glorious condition." *Contra Celsum*, pp. 420–421.

for growth in Stoic seminal reason, now with both unified in the active body itself. She suggests that this combination for Origen produced a non-hylomorphic notion of body that identifies *logos* with material substance rather than as a substantial form over against matter.⁵²⁹ But the key here is in seeing that Origen's articulation of the *eidos* of the body, as further illuminated under the sign of its future resurrection, is an attempt to re-conceptualize dialectical change in a way that brings together Paul's imagery of the sower and seed beyond any given cyclical process. The seeds within the body are the seeds of the new, and the spirit of the active body is identified with its sowing emergent forms of new growth from these latent surplus potentials for creativity.⁵³⁰

It is therefore telling that Origen, like Paul, also contrasts the spirit of this transformative activity not with the body itself, but rather with the soul. What is especially significant is that he describes the fall in terms of a contingent fall from the spirit into the soul, a slow gradual process indicated in terms of a kind of inertial cooling off of the spirit's creative energy. Moreover, this cooling process is suggestively elaborated as a cooling of productive fires by a fall into what could be characterized as intimations of an unproductive class position detached from its laboring body. That he deems the fall as a lapse into something like entropy-hastening non-productive interests can be seen in that he specifically describes the fall as occasioned by the improper use of surplus time and labor by which knowledge becomes increasingly divorced from its practical context around "skill", "art", "exercises", and "work". This growing detachment thus obscures one's vision of the eternal as it sinks increasingly into negligent and

⁵²⁹ Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, p. 66.

⁵³⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, p. 278.

irrational movements.⁵³¹ Indeed, for Origen any divisive hierarchical features inscribed upon the current flesh, and by which bodies are set against each other, are themselves contingencies of this accidental fall and not indications of an eternally ordained order.⁵³²

Thus, his understanding of spirit, as a transformative activity internal to the creative body and constitutive of the person, begins to suggest something close to Marx's description of the subjectivity of living labor as "form-giving fire".⁵³³ For both, the fundamental ontology of becoming is itself a perfective rising up precisely through transformation of the material into emergent forms, with any fall into divisiveness resulting from a mystified consciousness that has accidentally fallen away from being able to see the creative potentials within the productive interchange with nature.

Both soul and bare flesh are therefore only particular views offered from within the active creativity of the corporeal *eidōs* rising into emergent forms of embodiment. The bare flesh retrojected as a normative given by which the body's meaning supposedly could be reduced, is nothing other than a distinction in thought since its basic stuff is only approachable, engaged, and contemplated insofar as it is always already organizing and transforming itself through the work of its active body. Just as the material body is not a pure act, so it is also not primarily the passive bare flesh, but rather the active

⁵³¹ Origen, *On First Principles*, p. 156; p. 51.

⁵³² In presenting such themes of the fall from Origen's *First Principles* as anti-Gnostic and anti-Marcionite, see Dermot Moran, "Origen and Eriugena: Aspects of Christian Gnosis," in *The Relationship Between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992), p. 46.

⁵³³ "The transformation of the material by living labour, by the realization of living labour in the material – a transformation which, as purpose, determines labour and is its purposeful activation ... thus preserves the material in a definite form, and subjugates the transformation of the material to the purpose of labour. Labour is the living, form-giving fire." *Grundrisse*. See also Methodius's paraphrasing of Origen: "If we have rightly grasped the symbolism, the spermatic logos in the grain of corn, laying hold of the ambient matter and spreading through the whole of it, grasps it securely and imposes the form (*eidōs*) of its own powers upon that which once was earth, water, air and fire, and, overcoming the properties of these elements, transforms them into that condition of which it is itself the creator." Quoted in, Edwards, "Origen no Gnostic; Or, On the Corporeality of Man," *Journal of Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (1992), p. 33.

transformation of flesh and so always already more than bare given stuff. Thus to lose sight of the primary life giving activity of the creative body and to fixate on and reify the bare flesh as its normative essence is itself a contingent product of a fall.⁵³⁴

The normative sense of the person coming into view here is therefore neither an immaterial soul, nor a given biological structure, nor a pure material flux, but rather the dynamic organizing body identified through emergent patterned transformations of the material within the flux. The reduction of the person to the soul over against the body, or the body to a kind of positivistic given of the bare flesh, could not then account for the whole movement of the person's embodied activity as actualizing real change of given limits. Moreover, such an acceptance of the given, for Origen, cannot account for the resurrection of the body in a way other than through a facile appeal to omnipotence, pleading for an irrational and arbitrary surpassing of the given only to return to the given. In not being able to grasp the body's principal activity and thus its final cause as that rational perfectible whole by which it is to be perfected according to its own internal activity, the body is projected as saved only as the passive object of an external power unable to comprehend this body's own internal good. Thus, Origen agreed with Celsus on at least one point: that claiming omnipotence can do anything is not an argument for the resurrection but more like an ideological assertion and thus concealing of reasons.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Edwards in "Origen no Gnostic," convincingly shows that Origen's supposed notion of preexistent souls has more to do with the preexistence of divine ideas, and that Origen did not hold to a fall into the body but understood the human to be essentially embodied, with only certain limits of the present flesh contingently arising from transgressions.

⁵³⁵ See Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection," pp. 83–102. We might go further in claiming that any such championing of the bare body by assertion solely of an omnipotent concern for this body, will simply leave the body subordinated to the I-B-I inversion, since with the passive flesh being merely an object of salvation, resurrected by an arbitrary will for purposes outside of the active body's own internal perfection, we can then say that the only thing being saved is the omnipotent will in its exertion of arbitrary power over bodies. But the same goes for any mere ethical construal of the resurrection of the flesh, which seeks out an expression of unconditional love by affectionately resurrecting what is unresurrectable. Here

Such accounts of the resurrection for Origen, like those who deny the resurrection altogether, simply held too low of a view of both the perfection of creation as well as the body and what it was capable of.⁵³⁶

Origen therefore did not deny the resurrection of the body as his detractors suggested, but only denied the arbitrary and empty sense of this idea that simply reproduced the ideological conditions under which the reified body of bare flesh, without any internal claims to the eternal, appeared to itself as normative. Thus, his concerns were not born out of a disdain for the flesh but rather from a disdain for an irrational freezing of the active, evolving body against itself. With the sign of the future resurrection articulated around the transformative corporeal *eidos*, Origen set in train a critical consciousness of the active body whose internal claim to the perfection of eternal life became more intelligible to itself.

Eriugena and the Active Body of Artifice

While Origen's insights remained influential, but only loosely expanded and clarified, it was Eriugena who carried them forward into a more coherent systematic presentation that also explicitly drew out a more radically suggestive materialism.⁵³⁷ Yet to see the materialist potentials at work within Eriugena's thought, which he subtly set in motion within his system as an unwinding of any idealist register, one must read against the grain of contemporary interpretations that hold him strictly to his Neoplatonist

again, the flesh is not saved, because the body is in no way valued in itself despite all of the ethical claims to the contrary, since the only thing valued in itself here is the will's intentions around an unconditional ethical comportment—thus the flesh simply provides the occasion, a bare object which might be anything, for outwardly displaying this inward intention. This spiritualization of the resurrection of the body by rendering it in terms of an abstract ethicization is especially a modern issue we will touch on later.

⁵³⁶ *Contra Celsum*, pp. 278–279.

⁵³⁷ On the direct influence of Origen in the work of Eriugena see Moran, "Origen and Eriugena."

paradigm. Of course Eriugena was an idealist who privileged Neoplatonic themes, and modern interpreters are right to emphasize that he began with, and worked out his system on the basis of, the active movement of a self-reflexive subjectivity. Yet to read Eriugena as a precursor of the rationalism of Descartes⁵³⁸ or the subjective idealism of German thought,⁵³⁹ is to confine his emphasis on dialectical movement to the inner workings of consciousness alone in its abstract self-reflexivity over against nature. This reading, however, obscures Eriugena's affirmation of the constitutive value of the mechanical arts and humanity's active standpoint as a universal workshop in coming to know the whole of nature by participating in the objective movements of its perfection. More in line with my proto-materialist reading, Leszek Kolakowski is closer to the mark when he rightly finds a distinguished forerunner of socialist class-consciousness within Eriugena's articulation of human activity as an extension of divine creating. Yet, here too, Eriugena's dialectical thought is unfortunately interpreted as "a history of the salvation of Being by negation," according to a "schema of 'enriching alienation'" whose logic is a "prototype" of Hegel's dialectical form.⁵⁴⁰ Thus Eriugena's dialectic is deemed only that of the self-reflexive spirit of consciousness coming to reflect upon itself through the

⁵³⁸ For this reading of Eriugena as anticipating Cartesian humanism see Willemien Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1991).

⁵³⁹ For a reading of subjective idealism in line with Kant and Hegel, as well as anticipating some of Heidegger's critiques of this trajectory, see Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). For more concise treatment see, Werner Beierwaltes, "The Revaluation of John Scottus Eriugena in German Idealism," in *The Mind of Eriugena*, ed. John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1973), pp. 190–199. This connection between Eriugena and German Idealism, especially Hegel, is indeed more fruitful than connections with Cartesian rationalism, not least because German idealist such as Hegel explicitly stated the influence of Eriugena on their thought. In 1823 Peder Hjort published *Johan Scotus Eriugena* and in it he briefly makes a connection between the Christian speculation of Eriugena and Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Hegel was familiar with Eriugena and Hjort's associations, and he also proclaims: "Philosophy properly speaking began in the ninth century with John Scotus Eriugena." See Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825–1826*, v.3, ed. and trans. Robert Brown (Oxford University Press, 2009), p.42.

⁵⁴⁰ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, The Golden Age, The Breakdown* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), pp. 22–26.

negation of external nature, an idealist dialectic of negation that must allegedly await Marx's overturning.

Against these readings that lock up Eriugena's insights within his general idealist casing, however, I will claim that Eriugena is more directly related to Marx in that he already begins the inversion of subjective idealism, standing its inverted development of intellectual activity on its feet within the active body, in a way that also avoids the mechanical materialism of Feuerbach. By intuiting and articulating the perfectible whole from a movement closer to an historical materialist conception of labor as sensuous transformative praxis, Eriugena's ideal of bodily resurrection is conceptualized as an imperative from and for this historical and material process, and thus comes to more directly signify the active body becoming conscious of its constitutive value. Thus, what these dominant readings fail to see is how the ideal of bodily resurrection integrally operates within his system, tying together material forces in the body that cannot be articulated exclusively within an idealist sacred economy. To read Eriugena in this other manner then requires seeing how his understanding of the resurrection of the body throws critical yeast into the idealist mixture, in a way that metabolizes its rigid dialectical necessity into an open materialist dialectic of transforming necessity.

As I highlighted in the first chapter, Eriugena more directly grasped the new views of a perfectible whole that they were opening up from the forces of production within the monastic communal mode and its influence on the greater social body of labor. Born in Ireland, Eriugena became an educated intellectual without any official ecclesial ties. As a renowned teacher of the liberal arts he was able to find refuge in the Frankish court of Charles the Bald while Ireland was most likely under attack from Vikings raids.

His thought nevertheless would remain within the interstices between royal and ecclesial interests, eventually coming under suspicion from both.⁵⁴¹

That his thought stood outside the dominant ideological forms of the *bellatores* and *oratores*, functioning instead as organic to the rising *laboratores*, can be seen early on in his significant challenge to the hegemonic Augustinian pessimism of his day. Augustine's double predestination was increasingly finding ecclesial support, with its most severe form passionately articulated by the priest, Gottschalk of Orbais. Upholding god's inscrutable will as having already determined immutably the fate of both the elect and the damned, Gottschalk effectively negated any meaningful sense to historically embodied existence. Troubled by Gottschalk's campaign, Hincmar, the Archbishop of Rheims, solicited Eriugena as an outside party to provide a more moderate Augustinian refutation of these extremist views. While Eriugena showed deference to the authority of Augustine, he nevertheless laid out an original refutation of predestination that began by appealing to the efficacy of philosophy and the arts for reasoning about such matters. To the dismay of all the interlocutors involved, his subsequent argument then revolved around both a notion of divine simplicity, as predestining only the creative act of life for itself, and time as progressive, the historical time of continuing new creative acts. His argument was thus equally condemned alongside Gottschalk.⁵⁴²

Whereas most medieval intellectuals of this period were preoccupied with delineating the state and extent of human sinfulness, as well as justifying the divine will

⁵⁴¹ Deidre Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 13–15.

⁵⁴² Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). For the historical background see Avital Wohlman's "Introduction" to this text, and also Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, pp. 5–12. Wohlman highlights that the main concerns with Eriugena's argument were his heavy emphasis on the importance of the arts, and his notion of the human as dynamic, and history as progressive: "progress was the very law of history" and the reality of time was elaborated as "a pure elan giving each instant a novelty which escapes any foreseeing for Scotus". "Introduction," *Predestination*, p. xxvi.

in its judgment of such a state, Eriugena emphasized positively the creative and perfective capacities of humanity in its advancement toward the divine.⁵⁴³ In grasping the rising of the social body of labor in its constitutive value, its new productive forces of transforming nature, Eriugena articulated his system more directly around the creative act. Rather than viewing human work and artifice as an adaptation to given nature and thus an instrumentalized base for intellectually contemplating a past perfection, Eriugena's understanding of human nature as fundamentally art, began to grasp their constitutive value. Thus for Eriugena the human substance as art indicates its nature as the project of substance becoming subject. This marks out a significant departure from antiquity, which typically held to an understanding of the human substance as primarily intellectual with additional properties subsequently appended. Rather, for Eriugena, the human substance is not a definable essence as such since it is the ongoing creative work of unifying and defining "what" it is in relation to the whole of reality.⁵⁴⁴ Therefore, the human substance, according to Eriugena, is more accurately characterized as dynamically and equiprimordially composed of mind, art and skill, providing here the grounds for a constitutive and salvific value to the liberal and mechanical arts.⁵⁴⁵

The process of the human substance becoming subject, however, is not a matter of mere self-reflexivity in consciousness alone since the human continually defines itself only in the creative process of participating in and integrating the whole of nature's

⁵⁴³ Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴⁴ Joannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, On the Division of Nature* trans. Myra L. Uhlfelder (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), pp. 220–245. Eriugena often emphasizes that humanity is both animal and non-animal to emphasize that its natural kind is creatively *in via* and not yet finished.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 238. "For although the mind seems to be born unskilled and unwise, an accidental state resulting from transgression against the divine command by forgetting itself and its Creator, yet by the rules of learning it is formed again and can find in itself its God, itself, its skill and discipline, and everything which naturally subsists in it." See also Moran, *The Philosophy of Eriugena*, p. 205, "[the mind, art and skills] are now thought of as substances (*hypostases*) in one essence (*ousia*), and as all standing on the same epistemological and ontological levels."

creative movement. This marks a significant move beyond Neoplatonist paradigms that generally position nature below the self-reflecting One, as a degrading fall from this self-thinking unity. Thus Eriugena's most significant work, *Periphyseon (On the Division of Nature)*, is a "careful consideration into the nature of things" guided by "nature, our teacher, herself," with nature indicating the all-inclusive divine principle, which is that "general name ... for all things, for those that are and those that are not."⁵⁴⁶ Nature is thus the cosmic totality of the ongoing process of self-creation that includes both the divine and the human, a conception that will later influence Renaissance accounts of an infinite *natura naturans*. Human nature is precisely the task of raising nature, in its own creative drive, toward a unified totality by which nature can comprehend itself in some sense as a collective subject. Reasoning from humanity's position within sensible creation and not above it, as that creature defined by its rational organization of material reality into greater unities, Eriugena thus calls humanity "the workshop of all things". As Dermot Moran remarks, here "Eriugena offers an attempt to overcome the Latin separation between nature and spirit."⁵⁴⁷

For Eriugena humanity is therefore a *universal* workshop because it is both the evolved outworking of every form of given nature, as well as that species who thereby comprehends creative nature, its potentiality for new syntheses, by actively gathering

⁵⁴⁶ See the Sheldon-Williams edition, John Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams with Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* v. IX (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), bk. II, p. 187; and *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, ed. I. P. Sheldon-Williams with Ludwig Bieler, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* v. VII (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), bk. I, p. 37.

⁵⁴⁷ As Dermot Moran explains, like Neoplatonism Eriugena begins with the "immovable self-identical one" and yet in a "significant departure from traditional Neoplatonism, Eriugena calls this first and highest divine cosmic principle 'nature' (*natura*), which he defines as the 'totality of all things' (*universitas rerum*), that are and are not (*ea quae sunt et ea quae non sunt*), which includes both God and creation (understood as the self-expression of God)." He then highlights this conception of *natura* in influencing Nicholas of Cusa as well as possibly Spinoza. Moran, "'The Secret Folds of Nature': Eriugena's Expansive Concept of Nature," in *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*, ed. Alfred Kentigern Siewers (Lanham, MD: Bucknell University Press, 2014), p. 117; p. 123.

everything up through its very artifice into more integrally organized wholes.⁵⁴⁸ He discusses humanity as *workshop* in terms of that agent of unification whose work, in its most basic attempt to overcome divisive barriers in nature, is therefore the organically located site for exceeding any given barriers or limits to creation. Human art is then a kind of locus of perfective grace within nature, providing an intuition of the perfectible whole through its transformation of necessity within nature.

This view of the human, internal to the integrative work of nature, rejects any attempt to define human artifice as essentially antagonistic to given nature, since nature and the human are a single yet complex creative process toward higher unities. This view also removes embodied human nature from its typical lowly station and objectified placement within the chain of being.⁵⁴⁹ In fact, contrasting with his Neoplatonic heritage and its emanationist degradations, Eriugena thinks that human beings can surpass the purely intellectual being of angels.⁵⁵⁰ And this is so precisely by virtue of, and not despite, their nature as an evolving universal workshop, thus privileging the standpoint of the constructive nature of humanity in transforming the material, knowing the whole by progressively making whole.

Therefore, in Eriugena the natural inclination of humanity toward its own good is not simply limited to reproducing and preserving a set form of its species, since its natural operation which determines its essence is itself the creative project of universally comprehending all of nature within itself through newly raising creation into the divine

⁵⁴⁸ Trans. Uhlfelder, p. 295. As Willimien Otten further elaborates: “In his capacity as a so-called workshop ... man contains the ensemble of the created universe within himself, just as an artisan’s studio contains all the tools and materials required for putting together the definitive work of art.” *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, NL: Brill Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 127

⁵⁴⁹ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 96.

⁵⁵⁰ *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 204. See also, Otten, *The Anthropology of Eriugena*, pp. 108–109.

whole beyond all divisive boundaries, including that last division, death. Humanity thus produces and reproduces itself, only by reproducing the whole of nature at a higher level of integrated complexity. By virtue of its rational nature as manifest in its creative interchange with nature, humanity is therefore not essentially bounded by anything other than the divine attributes for which it has the means to produce, however presently obscured.⁵⁵¹

That human nature has the means for producing the Divine through its act of knowing and making, however, is not a form of Prometheanism in Eriugena since it is not a matter of merely increasing the abstract capacity of the will to power in competition with divine omnipotence. Rather it is the process of participating in the perfection of divine nature in which the transcendental perfections are convertible. While divine nature creates all things, it is the divine will that its nature also be “made in all things.”⁵⁵² He likens divine nature to an overflowing creative power that “runs” through and shares itself in all things, which means that to be is to participate in and non-identically repeat the act of new creating. As he says, “The Maker of all ... does not cease to be made; and though made, it does not cease to be eternal”.⁵⁵³ Thus the substance of divine nature as creative act is also for Eriugena indefinable in terms of a localized “what” and therefore can only be known by likewise making the divine.

Knowing the divine nature, which could also be said as the divinity of nature, is not then a purely intellectual act of recollecting an a priori vision of the whole (pure *theoria*) whose reconciliation would be in thought alone; nor is it a mimicking of arbitrary power (pure *praxis*) in refining the will’s command over against external nature.

⁵⁵¹ *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 244.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 140, 156–157.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 197. Cf. p. 15.

Because divine nature is a creative process better understood as a “Divine Artificer”, it cannot be known definitively except by likewise knowing oneself as actively creating and making whole; but because the creative act from which the world emerges was initiated without necessity, knowing the whole by creating new wholes can only be through perfecting the embodied act of creating in its transformation of necessity—an ethically and aesthetically charged knowing and being increasingly tied together and hinging on creative making without it necessitating alienation (true *poiesis*).⁵⁵⁴

That this whole creative movement of Nature, grasped through human activity, for Eriugena more directly and openly harbors an ascendant materialism, rather than exclusively rehearsing another idealist condescension of spirit, can be seen especially in his understanding of matter. From the start of Eriugena’s elaboration of nature he discusses those things which are, and those which are not, the latter being no simple non-existence but rather “those which because of the excellence of their nature” transcend sense and intellect. These aspects of nature, which are in some sense eminently beyond being, he claims, “are correctly understood only of God and matter”.⁵⁵⁵ If the divine is above being due to its superabundance of perfection, then matter is not simply below being as pure nothingness, but rather a potentiality for the divine, a latent harboring of emergent forms within “the most secret folds of nature”. As a *capax perfectionis* for

⁵⁵⁴ Eriugena describes God the Creator as both Artificer and Craftsman and emphasizes our act of knowing God as likewise a form of creating, using interchangeably the terms of *creare* and *facere*, though not denoting a similar act of creation ex nihilo. Ibid., pp. 107–205. Prior to Eriugena, for many Church Fathers, particularly in the East, knowing the divine through participation was a matter of dynamic synergy, a sharing in the divine *energeia* by likewise creating. This contrasts with the salvific economies of Greek philosophy that offer only a formal participation to the purely intellectual act of contemplation, thus leaving the active body unintelligible. See David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵⁵⁵ *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. I, p. 39.

emergent forms of being, the first principle of the divine superabundance can only be known as matter's final cause to be approximated through a creative rising.⁵⁵⁶

Indeed, in light of this correlation between matter and the divine, Moran notes that prime matter in Eriugena seems to be "another name for the mysterious hidden recesses of the primary causes from which all creation emerges." According to these alternative valences within Eriugena, prime matter is neither a passive receptacle nor identical with privative nonbeing as such, because it is "classified beside God, as it were", as Moran further states, and therefore in some way convertible with the excellence of the creative power of primary causes.⁵⁵⁷ Matter is thus excellent because it harbors within itself a latent causal power as a certain striving motion, meaning that form does not necessarily stand externally to a passive sense of matter, but is rather the actualization of matter itself as it self-organizes into new forms of being.⁵⁵⁸ This entails a radical affirmation of the material, since as a latent cause for its own qualitative movement, matter is potentially convertible with the divine act through its own unfolding. This would deconstruct any notion of matter as necessarily fallen or essentially corruptible, yet without adhering to a hylomorphic conception of an indifferent prime matter as a preexisting inert substrate of purely passive potentiality, awaiting the stamp of external forms.

⁵⁵⁶ For Eriugena's phrase, "the most secret folds of nature" see *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. I, p. 43; for matter as striving for perfection, see *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. II, p. 51: "For we say that formless matter and its formlessness are a kind of cause of things. For in it they have their beginning, although formlessly, that is to say, imperfectly as yet, and are understood to be almost nothing, yet not to be entirely nothing, but to be in some fashion a beginning and to seek form and perfection."

⁵⁵⁷ Dermot Moran, "Time, Space and Matter in the *Periphyseon*: An Examination of Eriugena's Understanding of the Physical World," in *At the Heart of the Real: Philosophical Essays in Honour of the Most Reverend Desmond Connell Archbishop of Dublin*, ed. Fran O'Rourke (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), pp. 88–89.

⁵⁵⁸ *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. II, p. 52.

Here then we see Eriugena undoing the very imaginary debt to death from which the inverted idealist dialectic seems to legislate reality. In seeking to understand the mutable nature of matter as a positive good, Eriugena reviews the answers of Plato and Augustine, who both define matter as merely the passive reception of form, with its mutability in itself equated with corruption and decay in light of the prior perfection of its formal principle.⁵⁵⁹ If this equation were the definition of matter's mutability tout court, however, the order of nature as a new creation in itself would be denied, since everything would hinge on a dialectics of negation in which all materialization is merely determined by its necessary dissolution before its original formal principle, a mere occasion of circling identically back to the perfectible whole already contained within the One reflecting upon itself. While this Platonic view of matter rightly sees that corruption and decay indicate something is wrong or not yet perfected within physical nature, it nevertheless uses this occasion to divert one's gaze from the mutable realm, converting oneself instead to an intellectual act of contemplatively recollecting the perfection of the a priori forms. This however fails to see that the strict equation of mutability with corruption and decay can only be an erroneous, because self-contradictory, conclusion, since the act of identifying perfection and turning away from corruptible appearances presupposes, in the first place, a deeper sense of the goodness of matter's mutability as the very basis of possibility for turning away and critically exposing corruption and decay.

Thus, seeming to be unhappy with this traditional conception, Eriugena immediately offers another definition of the mutability of matter from Dionysius the Areopagite as that which is more fundamentally and positively a "participation in

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., bk. I, p. 169.

adornment and form and species”.⁵⁶⁰ That is, since Eriugena already views matter as in some way a causal power of coming into being, its mutability must signify more fundamentally the capacity to create emergent forms without an inherent relation to corruption and decay. Corruption is then not essentially related to matter and its changeable capacity as such, but rather is a lack of participation in this upward qualitative movement of creation, its privative distortion. This is why Eriugena can then attribute to matter nothing other than a dynamic movement of actively coalescing accidents and qualities into visible networks of newly integrated complexity, an objective movement of producing material bodies, which he describes in the affirmative as “a certain marvelous commingling”.⁵⁶¹

As Jorge Gracia comments, this account of matter indicates that, “substantially, the corporeal is equivalent to the incorporeal.”⁵⁶² This substantial equivalence indicates that Eriugena’s idealism here flips over into a non-reductive materialism without losing its spirit, since matter and form, nature and spirit, are two aspects or modes of a single dynamically self-transcending process. It thus implies that matter as an internally good upward movement of emergent self-organization is never simply the puppet expression of a prior immaterial spirit, but itself a participation in and imitation of its first principle precisely as its own new creative addition of emergent bodies for further creative self-organization. Thus as a capacity for a new creative act, matter comes to know its own spirit as a unified body, whose perfectible quality is not the elimination of its materiality itself, but rather the transformation of its matter by virtue of its mutability toward more

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 121; cf. trans. Uhlfelder, p. 48.

⁵⁶² Jorge J. E. Gracia, “Ontological Characterization of the Relation Between Man and Created Nature in Eriugena,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 16, no. 2 (April, 1978), p. 161. See especially *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 75.

perfect participations in creating beyond corruptible privations. Thus Eriugena explicitly affirms the Pauline pneumatic body as a creative sowing process within the present body, adding to given nature a new way of being that is transforming the currently mortal body, actualizing what already “lies hidden in the secret recesses of human nature”.⁵⁶³

Matter is then more like a vibrantly relational and potentially transcending movement toward complexity than a necessarily downward pull. And time, as the measure of matter’s movement as a self-organizing body of further creation, is for Eriugena neither a category in opposition to eternity, nor a fixed external and neutral category containing being.⁵⁶⁴ Being is not a static substance, but a dynamic triad of essence, power and operation, with time as a relative mode of participating in the transcendental perfection of being through the material production of eternal life.⁵⁶⁵ That is, time is creation, the creative tempo of being as it is materially produced and shared through new modalities of power and operation. As a mode of participating in creative perfection, time is also history, since it is the measurement within the productive process of approximating to the fullness of being.⁵⁶⁶ The time of mortal finitude indicates an accidental fall, not from eternity into time per se, but rather from this creative tempo of matter’s primal cause, into an enclosure of stagnation and devolving processes that no

⁵⁶³ *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Willaims, bk. II, p. 133.

⁵⁶⁴ Moran, “Time, Space and Matter,” p. 93; *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 293.

⁵⁶⁵ *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 57. See also Moran, “Time, Space and Matter,” pp. 72–73.

⁵⁶⁶ With the contemporary portrayals of Eriugena as a proto-subjective idealist, it is helpful here to clarify the differences between Eriugena and Kant. For both, as Dermot Moran has noted, time is an aspect of the constructive subject. But what he does not emphasize are the two very different senses of the transcendental that orient time. For Eriugena, time is the mode of creating as a participation in transcendental perfection, whereas for Kant time is a given transcendental condition of intuition. This latter sense does not denote time as the measure of perfection in producing being, a tempo that implies differing degrees, speeds, and novelties, as well as a process coordinating the entire cosmic upsurge toward a final cause, but only an abstract a priori frame that internally organizes an exterior and passive manifold. Thus for Eriugena time is history since it is a creative process of materially approximating to perfection; whereas for Kant time denotes the internal unifying of consciousness whose history is immaterial. See Moran, “Time, Space and Matter”.

longer participate in producing being. The *duplex speculatio* for Eriugena therefore need not suggest two competing views between an abstract eternity and necessarily fallen temporality. Instead it implies that viewing things from the perspective of eternity is to contextualize the movement of time within the whole of its creative trajectory toward its perfection—which is to see time as *historical* movement toward a final cause; whereas to view time as locked entirely within mortal time, as if it cannot change the existing structures of its own mortality and necessity, is to view it under an abstraction from its whole transformative movement toward emergent ways of being. To accept mortal time as necessary and absolute, therefore, would be to negate any sense of a final cause of emergent newness that could draw history into being. It would be to forget that this abstracted view is only afforded in the first place by the possibility of progressive movement toward the perfectible whole of eternal life.⁵⁶⁷

Matter and time, the very content and form of the laboring body are therefore in no way a product of a necessary fall, but the conditions of change as creation, by which every contingent fall might be overcome—thus with Eriugena we get the true sense of flesh as the hinge of salvation. If the active body of artifice is a new emergent form of actualizing the creative potentials of matter, rather than a mere indifferent tool on par with a notion of passive matter adapting to whatever external form is imposed upon it, then it provides the constitutive relation to the eternal. Perfectible form is therefore not something merely beholden in consciousness and contemplated from the past, but

⁵⁶⁷ Moran, “Time, Space and Matter,” p. 93. Moran distinguishes Eriugena from Neoplatonic accounts of time by this double vision that is able to see the created world as either “eternally temporal” or merely “temporal”; or, said otherwise, we could claim Eriugena is distinguished according to his recognition of time as a mode of participating in transcendental perfection rather than as a transcendental condition of fallenness.

something made from the active body rising up from matter and further raising up matter into a new perfectible whole organized in, through, and as a creative body.

That Eriugena emphasizes the ontological meaning of the active body of artifice as underived from its current mortal situation is a significant development beyond tributary ideology. In light of his deconstruction of the debt to death by cutting any ties between mutability and necessary corruption, it is then no surprise that Eriugena had asserted, “life did not make the death of life.”⁵⁶⁸ The import of his thought here regarding the contingent fact of death, however, requires some unpacking, especially in light of his peculiar assertion in the *Periphyseon* that human making is in some sense prior to, and even the cause of, death itself: “for it must not be doubted that the puffed up, mortal, and corruptible bodies with which we are now encumbered take their origin not from nature but from sin,” and “everything mortal that is seen to be in this sensible world, being both fragile and transitory, is either made by ourselves when we are led astray by our irrational motions or is permitted to be made on account of our sin”.⁵⁶⁹

It should be noticed that these statements do not diminish the nature of the material body, which Eriugena states is not itself a product of a fall as if appended to an immaterial soul, but rather is original to the nature of the human person as an active potency for creative additions.⁵⁷⁰ Thus, whereas tributary ideology, especially in its Neoplatonic forms, represents the natural body as essentially mortal and destined to corruption precisely because of natural necessity, Eriugena claims that nature requires no necessary corruption and no necessary fall into a mortal body for embodied reality to

⁵⁶⁸ Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, p. 120.

⁵⁶⁹ *Periphyseon*, Book II, trans. Sheldon-Williams, p. 105, p. 131–132.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, bk. II, p. 105.

arise.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, Eriugena is explicit that the creative power of nature is not exhausted by the fall since its original source of creative power did not need to generate a necessary fall to initiate creative becoming.⁵⁷² That is, just as the divine fullness of being, that creative principle of the totality of nature, did not need to confront a contradiction in order to create, so also with material bodies of labor as creative participation in this source. There is then no necessity determined by nature by which the laboring body *must* alienate itself in order to more fully participate in the perfectible whole. It is only by accidents within history, which is the free tempo for realizing nature's creative movement, that the active body can become increasingly enclosed in, and conditioned by, a mortal state that conceals its natural potencies.⁵⁷³

Therefore, while Eriugena claims that death is unnatural, non-necessary, and thus in some sense contingently "made", this last point need not imply that innocent nature is invaded by artifice, whose work knows only death, since death is only contingent upon a distortion of the creative essence of making and not the end of making itself. Nor does this claim entail that within natural history there was no perishing prior to the emergence of human beings and their labors. Chronologically considered, the inexplicable fact of perishing obviously appears before the empirical arrival of humanity and human artifice; but ontologically considered, the statement implies that the human substance as art arrives as a continuation of a creative power of nature logically prior to, and not

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. For Plotinus the material body is simply an instrument employed by the soul temporally, and is good only instrumentally insofar as it serves the soul's contemplation and return to the One, so that the material body is good insofar as it obeys its debt to death. See *Enneads*, v. I.1.

⁵⁷² *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 318. Nature can never be totally corrupted, not even by a satanic will, since nature does not sin but only accidentally suffers its irrational privations. This means that every willing being by nature is potentially redeemable for Eriugena, including Satan.

⁵⁷³ *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. II, p. 133: "but vital motion itself does not always show its potentiality for action equally in each genus, either because of certain accidents which are not congenial to the seeds and are born of contrary qualities, or because of hostile powers which operate, as we have said, against their natural motion".

essentially conditioned by, the contradictory forces of death. As a participation in nature's creative power of being, then, human artifice by its nature has a latent power over death, but death has no equal power over the source and potentiality of artifice, except for what artifice contradictorily gives to death through its distorted irrational motions.

One can extend Eriugena's insights here to further argue that the inexplicable fact of death is made into a certain tragic, yet illusory, sense of absoluteness by the exacerbation of entropic tendencies proportional to the degree of intensity and complexity in the form of creative power so distorted and inverted from its anti-entropic directionality. Therefore, in being irrationally and habitually led non-productively astray from perfecting nature through developing its own creative powers of self-organization, human artifice, as that universal workshop, has instead absurdly compounded the effects of mortality to the extent of inventing a new form and experience of death within nature. This form of devolution, or what the theological tradition would obliquely call hereditary sin, has the effect of obscuring labor's anti-entropic nature by irrationally multiplying the possibility of seemingly irreversible entropic forces, as all too evident in our capitalist age of exploiting labor and nature, leading to increasing suffering and warfare, the arms race for WMDs, and unparalleled anthropogenic ecological crises. Such compounding effects then make death further appear, not as a contingently accidental fact, but rather an insurmountable transcendental condition or absolute fate.

Yet, the foregoing argument gleaned from Eriugena, that the creative power of human artifice in its nature is never exhausted or totally deprived by its fall, demystifies any reified essentializing of death, exposing this conceptualization qua conceptualization

as itself an irrational production from within an imaginary relationship to the material contradiction of death. Thus, the problem is not productive forces in themselves, but their irrational arrangements into self-contradictory processes, which further “make” rather than undo death’s pseudo-order. But things can always be made otherwise, including the unmaking of death, if artifice is not essentially corruptive but able to effectively change and transform necessity through new creative acts. Here we then see not only the basis for an emerging consciousness of the significance of productive power, but also a critical consciousness of the historical specificity of its alienating distortions within certain “irrational motions”. This indicates an enlightened advancement in historical awareness beyond that Augustinian ahistorical framing of productive power per se as totally conditioned by an ontological fall, and thus metaphysically condemned to impotence, no matter what historical arrangement.

This is why, despite all of Eriugena’s obvious Neoplatonic architectural designs within his system of emanation and return, he is nevertheless laying the foundation for building a somewhat different creation, according to the rational kernel of matter and its active body bursting through its inverted mystical shell. It is a movement of new creation coming to the fore that does not build into its product a planned obsolescence that will force everything created and creating to necessarily deny itself in light of its alleged formal origin, but rather seeks to perfect the historical act of creating in order to more perfectly produce a whole that no longer negates the producer. Thus militating against every conception of a dialectic of negation that his idealism still retains, is Eriugena’s own conception of matter in its striving toward new embodied relations of qualitative perfections. It is a dialectical movement toward the actual infinity of positive self-

subsistence, whose movement as a creative transformation of necessity perfected in, by, and for the body can only be intelligibly understood as the movement of negating that which negates its creative body. That this alternative trajectory of inverting the idealist inversion is no mere peripheral matter within his system, is confirmed and further developed within his understanding of bodily resurrection as a natural imperative from, and made possible by, this self-transcending, anti-entropic movement of humanity as a universal workshop.

The future resurrection of the body thus signifies the perfection of the active body as a social transformation of organic nature, and thus as a natural grace to nature's creating. Moreover, the ideal signifies a perfection of this transformative work that is in no way an extrinsic counterfactual miracle, as if nature were statically predetermined by inalterably given laws. It is an imperative of objective tendencies within creating nature, as they are opened up in the social body of humanity as workshop. Thus, Eriugena emphasizes that the difference between nature and grace is best understood as a distinction between "grant (*datum*)" and "gift (*donum*)" as two different, but not separable, aspects of naturally participating in the creative act.⁵⁷⁴ His elaboration indicates that the grant of nature is the given common share of all things by virtue of being created, while the gift, by virtue of creating, is the conscious raising of the common share to higher, more integrated levels of being not simply anticipatable from nature's presently given structures. The motion of nature as creating is thus partially conditioned by, but never totally confined to, the created structures of nature. He notes that if the universal resurrection were caused by an extrinsic grace alone, then this change would negate its very object of perfection, which is nature in its embodied "vital motion". But if

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 138, 303–309.

resurrection were caused solely from and for nature in its current generic and cyclical givenness, then it would not be a perfection of its vital motion as it emerges into a subject, i.e., according to its self-surpassing potential for hyper-personal forms of embodied organization.⁵⁷⁵

Eriugena conceptualizes the ideal of resurrection from an implied grasp of the laboring body in such a way that it more directly renders intelligible the constitutive value, and thus the normative standpoint of the active body, in relation to the perfectible whole. The ideal, therefore, is articulated more directly from and for activating its prior body as an agent of material reconciliations, perfecting it according to an increasing actualization of its own secret folds of creative power, rather than concealing its agency in some other mythical sphere or agency, or according to an abstract reconciliation in consciousness alone. Like Origen, Eriugena was deeply critical of the positivistic statue imagery and its appeal to omnipotence for arbitrarily resurrecting every given bit of inert matter into a static image. He clearly saw the ideological import of this discourse as concealing the possibility of change by eternalizing the given inequalities and hierarchies of the present, hiding how these are only contingently determined by the privations of mortal finitude. For Eriugena, such a distorted salvific economy could only be ordered by “the severity of a vindictive judge,” thus concealing how resurrection is more than a mere moral postulate but rather an ontological and epistemological requirement of the whole of nature coming to know itself, in the higher causal syntheses of its active body of artifice.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 308–309.

⁵⁷⁶ *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, p. 340.

Thus, when he discusses resurrection of the body in terms of its return to “primordial causes” this cannot consistently mean a passive absorption back into a primal monism. Rather, with his previous identity of prime matter with primary causes as the creative capacity for emergent forms, the resurrection can only signify a redistribution of creative power to the material body in its upward refinement. It thus marks a movement of restoring within a higher unity, “the whole primordial nature together with what has been added to it,” rather than marking the dissolution of the material body back to its generic organic cycles so that an intellectual element can be redistributed back to its formal order in the celestial spheres.⁵⁷⁷ It thus indicates the material body progressing toward closer approximations, beyond all deadening enclosures, to the perfect act of divine creativity without deprivations. The idea of the resurrection, then, is that idea by which the productive body begins to recognize itself within a religious ideal of eternal life precisely by virtue of its creative activity. This is because the ideal body here represented, is not the statuesque object of divine omnipotence, which would presuppose the normativity of bare flesh, but the active body subjectivated only as it approximates a divine artificer, which presupposes and further requires reinvestment within the normative standpoint of the laboring body in its socially creative capacities.

It is in light of Eriugena’s articulation of this ideal of bodily resurrection that an emergent materialism is therefore suggestively presented in terms of historical movement, and in such a way that any charge of a facile pantheism is avoided. Because the ideal form of eternal life here demands the overcoming of any dialectical necessity of negation itself from the creative process of becoming a body, it therefore cannot simply

⁵⁷⁷ *Periphyseon*, trans. Sheldon-Williams, bk. II, p. 133: “for the whole primordial nature together with what has been added to it will be restored into unity”.

attribute divinity, tout court, to the evolutionary process as such, with its agonistic contradictions and all. This blanket affirmation would both deny the material as an emergent perfective movement of creative activity in the body, as well as deny the divine ideal of eternal life as a truly creative self-mediating act of knowing the whole through making whole, reducing this ideal instead to the baptizing of a partial whole and its deathly mechanisms.⁵⁷⁸ Rather, what is affirmed here and now is of course an ideal not yet fully realized, but it is nevertheless already in motion within the material body's historical capacity for novel approximations toward higher forms of creative self-mediation without the employment of death.

Failing to engage, or even recognize, the resurrection of the body in Eriugena—precisely as to how and why its vision of a perfectible whole from creative activity requires transcending a dialectics of negation—has led to misconceptions of his valorization of creative activity. In missing how this idea functions to qualify the perfective ideal of eternal life within his system, there is then an inability to see how Eriugena lays out the groundwork for standing any idealist dialectic back on its feet. An especially egregious example is provided by David Noble when he claims that Eriugena's

⁵⁷⁸ Such pantheism can be glimpsed in later 20th century process theology, which tends to attribute divinity to the whole evolutionary process as such. But this would fail to affirm the material as well as the potential divinity of its perfection. Insofar as matter in all of its current contradictory processes, involving arbitrary pain, suffering, disorder and death, are legitimated as necessary for the divine whole to experience the full reality of its finitude, then the perfect whole has to do solely with divine consciousness and its self-experience, and not with perfecting the historically and socially creative movement of life for itself in the body, socially and individually, which everywhere seeks to overcome death. The perfection of eternal life would therefore involve merely an imaginary resolution within divine self-consciousness, so that it would remain within a version of objective idealism baptizing a debt to death, as Charles Hartshorne concedes in declaring that “true immortality is everlasting fame before God”. Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), p. 259. This would fail to grasp the perfective movement internal to embodied material and historical movement, seeing this process instead as the cipher for some other agency. And insofar as the divine ideal can only perfect itself by justifying the historical necessity of giving death and letting die as necessary for its self-experience, then this would also fail to grasp the divine as a perfect creative act of making whole, seeing the divine instead as resigned contemplation of a false whole, frozen in its given cyclical processes.

valorization of human artifice commences “the ideological elevation of mankind above nature,” a trajectory whose real meaning, he argues, eventually finds its apogee in the domineering stance of modern industrial and technological culture.⁵⁷⁹ Aside from the fact that Noble’s genealogy of “modern industrial and technological culture” lacks any analysis whatsoever of the historical specificities of capitalist modes of production, or the historical development of bourgeois culture more generally, his study also suffers from a seeming illiteracy concerning theological ideas in their rich development. Interpreting theological ideas around divinization along a Weberian line of spiritual detachment and control, that is, as anachronistically understood in terms of an ancestor of a bourgeois ethos of instrumentality, Noble interprets Eriugena’s valorization of the mechanical arts as a desire for a Promethean mastery over finite nature.

An equally misconceived, though opposite assessment, can be found in Heideggerianized attempts to save Eriugena from readings like Noble’s, by exclusively emphasizing Eriugena’s apophatic theology within his idealism. This can be seen in Thomas Carlson’s recent elaboration of Eriugena’s negative anthropology from a framework that situates human creativity within an absolutized mortal finitude, poised between infinite nothingness and an infinitely inaccessible and unapproachable end.⁵⁸⁰ Carlson thus promotes an absolute and necessary cloud of unknowing and indeterminacy, which is called upon to both temper human self-aggrandizement, as well as spur on continual change beyond any triumphant closure. Yet, this requires that the apophatic mode is not merely a tool for demoting definitional concepts in relation to perfecting

⁵⁷⁹ David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p.16.

⁵⁸⁰ Thomas A. Carlson, *The Indiscrete Image: Infinitude & Creation of the Human* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 2.

productive activity, but rather the point of knowledge itself, so that perpetuating the indeterminate act of metamorphosis, in its endless cycles of generation and corruption, becomes the meaning itself of creating.⁵⁸¹ Such a position views every positive sublimation within the dialectic of change, *tout court*, as the premature suppression of the potential for change. But an endless dialectic of change and corruption, without sublimation or surpassing of any sort, is equally a suppression of change. Much like a pantheistic attribution of divinity to the contradictions and corruptions within the totality of process as such, it fails to think through the decoupling of the essence of change from corruption whereby a more radical sense of creative change would mean precisely the possibility of historically overcoming corruption as such without self-negation—the realization toward an actual infinity of positive self-subsistence that requires the negation of negation, rather than the bad infinity of endless dialectical negation. Therefore, the form of change within Carlson's purely apophatic paradigm is not perfected according to its capacity for real transformations of material conditions and limits, but only as the bad infinity of an abstract and identically repeated performance within the same fixed conditions. In this sense, it then remains within the debt to death, not by rendering it necessary for attaining a purely formal perfection, but by simply absolutizing it as the immutable and totalizing condition for an authentic acceptance of finitude as such.

Thus if Noble fears that Eriugena begins to regard the human antagonistically over nature, Carlson potentially dissolves the human within given nature as the bare flux

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 74–117. Eriugena, following Dionysius's *triplex via*, does not negate without reason. In light of knowledge *that* God is and is thus infinite perfection, God is removed from every substance by virtue of God's uncontainable excellence, which cannot be definitively grasped in a concept. Carlson acknowledges this but celebrates the moment of *remotio*, ignorance as an end in itself, and absolutely indeterminate creativity, at the expense of the existential knowledge of cause and its consequent activity of knowing eminence through practical approximations in certain partially, yet openly, determinate forms of creating. This is due to his rendering of superessential non-being as convertible with privative nothingness.

of indeterminate metamorphoses. Both read Eriugena in a way that elides the concrete agent of material transformation into an abstract immaterial power, thus missing Eriugena's emphasis on the material forces of the active body historically transforming necessity, which the resurrection, as a required ideal of this process, was rendering intelligible.⁵⁸²

What needs to be emphasized here is that Noble and Carlson fail to consider how, in Eriugena, the resurrection of the body specifies a totality for which its objective, agent, and concrete form of change are nevertheless non-totalizing. In light of Noble's concerns it must be highlighted that the objective of the resurrection is the subjectivization of all of nature through human artifice. Humanity is not perfected as a subject over against nature, but precisely as the elevation of nature into a kind of universal subjectivity, cultivating the latent potentials in nature toward a self-comprehending cosmic community no longer riven with opaquely objectified divisions and exclusions. This perfectly self-comprehending whole through the positive self-subsistence of actual bodies has nothing to do with submitting a deadened and inert nature to Will. Rather, it regards the perfect integration of all of nature as a more complete share in the transcendental perfections of being, that is, to realize their convertibility of qualitative perfections in higher levels of unity.

⁵⁸² Noble views Eriugena as commencing the augmentation of the empty will over nature through technology. Carlson views Eriugena along the lines of a Heideggerianized mystic-idealist thesis. It is telling that both Noble's and Carlson's very different treatments of modern productive activity and technology similarly navigate this topic without treating its historical specificity under capitalism. Indeed, the fact of capitalism is rarely, if ever, acknowledged. Thus, change as connected to the laboring body and its directed transformations of material conditions, which would require an assessment of the forces and relations of production, is virtually absent for both writers. And so, of course, there is no acknowledgement of the vastly different productive modes from and for which Eriugena was able to articulate his new views. Therefore, neither is able to think a revolutionary subject as an agent of material change. Instead they both operate, in their own ways, at the very conservative level of reforming and disciplining consciousness to become more aware of its absolute finitude and limitedness; hence both are implicit attempts to Augustinianize Eriugena and thus false consciousness that reactively and conservatively reifies death in a certain way in order to discipline labor.

The perfective final cause signified by the resurrection is not then the perfection simply of the will's empty capacity over nature or its vision of a perfected instrumentalization of labor, both of which are one-sided consumptive capacities, but the perfected integration of the laboring body with nature in its creative process, cultivating the whole as a self-comprehending work of art. Humanity is then not more than nature, for Eriugena, but the outworking of nature's own excessive potentials for more creation. This begins to close any antagonistic gap between abstract senses of humanity and nature over against each other, without collapsing nature into mere fodder for human disposability, or collapsing humanity into the bowels of generic and impersonal natural processes.

Thus in contrast with Carlson's irrational process of metamorphosis, it must be highlighted that this substantive end signified by bodily resurrection rationally directs productive activity as the privileged site of change, toward a perfection that nevertheless does not terminate all movement and change within a triumphant closure. This is because the final cause signified in the resurrection of the body draws forth the active body of artifice toward perfective movements of creative knowing and making, eliminating not mutability *per se*, but its ties to corruption and alienation—it is a perfection then of true making, the transformative labor process organized toward realizing its essence as art. And because this perfection of creative activity is simultaneously the matter of perfecting nature in making whole, it is not the perfection of pure action in itself, but bound up with a determinate product, which is the producer itself in the totality of its creative relations. Rather than implying indeterminate creativity ordered to a completely abstract *novum* without a material subject, therefore, this final cause can then be understood to signify the

true form of change, a new mode of becoming that also begins to concretely privilege the laboring body as its agential standpoint—hence a utopian form whose minimum required content is the active material body, yet without positivistically predetermining the exact future content of this agent such as in the statue imagery.

Thus, in coming closer to a Marxist position we can now see how Kolakowski's reading of "enriching alienation" back into Eriugena fails to account for how Eriugena's nuanced view of matter, confirmed under the light of bodily resurrection, pushes against hylomorphism and its tendency to render contradiction necessary whereby an inverted idealism always hangs in the balance. As suggested above, matter is not simply the passive occasion of an a priori spirit's externalized self-discovery, which always implies a kind of necessary fall into matter and its subsequent negation in perpetuity. Instead, as not essentially corrupting but in some way equal with the primary causes, matter is necessarily an upward movement into higher forms of embodied self-organization, so that matter is not something one falls into. This implies that the creative materialization of spirit, better understood as matter's own self-organizing spiritualization through perfecting the creative self-mediating act of labor, is a movement non-reactively initiated, and thus can only become contradictory in a contingent and accidental sense. Such a logic therefore critically exposes as ideological any attempt to justify the active body's alienation, as if plainly a matter of dialectical necessity for expressing a purely symbolic meaning in the Idea or spirit's relation to such. That is, the ascending materialist shift to understanding spirit as matter's own coming to know itself in the self-organization of a creative body, would require the resurrection of the body, since the very Idea is only perfected in the real material resolutions of raising a body without privations.

Since the resurrection as final cause signifies a real historical movement of materially overcoming and undoing the entirety of alienating contradictions in nature, through the perfection of the productive body, its meaning cannot then be reduced to the subjective idealist symbol of spirit's reflective self-consciousness continually won through its negations of particularity. With Eriugena the ideal of resurrecting the body thus more directly suggests a symbol that refuses to fetishize its own symbolic order, that is, it signifies perfection precisely by refusing to refer the meaning of the body as an ahistorical medium to some abstract ideal other than the perfection of its own materially creative being. It then implies that non-inverted ideal of perfection that comes to transparently serve its prior historical body, rather than employing the body to serve its own circular formal abstraction.

In sum, the resurrection of the body as final cause signifies that there can be no elevation of the active body of artifice without the whole of nature rising with it, since humanity is nothing more than this universal workshop of raising given nature toward newly integrated wholes.⁵⁸³ But it must also be emphasized in Eriugena that this project of organizing matter beyond all exclusions is necessarily collective, an extension of the Hebrew prophetic ideal of reconciling the whole of social and natural relations, so that the raising of nature is also the expansion of a more inclusive social totality no longer beset by antagonistic divisions of class, race and gender.⁵⁸⁴ There can be no elevation of

⁵⁸³ Otten, *The Anthropology of Eriugena*, p. 127.

⁵⁸⁴ *Periphyseon*, trans. Uhlfelder, pp. 271–360. On the collective task of humanity coming to know and make itself without divisions and exclusions see *Ibid.*, p. 255, and also Dermot Moran, "'Officina Omnium' or 'Notio Quaedam Intellectualis in Mente Divina Aeternaliter Facta': The Problem of the Definition of Man in the Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena," in *L'homme et son univers au moyen age*, ed. C Wenin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Editions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1986), vol. I, pp. 195–204. The new unity that humanity makes in its return to the Divine, which no longer privileges social, racial and sexual hierarchies, eliminates all elitism since it cannot universally raise humanity if a part is left behind or below. And while Eriugena is not always consistent, this movement need not be seen as a leveling of everything to

the body of artifice and the whole of nature, then, without also its transformation into a new social body. Therefore, the resurrection of the body in Eriugena implies a whole from which we can extrapolate the normative standpoint of the embodied person, as not simply the active body and its individual labors alone, but the active body of artifice socially constituted in the historical project of perfecting nature.

This suggests the rudimentary outlines for conceptualizing the labor process as essentially the “humanization of nature and the naturalization of humanity,” anticipating what the young Marx deemed “the true resurrection of nature”.⁵⁸⁵ And indeed the *homo artifex* emerging in Eriugena’s anthropology of the universal workshop, should be seen as anticipating more directly Marx’s anthropology of the universal producer rather than Hegel’s spirit. Both understand humanity as an open project similarly hinging on a constitutive sense of *poiesis*, whose time is the time of perfecting production. And both understand this historical time of perfecting productive activity as not simply a medium for self-consciousness over against nature, but rather as always also intending the perfection of the whole of nature within a work of art. Therefore, Eriugena can be read as not only anticipating Marx’s overturning of Hegel’s idealism, but also his critique of Feuerbach’s partial overcoming, in that Feuerbach only projects to a conceptual infinity from a reflection on humanity as a universal species, but not the substantive infinity from humanity as a universal producer. Insofar as the ideal of resurrection is projected from and for a material movement of humanity as universal workshop, intuiting and intending

a primordial simplicity but rather an overcoming of all antagonistic divisions and exclusionary positions that were determined solely by mortal conditions. Since there is no return without transformation and no transformation without the collective and creative work of humanity, this can imply that even the given sexual differences, which Eriugena envisions as overcome, have complexly evolved beyond their currently rigid division of reproductive labor as determined by the present realm of necessity, rather than simply collapsed into a primitive androgyny.

⁵⁸⁵ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 104. See chapter 2 for a discussion of this Marxist notion.

from objective and subjective tendencies within the transformation of the material, to an actual infinity of positive self-subsistence in the body, Eriugena can then be read as already surpassing Feuerbach's purely abstract infinity within consciousness alone.⁵⁸⁶

A New Idealist Inversion

To summarize the discursive development of the original Hebraic trajectory advanced in Origen and Eriugena, *poiesis* as the true this-worldly site of participation in eternal life was made intelligible, therefore, within a discourse whose inextricably religious or utopian form of transcendental perfection allowed for a series of critically progressive shifts to Neoplatonic and Aristotelian architectonics, breaking them open to their ordinary intuitions and intentions within the laboring body. The core of these critical shifts, in reasoning from and for the laboring body's self-transcending perfective trajectory, can be reiterated as such: 1) Discourse on the final cause of perfection in light of bodily resurrection required a separation of mutability ontologically from corruptibility. This relativized death as a contingent accident and as potentially surmountable, thus no longer suppressing a view to the capacity of the mutable dynamisms in nature for incorruptibility. 2) This decoupling then allowed for an internal dialectic of change within nature to be understood as drawn toward a final cause whose perfection entails increasingly organized wholes around a creative, non-contradictory becoming. Such an end meant that the mode of being drawn could not be solely through eternally fixed generic processes or statically given kinds, with their perpetual sacrifice of material particulars, but through self-surpassing novel transformations of embodied

⁵⁸⁶ For the critique of Feuerbach as not going far enough in inverting Hegel, see Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).

activity that no longer require necessary negation. 3). Theological and philosophical discourse around the pneumatic body therefore more clearly began to give voice to the mutable body as an active potentiality for these novel transformations. As matter and time were no longer perceived as necessarily fallen, but fundamentally ascending movements, the normative site of their directed elevations toward new unities of qualitative perfections was worked out in the active body of artifice, historically and collectively constituted. Thus, with discourse on the resurrection of the body the antique ordering to transcendental perfection was taken back from its tributary deformations and made critically conscious of the open dynamisms of nature as mediated through, and known in, the laboring body as a real creative act.

Against attempts to enclose Eriugena within his idealism, I have expressly brought forth those fundamental aspects of his thought involved in laying the ideological conditions, listed above, for birthing *homo artifex*. This provides a more complete genealogy, then, of the discursive backdrop of religious ideas, drawn in relation to their social conditions, behind the intellectual and social forces within which the medieval laboring body became conscious of its eternal value, and thus began to recognize itself as a universal class. Eriugena's ideal of bodily resurrection thus marks a certain culminating point in the long history of the laboring body coming to recognize itself within its own ideals of eternal life.

Eriugena's proto-materialist rationality around bodily resurrection was carried well into the 12th and 13th centuries, significantly influencing the burgeoning age of *homo artifex* as was spelled out in the first chapter. Despite earlier condemnations of his work he was widely read during the 12th century renaissance, which also led again to another

round of condemnations. If not always as explicit about the significance of the active body of artifice, many medieval theologians nevertheless still regularly understood the creative capacity for resurrection to reside, in a more or less synergistic manner within nature, as a participation in the divine. Of course, the dominant discourse on the resurrection of the body continued to be mired in the sacred economy of the cross, and thus often conceptualized secondarily as simply about a judgment at the end of time. Yet, more often in this period, explorations were still given to searching out the intelligibility and eternal value of the material body in light of its perfection as a creative integrity, rather than according to an externally fixed reassemblage of given parts. Bonaventura, Albert, Giles of Rome, Godfrey of Fontaines and even the young Aquinas, among others, held—even if only loosely or warily—to some *inclinatio*, yearning, or active potency intrinsic to the material body, whose telos was not reducible to corruption and the corpse.⁵⁸⁷

Yet by the 14th century, ideals of eternal life were also becoming increasingly articulated in the otherworldly terms of a disembodied individual immortality, exclusively acquired within a sphere after or outside life. That ideal projected more transparently from the social process of perfecting a new, more comprehensive whole in which the laboring body could recognize itself, will be increasingly mystified and displaced into imaginary visions of a soul traveling through purgatory; or, in eliminating any ongoing process altogether, eternal life will be set within a vision of a perfect whole conceptualized around a disembodied *visio Dei*, immediately granted to the soul

⁵⁸⁷ Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 227–278.

following the death of its body.⁵⁸⁸ It will be no coincidence that these shifts were taking place right as another socioeconomic transition, now toward a more intensified form of real subsumption, began to gradually take hold of the body in a way that more fundamentally distorted its intuitions and intentions of the whole. With the rise of a proto-capitalist market—its more generalized exchange relations under the wage form already taking root within late Medieval Europe—matter, and the body with it, became increasingly obscured from their own internal perfective activity, eventually viewed instead as parts within a growing conception of nature, understood as a deadened or indifferent machine without internal ordering to its own qualitative perfections. The idea of the resurrection of the body, especially throughout the rise of modernity, thus will become divorced more severely from the intuitions of its laboring body, emptying out any sense from this concept in both its conservative and liberal varieties.

One reversion of the idea back to an idealist inversion—anticipating the new modern form of its remythologization—is already glimpsed within the ideologies of those radical 12th and 13th century social movements influenced by Eriugena, among others.⁵⁸⁹ Both the Amauricians and the Joachimites rightly took up Eriugenian insights into the progressive value of the pneumatic body, drawing from its activist and universalist sense for promoting social movements toward more communal forms of being. Yet the fact that these movements were oriented strictly around communisms of consumption, rather than of production, is tellingly complemented by the fact that their articulations of the resurrection retained no sense of an objective material and historical process linked to the

⁵⁸⁸ On these shifts see, Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁵⁸⁹ For the broad influence of Eriugena in this period, yet his misappropriation by Amauricians and Joachimites, see I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “Eriugena and Citeaux,” *Studio Monastica* 19 (1977): pp. 72–95.

active body's transformative interchange with nature. For Amaury of Bene the meaning of resurrection became wholly spiritualized, referring exclusively to inner forms of self-consciousness and thus taking on that proto-subjective idealist metaphor representing the indwelling of the spirit already within the body.⁵⁹⁰ For Joachim, the third kingdom will at least come to refer to a historical social movement toward something like Eriugena's idea of a future universal resurrection. But here, too, Joachim's emphases are telling in his elaboration of the historical process. The key difference is that Eriugena's movement is based in the divine perfection of self-creating, with resurrection serving the creative process of nature coming to know and be in the perfected act of embodied creating; whereas Joachim begins with god as self-revelation to consciousness, with resurrection serving the act of spiritual knowing within the self-reflexivity of consciousness alone.⁵⁹¹

As I emphasized above, with Eriugena's conception of resurrection as an imperative of a real material process of historically transforming nature into higher social forms, its ideal required redistributing creative power back to productive bodies. But with the Joachimite movement of history, oriented in terms of a spirit of self-revelation within consciousness alone, without considering the objective appropriation of nature from and for which consciousness reflects, the resurrection becomes a theological metaphorization referring to new dispensations of spirit and its mystical experiences in consciousness over against the material.⁵⁹² The tributary ideal here is not taken back from and for its prior

⁵⁹⁰ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 153–154.

⁵⁹¹ On the millenarian theology of Joachim de Fiore, see the works by Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), and, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

⁵⁹² Joachim claims to have seen the historical harmony of the Old and New Testaments purely from contemplating Scripture, and thus from within his "own mind's eye". Moreover it is a movement of history that has to do solely with the self-revelation of the Holy Spirit to the contemplative spirit of consciousness, and it will end in universal contemplation of this spirit. Moreover, it should be noted that while Eriugena grasps the perfection of universalizing social forces that exceed any origins within a prior monastic nursery,

productive body's creative rise, but rather its inverted form is retained within consciousness, as inverted ideals remain but their history of conceptual self-negation in and for the contemplative spirit becomes the thing that is internalized. That is, what is negated throughout Joachimite history and its different dispensations of spirit, is not necessity and death within material existence, but only a series of conceptual abstractions by which consciousness becomes more transparent to itself within its own inward self-reflexivity.⁵⁹³ Thus, despite his radical intentions, with Joachim the active side of idealism, for which the laboring body was beginning to recognize as its own under the sign of the bodily resurrection, is now regressing back into its inverted idealist form again, losing sense of its creative body in favor of the realm of absolute spirit and its necessary dialectics of negation. Socially, this spiritualized remythologization of bodily resurrection therefore marks the spirit of the active body becoming unable to find itself within its material productions, unable to recognize the contribution of its works to perfecting the whole. It is an ideal of resurrection that no longer is socially and materially associated with the religio-cultural mediation of production and redistribution. Thus it is Joachim, and not Eriugena, who is more truly the direct forerunner of Hegel's idealist dialectics.

Joachim instead sees the perfection of history from, in, and for the monastic life of contemplation, though universalized to all in a contemplative communism of consumption. See especially his *Expositio in Apocalypsim*, trans. Bernard McGinn, in McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 130, 133–134.

⁵⁹³ Joachim's "new spiritual men" are not an expression of the spirit of the active body, but rather of the contemplative spirit of self-consciousness. His follower Gerard of Borgo San Donnino and other Joachimites saw Francis as the angel of the Apocalypse. Within the Joachimite vision the mendicant Franciscans ushering in the *ecclesia contemplativa* would replace the church clerics. They will therefore identify the coming "Order of the Just" with the Franciscan Order itself, as Gerard explicitly does in his work, *Eternal Gospel*, rather than seeing it as the more holistic perfection of universal social forces for which the Benedictine Order helped foster beyond its own monastic walls. See, David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 139–140.

The difference between this idealist interpretation of bodily resurrection and Eriugena's suggestive materialist one, can be seen best as a difference between identifying the self-transcending movement of subjectivity with a dialectical necessity of self-consciousness that requires the disappearance of the body for its own formal intellectual transparency to itself, on the one hand, and identifying it with an emergent materialist ascendancy into a more perfectly creative body, which requires only the disappearance of the dialectical necessity of negation, on the other hand. The emerging modern remythologization of bodily resurrection as a metaphor for the subjective idealist dialectic of self-consciousness, will therefore present another counter-revolutionary response to the rise of the laboring body that requires the disappearance of its determinate perfection. Rather than the ideal of resurrection signifying the realization of determinate capacities for qualitative perfections within the material body, signifying more fully what this body can do in terms of its creative activity, it will now come to express another relation to the body as a bare indifferent occasion for an alien spirit.

Conclusion

I have now presented more fully that corresponding religious expression and articulation positively internal to the laboring body's emerging rational self-organization. This genealogy of the resurrection of the body developed as an extension of the communal mode of production raising itself up and grasping itself in thought. Yet its intellectual formulation of perfection does not refer to its termination solely within its own formal conceptual unity, but only insofar as this ideal is realized in the material unity won, historically, within perfecting the active body of creation. Therefore, it is a

conception of eternal life organic to the free movement of labor, synthesizing its intuitions and intentions into a more comprehensive and rational vision of a perfectible whole in which it becomes intelligible to itself as more than bare flesh fated to pass away—that is, it positively mediates the laboring body’s conscious self-understanding as a historical agent with constitutive value. Insofar as this ideal stands as the orienting principle of perfection behind the discursive formations of homo artifex, being drawn more directly from and for the emerging composition of the laboratores, who eventually began to break down feudal obstacles, it therefore presents that historically necessary religious consciousness internal to labor’s recognition of its own self-transcending essence. Within this new historical account, then, the late medieval and early modern apocalyptic and Protestant religious expressions alike, are removed from their perch in any hegemonic bourgeois narrative. They can no longer be the privileged interpretive keys for understanding how religious ideas help reveal labor’s rational essence to itself; rather they are only contingent ideological deviations and distortions that reflexively express the new irrational social forces decomposing the ascendancy of this prior body and thus concealing its intrinsic religious consciousness.

Moreover, this genealogical presentation of both the social and ideological components within the positive organic emergence of the resurrection of the body from its modes of production, has provided a more dialectically nuanced account of its historical unfolding without unilaterally privileging the causal priority of either, an idealist religious consciousness, or a mechanical dialectical necessity of base economic forces without self-transcendence.

CONCLUSION

“Conceivably, life might be able to change those laws of physics that today seem to imply its extinction along with that of the universe. If that is so, then might not life have a more important role in cosmology than is currently envisioned? That is a problem worth thinking about. In fact, it may be the only problem worth thinking about.”

–Heinz Pagels⁵⁹⁴

“My guide and I came on that hidden road
to make our way back into the bright world
... It was from there that we emerged, to see—once more—the stars.”

–Dante⁵⁹⁵

This dissertation has been a work of critical social theory and religious studies, as I have attempted to set out a critical labor theory that returns labor to its revolutionary and thus utopian nature. In attempting to raise consciousness of labor’s revolutionary nature I have argued for its necessarily religious-utopian self-understanding, not as something outside the science of its own becoming, but as that critical consciousness by which it is the laboring body itself that newly thinks its own perfectible ratio and thereby remembers and rationally works toward its future. In uniquely exploiting the Marxist distinction between historical periods of formal and real subsumptions I have presented a challenge to historical materialists and critical theorists to rethink the normative relation of the religious to the modes of production, as fundamentally its revolutionary counterpart in thought. This is because if the religious first emerged with a communal mode of production that did not yet know its commodification, class division, and alienation it cannot then be a form of consciousness normatively reducible to such

⁵⁹⁴ Pagels, *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics as the Language of Nature* (New York: Dover, 2011), p. 322.

⁵⁹⁵ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (University of California Press, 1980), p. 317.

contradictions. The religious, then, can no longer be prejudged as reducible simply to alienated consciousness removed from its laboring body; rather it must be reconsidered as to how it historically emerged with the first revolution in the village communal modes of production as the necessary reflection and cultural mediation of social surplus that allowed its reinvestment in humanity as a transformative agent raising up nature into a new whole. I have thus made the case in theory and through a historical genealogy that the religious ideal that came to grasp this trajectory most directly and positively, signifying the ends of production as a reinvestment in raising up its laboring body, is the Hebraic ideal of the resurrection of the body, tracing how this ideal developed in a certain non-statist direction through Christianity as well. As signifying the creative and collective body as the end or final cause of production and redistribution itself, future resurrection articulates a demythologizing transcendental ideal of perfection that rejects and deconstructs every dialectical necessity of the body's negation.

But where has the idea of the resurrection of the body gone in modern times? One inquiring into its whereabouts will find that it has largely disappeared altogether from religious, theological, and philosophical discourse, with hardly a whisper in social consciousness concerning it. If it does still linger within discourses outside the walls of religious fundamentalism it is often only as a metaphor for some version of absolute spirit. The answer as to why this ideal has lost sway should by now be no great mystery. Rather than focusing on the advent of Cartesian dualism, scientific "rationality", political "realism", or a somber existentialism, all of which accept a certain reified transcendentalizing of death as absolute, we must instead see these mentalities, discursive formations, attitudes and their imaginarily structured relation to death, as a symptom of a

certain mode of irrationally producing and reproducing the social body. That is, the disappearance of the resurrection of the body has occurred because the body in its own rationalizing activity has largely disappeared underneath the irrationality of the commodity form with the capitalist generalization of commodity production and exchange. The real subsumption of labor under the wage form and its exchange abstraction renders the body of living labor indifferently disposable stuff, while its productive activity is converted into private property, or as Marx called it, “dead labor.”

Such a social body, as was elaborated in the introduction, no longer feels and knows the rational constitution of its social synthesis through its basic activity of transforming nature in collective and creative labor, but rather through the exchange and consumption of its laboring bodies and nature for private abstractions—meaning the social body’s very mode of producing and reproducing itself is now blinded to its own perfective activity more deeply from within. It is a social body then that cannot recognize itself because its mode of production is internally organized more effectively in such a way that the producer actually producing cannot, and must not, be the perfectible work produced. Therefore, the one form of eternal life within our capitalist social order that not only remains largely unthinkable and supposedly undesirable, but also must be rigorously eliminated from social memory, more so than in any previous society, is the resurrection of the body. Why would one want the laboring body raised up through its product, resurrected as the real work produced, when it is its conversion into abstract exchange value—money—as the real immortality we are after? And besides, the material body is allegedly only an indifferently death-bound being and so naturally alienable anyway, meaningful only insofar as it is disposable to an abstract will, and thus not meant to be

itself the locus of eternal value. If in antiquity the body politic was a kind of communal projection of eternal life in a generic form in which the laboring body could still dimly recognize something of itself (regardless of the many distortions), within the necropolitical body of liberalism there is no projection to eternal life but only a subordination of bodies to that most utterly abstract form of the eternal in the god of commodities, a present for which there is no past or future. To think the resurrection of the body, therefore, more truly from and for its prior laboring body, could then only be to pursue and think through a return of labor for itself that explodes capitalist logic and its irrationally fantastical structuring of reality.

Of course, we can still think this ideal since the laboring body within the real subsumption of capitalism is not totally and absolutely subsumed; if it were there would be only machines and the most abstract financialization of value, which of course would no longer be able to reproduce itself, at least in any way that would literally *matter* for a body. Indeed capitalism needs living bodies to physically produce and reproduce itself, especially as its generation of surplus value still fundamentally relies on exploiting the comparative advantage from fragmented mortal bodies selling their labor. That we are still living and breathing as creating, playing and thinking beings (even if only minimally) means that there is still surplus life left in living labor by which to glimpse, project to, and plan out a better future. And that the ideal of the resurrection of the body is still presented for thought within various traditions means that the cultural memory of past labors lives on in the present surplus activity of various intellectual and cultural labors—not to mention that the body of living labor at the socioeconomic level still dimly

intuits and intends its own return at a higher level insofar as it still pursues the perfection of its own self-organization without expropriation.

Bringing back the ideal of the resurrection of the body then is not a matter of bringing back an arcane theological idea but rather a matter of bringing back a history of the laboring body thinking itself from within its own rationalizing trajectories of making itself. It is to reinvigorate the Marxist standpoint of labor away from its mechanically economic reductions and dialectical necessities of negation, whereby the revolutionary agency of history had been reduced to a very particular form of a suffering servant within a certain industrial working class. It is instead to articulate a broader sense of the proletariat as itself bound up within a larger historical labor movement of humanity, as a laboring body whose universality in the creative act is positively constituted by more than what the mortal present of capitalism decides for it. And in emphasizing the ideal of resurrection as transcendental to labor's self-understanding, it is to bring forth a critical consciousness of totality according to those minimally objective teleological directives within the very movement of free labor. This is to counteract the recent reactionary tendency within Marxism, especially since Louis Althusser's work, to abandon teleology and perfective ideals altogether, which is to then give up labor's own ability to recognize its perfective movement.⁵⁹⁶ This acceptance of the bourgeois picture of reality as only a random flux mystifies the material contradictions of capitalism, since if there is no internal end and normative sense by which labor understands its own perfective activity, then there is no expropriation of it that can be identified as its alienation and thus false.

⁵⁹⁶ For Althusser, the materialist philosopher "always catches a moving train, the way they do in American Westerns, without knowing where he comes from (origin) or where he's going (goal)." *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), p. 290. This analogy suggests maybe more than Althusser intended, showing that his "materialist" conception of reality is really just the reification of what the bourgeois picture industry shows of it.

Such would be another ideological representation of an imaginary relation to deathly contradictions.

But nor can we attempt to move against this ateleological picture by pursuing merely a negative theology of utopia. The ideal of bodily resurrection is transcendental in the sense that it minimally signifies the perfectible image of a concretely active body objectively drawn from and for the emergent tendencies of creatively becoming a body within the totality of natural and social relations, and therefore it is not merely an empty formal structure within consciousness alone.⁵⁹⁷ Thus the ideal of resurrection calls historical materialists to move beyond their dogmatic acceptance of the bourgeois conception of labor as a bare efficient cause in order to ground its critical theory in a more nuanced yet concretely empirical standpoint of labor as that self-transcending act of resurrecting nature into a new social body without a sacrificial economy, negating neither the significance of the physical body nor its own thought. The early Marx himself already referred to this ideal, but the historical lines from which it had been drawn were not fully disclosed, leading some Marxists on the errant path of idealizing mystical trajectories and tracking down apocalyptic flights that could only be rejected by others as irrational speculations divorced from the laboring body. What was needed, and what I have sought to provide, is to rethink a more comprehensive ratio of self-perfection from within the modes of production, and to thereby work back through the historical production of

⁵⁹⁷ This latter reaction can be found most recently in Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). Here he seeks to explicitly overcome Althusser's ateleological Marxism with a Kantianized transcendental messianic ideal that a priori structures thought while also remaining without any content, negatively signifying a novel future that remains novel only in that it is unapproachable. But like Kant this is to think within an alienated consciousness whose natural unifying directionality is falsely taken as a priori thus forgetting that it is directed because it is always already from and for a concrete laboring body socially transforming nature.

religious-utopian ideals to find those that more directly expressed and reinvested in labor's own developing rationality.

Rethinking the history of this ideal in relation to the modes of production has also challenged those post-Marxist critical theories that want to retain aspects of the Marxist critique of capital, rightly supplementing it with a reappropriation of various religious ideals, while nevertheless forfeiting the standpoint of labor. Due to the theoretical deficit from this forfeiture of labor there is, however, a growing overreliance within post-Marxist critical theory on messianic and religious themes that remain nothing more than a moralizing and politicizing critique of capital. Indeed, the rejection of the standpoint of labor, losing a sense of its making whole, is once again coupled with what can be understood as a bourgeois-Protestant narrowing of the holy within consciousness alone in relation to that imaginary representation of death as a transcendental condition for the body. This can be seen in the curious return of the apostle Paul, especially in the differing works of Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou among others, insofar as their appropriation of Paul has nothing to do with rethinking the progressive unifying trajectories of his pneumatic body under the Hebraic sign of the resurrection. Indeed, the gains made by Paul's pneumatic body in taking back the active principle of idealism for the material body itself, have now regressed into the counter-revolutionary forms of either a Franciscan piety or a religio-political fideism.

The thrust of Agamben's work, occupied as it is in overturning the Aristotelian relation between potency and act, can be understood as a critical continuation of Heidegger's being-toward-death.⁵⁹⁸ What distinguishes humans from animals for

⁵⁹⁸ See especially, Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Heidegger is only our consciousness of being-toward-death rather than blindly perishing.⁵⁹⁹ But this entails that the meaning of being for humanity shows up only under the aspect of death as its transcendental condition of appearance for consciousness. And likewise for Agamben, the significance of human life and freedom is in no way revealed in actualizing and perfecting its creative powers since this is only an aspect of animal necessity. Instead the freedom and significance of human life is disclosed in recognizing our essential nonbeing—our potentiality not to-be rather than to be—and therefore in letting go rather than making whole. As he says: “To be free is ... *to be capable of one’s own impotentiality*, to be in relation to one’s own privation.”⁶⁰⁰ Indeed for Agamben the standpoint of labor as the actualization of potentiality is precisely what must be negated since this standpoint, in attempting to determinately be something or to save life, can only betray corruptibility and nothingness, which are supposedly the salvific conditions for a free human life. This is of course a failure to think through what Paul had begun: that the dialectics of the changeable body, if thought from its own creative act of labor, need not be essentially equated with the dialectical necessity of its corruption. Hence Agamben’s notions of *inoperativity* and the primal innocence and passivity of a pre-productive bare life as also drawing out themes from Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* – notions of passivity and negation which continue a polemic against the transformative and perfective vocation of work since they imply that labor in its transformative capacity as such can only be a futile

⁵⁹⁹ See especially section 49 in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996).

⁶⁰⁰ Agamben, *Potentialities*, p. 183.

and ultimately sinful attempt at self-justification over against the supposedly unchangeable conditions of mortal existence.⁶⁰¹

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Agamben's reading of Paul, in *The Time that Remains*, emphasizes a messianic calling to be "as not", which plays out Paul's conservative active passivity, revoking the worldly significance of every vocation in a manner similar to Luther: the structuring of vocation and the conditions of labor themselves do not change but only one's ironic comportment within, which is triggered through an inner relation to mortal temporality.⁶⁰² With no standpoint of transformative labor that might produce history otherwise, all we can do is occupy history differently through a reformed consciousness, implying that history remains transcendently set as a cyclical time of mortal temporality.⁶⁰³ Thus, the messianic calling and being-toward-death remain indistinguishable, reducing being to the structure of mortal time and so offering only an exposure of every work and worldly project, without differentiation, as corruptive, decomposable and thus separated from any real significance.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹ Agamben has taken up the thematics of *Gelassenheit* in *Potentialities*. For inoperativity see especially Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford University Press, 2004). Negri and Hardt have made a similar critique, claiming that for Agamben "the only possibility of rupture with biopower resides in 'inoperative' activity (*inoperosita*), a blank refusal that recalls Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit*, completely incapable of constructing an alternative." *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 58. That is, Agamben takes forward Paul's active passivity.

⁶⁰² Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), *passim*.

⁶⁰³ Agamben, "The Time that is Left," *Epoche: Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2002): 1–14.

⁶⁰⁴ Thus Agamben is following a theme of identifying the Messianic itself with the transience of absolute finitude, which came especially to prominence with Walter Benjamin: "For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away." Their point is to counter the use of death as a necessary means to something other than death, by rendering death itself as absolute and unsurpassable, thus short-circuiting its relative use to achieve anything else. It is like the conservative religious appeal to the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics as absolute in order to deconstruct the evolutionary idea of progress and its supposed necessary laws of development. But then this means that life is either a singular blip that is absolutely death-bound, for which only a deity from outside could save it, or life is a mechanical process that necessarily employs death for higher levels. Thus, absolutizing death in order to undo the necessitating of death, is merely to exchange one reification of death for another: it merely plays the various contradictions of bare life against itself without questioning how this self-contradictory concept became so reified. And it

Instead of understanding the transition of potentiality into actuality in a different way, that is, according to labor as a creative anti-entropic act that emergently brings into being according to more than just meeting the needs of the stomach but also according to the *fitting and open* laws of qualitative perfections such as beauty, Agamben simply gives it over to an essentially oppressive movement. He denies the standpoint of labor as actualization because he fetishizes the standpoint of death, and this because he uncritically accepts as factually given and insurmountable the ideologically constructed notion of bare life. But life defined only in its relation to death, imaginarily represented as absolute, ensures that to be holy is precisely in not being, in not actualizing, but only in being set apart within an impotent form of consciousness that must repress the irreducibly creative movement of life toward its own perfection. In this way Agamben remains in a kind of contemplative Franciscan stance beholding the construct of poor flesh, much like Adorno, within a moralistic and condescending attention alone.⁶⁰⁵

Badiou's project also obscures the creative movement of living labor but through a more explicit acceptance of nature as mechanical and an ontology lifelessly reduced to mathematics. His understanding of economy is that it is entirely reducible to the functional realm of necessity because it does not transcend the order of Being, which, according to his mathematical ontology, is the purely indifferent order of numerical multiplicities.⁶⁰⁶ For Badiou there can be, then, no possibility for transformative, collective *projects* discovered from within socioeconomic movements because the

continues the reification in both its absolutizing and necessitarian forms by still implying that there is no possibility for Messianic change without the requiring the fact of death in some eternally cyclical form. See Benjamin, "Theologico-Political Fragment," in *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935–1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), pp. 312–313.

⁶⁰⁵ For a similar critique see Lorenzo Chiesa, "Giorgio Agamben's Franciscan Ontology," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 105–116.

⁶⁰⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005).

economy's functional logic of interests, which deals only with dead indifferent matter, will always fall under the count of capital. Thus, the human as determined economically and ontologically for Badiou is nothing more than a "miserable creature" basely qualified only as "animals of the city".⁶⁰⁷ Whereas Marx pursued a value-theoretical paradigm of science that sought to overcome positivism by discovering the prescriptions for transformation within the very workings of productive forces and social relations, Badiou tends to accept as "value free" the imaginary bourgeois science of economy and its pessimistic anthropology, and thus its reified projection of a deadened ontology.

Badiou therefore looks for the constitution of a revolutionary subject completely outside the economy and the order of being, in a "pure" political act that is in no way conditioned by material relations. Moreover this pure political act of self-constitution is conditioned by the arrival of interruptive truth events that are demarcated only through contradictions within the material order. And since truth events arrive *sub contrario*, only as a pure rupture over against productive forces and relations, as Badiou argues, they can only be related to through a pure act of fidelity that sets the subject apart from its economic activity. Thus we see, in Badiou's reading of Paul, another Lutheran trajectory, but this time more along the lines of a Bultmannian rendering of *sola fide*: in the cross-shaped void of the situation arises a subjective act of faith, and this is resurrection, which is not itself an actual transformation of the material in a certain way, but only the raising of an inner declarative act of fidelity to an eternal truth set in opposition to bare life.⁶⁰⁸

Thus while Badiou says he wants to uphold the positive significance of the resurrection

⁶⁰⁷ Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 51.

⁶⁰⁸ Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

over against any dialectical necessity of the cross, it merely becomes another metaphor for absolute spirit within his program, even if not entirely determined in a strict Hegelian form.⁶⁰⁹ Because Badiou fixes economic activity within the transcendental standpoint of dead nature, the collective, perfecting capacity of labor in making whole is *a priori* eliminated so that holiness is predetermined to appear only in a narrowly formal religio-political act of faith to what can only appear as an alien power.⁶¹⁰

The post-Marxist turns to Paul, in both Agamben and Badiou, therefore similarly perpetuate that bourgeois-Protestant enclosure of the holy within an abstract formalism, either as a pure passivity and conscious resignation to mortal life or a pure decisive act as empty command over mortal life. In other words, for Badiou the pure act of decision is not that which saves bare life, but rather that which saves itself, the formal unity of its pure declarative act in the will set over against deadened life, while for Agamben bare life saves itself from any and every declarative act or mediated work through its transience, its own formal nonbeing and letting go. Thus in both cases there can be no fundamental transformation of dead labor into living labor but only an abstract separation from it into a reformation of consciousness that has learned to live with the image of mortal flesh as prescribed by the bourgeois fiction of “man as he really is”. This lack of consciousness is so because both options fail to think from the concrete fact of labor,

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 65–75.

⁶¹⁰ As Slavoj Žižek rightly comments, Badiou’s “‘pure’ political organization ... limits itself to mobilizational declarations ... The only way out of this deadlock is *to restore to the ‘economic’ domain the dignity of Truth*, the potential for Events.” Žižek, *Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p.328. Žižek’s own appropriation of Paul will follow a more explicit and severe Lutheran line, emphasizing even more the total depravity of humanity. This is the so called “Protestant revolution,” that it reveals humanity to itself as nothing more than the “divine shit” with no “higher vocation” and “ultimately reduced to a machine oscillating between the search for a homeostatic balance of pleasures and the fatal attraction exerted by some excessive *jouissance* which threatens to disturb this homeostatic balance” (Ibid., p. 188). Žižek’s own project is simply to remain within this bourgeois picture in order to more fully exploit humanity’s death-drive in novel ways, rather than trying to transform this drive altogether.

abstractly delimiting instead the very being of material life and labor within a transcendental apparatus similarly oriented around an imaginarily fixed standpoint of death—a standpoint for which life can only be thought of as an ahistorical blip subordinated to the unchangeably given Laws of existence.

Thus we have here a bourgeois fixation on those conservative aspects of Paul apart from the harbored progressive seeds of his pneumatic body, a conservative side which I had suggested appears as an ideological reflex of an impending intensification of labor's real subsumption within proto-feudalization. What is more, this conservative Paul is read through a kind of conservative Lutheran appropriation that tends to exacerbate these ideological reflexes. But I hope that this dissertation has challenged critical theory more broadly to rethink the transcendental ideal of bodily resurrection in its revolutionary Hebraic form as it came to us through pressuring figures such as Paul to think with the laboring body against every dialectics of its subsumption. This might allow critical theory to think religious and utopian ideals more substantively from the pre-capitalist fact of labor, but in its emergent self-transcending trajectories, in order to avoid the reified subsumptions of bourgeois reality and its abstractly and negatively conditioned utopianisms and their mystifying flights.

This is also to challenge theology. If theology will not accept that the very rationality of this ideal emerges according to a more truly materialist logic of fact, then at least it might rethink the historical genealogy of this religious ideal, examined in both its development and diminishment according to corresponding historical periods of formal and real subsumptions of labor. Luther and, more generally, Protestantism marked a new emphasis on divine revelation arriving *sub contrario* through the cross, which eventually

was understood as opposed to cosmos and history, signifying a purpose for the whole bound up within a hidden will and set against any and every works righteousness. Is it then any coincidence that these forms of theology drawing on a narrow form of Paul came into prominence with the arrival of a social order by which the worth of labor was newly being stripped down and given over to the hidden hands behind exchange value, its value determined *sub contrario* to its use value? Despite the backwardness of Catholicism as it retains many of its feudal structures, it nevertheless seems to retain the memory of labor from a period before its intensified real subsumption by the wage form. Is it a coincidence, then, that Catholic thought and practice promotes a more significant, if still distorted, sense of the perfectible whole of nature in whose creative movement humanity can still recognize something of itself as homo artifex? What is it that can account for the fact that it has been various Catholic formations that have historically given substantive support to the labor movement in comparison with the relative absence of any organized support from within Protestantism, which more typically remains bound up in the narrow moralizing confines of protesting only religio-political authority? The latter critique of arbitrary authority is needed of course, but not without the more basic revolutionary transformation of their very modes of production.

This is not a call to return to Catholicism over Protestantism, but only to search out and take forward the best of both in order to advance the labor movement into a newly integrated socioeconomic and religio-cultural mediation of its constitutive power toward producing eternal life. It is not a negation of theological intentions but their material realization, and thus not a death of the divine but its historical birth. Humanity as a contingent being of history of course cannot obtain the status of a necessary being. And

yet thinking through to the perfectible ends of history according to the transformative anti-entropic movement of labor, as it reflects upon itself in the ideal of the resurrection of body, is to understand the laboring body's historical contingency *as-it-really-is*, which is the chance by which it can somehow materially overcome and return from the captivity of death to a new life. Increasingly perfecting production so that it is the producer as the work produced would be to cultivate our creative and collective self-organization of life for itself, raising matter into a social body that discloses new laws of physics in optimizing life's qualitative perfections of integrated complexity. The realization of such would deactivate death so that, if still a possibility for contingent beings, it would nevertheless no longer be a necessity, since it would no longer be something life is forced to undergo by blind laws of nature, nor forced to employ by deformed social relations; rather it would remain a mere useless remnant of past experiments in material becoming, an aspect of an extinct mode of becoming whose obsolescence renders death itself a near impossibility, while material life itself would be nonetheless released for more concretely creative embodiments. In this social perfection of life for itself, death could no longer remain a victorious expropriator over the dead of the past, but instead this unnecessary expropriator would itself be expropriated by the perfected social totality of the past newly becoming future.

Working out the materialist logic in the ideal of the resurrection of the body is therefore a matter of being guided by that cultural memory of the hidden roads within labor, roads whose perfection according to labor's own ratio might allow us one day to emerge from our contingently instituted mortal captivity in order to truly see and commune with—once more in the body—the stars.

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