***The Historical Mind***

*Marxism, materialism and making ‘the person’*



*Mark O’Brien*

Foreword

The first maxim of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi was a very simple phrase, yet an enigmatic challenge to the person: ‘Know thyself’. This injunction is in fact the opaquest of all. Can we confront ourselves directly? Do we not always see ourselves indirectly - *via* our social world, our relationships with other selves and the objects that organise our proximal environment. Are we ever transparent to ourselves?

And of course, there are aspects of human experience that occur without reflection, and ‘spontaneously’. Desire, attraction, phobia, disgust, pleasure, obsession, compulsion, dread, moral feeling, love, aesthetic tastes, sexuality, temper, gender-identity, ambition, and other life orientations can all be things are ‘discovered’ within; the origins of which are obscure to the individual themselves, and difficult or impossible for them to explain.

One response to this challenge can be to head into the psychological interior, in an experiential inquiry that seeks an answer to the question: ‘What does it mean to be *me*’? Countless journeys of this kind give us worlds of poetry, narrative literature, and personal philosophies.

Another response is to ask ‘What is the ‘self’ *itself*, in its material reality - ‘material’ in the sense of being social in origin, development, and agency?’ Then ‘What is the ‘personal self’, the identity that emerges in a contextual world of relationships with other selves?’ And, arising from these questions, ‘What kind of materialismdo we need to account for the self; one that can explain types of behaviour in specific historical contexts?’

Responding to this challenge our discussion will be a wide sweep through aspects of critical theory, philosophy of mind, brain science, psychoanalysis, Marxism and the meaning of materialism. Glancing ahead, the answers we will work towards are: ‘self’ understood as social strategy; and ‘materialism’ understood as the challenge of survival, and the concomitant negotiation of social – and existential – risk; with the various types of mental, cognitive, and conceptual repression this entails for the person, and for organisations within class society.

And here also we will say that all aspects of the self are social in origin; and that biology – whilst dictating the absolute material requirements for existence – does not determine interpersonal behaviour.

Our aim ultimately is to describe how a general model-of-mind, can become a socially specific and personal mind, with all that means for ideology, gender, and individual orientations in the world.

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**Introdu****ction**

A ‘historical’ account of mental life must be at once general enough to serve as a ‘model-of-mind’, applicable across all human societies, always and in all places; whilst also adaptable enough to explain of ‘modes-of-mind’ that are specific to historical settings and geographical locations. Marxism offers explanations of historical consciousness and of ideology, and these provide a framing for any discussion of mind as a historical phenomenon. More difficult to locate within Marxism is a structural account of the personal mind understood as a social object: an account of mind *per se*.

This is problematic insofar as our social reality is experienced not at the historical level alone, nor at the level of an abstract and atomised individual (that never really appears), but at an intermediate level – and indeed many levels – between the two. It matters for accounts of gender, sexual orientation, individual pathology, aesthetic sensibility, and so forth. In turn these are important for a theorised understanding of personal liberation within movements of social change and revolution. The problem also has implications for the question of ‘human nature’ within Marxism. The theoretical space that exists here demands a content. One way of providing this is by appeals to dialectical biology in which brain structure, and accompanying inherited traits interact with social influences, leaving biology as an essential factor in these accounts, albeit socially mediated.

However, there is another hypothesis that should be considered, and that will be explored here. This is the possibility that within the mind and its behavioural expression, there are embedded processes that, whilst they originate in society, are hidden from the person’s own self-awareness, their effects being felt as ‘natural’. Developing this idea however, requires a model-of-mind, even if only in hypothetical form. This is why its absence within Marxism is a problem; and one that we will address.

One thinker who did theorise the mind in a structural sense was Sigmund Freud. Putting aside whether one embraces Freud’s modelling of the mind, dismisses it entirely, or something in-between, we can scrutinise his logic by comparing it with that of Marx to shed light for our questions. Along the way related aspects will be touched upon, such as the relationship between mind and brain, the use of biology in explanations of human behaviour and the meaning of social causality.

Marxism provides the theoretical starting and ending points here. However, it is interesting, rewarding and sometimes important to engage with Freud’s ideas, even where we finally reject them. This is an unfashionable thing to say. Freud is not a respectable reference in Anglophone academic psychology. In the long wake of Karl Popper’s critique in his *Science: Conjectures and Refutations* (1962),[[1]](#footnote-1) Freud’s ideas are seen as unscientific in failing the test of falsifiability, antiquarian and even quixotic.[[2]](#footnote-2) Freud has also fared poorly under feminist critiques that point to sexual stereotyping and misogynistic undercurrents in his constructions.[[3]](#footnote-3) Especially damning was the accusation that he effectively colluded in the concealment of child abuse, rejecting the validity of accounts from his female patients of sexual molestation by their fathers during childhood, deeming these reports to be fantasies.[[4]](#footnote-4) Freud has also been cast as an incompetent therapist with no clinical success, ultimately driven by self-promotion and an obsession with personal legacy over and above any genuine scientific inquiry.[[5]](#footnote-5) And there is sport to be had trading in quotations from Freud’s vast complete works stretching to 24 volumes.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although Freud does have his modern defenders in areas such as dream analysis[[7]](#footnote-7) and psychodynamic psychotherapy[[8]](#footnote-8), for all his eloquence as a writer his speculative formulations and pronouncements upon the human condition do not stand up well to a modern critical reading. Indeed, it is tempting to see Freud as important only for his place in Twentieth Century culture; a figure of historical and perhaps biographical interest. But no more.

But this misses something important about Freud. Whilst his *oeuvre* reflects the Viennese *fin d’siecle* cultural landscape in which he worked and developed intellectually,[[9]](#footnote-9) his work offers occasional insights into human behaviour that are thought-provoking; creating novel perspectives that are potentially relevant beyond the cultural hinterland from which they came. Moreover, there are ideas and observations about the workings of the mind that should be taken seriously, even only as hypotheses, by any philosophy that is concerned with human oppression and its opposite, human liberation. So, it is the underlying logic of Freud’s formulations that is the focus here, based upon a critical appreciation of his significance as a paradigm thinker.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Whilst Marx developed an understanding of how ideas are controlled in the interests of ruling classes, Freud examined the fine structure of interpersonal relationships and human passions. Marx traced the social, political and psychological processes by which ruling ideas are propagated in society, and the ways in which exploitation under capitalism is masked by the appearance of fair exchange. Freud suggested an intra-psychical mechanism by which outward familial relations become internalised into the life of the person.

Freud’s theorising of the human mind, and of human behaviour revolves around the pivotal concept of a repressed unconscious. Even where psychoanalytical categories are otherwise incompatible with those that provide the foundations of Marxism, a critical appreciation of this notion, and its incorporation into a historical model-of-mind is something to be considered. Potentially, ‘repression’ can provide an explanation of the relationship between the person and their society that takes account of identities, behaviours, and desires over which they have little or no conscious control and which they experience as fate. We will see however that this requires a reworking via the Hegelian philosophical categories that influenced Marx in his early theorisations of the historical subject.

A key theme developing through this discussion then is that the concept of ‘repression’ and of a ‘repressed unconscious’ allows for an explanation of feelings that are experienced spontaneously by the person and interpreted as ‘natural’. Obvious examples of this are the sexual urge, sexuality, and gender; and there are other aspects to this. A central contention throughout is that ‘All is social’. In other words that the physical aspects of our bodies and the ‘wiring’ of our brains do not explain forms of social behaviour or types of relationship. Putting biologistic factors aside entirely is provocative. Anticipating this, the general contours of the theoretical position to come are given here, mapping broadly the more detailed argument to follow.

This exploration begins with the acknowledgement that there are indeed types of social experience and personal life that for the individual seem inevitable, merely a matter of inter-generational chance or of familial inheritance. For the Marxist this is problematic. Whilst seeking to avoid appeals to biological causes for things such as sexual attraction and coupling, because of the conservative tendencies they typically suggest, equally any reduction to culture can be dismissed as one-dimensional, idealist or unscientific.

An alternative to ‘reductionist biology’ used to explain spontaneous human behaviour, is the ‘dialectical biology’ alluded to already; a biology that does not depend upon uni-directional causality originating at the genetic level, travelling outwards to create phenotypic and behavioural effects. Rather, causality is conceptualised as multi-directional, causes and effects as changing places, and phenotype capable of influencing gene expression in ‘epigenetic’ processes. The genome itself is seen as labile, with the transposition of genes occurring by the relocation of sections of DNA along a chromosome or across different chromosomes.

Dialectical biology became influential on the political left in the 1970s. Associated with the work most notably of Richard Lewontin, it draws upon all the insights mentioned above, and more. Whilst such dialectical biological processes are fascinating in the accounts of life-processes by scientists such as Lewontin and his collaborators[[11]](#footnote-11) in their popular publishing, the argument here will be that they should not be seen as foundational for explanations of human social behaviour beyond the most abstract accounts of general capacity. The issue is that where ‘biology’ lingers as an assumption in our understanding of any specific social behaviour, there also will remain the search for the biological – often ‘instinctual’ - element as a necessary ‘factor’. At a more general level, the traditional ‘mind and brain’ problem in western philosophy, that revolves around interpretations of the relationship between the two, notwithstanding any insistence that they are ‘mutually influencing’ of one another, then gravitates back to naturalistic models. This is increasingly so with each leap of the brain sciences, and with each (amazing) discovery of the neuro-physical events that we experience as – and that substantively *are* - mental activity; and that we experience as spontaneous feelings and drives. The ‘dialectical’ aspect of this conceptualisation of biology then is unstable when used to explain any specific human behaviour.

Navigating this wide river of inquiry, requires explorations of the tributaries running away from, though always returning, to its main course. The questions involved are old and difficult. ‘What do we mean by ‘mind’?’ ‘Can we speak of an authentic ‘self’ and if so, what might that mean?’ ‘What do we mean by a ‘materialist’ view of the world and of human behaviour within it?’ ‘As the science of the brain advances, can we discern how we might one day explain the mind?’ And ‘What of ‘human nature’, of sex and gender, of our ‘sense-of-self’, and of our inter-personal behaviours: do these aspects of our experience as human beings emerge from our biology, from our social interactions, or from an amalgam of both?’

If we put biological categories aside, the question remains ‘What then is our alternative framework to account for those affective states that we experience as ‘natural’?’ Putting the question differently we can ask ‘What is the plausibility of an entirely non-essentialist account of human behaviour, distinct from the essentialism and ‘mediated essentialism’ of these different uses of biology?’ Answering this question will require a reformulation of some aspects of Marxism itself; and a reworking of the meaning of ‘materialism’ in explanations of human behaviour. But before we embark on that perilous journey, we will survey what has gone before and the most historically influential attempts to explain the human mind as a social object.

Preparing the ground for our theory and its construction will mean addressing the sort of materialism we require, moving decisively away from the Newtonian framework of linear ‘genetic’ cause-and-effect rooted in biological categories. We will need to visit aspects of the relationship between the brain and the mind, treating each as an object of a different type. It will be important also to map the terrain that has been tilled previously by the two most significant figures for this project, Marx and Freud, appreciating what each has said about consciousness. Extending this part of our discussion we will explore the different engagements of various Marxists with psychanalysis, their historical motivations and theoretical formulations, evaluating them also for their purported commonalities and reckoning with their different foundations in theory. We will finally deliberate upon a model-of-mind that can help develop Marxist theory and practice for controversies about gender and sex, mental illness, ideology and political behaviour.

This journey will take us from fundamental questions about our relationship with the external nature that constitutes our environment and the internal states that we experience as ‘natural’, through a line of conceptual development we can trace in the work of key figures in the history of psychoanalysis. Ultimately it will lead us back to the early works of Marx via the refashioning of the category of ‘repression’ as one moment in a creative dialectic. This in turn means recognising the shortcomings of the dominant ‘Marxisms’ of the Twentieth Century, and a final jettisoning of psychoanalysis as a primary theoretical platform. But at the end we arrive at a model-of-mind that is needed for Marxism.

First, we will consider the position of ‘nature’ within Marxism. This requires a distinction between the relation that human beings have with nature and the status of human ‘essence’ – what is essential to human behaviour - that results from social relationships. This will move into a discussion of dialectical perspectives on biology that are influential on the left, before offering a perspective on the old and familiar question of ‘human nature’. We will also look critically at the uses of language involved.

Second, we will survey accounts of the relationships between mind, brain and the social world, and the type of materialism needed to illuminate this topic. Also, we will discuss how Freud modelled the mind in different phases of his career. The Marxist interpretation of consciousness will be explored, also introducing the important notion of ‘first and second nature’ found within Marxism as one way in which an account of the mind can be framed.

Third, we will trace the historical interactions of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The brief rise and fall of psychoanalysis in Russia in the decade following the soviet revolution will be discussed. We will take stock of the distortions of Marxism that have suppressed the role of the active subject in history. These types of Marxism have created a need in the minds of some significant theorists to engage with psychoanalysis either to imagine liberation or to explain defeat. The ‘turn to Freud’, the ideas of the Freudo-Marxists and the influence of psychoanalysis on the New Left of the 1950s and 1960s will be considered. Finally, the impossibility of an integration of Marxism and psychoanalysis of any importance will be explained.

Fourth, we will examine an account of the human mind located within the major categories of Marxism. However, this will also be with amendments to some of its organising elements. ‘Materialism’ within Marxism for instance, will be premised upon ‘risk’ in relation to social success and survival. Crucially this will involve the principle of psychological ‘repression’ but repositioned from its more familiar place in psychoanalytical theory. This will be done via Hegelian categories that make the meaning of ‘repression’ different from its Freudian usage. The result is a ‘social materialism’ that acts as a third term mediating between the individual mind and its historical context; and one also that better illuminates the behaviour of individuals, social groups, and organisations, as well as the origins of gender and the modern meaning of sexual identity.

Altogether, and by the end we will have travelled far, stopping by some major controversies in philosophy and the human sciences. At each we will spend a little time absorbing their central questions where they are relevant, helpful or challenging for our quest. And we will do our best to answer them, before leaving with what might be of use. But our destination will be a return to where we began, but now with a different view of the questions we started with and finally equipped with the ideas and constructs we need to answer them.

# **Part I. Marxism, nature and the role of biology**

## Humans and nature

What we understand ‘mind’ to be touches on controversies within Marxism and in social movements. These have often revolved upon questions of ‘Nature’, and by implication the position of biology within Marxism. Three broad questions of relevance here are: ‘Is there a human nature that plays a role in social formation and behaviour?’; ‘Are there individual pathologies that are to some degree heritable?’; and ‘Do explanations of gender and sexuality within Marxism require a genetic element?’

Interest in the interaction between humans and nature is found in the earliest publications of Marx and Engels and continues through both of their lifeworks. In *The German Ideology* (1845) they contrasted their own understanding of this relationship to that of Ludwig Feuerbach who had counterposed nature to the human being, making it something external to human activity. For Marx and Engels this was not the case. Rather nature was worked upon and changed by human activity, by industry. Forests became sources of timber; rivers sources of power; grasslands became grazing pastures or arable land; *etc.* Nature became transformed by human labour. Only in the remotest zones could nature be said to exist untouched by human activity. But more than this, in the process of working upon nature, human essence itself became transformed. In other words, as humans worked upon nature, they changed themselves. So, whilst the entire history of human industry was seen as nothing but the ’humanisation of nature’, it was equally understood as the ‘naturalisation’ of human essence. The conceptualisation of ‘human nature’ here was not one of unchanging internal being, but one of constant conditioning and alteration throughout history, driven by the types of industry and forms of labour prevalent in any given epoch. As Marx was to put it later against Proudhon:

“ … *all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature* …"[[12]](#footnote-12)

And whilst external nature and the natural endowments of human beings provided the conditions of survival, setting the limits of human possibility, the type of society that was specific to any concrete setting was the result not of interior or exterior nature, but rather of the form of labour which had created it. Unlike Feuerbach, Marx and Engels did not see an absolute opposition of humanity and nature; humans had emerged *from* nature, changing both it and themselves simultaneously. And crucially, once again, this meant there was no intrinsic human essence - biological or otherwise - that was separate from the capacity of human beings to work upon the world or from the process of labour itself.

An illustration of this for their general anthropology is given in Engels’ 1876 essay, ‘The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man’, part of the larger work *Dialectics of Nature* first published in 1925. Engels hypothesised a developmental dialectic between the challenges and opportunities presented by nature for species survival, and the adaptive power created by the evolution of the human hand: a dialectic driven by, and simultaneously expanding, the emergent capacity of humans to work upon and so change their environment.

Both Engels and Marx were interested in the scientific progress of their time. Engels particularly kept abreast of the latest advances, and Marx acknowledged his debt to him for his scientific knowledge.[[13]](#footnote-13) Both were enthusiastic about the revolution in biology represented by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (1859). In correspondence Marx also referred to Pierre Trémaux’s *Origin and transformations of man and other beings* (1865) that anticipated the modern evolutionary theory of ‘punctuated equilibrium’. Significantly, both saw these works as representing an ‘end of teleology’ in theorisations of human pre-history that had implicitly suggested a determinism of ‘natural development’, whether understood as external and environmental or internal and bodily. This naturalising tendency was evident in the ‘progressivist’ philosophies of the Victorian era. By contrast the emphasis in Marx’s published writings particularly was based upon a dialectic *between* human society and nature, such that transformations of social being occur with changes in the character of labour.

So, whilst nature provides the conditions of human labour and whilst environmental change makes adaptation necessary, these external realities do not explain human adaptation as such. It is the capacity for labour itself that is essentially human, and that produces changes in social being. Such changes then arise from revolutions in productive technique and industry rather than emerging under the influence of biological factors, evolutionary pressures or necessary historical stages.[[14]](#footnote-14) Here the relationship between humans and nature is resolved into two aspects: the first, the interaction of humans *with* their natural environment and the material limitations it presents and resources it provides; the second, the form of labour with which humans work *upon* their natural environment to overcome those limitations and fashion those resources for subsistence.

Putting this differently, whilst humanity at every stage of pre-historical and historical development of necessity interacted with external nature, meaning that nature was always reflected in culture, the essence of a human society – the necessary social forms and relationships that sustained the group – was not determined by this interaction in a general sense. Rather this was the result of the specific form of labour and productive technique central to the group’s survival; with divisions of labour shaping the social, gender and class relations particular to that group. So, a pre-settler North American community that relied on a vegetarian diet and the cultivation of crops would develop a different social structure and internal culture to another that relied more on hunting and the cooking of meat. Despite the comparable technological capacities of each, the social relationships would vary, reflecting the different forms of labour involved: cultivators often having a settled, clan-based hierarchical social structure, a centrally defined leadership and a culture of collectivism; hunters often having a more mobile, family-band based social structure, a decentralised leadership and a culture of individual-merit. Seen in the light of this distinction, the essential character of ‘human being’ does not arise from the interaction of ‘nature’ as one set of factors with ‘society’ as another set of factors as a kind of amalgamation. Rather, it comes from the particular mode-of-production upon which it depends and that creates the ‘ensemble of the social relations’ that defines it, working as the causal principle for social structure and behaviour prior to and beneath environmental and cultural influences; this being the meaning of ‘essence’ – what is essential to a human group, explaining its cultural types and social behaviours - in Marx’s definition.

And for Marx the relationship between humanity and nature was not one of immediate contact. The interaction is constantly mediated by labour, nature always presenting a practical horizon that both obstructs and constructs our perceptions of the world and of our own human essence. Whilst there could be no unmediated knowledge of nature, equally there could be no unmediated contemplation of the self. For both Marx and Engels this was an anthropological principle that characterised the entirety of human history for as long as human existence was dominated by the struggle for survival, and within the realities of class society.

Under capitalism, whilst labour was an alienation of the worker from their labour power and its product, human *essence* – the transformative potential of creative labour – was separated from human *being* in its concrete social manifestations, and in the life of the individual. This alienation also had its corollary in the relationship between humanity and nature. The emergence of capitalist property relations, and as a direct consequence the enclosure of land and the commodification of the fruits of nature, represented a break of human beings from their natural environment. The ‘metabolic’ interaction between humans and nature had been severed, causing an estrangement of humans from their environment with social relationships now dominated by commodity fetishism. The result was the despoiling of nature through the exhaustion of soil by intensive farming for markets, and by voracious extractive capitalist industries and their waste products.

*Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance … it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil.*[[15]](#footnote-15)

For the capitalist the original state of nature was a matter of pure indifference, the object of nature valued only for its contribution to the creation of the commodity. With each round of increasingly intense capitalist competition the natural world became ever more separate from the social form of production (alienated labour), valued only as a source of power and raw materials; ‘nature’ now reworked in countless cycles of historical, economic, social and cultural change, decomposed and ultimately lost to contemporary experience. Finally, the ruination of natural environments and the destruction of ecosystems could only worsen under capitalism, and with it the debasement of human relations now subject to the predations of capitalist exploitation of both the individual worker and of nature’s gifts.[[16]](#footnote-16) Only in revolution and the establishment of communism would human essence be reunited with social being, and people with nature, as humankind achieved full actualisation of its potential as a creative species and a free historical subject.

But it is the status of the idea of a ‘human nature’ with respect to social behaviour that concerns us mostly here; in other words, the question ‘Are the social forms that organise relations between humans today the result to some degree of an unchanging natural principle found in all human societies from our earliest origins?’

## Is there a ‘human nature’?

In his *Marx and Human Nature. Refutation of a Legend* (1983),[[17]](#footnote-17) Normal Geras took Marxists to task where they maintained that Marx had rejected the idea of a ‘human nature’, pointing for their evidence to the sixth of his *Theses on Feuerbach*.

Marx’s sixth thesis runs as follows:

*Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence is hence obliged:*

1. *To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment regarded by itself, and to presuppose an abstract — isolated - human individual.*

*2. The essence therefore can by him only be regarded as ‘species’, as an inner ‘dumb’ generality which unites many individuals only in a natural way.*[[18]](#footnote-18)

Geras conducted a thorough secular exegesis to establish that this does not mean a rejection of the idea of human nature. He pointed to other passages across Marx’s works that refer to natural and enduring human characteristics. Whilst recognising the emphasis Marx places upon social relations in shaping human behaviour, Geras insisted upon his acceptance of an unchanging, nature-given set of attributes that belong to human beings in any given time or place. And he finds a normative value in the idea of human nature: a measure against which capitalism can be judged and condemned; and a way that socialism can be defended as a goal worthy of effort.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Despite Geras’ defence of a Marxist notion of human nature, the term is at best unhelpful for our understanding of human experience, and at worst is obfuscating. ‘Human nature’ is of course commonly used to ridicule the idea of socialism as a possible state of human affairs and organisation. Humans are naturally selfish, it is said, each seeks personal advantage over others, and we are naturally acquisitive, so making nonsense of the idea of a free and equal society. This wearisome usage of the phrase won’t detain us here; it is an argument dispatched daily by socialists in the normal course of their activisms and personal lives. In recent years however, a version of the idea has lurked beneath public controversy around questions of gender; and crucially the matter of self-identification by those who change theirs by declaration.

Before we look at why the notion ‘human nature’ is unhelpful for our understanding of human sex, sexuality, and gender, we will lay out the terms of this debate and their meaning.

By ‘human’ we are referring to the behaviourally modern form of *Homo sapiens* – the highly intelligent, tool-making species of the Homininae family that evolved into existence in Africa around 300,000 years ago.[[20]](#footnote-20) From this species came anatomically modern humans, possibly 160,000 years ago.[[21]](#footnote-21) And from these latter emerged humans with brains and minds that we infer to have been much like our own, perhaps 50,000 years ago, who were to migrate northwards into Europe (in the footsteps of the Neanderthals who had preceded them by 400,000 years) and eastwards into the Levant, and eventually into the Sunda region, Asia, Australia, and the Americas over the subsequent decamillennia.[[22]](#footnote-22) This was the species we know to be ourselves.

By ‘nature’ we mean aspects of reality that have not been created by human action. Such reality is the ‘given’ element of the external environments human beings have adapted to. This reality moves under physical, chemical, and biological principles, independently of human action. We do not mean here the effects of human action on the environment that they alter, but rather to an underlying material substrate. Whilst human beings can and do affect nature by their activity, they cannot create it; so, whilst plastics can be created from a natural product (oil), the chemistry involved is something that is fixed and unchanging (despite the best efforts of the alchemists from the Greco-Roman era to the European Renaissance).

And by ‘human nature’ we mean the idea that there are types of interpersonal behaviour that are historically unchanging, that we inherit from our evolutionary past and that are constitutive, in some sense at least, of what it is to be human; types of behaviour that are wholly or partly, genetic.

Geras’ logical exposition of the ‘sixth thesis’ is clear. The thesis is indeed prey to the possible interpretations that he lays out, that whilst Marx heavily emphasises the role of social factors in determining the essence of humanity, this does not preclude non-social factors *per se*. As he moved away from the dominant philosophical paradigm of his intellectual youth, Marx distinguished his own thinking on this point. Many of the great names of the European Enlightenment such as Jean-Jaques Rousseau, Johann Herder and Georg Hegel had tended strongly towards historicising discourses that understood all-things-human in terms connectedness; interconnections that is of the individual and their society, of identity and mythic pasts, and of the nation and its culture. In this Romantic Historicism, the brute realities of human need and means of survival were eclipsed, whether understood as a theoretical starting point or destination. It was against this ‘historic*ism*’ that Marx would come to contrast his and Engel’s ‘historical *materialism*’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Geras gives examples where Marx uses expressions such as ‘nature of man’ or ‘natural essence’ and so on, even if just in passing. He presents certain features as coming under the rubric of ‘human nature’, understood not as transformational potential, but rather as fixed and universal aspects of the species. We can evaluate these from the most basic material conditions for life, through to those that affect the higher needs of human beings for health and fulfilment. Following the structure employed by Geras, we will consider ‘form’, ‘metabolism’, ‘needs’, ‘instinct’, ‘behaviour’, and ‘capacities’ as the relevant biological categories for our inquiry.

Shall we begin by agreeing that the human form is of the bipedal, upright standing, bilaterally symmetrical type? Variations occur because of injury or accidents of birth. The normalising of the human body has an ideological aspect. And conditions such as amelia (the absence of limbs) and polymelia (having extra limbs) arise from a range of chromosomal, hormonal, and environmental causes. However, we are talking now of the global human form as it has developed over evolutionary spans of time, covering the transition from its pre-historical origins to the modern day, and understood in terms of its most general and recognised characteristics.

With respect to ‘metabolism’, shall we also agree that the human being is an omnivorous creature, adapted to consuming many types of vegetation and meat; this having been important for the adaptability of the earliest Hominini to a wide range of environments, and their ability to migrate across continents? Certain vitamins are essential to the human diet; and there are specific requirements also for minerals that are important for metabolic and immunological processes. Again, there are variations: the non-functionality of the gene responsible for aldehyde dehydrogenase in some Asian populations; metabolic disorders linked to ethnicity; *etc*. Still, variations notwithstanding, there remains an obvious general conformity of human metabolism.

With respect to both form and metabolism (and discounting the potential of hybridising technologies, artificial intelligence and cyborgism that move us towards futuristic speculation), we are talking of attributes that have not changed for epochs. These are the constant features of our species. Some are aspects of our mammalian, animal nature. Others have been consequential for our evolution, creating the template for pre-human and early human development; this is true of some aspects of diet with respect to brain development, and of bipedalism for the freeing of the forelimbs and the evolution of the hand. This latter factor was an essential co-requisite for the emergence of hominin tool-use as early as 3.4 million years ago.[[24]](#footnote-24) Also in this ancient archaeological record, there is the first evidence of the neurophysiological basis for language capacity, in the form of the Brocca and Wernicke speech areas that appear in skull endocasts of *Homo habilis*.[[25]](#footnote-25) These aspects of the corporeal form and brain structure of the Homo genus created the biological template for the emergence of modern humans.[[26]](#footnote-26) These types of characteristic and others like them are consequential features of form, structure and physiology that create our human potential and set its physical boundaries.

This range is true also at the chemical scale: whilst the possession of DNA polymerase is a characteristic of all cellular life, and cytochrome oxidase is necessary to all aerobic organisms, the possession of the genes that code for the endorphins, vasopressins and other hormones associated with mood and affective states are important only for social animals. From these observations we can resolve our species specific biological inheritance into characteristics of the ‘animal’ type necessary for life, and those of the ‘consequential’ type - consequential that is, for the emergence of human intelligence and social structure.

Turning our attention to ‘needs’, we also find a range of types. Here we should separate out obvious basic needs from higher social needs shared by all humans - as does Geras. Of course, we need a stable supply of food that provides us with the right combinations of food groups, vitamins, and minerals. The child of a woman who was undernourished during pregnancy may be born with defective brain development that will affect its intelligence. We need shelter, warmth and protection from the elements and the vagaries of climate. To function we need to be free from infection and disease. With respect to sex, although a highly enculturated area, there are physical urges involved and a need to successfully reproduce for the continuation of the group. All these basic needs, and their fulfilment or otherwise, occur in a social context; all are socially mediated. However, as Geras emphasises, they remain obvious physical requirements for human survival. Considering higher social needs there is the need for human conviviality, playfulness, inventiveness, varieties of consumption and of work, intellectual stimulation, and so on.

Marx explores this distinction between basic and higher needs in his account of the emergence of consciousness and of ‘history’ in the *German Ideology* (1845). In a passage aimed at the speculative philosophies still fashionable at the German universities, he outlines four ‘moments’ that must occur before human consciousness, and therefore human history, become possible. The first is meeting the most basic needs for human survival. The second concerns the emergence of ‘new’, higher needs as the first are met. The third is the need to reproduce the next generation. This last need differentiates into sexual reproduction in its dual aspect: as a natural relationship; and as a social relationship. Only once these four moments are complete can consciousness emerge, firstly as group-, or ‘herd’-consciousness, and then, as productive technique advances and divisions of manual and mental labour emerge, in the form of ideologies, philosophies, theoretical systems, ethics and so on: in other words as historical consciousness.[[27]](#footnote-27) Here we see references to natural and biological factors that contribute to the emerging capacity of human beings for culture. However, Marx is clear: ‘history’ itself begins only when humans move beyond their origins in nature.

And what of ‘instinct’ and human behaviour? In daily tropes we hear often that behaviour is ‘natural’, a part of our fundamental make-up. We are told - in crude and explicit ways by tabloid newspapers and street common-sense, and in the more subtle messaging of ministerial speechmakers, educational curricula and some types of popular science - that human beings are inclined towards selfishness, competition and personal opportunism. Moreover, individuals can feel this within themselves, taking it to be natural. The logic of these ubiquitous sentiments and viewpoints can be based upon observations of, and assumptions about, animal behaviour. We behave instinctively, we are asked to believe, because this is our animal make-up. Our sexual behaviour apparently is the result of our evolutionary past, and something we share with higher animals.[[28]](#footnote-28) The ethologist Konrad Lorenz[[29]](#footnote-29) argued that aggression had emerged as a positive group-binding attribute of social animals, transferred by the phylogenetic evolution of instincts into human behaviour. Influenced by Freud’s libido-cathexis model, Lorenz argued that aggressivity accumulates up to the point where it is discharged, either literally in intra-species aggression, or in ritualised behaviour.[[30]](#footnote-30) For Lorenz, observable and consistent ‘behaviour patters’ found in animals have been carried by evolutionary trends into the human species. Another mechanism is suggested by the ‘Baldwin Effect’ discussed by Dennett (1991), by which advantageous phenotypic social behaviours may become selected for, to become ‘hard-wired’ into the animal as heritable instinctual traits.

But what is ‘instinct’? By ‘instinct’, we mean behaviours that have a predictable character and are innate to a species. Such set behaviours are often in response to different kinds of stimulus, such as threats, feeding opportunities or seasonal cycles. The behaviours of the males and females of a species will revolve around breeding times and the protection of the young. Hierarchical behaviours will be evident in the group dynamics of social animals. These are the kinds of patterns that arguments for a ‘human nature’ position will appeal to, as telling us something about ourselves. It is also the stuff of the Disneyesque anthropomorphisms of popular entertainment; and even explains the fondness that we have for our pets. However, the use of animal, instinct-based behaviour as a template to understand human behaviour makes little sense.

Firstly, ‘instinct’ is not only species-specific; concomitantly it is usually environment-specific. This means that the instinctive behaviour of an animal is what suits it to its biome. In a stable ecosystem of predator-prey relationships, biotic and abiotic substrata, and seasonality there is a regularity in the life of the animal to which its instincts have adapted it. Of course, there is also animal learning, which may enable the adult animal to distinguish between the edible and the non-edible, the poisonous and the non-poisonous, places of exposure to danger and places of safety, and so on. In artificial environments however, animal intelligence does not rise above the level of elementary tool-use and puzzle-solving in multi-stage tests. A very small range of animal species have become town and city dwellers, where they can transfer their instinctive behaviours to environments that in some essential ways resemble those of their long-lost environmental origins. And animals that have a social structure in the wild, may indeed transfer their bonding instinct to their human keepers. Some domestic pets will devote themselves to loving owners, echoing a distant evolutionary past of hierarchical group dynamics. By contrast, human beings not only adapt to almost every type of environment on Earth but also alter them by their activity. And crucially the ‘instincts’ humans experience as natural will change according to how they work upon their material environment. Seen in this light, comparing human behaviour to that of animals has no explanatory value at all.

Secondly, similarities in the outward behaviours of human beings with those of animals do not evidence that they are the same phenomena. A basic evolutionary principle illustrates the point. Convergent evolution of phenotypic characteristics can belie different evolutionary routes to the same adaptive solution in different species. This is truer still when we compare human behaviour to that of higher mammals. If we do see similarities between group dynamics of higher primates for instance and human social behaviour, this is not evidence of a common stock of genetic drivers. In some human cultures, animal behaviours may be replicated, or mimicked, in rituals. Human beings may ‘make-sense’ of their own behaviour by analogous reference to animals they have a close relationship with. Ideological forms may travel into modern life as historical ‘hangovers’ from earlier societies based upon farming. In zoomorphic fashion individuals and social groups can act into ideological roles that take animal behaviour as their rationalisations. And human behaviour can be degraded into types that we describe as animalistic, or bestial, because of various kinds of immiseration and brutalisation. In each case, whilst the outward form of the behaviour may suggest sameness, the underlying motivations and drives will be different for humans and for animals.

This can be true also of human traits across the span of human history - modern and ancient. So, the avarice for which “ships are rigg’d, Seas travers’d, and fierce battles waged”[[31]](#footnote-31) has a meaning that belongs to the 8th Century Homeric period. It is the avarice of tribal aristocracies of the ancient world, based upon the conquest of lands and the subjugation of entire peoples to slavery. This is different to the avarice of the modern financier speculating wildly on the money-markets of modern capitalism. In both cases the individual may seek to enrich themselves without limit. However, the modes of production and consumption are different, and the economic, social, and cultural dynamics are particular to each. The ‘avarice’ in question then, is the effect of these dynamics, not their cause. What is continuous is the word itself; its historical meaning different in each case.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Distinguishing the modern expression of a human attribute from its prehistoric form is also important where neural priming is associated with outward behaviours. Such ‘dispositions’, and the nascent neural networks accompanying them, can appear as instincts *in potentia*, awaiting their environmental triggers. However, our perceptual cognition of the bodily sensations involved have been churned through countless historical re-compositions, remoulded each time not from primal urges - that are lost in the distance we have travelled from our hominid ancestry - but from their immediately preceding cultural versions. Their meaning no longer lies in an original animal purpose but rather in the dense cultural, social, institutional and industrial systems of capitalism. And the inward determinations driving them are no longer rooted in nature but in contemporary ideological fields.

Finally, there are human capacities. This is something that Geras makes central to his case. He argues that the needs humans have for variety of activity and for the free play of creative faculties, are trans-historical continuities, and can be found in all human cultures.

*Extant amongst his preoccupations, finally, is ‘the worker’s own need for development’: therefore the time available for ‘the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind’: and a variety of pursuit – for ‘a man’s vital forces … find recreation and delight,’ Marx says ‘in change of activity’.*[[33]](#footnote-33)

Where these kinds of higher need are denied and repressed, as they are for most in class society, there also are human beings found in their most unhappy states. Geras points to many quotations from Marx that express a rage at capitalism for the distorting effect it has upon human life and development.

The model-of-mind that will be proposed later in fact goes much further than Geras on the question of the variability of the human mind, and how it configures itself into specific modes-of-mind. Crucial to this is the proposition that the human mind is capable of fantastic adaptability; that in its general range of possible expressions it is far from fixed. Only with the emergence of specific modes-of-mind does the human mind become fixed in its underlying structure.

Further to the point, this characterisation of the human mind suggests a continuation across the span of human existence. And on this point Geras is right: this aspect of humanity is indeed an enduring constant, found in every type of society. However, it does not follow that the idea of a ‘human nature’ finds any sensible application in understanding specific human behaviours at the levels of the individual or of the group. As we will explore in more depth later, this is because the constant is one of ‘capacity’ only in the most general sense. ‘Mind’ *per se* is an inferred object, the limit to a concrete analysis of any given type of mind; its totality always greater than its specific aspects. It provides the medium for the mental structure belonging to a society: the mode-of-mind that rises from it. The capacity-*for*-mind, or the model-*of*-mind, that we infer is always an abstraction.

And what of the term ‘human nature’? We have seen that Geras’ uses it with several meanings connected with biochemistry, biophysics, basic (animal) needs, behaviour, instinct, higher (human) needs, and human capacities. Some of these are obviously basic material aspects of human life. However, as we ascend from organic forces, through the basic animal functions and upwards, we arrive at aspects of human life that cannot be so straightforwardly categorised. So, human behaviour may show outward similarities with some animal behaviours without there being any substantive commonality. The term ‘instinct’ with its meaning rooted in the specific stimulus-response reflexes of animals in their habitats, cannot be properly applied to human beings who alter their environment by consciously working upon it, or by migration. The fact that ‘human nature’ is used to cover this range of meanings, gives it the character of an overdetermined phrase; and one moreover that is saturated with ideology.

It is when we come to human capacities that Geras’ argument for the idea of human nature is most problematic. Where we are addressing capacity created by the neurophysiology of the brain the picture is one of steadily advancing brain sciences. We know for instance that the human connectome – its neurological map – possesses 33 specifically human connections that are peculiar in their length, connecting many parts of the brain that in other primates are unconnected.[[34]](#footnote-34) This super-interconnectedness helps make possible the higher reasoning that is beyond even our cleverest cousins in the animal kingdom. We can also consider here the endocrinal capacity for subtle and wide-ranging emotion, for the communication of feeling in speech and nuances of facial expression, and for social reciprocity.[[35]](#footnote-35)

However, the significance of the biophysical substrate enabling flexibilities of thought and imagination is that it lifts humans out of restrictive behavioural structures. It makes possible the overcoming of fixity and the breaching of previous limitations. The capacity it provides supports a mental form that enables culture to emerge, and the ability of humans to adapt and to change.

Beyond brain substrate, this is a necessarily abstract construct that enables concrete configurations of mind, giving it a strange and unique ontological status. So, it is the (abstract) continuity (model-of-mind) that makes possible the (concrete) discontinuity (mode-of-mind). It is this general human capacity that enables vast social and cultural variety, and that has allowed human beings to proliferate so spectacularly. To include this characteristic of the human species under the rubric of ‘nature’ with its connotations of fixity and limitation, is to stretch its application to a vanishing point. If the essence of humanity is its ability to change reality, then the meaning of ‘human nature’ with the usage that Geras insists upon, can only oppose the idea of fixed reality: its meaning in this context is more one of ‘anti-nature’, and the overcoming of limitation. Human capacity does indeed represent a constant; however, it is one that provides the potential for human beings to work upon nature, in a process of reciprocal transformation. It does not support the notion of an unchanging essence, but rather of the capacity of human beings to re-define the natural limitations of their environment and of themselves. It is a feature of the general human condition, but it is not an example of ‘human nature’, because that is an illogical coupling and a false category, unamenable to any specific content.

## The ‘biological’ and the ‘social’

Under our alternative framing of these topics, we will put aside ‘human nature’ as a term that is logically incoherent, empirically obfuscating and irretrievably ideological. However, there is a related topic that requires attention before considering a Marxist model-of-mind. This is the matter of genetics and human behaviour. Here we arrive at the most ideological and political aspect of this discussion; and its central proposition: ‘There are no specific types of social behaviour to which we are biologically pre-disposed.’

Maintaining this position demands two preliminary things: an account of the ideological aspects of ‘biology’ itself as a scientific discipline; and an acknowledgment of the ways in which biology is used ideologically to rationalise and justify existing social norms.

In their *The Dialectical Biologist* (1985),[[36]](#footnote-36) Lewontin and Lewin critique what they call the ‘alienated world’ of biology (and science, generally) that prevails under capitalism. The conceptualisations that characterise biology in this paradigm are based upon: the framing of the ‘object-of-study’ as static, self-enclosed and homogeneous; the analytical separation of organism and environment; and a unidirectional idea of causality ascending from gene to organism. In a dialectical view of biology, organisms and the components of life supporting them, are understood developmentally, as always changing in time. They are heterogenous and defined as much by dynamic tensions within them, as they are by the physical boundaries that demarcate them from their surroundings. Also, the distinction between organism and environment is not absolute; rather these are inter-penetrating and mutually co-dependent. Finally, in the dialectical conceptualisation of life, many levels of reality are in constant and multi-directional causal relationship with one another. Lewontin and Lewin summarise this dialectical understanding in five aspects which are: historicity; universal interconnection; heterogeneity; interpenetration of opposites; and integrative levels.[[37]](#footnote-37)

This means that the organism defines its ‘environment’. As Lewontin (2000) explains:

*Just as there can be no organism without an environment, so there can be no environment without an organism. There is a confusion between the correct assertion that there is a physical world outside of an organism that would continue to exist in the absence of the species, and the incorrect claim that environments exist without species. The earth will precess on its axis, and produce periodic glacial and interglacial ages, volcanoes will erupt, evaporation from oceans will result in rain and snow, independent of any living beings. But glacial streams, volcanic ash deposits, and pools of water are not environments. They are physical conditions from which environments may be built. An* environment *is something that surrounds or encircles, but for there to be a surrounding there must be something at the centre to be surrounded. The* environment *of an organism is the penumbra of external conditions that are relevant to it because it has effective interactions with those aspects of the outer world.*[[38]](#footnote-38)

Moreover, all species by their activity alter their habitats. The relationship is normally one of interpenetration, rather than the interaction of otherwise internally unrelated entities; in other words, it is one of mutual and interdependent change. So, the organism and its environment are each constantly influencing and changing the other. The activity of an organism over time will influence biotic factors such as ecological balances, predator-prey relationships, food-chains, *etc.* and abiotic factors such as soil pH, water turbidity, rock surfaces, *etc.* Lewontin describes this view of the relationship between an organism and its environment as *constructionist*; as opposed to its conventional characterisation as *adaptionist* in popular evolutionary theory.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The ‘alienated’ framing of biology is intrinsic to its ideological *use*. In *Not in Our Genes* (1984),[[40]](#footnote-40) and moving now to the human significance of biology, Rose, Lewontin and Kamin critique the popular idea that genetics provides an adequate basis for explanations of society. Traversing the topics of social inequality, intelligence, patriarchy, and mental illness, and targeting particularly ‘sociobiology’, they reject all theoretical attempts to reduce social structure to biological factors, and effectively so.[[41]](#footnote-41)

One part of their argument is that there are ‘levels of explanation’, each with their own appropriate and proportionate ontologies, scientific methodologies, and theoretical focuses. At each level, biological factors belong to, and become manifest through, a proximal environment that mediates their consequences in the world. So, the gene does not determine anything alone. Rather it operates, often in combination with other genes, within an enzymic environment upon which it relies for its expression. So too the cell, in higher, multi-cellular organisms works within an environment of biochemical nutrients, thermal conditions, and hormonal regulators. This logic can of course continue through many such levels: organs; organ systems; the body in its biotic and abiotic environment; the individual animal in its social group; the human being in their gens, their familial group, their tribe, *etc*; the social group in its larger society; and so on. No single level can be causally reduced to the level ‘beneath’ it in a simple manner. Rather each has its own laws of motion and material interaction. Moreover, although these levels may be separated analytically for the purpose of scientific scrutiny, they all work at once, in a total process that is vastly complex; creating a ‘web of reciprocal determination’.[[42]](#footnote-42) The notion that ‘a gene’ or even the human genetic substrate, can ‘determine’ events at the level of the individual, let alone society, acting through all these differentiated domains, stretches credulity beyond breaking point. It is not a feasible proposition.

More concretely, we should note that the relationship between an organism and its environment is not a causally equal one. An organism’s environment is resistant to the change it effects upon it; in most cases it will change slowly, often over enormous spans of time. As the species evolves features of its environment can eventually become altered by its activity - in combination with great forces of geological and climatic change - as its resistant properties give way to the long-term effects of the prevailing flora and fauna.[[43]](#footnote-43) The dependencies involved are asymmetrical: living organisms *depend* upon their environment whilst also changing it. Abrupt changes to the environment such as ice-ages and hot-ages also make this clear in the reverse sense, with the disappearance of entire ecosystems from the fossil record.

In the case of human beings this environmental resistance has led to both innovation and migration. So, whilst animals survive with behavioural instincts that tie them closely to their habitats, humans alter their habits and unconscious behaviour to conquer new environments through intelligent adaptation.[[44]](#footnote-44) And human evolution has meant the ability to adapt to a huge variety of environments; something made possible by the replacing of instinct by intelligence and social organisation.

A second component to this critique of genetic reductionism lies in causal direction. In reductionist accounts, this travels from the genetic level ‘up’ to animal behaviour; the behaviour being its result. With respect to human behaviour what such theoretical models do not recognise, and something that Rose *et al.* emphasise, is that causality also moves in the opposite direction. This follows from the ‘levels of explanation’ in their theoretical framing of ‘biology’. So, whilst the expression of a human gene may alter its immediate environment by protein synthesis, nutritional status for example will alter the chemical environment of the gene itself, potentially influencing its expression in absolute or relative terms. Causality can and does work from the level of the individual or social group as they interact with the external environment, ‘down’ to organs, cells, and chromosomes.

Rose *et al.*’s framing however, is not that of ‘interactionism’; rather it is one of mutual transformation of organism and environment. This is especially the case for explanations of human behaviour. Their argument is not that any given behaviour, for example sexual behaviour, is influenced partly by biological factors and partly by societal factors, interacting to produce outwardly observable traits. Instead, these are seen as co-determining of one another; each an aspect of a unified reality, and human behaviour being simultaneously both biological and social. This ‘dialectical determinism’ is the principal conclusion they reach. Moreover, it rejects all reductionism, cultural as well as biological. Their final chapter includes this observation that is directly pertinent to the task of developing a Marxist model-of-mind:

*What is true of the organism in general is all the more accentuated in human psychic development. At every instant the developing mind, which is a consequence of the sequence of past experiences and of internal biological conditions, is engaged in a recreation of the world with which it interacts. There is a mental world, the world of perceptions, to which the mind reacts, which at the same time is a world created by the mind.* […]

*Further, our behaviour in response to that self-created mental world recreates the objective world that surrounds us. If we perceive others to be constantly hostile to us and behave toward them as if they were hostile, they indeed become so, and the perception becomes reality. As a child develops, its psychic environment comes into being partly as a consequence of its own behaviour.*[[45]](#footnote-45)

This dialectical use of biology in understanding human behaviour complements the Marxist model-of-mind, but at the general level only, and in relation to the capacity-for-mind that must be its starting point. The capacity for a general model-of-mind and its neurodivergent varieties of course is supported by a stock of chromosomal inheritance. And for Rose *et al*., whilst acknowledging evolutionary constraints - language capacity, sexual reproduction, basic cognitive architecture, *etc.* - biology is always mediated by social and cultural factors.

However, we will see that our proposed model-of-mind goes much further than this insofar as ‘the biological’ is pushed into the most abstract category of ‘capacity’ with respect to social behaviour. It also goes beyond ‘mediation’ in its normal usage that implies an equivalence of effect between biological and cultural forces, and that remains silent on the question of their respective causal ‘weighting’. Furthermore, it allows for a type of ‘meta-mediation’ by which already mediated bodily sensations are re-presented in thought as ‘natural’. And here the ideologies involved are always pernicious, intended to maintain or restore oppressive social codes, patriarchies and subaltern positions.

So, our general position here is that whilst the biological element – interpenetrating with social factors - provides the neuro-physical and anatomical possibilities of human activity, it does not itself explain any form of social behaviour. And it is the specific formation of social behaviour within a given type of society which is our interest.

Human society, industry and culture naturally have their corporeal substrate. Form and physiology set the parameters to human evolution and historical development. As Lewontin (1991) entertainingly points out, the six-inch tall Lilliputians of *Gulliver’s Travels* could not have smelted iron, mined minerals with miniature pickaxes, sustained fire with tiny twigs or mined to extract ores. Indeed, their tiny brains, he goes on, would not have been capable of even conceiving of such things.[[46]](#footnote-46) Whatever disservice Lewontin may be doing here to the intellects of the fictional inhabitants of Lilliput, his serious point is of course correct. Our technological achievements may overcome our biological limitations; but they do not eliminate them.

However, biological categories do not give human activity its social meaning. In other words, whilst our biology provides the most general potential for mental life, it does not create mental content all of which, it will be argued here, is attributable to social, cultural, and institutional structures and processes. Whilst all thought is ultimately the matter-in-motion that is the neuronal activity of the brain, as well as the physiological processes operating at higher levels of brain organisation, the question is whether this is the origin of any particular interpersonal behaviour, the result of genetic inheritance. Leaving this question open creates a theoretical slipperiness that doesn’t resolve the position of ‘the biological’ as a factor, allowing it to float free in the debate.

The task of dealing with the ‘biological’ factor then is not exhausted. To explore this point, we will go to Lewontin and Levins (2007), where they identify a space within a false polarisation of biological reductionism on the one hand, and social constructionism on the other.

*For determinism, all social phenomena are merely the collective manifestation of individual fixed propensities and limitations coded in human genes as a consequence of adaptive evolution. At the opposite pole, subjectivity claims that all human realities are created by socially determined consciousness, unconstrained by any prior, biological or physical nature, all points of view being equally valid.*[[47]](#footnote-47)

They fill this gap with their ‘dialectical determinist’ conceptualisation of the relationship between biology and society. And there are many areas where this is a cogent ‘third term’ between the two, for example for certain physical- and mental-health outcomes at the individual and statistical levels; poor health status obviously interacting with social circumstance. This is also true of body form. So, whilst gendered behaviour can be located within the cultural fields that create it, it will itself have consequences for the body *via* behavioural feedback loops. Diet, exercise, economic roles and lifestyle choices can have a continuous effect on musculature, motor control, fat distribution, and posture. These in their turn will reinforce gendered identities, resulting in outcomes that are essentially biocultural.[[48]](#footnote-48) However, in this example, the outcome is not a result of ‘genetics and society’, commonly understood as an interplay between equivalent factors. Rather the process originates in society, where its primary drivers are located, the influence of behaviour being a secondary or proximal cause, rather than primary or substantive, within a larger dialectic.

For behavioural categories *per se* then, for example sexual, within Lewontin et al’s perspective, biology remains as a primary determinant, albeit acting in concert with social structure.

*Whereas human sociality is itself a consequence of our received biology, human biology is a socialized biology.*[[49]](#footnote-49)

However, the extension of ‘socialised biology’ into human behaviour here is only necessary because of the theoretical lacuna that persists in this framework; a space left still unfilled between drives that we experience as ‘natural’ and behaviours we consciously choose. A view of social construction that differentiates between overt and obvious social influences, and unconscious and concealed forms of social determination can complete this task.

Biology sets limits for, and is intrinsic to, social being at the level of general capacity. However, the notion that any specific behaviour ~~is~~ originates in biology is rooted in the explanatory gap between the individual and society. A Marxist model-of-mind, and the risk-based social materialism this supports, can help here, suggesting a differentiated notion of social determination and a behavioural substrate that we experience spontaneously, making such appeals to biology, albeit dialectical biology – or the scientifically agnostic position of ‘We don’t know’ – unnecessary. So, whilst we may experience biological identifications, such as ‘male’ and ‘female’, to be ‘always there’ and within us, they are not the universal categories they seem. Nor are they where the explanations of our inter-personal behaviours ultimately lie, or the real source of their social and personal meaning.

## The problem of language

We have just surveyed a range of arguments and positions on questions of ‘nature’, ‘human nature; and ‘biology’. For that we required definitions of key words that were needed to achieve clarity and to aid the resolution of the questions at hand. This points to a problem of language that we will address here before going any further with our main endeavour – to find explanations of behavioural forms that do not include biology as an explanatory element. This is important for our approach to a range of debates about identity and personal expression in contemporary society. So, before we proceed with our treatment of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ for example we would be wise to define our terms. We will begin however with an overview of the problem of language itself in rhetoric and political debate.

In *Protagoras* the eponymous rhetorician of Plato’s play employs the method of ‘orthoepeia’ in his teaching: the use of words with their exact meaning.[[50]](#footnote-50) But words can be deceiving, as Protagoras knew well with the crowd-pleasing sophistries he encouraged his young law students to use. This is because a word can have a transitive character, its meaning going beyond its formal designation as it is used in public discourse and debate.

The cultural Marxist Raymond Williams called this a ‘problem of vocabulary’.[[51]](#footnote-51) By this he meant two things. Firstly, that the meaning of a word can change over time, even to mean its opposite compared to its original usage. In *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society*’ (1976) he chose a hundred words commonly used in political and critical discourses to interrogate. One was ‘positivist’. This had been coined in the 1830s by the sociologist Auguste Comte as part of the new rationalist science of society, supporting the establishment of the secular French state. By William’s own time however, the word had become pejorative, used to describe a naïve empiricism by which ‘facts’ are treated uncritically as given, with no further scrutiny of the cultural load they bring with them. Secondly, Williams observes that words do not appear in isolation; rather in relation to other words - in ‘clusters’. For this he gives the example of ‘culture/art/industry/democracy/class’. These habitual groupings he says occur within ‘fields of meaning’, their uses overlapping and often sliding into one another in ways that again demand vigilance about how they are used in debate.

In *One Dimensional Man* (1964) Herbert Marcuse provides us with a syntax of a type of language that conceals its ‘object’. This type of language – ‘one dimensional language’ – is constituted by an ‘identification’ of the fact behind the word separately from the transitive meanings of the word itself. This allows for opposing meanings to be unified in the common usage of the word. And so, the linguistic and cognitive aspects required for a proper evaluation of the meaning of the word and its truth value are removed. As he puts it:

*“In this behavioural universe, words and concepts tend to coincide … the concept tends to be absorbed by the word.”[[52]](#footnote-52)*

In a process Marcuse calls ‘abridgment’ the transitive meaning of the word is suppressed. The formal designation of the word now eclipses wider meaning with a restricted definition which is dominant. The phrases that employ the word also become skewed towards a narrative in which opposites are compressed and tensions eradicated beneath a singular declaration.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Marcuse was commenting particularly on the political narratives of western political propaganda. However, his illustrations are helpful for our purpose. As he says, military spending allegedly justified by the defence of the ‘free world’ was based upon wage slavery. And the ‘peace’ of the West meant living always on the precipice of war.

*“This language speaks in constructions which impose upon the recipient the slanted and abridged meaning, the blocked development of content, the acceptance of that which is offered in the form in which it is offered”.*[[54]](#footnote-54)

From this point Marcuse moves his analysis into a deeper consideration of the ways in which linguistic forms shape our cognition. The significance of the concealing constructions of language here was epistemological. This was especially the case for methodologies and categorisations within the social sciences. Marcuse pointed to what he described as the ‘Research of Total Administration’. This meant that the linguistic techniques he identified produced a social science framed within the parameters of existing class-relations. The concepts used are then gutted of any critical content, the methodologies employed creating their own ‘objects-of-study’ based upon ‘false concretisation’.

This latter concept – ‘false concretisation’ – is useful for our project. It develops the idea already touched upon, that a fact is never simply a fact. This is especially true when it is about some type of human expression. It comes always with a context, existing within a near-world of other facts, having a history and a potential, and changing as it is studied.[[55]](#footnote-55)

We can make a final comment on this topic by considering the critical reflections of the Marxist Louis Althusser. In his discussion of political economy in *Reading Capital* (1970), that he co-authored with Etienne Balibar, Althusser described how the play of language obscures a theoretically consequential distinction between the object as it exists in the world and the object as it exists within the mind. This observation was made for an exploration of the way in which bourgeois economists would analyse types of value (land value, rent etc.) rather than value itself in their studies of capitalism. In-so-doing they worked (once more) within an empiricist paradigm in which more fundamental questions about capital remained unresolved.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Later we will be considering ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ as categories in theory and social practice. And so, the critical reflections on language here are important. Let us take a brief look at the most contested of these: sex. Scrutiny of the category, and of the word, quickly reveals that its meaning is not homogeneous. Indeed, it covers a multitude of usages. We will list some here: chromosomal sex (‘XX’, ‘XY’ and intersex variants); sex-organs; primary sexual characteristics; secondary sexual characteristics; sex as a range of specific acts; sexual endocrinology; sexual behaviour; sexual identity; sexual culture; uses of sex; and so on. Of these, only chromosomal sex and (today) internal sex-organs are beyond change or adaptation. So, when we ask ‘What is sex’ we need to define what exactly we mean by our question if we wish to avoid causing confusion by our answer. And for our general purpose we need to disaggregate and clarify our language as we survey our broader terrain.

# **Part II. Theorising the mind**

## The reality of ‘the mind’

There is an important question for us to address before we move on to what a Marxist model-of-mind might be. This is to ask, ‘Can we consider the stable self as something real?’ B. F. Skinner in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1972) casts the notion of an interior self as a relic of medieval notions of vital forces and animal spirits. For theoretical purposes, the positing of ‘inner man’ (*sic*) for Skinner achieves no more than a filling of explanatory gaps; an analytical dead-end. In the pursuit of an account of human behaviour that uses only externally observable traits, he recommends that we shake-off the ‘autonomous man’ within, living on in the ‘literatures of freedom and dignity’.

*His abolition has long been overdue. Autonomous man is a device used to explain what we cannot explain in any other way. He has been constructed from our ignorance, and as our understanding increases, the very stuff of which he is composed vanishes. Science does not dehumanize man, it de-homunculizes him, and it must do so if it is to prevent the abolition of the human species. To man* qua *man we readily say good riddance.[[57]](#footnote-57)*

Another influential version of this rejection of an authentic human self came in Daniel Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* (1991). Dennett subjected the idea of ‘mind’ itself to a sustained critique in favour of replacement by a computational model of mental processes. He rejected *tout court* the Cartesian Theatre; a focused self that controls the psychology of the person and orients them in the world. Instead, cognition and what we experience as ‘consciousness’, were the result of ‘multiple drafts’, internal narratives that rival one another. Moreover, in this framing there was no ‘Central Meaner’ that can adjudicate between these competing drafts. Those that became dominant by continuous testing and re-testing against reality (recalling Skinner’s Operant Conditioning), emerged as winners that achieved a metaphorical ‘fame’ as they organised mental horizons. In the spirit of Ryle, Dennett said that what we experience as ‘mind’ is no more than the end result of a process of Narrative Editing in which the mental representations we believe to be our own creations, are in fact the end-product of a chain of events in the brain. Dennett’s position was an ‘eliminative materialism’ that rejected the concept of consciousness itself, making it an effect of material events of which we are not, and cannot be conscious. ‘The mind’, for Dennett did not exist as a coherent theoretical construct, nor indeed an existent entity.

What these philosophical dismissals of ‘the self’ and ‘the mind’ – and, by implication, ‘the subject’ (for Marx), and ‘the ego’ (for Freud) – have in common is an underlying mechanistic paradigm that seeks to establish the brain as the cause of all mental processes. So, an idea, a mental representation, an emotional state, must each be explained by the electro-chemical events and neuronal networks associated with them. The causal logic travels from brain to mind, or what we experience as mind. Moreover, within this way of seeing things, for a mental phenomenon or psychological trait to be treated as amenable to objective study and worthy of scientific analysis, it must at least in principle be locatable as a structure or an event in the brain. If is not, then it does not exist, except as a psychical deception or an illusory artefact.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Whilst no Cartesian dualism of material and mental substance is suggested here, there is a reversal to this logic that is being proposed as an alternative (and better) conceptualisation. This has two aspects: causal direction; and absolute and relative ontological status.

Firstly, the matter of causal direction. As we have seen, in this mechanical model brain is posited as the cause of mind. This is taken to be axiomatic and incontrovertible. However, it is not. We can also say, ‘Mind is the cause of brain’. This may seem a casual abandonment of materialism, and a wild jump into idealism. Again, it is not. Mind is of course something that happens in the brain, and that cannot exist without billions of neuronal ganglia, connections, and pathways. Indeed, with each advance in neural imaging and electroencephalography we come to have an increasingly detailed understanding of the ways in which brain structure and function enables the general capacity for mind. Roaming glial cell for instance, once understood to be of secondary significance, and as having an auxiliary function to the important work of the neurones themselves, may contribute to human intelligence.[[59]](#footnote-59) Brain activity is now also thought to display non-linear, ‘fractal’ dynamics that may account for creativity, imagination and the swiftness of our mental responses to changes in our immediate environment.[[60]](#footnote-60) Consciousness itself may be distributed throughout the brain, rather than occurring in a structural centre. And it may be that the interactive dynamics of consciousness and ‘the unconscious’ in the Freudian sense, is enabled by the neuronal networks that have been observed connecting the pre-frontal cortex to the amygdala-limbic system within the deep structure of the brain.[[61]](#footnote-61)

However, this steadily improving - though still speculative - picture of how the brain works continues to leave open the question of the location of the causes that drive neuronal processes. The causes of the nervous pathways associated with social behaviours – their growth and their moment-to-moment activity – still need not reside in the brain itself. In this sense we have not progressed from the point that Freud reached when he moved away from the mechanistic scientific paradigm towards symbolic theory.

Rejecting neuronal ‘mechanism’ as a paradigm, we instead locate our explanations of the specific aspects of consciousness in society, in the social interactions of the person, mediated by their memories, identities, tastes, biography, culture and so on, and those of the others with whom they share a social world and who form the ‘audience’ for their selfhood. If this, we call ‘mind’ (perhaps ‘outward mind’) - something that happensin the higher cortex of the brain under the stimulus of social interaction (its cause) - then we can hypothesise its role in moulding the deeper processes of the brain into neural structures that become fixed as our historical mode-of-mind (perhaps ‘inward mind’). Linguistic processes may then play an important role in fixing these constructions into a stable mental architecture. However they are established, they are then active in the continuous processing of the stream of information constantly entering the person’s experiential and perceptual fields. And so, the social structure into which the person grows, the instruction they receive, and the learning that results provide the creative impetus towards enduring cognitive and affective systems. From this vantage-point, it is ‘mind’ (the cerebral-cortical correlates of conscious social life) that is the primary cause of the deeper neural structuring of the brain in its historical context; and not the other way around.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Secondly, the matter of ontological status. In the Dennettian model, only the neuronal events that produce the mental processes we call ‘mind’ are substantively real. The ‘drafts’ that compete with one another for dominance have an agency of their own that does not require any supervening consciousness to function. What we call our ‘mind’ then, is no more than an effect of underlying processes that are doing the ‘thinking’, responding to stimuli, and navigating in the objective world that we believe (falsely) our ‘selves’ to be doing. We are zombies; complicated zombies, but zombies nonetheless. We do not steer ourselves in the world, we are steered; we do not think, we are thought. Such a robotised (and nihilistic) account of human consciousness comes from the idea that for the mind to exist it must do so as a distinct entity that can be identified and located within the brain, and that can be positioned as a prime cause for subordinate mental processes. This is a mechanistic notion. It means that if such a structural centre cannot be found, then *ipso facto* consciousness is an illusion. But again, there is an alternative way of looking at things.

The brain itself shows great structural and functional plasticity, with neurological changes happening continuously with learning and throughout the aging process. The mind then, rather than being seen as ‘local’ in a neurologically structured sense, should also be understood as ‘global’ and so distributed across the brain, with no single centre. But more than this, the general Marxist model-of-mind we are moving towards, allows for a vast range of possible manifestations and degrees of solidity. This relative ontology means that the mind can be both stable in any given historical mode, whilst also changeable within the lifetime of a person and across generations, eras, and epochs. As we lay out this model in the sections that follow, we will discern its potential to provide a far more satisfactory account of human behaviour than dialectical biology, and to dispense with brain-based reductionism entirely.

Now, whilst maintaining the distinction between the general capacity-*for*-mind and a particular mode-*of*-mind, it is the brain that obviously provides the capacity for a mind to come into being. This is something that can be – must be – conceived structurally, and explored with empirical, neurological study. A particular *mode*-of-mind however, belongs specifically to the social and historical context that has produced it. And our sense-of-self as something separate from society for example, Skinner’s ‘autonomous man’, is not the pretender to a structurally constant anthropological throne; a fraudulent homunculus to be exposed. Rather it is historically variable, and in some types of society may barely exist. It has a relative ontological status. Furthermore, and to repeat, it need not be a ‘thing’ in a neurological-structural sense. Rather it can be a functional centre that emerges through memory as a mode from the regularity of decisions, influences, worldly actions and reactions, desires, and ambitions of a real person in a concrete social setting.

‘Mind’ then, understood in its singular sense, comes into being as an attribute of general mental activity and complexes introjected from the social world. It need not be a structural centre, but instead an ordered patterning of higher cortical processes; these may be unique to the individual in-so-far as brain allows for many and various neuronal pathways to achieve the same systemic result. These cortical processes then produce a foveal minds-eye that views the world from a central vantage point as a part of a social group, or simply as an individual. This active precipitate of a life experience within a given culture this way becomes the real ontogeny of the person, understood as an authentic self with agency, rationality, and moral perspective.

## Brain, mind and materialism

The question of ‘the mind,’ understood as something ‘non-material’ existing in a material body, has vexed Western philosophy since the European Enlightenment. Before this, in the ancient world, precursor ideas of the mingling of the non-material and the material infused the symbolism of myth and religion. The towering figure Gilgamesh of the ancient Mesopotamian capital of Uruk drew his strength from being two-thirds god and one-third human. In the pre-Socratic Hellenic world, the trade in ideas between Greece, Asia, Africa, and the Near East provided the elements from which Pythagoras would explain the soul as comprised of reason, intelligence and passion. Of these, reason alone, residing in the brain, was immortal. In China, the *I-Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, whose earliest layers are traditionally associated with Wen Wang of the Zhou dynasty (11th century BCE) but which was written over many centuries, offered a metaphysical system grounded in the duality of yin and yang. Yang, the celestial and masculine principle of light, energy, and productivity, and yin, the earthly and feminine principle of body, matter, and death, together provided an ordered key to all reality.

In 5th-century Greece, the status of the soul animated philosophical speculation. Plato held that the soul was insubstantial, an essence that would survive the end of corporeal existence. Aristotle, by contrast, defined the soul as a form essentially inseparable from the human body, the general aspect of specific human attributes. Thus, ‘behaviour’ was the form of all behaviours, and ‘motion’ the form of all motions. For Aristotle, the soul was the form of human life itself and perished with the being to which it belonged.

These divergent accounts of the relationship between a material and a non-material aspect of human existence later influenced theological traditions in the medieval Christian church. Neo-Platonism, for example, shaped Augustine’s teachings on the soul as existing before and after corporeal life, in agreement with Plotinus. By contrast, ancient Hellenic atomism, most clearly articulated by Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius, was eclipsed for centuries by Christian Neo-Platonist theology. In the 13th century Aristotelian ideas reappeared in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Encountering the rationalism of Islamic thinkers such as Avicenna and Averroes, Aquinas returned to Aristotle but adapted him to Christian doctrine. For Aquinas, the soul was the form of all living beings: the souls of animals perished with their bodies, while the human soul was both the substantial form of the body and subsistent, able to continue after death. Though, unlike Aristotle, Aquinas also emphasised that the soul remained incomplete without the body, to be perfected only at resurrection.

In the modern era, the relationship between the material and immaterial in the human being found new expression in the rationalism of René Descartes. For Descartes, the body was material, extended in space, and divisible, while the mind was immaterial, without extension, and indivisible. He posited the pineal gland as the site of interaction between the two, through which passions of the soul were transmitted. This ontological dualism became a pivot for much subsequent European philosophy, shaping debates to the present day.

For Descartes, the mind was substantial: an immaterial ‘ghost’ in a bodily ‘machine.’[[63]](#footnote-63) David Hume, however, denied the existence of mind as a unified entity. In his ‘bundle theory’ the self was nothing but a collection of associative impressions and experiences that gave the illusion of unity.

In contrast, Immanuel Kant acknowledged the mind but conceived it functionally, as a set of operations rather than a substance. Kant argued that mind provides the conditions for knowledge - space and time forming the framework within which perception is possible - and that the mind synthesises experience through three interconnected processes. First, the *synthesis of apprehension in intuition* organises sensory input spatially and temporally. Second, the *synthesis of reproduction in imagination* integrates perceptions into a unified field of mental processes. Third, the *synthesis of recognition in a concept* allows objects to be grasped conceptually. For Kant, the fundamental role of mind was the unification of manifold reality into singular representations. This was not a psychology of mind but a transcendental account of the conditions of knowledge itself.

Where Kant’s view of mind transcended time and context, Georg Hegel conceived it as historically developing and intersubjective. For Hegel, mind was essentially activity. He sought to reconcile Kant’s universal structures of cognition with the historical and social nature of human experience, a paradox he called the ‘finite-infinite.’ Concepts that mediate objects of perception generate both consciousness and self-consciousness, as the individual recognises both their distinctness from and belonging to these concepts. Crucially, self-consciousness emerges in recognition of other self-conscious beings, grounding mind not only in individual subjectivity (*subjective spirit*) but also in shared institutions, practices, and ethical life (*objective spirit*).[[64]](#footnote-64) This represented the more materialist side of Hegel’s system, where mind is realised in family, culture, religion, and social life.

In the 20th century, debates about the nature of mind took new turns, informed by both philosophical traditions and discoveries in neuroscience. A dominant framework was physicalism, which regarded all aspects of mental life as ultimately neuronal activity, though with different takes on how exactly this worked.

One influential approach was functionalism, which interpreted mental states in terms of their inputs and outputs. Drawing on cognitive science, psychology, linguistics, and computation, functionalism compared mental processes to ‘software’ running on the ‘hardware’ of the brain. Computational theories encouraged speculation about artificial intelligence and non-human forms of mind, while identity theories reduced mental states to specific brain states. At the eliminativist end of this spectrum, philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle, W. V. Quine, Daniel Dennett, and Paul and Patricia Churchland rejected the notion of mind itself as a substantive entity, replacing it with either behavioural accounts or neuro-scientific explanations.

Yet not all 20th-century philosophy of mind was reductionist in this way. Phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasised lived, embodied experience; existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre explored freedom and consciousness; and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later philosophy redirected the problem of mind toward the role of language and shared practices. These traditions tended away from the functionalist tendency to collapse mind entirely into brain.

Psychoanalysis, meanwhile, represented a different strand of theory, treating mind as a structured reality animated by identifiable psychic forces. Across his career, Sigmund Freud proposed several models: the economic model of psychic energy, the topographical model of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious levels, the psychodynamic model of drives and defences, the genetic model of psychosexual stages, and the structural model of id, ego, and superego. Of these, the topographical and structural models most closely resemble systematic accounts of mind, though his psychodynamic and genetic models also aimed to explain mental development and conflict.

By the late modern era, most philosophical positions had dispensed with notions of the immaterial and the strong dualisms of Plato or Descartes, materialist discourses - now dominant - framing mental activity as neuronal activity. Yet this need not entail a reductionist account of mind. Differentiated accounts of brain function distinguish between higher mental states and vegetative regulation, whilst recognising both as manifestations of the same physical substrate. In this differentiated materialism, the higher activities of mind, such as abstract reasoning, symbolic thought, and emotional communication, are understood as emergent orders of brain activity, shaped not by biology but by social relationships, culture, and history: brain being the *place* of mind; social relationships being its *cause*.

The characterisation of ‘mind’ as essentially ‘material’ is taken as a given for the rest of our speculations. But what might these terms mean exactly?

**What is ‘materialism’?**

The statement ‘All is matter’ is not new. Beginning with ancient precursors to ‘materialism’ we see ideas of abstract and impersonal forces that create or support the world. Such principles tend to be irreducible, self-sustaining and all-encompassing. We see examples of this in the pre-Socratic philosophers of Ancient Greece. The cosmologies of these various philosophical schools all had their different elemental foundations. Competing ontologies emerged from the Milesian school especially. The teachings of Thales of Miletus, in the 6th Century BC, whilst retaining an animistic aspect, saw water as the living principle of all things, explaining the world independently of stories of the gods. For the generation that followed, the students of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, chose different fundamental principles to develop their non-mythological cosmologies: Anaximander, an indefinite and featureless originating force, *apeiron*; and Anaximenes, ‘air’ - giving rise by various transformations to fire, water, earth and stone and to tangible forms in the world. For Heraclitus of the Ephesian school of the late 6th and early 5th Centuries BC, fire was the outward manifestation of a fundamental flux driving change in the natural world. For Empedocles it was the combination of four irreducible roots (’rhizomata’) - earth, air, fire, and water - that in their different combinations and organised by the two opposing forces of ‘love’ (*philia*) and ‘conflict’ (*neikos*) create the world as we experience it. For the philosophers of 5th Century Elea, Parmenides and Zeno, the multiplicities of our experience were illusory, and ultimately reducible to ‘the One’: the singular, imperishable, eternal and unchanging ‘true Being’. Even Plato, the philosopher of Forms, the immaterial soul, and The Divine Craftsman, offers a geometrical cosmology in The Timaeus. There, his character Timaeus explains, the world is comprised of the four ‘elements’ - earth, air, fire, and water - each constituted of regular polyhedra that combine in different chemical and mathematical amalgamations.

At the heart of these metaphysical systems in each case was a shift to impersonal, abstract, geometrical and mathematised principles that no longer relied upon anthropomorphised and heavenly story telling. They represented what in a historical survey we can see as a deeper quest for a fundamental and self-supporting realm that is indivisible, so representing an endpoint for analysis. The most prescient of these ancient formulations was the atomism of Leucippus, and after him of his student, the Thracian Democritus. For both, ‘atoms’ were indeed indivisible, and eternal; assembling, disassembling, and reassembling, to create the objects of human experience as they moved through the void. For the 4th Century BC philosopher and follower of Democritus, Epicurus, also the observable world was the result of the movement of invisibly small atoms; although with the difference that each could move indeterminately, at points ‘swerving’ randomly in its motion (the *clinamen*).

This philosophical atomism was carried into early modern European thought by a single Roman text written in the 1st Century. The De Rerum Natura, penned by the Epicurean Lucretius, described the cosmos as having emerged from Chaos, and the material world as the result of the churn of an infinitude of materially irreducible particles. Though lost during the Middle Ages, its rediscovery in 1417 was to influence Renaissance and early modern natural philosophy.

Briefly reflecting upon this classical atomism before updating its story, the imagery of ‘the atom’ is thus far a sensory one. That is, atoms are ‘material’ in the same way that our felt world is material. The atom then, is an extension into the invisibly small scale of our own familiar reality; the meaning of ‘material’ being of a kind with the ‘matter’ we experience.

This ‘materialism of the tangible’ however, is qualified by the notion of ‘force’. Forces are aspects of the material domain, of course; but they are not material in the same sense. Whilst we know their existence through the movement of matter, they are not *per se* materially substantial. For the pre-Socratics, as we know, the forces that drove atomic motion could be animistic: ‘love’ and ‘strife’ for example. The notion of force was to change with the emergence of modern scientific thought. In the 17th Century Newton’s gravitational theory put force at the centre of a new cosmology; its mathematical exactitude recalling the Pythagorean metaphysical insistence upon ‘number’ as the root of things, but now with empirical measurability and predictive precision. Later, Dalton’s atomic theory and what would become the Rutherford-Bohr model of the atom, relied upon electrostatic charges holding atoms together in mathematical combinations. From the middle of the 19th Century James Maxwell had unified electricity, magnetism and light, so that force became conceptualised no longer simply as action, but as the potential for action. This was the field-theory in which a body created a spatial zone exerting an effect upon another body coming into proximity with it; an idea that became pivotal in the relativistic and quantum physics of the Twentieth Century. Force theory has since developed to include strong and weak intra-nuclear forces, electrical forces and an array of force-bearing sub-atomic particles and field-quanta (gauge-bosons) that mediate the motion of material particles (fermions). The strangeness of this modern materialism is only compounded by other counter-intuitive components of current cosmological modelling, such as the mysterious ‘dark matter’, and the even more mysterious ‘dark energy’.

‘Materialism’ then is not quite the reduction of everything to ‘matter’ (to be precise, the ‘baryonic matter’ of the world we experience). Perhaps better to say that materialism refers to the idea that all is explainable in ‘material terms’; so, matter and what pertains to matter. But again, this tautology throws us back upon the exact meaning of our language, and of the word ‘matter’ itself which, given its hazy status in modern scientific thinking (in the lay imagination, at least, and certainly for visualising metaphors) is problematic for the clarity we are after.[[65]](#footnote-65) Perhaps we should simply say that all is explainable within the reality that is independent of the human mind; whatever that turns out to be. This then up-ends any notion that there is something exceptional about mind itself; something non-material, that is. Into the frame here of course come religious and quasi-religious notions of spirit, supernaturalism and intelligent creation that invest life, and especially human life, with divine charm.

So, ‘materialism’ in this primary sense, no longer has the reductively tangible meaning attributed to it in pre-quantum mechanics. Saying this means moving away from classical materialism towards a scientific realism grounded in hypothesis, method, logic and probability. For our purpose it is a comment upon the status of the human mind and need not be tied to any single theorising of the physical world. It is essentially a philosophical position that decentres the mind from any enthroned special status as being something other than part of the totality of ordinary things.

This articulation of mind in relation to ‘world’ echoes the proto-materialism of the ancients for any evaluation of our own existence in the universe. For Epicurus, mind cannot be incorporeal as Plato had taught; mind must indeed be matter. The picture painted by Lucretius in De Rerum Natura was of a cold universe, indifferent to the suffering of humankind. The gods, though they existed had not created the cosmos, and did not involve themselves in human affairs. Moreover, death was the end; no incorporeal substance would remain.

So, the term ‘materialism’ has been used with different senses in different controversies and in relation to different aspects of reality.[[66]](#footnote-66) In this discussion we have moved the meaning of the phrase for the physical world away from any particular ontology to one of scientific method. However, it is materialism as it relates to human activity that is our central concern, in other words its meaning for social behaviour. And here the central issue we need to resolve is the character of the dynamics between the brain, the mind, and social structure.

**‘Brain’ and the capacity for mind**

It is useful to distinguish between long-term evolutionary changes in the brain that created the general capacity for mind, and the shorter-term adaptive changes that occur within individual lives and cultural histories. More specifically, there have been different types of change to its global structure and its parts in relation to one another. We need to be clear about the rates and kinds of development they entail, and the spans of time involved for each.

Over millions of years, fossil endocasts and comparative anatomy show that the brains of our hominin ancestors expanded and reorganized, particularly in regions supporting social communication, language, and complex cooperation. These evolutionary changes shaped the general architecture of the brain. By contrast, shorter-term changes occur within an individual’s lifetime and across generations of cultural transmission. These involve neuroplasticity - the modification of neural circuits in response to learning, environmental pressures, and social interaction - especially in the prefrontal cortex, the region associated with reasoning, abstract thought, and personality. Such changes do not alter the architecture of the brain but reflect its capacity to adapt within historical and cultural contexts.

To understand the emergence of the modern capacity for mind, we can trace some of the major milestones in brain evolution.

Human evolution is marked by a dramatic increase in brain size relative to body size. From around two million years ago, with the emergence of *Homo erectus*, brain volume nearly tripled compared to earlier hominins. This expansion required new neuronal types, longer axons, and greater connectivity, especially within the neocortex, the outer layer of the brain. By around 300,000 years ago, with the appearance of early *Homo sapiens*, brain volume and shape had reached broadly modern proportions. This expansion underlies capacities for problem-solving, communication, strategic thinking, and cumulative knowledge transmission.

Within the neocortex, the prefrontal cortex is of special importance. Located just behind the forehead, this region supports planning, empathy, memory, self-regulation, and social bonding. Evidence suggests that it began to expand significantly in *Homo heidelbergensis* and related archaic humans around 800,000 years ago. Its development is central to the emergence of distinctly human forms of sociality and self-awareness.

The cerebellum, a neurologically dense region situated at the back of the brain beneath the occipital lobes, contains more than half of the brain’s neurons. Traditionally associated with coordination and dexterity, it is now understood to contribute to learning, cognition, and the integration of thought and action. Its relative size is greater in humans compared to other primates, and it likely played an important role in skill acquisition and the fine motor control needed for complex tool use. While its basic structure has been stable for hundreds of thousands of years, it seems that subtle refinements continued well into the evolution of modern humans.

The capacity for language is supported by two main cortical regions: Broca’s area (in the left frontal lobe), associated with speech production, and Wernicke’s area (in the temporal lobe), associated with comprehension. Whilst their exact evolutionary timeline is debated, they were probably present in archaic humans. So, the genetic and anatomical foundations for language predate modern humans, though the emergence of complex symbolic communication appears from around 50,000 years ago.

Another area of interest is the Mirror Neuron System, which enables individuals to map the observed actions of others onto their own motor representations. Present in primates, it is thought to have become significantly elaborated in humans, supporting imitation, social learning, and possibly aspects of empathy and communication. Although its exact function remains unclear, it is thought to have contributed to the development of shared behaviours and cooperative culture.

Underlying these structural changes are key genetic factors. Notable examples include:

* FOXP2 – linked to speech and language development.
* ARHGAP11B – involved in neocortical expansion.
* DUF1220 – associated with brain size and found in high numbers in humans.
* LRP2 – implicated in cortical development and reasoning abilities.
* ASPM – crucial to regulating brain size during development.

It is estimated that hundreds to perhaps a thousand genes have been uniquely modified in the human lineage or numerically replicated, contributing to brain size, connectivity, and cognitive capacity.[[67]](#footnote-67) Indeed the genetic variation created by a ‘mosaic’ of interbreeding between human groups probably led to the emergence of anatomically and, later, behaviourally modern humans and their adaptability, making possible the subsequent migrations out of Africa.[[68]](#footnote-68) These genetic innovations would provide the neuro-physical substrate for cumulative culture, cooperation, and abstract reasoning.

The large primate neocortex particularly has supported a ‘Social Brain Hypothesis’ in evolutionary anthropology. In 1992 Robin Dunbar published a groundbreaking study showing a correlation between the ratio of the size of the neocortex to overall brain volume and social group size in prosimian and anthropoid primates.[[69]](#footnote-69) The inference was that the relative size of the neocortex was connected to the number of close relationships of different types that could be successfully negotiated within a social group, and therefore to the size of the group itself. This suggested that social dynamics rather than ecological factors were the principal explanation for the emergence of the large neo-cortex in higher primates. Whilst extrapolation from trends in primate data to apply the principle to modern humans has come under considerable scrutiny and challenge[[70]](#footnote-70) still the concept of a social driver to the emergence of the Sapiens brain remains an important working hypothesis for our understanding of human evolution.

**What is mind?**

What do we mean when we ask, ‘What is mind?’ The question encompasses many aspects: ideas; conceptualisations of objects; self-awareness; decision-making; conscious apprehensions of the world; awareness of other selves; intuitions; mental activity; sense of self; and more. These cognitive phenomena provide the content of mind, rather than being mind itself: with ‘mind’; referring to the underlying structure that accommodates them, their sum, or perhaps the medium through which they are articulated.

For Freud, the term psyche encompasses these attributes but also includes the sexual and gendered self, as well as the unconscious. For Marx, the term subject must be considered both in its individual sense and as the active - or conscious - dimension of historical processes.

We are, therefore, concerned with the totality of mental activity and the inward dimensions of humanity’s relationship to its environment. So, this includes both the external world we inhabit and the internal emotional and cognitive landscape that sustains our sense of self. From this perspective, mind is privileged as a personal entity: an individuality that, while socially shaped, is also a thinking, decision-making, and ethical centre.

We can however distinguish the mental processes that interact with bodily states from the translation of these states into social meaning and behaviour. Physicality clearly affects behaviour: our bodies influence how we act, and irritability or mood affect our social interactions. Yet explanations of the relational modes that constitute culture need not rely on these bodily sensations. The contention here will be that better illumination comes with seeing social forms themselves - sexual pairing, property relations, family structures, gender types, subcultural bonds, competitive strategies, institutional identities, and so on - as the origin of any specific behaviour, each preceding the associated sensations and individual mentalities involved. From this standpoint, the development of mind is rooted in social interaction and ideology, introjected as inward mental form. Mind in its specificity then is seen not as a product of nature or an intergenerational constant, but as an intrinsically social formation. And ‘Biology’, understood as inheritance – as a genetic cause - is regarded as a false and distorting category when used to explain behavioural structure.

A different approach clarifies our object of analysis. Mind can be seen in the continuous, observable behaviours of close social interactions: this is how we infer the minds of others. Such behaviours are influenced by countless factors - bodily, psychological, cognitive, and social - which vary with health, ability, personality, group membership, and other conditions. Together, these factors constitute the fabric of personal experience, shaping the tangible flow of daily life. This domain represents proximal causation, where mental activity is influenced by immediate bodily and cognitive states.

Mind can also be considered as the deeper structural aspect of society, experienced indirectly through its effects rather than immediately perceived by individuals. This ‘social mind’ is shaped by macro-social forces that create the conditions of our lives even when their mechanisms are opaque to us. In capitalist societies, such structures may include the tension between public and private selves, the commodification of social life, the division between mental and physical labour, and the pervasive transactional nature of social interactions. These structural forces represent substantive causation, shaping individual consciousness indirectly and interpreted ideologically as natural.

This latter historically modal notion of mind is the ‘object’ we seek to understand. It is the type of mind that characterises any given social structure in its historical context. Questions of causality dominate this investigation, and the all-too familiar one of the role, if any, of ‘Nature’. Seeking an answer requires an excavation that goes to a deeper level than the question. We must account for ‘mind’ itself to be successful. And for that we must find a plausible alternative hypothesis to the default biologism that saturates this discussion reductively on the political Right, and that lingers, non-reductively, on the political Left.

**Mind and materialism**

There is a philosophical tradition that sees mind as a direct and immediate product of matter in motion; the result of sensory and motor stimuli alone. This kind of mechanical materialism appeared in publications from the mid-Eighteenth Century into the early Nineteenth Century. Julien de La Mettrie in *L’Homme machine* (1748), had suggested a mechanistic view of human activity, rooted in the nerve impulses of the brain. In his *Systèm de la Nature* (1770) Paul d’Holbach identified cognitive and emotive states as being the result of modifications of the brain. And in *Relations of the Physical and the Mental in Man* (1802) Karl Vogt gave his readers the vivid image of mind as being a secretion of brain activity: ‘The brain secretes thought, the way the liver secretes bile’.

David Hume, building upon John Locke’s rejection of an innate origin of ideas and mind, had argued that experience is the basic source of all mental concepts. For Hume the sensory inputs of the physical world created mental impressions that combined to produce simple and - by the operations of the imagination - complex mental objects.[[71]](#footnote-71) ‘Mind’ for Hume, was no more that the ‘bundle’ of perceptions created by experience, with no underlying substance.[[72]](#footnote-72)

This Humean attitude on the question of mind found its Twentieth Century expression in Gilbert Ryle’s 1949 *The Concept of Mind*. For Ryle, an act of thinking is what thinking is; an act of intelligence, the intelligence itself. In other words, there is no entity (that we call ‘mind’) that is the source, or cause, or ‘I’ that underlies these acts. The neuro-physical aspect of mental events is what they are; and nothing more. To think otherwise is to recreate the Cartesian dualism – the ‘two worlds’ of mind and body - that Ryle sets out to close the door on, and is to mistake one type of reality for another. It is to confuse categories.

Ryle provided the foundation for the emergence of an ‘identity theory’ of mind, pioneered by the generation of British philosophers that followed. According to the ‘identity’ school what we experience as ‘mind’ is identical to, and nothing more than brain activity. In other words, each mental state, or object of consciousness, equates to, indeed *is*, a corresponding ‘brain-state’. For Ullin Place, all higher conscious functions are analytically (and eventually, empirically) reducible to physical events in the brain;[[73]](#footnote-73) ‘mind’ then becoming an unscientific fiction.

Finally, in the anti-humanist philosophising of B. F. Skinner[[74]](#footnote-74) our knowledge of the ‘human being’ is treated as limited to outwardly observable behaviour; and in the forceful materialism of Daniel Dennett (directly influenced by Ryle in the 1960s) consciousness is seen as the result of mechanical sensory-input-feedback loops; a type of ‘narrative editing’ process by which our sense-of-the-world is created.[[75]](#footnote-75)

An important objection to the reduction of mind to matter, apart that is from philosophical dualisms that insist upon the mind as a non-material substance, has come from the theory of ‘qualia’.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in the 5th Century, in his *Confessions* muses on the strange status of the remembered sensation:

*Yea, I discern the breath of lilies from violets, though smelling nothing; and I prefer honey to sweet wine, smooth before rugged, at the time neither tasting nor handling, but remembering only.*[[76]](#footnote-76)

He is asking what it is exactly that we are ‘remembering’ when we conjure something into our minds from our previous experience? The object is no longer there. The experience is in the past. The sensations are no longer present. What is it then that is before us, or within us, when we recall the scent of a flower, or the taste of honey and wine? With these questions he was touching upon the modern quandary of the quale?

The quale (‘qualia’ in the plural) is the uniquely subjective aspect of mental experience. When we experience the ‘redness’ of a red object we do not experience light of a certain wavelength, nor sensory neural transmissions, not even the brain processing by which we recognise colour. What we experience is the phenomenon of redness *itself*, in *this* moment, as an attribute of *this* object, and in *this* context, *etc.* And, the argument goes, a phenomenon is different than the events that science tells us are occurring to create it. It has a reality of its own, and one that cannot be accounted for by appealing to the brain states accompanying it. We can take this further by factoring in human meaning. If the ‘redness’ is also the redness of the coat my daughter wore when she was a toddler, bringing back memories of a happy autumn day (and so forth), then the uniqueness of the phenomenon understood as a quale becomes more compelling, forcing us to confront a simple question: ‘Can physical events in the brain adequately account for, or even have relevance to, the experience of redness I am having when I bring such memories to mind?’ If not, then we part company with the physicalism that characterises the identity theory of mind.

A widely cited argument for qualia came from a 1982 paper by Frank Jackson.[[77]](#footnote-77) In a thought-experiment Jackson asked his audience to imagine a character, Mary, who has been raised in an entirely monochromatic space, learning all there is to know about the outside world *via* a black-and-white television. She even comes to know the entirety of the physical aspects of the sense of vision and colour. Still however, when she is finally exposed to the colour red, she learns something new: *that* is how ‘red’ looks. The actual sensation of colour then, according to Jackson, was something that a materialist account of experience could not completely explain. The defence of the quale was taken up later by David Chalmers. In his *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (1996), he argued that subjective experience and consciousness itself must be treated as unique phenomena without a reliance upon brain function for an ultimate explanation. Addressing what he termed the ‘hard problem of consciousness’ he maintained that it is ‘what it feels like’ to live, and not only the brain’s ability to process information, which was the thing to explain.[[78]](#footnote-78) Thinking again of our experience of colour and the way it can be ‘awe-provoking’ Chalmers asked: ‘Why should it feel like *that*? Why should it feel like anything at all?’[[79]](#footnote-79) Defending the phenomenal status of subjective experience as real, he constructed a ‘zombie’ proposition in which the zombie has all the functional attributes of a human being but does not have the subjective experience that we recognise as uniquely human.[[80]](#footnote-80) For this he said we need the concept of the quale.

For philosophical functionalists, those who see mind as reducible to the activities of the brain, this is all unacceptable. Daniel Dennett, in his much-debated essay ‘Quining Qualia’ (1988),[[81]](#footnote-81) argued that qualia are the result of flawed and unreliable introspection, ultimately a meaningless notion without logical coherence or proper status in the philosophy of mind. And whilst the quale is purported to represent private inner experience then it must also be seen as untestable. So where two people see colours (or taste coffee) differently but behave identically, unaware of their different experiences, there is no worldly effect. This for Dennett, makes the quale a purely philosophical construct with no independent reality; something that he calls a ‘skyhook’.[[82]](#footnote-82) Elsewhere, responding to Chalmer’s zombie experiment, he argued that where the ‘zombie’ (Dennett used the term ‘zimbo’) mimics human behaviour perfectly, including reporting internal states that do not exist, then we must attribute consciousness to it, since we can neither confirm nor deny its ‘private’ experience.[[83]](#footnote-83) The quale then is either there, but explainable in functionalist terms; or it is not there, and therefore irrelevant. And considering the ‘Mary paradox’ Dennett argued that if only our language was sufficiently fine-grained, we would be able to describe our subjective experience without any need of the ‘ineffable’ quale.[[84]](#footnote-84) For Dennett the quale did not exist.

One way of looking at this question is that Jackson’s positing of the experience of ‘redness’ need only be seen as the subjective ‘this-sidedness’ of an entirely material substrate; the manifest, ‘surfaced’ aspect of otherwise hidden events. Yet qualia (and St. Augustine’s musings on remembrances) - things that move us and that are experienced as uniquely human - remain difficult to simply dismiss. The reducing of subjective episodes to electro-chemical events does seem problematic, albeit perhaps from a position of philosophical naiveté. To see the full richness of human subjective experience as the result only of a series of brain-states surely challenges our sense of how it feels to live.[[85]](#footnote-85) Should we not consider the role of a life in the creation of a conscious person, with all the enjoyments and strife, achievements and disappointments, and decisions, mistakes and turning-points involved. And what of human suffering; is this to be understood only as a type of sense datum, and no more?

This debate does not present an obstacle to the approach being developed here; our question is not in fact about whether a subjective moment is the experience of a particular brain-state at all. Rather, it is whether a brain-state is the cause of that subjective moment. We can straightforwardly say that subjective experiences, cognitive apprehensions of world and emotive associations all have their correlative events in the brain (and indeed the body), without resorting to a reductionist standpoint that eviscerates them of their human meaning. The reason for this is that asserting the materiality of consciousness does not tie us to the hypothesis that the brain is the *cause* of consciousness. Mental events are neuro-physical in a philosophically trivial sense; but it is their social and cultural dimensions that give them their meaning.

It is far more important (and interesting) to address this proposition: Mental events, moments of cognition and consciousness and indeed mind itself, are *relational* objects. Their regularity, predictability and durability are the result, not of the neuronal activity that underlies them, but rather of the social structures and inter-personal processes that create them. Our explanations of them then will be found in the more appropriate domain of social causality.

We can put it in the following way. ‘Brain’ and ‘mind’ are not the same kinds of object. The brain is a ‘discrete object’; having an enclosed, and boundaried status, with an internal structure that can be distinguished from its surroundings. ‘The mind’, by contrast, is a ‘relational object’, existing between human beings, and inferred from mental states and behaviours derived from myriad social interactions. This important distinction becomes lost in the application of naturalising biological categories – including those of dialectical biology - in explanations of mental states.

Brain-state of course affects mental activity in countless ways. The tragedy of neurodegenerative disease makes this abundantly, and terribly, clear. The chemical effects of hallucinogenic and psychotropic drugs provide another example. Tumours in the brain can create disinhibited social behaviour. Another awful example is that impaired brain development caused by *in utero* maternal malnutrition can result in lowered mental capacity later in the infant. Hormones we know can affect concentration and mood. Many people in their older years, will also be familiar with the challenges of new learning as neuronal networks form more slowly and with fewer connections. Finally, as we get older, as our brains lose neuronal networks and connections, we become forgetful. Obviously, brain states affect mental function.

However, it does not follow that the neuronal events that make mental life possible, are therefore responsible for its content; and it is there that mental activity connects with social behaviour. So, whilst brain activity creates the general capacity for mind as well as mental function (focus, agility, clarity, abstractive facility, memory, *etc.*) it does not create its specific and social consequences or meaning in ways that are relevant to questions about the relationship between brain and forms of social behaviour.

We must distinguish then between the general capacity for mind that is enabled by the brain; and the specific mental aspects we wish to explain. Whilst we can marvel at the unfolding mysteries of the gross structures of the human brain, and our emerging insights into neuronal processes, these do not *per se* explain any specific trait of human social behaviour; for these we must investigate the nature of the society in which a behaviour occurs to illuminate its origins. It is in the social structure that we must locate our search for explanations

So, we can conceive of the contents of mind, and of mind itself, differently to their being reducible to physical events in the brain. It is better to understand them as the result of interactions of the brain with the brains of others, in socially structured human relationships. Indeed, this can be seen as a defining human characteristic, and essential to social formation. Then intersubjectivity becomes the basis of shared myths that whilst unreal in a material sense, are real socially – because they are believed.[[86]](#footnote-86) Religious and other belief systems, cultural identities, customs and rituals, and so on can all serve this function. Economic forms also (and especially) provide instances of this feature of human coalescence, with money – coinage - being a particular example, alternatively termed a ‘real abstraction’.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Our quandary then lies not within the brain, but in the zones of activity created by social relationships and processes. The coagulations of social meaning that emerge are introjected as social complexes, in turn accumulating into associations, social constructions, personal and group identities and behavioural motifs. Moreover, these subjective processes draw for their fullest meaning upon the countless human interactions that have gone before. This shifts our conceptualisations of behaviour from a vestigial Newtonianism of uni-linear, brain-based and ‘genetic’ causality, to one of interpersonal, social and institutional fields. Mind is material of course, so (let’s all agree) a mind could not exist without a brain. But mind here is seen as always situated within bodily, cultural, and perceptual zones of sensory interaction with the minds of others in a social world.[[88]](#footnote-88) Looking for ‘*the* mind’ (a relational object) in ‘*the* brain’ (a discrete object) then, is to create an unnecessary mystery – a ghost that beckons us into a wasted philosophical journey; a category error that belongs to the physicalists in the debate. For a mind is the creation not of *a* brain, but of many brains (and bodies) in interaction. In other words, it is the result of society, culture, and history; and in society, culture, and history we also find its material (and institutional) reality.[[89]](#footnote-89)

In our discussion to this point we have touched on a range of thinkers for our reflections about the theoretical status of ‘mind’ and its relationship with reality. However, there are two names we must now consider, for different reasons, to signpost our way: Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Whilst Marx saw mental activity as intrinsically intersubjective, he did not elaborate a structural model of mind; and whilst Freud theorised several models of the psyche he could not adequately resolve its relationship with the social world. Marxism, we will see, can provide a stable theoretical framework for our major objective – to identify a general model of mind that can account for its specific historical manifestations. Psychoanalysis, we will see, lays out a path via one of its organising categories - ‘repression’ - that guides us ultimately, via transformative steps, back to the philosophical roots of Marxism. The result is better illumination of the subjective side of the historical process and of the character of the human mind in its society.

## Marx and Freud: iconoclasts of the age of Modernism

Why discuss Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud together? Really, ~~At first glance~~ they are worlds apart. As a young man in the early nineteenth century, Marx moved quickly from the philosophical disputes of Left Hegelianism to politics, economics, and the workers’ movement in Europe’s new industrial centres. Freud, later in the century, began in neuroanatomy, shifted to psychiatry, and created the psychoanalytic method that made him famous. Unlike Marx, Freud’s concerns were rarely political, apart from scattered remarks in his writings.

And yet attempts to reconcile the theoretical paradigms of these two thinkers about the human condition have been made since the second decade of the Twentieth Century, in phases that have emerged from and in various ways reflected, the dramas, conflicts and agonies of their day. There has been a recurring fascination with how their two quite different theoretical endeavours might complement, correct, or complete one another. In some respects, the motivation has been the notion that they addressed different areas of human activity exclusively; each therefore having something to benefit from the other. However, only a very selective reading of both – and the mistaken view that Marx was concerned only with economic life, and the equally mistaken view that Freud was concerned only with sex - could support such a position. At deeper levels of conceptual focus, some have held that there are voids, structural blind-spots in one or both leading to errors and theoretical directions that in some way ‘get humanity wrong’. For others the issue has been not which is right, and which is wrong, but rather which of these is the more fundamental; assuming then, that whilst both are valid in their own sphere, one is in some sense reliant upon the other.

Erich Fromm argued that Marx and Freud shared a ‘common soil’: a relentless doubt of received ideas, an openness to all that is human, and a conviction that truth brings freedom. Both distrusted clichés and ideological mystifications.[[90]](#footnote-90) And their respective commitments to uncovering hidden structures of reality produced the originality of their contributions. So, in Fromm’s assessment there is a suggestion that in the intellectual ‘atmosphere’ of their life-projects Marx and Freud are alike; that there is about them both an affinity of intellectual temperament, of unsentimental objectivism, and of personal iconoclasm. The unflinching commitment that each had to penetrating the appearances of reality to its underlying essence enabled the original contributions they made. For Marx, the radicalisation of the concept of abstract labour as the source of value under capitalism rather than any one type of labour, the fundamental role of class in history, and the derivation of the power of the state from civil society all involved overturning established theoretical constructions within the fields of the economic, historical, and political sciences. For Freud the discoveries of ‘the unconscious’ as a hidden realm of repressed trauma and dangerous desires affecting the person throughout their life, the reality of an ‘infantile sexuality’ in the pre-pubescent child, and the decisive role of the family in the gendering of the person, all established him as a figure of theoretical controversy, not to mention public scandal.[[91]](#footnote-91) Both men were above all rationalists, and believers in the scientific thinking of their times.

The lives of Marx (1818-1883) and Freud (1856-1939) overlapped by 27 years. When Marx died, Freud was a young scientist establishing himself in his first field: neuropathology. There were some overlaps in their German intellectual heritages. Marx developed his early thinking through his critical immersion in Hegelian philosophy. Freud did not read Hegel, although there is an argument that a link between Hegel and Freud exists in their uses of the concept of ‘desire’.[[92]](#footnote-92) Particularly in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) ‘desire’ features as a central organising category for the dialectic of apperception and self-consciousness; being in fact treated as identical with self-consciousness. As Hegel puts it “self-consciousness is desire in general”.[[93]](#footnote-93) However, the respective uses of ‘desire’ here do not in fact align with one another: Hegel’s use being central to the need of one consciousness for recognition by another; Freud’s use being essentially libidinal in character.

Freud did read Kant and referred to him throughout his writings. In his youth he was influenced by the neo-Kantian ideas of the educationalist and early theorist of modern psychology, Johann Herbart. Late in life he came to the gloomy philosophy of Schopenhauer. In Schopenhauer’s irrational Will and its mental representations (‘Vorstellung’), to which the mind is slave, he found a precursor to his own construct of the id. Both Marx and Freud were familiar with the German Romantic tradition. Marx was on personal-familial terms with the poet Heinrich Heine, enjoying for many years a close friendship with him. Freud too, was a great appreciator of the works of Heine. Above all however, both placed their lifeworks in the ‘scientific age’.

For their cultural status Marx and Freud can be seen as critical inheritors of the European Enlightenment, and pivotal figures in the age of Modernism that it spawned. Both pushed at the limits of the established – bourgeoise – theories and sensibilities of their day: Marx overturning the primary organising concepts of historical, economic, and political science; Freud creating a new terrain of psychoanalytical theory and therapeutic technique. Both set out to establish a ‘new science’ of humanity in their very different areas, in the process overturning established preconceptions and ideological mystifications that concealed reality. And for both also, going rigorously to the ‘root of things’, stripping away layers of obfuscation and identifying ‘ultimate origins’ of their respective fields were of over-riding importance.

For Freud psychoanalysis was central to the rationalism of the modern age.

*… intellect and mind are objects for scientific research in exactly the same way as any non-human things. Psychoanalysis has a special right to speak for the scientific* Weltanschauung *at this point, since it cannot be reproached with having neglected what is mental in the picture of the universe.*[[94]](#footnote-94)

For Marx and his lifelong collaborator Engels, their historical materialism was shaped by the notion of a ‘unified science’, and the emergence of humanity from nature.

*We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist.*[[95]](#footnote-95)

For Marx and Freud then, understandings of ‘history’ and of ‘natural history’ would become increasingly a part of one another in an ever more complete body of knowledge. With these science-centred views, each had religion in their sights both as a target of critique and puzzle to be solved, considering the grip that it held over the mentalities of the great majority of humankind. Indeed, at one level Marx and Freud say quite similar things about religious worship. In the works of both, the individual is subject to painful social realities: for Marx arising from the alienations of life within class-based society; for Freud arising from the repression (‘*Verdrängung’)* of otherwise untrammelled desire under the stern authority of the superego. For each also the individual finds refuge in fantasy, in the imagination of a realm of deities and poly- and mono-theistic beliefs.[[96]](#footnote-96) Religion for both is a salve that eases the pain of the lives to which human beings are fated.

One shared aspect of their respective theorisations of the relationship between the mind and the world is that it is not one of immediate contact or simple access. Rather, and for both, the way in which we experience the world is filtered, mediated and distorted, requiring correction by critical interpretation. Of course, the unreliability of the human mind in grasping the truth of reality has long been acknowledged. In the fifth book of his *Republic*[[97]](#footnote-97) Plato portrays a kind of naïve realism in his story of the chained captives, who can only ever infer the objects of the outside world from the shadows they see moving on the wall of their prison cave. In the early modern era Francis Bacon conjured up ‘four idols’ of illusion that baffle human comprehension. These are: Idols of the Tribe that appeal to intuitive and common-sense understanding; Idols of the Cave rooted in the passions, enthusiasms and ideologies of the individual; Idols of the Marketplace that arise from political manipulation and rhetoric; and Idols of the Theatre that look only to traditions of thought and longstanding received wisdoms.[[98]](#footnote-98) The Enlightenment thinking of Bacon’s generation onwards represented an assault on such ‘Idols’, overturning received wisdoms, especially those of religion, and turning to scientific methodologies. Freud and Marx also were concerned with illusions of the mind.

In Freud’s theorising, consciousness is unreliable, built upon ruses, self-deceptions, and protective defences against reality. Only by the work of analysis can the truth be revealed, and the person achieve self-understanding to be brought into a tolerable life-orientation. In Marx also, human consciousness in a particular society cannot be taken simply as an illumination of its social truth. At the social level, consciousness for Marx is normally an outward and instrumental reflection of the relations of production prevailing in class-based societies, masking the realities of exploitation in the interests of the dominant class. This becomes exposed at times of revolution and historical transformation.

*Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between social forces of production and the relations of production.[[99]](#footnote-99)*

Consciousness then does not determine social structure; rather social structure determines consciousness. For Marx, this characterises all hitherto existing and contemporary societies. Only in the communist society will this be reversed, as humankind leaves behind the ‘realm of necessity’ and enters the ‘realm of freedom’. In that liberated state humans will consciously make their own arrangements for life and productive activity, all in full and free mastery of their social relationships. Only then will human consciousness be transparent to the truth of social reality.

But it is not only the filtering of the mind’s view of the world that is in question here. There is also the matter of the self’s understanding of itself. For Marx and for Freud, we do not ‘see’ ourselves in an immediate way; we are not transparent to ourselves. Freud had analysed the conscious self, the self-aware ego, in dynamic relationship between a powerful but wordless id that influences, pushes and moulds it, and an equally powerful superego that holds it in check as the person navigates a hostile and dangerous reality. The notion the ego has of itself, as making choices, having agency, and so on, is a distortion. So, we follow rather than make our fate; we are slaves to interior forces that are hidden to us. For Marx, the notion of an isolated self, a sort of imaginary Robinson Crusoe figure that inhabited the ‘bourgeoise economics’ of his day, was a fantasy. Whatever sense the person has of their rational, independent self-commanding identity is based upon a fallacy. As with Freud, the self is shaped by unseen influences; though for Marx, these did not come from a psychical interior. They were the result of social structures, exterior processes, and historical forces.

In his early writings Marx had coined the term ‘character-mask’,[[100]](#footnote-100) taken from Greek tragedy, to express the ways in which historical and social persons come to represent or embody larger forces than themselves. He also applied to term to corporate bodies, professional associations, and political parties. The meaning was the same for each case. Human action is mediated by ideas hiding the true - *i.e.* self-serving, interest-based - nature of human motivations; so, as for Freud, the self being opaque to itself. The concept appears in Marx’s analysis of the shifting class alliances of the 1848 revolution in France. Marx explains the concept briefly, alluding to Hegel’s comment that ‘all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice’. ‘The mask’, assumed in the historical moment, is used to make sense of events with reference to the past.

*Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95.*[[101]](#footnote-101)

Further on, commenting upon the ascension of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to become emperor of France, Marx uses the idea to explain what made it possible “for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part.” In acts of public deception and private self-delusion, political actors don the masks of previous historical sagas, to make sense of their own contemporaneous dramas.

Marx’s understanding of ideology is also centred upon the hiding of true interests behind obfuscating mental constructs. ‘Character-mask’ was later, through Engels’ work, to become the concept of ‘false-consciousness’ by which rationalisations of action and behaviour disguise its real meaning.

‘Opacity’, the hiding of real motivations and venal interests by the self from itself, is linked to another major theme for both Freud and Marx: that of ‘alienation’. In fact, the explicit term appears hardly at all in Freud’s work. However, the concept is discernible in some of Freud’s theoretical formulations. It is present for instance in his discussion of the oppressive character of sexual norms as a cause of nervous illness in his essay ‘*Civilised’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908). The demand that everyone should obey the same ‘conduct of sexual life’ was for Freud an ‘injustice’ and a cause of widespread unhappiness both within and beyond the conventional, monogamous, and hetero-sexualised family.

Another example in Freud’s work lies in the tensions between parts of the intra-psychical structure; principally caused by the control of the id by the superego *via* the ego (acting “in obedience to its orders”[[102]](#footnote-102)). For the person this is felt as internal tensions – a ‘tendency to conflict’ - caused by the work of the ego pushing down upon libidinal desires. Talking of the causes of neuroses Freud says:

*First there is the most general precondition – frustration; next, fixation of the libido which forces it into particular directions; and thirdly, the tendency to conflict, arising from the development of the ego, which rejects these libidinal impulses.*[[103]](#footnote-103)

Moreover, where we see the id representing a primordial nature, reined in, and mastered by a cultural superego, we see also the negating of urges and basic instincts by the repressive mechanisms of the psyche to the detriment of self-understanding.[[104]](#footnote-104) These processes, involving structural tension, antagonism, and repression, also render the ‘authentic self’ opaque to the ‘conscious self’. In *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) Freud develops this theme in relation to his libido-theory, now structured by a bifurcation between a life-instinct and a death-instinct. The aggressive drives of the death instinct must be controlled by a dominant superego working through a personal ego that it harries and chastises to achieve its goal; the repression of potentially dangerous appetites. The result is dissatisfaction, anxiety, guilt, and discontent. And consequently, the person cannot fully know themselves.

For Marx ‘alienation’ is an explicit, foundational category. It was a central part of his intellectual struggle with the influence of the great figure of German speculative philosophy, Georg Hegel, that was still a cause of philosophical controversies amongst political radicals into the 1840s. For Hegel human consciousness was unable to know itself without the attainment of an ‘absolute knowledge’, a total apprehension of the world; and so, until it had reached this final state, was destined to be estranged from itself. This notion of an estrangement lying within the human being was taken by Marx and turned into one of a social relationship. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx formulates alienation as that of the worker from their labour power and the product of their labour.

*So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the less he can possess and the more he falls under the sway of his product, capital.*[[105]](#footnote-105)

So, the worker’s labour power and labour product are overtaken by the capitalist, who returns wages in the name of ‘equal exchange’. The product, now the property of the capitalist, is hidden from the worker as something they have created. So also is their relationship with their own labour, and that with their fellow workers, as the source of their own essential self, of their humanity. The true relationships that organise their social existence are obscured; all is opaque. They are lost to themselves.

We can also consider the use of ‘dialectical’ conceptualisations to compare Marxism and psychoanalysis. Marx’s youthful intellectual development was through a critique of Hegelian philosophy. What Marx took positively from Hegel was that reality is dialectical in character; that it moves through moments of opposing forces, tensions and contradictions that become resolved into new unities *via* changes in material quality. However, Freud’s work does not generally conform to this description, certainly in any explicit sense. His early foundational conceptualisations, associated with his economic model of psychical processes particularly, are informed by notions of mechanistic force, energy quanta, and hydraulic metaphors. In later work, Freud’s use of symbolism and mental representation remained reliant upon the id as an organic force operating beneath outward social behaviour. His use of the term ‘repression’ also retained a primarily mechanical meaning in his various theoretical models. Even the concept of ‘sublimation’ by which unconscious drives or desires become higher ideals, strivings and symbolic imagery, Freud conceptualised chiefly in terms of bioenergetics. And in his attempts to raise psychoanalytical insights to the level of society and human history - his metapsychology – he appealed to vitalistic forces. At no point was Freud’s thinking influenced by dialectical philosophy.

Finally, a related consideration is the suggestion of a ‘scale of value’, with the ‘higher’ orders *i.e.* more developed, more refined, more cultural, more moral *etc.*, being rooted in the ‘lower’ orders of these aspects of life. So, for Marx the most exalted cultural creations may be seen as expressions of, and ideological coverings for class-based interest; and for Freud the achievements of the person in creative, commercial, and romantic life are ultimately made possible by the sublimations of basic sexual drives into the strivings of the superego.[[106]](#footnote-106) But again, the apparent similarity is one of outward form only. The underlying concepts are unalike: Marx’s thinking always dialectical in character; Freud’s never breaking from a Newtonian paradigm of linear cause-and-effect’.

## Psychoanalysis and the psyche

**‘Mechanism’**

Freud’s earliest scientific work was conducted within the developing field of neuron theory - the doctrine that nervous tissue, including the brain and central nervous system, is composed of interconnected cells (neurons).[[107]](#footnote-107) Scientific figures of his day, such as Hermann von Helmholtz and Freud’s teacher Ernst Brücke, embraced a mechanistic philosophy: all mental activity, even the highest cognitive functions, being explained as electro-chemical impulses along neural pathways. Although Freud later distanced himself from this strict mechanism, its influence shaped his early thinking and left lasting traces in his theories.

Particularly, Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) is important for understanding the continuity between his neurological observations and his later theorising about the mind. This work drew on his microscope studies of non-human nervous tissue and introduced theoretical inferences that foreshadowed his later models of the psyche, particularly his conception of the ‘psychic apparatus’.

In this early period, Freud classified three types of neurons—phi (φ), psi (ψ), and omega (ω). He proposed that a nerve force (Qη) moved through these systems, operating on principles of energy conservation, inertia, and equilibrium. Phi neurons received excitatory input, while psi neurons acted as ‘contact-barriers’, regulating the flow of stimulation to prevent overload. Freud argued that Qη both flowed through and filled these neurons before discharge in quantised bursts of energy. Over time, repeated discharges created stable neural pathways that allowed energy to be diverted away from points of overload. This process also produced ‘sedimented’ redundant pathways, which Freud interpreted as primitive memory structures in the vertebrate endo-psychical system. The omega system, meanwhile, processed perception and external sensory input, highlighting and suppressing different elements to facilitate navigation of the environment, submerging unwanted material into latent ‘memory’.

At higher and more complex levels of neurological and mental function, Freud still saw these different neuronal systems as providing the essential animus of human consciousness, and its interactions with its environment. In his modelling during this early phase of theorising, the *omega* system is the locus of consciousness in the human being. It receives input from the neurones of the *phi* and *psi* systems that work as a substratum of somatic drives, or instincts. However, whereas the inputs of neuronal stimulation travelling from the *psi* into the *phi* systems are regulated *via* a homeostatic ‘inertia’, the *omega* system, receiving inputs from the *phi* system and the somatic drives that it generates, is afforded no such protection. It is ‘at the mercy’ of the nerve-force of the primary neuronal systems working upon it and so, at a higher level, leaving consciousness in need of ‘discharge’ of excessive energy.

Freud’s metaphors used to explain his later libido-cathexis model are coloured by the scientific metaphors of his day.[[108]](#footnote-108) The imagery that runs through many of his early works is by turns hydraulic, electrical or influenced by the steam-driven technologies of his time; each suggesting mechanisms by which basic impulses exert their force upon consciousness, and therefore personal behaviour. The key elements in the economic model that Freud continued to develop from the 1890s over more than two decades included: energy transformation; drives for the satisfaction of desire; the object-orientation of desire (cathexis); and the channelling of psycho-sexual energy into many areas of life.

To illustrate with some of Freud’s recurring tropes on this topic - found also in his later publications - libido: can be ‘dammed up’ by the absence of outlets;[[109]](#footnote-109) forms a ‘reservoir’ within both the ego[[110]](#footnote-110) and the id;[[111]](#footnote-111) is ‘discharged’ by action towards an object of desire (or by neurotic behaviours);[[112]](#footnote-112) and can even ‘flow’ backwards to create reversals of sexual development.[[113]](#footnote-113) A consequence of these metaphors is a tendency to interpret higher human functions principally as the epiphenomena of impersonal mechanical forces within the person.

So, the ‘libido’ and connected with it the ‘cathexis’ by which psychic energy becomes channelled towards a specific object, idea or attachment, are material phenomena, arising from bodily organic forces as quantised energy transmissions *via* neuro-mechanical processes. With historical hindsight we can see here anticipations of the psychoanalytic modelling which would make Freud’s reputation. In fact, by the autumn of 1895, he already had a strong sense of the importance of these ideas for modern psychology. In a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fleiss, he described his ambition for this work as being "to peel off from psychopathology a gain for normal psychology".[[114]](#footnote-114)

**Transition**

The shift away from a unidirectional causal logic in which higher mental functions are essentially epiphenomena of primary neuronal systems was the result of an evolution of thinking and discovery for Freud that happened over more than a decade. The earliest influences in his scientific thinking were teachers and professional supervisors such as Theodor Meynert and Jean-Martin Charcot who were steeped in the ‘mechanistic’ paradigm of studies on psychological disorders and neurosis. For them, all such mental ailments were ultimately rooted in problems of neurophysiology.

However, Freud began to harbour doubts about a strict adherence to mechanism. These surfaced in debates at the time about ‘hysteria’,[[115]](#footnote-115) a type of neurosis characterised by symptoms such as fitting and paralysis. Charcot’s clinical observations, his own commitment to mechanism notwithstanding, revealed that paralytic symptoms associated with hysteria often did not conform to any known neurological pattern. Increasingly Freud began to speculate about the role of ideas as a cause of physical symptoms; a type of psychosomaticism that ran contrary to mechanism.

Freud’s increasingly unorthodox theorising of the outward symptoms of hysteria cast him in this period into the margins of established medical science. He was to find an ally in his old teacher at the Institute of Physiology of the University of Vienna, Josef Breuer.

For many years, Breuer had been using hypnotism in his therapeutic practice, as well as a technique he called ‘cathartic method’. This involved the unearthing and ‘talking-through’ of early childhood memories that lay beneath adult psychological and behavioural disorders. This ‘talking cure’ had the effect of alleviating the neurotic symptoms of the patient. The fact that physical symptoms such as problems with speech and even paralysis, could be improved in this way, confounded the mechanistic view that all such disorders must be rooted in neurophysiology; that all outward manifestations of hysteria were caused by malfunction in the nervous system.

Freud became especially interested in the notes from one of Breuer’s cases: that of ‘Anna O’.[[116]](#footnote-116) In this case, which had already been made well known in psychiatric circles, when the patient relived the traumatic experience of nursing her dying father, small details of these memories had become significant for her later symptomology. For example, squinting was revealed to have arisen from a suppression of the analysand’s memory of looking at their watch in the dark at their father’s bedside. The realisation of this in the patient allowed the ‘event’ to be brought out of a realm of repressed memory - her ‘unconscious’ - and into a realm of understanding; and from this a relief of the pain that had accompanied it. Freud increasingly saw such symptoms, working as self-protective mechanisms of the psyche – understood now as symbolic representations of repressed material – as being of great interest and theoretical importance.

*The ugliest as well as the most intimate details of sexual life may be thought and dreamt of in seemingly innocent allusions to activities in the kitchen; and the symptom of hysteria could never be interpreted if we forgot that sexual symbolism can find its best hiding place behind what is commonplace and inconspicuous.*[[117]](#footnote-117)

Freud and Breuer published their therapeutic findings, based on the case of Anna O and four other case-histories, in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895).[[118]](#footnote-118) This work forwarded a theory that was pivotal for Freud’s emerging model of the human psyche. He now saw clearly that a part of the psyche that was hidden from normal daily thought, a subconscious realm, impacted upon conscious life in ways that could be disruptive and harmful to the individual. Moreover, the ‘traumatic memory’ did not simply disappear, but remained in this hidden recess as an active pathogenic presence, causing an accumulation of negative emotional energy which over time could produce terrible mental, behavioural, and psychological effects. However, the repressed traumas that were responsible for these neuroses were accessible to therapeutic treatment.

Increasingly also Freud was coming to see the repression of traumatic experience, and its relegation out of the domain of normal self-awareness, as a sexual phenomenon; the traumas involved often linked to experiences of one sexual type or another. Here, Freud and Breuer were not in agreement. Indeed, this was the point upon which they were to part company in terms of theory, professional collaboration, and friendship. Nonetheless, Freud’s work with Breuer, and their 1895 publication, marked his shift from the purely mechanistic theorising of his early scientific career to the symbolism of his later understanding of the mind.

**The Topographical Model**

Freud presented his early theory of the mind in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Until he began to study dreams, he had been involved in controversies about neurosis. That work had led him to the idea of an unconscious containing submerged memories of past traumas that exert a powerful though covert influence upon conscious life. By 1896 however, he had embarked upon a systematic study of dreams because, whilst a normal and familiar experience, they could also be seen as a model of neurosis ‘in miniature’. Furthermore, whilst the person slept, the normal mechanisms of self-control and internal repression that regulated their daily life were suspended. The free rein this gave to the unconscious also made dreams interesting for the intra-psychical dynamics they revealed, for illuminations of illnesses of the mind and for normal psychology.

*The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind. By analysing dreams we can take a step forward in our understanding of that most marvellous and most mysterious of all instruments. Only a small step, no doubt; but a beginning. And this beginning will enable us to proceed further with its analysis, on the basis of other structures which must be termed pathological.*[[119]](#footnote-119)

As far back (that we know) as the Sumerians of Mesopotamia more than 7,000 years ago, dreams have been seen as meaningful and requiring interpretation. Freud undertook a systematic study of dream meaning with the deeper aim of shedding light upon the working of the human psyche. He was reacting in part to the methodological assumptions of the psychology of the day to see dreams as the result of somatic inputs and physical states such as hunger and discomfort, or of brain activity during sleep and therefore random and without meaning. His analytical model of ‘the dream’ comprised several elements.

Freud saw the dream essentially as the distorted expression of desire. This was the ‘wish-fulfilment’ of the dream. Often this was sexual, the result either of early sexualised experiences or traumas, or of adult wants. Even in its sleeping state, however, the mind in Freud’s account exerts censorship over the full expression of such memories. This struggle produces the ‘manifest dream’. This is the dream we experience. It is the result of the ‘dream-work’ which, acting upon the ‘latent-dream’, the true or original dream material that is being censored, creates the dream that we remember.

The dream-work, the author of the manifest-dream, operates *via* the creation of symbols. The appearances of objects or words that are quite ordinary and ubiquitous in normal conscious life, become suffused with symbolism in the dream. Such ‘dream objects’ may be taken from the mundane experiences of the day, whilst their meaning may reach far back into the suppressed memories of the person’s distant past. So, a comb can represent a frustrated tryst, a tree a father’s gifts, a purse a vagina, and so on. There is no prescriptive order to how such symbols are ascribed, only that they always stand for something that has been suppressed and put ‘out of (conscious) mind’. The excavation of the unique meaning of each is something that requires interpretation, conducted through the therapist-patient alliance.

Freud’s study of dreams led him to identify four mechanisms employed by the dream-work.

1. Condensation. This refers to the layering of different meanings and symbolic representations onto the same specific element of the manifest dream. So, a dream-character for instance, can in fact represent two, or even several figures from the real-world life of the dreamer. An item from the ‘day-just-gone’ can be infused with meanings that even pull in different directions of interpretation. This means of course that dreams are complex and paradoxical, raising problems always for their decipherment.
2. Displacement. Freud observed that the meaning of an element of a dream, or even of the dream in its entirety, was often not true to the latent dream from which it was derived. Its presented meaning – the story of the dream, the dreamer’s direct sense of the what the dream was about – was often more apparent than real. The actual meaning then, had been *displaced*, from its origin deep in the psyche, onto a canvas of seemingly unrelated symbolic objects.
3. Secondary revision. This can be thought of as the ‘editing’ of the manifest dream; the stitching together of otherwise disconnected fragments into some kind of ‘logical’ sense. Where the symbolic elements of the dream represent difficult, painful, or confusing ideational material drawn from life experience that has been repressed, other elements drawn from consciousness are used to ‘fill-the-gaps’ or complete the narrative of the dream. It is ‘secondary’ in the sense that it comes at the end of the dream-work; its task to tidy-up the story.
4. Representation. Freud saw this as the most interesting aspect of the dream-work, and the most difficult to understand. For the dream to be constructed, meanings must be converted into pictorial representations, or definite word associations. Whilst consciousness can only do this with effort, in the sleeping state this occurs quite naturally, with no work required on the part of the sleeper (to their knowledge, at least). It is the job of analysis, to wind this process backwards as excavation and interpretation of the latent dream material.

Freud’s interests had by now travelled from a focus upon neurosis, to one upon ‘normal psychology’. In so doing, he had developed his modelling of psychical structure. Most importantly, through his systematic study of dreams he had established his most far-reaching discovery: the role of the unconscious in the normal life of the person. By the turn of the century, along with his shift to the analysis of symbols, the insights he had gained from his therapeutic work and his study of dreams, Freud had ploughed the ground for a generalised theory of mind.

Freud’s first account of the psyche, his ‘topographical model’, consisted of parts that were in dynamic tension with one another. Beneath our conscious, self-aware mental life, there lay an unconscious (the ‘system unconscious’), an opaque realm of primitive needs and libidinous impulses. These were the result of infantile wishes and the repressed material of forbidden desires in the adult. If not repressed entirely, they could only enter consciousness (the ‘system conscious’) after filtering by the pre-conscious (the ‘system preconscious’), acting as a censor and regulator of potentially dangerous urges. Where especially powerful strivings in the adult were repressed, the result could be a ‘fixation’ causing obsessive and repetitive behaviour.

Moreover, the unconscious was different to other components of the mind in more respects. The unconscious had no sense of time for instance, with material from early life often creating even greater disturbances than more recent experiences.

*The unconscious is quite timeless. The most important as well as the strangest characteristic of psychical fixation is that all impressions are preserved, not only in the same for in which they were first received, but also in all the forms which they have adopted in their further developments.*[[120]](#footnote-120)

The unconscious also did not distinguish between the real and the unreal. Imagined experiences and actual experiences in the person’s life were treated with equal significance and value. This also meant that the logic of normal daily life did not apply, with ideas being merged that would be incompatible in external reality. The ‘system unconscious’ was therefore not directly knowable or accessible. This material could however be detected by its effects in the person’s life, and *via* indirect therapeutic techniques such as ‘word-association’.

*Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to be. We shall be glad to learn, however, that the correction of internal perception will turn out not to offer such great difficulties as the correction of external perception – that internal objects are less unknowable than the external world.*[[121]](#footnote-121)

Between the unconscious and the conscious lay the preconscious. This contained repressed memories that could be brought back to consciousness often quite easily, and through therapy. Moreover, the preconscious was something familiar to us in our normal lives. In his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud describes the many ways in which material that has been pushed into the preconscious cause parapraxes - slips-of-the-tongue, significant moments of forgetfulness, meaningful errors, and so on. These three elements then, the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious made up a topography in which the self-awareness of normal day-to-day life sat atop a vast realm of unconsciousness: the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

In this period Freud developed his first formulation of the ‘pleasure principle’. This referred to the tendency of the organism to seek pleasure and to avoid pain. For this early version of the principle, Freud spoke of the organism’s avoidance of ‘unpleasure’. This could refer to the failure to achieve pleasure as much as to physical or emotional distress. In their endeavours to achieve their goals under the influence of the primitive urges of the unconscious, the person could experience unfulfilled desire, undischarged energy, and the nervous tension of unsuccessful strivings. In this circumstance, they could consequently descend into fixated neurosis or alternatively, the ‘unpleasure’ they experienced could be pushed back down into the unconscious as repressed mental material.

In his essay *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911),[[122]](#footnote-122) Freud introduced the ‘reality principle’ that countered the appetite for pleasure and its impulses. He began his discussion with the observation that at the root of neurosis is a ‘flight from reality’, a turning away from a painful external world, inwards to a realm of hallucination. The very young infant also, not yet able to control its world, takes refuge in the hallucinatory satisfaction of internal needs. The inadequacy of this realm in meeting real needs creates a striving to master and manipulate the external environment; so, creating the reality principle. At this stage the sense organs become increasingly important as the young infant gives ‘attention’ to its world, committing what they ‘note’ to memory, and learning how to ‘judge’ the correctness of their ideas about objects within their reach. During this developmental process, ‘thinking’ becomes important for the child’s self-mastery. Over time the reality principle comes to dominate over the pleasure principle, as the child realises the possibility of delayed gratification for its pleasure-seeking desires.

*Actually, the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the path an assured pleasure at a later time.*[[123]](#footnote-123)

All of Freud’s theorising of the mind and its growth from the neonatal stage, through childhood and on to adolescence and adulthood, was related to his emerging theory of human sexuality. In his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905),[[124]](#footnote-124)along with his model of psychosexual phases of development, based upon an ‘oral stage’, an ‘anal-sadistic stage’, a ‘genital stage’ and a ‘latency stage’, Freud also promoted the existence of infantile sexuality.

*It is remarkable that those writers who endeavour to explain the qualities and reactions of the adult individual have given so much more attention to the ancestral period than to the period of the individual’s own existence—that is, they have attributed more influence to heredity than to childhood.* […] *No author has to my knowledge recognized the lawfulness of the sexual impulse in childhood, and in the numerous writings on the development of the child the chapter on “Sexual Development” is usually passed over.*[[125]](#footnote-125)

Freud had already put forward his novel concept based upon the Oedipus myth of ancient Greece that was to capture the imagination of his readership and a wider public. In Sophocles’ play, *Oedipus Rex*,the eponymous hero slays his father, King Laius and (unknowingly) marries his mother, Queen Jocasta. Freud used the story to illustrate a dynamic in human psychosexual development, that he would call the ‘Oedipus Complex’, holding it to be universal across all cultures.[[126]](#footnote-126) This dynamic appeared with the growth of the young child into awareness of their dependence upon their mother, and an emerging sense of rivalry with their father for their mother’s love. For Freud, the Oedipus Complex was the key to the riddle of sexual attraction and coupling in adult life. It was a theory he was to amend and develop over much of the rest of his career.

**The Structural Model**

The years across the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the outbreak of the world war and the years following it, saw Freud struggling to address what he recognised as weaknesses in his theorising. A central issue, and the point on which his theoretical model would falter, was his acknowledgement that the reality principle did not in fact counter the pleasure principle; rather it merely regulated it, tempering its immediate demands to achieve satisfaction at some later point. So, the dynamic here was that the reality principle served the interests of the more fundamental pleasure principle. But then why it should be that some types of neurotic patient in Freud’s clinical cases, compulsively repeated their traumas, seeking to re-experience episodes that clearly caused them distress. In addition, there were the examples of recurring anxiety dreams (clearly not driven by ‘the wish’), and the repetitively re-lived traumas of war veterans.

Freud tackled these issues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) where presented his theory of drives, themselves the result of primordial impulses. The apparent over-riding of the pleasure principle that Freud saw in his patients, as well as in some aspects of children’s play, he labelled ‘repetition-compulsion’. For his cases Freud found a new purpose to the fixated behaviours that characterised many of the neuroses involved. The repetitive patterns, or ‘reaction-formations’, he interpreted now as returns to earlier life-episodes and attempts by the psyche to deal with unresolved shocks and traumas.[[127]](#footnote-127) In such obsessive behaviour, the individual repeatedly re-lived the anxieties associated with painful recollections from their lives. The pleasure principle did not always prevail, and Freud’s observations forced him to accept its dethroning as the commanding principle of the human psyche.

To resolve this impasse Freud elaborated the novel concept of the ‘death instinct’; later to be termed ‘Thanatos’. His reasoning ran as follows. From the most irreducible level of life, covering the entire spectrum from the simplest to the most complex forms, and onto humanity, a death-instinct reigned, under which the organism strives to achieve a final entropic stasis, that can only mean its own end; that can only mean death. And yet the organism also strives to survive and reproduce itself. The death-instinct was balanced against a second instinct, this one a life-force; later to be termed Eros. Whilst the overarching trajectory was defined by a drive towards death, the life-instinct checked any premature termination for the organism. The aim of life was indeed death; however not any death. Only one kind of death would be appropriate to an organism in its environment; and, by extension, for a person in their own life circumstance. Freud’s model of the psyche was now rooted in a dual ‘instinct theory’.

A shift from a model rooted in a striving for pleasure, to one rooted in a striving for death, demanded a revision of Freud’s explanation of the psyche. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud now altered the topographical model to focus far more upon on the ego, a construct that he had referred to previously but that he now formally theorised. The ego drew its energy from the unconscious, the site of the competing instincts of death and love; of destruction and creation. In its efforts to manage reality, the ego also created an idea of itself, a self-image of its strivings and achievements. This became an ‘ego ideal’, a psychical precipitate of the ego’s activity; an entity for which Freud coined the term ‘superego’. Whilst, like the ego the superego drew its energy from the unconscious, it also played the role of an unforgiving critic, standing in judgement over the ego’s failings and shortcomings, and creating a background sense of the guilt in the person’s subconscious.

*The broad general outcome of the sexual phase governed by the Oedipus complex may, therefore, be taken to be the forming of a precipitate in the ego, consisting of these two identifications in some way combined together. This modification of the ego retains its special position ; it stands in contrast to the other constituents of the ego in the form of an ego-ideal or super-ego.*[[128]](#footnote-128)

In Freud’s new account the opposition between ego and superego had consequences for psychosexual development and the ways in which the person grows into their social world. This resulted from a difference in how these entities incorporated their formative childhood relationships. Whereas the tendency in the ego was to relate to the object or person of desire by ‘bringing it into itself’, internalising a mental version of it in a process of ‘introjection’, the tendency of the superego was to identify with an abstraction of the object or person of desire, so ‘becoming’ it or them in its imagination. In the boy this meant a tendency to identify with the father; in the girl it meant a tendency to identify with the mother.

Later in ‘The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’ (1930) he would put it in the following way:

*The basis of the process is what is called an ‘identification’ – that is to say the assimilation of one ego to another one, as a result of which the first ego behaves like the second in certain aspects, imitates it and in a sense takes it up into itself. Identification has been not unsuitably compared with the oral cannibalistic incorporation of the other person. It is a very important form of attachment to someone else, probably the very first, and not the same thing as the choice of an object. The difference between the two can be expressed in some such way as this. If a boy identifies himself with his father, he wants to be like his father; if he makes him the object of his choice, he wants to have him, to possess him. In the first case his ego is altered on the model of his father; in the second case that is not necessary.*[[129]](#footnote-129)

So, the separate socialising mechanisms of the ego and the superego had implications for gendering in the person. One interpretation now could be that under heteronormative sociocultural cues and pressures the male child would seek to *have* the mother, to introject her presence into his ego, later in life seeking to *possess* the feminine object, the women, the wife; and as he grew, he would come to *identify with* the father *via* his superego, striving to *become* the masculine object, the man, the husband. In the female child, the process was the reverse. Here, again under heteronormative sociocultural influences, the girl would seek to *have* the father, to introject him into her ego, later in life seeking to *possess* the masculine object, the man, the husband; and as she grew, she would come to *identify with* the mother *via* her superego, striving to *become* the feminine object, the woman, the wife.

But by 1923 the key elements of Freud’s new theory of the psyche had already come into focus. The third component of the structural model after the ego and the superego, was the id. Whilst the general categories of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious were still present, the new model was centred upon the interactions between these three principal psychodynamic elements. In addition, the id was a powerful entity that contained the two primordial forces – the life instinct and the death instinct - that directly and indirectly governed human behaviour.

So, the three actors of the structural model were locked in tension with one another: the ego and the id struggled for command of the individual’s behaviour; the ego and the superego also wrestled for dominance in the person’s life. In fact, the id and the superego could be seen as working in alliance with one another, in that the higher strivings of the superego drew their energy from the id itself; this cathectic energy now decoupled from sexual objects, being reoriented for loftier aims in a process of ‘sublimation’.

Between these struggles the ego was caught in the middle, besieged from both sides, as well as having to deal with the threats and dangers of the external world, this being its principal role.

*This superego occupies a special position between the ego and the id. It belongs to the ego and shares its high degree of psychological organization; but it has a particularly intimate connection with the id. It is in fact a precipitate of the first object-cathexes of the id and is the heir to the Oedipus Complex after its demise. This superego can confront the ego and treat it like an object; and it often treats it very harshly. It is as important for the ego to remain on good terms with the superego as with the id.*[[130]](#footnote-130)

The interactions between these constituents were complex, as indeed where the internal dynamics of each. So, the ego was rooted in the id and itself was both conscious in its dealings with the world, and unconscious insofar as it pushed ‘down’ unwanted material into the pre-consciousness realm of the psyche. This detail of the ego’s activity as a ‘defence’ against previous traumas, gave Freud the mechanism of repression that his previous model had lacked.

To engage with external reality the ego operated chiefly as a system of perception, whilst in its interactions with the id it dealt with repressed ideational material. One further consequence of this was that whilst the id was an opaque and impenetrable realm, the ego contained the residue of ‘verbal-images’ that had been repressed and so could be accessed and brought into the light once more by analysis.[[131]](#footnote-131)

**The ‘mind’ in Freud**

Freud’s theory of mind developed through his therapeutic observations and theoretical speculations. His discovery of the unconscious as an object of importance for a scientific understanding of the human mind, and as being accessible to analysis, provided the basis for his ‘topographical model’. Here, the preconscious acted as a conduit of mental material that the conscious part of the psyche found difficult or painful, working to push it into the unconscious, rendering it harmless to the person’s normal functioning. Freud could not however, explain the recurrence of repressed material through cycles of behaviour that repetitively conjured up previous traumatic experiences.

Freud’s later ’structural model’ of the psyche placed conflict at its dynamic centre. The three entities that comprised the model were locked in a permanent struggle, driven by the restless energy of the id. The ego ceaselessly battled with the id, striving to temper its impulses with its own perceptions of the threats and hazards of external reality. Meanwhile, the superego, the ‘precipitate’ of the ego’s own endeavours, and representing the ego’s self-ideal, stood in judgement over it, creating by its censures a permanent residue of unfocused guilt in the person.

All of Freud’s theoretical models of the mind were essentially individualistic. He was concerned above all with the effective functioning of the person in their society, with no further critique of the form of the society itself. Going beyond this limitation to explain how ‘mind’ emerges requires the historical critique that Marxism provides.

## Marxism and consciousness

**Mind and world**

For Marx ‘society’ is the analytical starting point for understanding human behaviour; social relations being the ultimate source of human consciousness. However, it is the nature of the relationship between the material world and the mind that is the focus here; the mechanism by which social experience becomes mental content.

Within the Marxist tradition, different versions of materialism have been developed. Because of their revolutionary orientation, these are usually tied to the status of the mind in relation to both nature and economic structure. What matters here is the causal relationship between economic and social structures on one side, and human consciousness and historical action on the other.

Examples of the type of materialism we have already encountered in David Hume, namely that an object of the external world making an impression upon the mind in turn creates a representation of it, can indeed be found in the Marxist tradition; and sometimes alongside of more dialectical types of philosophical materialism. One notable example is found in Lenin.

Throughout most of 1908 and the early part of 1909, Lenin was involved in a polemic against a philosophical tendency within the Russian revolutionary movement: empirio-criticism.[[132]](#footnote-132) Empirio-criticism promoted an epistemology premised upon ‘pure experience’ that did not require non-experiential metaphysical categories, structures, or constructions. More to the point, this ‘naïve realism’ dispensed with any notion of a necessary underlying material reality in favour of a complete reliance upon sensuous experience for our knowledge of the world. For Lenin it was the anti-materialist leanings he detected towards subjective-idealism and psychological symbolism that was the problem. He subjected it to unforgiving criticism in his *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (1909).[[133]](#footnote-133)

The opening part of Lenin’s attack was organised around a reflectionist version of materialism, that drew upon some key passages in Engels’writings. In this theorisation the external object makes an impression, in a Humean sense, upon the mind, which then creates a mental ‘image’ of it.

*… the materialist Frederick Engels … constantly and without exception speaks in his works of things and their mental pictures or images (Gedanken-Abbilder), and it is obvious that these mental images arise exclusively from sensations.*[[134]](#footnote-134)

And

*Anybody who reads Anti-Dühring and Ludwig Feuerbach with the slightest care will find scores of instances when Engels speaks of things and their reflections in the human brain, in our consciousness, thought, etc. Engels does not say that sensations or ideas are “symbols” of things, for consistent materialism must here use “image,” picture, or reflection instead of “symbol,” …* [[135]](#footnote-135)

Later, Lenin puts things even more clearly.

*Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.*[[136]](#footnote-136)

So, for Lenin here the mental ‘object’ was the result of a ‘copying’ of the actual object, a mental construction that reflected the impressions created by the object upon the senses and upon the brain. This was a type of materialism that he equated with ‘objective sensationalism’, a philosophical current in popular pre-War European philosophy.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Lenin’s sensation-based materialism, that he was to put aside in his later philosophical writings,[[138]](#footnote-138) was critiqued at some length by the Dutch communist Antonie Pannekoek. Pannekoek’s analysis of Lenin’s position in 1909 is useful for our purpose and we will survey it here, as well as his writings on materialism in Marxism more generally. It was a topic he wrote about frequently throughout his political career.

In his *Lenin as Philosopher* (1938)*,*[[139]](#footnote-139)Pannekoek makes a distinction between two types of materialism: bourgeois materialism;[[140]](#footnote-140) and historical materialism.[[141]](#footnote-141) The first connects ‘spiritual phenomena’ to the brain’s ‘physico-chemical-biological’ processes. The second relates mental contents to the external world; and to social structure. For this second type, and in familiar Marxist terms, Pannekoek emphasises the *active* – as opposed to *contemplative* - character of the relationship between the mind and the world; a relationship centred upon the transformational character of human labour upon its object.[[142]](#footnote-142) Pannekoek’s charge against Lenin’s 1909 position is that it retains the materialism of the first type in this distinction.

Pannekoek argues that bourgeois materialism opposes itself not to idealism *per se*, but to fideism; it is a critique first and foremost of religion. This is the tendency he identifies in Lenin’s position. And the root of that he sees in the influence of Georgi Plekhanov, the leading Marxist philosopher of the time.

Plekhanov, according to Pannekoek, confuses the meaning of a historically pivotal statement by Marx on the nature of the relationship between consciousness and the world. In the first of his eleven theses on Feuerbach,[[143]](#footnote-143) Marx distinguished between the material object as an object of contemplation, and alternatively as one of human labour.

*The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.*[[144]](#footnote-144)

For Marx and Engels, and the Young Hegelians, Feuerbach’s reduction of god and all things religious, to the secular domain of human creation, had been exhilarating.[[145]](#footnote-145)However, Marx came to see this as an ‘inconsistent materialism’. Whilst the relationship between the human being and their world was one of contemplation only, of observation and scrutiny, the sensuous world of experience was simply a given, independent of human action, and reality the result of the churn of worldly objects, and their multiform but fixed characteristics. This rendering of the human being, not in their active involvement in the world, but only in their theoretical aspect, retained for Marx the trace of idealism. Only with the re-rendering of the human being in their active relationship with the world, centred upon the transformative role of human labour working upon nature, and back upon consciousness itself, could this last vestige of idealism be put aside.

For Pannekoek, the radical break with Feuerbach that the ‘first thesis’ represented, was lost in Plekhanov’s conflation of the different ideas of Marx and Engels on the one hand, and Feuerbach on the other. The result, by this argument, was that the importance of the first thesis for the achievement of a thoroughgoing materialism became submerged beneath an otherwise superficial anti-fideism; and the banal observation that the brain is a prerequisite for human consciousness.

*It is a significant indication of the point of view of Plechanov* (sic) *that he does not see this antagonism and that he assigns the main importance to the trivial community of opinion – which is unimportant for the real issue – that thoughts are produced by the brain.*

Other figures in the Marxist tradition have discussed the interaction between mind and the world. A first example, from the standpoint of philosophy, is György Lukács who in his *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (1925 or 1926)[[146]](#footnote-146) defended his account of consciousness from accusations of philosophical idealism. A second example, from the standpoint of experimental psychology, is Lev Vygotsky, who in his *Thought and Language* (1934)[[147]](#footnote-147) suggested a process by which mental concepts come into existence; one that ran counter to the ‘copy’ theory of Lenin’s 1909 materialism. And a third example, from the standpoint of literary criticism, is Frederic Jameson, who in his *The Political Unconscious* (1981) suggests an ‘unconscious’ that is primarily both historical and collective, and a source of contradictions that whilst hidden to the self, find symbolic resolution in cultural artefacts.

In his *Tailism and the Dialectic*, Lukács maintains the impossibility of an unmediated connection between the mind and the objective world. To his critics, this represented a sundering of the dialectic of consciousness from that of nature. This was the ‘idealism’ of which he stood accused in the world of Soviet philosophical orthodoxy, despite his insistence that a connection was always present, but via mediating categories. However, the debate posed a question that is relevant to our broader inquiry: ‘If all our consciousness is conceptual, the result of mental activity, then how can we know the world as it really is, without some type of direct and immediate experience of worldly objects?’[[148]](#footnote-148)

But then how we might locate such ‘immediate’ experience?[[149]](#footnote-149) The question is not straightforward. Experience, even when novel, comes to us with some mental organisation that is proximal to it. A new experience of reality presents itself to us as just that - a ‘new experience’, not yet integrated into our general mental schema, but still recognisable as a part of the world of which we are familiar. Alternatively, we can identify the sensory input in an analytical exercise that separates it out from its mental aspect. But even then, the sense-data involved does not exist in isolation in a pure form. Rather, it comes to us as part of a material environment or social circumstance, reflecting our position within it. It is also corporeal, dependent upon our physical condition, the health of our senses, and the satisfaction of our basic needs. Consequently, our search for a pure sensory input into our conscious thought processes, that is not mediated in one way or another, takes us to ever greater abstractions. Ultimately, we can defend the notion of immediate experience of the world only as an inferred limit, a ‘zero-point’ that we can treat as ‘real’, but with no content of its own. Reversing this logic and working from the outside world inwards into the mind, we can understand this liminal position as also representing an origin; or perhaps a source of moment-to-moment information about the world to which the mind responds and seeks to organise for its own survival.[[150]](#footnote-150)

An analogy from chemistry with its language of elements and compounds, can help us to better appreciate this point. So, chlorine can exist in diatomic form as a gas, in solid form as an ionic lattice, and in solute form as a chloride or hypochlorite salt. In fact, ‘chlorine’ does not exist unless in one observable form or another. Even in its highly reactive and unstable free radical form we know it, not directly, but by its oxidative effects. It is itself a non-empirical abstraction generalised from empirical observation, a construct of atomic theory and mathematical modelling. It is real, though inferred as such; the various forms of chlorine being what chlorine is. The contact between mind and world has this type of philosophical status. So, as sense-data enters the mind it does so in an ideational form. It cannot enter thought in some other way, independently of mental processes. The creation of ‘experience’ then, involves the melding of sensory stimulation with the activity of the mind, instantaneously and in the very moment of entry. It is the way sense-data is assimilated by the mind.[[151]](#footnote-151)

So, direct contact with the world stands outside of ‘experience’. We can infer it as a ‘limit’ to our mental apprehension of the world, as well as an ‘origin’ of our organic character as biological beings. And conscious apprehension of the world requires experience, with all the layered mediation mentioned above and more, but also combined with the operational concepts that work upon it to create understanding. And yet, how do such concepts themselves emerge?

We can create a hypothetical scale of mental constructs, from novel sensory inputs not yet integrated into any conceptual schema (‘new experience’), through to highly organised conceptual articulations, informed by sensory inputs that are familiar (‘integrated experience’), and that bring no surprise. Drawing upon experimental studies with young children Vygotsky created this type of scale to illustrate pathways of mental development and the emergence of concepts.[[152]](#footnote-152) His classification was based upon tests that asked children of different ages to group blocks of different shapes, colours, and labels. It ran as follows:

* Syncretism. The assembling of groups (physical and mental) based upon random selection or spatial distribution but with no objective meaning.
* Complex formation (first type). The formation of groups (physical and mental) based upon objective characteristics observed by the child, that are factual, rather than logical, as in family groupings for example. The principle is one of association.
* Complex formation (second type). The formation of groups (physical and mental) based upon objective characteristics that distinguish sub-groups from one another, or that represent actual similarities, allowing for their organisation into collections. The principle is one of assortment.
* Chain-complex formation. The creation of linked groups (physical and mental), by which the child, having assembled objects according to one attribute, moves into a different grouping activity based upon another attribute of some of the same objects.
* Diffuse-complex formation. The creation of groupings (physical and mental) by the observation of degrees of similarity *e.g.* shadings of colour, composite shapes, *etc.*, that allow these assemblages to shift from one type to another. These groupings are fluid, though they are still based upon observed and factual attributes.
* Pseudo-concept formation. The creation of groupings (physical and mental) that are based upon factual attributes, but that are named by the child using words that are borrowed from the adult. These words for the adult represent a generalisation based upon observation and experience of the world. They symbolise an abstract idea: a concept. However, the child’s use of the word still relies upon objects of experience, despite the *appearance* of conceptual thought.
* Concept formation. The creation of a unified mental concept that works independently of particular observations of the world, and that can be transferred from one experience to another. The concept is represented by a word, standing as its symbol in relation to others, making possible mastery of the environment and rational communication; the word being provided by the child’s social world so integrating them into a culture.

So, the introduction of the ‘word’ (symbol) acting as a mediating third term between the object and the concept enables understanding for the child, and the possibility of communication. This facility becomes apparent at puberty.

In his account of mental development and of the emergence of conceptual thinking, Vygotsky emphasises the active role of the mental operations involved. This is the opposite of the ‘copy’ theory of the development of ideas in which repeated exposure to the object gradually imprints it as a mental representation; the mind being essentially a passive receiver of impressions of the world.

*When the process of concept formation is seen in all its complexity, it appears as a movement of thought within the pyramid of concepts, constantly alternating between two directions, from the particular to the general, and from the general to the particular.*

*… a concept is formed, not through the interplay of associations, but through an intellectual operation in which all the elementary mental functions participate in a specific combination.*

*… the use of the word is an integral part of the developing processes, and the word maintains its guiding function in the formation of genuine concepts, to which these processes lead.*[[153]](#footnote-153)

Vygotsky’s view of the role of ‘the word’ in mental processes, and of language more generally, gives a final insight that is useful for our inquiry. This is the notion of ‘inner speech’. The external speech of the young child occurs in two forms: egocentric speech; and social speech. With egocentric speech the child focuses upon themselves and their immediate environment, often showing little interest in communication with others. With social speech communication and shared understandings occur. Inner speech however, a later stage of development, is not anchored to ‘the word’; it can be wordless, working in ‘meaning’ rather than formal language. Through inner speech such meaning can attach to words, though often in an unstable, fluctuating manner, oscillating between its word and wordless forms. For Vygotsky, this is the nature of thought, and its emergence, development, and maturation.[[154]](#footnote-154)

Vygotsky’s theory of concept formation provides a model of mental development in the individual. However, Marxism is not only a theory of social dynamics, generally understood. It is also a theory of human consciousness in its historical context. Our question now is ‘How do we explain the self that is able to reflect upon its own existence, yet is unable to understand its creation as a historical entity?’

For Jameson, there is an unconscious that is the result of the history of a people, that is active in their social experience and that is particular to them. This ‘history’ however, is ‘not there’ in a material sense. There is nothing tangible that can be grasped in any substantive way. Its force as a cause lies in its hidden character, and its effects are political, manifest in human behaviour at the level of the individual, the group and the society in its entirety. Jameson deems history, borrowing a concept from Spinoza, to be an ‘absent cause’; always working on the present; yet always obscure to those that are its bearers.

This ‘history’ however, is not a simple and homogeneous cause. Rather it is full of contradiction, and tensions and antagonisms that are felt in the moment-to-moment experience of the present; felt as the ‘ideological unconscious’ working its effects upon the conscious mind and people in their social behaviours. The importance of this for Jameson, is that it enables us to understand cultural works – the artefacts of literature and art[[155]](#footnote-155) - as symbolic resolutions of these tensions, illuminating them with a critical light for analysis and comprehension.[[156]](#footnote-156) This understanding of culture places it in a wider framing, as one part of a complex historical whole. ‘History’ then becomes a ‘totalising narrative’, essential to an understanding of any creative work, whilst being itself an inexpressible presence.[[157]](#footnote-157)

*It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity.*[[158]](#footnote-158)

This historically relativising tendency is relevant to Jameson’s use of the psychoanalytical unconscious. For Jameson the unconscious is intrinsically time-bound. It is also structural, an effect of the social experience of a community, whereas for Freud it is rooted in individual desire. Moreover, the historical nature of Jameson’s unconscious and his re-casting of libido-theory are linked. This becomes clear when we look at his treatment of ‘desire’ as itself historical. So, for Freud, desire - understood as ‘wish-fulfilment’ - arises from the restless id. It is a constant, universal, and unrelenting urge towards pleasure-oriented consumption. However, from Jameson’s standpoint desire is understood as a historical creation, bound up with its cultural context, mediations, and production. It exists through industries that belong to a particular social, political, and technological setting. Desire then is never natural; always under capitalism it is manufactured and commodified.

This relativising of desire suggests a means by which to disentangle a non-libidinal unconscious from the sexual meaning Freud gave it throughout his works. Freud’s unconscious - the result of repression that is rooted in the sexualised jealousies of early childhood – we can now re-frame as only one aspect of an unconscious that reflected his cultural environment.[[159]](#footnote-159) Analytically, beneath this we can place a structural unconscious; one that arises from the full range of the challenges and complexities of life. It is something that results from the repressive psychic mechanism enabling us to survive; the blade that splits and sculpts the subject into empirical character and individual personality. This general form of repression and the structural unconscious it creates is helpful for a model-of-mind that traverses many historical settings.

A non-libidinal understanding of repression would bring it closer to its pre-Freudian usage. In the work of Joahann Herbart, ‘repression’ (*‘Verdrängung’*) is the mechanism by which apperceptive complexes are pushed ‘down’ below the limen that separates the conscious mind from an unconscious realm. Herbart’s modelling of the mind, influenced by the Newtonian paradigm that served as the standard of modern science at the time, was a mechanical and mathematicised one. This biophysical model of the mind, that was to influence the young Freud *via* his teacher and mentor Theodor Meynert, was premised upon the notion of mental material that comes into consciousness by achieving ‘apperceptive mass’ as it combines with other representational complexes (‘Vorstellungen’). As it does it finds its place in a process of synthesis leading to the mind’s ‘sense-of-the-world’. Complexes that are incompatible with this sense are pushed out of consciousness, though they never disappear entirely from the mind’s store of repressed mental material.

In later work, Jameson draws on Raymond Williams’s model of residual, dominant, and emergent ideologies[[160]](#footnote-160) to describe a cultural field that is continuously contested. These ideological formations, read through the lens of the political unconscious, reveal the hidden processes by which ideology embeds itself within subjectivity. It is this opacity at the heart of the self that enables the deceits and manipulations of ideology.[[161]](#footnote-161)

**Marx on ideology**

Marx's theory of ideology can be classified as three different approaches. Each captures a different aspect of how the primary producers of any given type of society are persuaded to accept their position within oppressive class structures. These different conceptualisations are: ‘representation’; ‘material practice’; and ‘appearance’. In *The German Ideology* (1846) Marx outlines a theory by which ideology represents the dominant ideas of a society, corresponding to the economic interests of its ruling class. In this same work, there is a description of human consciousness in its various forms that centres material processes of survival as its source. In later works, and chiefly in *Das Capital*, Marx describes the social appearance of capitalist relations of production that, whilst originating in the lived experience of exploitation, also masks their true character with ‘fetishised’ conceptualisations of reality.

*Ideology and representation*

In the *German Ideology*, Marx gives the following account of the role of ideology in society.

*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy, and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an “eternal law.”*

This passage is an evocation of the importance of ideas for the power wielded by a ruling class over those it exploits. It highlights the role that the manipulation of mental life plays in class society. It also suggests mechanisms by which this happens. There is the notion of the ‘means of mental production’, by which Marx means the scholastic monasteries of the medieval order, universities, the legal system, and the raft of institutions that he was to bring under the rubric of ‘superstructure’. Connected to this is the ‘distribution of ideas’, meaning the popular press and other media, the education system, the pulpit and so forth. These are essentially social mechanisms.

This passage also suggests mechanisms that are closer to our theme; touching upon how Marx conceptualises the mind.[[162]](#footnote-162) We will classify them here. Firstly, there is the conversion of social (‘material’) relationships into idealised forms. This is in effect a ‘mystification’ of social reality, and a re-casting of it into a sanitised imaginary construction. This involves a second mechanism, that is the ‘inversion’ of unjust social reality into an unreal notion, reconfigured as ‘just’. To illustrate, we might consider the mystification and inversion of an unequal social structure into an idealised version of it that is centred upon the concept of equality. The third mechanism suggested here is the ‘eternalising’ of such idealisations. Here, exploitative social relationships are presented as timeless, fixed, and unchanging. This ‘universalisation’ turns historical realities into things of a natural order that cannot be changed; that are invulnerable to human action.

To better understand these mechanisms of mystification, inversion, and universalisation, we can trace their development in an earlier work in which Marx interrogates the philosophical categories devised by Hegel and his followers. This is *The Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844).[[163]](#footnote-163)

Mystification

In *The Critique*, Marx points to Hegel’s propensity to elevate abstractions above empirical reality; reality becoming derivative of transcendental entities, rather than seen as their origin. Central to Hegel’s system is the Idea, expressing itself through corporeal manifestations in its historical journey towards self-realisation. The Idea, realised in the institutions of public and private life as ‘objective spirit’, is the definitive mystification residing at the core of Hegel’s metaphysics.

One result of mystification in Hegel’s philosophy, according to Marx, is that human activity-in-the-world is not seen as being real in itself, but rather as being merely real only for the metaphysical demiurge that is the Idea, or *Geist* (‘Spirit’) moving through history. Human activity then, is afforded not an independent reality but, in Marx’s terminology, an ‘allegorical’ status.

*This inversion of subject into object and object into subject is a consequence of Hegel's wanting to write the biography of the Idea ... with human activity ... having consequently to appear as the activity and result of something other than man.*[[164]](#footnote-164)

And consequent upon all of this, where human activity is the result not of human agency, but of a power that stands over it, upon which it relies for its historical meaning, freedom disappears. The ethical result of Hegel’s philosophy can only be a ‘dumb acceptance’ of reality as it is, and as it must be. Hegel’s metaphysics Marx argues, becomes the legitimation of an indifferent cosmology, and a fixed and unchangeable social order.

Inversion

Marx took his technique of inversion from Feuerbach. Feuerbach, in his critique of Christianity, had inverted the relationship between ‘God’ seen as the origin of the world, a real entity to be worshipped, and a humankind held in faithful fealty to its creator. With Feuerbach’s inversion, humankind itself was seen as the source of the content of religious belief, and ‘God’ an imagined construction, created to meet the psychological needs of human beings, but externalised into the structures and rituals of religious veneration. Where ‘God’ had been the subject, and humankind the predicate, now ‘God’ was the idealised predicate of the real historical subject; humankind itself.

Marx subjected Hegel’s logic to this same inversion – or, more precisely *re*-inversion - technique. In Hegel’s formulations of property relations for instance, the person’s right to property is a facet of the working of ‘will’ in history. It is will, embodied in the person, and in the political sense their ‘personhood’, that drives the desire for, possession of, and entitlement to, private property. For Hegel, this is also the expression and fulfilment of its freedom. Marx argued that this was an inversion. Taking the law of inheritance, primogeniture, as his example, he pointed out that the passing down of landed property to the eldest son was not in fact a matter of choice (‘will’) for the landowner, but rather a matter of property law. Property was not the expression of will in the person, its determination. Rather it was the inverse; the generational passage of landed property resulting from the power of property over will, and inheritance its determined result.

In similar fashion, Marx reworked Hegel’s view of the relationship between civil society and the state. For Hegel, the state stood above civil society and its constituent parts that included economic relations, familial bonds, and other types of particular and private interest. The state for Hegel was of a higher order, the embodiment not of private interests, but of the general interest of the whole of society. It was the expression of a universal principle from which institutions of civil society derived their social meaning and juridical status. Again, for Marx this was an inversion of reality. Rather, civil society was the source of the authority of the state, not the other way around. The state in fact did not stand ‘above’ society but was rooted in the private interests of the dominant class it served. Marx had once more re-inverted Hegel; he had found Hegel ‘standing on his head’ and had turned him the ‘right way up’.

*Family and civil society are the presuppositions of the state; they are really active things; but in speculative philosophy it is reversed ... the political state cannot exist without the natural basis of the family and the artificial basis of civil society; they are its* conditio sine qua non*, but (in Hegel) the conditions are established as the conditioned, the determining as the determined, the producing as the product of its product.*[[165]](#footnote-165)

Universalisation

Finally, Marx identifies a tendency in Hegel to find ‘empirical universals’ in particular interests appearing in an idealised universal form. In his discussion of the Estates of the French Revolution Hegel sees in the new bourgeois state the universalised embodiment and ‘general interest’ of the French Republic. Marx argues however, that this is simply the self-representation of the bourgeoisie to itself and to France as the ‘historical positive’ *contra* the ‘historical negative’ that was the feudal *Ancien Régime*. In the popular tumult that was the 1789 Revolution, whilst the bourgeoise class joined the commotion on the streets of Paris, its real historical interests were always going to prevail.

*No class of civil society can play this role without arousing a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses, a moment in which it fraternizes and merges with society in general, becomes confused with it and is perceived and acknowledged as its general representative, a moment in which its claims and rights are truly the claims and rights of society itself, a moment in which it is truly the social head and the social heart. Only in the name of the general rights of society can a particular class vindicate for itself general domination.*[[166]](#footnote-166)

This raising of the class-interest of a particular - and in this case revolutionary - class, to the status of the interests of the nation, the sum of all the particular interests of civil society, and even to those of humanity in its entirety, are instances of the universalisation of the concrete and selfish interests of a dominant, exploiting class.

These ‘mechanisms-of-the-mind’ - of mystification, inversion, and universalisation - for Marx comprise a system of representation; one that supports the creation of an ideology that rationalises the position of a ruling class, making its dominance a matter of ‘reason’.

*Ideology and material practice*

Marx’s observations about the representational content of consciousness – its constructions of reality in the human imagination - illuminate his view of role of social institutions in the manufacture and dissemination of ideology. In other passages Marx also presents theorisations of ideology based upon material practices within historical societies with their distinctive economic activity, behaviours, belief systems and cultures. These are more concerned with how ideas emerge from social processes and how ideology interacts with society as a whole.

In a short passage in *The German Ideology*, Marx describes a type of efflux by which ideas emerge from patterns of economic life. Here, Marx is emphasising that ideology does not occupy a separate realm from practical life. Rather, it is located within the life-process itself, the ways in which human beings sustain and reproduce their existence. In this account ideas are the “ideological reflexes” and “echoes” of a society’s productive forces and its types of social interaction.

*The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.*[[167]](#footnote-167)

This is a spontaneist explanation for the origin of ideas from economic and social practice. There would be no need here for the mind understood as an autonomously active agent in the creation of ideas. Instead, ideas would emerge, preformed from unreflective human activity.

However, this is not Marx’s primary theoretical model. And beyond this emanation of forms of thought from productive processes Marx does see ideas as feeding back into them, affecting, shaping, and even limiting their development. This suggests an active role for ideas in society. In this ‘organic’ account, historical changes are characterised by interactions of ideology with basic productive forces and their social processes.

What Marx calls the ‘theoretical products’ of human material processes, the ideas created by humans as they work upon nature, become interwoven with those same processes. So, historically specific social and ideological forms - of law, politics, religious practice, *etc.* – correspond to the specific character of the processes that sustain life in an economic mode. Moreover, types of ‘social intercourse’ arising from forms of production also act back upon them, either ‘corresponding’ to them optimally to enable their further development; or acting obstructively to either fetter this potential or to become replaced with new social forms; usually by violence.

Also, the interactions of ideology and material practice, indeed the interactions of all the different facets of a social order, meant that a society could be understood, not just analytically, part by part, but in its totality.

As Marx put in, in summary:

*This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e. civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. and trace their origins and growth from that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another).*[[168]](#footnote-168)

The emphasis on ‘totality’ here means that Marx’s understanding of ideology is not after all a reductionist one, notwithstanding the ‘efflux’ model alluded to earlier. All parts of a society interact with one another and the society itself is more than the sum of its parts; the totality acting back upon the processes that give rise to it. These interactions moreover are ‘mediated’; that is, they work *via* intermediate structures, processes, and social objects.

At its most abstract, the Hegelian category of ‘mediation’ refers to the third term that reconciles opposing entities, otherwise locked in an irreconcilable tension. The movement that overcomes this opposition occurs *via* an intermediary through which the antagonism is eliminated. Applied concretely, it allows Marx’s account of a society to capture the complex interactions between its economic base and the ideas within it. This idea of a ‘mediated totality’ in Marxist theory is developed particularly in the work of Antonio Labriola and his ‘organic conception of history’.[[169]](#footnote-169)

In conclusion, in corresponding to a mode-of-production, ideology reflects the mind-set of the class that owns and controls it: the exploiting class. So, whilst corresponding to the material base of a given society, the dominant ideology, aided by the psychological mechanisms of inversion, mystification, and universalisation, distorts reality to represent only the interests of the dominant class; conversely, masking the interests of the exploited class.

*Ideology and appearance*

The ‘correspondence theory’ of ideology characterised Marx’s writings from *The German Ideology* (1845) through to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).[[170]](#footnote-170) In the preface to the latter, Marx stated:

*In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.*[[171]](#footnote-171)

From this point onwards however, a different explanation enters Marx’s works, based upon the concept of ‘commodity fetishism’. This was a special case of his more general theory of ‘reification’. Reification resulted from the cognitive transfer of something out of its actual setting in external reality, into an imaginary realm, now experienced as something separate, and intrinsic to itself. This involved a perspectival distortion so that something that was the effect of unseen objective causes, was now invested in the mind with an independent existence.

Reification for Marx was not an ideological trick, nor a simple illusion. It was a result of the structural relationships that defined capitalist production. Under capitalism human relations work through the exchange of things; in the form of trade and commerce; and in the form of the capital-labour nexus in which each party has something to exchange. What is a relationship between human beings becomes seen – becomes experienced – as a relationship between things.

*Even from the point of view of the merely formal relation — the general form of capitalist production, which has its less developed mode in common with the more developed — the means of production, the* objective conditions of *labour, do not appear as subsumed under the worker; rather, he appears as subsumed under them. Capital employs labour. Even this relation in its simplicity is a personification of things and a reification of persons.*

*But the relation becomes still more complex — and apparently more mysterious — in that, with the development of the specifically capitalist mode of production, not only do these things — these products of labour, both as use values and as exchange values — stand on their hind legs vis-à-vis the worker and confront him as* “capital” *— but also the social forms of labour appear as* forms of the development of *capital, and therefore the productive powers of social labour, thus developed, appear as* productive powers of capital.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Marx distinguished between the use-value of the commodity and its exchange-value. The use-value was the non-quantifiable practical usefulness of the object or material in question: the value of a plough to till the soil; the value of bread to satisfy hunger; and so on. The exchange value however, lay behind the quantified ratio in which the item could be exchanged with an item of another type. The equivalence that underpinned this ratio was in the amount of labour involved in the making of each of the commodities, quantified as necessary labour time.

This feature of the commodity – as the embodiment of the socially necessary labour time that had created it – gave it another mysterious quality; one of seeming to have a ‘life’ - a ‘value’ - of its own. In other words that its exchange-value on a market of other commodities appeared as essential to it, and something possessed by it. So, although a diamond is no more than a crystal of carbon, its commercial value is seen as a property of the diamond itself, as something that inheres in it. This is the result of the separation of production and consumption under capitalism: production being the labour required to manufacture (or excavate) the product; consumption represented by the market upon which the product becomes a commodity. And its ‘value’ representing a hidden social relationship.

Regarding the worker under capitalism now, they do not own the product of their labour which is expropriated from them; this being the exploitation that defines capitalism. This severing of the process of production from the consumption of the commodity on a market is what makes its true nature – a result of exploitation - opaque. The commodity appears as something of inherent value; this appearance now fetishised as a self-supporting ‘objective’ reality. However, the essence of the commodity is its character as the embodiment of exploited labour. It is the commodity’s appearance free-floating on its market, unrelated to the human labour, that is the basis of Marx’s theory of ‘commodity fetishism’.

*In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.*[[173]](#footnote-173)

The implications of Marx’s analysis of the commodity becomes clear when he comes to the labour-capitalist relationship. Here, we need to see the worker as also situated in the capitalist market. The worker’s survival after all depends upon their ability to sell their labour to a capitalist who will employ them. The capitalist owns the wherewithal – the capital - needed to produce goods for sale: the tools; the machinery; the transportation; the buildings; and so on. However, the worker has something the capitalist needs which is their ability to work with these tools and materials – these means of production; this is their ‘labour power’. It is their labour power they must sell, making it also a commodity, and one of a special kind because it is manifest always through human activity.

This all means that the experience the worker has of the labour-capitalist relationship is one of equal exchange. The worker sells their principal commodity, their labour power, for a return: the wage. The wage-labour exchange has the appearance of a fair bargain. ‘Fair’ here requires a caveat. The worker in fact may see the wage as unfair, but only because it is too low. Then some negotiation or perhaps some industrial struggle may occur that, if successful, raises wages to a level that is experienced as closer to a ‘fair’ rate for the job.

But these very notions of equal exchange and a ‘fair wage’ hide the real character of the exchange. The capitalist returns to the worker a portion of the value of the labour time for which they are employed; the socially necessary time required to produce a quantity of goods. Beyond this the rest of the worker’s labour time is used to create a further quantity of goods for which they go unremunerated. To put it in moral terms, the essence of the worker-capitalist relationship is one of robbery. This time is stolen from the worker, to be realised upon the market as value that is surplus to the maintenance of the productive cycle. As Marx put it, this is the ‘surplus value’ that becomes the capitalist’s profits but now demystified and exposed for what it truly is: the fruits of the exploitation of the worker.

The commodification of labour provides the basis for Marx’s new theory of ideology. This is because the appearance of the worker-capitalist relationship conceals its essence. Whilst the worker understands the employment relationship as one of equal and fair exchange, it is in fact nothing of the kind. The surplus value that is appropriated by the capitalist is not revealed as such. Rather it is taken from the worker as a hidden quantity, robbed in an economic sleight-of-hand worthy of the stage magician; except that it is performed day-by-day, week-by-week, *etc*. for the entirety of the worker’s working life. This appearance then is not just an illusion; it is structural to the social experience of exploitation.

So, the ideological distortion involved is constitutive to the perspective of the worker, and the appearance is an ‘objective appearance’. It is different in this sense from the more psychological character of Marx’s earlier correspondence theory of ideology. This perspectival distortion is the foundation for the host of secondary tricks, ruses and deceits by which capitalists *via* their ideological servants in the media, the courts, universities, and so on, perpetuate their rule.

**First nature, second nature and the ideology of the ‘given’: Adorno, Horkheimer and Sohn-Rethel**

Theodor Adorno had reflected upon ‘first nature’ and ‘second nature’ in his lecture ‘The Idea of a Natural-History’ (1932).[[174]](#footnote-174) These concepts referred to human experience that seems to arise from contact with the world of external objects (at different degrees of removal), and with a pre-determined reality that is prior human activity. Human experience in other words – somatic, cognitive, and aesthetic – that arises directly and indirectly from contact with nature, whether of the outside world, or within us. An ‘ideology critique’ lies in the task of revealing the historical mediations involved, and the inter-subjective constructions really at work, moulded by oppressive social structures and their replications in human thought and behaviour. They are ‘given’ for the individual as they mature through adolescence into adulthood; but are given by society, not ‘nature’ *per se*. Their force lies in their opacity to the person themselves, locked within their historical subjectivity.

Adorno’s early account of the interactions of nature and history was influenced by Lukács’ treatment of the topic. For Adorno, first nature - understood both as external reality and internal state – is encountered by the human subject as the world of independent objects and of sensations that the mind takes within itself in conceptual form, so representing the transformation of reality as it enters human consciousness. This process of internalisation creates experiences the person understands (falsely) as ‘natural’. The subject then, encounters the object as something inert to it, that can only be conceptualised in an alienated fashion for the purposes of comprehension and manipulation. Second nature arises from the subject’s experience of this first nature, as it comes into self-consciousness, reflective now of its own reified internal states. This essentially Kantian (apperceptive) account of the relationship between an apprehending subject and a fixed and unchanging object, interacting only *via* its external properties, gave way to a more Hegelian understanding in Adorno’s later writings with Max Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1947).[[175]](#footnote-175) Here the discussion revolves more on the transformations involved in the creation of both a first nature that is intended as a comprehension of the world we find in its outward phenomenal form and as our given internal states – our ‘biology’ -, and a second nature that arises from it and that makes up our social being; full of fetishised, commodified and alienated inter-subjective states, again experienced falsely as ‘natural’.[[176]](#footnote-176) So, our first (biological) nature becomes by transformation our second (social) nature. Both are experienced as non-historical and immediate; but both are historically mediated. Neither are independent of human activity; neither are ‘natural’ in the sense suggested by the natural sciences. A corollary to this is that as second nature emerges, it does so with the conceptual material provided by a first nature that has already objectified in thought the subject itself - now seen as separate from the world - and that already represents a falsified image of reality. In the construction of the person under capitalism, ideology is the result of the kind of rationality produced by the alienated social relationships constitutive of it. For the modern subject, what is achieved by enlightenment in science, Adorno sees as paid for in consciousness by the descent into myth.

The Hegelian approach to conceptualising second nature is more explicit in the work of Alfred Sohn-Rethel. His *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, was finished in 1951, but not published until 1973. In it he gives an account of the creation of ‘self’ at historical junctures. Its importance lies in the dialectical step it makes towards an explanation of human consciousness and behaviour that does not appeal to primordial, biological, or otherwise natural forces. Rather, in Sohn-Rethel’s model, they are result of historical-social processes that are unseen by the subjective mind that they construct.[[177]](#footnote-177)

For Sohn-Rethel, the self arises from a ‘circuit’ in which consciousness of the world of external objects becomes internalised as self-consciousness. In his historical discussion, this return of consciousness back to itself with self-awareness, creates meaning from external processes of commodity exchange. This meaning is unintended and its origin opaque to the person, for whom the forms of consciousness it produces are experienced as given; as natural.

*The formation of thinking which in every respect merits the term “social” presents itself as the diametrical opposite to society* […] *Nothing could be wrapped in greater secrecy than the truth that the independence of the intellect is owed to its originally social character.* (Sohn-Rethel, 1978: 72)

The source of this ‘secrecy’ is a bypassing of awareness of the inter-subjectivity present in the exchange of commodities. The exploitation involved is eclipsed, creating an ‘automatic subject’ that is unaware of its social origin. The overall result is what Sohn-Rethel terms a ‘practical solipsism’ by which the self experiences its existence internally, without an acknowledgement of the sociality that is its real substance. The self now sees itself as its own creation – the ‘social’ being the external environment in which it finds itself, and which it must navigate as an autonomous cogito.

Sohn-Rethel further identifies a ‘real abstraction’ in commodity exchange based upon a quantifiable equalising of value that becomes internalised as an ‘ideal abstraction’ in mental cognition. Such ideal abstractions give rise to the mental categories that create the conditions of consciousness in each historical context. He is particularly interested here in the cognitive faculties of abstract space and time that are the foundations of Kant’s transcendental philosophy, and the conditions of subjective experience. In his application of ‘real abstraction’ to mental processes he also goes on to explain the emergence of abstract thinking in 6th Century Greece (consequent upon the introduction of coinage), the foundational categories of modern scientific cognition and the separation of mental from manual labour.

So, from Sohn-Rethel’s circuit that is ‘consciousness-of-world’ to ‘consciousness-of-self’ *via* the unrecognised inter-subjective effects of commodity exchange, a second nature emerges. This is created as the ‘self-aware-self’ becomes co-constituted alongside the concepts that are internalised from the objective world in motion. Consequently, the self, though able to reflect upon its own reality, experiences its existence not as the result of the social forces that have created it but spontaneously, complete with forms of thinking, modes of cognition and types of feeling that are historically and socially specific.

Finally, the transformations of first nature and second nature give an insight into social pedagogy, and the transmission of ideology from one generation to the next.[[178]](#footnote-178) For whilst the infant develops within the limitations of first nature, the ‘adult’ world works upon the child with cultural cues, informal communication and formal curricular. They do so *via* the mediations of the second nature that sets the ‘natural’ expectations of how the child ought to develop, so passing on those mediations to the child as they grow into their own second nature.[[179]](#footnote-179) The transformations involved however, are not only those occurring in the change from first to second nature in the child. They are also occurring in the adult as the reinforcement of these same second nature mediations, converted now into didactic methods for the purpose of cultural transmission.[[180]](#footnote-180)

**The ’mind’ in Marxism**

Within Marxism there are different views of the nature of the mind and its relationship with reality. In Marx’s published works there are two developed theories of ideology: the theory of the ‘correspondence’ of ideas to the social and material processes of class society; and the explanation of ideology as being rooted in commodity fetishism under capitalism.

What all accounts of ideology found within Marx and Marxism agree upon however, is that consciousness is specific to each type of society, and therefore to its historical context. There is no universal human consciousness. To understand the ‘the mind’, we must understand its society; this being the starting point and the end point of Marx’s historical materialism.

We also need to take a long view of ‘Marxism’ itself, and its interactions with the psychoanalytic intellectual tradition during real historical events. This requires an account of the limitations of its ‘official’ versions, to understand why some have found it necessary to reach beyond its formal theoretical categories to explain and negotiate the realities that have confronted them. Critical attention to some of the pivotal thinkers who have worked at the interface of Marxism and psychoanalysis can also help us here. The interweaving of Marxism with theoretical elements from psychanalysis has its own history and insights to offer.

# Part III. Distortions of Marxism, revolution, and the ellipses of psychoanalysis

## Mechanical ‘Marxism’ and the suppression of the subject

The first important engagement with psychoanalysis by Marxists came with the wave of social and legal emancipation that swept through Russia and the countries of its old empire, in the years immediately following the Revolution of October 1917. At that time the interest was in its anti-bourgeois and liberating ideas, as much as for its clinical and educational potential.

Indeed, Marxist engagement with psychoanalysis has always been connected to the challenges, traumas, and social convulsions of the time. It has always also reflected the ‘Marxisms’ to hand in those moments, and crucially the distorted forms of Marxism dominant in workers’ movements throughout the Twentieth Century. We can’t understand the historical ‘turns to psychoanalysis’ from within Marxism without an appreciation of these various interpretations.

Countering the erroneous view that Marxism gives us a purely structural understanding of human experience, a philosophy of mechanistic laws and determinism, we should consider the young Marx reacting against the metaphysical system building of the Hegelian schools of thought in his own time.[[181]](#footnote-181) It was the feuds over the Hegelian legacy that created the intellectual milieu in which he developed his first critical concepts. The schools of ‘speculative theism’ - seeking to salvage the ‘God’ of traditional Christianity from the abstract Geist of Hegel’s Logic – and of the Right Hegelians[[182]](#footnote-182) - seeking to uphold the Prussian form of government as the fulfilment of Hegel’s ideal state – provided the context for the intellectual revolt of the 1830s. Figures such as Johann Erdmann (1805 - 1892), Johann Rosenkranz (1805 - 1879) and **Georg Andreas Gabler** (1786–1853), seeing the modern European state as the endpoint of the historical dialectic, had arrived at world-views characterised by fixed categories, rather than changeability and creative flux. Reacting against these conservative philosophical and political orthodoxies in his early publications, Marx articulated a philosophy of human action and authentic subjectivity centred on the relationship of the self with others. For Marx, consciousness was essentially social in origin, substance, and form; understandable in terms of relations with other conscious selves.[[183]](#footnote-183)

In Marx’s own lifetime mechanistic types of theorising had become dominant in both the human sciences and the socialist movement. These tended towards explanations that reduced human behaviour to external causalities and ineluctable laws. Abstract determinism, empiricism, scientism and simplifying reductionism were everywhere. During the 1850s in Germany Gustav Fechner pioneered statistical approaches to understanding sensory perception and mental processes. In the early 1880s, laboratory studies in psychological research were introduced by Wilhelm Wundt. Empirical methods became established in studies of memory by Hermann Ebbinghaus, and later in studies of conditioning by Ivan Pavlov. Thus, modern psychology emerged as a positivistic science with human behaviour as its object.

In the German workers’ movement, the most influential theorists of the Social Democratic Party promoted philosophies in which human action was relegated beneath economic and political processes created by capitalism. An example was the Iron Law of Wages, based upon David Ricardo’s idea of the ‘natural price of labour, promulgated by Ferdinand Lasalle, a founder of German social democracy, by which the workers’ share of the profits of industry would always tend towards the lowest levels needed for basic sustenance. The fight for better wages by workers themselves through their trade unions was futile; only political work through legislative avenues by professional politicians would achieve lasting social improvements. And for the most influential Marxists of German social democracy socialism was seen as emerging from developments in industry, the expansion of the factory form of production and the development of democratic government. This optimistic outlook was informed by notions of unstoppable historical development such as in the ‘organic progressivism’ of Rudolph Virchow and the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer. Where the revolutionary moment was acknowledged as necessary, it was depicted in theory as something to be always delayed. Reflecting upon his 1918 polemic with Lenin on this question, Karl Kautsky put it in the following way:

*The conflict between the two camps – the proletarians and the profit makers – became ever sharper. It was bound to culminate in a violent clash. But Social-Democracy had no reason to hasten a violent collision. Under the conditions prevailing it was growing in power from year to year. The number of proletarians grew faster than that of any other part of the population. And the influence of Social-Democracy on the proletariat was increasing in the same measure. The number of proletarians and Social-Democrats in the army also increased. And this army was less and less to be relied upon by the government in case of internal war.*

*It was vitally important for Social-Democracy not to disturb this state of affairs by a premature, violent collision with the government. It had to strive to postpone this collision as long as possible*.[[184]](#footnote-184)

The political philosophy of the Second International invoked the spirit of ‘scientific socialism’ distinguished from the utopias of the early socialists. For the leaders of German social democracy it meant that socialist consciousness could not come from the workers’ movement but would rather be the work of specialist theoreticians and expert historians; and was something that had to be introduced into the working-class movement from ‘the outside’. Lenin too broadly shared this understanding of the relationship between the social experience of the working-class and the creation and incorporation of socialist ideas within it, though with a very different political consequence and a much more radical purpose. Whereas for Kautsky it meant that capitalism would end through the patient work of socialist legislators, for Lenin it meant that effective socialist agitation and education required the intervention of a revolutionary cadre.[[185]](#footnote-185)

And on the ‘Revisionist’ political Right of German social democracy, Eduard Bernstein rejected the revolutionary aspects of Marxism centred upon proletarian historical agency, also arguing for incremental legislative steps towards a complete socialist society.[[186]](#footnote-186) In this quietist perspective, politically and industrially active workers were no longer needed for historical change and were instead positioned as the passive beneficiaries of state enacted social improvements.

With the rise of Stalinism in Russia, and the end of the international revolutionary wave that followed the First World War, a different notion of historical determinism had become influential in the international workers’ movement. Through the 1920s there had been polemics inside the socialist movement over philosophy and the scientific status of Marxism. In 1931 Stalin issued a decree declaring ‘dialectical materialism’ to be the official philosophy of ‘Marxist-Leninism’, to be taught on all university programmes in the Soviet Union, and across all curriculum areas. The very idea of an ‘official philosophy’ signalled its ideological character, this ‘dialectical materialist’ orthodoxy appealing to ‘laws’ of nature and history that once more nullified the human subject. As Stalin was to put it in his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (1938):

*… if it is not to err in policy, the party of the proletariat must both in drafting its program and in its practical activities proceed primarily from the laws of development of production, from the laws of economic development of society.*[[187]](#footnote-187)

In the Soviet Union and within the political milieus of communist parties around the world, the stultification of original thought, or even observations of reality that failed to support the pronouncements of ‘Marxism’, now a codified ideology, would produce extremes of improbability and absurdity during the height of Stalin’s power. In literature and art only those works that extolled the greatness of Russian achievements in science, technology and other areas of human endeavour were acceptable. DiaMat, a doxa of axiomatic speculative statements, purported to resolve all problems in philosophy. And in the natural sciences conformity with ‘Marxism’ was held up as a test of validity against ‘bourgeois science’, over which ‘proletarian science’ must always triumph. In all these areas and more, problems of theory and practical life had been resolved, and ‘truth’ established. Creative work and experimentation were condemned as unnecessary and indulgent diversions from the task of building Soviet society; and were highly risky for the individual. Nowhere was this truer than in the areas of political life and inquiry into human behaviour. And the political role of the worker was nothing more than to turn all their strength towards industrial success and the goals of ‘socialism’. During the High Stalinism of the 1940s and 1950s this was the meaning of Marxism in the communist world.[[188]](#footnote-188)

It was against this dogmatising and anti-humanistic intellectual atmosphere that a new generation of Marxist social theorists began to investigate once more the role of the active subject in history, and the nature of the self in political and social behaviour. These new theoretical strivings interweaved with memories of the 1930’s, and the revelations after World War 2 of the gulag and political repression within the Soviet Union, as well as the violent suppression of workers’ risings across East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and Novocherkassk, Russia in 1962. With each moment of disillusion, and each political shock, Left intellectuals recoiled from the failures of the ‘official Marxism’ of their day and reached for new articulations of human subjectivity.

Against the backdrop both of scientistic and reductionist views of human consciousness, social behaviour, and historical change, and of the disasters associated with bureaucratised forms of Marxism, the discovery of one of Marx’s early texts – the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) – was important. Published in 1932, these essays explored the human subject as a set of relationships - of self-with-self, and of self-with-others – creating a space for a re-examination of the meaning of human subjectivity within Marxism and a renewed appreciation of Marx’s Hegelian intellectual roots. Along with this new engagement with concepts such as ‘alienation’, ‘fetishism’, *etc.,* and in the work of the key figures of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, Marxism was admixed with the work of non-Marxist theorists; Freud’s being only the most prominent. The new theorisations of this movement, and the empirical work connected with it, now foregrounded family structure and the socialisation of sexual relations. By the late 1920s theorists such as Erich Fromm had become interested in the changing characteristics of the family as one way of understanding the retreat of the workers’ movement in Europe. In the 1930s, Wilhelm Reich had focused upon the repression of the sex drive in the German middle-class family to help explain the rise of Nazism.

We will note here finally, the very different reaction to a Marxism dominated by fixed theoretical categories in the works of Galvano Della Volpe and Lucio Colletti. Each sought to establish a type of Marxism free of dialectical logic that they saw as abstract and rigidifying. They were reacting also against the philosophical idealism of Benedetto Croce who earlier in the Twentieth Century had defended a Hegelian theoretical version of historical materialism.[[189]](#footnote-189) The Marxism that resulted from this reaction was one of empirical methodology and categorisation, more familiar to fields of economic and social research than to its founding purpose of historical change.

But it is real history rather than theoretical work that can invert the empty categories of mechanical determinism, replacing them with the transformative potential of active subjectivity found in Marx’s original theory. And it was real revolution that gave rise to the most important experiment in a political, Marxist psychoanalysis. This was the example of Russian Revolution between the years of 1917-1930, which we will now consider in some detail.

## Mind, revolution and reaction

**Culture, life and the ‘new horizons’ of the Russian Revolution**

An effect of revolution and of social movements of sufficient depth and scale is that mental and intellectual life are convulsed in ways that previously were unimaginable: ideas deemed ‘foreign’ before, find a new home; theories developed in the cultural undergrowth of repressive states erupt into popular consciousness; and what once was strange and feared becomes familiar and influential. In the intellectual ferment that revolution creates, new vistas appear that overthrow long-accepted cultural forms. This was true of revolutionary Russia during the 1920s.

New cultural movements emerged - such as Proletkult (striving to create a proletarian culture that would break decisively and immediately from bourgeois culture), the Scythians (advocating a ‘Revolution of the Spirit’, allied to the Left Socialist Revolutionaries) and Futurism - that became wedded to different aspects of the Revolution. The Futurists particularly, the first artistic movement to attach themselves to the Bolsheviks, flourished in the 1920s. Iconoclastic towards all past movements in art, they and their most famous representative, the poet and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky, saw themselves as the vanguard of a new culture made possible by the Revolution.[[190]](#footnote-190)

These all-too-few years saw an openness to innovations across all the arts, and a flourishing of creative expression without any necessary doctrinal allegiance with Marxism.

*In art and literature, the 1920s were marked by many valuable achievements. Outstanding writers who identified with the Revolution gave it a kind of authenticity by their work: these included Babel, the young Fadayev, Pilnyak, Mayakovsky, Yesenin, Artem Vesyyoly, and Leonov. Their creativity is proof of the fact that the Revolution was not a mere* coup d’etat *but an explosion of forces truly present in Russian society. But other writers who by no means favoured the Soviet system were also active at this time, for example, Pasternak, Akhmatova, and Zamyatin.*[[191]](#footnote-191)

Some of the Russian names of world cinema – Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dziga Vertov – appear in this period. At the same time Vsevolod Meryerhold was creating constructionist theatre with techniques that privileged gesture, movement, and rhythm over spoken language to connect with the audience.

Along with novelty in the arts, new ways of organising personal life were thrown up. The progressive ambition of the Bolshevik government became evident quickly after it took power in October 1917. The emancipation of women in its social, legal, political, and sexual aspects, was a central concern. Issues that arose from or overlapped with questions of gender and sex were framed socially, rather than being medicalised or seen in terms of biological necessity. With respect to medicine, socially oriented types of practice were adopted. Under the Commissar for Health, Nikolai Semashko, the pre-Revolutionary tradition of social medicine associated with pioneers such as A. P. Dobroslavin and G. V. Khlopin became professionally established.[[192]](#footnote-192) Under the Code of Laws, drafted within weeks of the October Revolution, the Czarist ‘anti-sodomy’ laws were repealed. [[193]](#footnote-193) So, where it was a crime in other parts of Europe carrying sentences of up to five years in Germany and imprisonment with hard labour in England, in revolutionary Russia in this period consenting same-sex sexual activity between men, from having been horribly repressed before the Revolution, became legal.

The overthrow of oppressive sexual codes is a part of the cultural ferment created by revolution. After the 1905 Russian Revolution popular interest in sexual relations expressed in literary outputs, newspapers, diaries, and correspondences fed into the emergence of a new liberal-civic culture in the metropolitan centres.[[194]](#footnote-194) In 1917, a consequence of the October Revolution was a surge of interest in matters of sexual life from young workers and students.[[195]](#footnote-195) During the 1920s the ‘sex question’ was to become one of intense fascination in all of its ideological, political and literary aspects. Moreover, the subject of sex resonated with the social turbulence of the 1920s *via* the notion of a political ‘collective body’ that served as its ideological metaphor.[[196]](#footnote-196)

The early policies of the Bolshevik government also contrasted starkly with the state indifference to public sexual health that had prevailed under the Tsars. This was especially true of matters such as the horrors of illegal abortions and the abandonment of illegitimate children that had previously characterised working-class and peasant life.[[197]](#footnote-197) The ’new proletarian morality’ of this period encompassed legal relaxations of the laws of marriage and divorce, so that breaking the marital bond became as simple as entering it, the abolition of discrimination against children born out of wedlock and the lifting of all restrictions on abortion.[[198]](#footnote-198)

It was during the years of the New Economic Policy, between the end of ‘war communism’ and the abrupt impositions of economic centralisation under Stalin by the early 1930s, that we find most evidence of a new climate of sexual liberation amongst the young. Despite the need for the regulation of family life, the responsibility for children, the exhaustions of the civil war period and its effect upon the nervous condition of thousands of young workers,[[199]](#footnote-199) and the difficulties of accessing contraception, experimental attitudes of sexual freedom and free love were influential amongst students, such as those at the Sverdlov Communist University. The attractions of unfettered individualistic sexuality for young workers attending university in fact came to be seen as a problem by the Soviet government during these years; raising concerns about a perceived new culture of self-indulgence that turned the individual away from the tasks of the Revolution. However, even amongst sections of the politically austere Komosol youth movement,[[200]](#footnote-200) these ideas were sufficiently current to provoke controversy and eventually dissension in its ranks.[[201]](#footnote-201)

**‘Sciences of the mind’ in revolutionary Russia**

The theorising that had dominated Russian psychology in the years leading up to the 1917 Revolution derived principally from the work of the neuroscientist Ivan Sechenov. Sechenov had concentrated his scientific work upon physical reflex actions, conflating them with mental processes. This emphasis upon outward and observable action and reaction made Sechenov’s work a precursor to the behaviourism of later psychologists such as Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Bechterev. Through the 1920s, this insistence upon observable behaviour remained the standard professional model, overshadowing those types of psychology that focused upon subjective inner states of the psyche. And by the mid-1930s, Soviet psychological sciences operated under a strict state imperative that productivity, industry, and the intensification of labour were the ultimate aims of the human sciences. Similarly, in the study of human movement, whilst Nikolai Bernstein made important breakthroughs in the study of physical reflexes, his achievements were celebrated within the Soviet Union for their contribution to the understanding of biophysical functionality and fine motor control during manual labour.

Despite this dominant behaviourist paradigm, for a decade a new generation of Soviet psychologists were allowed intellectual and professional space to explore the inner world of the psyche. In the wake of the Revolution, it was this widening of theoretical horizons that made possible applications of Freudian psychoanalysis and a nascent enlightenment in the study of human behaviour. The full significance of the Revolution and the opportunities it afforded however, were not immediately apparent to established figures in the international psychoanalytical movement. In his 1921 report to the Viennese Psychoanalytical Society, the most prominent figure in pre-revolutionary Russian psychoanalysis, Nikolai Osipov, gave a picture of a movement in disarray.

*…in fact it has been impossible to collect and publish accounts either of proceedings of meetings or of papers read and discussed. Scientific journals have entirely ceased to appear during the last three years; the only journal concerning itself with Freudian conceptions, Psychotherapy, stopped publication in 1917* [sic] *owing to financial difficulties.*[[202]](#footnote-202)

What Osipov could not have appreciated, having already moved to Prague at the time of his report, was how radically the political landscape had changed for psychoanalysis, and indeed any discipline within the ‘human sciences’.

The great name of experimental psychology at the time of the October Revolution was Konstantin Kornilov. Kornilov’s work, like that of the behaviourists, concerned outwardly observable physical and mental reactions. Kornilov however incorporated theoretical elements that made his approach distinct from the basic behaviourist model. Human action for Kornilov, could not be conflated with physiological processes; nor was it seen as a simple matter of responsive reflexes to environmental stimuli. Rather, in Kornilov’s ‘reactology’, a dialectic occurred between the external and interior worlds. The interior was no longer a merely an effect of objective causal factors. It was an active element that interacted with the external processes.

This view of human consciousness as active and having a generative character, rather than being seen as passively reflective of external objects, had been present in a pre-revolutionary tradition of Russian psychology. There had already been a psychoanalytic society in Moscow.[[203]](#footnote-203) An Idealist paradigm attributing mental activity with an independent dynamic had been established with the founding of the Institute of Psychology of Moscow in 1912, building on the earlier work of Matvei Troitski and Nikolay Grot.[[204]](#footnote-204) The Institute’s founder, Georgy Chelpanov (Kornilov’s immediate predecessor) brought a student, Gustav Shpet, to contribute to its work. Shpet was later to become an influence on a young Lev Vygotsky, emphasising the roles of language and culture in cognition.[[205]](#footnote-205)

In the emerging area of child development, interest in the ‘psychical interior’ would make possible Vygotsky’s theoretical speculations and experimental work. In his theoretical model, intrapersonal experience is the result of the meeting of mental processes emerging from within the psyche and those originating from interactions with the world outside. The processes involved are mediated by cultural artefacts, and crucially language. The infant argued Vygotsky, develops mentally along two lines: linguistic intelligence; and non-linguistic intelligence. In the first phase of language acquisition, the very young child develops a ‘social language’ that mimics what they hear. Later non-linguistic intelligence crosses the linguistic line, and so they begin to think in language, eventually mastering their own inner ‘ego-speech’. In this developmental movement, the language they interiorise brings with it its social and cultural context, the child now rooting themselves in the world. For Vygotsky this led to the development of ‘higher mental processes’, as the child’s learning established their cognitive framework; this learning itself facilitated by their social environment, or ‘zone of proximal development’.[[206]](#footnote-206) Vygotsky was to re-orientate towards a psychological ‘objectivism’ after 1932 as the human sciences became increasing politicised. During the 1920s however, his work was characterised by a focus upon subjectivity in learning and child development. Affective factors, personality, fantasy, and imagination all feature in this phase of Vygotsky’s output. The concept of ‘perezhivanie’ captured moments of ‘deep learning’ which transform the person’s mental horizons; signs are active elements in complex and discursive subjective processes; and the notion of ‘sense’ as distinct from ‘meaning’ represented the world of feeling conjured up by a word, though not expressed in its formal definition. For the Marxist Vygotsky in this period, social-historical processes provided the cultural mediations supporting the child’s psychological growth.

By the early 1930s a third position in psychology had emerged. Along with behaviourism and reactology, there was now the ‘dialectical-materialist psychology’ of Sergey Rubinstein, who had become the Chair of Psychology at the Hertzen Pedagogical Institute of Leningrad. For Rubinstein, consciousness and outwardly observable activity formed a unity. Consciousness could not be understood independently of the objective world, but rather as operating in continuous conjunction with it. Rubinstein’s paradigm became dominant in Soviet psychology throughout the 1930s, and for most of the 1940s. In 1948 however, he was ousted from his academic post as ‘Pavlovianism’ was imposed as the new orthodoxy for a ‘Marxist psychology’.

**The rise of soviet psychoanalysis**

The flowering of interest in the ‘internal life’ of the mind in experimental and theoretical psychology, as well as public interest in the ‘sex-question’ during the 1920s, fertilised a new movement in psychoanalysis. The concerns of the Russian psychoanalytical community however, were no longer those predominantly of personal neurosis recorded in a catalogue of individual analytical case studies - often of members of the minor aristocracy. Rather, as Russian psychoanalysis was to develop over these years its concerns would be those of social psychopathology, of education and of social settlement. It became rooted in humanist-rationalist enlightenment on the one hand, and in state imperatives on the other. Osipov in his pessimistic 1921 report to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society was not fully aware of the growing interest in psychoanalytical work. In Petrograd, Tatiana Rosenthal for instance, chief physician at the Institute of Brain Pathology - and, unlike Osipov, a supporter of the Revolution - developed therapeutic techniques for educational work with learning-disabled children that drew upon the Freudian and Adlerian schools of psychoanalysis.[[207]](#footnote-207) She was also to apply psychoanalytical insights to literary analysis in her 1920 publication that explored ‘the unconscious’ in the characters of Dostoevsky’s novellas.[[208]](#footnote-208)

By 1921 Moscow had become home to a newly formed psychoanalytical group striving to understand the roots of human creativity. The leading figures in this group, principally Ivan Ermakov and Moshe Wulff, had published previously in Freud’s own journal and so were known in the West. The group soon attracted new members, and by 1922 had re-founded itself as the Russian Psychoanalytic Society. As it grew, its activities became more diverse. So, along with continuing engagement with the roots of artistic expression and clinical analysis there was amongst the newer members an interest in the theory and practice of education and of child development. Otto Schmidt,[[209]](#footnote-209) who was responsible for the pedagogical work of the group was now working with young researchers such as Pavel Blonskii, Stanislav Shatskii and Lev Vygotsky.

Independently of developments in Moscow an active student group had emerged by 1922 in the town of Kazan. Under the energetic leadership of the Alexander Luria, their work spanned a similar range of medical, psychological, and artistic interests as the Moscow society. Its leading figures soon accepted an invitation to move to Moscow to join the burgeoning psychoanalytical community there. Luria himself took up a position in the Moscow Institute of Psychology. He collaborated with Lev Vygotsky and Alexei Leontiev who was later to develop the cultural-historical model of the analysis of human behaviour. Luria’s new position was effectively a government appointment. Growing in numbers, and in professional status, the society had by 1924 become the Institute for Psychoanalysis.

By establishing a properly constituted training programme, curriculum, and clinic (all required for official recognition by the International Psychoanalytical Association) the Institute for Psychoanalysis had made Moscow an important section of the international psychoanalytical movement, along with Vienna and Berlin (soon to be followed by London, Budapest, and New York). This official status had been achieved in the face of resistance from many leading figures around Freud who viewed the Bolshevik government with suspicion. Freud’s approval of the Moscow group probably influenced the outcome however, overcoming the misgivings of the most avowedly anti-Marxist figures of the international society. The presence in Moscow of Sabina Spielrein who had been a member of the society in Vienna and whom Freud knew well seems likely to have been a factor in his decision to support full status for the Moscow group. So also, was the fact that at its peak by the end of 1923, Russian membership represented one eighth of the psychoanalytical movement membership worldwide.[[210]](#footnote-210)

The Institute ran introductory courses on psychoanalysis as well as courses on child psychology and literary analysis. An ambitious publishing programme was launched that aimed to translate into Russian the most important psychoanalytical works. An out-clinic was established to which all Russian citizens could obtain access: a reversal of the often elitist character of Austrian and German psychoanalytical practice that relied upon a paying clientele. A clinic for disturbed children, the **Detski Dom,**[[211]](#footnote-211) was also established and ran under the direction of Vera Schmidt with help from Sabina Spielrein until 1925. This was important in a Russian society emerging from the trauma of civil war. Many thousands of children had been displaced, and many had lost their families. These children, the Besprisorniki [the Unattended] were surviving in the ruined tenements of Russia’s cities. Their rehabilitation and settlement posed a significant challenge to the Soviet state. Asja Lacis, a Latvian Bolshevik, had been charged with this task in the city of Orel, and achieved remarkable results with precious little in the way of resources. A clinic that specialised in children’s therapy using the methods of European psychoanalysis for a time was seen as offering something important in the struggling socialist republic.

The Institute was also remarkable in becoming the first state sponsored psychoanalytical centre. The process by which this came about was not straightforward. Key to success for the application for state support would be acceptance by the State Scientific Soviet (SSS) and its pedagogical arm. In their report of September 1922 to the scientific-pedagogical committee the Moscow group highlighted the contributions that psychoanalysis had made and could still make to medicine, psychology, sociology, and for the problems of everyday life. They further stressed its relevance to “artistic creativity, labor relations, religious and philosophical formulations” and argued that “in psychiatry, psychoanalysis provides new and fruitful possibilities ...”.[[212]](#footnote-212) This appeal for state endorsement and hoped-for support was followed by a submission of the Charter of the Psychoanalytic Society that outlined its extensive ongoing and planned clinical, pedagogical, and publishing activities. It also explicitly confirmed the Society’s administrative (and by implication, political) subordination to the government. This latter element of the Society’s submission highlights an inevitable tension. Ideological work was intrinsically linked to solving practical problems in this period, not least in education. Moreover, any position taken within the human sciences had to establish its relationship to Marxist theory, and any theoretical stance that could be interpreted as in some senses rivalling Marxism would find itself caught up in a political game. This was truer still of interpretations of human behaviour premised upon the individualism and implicitly class-based character of Freud’s formulations. One consequence was the closing down of the Detski Dom in 1925. Notwithstanding this setback, a degree of tolerance remained, allowing these psychoanalysts to continue their efforts for the rest of their programme. The Institute’s publishing through the State Publishing House for example continued unabated, with fifteen volumes of key psychoanalytical works appearing. Indeed between 1922 and 1929 intense publishing activity continued with the appearance also in Moscow of the Psychological and Psychoanalytical Library under the direction of Ivan Ermakov. Nineteen books by Freud, Anna Freud and other significant figures were published over these years.[[213]](#footnote-213) This publishing fed an eager and expanding readership with each volume rapidly selling out.

**The demise of soviet psychoanalysis**

The clinical and training activities of the staff and associates of the Institute continued through the early 1920s. However, by the middle of the decade the relationship between psychoanalysis and Marxism had become an issue of increasingly intense theoretical debate. The defensive position of the Revolution internationally was by now distorting ideological positions in all areas of public life. Psychoanalysis, straddling the worlds of psychiatric practice and medical science on the one hand and ideology and politics on the other, was particularly vulnerable in this situation. Standing within a tradition that had originated in the West and at the high point of the European *fin de siècle*, with its connotations of decadence and literary and philosophical irrationalism, not to mention the association with Trotsky, Freudians were becoming politically isolated. Still, it is noteworthy that up until 1925 articles defending psychoanalytical perspectives for the interpretation of social behaviour and religion were still appearing in leading Bolshevik journals such as *Under the Banner of Marxism* and *The Press and the Revolution*. That said, the increasingly polemical and aggressive tenor of the articles opposing ‘Freudism’ from 1924 onwards was a prelude to the onslaught that soon followed. By 1929 Wilhelm Reich was to declare that “It is impossible to speak of a “psychoanalytical movement” existing in the Soviet Union ...”.[[214]](#footnote-214)

That psychoanalysis - and the schools of thought, clinical practice and pedagogy connected to it, often in tension with Marxist orthodoxies - was allowed to exist and for a short time flourish at all in the early 1920s, had been made possible by a political tolerance at the most senior levels of the Bolshevik government. In the case of Lenin, the evidence is mainly inferential. The reports of the pedagogical arm of the State Scientific Soviet for example, went directly to the Commissar for Enlightenment and Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky. Lunacharsky, who was on personal terms with Lenin, would have had to approve any decisions regarding the Russian Psychoanalytic Institute. There is also the high governmental level of many of the supporters of psychoanalysis and contributors to psychoanalytical discussion to appreciate. Otto Schmidt for example, was a leading member of the Institute as well as being director of the State Publishing House at the time it produced The Psychoanalytic and Psychological Library of Freud’s published works. For Trotsky, who had been acquainted with psychoanalytic circles during his time in Vienna between 1907 and 1914, we can say more. In a 1923 letter to Pavlov he describes himself as being impressed by the Freudian approaches to psychological problems.[[215]](#footnote-215) Other explicit statements suggest a supportive intellectual attitude to psychoanalytical theory. For instance, whilst Freud’s formulations could be ‘exaggerated’ and ‘paradoxical’ with respect to the ‘sex-element in the forming of individual character and social consciousness’, they were also ‘significant’ and potentially ‘fertile’.[[216]](#footnote-216) Psychoanalytical theory was, he stated, compatible with materialism.[[217]](#footnote-217) As to its relationship to Marxism “It would be too simple and crude ... to turn one’s back on it.”[[218]](#footnote-218) Furthermore, transformation of the human psyche would be central to any future communist society.

*There can really be no doubt about the fact that the humans of the future will be communitarian citizens, much more interesting and attractive beings with a very different psyche from ours.*[[219]](#footnote-219)

Trotsky’s attitude to psychoanalysis can be characterised one of ‘scientific tolerance’. He regarded it as having a quasi-scientific hypothetical status comparable (reflecting the science of his day) to that of electrons, ions, and relativity.[[220]](#footnote-220) For Trotsky, it ought not be discarded for reasons of party doctrine.

As late as 1932, in a speech delivered to the Danish Social Democratic student group in Copenhagen, we see a now exiled Trotsky celebrating the importance of Freud’s work in presaging the new dawn of a future communist humanity.

*Psycho-analysis, with the inspired hand of Sigmund Freud, has lifted the cover of the well which is poetically called the “soul”. And what has been revealed? Our conscious thought is only a small part of the work of the dark psychic forces. Learned divers descend to the bottom of the ocean and there take photographs of mysterious fishes. Human thought, descending to the bottom of its own psychic sources must shed light on the most mysterious driving forces of the soul and subject them to reason and to will.*[[221]](#footnote-221)

The surge of interest in psychoanalysis, and state support for the professional and literary activities of the Institute and its public readership, was brief. From the mid-1920s onwards the climate became colder for any working psychologists, clinical practitioners and theoreticians associated with the Freudian school. By late 1920’s, the situation had become very difficult indeed for such figures and for most, untenable.

By 1925 the figure of Stalin was looming large within the Soviet leadership. Lenin had died the year before. Trotsky had been sidelined into essentially technical work. Collaborating with Nikolai Bukharin and reacting to the defeat of revolutions abroad, Stalin had formulated the doctrine of ‘Socialism in One Country’. The formal adoption of this slogan in January 1926 inaugurated an era of abrupt industrial realignment. This was driven by an intensive process of state-capital accumulation and of forced collectivisation of the peasantry in large parts of Russia. The centralisation of political power required for this new direction now reached into all areas of intellectual and professional life. The ‘science’ of any area of activity was increasingly subordinated to political imperatives. In the area of biological and agricultural research, to cite one notorious case, Trofim Lysenko’s promotion of the idea that vernalisation (the artificial cold treatment that triggers Winter wheat to grow in the Spring) is heritable on Lamarckian principles (which it is not) was given state endorsement because of its convenient ideological overtones.[[222]](#footnote-222) By the late 1930s Lysenko himself had been afforded the status of a hero of Soviet science despite the catastrophic implications of his doctrine for Russian agriculture.[[223]](#footnote-223)

The politicisation of scientific debate spelt the end for psychoanalysis in the Soviet Union. By the time of the 1930 Congress on Human Behaviour personal associations with Freudianism especially had become professionally dangerous. Speech after speech hammered home the message that the purpose of psychological work was one of socialist construction: to produce a ‘socialist psychology’ grounded in the categories of Marxism. Freud’s works were now banned and theoretical work premised upon an integration of psychoanalysis with Marxism, or upon notions of ‘compatibility’, was ruled out of court: reasoned debate was over.

Another motivation for the assault on psychoanalysis lay in state attitudes to sex and sexuality. The stabilisation of the family became an over-riding priority for the new Russian ‘socialism’. Talk of free sexual relations, the need to overcome the repressive functions of the family and acceptance of homosexuality as an authentic expression of love, were now criticised in literature and in government pronouncements. The central concern with sex within Freudian thinking meant that it came squarely into the firing zone for the new generation of Soviet ideologists. In these circumstances, individuals began to look to their own survival. Some, such as Aron Zalkind, defected to the anti-Freudian camp.[[224]](#footnote-224) Others such as Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky moved into the safer field of pedology (the study of child behaviour and development). Bluma Zeigarnik was still doing experimental work in the field of psychopathology. On this basis, active psychological research did continue into the early 1930s. Vygotsky particularly produced theoretical innovations that were only fully appreciated with the re-issuing of his works after the death of Stalin and their translation and publication in the West. Still, by the middle of that decade, notwithstanding the occasional gesture towards its insights in official encyclopaedias, psychoanalysis as a recognised professional discipline in Russia and its affiliated republics was dead.

## Urbanism, consumption and the ‘turn to Freud’

As the principal figures of Russian psychoanalysis became increasingly politically isolated from the mid-1920s onwards, interest in the potential for fruitful exchanges between Marxism and Freudianism was developing in other parts of Europe. In the early 1920s in Austria a young Wilhelm Reich had established a professional relationship with Freud. In 1922 Reich took up a position at the psychoanalytic outpatient clinic in Vienna, the Ambulatorium, and by 1924 had become its assistant director. In the same year he took over the training programme at Freud’s Psychoanalytical Institute. Between 1924 and 1930 Reich was to conduct pioneering work in sex-counselling in the working-class districts of Vienna. As part of his ‘Sex-Pol’[[225]](#footnote-225) work he founded six clinics in the city, taking sex-counselling advice out to its suburbs. This work had two consequences for Reich. The first was intellectual. His observations of the squalor of the working-class districts and of the war-traumatised condition of many of their residents, led him to focus upon the role of social environment as a cause of neurosis, rather than looking exclusively to biographical and internal factors. The second effect for Reich was reputational. The advice offered by Reich’s clinics was free of moral tone or inhibition. It was based upon an acknowledgement of unrepressed sexual experience; and the support given was practical and prophylactic in nature with on-the-spot contraceptive fittings for women. In Catholic Austria this was courageous and provides an early glimpse of Reich’s personal radicalism. By the end of the 1920s Reich’s commitment to sex-therapy and psychoanalysis was converging with his Marxism. In 1928 he joined the Austrian Communist Party after the shooting down of demonstrators during the Viennese workers’ revolt of July 1927. In 1929 he published his ‘Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis’[[226]](#footnote-226) in the bilingual (German/Russian) journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*. It was during his trip to the Soviet Union that same year however, that he became finally convinced of the need to achieve a synthesis of Marxism and psychoanalysis. His interest in the ideas of Freud in this period was that of the revolutionary thinker committed to personal and social transformation.

Whilst the brief experiment in a Soviet Marxism open to psychoanalytical theory had risen and fallen by 1930, a group of Marxist sociologists and philosophers associated with the Institute of Social Research (loosely affiliated to the University of Universität Frankfurt am Main) were moving in apparently similar directions. Although openness to non-Marxist thinkers was evident, the motivations of this group of theoreticians were different to those of the Moscow psychologists of the early 1920s and of Reich. By the early 1930s the chief names connected to the Institute were concerned above all to explain the retreat of the revolutionary tide in Western Europe, the rise of Stalinism in Russia and of fascism in Italy and Germany, and the stabilisation of capitalism in countries such as France, Britain and the USA by the late 1920s. Their engagements with Freud, critical though they were, tended in this period towards the more pessimistic side of his theorising: repression; deference to the father figure rooted in the Oedipus Complex; and the death instinct that runs through his meta-psychology. Freud was not the only non-Marxist thinker with whom the group engaged. Other influences included Weber, Durkheim, Kant, Simmel, and Tonnies amongst others. Key names of this first generation of what would become known as the (early) Frankfurt School of social theorists and sociologists were: Max Horkheimer; Theodor Adorno; Erich Fromm; and Herbert Marcuse. The wider orbit of the school included Walter Benjamin and Wilhelm Reich himself.

In the years that led up to the Second World War, during the War and in the years that followed, these social theorists through their various research projects and collaborations - and despite the underlying note of despair that was forgivable for a generation of radical intellectuals witnessing the twin horrors of Stalinism and Nazism in their own time – produced analytically insightful and empirically rich sociological studies of capitalist society. These were also studies in which ‘Marxism’ of a form – one that whilst amalgamated with other theoretical traditions of thought, was also creative and non-dogmatic - was to survive, as ‘official Marxism’ became sclerotised under the rigid control of the increasingly Stalinised communist parties across Europe. Some of the Marxists whose names are still with us as reference points of modern social theory at this time looked to psychoanalysis for answers to the questions confronting them. The published theoretical and empirical work of these figures from the late 1920s through to the late 1940s together represent the foundation of what would become known as ‘Freudo-Marxism’.

In this period, unlike the Freudo-Marxists Adorno did not seek to blend Freud into Marxism. But working under the darkening shadow of European politics and seeking to explain Hitler’s rise to power, he did look to Freud for illumination. By the late 1930s he had identified Freudian themes within his wider social analysis. However, it was in his work with Horkheimer that the full implications of the application of Freudian categories for social psychology became apparent, and particularly with respect to their post-War analysis of western capitalist consumerism. Massified forms of entertainment for Adorno, employed the introjections of the superego to conjure up images and associations of commoditised consumable products. In their joint writing in this period, Adorno and Horkheimer explored the cultural manipulation of the person, already weakened by the incorporation of the family into structures and processes of mass society. In *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*they laid out a blueprint for the ways in which ‘the individual’ becomes increasingly prey to the control of repressive ideologies that oppose their own material interests.[[227]](#footnote-227) Positioning the abstract individual - removed from organic collectivism of community roots - as the ‘economic cell’ that formed the basis of capitalist society and locating this also within powerful forces of psychological and emotional assimilation into commoditised social relationships, they created a picture of the defeated and atomised person, incapable of critical thought. In this mentally and spiritually impoverished state the isolated person becomes vulnerable to the kinds of irrationalism, anxiety and paranoid fears that had once characterised the Dark Ages. With the rise of massified society under capitalism:

*Culture became wholly a commodity disseminated as information without permeating the individuals who acquired it. Thought became restricted to the acquisition of isolated facts. Conceptual relationships were rejected as uncomfortable and useless effort. The aspect of development in thought, all that is genetic and intensive in it, is forgotten and levelled down to the immediately given, to the extensive. Today the order of life allows no room for the ego to draw spiritual or intellectual conclusions. The thought which leads to knowledge is neutralized and used as a mere qualification on specific labor markets and to heighten the commodity value of the personality. And so that self-examination of the mind which works against paranoia is defeated.*[[228]](#footnote-228)

The economic dynamics of this process of isolation and constriction of critical faculties in their turn give rise to reified social relationships, invested in transactionally for their marketised exchange value. Alongside this partially Marxist analysis, and showing the methodological eclecticism that typified their approach, Adorno and Horkheimer introduced psychoanalytical categories. The diminished ‘ego-autonomy’ of the individual in their account arises from the incorporation of the middle class and working-class family into processes of capitalist consumption. In this analysis, echoing the concept of ‘parricide’ used by Paul Federn in his study of social revolt in Germany after the First World War,[[229]](#footnote-229) this results in the erosion of the power of the father as a source of social and moral authority. Without the presence of the traditional figure of the father, the superego develops in an attenuated form, leaving the individual vulnerable to the appeal of an abstract father-ideal in the form of the Fuhrer or Il Capo. It is this bricolage ‘putting together’ of Marxist and Freudian categories – as opposed to the synthesis that Reich has attempted - that characterises the work of Adorno and Horkheimer in this period.

Reich was concerned with many of the same questions addressed by Adorno and Horkheimer. His work however travelled in a different direction to theirs, ultimately seeking to achieve a new synthesis of Marxist and psycho-sexual categories. Indeed, they were to become critical of what they saw as Reich’s ‘biologism’. Throughout the 1920s he had published a series of papers based upon his clinical practice. These works of clinical sexology were laying the foundation stones for his later ideas about the centrality of the orgasm to human happiness and his theory of character formation. However, his psychoanalytical thinking became politically radicalised with a sharp turn towards communism after 1927.

In his essay *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* (1929),[[230]](#footnote-230) Reich tackled head-on the question of the compatibility of Marxism and psychoanalysis. He argued that psychoanalysis is an emancipating body of thought, and that psychological insight is intrinsically opposed to reactionary outlooks. More specifically, his defence of psychoanalysis as an intellectual school that is both compatible with, and has something to offer Marxism, took three approaches: that psychoanalysis is a materialist doctrine; that its object of study, namely the human psyche, is a dialectical phenomenon; and that psychoanalytical insights have significance for the future socialist society.

For the first part of Reich’s argument, regarding the materialist status of psychoanalysis, Reich pointed to its empirical findings.[[231]](#footnote-231) Chief amongst Freud’s discoveries for Reich were the libido theory - premised upon the sublimating mechanisms by which primordial sexual instincts are transformed into higher social drives - and, related to this, infantile sexuality and the psycho-social processes of the family that he named the Oedipus Complex. Reich argued that the rooting of psychical development and character formation within a social institution, the family, means that since social institutions change historically, so also must the human psyche, now seen as historical and therefore changeable.

*The superego of a woman in the age of Plato was fundamentally different from that of a woman in capitalist society: and to the extent that a new society is ideologically foreshadowed within the existing one, the contents of the superego naturally change also. This applies to sexual morality, say as much to the ideology of the inviolability of the ownership of the means of production; it also changes of course with the position of the individual in the production process.*[[232]](#footnote-232)

In this essay, Reich identifies idealist tendencies within Freudianism, particularly with respect to Freud’s metapsychology. Nonetheless, for Reich, basing an understanding of the development and final character of the person upon biological and social principles made psychoanalysis fundamentally materialist.

This moved him into his second defence. The psyche, he argues, is riven with tensions that are its animus. The inner contradictions involved in neuroses originating in the repression of instinctual urges by the ego (under the command of the superego) were one example of the dialectical processes that Reich had in mind. Another was the tension created by the conflict between the ‘pleasure principle’ (rooted in the unconscious or the ‘id’) and the ‘reality principle’ that governs the ego’s calculations negotiating the outside world. Others would include: the intertwining of irrational desires into otherwise outwardly rational forms of social behaviour; the sublimation of basic drives into higher cultural strivings suggestive of the transformation of ‘quantity into quality’; and the transferability of cathectic energy between outwardly opposing expressions *e.g.* from sexual frustration to ambition. This dialectical character of the psyche Reich argued, could never have been discovered without psychoanalysis.

Reich’s third defence of psychoanalysis was its sociological value. An important example was the focus on sexual repression in society. Here Reich makes a direct comparison with Marxism:

*Just as Marxism was sociologically the expression of man* becoming conscious *of the laws of economics and the exploitation of a majority by a minority, so psychoanalysis is the expression of man* becoming conscious *of the social repression of sex.*[[233]](#footnote-233)

With the establishment of capitalism, and the increasing incorporation of the proletarian family by state policy, this sex-repression spreads into working-class life, though never to the same extent as for the lower middle classes - which is “more Catholic than the Pope”.[[234]](#footnote-234) The further importance of psychoanalysis lay primarily in its potential applications for rational insight in three areas: research into early human history and the understanding of myth; the theory and practice of mental health therapies premised upon the principle of ‘libido-economy’ and the elimination of neurosis; and the study of child development and, consequent upon this, the development of principles of socialist education rooted in a comprehensively rationalist understanding of the needs of the person, from the infant to the early adult stages.[[235]](#footnote-235)

Reich was to integrate these ‘compatibilities’ into many of his studies from this time onwards. In his analysis of fascism in Germany he applied his theory of character formation from an early work, *Character Analysis*,[[236]](#footnote-236) using the ‘blocking’ of cathectic energies that congeal into ‘armour’-like rigidities in the behaviour of the person. Combining this theory of character formation with a social analysis of the family Reich described the constraints that acted upon the lower middle-class family: its members struggling to maintain their precarious position ‘above’ the industrial working-class, yet out of reach of the social stratum above them. This hemmed-in position for Reich, accompanied by the repression of sexual desire, gave rise to irrational attachments, mystical outlooks, and a vulnerability to the seductions of the charismatic leader. In his discussion of authoritarian ideology and commenting on the propaganda techniques used by Hitler and Goebbels in their rise to power he observed:

*Again and again we run across series such as this: personal honor, family honor, racial honor, national honor. This sequence is consistent with the various layers in the individual structure. However, it fails to include the socio-economic basis: capitalism, or rather patriarchy; the institution of compulsive marriage; sexual repression; personal struggle against one’s own sexuality; personal compensatory feeling of honor; etc. The highest position in the series is assumed by the ideology of “national honor”, which is identical with the irrational core of nationalism.*[[237]](#footnote-237)

The defence of a ‘compatibility thesis’ as formulated by Reich was echoed by his early collaborator, Siegfried Bernfeld.[[238]](#footnote-238) Indeed Bernfeld, whose work on understandings of child development borrowed directly from Freud’s libido theory as it applied to the infant and combined with specific cultural studies,[[239]](#footnote-239) employed the same three analytical elements. According to Bernfeld, psychoanalysis, exploring the origins of neurosis and adult character in early experience - its ontogenesis - is historical. It is also materialist, and in a non-reductive and non-mechanical sense. Finally, the antimonies of psychoanalysis – of Eros and Thanatos, of id and superego *etc*. - make it dialectical. All these characteristics together, for Bernfeld as for Reich, meant that Marxist social science and psychoanalysis, were capable of integration with one another.[[240]](#footnote-240) This was a position he was to develop in his pedagogical writings in the 1920s.

In his essay *Sysiphus or the Limits of Education,*[[241]](#footnote-241) Bernfeld deployed Freud’s theoretical formulations, principally the Oedipus Complex, to understand education under capitalism. Comparing schooling in his own time with the initiation rites of tribal societies, he argued that the ‘natural pedagogy’ of the spontaneous development of the infant under its mother’s influence, is insufficient for all human societies. Beyond a certain stage of child development, it is necessary to break up the ‘mother-child group’ to begin social acculturation. At this point a dramatic re-ordering of the child’s psychical make-up begins. The libidinal attachments to the mother, developed in the first years of life, are now redirected towards elders in tribal societies, and the teachers and pedagogical curricula of the modern school. The ‘violence’ of this shift from motherlove to the cold processes of social control becomes literal at puberty in some tribal societies, and in some respects also in capitalist society.[[242]](#footnote-242) Under capitalism however this process occurs over a decade at least, and is structured less through specific initiation rites, than through prolonged formal processes of repression and social prohibition. Society, for Bernfeld, as well as being structured by economic class, is also Oedipal.

Another figure of note in this era is Otto Fenichel. Fenichel developed the compatibility thesis to argue further that the integration of psychoanalysis was necessary if shortcomings within Marxism were to be overcome. So, whilst Marx had successfully shown that the means of production in any given historical epoch gave rise to forms of consciousness which then reacted back upon the economic ‘base’ of society, he had not been able to discuss how this occurred in detail. For Fenichel, considering the forms and means of the exertion of ruling class power, it was not enough to simply point to the fact that the ruling class controls the education system, religious institutions, and the press.

[Marxists’] *unawareness of the details of dynamic interactions can become a great impediment of their cause. Hence, they need to study the details of the influence through school, religion, the press, and the radio. In attempting to arrange a hierarchy of “mills of ideology,” they might discover even more effective mills of this sort such as the family and the suppression of sexuality by society.* [...]. *If man is the product of his material relationships, then he is to be understood in the sense Marx had in mind. Economic circumstances influence the individual directly and indirectly through the detour produced in his changing psychic structure.*[[243]](#footnote-243)

From this ‘integrationist’ position, Fenichel goes on to argue that early life events - organised through ‘mills of ideology’ that alter the psychic structure of the individual – produce ‘unconscious enthusiasms’ underpinning the ‘manifest enthusiasms’ of which the person is aware and that make up their conscious self. These are the result of structured processes that regulate self-esteem, partially meet the psychical and emotional needs of the child on the condition of approved behaviour and simultaneously operate to frustrate the child’s strivings towards satisfaction. They work to block the outlet of aggressive tendencies, moulding the sublimations of basic drives and conflicts towards resolutions that are socially compliant. Importantly also Fenichel repeatedly made the link between child-rearing and processes of character formation familiar in psychoanalytical discourses, and industry:

*There is a great difference between a nursing mother and an industrial employer; nevertheless the employer makes use of the fact that once there was a nursing mother; because it is the memory of the pleasurable dependence of the infant upon the mother which makes people long for external supplies and ready to believe promises and fulfil conditions.*[[244]](#footnote-244)

The theorists of the Frankfurt School did not have a political analysis of the disastrous Third Period of Stalinist Soviet foreign policy (1928-34) that in Germany threw communist workers into direct political and even physical conflict with members of the reformist SPD. They did not engage for example with Leon Trotsky’s writings on this period.[[245]](#footnote-245) Looking to psychoanalytical categories provided an alternative to the Marxism that they knew.[[246]](#footnote-246) In his *Escape From Freedom* (1941),[[247]](#footnote-247) Fromm, drawing upon his pre-war psychosocial empirical research, had centred his analysis of popular support for the Nazis on personality types that had become widespread throughout German society. One common tendency according to Fromm, was ‘automaton conformity’, originating from family structures in which the father figure was attenuated, diminished by their position in mass society. In similar fashion the Marxist psychoanalyst, Paul Federn pointed to the demise of social authority figures for the post-World War 1 generation, something he characterised as a ‘parricide’, representing the ‘loss of the father’ within Austrian society, so making the population susceptible to the seductions of the ‘strong leader’.

The key concepts of Freudo-Marxism were to feed into a later generation of left social theory, and in ways that created new spaces for critical thought. These intellectual trends resonated with the social movements that also and relatedly erupted in the post-War era. In combination these developments gave rise to types of Marxism that were independent of the orthodoxies of Stalinism and Second Internationalism. They also framed new ways of appreciating and emphasising the subjective side of the historical process and the central role of class struggle and movements against oppression, as well as the contribution that can be made by the individual.

## Liberation and the ‘New Left’

Reich, Bernfeld and Fenichel were all central to the development of Freudo-Marxist thinking in the 1930s. However, the figure that connects the work of the school from that era with the renewed interest in Marxism within the post-War New Left in the West and Socialist Humanism in Eastern Europe, was Erich Fromm. Beginning with his earliest empirical work that applied Freudian character analysis to the study of political orientations of workers in Weimar Germany [[248]](#footnote-248) Fromm was concerned with the problem of ‘conformity’ and the question of how the Nazis had risen to power in Germany. In *The Fear of Freedom* (1941),[[249]](#footnote-249) a book that was to achieve large readerships on both sides of the Atlantic, he posed the question of freedom as a ‘psychological problem’. Tracing the phenomenon of the ‘individual’ historically both as a political entity and as a felt experience, he identified a lag between the emergence of ‘individuation’ and the development of the self. Socially atomising economic and political forces, Fromm argued, marched ahead of the inward ability of the personal psyche to cope with the isolation it experienced. In Fromm’s analysis, this resulted in psychical strategies of denial and flight from reality.

*While the process of individuation takes place automatically, the growth of the self is hampered for a number of individual and social reasons. The lag between these two trends results in an unbearable feeling of isolation and powerlessness, and this in its turn leads to psychic mechanisms, which are later on* [in Fromm’s text] *described as* mechanisms of escape*.*[[250]](#footnote-250)

He suggested three such ‘mechanisms of escape’. The first was ‘authoritarianism’. Here, the individual, in abandoning their own autonomy and in fear of social ostracism,[[251]](#footnote-251) seeks salvation by forming ‘secondary bonds’ with a force, whether it be that of a person or a social or material object, outside of themselves. Taking from Freud Fromm identified both masochistic *and* sadistic personality tendencies as the outward manifestations of this form of escape. The second type Fromm termed ‘destructiveness’. Destructiveness was distinct from sadism. Whereas sadism represented the desire to dominate and incorporate the ‘other’, destructiveness represented the desire to *eliminate* the external object, whether human or inert. Still, like sadism it was also a reflex response to isolation and powerlessness in the world. The third of Fromm’s ‘escapes’ was ‘automaton conformity’. Here, the person labours under the delusion of a false individuality. The suppression of any critical self-knowledge early in life produces a disconnection with any actual or potential inner self. The result is that the person borrows thoughts, opinions, and feelings from sources and influences outside of themselves in ways that make them susceptible to conforming behaviours, even where these are clearly harmful to their own rational interests.[[252]](#footnote-252) These ‘escapes’ formed the basis of Fromm’s theory of social character.

As Fromm developed his social theory between the wars he was to move by steps away from Freudian orthodoxies, resulting in conflict with the leading figures of the Frankfurt School.[[253]](#footnote-253) Fromm’s major breaking point concerned Freud’s libido theory and, at a more general level, his theory of instincts. Whereas the other major names of the Frankfurt School adhered to Freudian orthodoxy on the question of the sex-drive and its repression and sublimations as providing the key to understanding culture, Fromm increasingly came to see it as one – albeit important - factor amongst a range of others. Departing from the ‘biological materialism’ upon which figures such as Adorno and Horkheimer built their critique of capitalist society,[[254]](#footnote-254) Fromm insisted upon an analytical framework in which biological drives did not only exist as a socially repressed substratum, but rather interacted with other factors such as interpersonal relations and the individual’s conscious ‘relationship to the world’. Fromm was to summarise his modification of Freud’s libido theory in the following way:

*At this point we can restate the most important differences between the psychological approach pursued in this book and that of Freud … we look upon human nature as essentially historically conditioned, although we do not minimize the significance of biological factors and do not believe that the question can be put correctly in terms of cultural versus biological factors. In second place, Freud’s essential principle is to look upon man as an entity, a closed system, endowed by nature with certain physiologically conditioned drives, and to interpret the development of his character as a reaction to satisfactions and frustrations of these drives; whereas, in our opinion, the fundamental approach to human personality is the understanding of man’s relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself. We believe that man is* primarily *a social being, and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs … Therefore, in our approach, the needs and desires that centre about the individual’s relations to others, such as love, hatred, tenderness, symbiosis, are the fundamental psychological phenomena, while with Freud they are only secondary results from frustrations or satisfactions of instinctive needs.*[[255]](#footnote-255)

Other leading figures in Freudo-Marxism were to sharply attack Fromm’s position.[[256]](#footnote-256) To his opponents, his reformulations of Freud’s key concepts represented a step away from the dispassionate rigour of the Freudian paradigm, and a drift into vague humanism and diffuse commentaries upon the human condition. It is true that much of Fromm’s later writing where of this type. Books such as *Man for Himself,*[[257]](#footnote-257) *The Art of Loving,*[[258]](#footnote-258) *The* *Essence of Man,*[[259]](#footnote-259) and *To Have or to Be*[[260]](#footnote-260) addressed largely ethical, humanistic, and existential concerns. However, Fromm remained a defender of Marxism,[[261]](#footnote-261) regarding Marx as the intellectually greater and more historically significant figure compared to Freud who “did not transcend the principles of bourgeois society”.[[262]](#footnote-262) Living in Mexico between 1950 and 1973, he also maintained some contact with Trotsky’s widow, Natalia Sedova. And along with figures such as Marie Langer he would go on to establish a tradition of Latin American Marxist psychoanalysis.

Fromm’s writings caught the mood of intellectual and social revolt that grew in the West throughout the 1950s and exploded over the following decade. For those seeking lives and a world built upon principles of rationality, personal and sexual fulfilment and peace, Fromm assumed the status of a *zeitgeist* figure. More relevantly, he was a bridge for Marxist and socially radical critique from the generation of revolutionaries of the 1920s and 1930s to that of the 1960s.

The other great transitional figure, whose philosophical and political influence - and activism - spanned the decades before and following the Second World War, was Herbert Marcuse, who began to engage with psychoanalysis following the suppression of revolutionary struggle in Spain under Soviet foreign policy, and as revelations of the Moscow show-trials emerged.[[263]](#footnote-263)

In 1955 Marcuse published *Eros and Civilization*,[[264]](#footnote-264) written in response to Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) and its message of curtailed fulfilment. By the time of its re-publication in 1966 it had become an influential literary and political work, its message of a liberated Eros catching the imagination of a young generation rebelling against sexual repression and the social conservatism and hypocrisies of their elders. At the heart of the book lay a re-working of Freud’s libido theory. Freud had argued that the unconscious pleasure-seeking impulses and drives (including the sex-drive) of the id, caused the conscious self, the ego, to collide painfully with reality. The behaviour and social orientations of the self were modified through the intercession of the superego that developed in the person’s eighth or ninth year. The superego, in Freud’s psychical architecture, exerted a repressive force against the id to curb its potentially destructive tendencies. The force of the id then - its cathectic energy - frustrated in its full expression, became channelled or sublimated into other, less potentially harmful ends. The outcome was forms of socially acceptable behaviour that allowed the person to make their way in the world, to work and to maintain outwardly successful familial relationships. The culture of a society was the result of these conflicting forces: repression (and accompanying neuroses) the price paid for the stability it afforded.

Freud’s prognosis for humanity was gloomy. The root of neuroses and the various types of psychological disturbance that were evident in the society of Freud’s time as they are in our own, lay in un-reconciled conflicts between competing psychical structures. Most notably, unresolved struggles within the person’s own Oedipal complex could cause deep-seated problems for their ability to form stable relationships, find sexual fulfilment and ultimately achieve personal happiness. Psychoanalysis could intervene to aid the individual in identifying the unresolved complexes that troubled them, bringing into consciousness conflicts that may have lain beneath the surface for decades. The result however, even with the most successful interventions, could never be more than a normative adjustment to the limits of personal fulfilment. The individual’s happiness and especially their sexual happiness, lay in their acceptance of the inevitability of repression of their desires; in other words, in the acceptance of disappointment.

In a radical re-working of libido theory that would later be taken up within the counterculture of the 1960s and the gay-liberation movement in the 1970s, Marcuse identified its ‘explosive’ kernel, trapped within the social conservatism and philosophical pessimism of its Freudian framing. This explosive potential was described by Marcuse as a ‘hidden trend’ within psychoanalysis, of repressed memory within the individual and their wider culture. In the process of psychoanalysis forgotten memories, coming once more into the person’s consciousness, brought with them truths too difficult to manage over the course of a conventional life. With them also came ‘critical standards’ by which the person could assess their inward states and public self.

*The psychoanalytic liberation of memory explodes the rationality of the repressed individual. As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies. Regression assumes a progressive function.[[265]](#footnote-265)*

The challenge as Marcuse saw it was to liberate this revolutionary content. And this he set out to achieve through a historicising of Freud’s theory.

Freud had proposed a ‘reality principle’ that blocked and frustrated the ‘pleasure principle’, continuously forcing it back into the unconscious and semi-conscious parts of the person’s psyche. Marcuse saw in the reality principle an undifferentiated construct that floated above history, constituted as a universal resistance to the deepest strivings of the unconscious self. Of all the elements of Freud’s theorising however, the reality principle appeared to be the one that most obviously required historical contextualisation. In Marcuse’s treatment, re-constituted now in relation to social structures and material culture, it was something that the individual had to master in their life, and against which they had to perform. So, the reality principle, for Marcuse, was also a ‘performance principle’ that arose concretely and differently from and for each historical epoch.

This historical reframing of Freud’s libido theory, particularly of its cultural aspects (its phylogeny), would make little difference to the outward result of the competing physical forces in Freud’s model for the greater part of human history. Throughout the millennia humankind had lived in circumstances of absolute scarcity (*Ananke*) that had made psychological repression and even brutality a necessity. Repression had for most of human history been the price paid for civilisation. Moreover, it was only with the repression of the libido and the re-channelling of its energies into work that human society and its cultures had progressed at all. [[266]](#footnote-266)

With the rise of capitalism, and especially of the form that was flourishing in the US society that Marcuse observed, this had changed. In affluent consumerist society the repression that was exerted by the superego upon the strivings of the id, whilst crucial for the maintenance of the social order and its systems, was no longer justifiable in terms of existential necessity; it was no longer a matter of survival. This ‘problem’ was captured by Marcuse *via* a modification of the concept of ‘repression’ itself. The normal repression that arose from needs created by scarcity was now accompanied by a ‘surplus repression’ that was imposed by social constraints and required of the individual that they accept its results for their lives: repression in affluent society must function as a *self*-repression. Furthermore, Marcuse argued that the degree of the surplus-repression required for the stability of any society provides a measure of how repressive it is overall.

*Within the total structure of the repressed personality, surplus repression is that portion which is the result of specific societal conditions sustained in the specific interest of domination. The extent of this surplus-repression provides the standard of measurement: the smaller it is, the less repressive the stage of civilization.*[[267]](#footnote-267)

For Freud the striving for libidinal pleasure that emanated from within the id, repressed by the superego, became sublimated into moralities and value systems; this repressive sublimation being the root of (and the price paid for) culture. For Marcuse surplus repression provided the psychological mechanism by which consumerism was perpetuated as a mode of social behaviour.

In Marcuse’s modification of Freud’s libido theory as he developed it a decade later in *One Dimensional Man* surplus repression, rather than being sublimated into higher order motivations, becomes *de*-sublimated – *returned* - into libidinal appetites to be met by the consumer products of everyday life and commoditised entertainment and distraction. The partial release of the id in conservative forms that work *for* ‘the *status quo* of general repression’, regulated through processes of ‘institutionalised desublimation’ provides the psycho-social material that fuels capitalist consumption.[[268]](#footnote-268) So, according to Marcuse, in modern consumerist society the pleasure principle absorbs the reality principle.[[269]](#footnote-269) In no other area of life was this more obviously evidenced than the sexual. In a style that anticipates Foucault’s observations upon the ubiquity of sex and its coincidence with continuing repression,[[270]](#footnote-270) Marcuse describes the false and joyless uses of sexual imagery so familiar in consumer culture.

By emending the key elements of Freud’s theoretical architecture Marcuse was presenting a new picture of the workings of the psyche; an altered understanding of its animus in consumer behaviour. The full significance of this however only becomes clear when, with Marcuse, we understand its implications for Eros. For Freud Eros (the life-instinct) remained forever trapped under the socially necessary control of the superego. Desire could never be satisfied: the human being never fulfilled. The impossibility of human happiness beyond the most borderline and compromised forms, equated for Marcuse with the impossibility of human liberation and as a corollary the futility of belief in the communist society. It was this anthropological ontology that Marcuse had set out to critique in his historicising of Freud.

We have noted the way in which Marcuse reconstructed Freud’s universal ‘reality principle’ into the historically concrete ‘performance principle’. In a society structured by repressive systems of social control and sexual regulation, Eros itself could be expressed in only the most constrained and distorted forms. In a free society this would not be the case. Given freedom in a non-repressive society the pleasure-seeking instinct would find creative rather than destructive outlets. Consequently, the libido could become free without ensuing chaos. But more than this, Eros would be freed of the repressively sexualised forms that dominate in capitalist consumer culture. Unlike Reich’s ideal of a liberated genital sexuality, for Marcuse the ‘erotic’, understood as life-enhancing human activity as opposed to exclusively sexual behaviour, would now permeate all areas of life.[[271]](#footnote-271) The rigidifying distinctions between labour and leisure, the aesthetic, and the non-aesthetic, the quotidian and the profound *etc.* would no longer apply. In this Marcusian sense, work itself would become erotic. As he was to put in his *An Essay on Liberation* (1969):

*Freud's last theoretical conception recognizes the erotic instincts as work instincts – work for the creation of a sensuous environment. The social expression of the liberated work instinct is cooperation, which, grounded in solidarity, directs the organization of the realm of necessity and the development of the realm of freedom*.[[272]](#footnote-272)

We can see Marcuse as a figure who connected the early phase of the North American counterculture and the interest in psychoanalysis within it, with the crises of Western Marxism at that time. His less well-known *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (1958) - published just three years after *Eros and Civilisation* - illustrates this.[[273]](#footnote-273) In that text Marcuse identifies what he terms the ‘coexistence’ of the capitalist West and Soviet ‘socialism’ for his analysis of the politics, culture, and social values of Soviet society. Despite outward differences of political form, their interdependence meant that a fundamental sameness existed between them in the ascendency of ‘technical rationality’ above human happiness, and the domination of the requirements of industrial production over any type of socially ethical culture or individual fulfilment.

*The world-historical co-existence of the two competing systems, which defines their political dynamic, also defines the social* function *of their ethics.*[[274]](#footnote-274)

Ultimately, for Marcuse, the liberated person, developing their creative potential and flourishing through personally fulfilling social relationships, was at once the essence and the justification of the free society. In *Eros and Civilization* particularly, and against Freud’s Oedipal pessimism, communism as the social form of human freedom was restored as both an ethical ideal and as a human possibility.[[275]](#footnote-275)

Based in the US from 1934, Marcuse can be seen as an intellectual bridge – generationally and geographically – that produced an Anglo-American river of radical Left psychoanalysis in the post-War era, but that was also influential in the German student movement of the late 1960s, the French May 1968 student movement and the Italian New Left (*Nuova Sinistra*) and autonomous workers movements of the 1970s and 1980s. His equivalent on the European Continent was Jaques Lacan. Lacan’s influence in all areas of the human and social sciences was and remains vast. Suffice to say here that Lacan created a ‘Francophone river’ of critical psychoanalytical theory.

Lacan’s first noted contribution to psychoanalytical thought was his ‘mirror stage’ of infant development that he presented at the 1949 16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Zurich.[[276]](#footnote-276) This drew upon the empirical work of the French psychologist Henri Wallon who in his ‘mirror test’ had observed the obsessive interest of the infant with their own reflected image between the ages of six to eighteen months. The concept also echoed the ‘looking glass self’ that was a category in the work of the American sociologist Charles Cooley, and for the school of symbolic interactionism he was associated with.[[277]](#footnote-277) For Cooley, the ‘reflected-self’ (understood both in literally visual terms and as a cultural metaphor) provided the means by which the expectations of ‘the other’, for example the mother, entered into the formative processes responsible for the emergence of self-hood. However, whereas for the symbolic interactionists, the continuous modifications of social behaviour demanded by the literal, social, and cultural reflections of the self still presumed a stable and enduring ‘I’, for Lacan it did not.[[278]](#footnote-278) Taking the mirror stage beyond clinical observation, he saw instead a fractured and unstable self, continuously threatened with annihilation. In the introduction to his 1949 paper, alluding to his psychoanalytical practice, he highlighted the philosophical consequence of this methodological starting point:

*It should be noted that this experience sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the* cogito*.*[[279]](#footnote-279)

The mirror stage for Lacan represents a moment of primary structuration, a ‘rootstock’ of all subsequent constructions, including that of gender. The steps in his formulation, as well as how they align with other aspects of his *oeuvre*, need to be understood to appreciate how this can be so.

In Lacan’s mirror stage, the infant sees in their reflection a singular being and so comes to experience themselves now not as a disassociated set of fluid sensations, but as an integrated whole. They discover now in their improving motor control – increasingly obvious to them in their reflected image - how to overcome the distress of their hitherto helpless condition. Whilst this is a pivotal moment of self-recognition - a primary narcissism that precedes society - it is also overwritten by the social symbols that constitute the external social world: a Symbolic Register (or Order) of linguistic and cultural cues and prompts, and of ‘law’. Moreover, the infant does not recognise itself in an unmediated fashion. Rather a host of ‘others’ are on hand to welcome the moment. The event is over-determined by the socio-linguistic context of the infant’s family, community, and cultural landscape. This provides a force-field of powerful signifiers that cut into the incipient mentalities of the child and become buried in its social cognition. The result is an ego that sits, cuckoo-like, in the psyche of the individual, as an object introduced from the outside. This notion of the ego as a virtual entity, an extimate (as opposed to an intimate) interloper, falsely presenting itself to consciousness as an authentic self, is for Lacan the root of a constitutive alienation that haunts the person throughout their life. This in turn produces a ceaseless and never-fulfilled striving for self-realisation through the creation of the ego, of alter-egos and of adjustments to the self’s representation *of* itself, *to* itself: it is the Imaginary Register interacting constantly with the Symbolic Register that provides its context. So, in the person’s early development, what they perceive as their autonomous self - their ego - is in fact an introjected entity created by ‘Others’ who organise their physical, social, and psychological environment. What they experience as ‘social reality’, including their notions of self-hood, is in fact a perceptual structuration of the world. This Imaginary however, cannot operate alone as a state of simple delusions. Its development is encrypted by the active involvement of the Symbolic: the matrix of signifiers carried by Others, that provides the socio-linguistic order in which the Imaginary appears, preceding it chronologically.[[280]](#footnote-280) It is the combination of the Imaginary Register and the Symbolic Register then that produces the subject’s lived experience with all its variegated richness and falsehood.

Finally, there is Lacan’s ‘Real’. This is not the ‘social reality’ just described. Indeed, the Real in Lacan’s theoretical framework has a mystery about it. It is that which cannot be captured by the Imaginary or by the Symbolic. It eludes both and in-so-doing remains continually beyond what the person can know. The opacity of the Real makes it an enigmatic realm known by its effects rather than a cognitively apprehended presence. The register of the Real was also central to Lacan’s formalised theory of sex, sexual development and sexual difference – or ‘sexuation’. Here, whilst the difference between the sexes is couched as non-biological, it is also an unbridgeable gap, a constitutive separation that resonates with the internal splits of the individual sexual subject.

Of particular interest here is Lacan’s understanding of the unconscious and its implications for interpretations of ideology produced by later thinkers he influenced. Here the Symbolic register is key. For Lacan, the unconscious is not a dark churn of impulse and unchained desire (*qua* Freud), but rather a complicated and highly enmeshed socio-linguistic lattice: the unconscious for Lacan, is ‘structured like a language’.

*Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him “by bone and flesh” before he comes into the world; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgement, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it – unless he reaches the subjective realization of being-toward-death.[[281]](#footnote-281)*

It is the Symbolic that structures, or ‘writes’, the unconscious. In the French, Lacan says ‘L'inconscient est structuré *comme un langage*". His choice of terms is precise in that ‘comme’ translates into the English as ‘like’ rather than ‘by’; and ‘langage’ (as in *de* Saussure’s original distinction) translates as language *per se* (or, as Lacan emphasises, ‘letters’) rather than any one spoken language.[[282]](#footnote-282) The Symbolic, drawn from the world of social signifiers, is the creation of the ‘others’ that populate the developmental environment of the infant and growing child. The unconscious that results is trans-subjective in character, criss-crossed by a multitude of conflicting and paradoxical social influences. Significantly, this means that along with being linguistically structured the Lacanian unconscious is also non-biological (unlike Freud’s id) and is the result of the work of the Symbolic upon the human subject. Finally, the Symbolic Register, animated by the dynamics of language, provides spaces – gaps created by the shifting alignments of signifier and signified – through and between which the unconscious slides.[[283]](#footnote-283)

Lacan’s Register Theory is central to his re-working of Freud’s Oedipus Complex. For Lacan persons outside of the individual’s own psyche come in three types each corresponding to one of the Registers. He distinguishes the first – the Imaginary Register – with a lower case ‘o’. The Imaginary ‘other’ is the other of normal daily interactions. It is the other to whom we broadly attribute the same ‘qualities-of-self’ as ourselves. It is our assumptions about the others with whom we interact that enable us to move competently within and through our social world. Over against these others there is the Symbolic *O*ther. This is the Other that resembles Freud’s superego. It brings with it the entire socio-linguistic world of norms, expectations, and morality. It most nearly approximates to the parent-carer in the early years of the infant’s life. However, it is more than the parent: it is the bearer of authority and the guardian of the ‘rules-of-behaviour’ that will govern the person’s life. These forces now play out in the forms of the Mother and the Father. To the infant, the figure of the Mother (or the socio-cultural presence the Mother-figure represents) is a source of anxiety. She is the source of life, sustenance, and comfort: in that sense she is the entire world. But by her presence she is overwhelming; whilst if she is absent, she creates terror. In the psyche of the infant there is the constant and urgent question: ‘What does the Mother *want*?’ The Mother in Lacan’s cosmology is always ‘too much or too little’. In the figure of the Father, the infant finds the source of law in the ‘Name of the Father’ – the socio-cultural representation of that which the Mother is not, and by which the suffocating and anxiety-inducing dependency upon her becomes disrupted as the child grows into the symbolic structure of its society.

Finally, it is this dance of cultural signifiers that structures the libidinal energies and hedonic patterns of the psyche of the person. Each of us has a biological substratum, an ontic body that has needs that must be met to survive. This is manifested as ‘demand’ that goes further than what is physically required to meet this need.[[284]](#footnote-284) The surplus that is left is for Lacan, desire. So, in a mathematically styled expression of desire being the remainder of demand minus need, Lacan brings us to his reworking of Freud’s libido theory.

*What is thus alienated in needs constitutes an Urverdrängung* [primal repression], *as it cannot, hypothetically, be articulated in demand; it nevertheless appears in an offshoot that presents itself in man as desire (das Begehren).*[[285]](#footnote-285)

This ‘desire’ must be understood in its peculiarly Lacanian inflexion. The desire is for an object, naturally. In the child however, the ‘object’ in question is that of the *Mother’s* desire: the ‘phallus’ (not the literal penis, rather the *signification* of that which she does not have). This is the Lacanian *object petit a*.[[286]](#footnote-286) So, the desire of the child is to *be* the ‘phallus’ (as above): the object of the Mother’s desire. In the child then, the desire is for something it cannot have; the ‘lack’ that is constitutive of the self. In Lacan’s sexual schema, beneath our desires are the desires of the *other*: or more prosaically, we might say the wish to *be* the object that is cherished by another.

For Freud, the pleasure principle had been one of the two primary psychical impulses (the other being the reality principle). For Lacan, it was the paradoxical principle of ‘jouissance’ that connected the outward strivings of desire with the opaque realm of the Real. Jouissance is the pleasure that is ‘too much’, going beyond mere satisfaction, and reaching across a threshold into pain. And the pursuit of satisfaction itself, perpetually seeking the object-of-desire, creates its own *jouissance*: the irritable pleasure of an incessant and impossible quest for a final sating of desire and its appetites.

The influence of the Left Freudian tradition was present in the western countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s. Broadly this influence flowed in two tributaries: that of the Anglophone Marcusian school; and that of the Francophone Lacanians. They were to influence various intellectual traditions within social and liberation movements in the post-war era. To take three examples: firstly, the influence of Left psychoanalysis within anti-colonial struggles; secondly, its role in feminist theory; and thirdly theoretical developments within Marxism. For the first we will consider the thinking of Frantz Fanon; for the second, the work of Juliet Mitchell; and for the third the contributions of Louis Althusser and Slavoj Žižek.

Each of these figures in their different theoretical regions and political contexts illustrate the meaning of socio-cultural determinations of subjectivity and personhood. They provide developmental steps away from the original biologism and empirical symbolism of early psychoanalytical theory, in a direction that takes us eventually to the foundational categories of Marxism via the model-of-mind we pursue.

*Frantz Fanon*

Before embarking upon a critical appraisal of the thought of Frantz Fanon, charting the heterogeneous admixtures of his political philosophy, the extent of his influence should be acknowledged. The readership of his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)[[287]](#footnote-287) throughout the colonised world and within anti-colonial, national liberation and minority anti-oppression movements was and remains enormous. There have been many armed insurgencies particularly, in which Fanon’s great key work has been cited by leaders and activists as having been an important intellectual reference in their political career. In the jails of apartheid South Africa, the H-Blocks of the Maze Prison in Long Kesh, Northern Ireland and the internment camps of the state of Israel, *The Wretched of the Earth* has circulated as an educational text.[[288]](#footnote-288) Figures of the stature of Malcolm X in North America, Che Geuvara in Cuba and Steve Biko in South Africa were affected by Fanon’s call for cultural renewal and the overcoming of colonial psychologies. A later readership of his earlier published book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952)[[289]](#footnote-289)grew out of the interest this influence had created. Across these two seminal works we can trace the eclectic philosophical and conceptual layers of his political outlook. More specifically, through them we can see the degrees to which Marxism and psychoanalysis, in differing and sometimes unorthodox ways, shaped his analysis of the colonial psyche and the struggle for mental, bodily and political liberation.[[290]](#footnote-290)

Fanon’s philosophical and political development can be mapped by his geographical journey from the Antilles to France and finally to Algeria. Absorbing and critically assessing the diverse influences of négritude, French phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, Fanon’s thought comprises a patchwork of insights drawn from this range of traditions. It is the influences of Marxism and psychoanalysis however, that is our focus here.

The character of Fanon’s Marxism is clearest in *The Wretched of the Earth*. This is where we see his analysis of the intrinsic and constitutive role of violence in the position of the colonised and the struggle for liberation. It is there that he warns of the dangers of co-option of the nationalist bourgeois by the colonial powers. It is there also that he gives his assessment of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and his scepticism of the potential of the industrial working-class of the Third World.

*… it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength*.[[291]](#footnote-291)

Here Fanon stresses spontaneity against the control of indigenous elites and the importance of cultural nationalism; and psychoanalytical motifs are present throughout. Fanon’s discussion of violence and cultural renewal for example employs the metaphors of libido, cathexis, discharge, and orgiastic release.

*The native's relaxation* [in dance] *takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away... There are no limits -- for in reality your purpose in coming together is to allow the accumulated libido, the hampered aggressivity, to dissolve as in a volcanic eruption.*[[292]](#footnote-292)

In the final essay of the collection ‘Colonial War and Mental Disorders’, Fanon speaks as a psychiatrist, but still with a political purpose. In this discussion, he draws upon his experience as a doctor with the *Front de Libération Nationale* (F.L.N.) in the Algerian War of Independence. From his case notes he identifies four types – or ‘series’ – of psychiatric disorders. These were: ‘reactionary’ cases in which the disorder arises directly from the experience, whether as perpetrator or victim, of the violent ‘event’; cases in which the disorder arises from the atmosphere of violent conflict – of total war - more generally; affective-intellectual ‘modifications’ and morbidities that had resulted from torture; and psycho-somatic illnesses and cortico-visceral disorders that are associated with war. In all these case-types Fanon treats the associated symptoms, not as the result of personal idiopathies or family histories (*qua* Freud) but rather as the result of environment. For Fanon the psychiatrist, disturbances of the mind arise directly from the injuries visited upon the psyche in the real violence of war.

*The Wretched of the Earth* is Fanon’s manifesto to the world: his cry to the ‘wretched’ to rise. It is in his earlier work however, that his philosophical and psychoanalytical influences are most evident. The great theme of *Black Skin, White Masks* is the dense and violent dialectic of race that runs through the European Enlightenment. In his discussion of the misrecognitions and non-recognitions that constitute the antagonisms of race, he acknowledges the influence of Hegel’s master-slave relationship. For Fanon, the white colonist creates the ‘Negro’. Fanon rejected the thesis put forward by the ethnologist Octave Mannoni[[293]](#footnote-293) that there can be such thing as psychological colonised ‘type’. Fanon argued that it was the synchronic collision of the European and the non-European in the creation of empires that lies at the root of oppression.

*I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and the black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analysing it to destroy it.* [[294]](#footnote-294)

For Fanon, the entire architecture of colonial relations, behaviours, tropes of speech and communication, modes of postural deference and social deferment become a ‘psychological-economic system’.[[295]](#footnote-295)

With respect to the influence of psychoanalysis, it is the ambivalence of Fanon’s use of it that is interesting. He rejects for example the ego-psychology of Alfred Adler. Linking Adler’s ‘goal-oriented’ psychoanalysis with Monnoni’s belief in a ‘dependency-complex’ by which a colonised people in some pre-determined fashion accept their fate, he argues instead that it is environment and society that give rise to passivity.[[296]](#footnote-296) Moreover, citing Malinowski’s studies of the Trobriand people of Papua New Guinea,[[297]](#footnote-297) he argues that Freud’s Oedipus Complex is not found in the matriarchal family structures of much of the colonised world. Even repression, so central to psychoanalysis, he argues finds no place in the psyche of the negro:

*Since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to* “*make it unconscious*” [[298]](#footnote-298)

If this was all that Fanon had to say on the subject, we could conclude that he had rejected psychoanalysis in its entirety and say no more. However, with respect to the ‘white race’, Fanon remained a Freudian. The deep-seated sexual repression Fanon saw in the interaction between colonised and coloniser for him demanded a psychoanalytical interpretation.

*Every intellectual gain requires a loss of sexual potential. The civilised white man retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license, of orgiastic scenes, of unpunished rapes, of unrepressed incest. In one way these fantasies respond to Freud’s life instinct. Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves “as if” the Negro really had them …* [[299]](#footnote-299)

Furthermore, the use that Fanon made of Lacan’s conceptual innovations in psychological theory means we should take seriously the psychoanalytical vein in his thought. In an extended footnote[[300]](#footnote-300) Fanon discusses the relevance of Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ of child development. We already know that according to Lacan at around six months the infant develops the singular self-realisation that results from seeing itself in the Other: the Other that is ‘not itself’. In this moment of self-awareness, the multiple and dynamic layers of recognition and misrecognition that drive the processes of socialisation commence. Now for Fanon, in the context of the coloniser-colonised nexus the *imago* of the Other was infused with an “imaginary aggression”. Fear of the ‘non-white’ then, churned through developmental processes of the ‘colonial infant’ as described by Lacan, ensures that the ‘native’ enters the imagination of the child as the presence of danger: the negro, in bodily form, is seen as forever a threat.[[301]](#footnote-301) In Fanon’s formulation we can still detect the distant influence of Freud, albeit in a Lacanian form.

*Juliet Mitchell*

In the decades following the Second World War much feminist comment on Freud framed him as representing nothing less than the ‘rationalisation in theory’ of the submission of woman from the origins of humanity. Across Freud’s extensive publications and private correspondences there are indeed quotes that can be used to present Freud in this light. His focus upon the sexual development of the boy (the ‘masculine model’) in his early work and terms such as ‘penis-envy’ and ‘hysteria’ used to describe normalising gendering processes and female neuroses especially, did nothing to help Freud’s reputation in this respect. And, of particular importance here, was Freud’s notion of the ‘vaginal orgasm’, distinct from the clitoral orgasm and regarded as a measure of the woman’s successful adjustment within her society. This idea was debunked in a series of feminist publications emerging from the counterculture of the early 1970s, for its political implications of sexual subservience to men,[[302]](#footnote-302) and later in the light of improved medical knowledge.[[303]](#footnote-303)

One figure who emerged from the New Left of the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s and who differed from the consensus regarding Freud’s theoretical significance was Juliet Mitchell. Mitchell was critical of both Marxism on the question of women, and of the forerunners and contemporaries of the Women’s Liberation Movement. She highlighted what she regarded as the eclipsing of ‘the woman’ as a real subject in the philosophical humanism of the early Marx, and in the category of ‘the family’ in its economic function in the later Marx and in the work of Engels.[[304]](#footnote-304) However, amongst other socialist feminists she detected the same tendency towards economistic analyses of women’s oppression: by adopting an ‘evolutionary economism’ that anchored the position of ‘the woman’ in property relations throughout history in the case of Simone *de* Beauvoir; and by treating ‘patriarchy’ as itself a mode of production by Kate Millett.[[305]](#footnote-305)

In her critical sweep of some of the most important names within the women’s movement Mitchell found that overlooking the conceptual core of Freud’s thinking was a recurring feature of their dismissals. Betty Friedan for instance in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), whilst she acknowledged Freud’s radicalism in shedding light on the importance of sexuality in the development and life of the person whether female or male, nonetheless emphasised the prejudices and offending foibles in his work that can only jar against modern sensibilities surrounding the position of women in society. This raising of what we might call the ‘biography of Freud’ over any more scientific critique of his thought results in a historicism that renders Freud only a product of his times, and then easy to dismiss. Commenting on other accounts of Freud by significant feminist thinkers, Mitchell noted theoretical mistreatments such as the tendency to displace the primacy of sex by losing it in diffuse constructs such as a generalised ‘life-energy’ (in the case of Shulamith Firestone)[[306]](#footnote-306) or in socio-existential categories (in the case of Simone *de* Beauvoir).[[307]](#footnote-307)

With these observations Mitchell was going against the stream within the women’s movement. She was also acting in the spirit of Lacan’s call to ‘return to Freud’ on the matter of sexual difference and its centrality to the structuring of the subject. She adopted an Lacanian approach to the question of how ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ occur. The question for Mitchell (and for Lacan before her) was this: ‘Are we born male or female, or do we become so?’ Beyond the anatomical differences between boys and girls Mitchell and Lacan (and Freud before them) were concerned with sexual difference in its behavioural sense. Why is it that humans couple in the way they do? What is working at the root of sexual attraction? What explains the social and personal consequences of our anatomical differences? Beyond the cultural variation of human sexuality, how do we explain its commonalities across cultures. And then, ‘Are our sexual differences, looked at in the general sense, essentially biological and innate, or are they cultural and therefore changeable?’ For Mitchell the answer was that sexual difference was the result of a ‘becoming’ after birth. We can trace the logic of this position through Mitchell’s discussion of Freud’s 1925 essay, ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes’.[[308]](#footnote-308)

In his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905) Freud had given an account of his theory of the Oedipus Complex. Focused exclusively on the attachments and frustrated jealousies of the boy, he had established a ‘male model’ of sexual development. However, the Oedipus Complex had little to say about the sexual development of the girl that helped to understand adult female sexuality. At this point Freud, resorted to a type of parallelism by which, whilst the boy fought the father for the mother’s affections (later transferring these energies to womankind) the girl merely mirrored this dynamic and so ‘therefore’ came to form an attachment with the father (and so later an attraction to the phallus). Freud was aware of the theoretical gap that this created in his account of human sexuality, revolving around an obvious question: ‘Why should it be that the girl, suffering the same disruptive intrusions by the father, should go on to form such an attachment with him and not, just as in the case of the boy, her mother?’ It was a problem that Freud struggled with for the next twenty years through a series of disputes within his psychoanalytical circle.

Freud’s followers in the International Psychoanalytical Institute tried to solve the riddle in different ways. Influenced by Melanie Klein and led by Ernest Jones, a number of notable figures began to question the fundamentals of Freud’s account of feminine sexuality based upon his ‘dynamic’ theory of mind and general ‘drive-theory’, and specifically the status of the Castration Complex. Focussing upon the infant’s pre-Oedipal development, Klein had elaborated instead an ‘object-relations’ theory. In the first months of life the object of comfort and sustenance was the mother’s breast. The loss of this ‘part-object’ (‘part’ that is of the mother) during short periods of separation created a psychical trace of the breast as a ‘phantasy’, so initiating the sexed unconscious. With the periodic return of the mother, the infant increasingly understands the breast to be a part of something larger: the mother herself, seen eventually as the ‘total-object’ by the infant. In this first phase of life, the process for the girl-child and the boy-child are the same. Increasingly aware of the social dynamics of the familial relations in which it is enmeshed, and of the gendered differences of those dynamics, the child strives to maintain its access to the nurturing mother. The stratagems eventually adopted by boys and by girls are different however in this ‘already gendered’ family world. This, for Klein and for the British object-relations school, was the origin of sexual identity in later stages of child development and adulthood.

Another position in the controversy came from Karl Abraham who put forward the concept of ‘vaginal receptivity’ by which, during the girl’s sexual development and by stages, a desire for the phallus (and for a baby as a phallic proxy), occurs as a natural development universally in all human cultures. Freud resisted this notion; his objection being its essentialising biologism. If it was indeed the case that psychological structures were the result of undifferentiated bodily impulses, then an original femininity (and by implication an original masculinity) determined the destiny of the person at birth. Moreover, this created also a ‘normality’ that made any complications such as homosexuality, the result of maldevelopment. For Freud sexual difference lay in its own obscure realm between the biological-anatomical substratum and social influences: the human psyche. Freud wanted to keep biology at the margins of the story.

Other prominent figures such as Jung with his ‘Electra Complex’ (a mirror of the Oedipus Complex) and rival biological accounts such as that of Fleiss, suffered similar rebuttals by Freud; and to the consternation of many of the leading figures of psychoanalysis.

Over these decades of controversy Freud came to the view that the sexual development of the girl was asymmetric to that of the boy. Rejecting direct anatomical sexual determination, by 1924 Freud had arrived at a revision of the Oedipus Complex that altered its dynamic. This shift occurred through the mobilisation of a hitherto minor element in the earlier theory that was now to assume centre stage: the Castration Complex.

In his original theory the boy becomes aware at a very young age of the penis as the mark of sexual difference between his mother and father, and between himself and his mother and sisters. Pained also by the dominance of his father for his mother’s affections, the boy develops an anxiety at the realisation that the penis is something that need not exist and so, in his infantile imagination, something that he might lose. It is the suppression of this anxiety that creates the sexualised unconscious in the young boy and marks the onset of the superego by which the principle of law (or authority) becomes established as the beginning of socially regulated behaviour.

This process could not occur in the girl given the actual absence of the penis. Freud had previously talked of the girl’s ‘penis envy’ resulting from her unsuccessful attempts to compete with the father. Freud was not advocating an anatomical reductionism. He was insistent that the penis ‘cannot be the motive, only the trigger of the child’s envy’.[[309]](#footnote-309) In other words, the body could not alone confer meaning, sexual or otherwise, on anatomy or sensations. Nonetheless, Freud did now see anatomical difference as the trigger of genderising processes, organised around the principle of castration. In the boy this meant the imagining of the loss of the penis as well as the behavioural prohibitions regarding the mother’s affections imposed by the father. In the pre-adolescent girl, it meant the psychical suppression of the clitoris and its sensations, and the discouragement of boyish expressions of rivalry with the father and the prohibitive ‘command’ to remain by the mother’s side. This suppression created the feminine sexed unconscious. Only with the onset of puberty did ‘sex’ return but now, in Freud’s revised theory, centred on the vagina, the ‘clitoris’ remaining outside the reach of consciousness. This transfer of the primary locus of female sexual identity to the vagina as a site of receptivity (awaiting the phallus), driven by the ‘castration’ of the clitoris, gave Freud his asymmetric model of gendering processes.[[310]](#footnote-310) It was also the point from which Mitchell, following Lacan, took up a theoretical reworking of Freud that would take her away from the mainstream of the women’s movement. As she put it, taking up where Freud had left off and summarising the main terms of the debate:

*In the final analysis, the debate relates to the question of the psychoanalytic understanding both of sexuality and of the unconscious and brings to the fore issues of the relationship between psychoanalysis and biology and sociology. Is it biology, environmental influence, object-relations or the castration complex that makes for the psychological distinction between the sexes?* [[311]](#footnote-311)

Lacan saw Freud as having been limited by the conceptual tools available to him. Working within the theoretical legacy of the nineteenth century, Freud’s work was saddled with hydraulic and thermodynamic metaphors that blunted his explanations of the human subject and normalising social-sexual processes. Despite the use of symbols in Freud’s early analytical dream-work and his later biographical interpretations, Lacan viewed Freud’s application of ‘the symbol’ as only partially effective. Particularly, without knowledge of the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Freud was unaware of the role of the ‘signifier’ foregrounded by the new linguistics that was developing contemporaneously. Lacan had subsequently applied the type of socio-cultural analysis to Freud that Saussure’s linguistics made possible, reworking the Castration Complex accordingly.

For Mitchell the gendering processes driving sexual destiny pre-existed the infant in the form of a symbolic order. The erogenous zones of the body, not yet inscribed with social meaning, would come into sexual life only as part of a ‘chain of signifiers’ in which the phallus serves as *the* signifier of sexual difference. One consequence of this was that the literal presence of the father was not key to the sexual development of the person. Even with the father weakened or physically absent, normalising processes would nonetheless shape sexual identity. Fundamental to sexual difference now wasn’t biology, sociological influences, or object-relations but a split in the subject that marked both the infant’s realisation of itself apart from the world, and the beginnings of both the male and female sexed unconscious. The ‘subject’ now wasn’t a Cartesian ‘self’; the unified, singular ‘I’ of the Cogito. Rather it was a fractured entity, always unstable and forever seeking an unattainable resolution of its contradictions by union with another. Pulled every way by life and circumstance, the subject’s striving for heterosexual union was ‘normal’ only in the sociological – and not ‘natural’ - sense. Whilst the dominant (*i.e.* more *frequent*) form of union was one of male and female coupling homosexuality was not here seen as a confounding aberration, but rather as one cultural variant of a complex universality. Finally, for Mitchell as for Lacan, the subjective ‘split’ represented a primary alienation that launched the person on their sexual life trajectory. It also created the moment of human ontogenesis: the end of nature; and the beginning of culture.

So, Mitchell had answered the question she had started with. No original sexual difference existed. There was no essential ‘male’ or ‘female’. Rather, in Lacan’s formulation, a ‘primordial split’ in the psyche of the infant created the person as male or female within a pre-existent symbolic order. For Mitchell, sex did not arise from object-relations (Klein, Jones, Horney *et. al*), sociological factors (Adler) or a unitary biological drive (Fleiss),[[312]](#footnote-312) but from a sequence of symbolically mediated social interactions. This process was animated by asymmetrical developments for the female and male infant, but in each case genital repression (‘castration’) arising from the intrusions of the father, played a central role: of the penis in the boy; of the clitoris in the girl. In the case of the girl the drama was played out to its end game at puberty with the re-presenting of the vagina as the site of sexual receptivity in the young woman.

The potential consequences of this analysis were far-reaching. It would mean that the sexualised split in the infant’s psyche into male or female at the very beginning of personhood represented a defeat of the free and unfettered human subject, so providing the irrational sub-soil into which ideology put down its first roots. It would also mean that in any future socialist society the type of sexual difference created by capitalist society would not simply fall away under socialism: it would require a generational change in modes of child rearing from the earliest stages of the life of the infant.[[313]](#footnote-313) Equally of course, it would mean that sexual difference is not a natural fact of human development and can be differently configured in a different type of society. Seen in this light, it secured the possibility of human liberation in its personal, sexual, and social aspects in interdependence with one another.

*Louis Althusser*

Whilst Juliet Mitchell was reconstructing Freud *via* socio-cultural categories in the English-speaking world, ‘across the channel’ (once more) a psychoanalytical re-fashioning of Marxism was underway in the work of Louis Althusser. Althusser’s goal was to overturn the Hegelian legacy within Marxism, to recast Marxism as a science. This involved: scrutiny of the logic and ‘reading’ of Marx’s key-work *Das Kapital*; the question of the historical subject and of human subjectivity in general; the rejection of familiar Marxist concepts such as ‘alienation’; the teasing out of humanism from Marx’s own formulations; and the re-interpretation of the concept of ideology within Marxist sociology.

Althusser adopted a ‘symptomatic reading’ of Marx that, guided by Lacan, he took from Freud.[[314]](#footnote-314) In his practice Freud had paid close attention to the silences of his patients, their elisions and avoidances as well as their explicit statements. These were clues to the ways and means by which the unconscious evaded detection and capture by the conscious self – and by the analyst ‘behind the couch’. A symptomatic reading of *Das Kapital* with careful attention to “the lacunae, blanks and failures of rigour”[[315]](#footnote-315) could reveal Marx’s logic beneath its formal economic analysis and political imperatives. This type of ‘reading’ then could bring Marx’s epistemology to the surface.

Althusser saw parallels in the logic of *Das Kapital* and in the work of Freud. In his account of his ‘readings’ Althusser emphasises the historical nature of ‘the objects’ of both: capital in the case of Marx; the psyche in the case of Freud. It is not simply that both exist and develop ‘in time’; rather it is in the character of their *movement* in time that Althusser sees their commonality. For Marx, capital evolves in successive forms from mercantilism in the late mediaeval period, through to fully-fledged commodity production and the factory system. For Freud, the psyche evolves through stages of Oedipal formation and suppression, latency, pubescent crisis and (‘all being well’) successful resolution and sexual transference. For both, the patterns of change are those of compression and intensification, displacement, concatenation, and transformation.

*... I do not mean that this analysis suppresses the problem of the relation between component histories and general history – a problem which must necessarily be solved before it is possible to speak strictly of ‘a history’. On the contrary, it shows that this problem cannot be solved unless history really* constitutes *its object, instead of* receiving *it. In this sense, the term* analysis *used by Marx has exactly the same significance as that given it by Freud when he speaks of the ‘analysis of an individual history’: just as Freud’s analysis produces a new definition of his object (sexuality, the libido), i.e., really constitutes it by showing the variation of its* formations*, which is the reality of a history, so Marx’s analysis constitutes his object (the ‘productive forces’) by constructing the history of its successive forms, i.e., forms which have a determinate place in the structure of the mode of production.*[[316]](#footnote-316)

This observation, drawing on his reading of Marx’s *Das Kapital* and particularly Freud’s 1905 *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, suggested to Althusser ‘epistemological analogies’[[317]](#footnote-317) that connected the two figures. Whilst outwardly the projects of each were not at all the same, the underlying logics to their respective critical inquiries were comparable.

One aspect of the ‘comparability’ Althusser identified arose from his essentially linguistic-conceptual analytical technique. His consideration of the ‘object’ of political economy for example revolves around a distinction between the ‘real object’ and the ‘object-for-knowledge’. With this distinction providing the foundation of our approach to political economy we separate the empirical object-world as it is outside of consciousness, and its psychical simulacrum operating as a driver within it, loaded with its own ideological excrescences. For Althusser, without this distinction made explicit we fall prey to the “’fraudulent unity’ of the word ‘object’”.[[318]](#footnote-318) So, where with Freud for whom the unconscious became comprehensible (indeed apprehensible) *via* his symptomatic psychoanalysis, in Marx the object of political economy, capital, becomes comprehensible by its separation from different forms of value (land value, rent value and so on) and its identification as value itself. By this distinction, between the real object and the object’s ideological expression, a new science is born.

*In this case, it is strictly correct to speak of a* revolution*, of a qualitative leap, of a modification affecting the very* structure of the object *… In fact, this theoretical revolution which is visible in the break which separates a new science from the ideology which gave it birth, reverberates profoundly in the object of the theory, which is at the same moment itself the site of a revolution – and becomes peculiarly a* new object*.* [[319]](#footnote-319)

Regarding the types of object of Freudian psychoanalysis on the one hand, and Marxist political-economy on the other, Althusser appropriated a key category from Lacan: ‘metonymic causality’. Lacan had found in Freud a notion of causality different from that of the sequential ‘X follows Y’ type. In his dream-analysis Freud had used interpretations that identified ‘synchronic’ causes acting also as effects of the ‘dream work’ - to create the ‘manifest dream’ as an entire structure. In other words, the causalities that worked upon the ‘dream material’ (taken from life) did not come from an exterior realm but rather emerged from the structures of the dream itself. This immanent, metonymic process, operated through mechanisms such as the ‘condensation’ of partial fragments of reality and their ‘compression’ into meaning for the dreamer. For Freud this had established the psyche as an object of a special type; known only by its effects and self-generative status. For Althusser the same was true of ‘Capital’ constituted as a human relationship, rather than a thing amenable to external analysis.

Althusser’s interest in Freudian categories was driven by a wish to establish a logic that could break from what he saw as the vestiges of idealism inherited by Marxism from its Hegelian legacy. Applied to history for instance, this suggested a motive force in which the totality of each historical moment interacts in a complex fashion with its specific effects. *Contra* Hegel, these complex interactions were not ones in which each element exerted equal effect. Rather, a structure inhered within each complex that would determine the outcome of a concrete conjunctural moment. This would always ultimately emerge from the economic realm, though never as a pure isolate of a historical process. This was the ‘structure-in-dominance’ which captured both the contingent aspects of history as well as its underlying determinism. Here Althusser avoided the Hegelian concept of ‘contradiction’, looking rather to Freud (*via* Lacan) for an alternative theorisation of causality. Eventually, it was the concept of ‘overdetermination’ that he was to (reluctantly) adopt for a non-Hegelian articulation of his philosophy of history.

*I am not particularly taken by this term* overdetermination *(borrowed from other disciplines), but I shall use it in the absence of anything better, both as an* index *and as a* problem*, and also because it enables us to see quite clearly why we are dealing with something* quite different from the Hegelian contradiction*.*[[320]](#footnote-320)

Althusser further clarifies his distinction: the Hegelian contradiction is always ‘simple’. Of course, Hegel is aware of complexity in history. The multiple and interacting expressions of historical action and meaning, the accumulation of the past within the present and its presages of future manifestations, all characterise Hegelian interpretations of history.

*However, it can be shown that this complexity is not the complexity of an* effective overdetermination*, but the complexity of a cumulative* internalization *which is only an apparent overdetermination.”*

and

[For Hegel] “A circle of circles, consciousness has only one centre*, which solely determines it; it would need circles* with another centre than itself – decentred circles – *for it to be affected at its centre by their effectivity, in short for its essence to be over-determined by them. But this is not the case.*[[321]](#footnote-321)

So, in Althusser’s view these complexities remain for Hegel reducible to a unified essence-of-the-age; a striving of historical consciousness to become actual as the ultimate quest of Spirit (*Geist*) lying at the centre of the historical moment. This is the ‘simplicity’ of Hegel’s notion of contradiction. For Althusser, there is no such unified centre that lies undifferentiated beneath the outward variety of consciousness. Rather, it is historical complexity that is real: the result of *de*-centred historical forces and of competing and conflicting determinations that interact with one another, and with the totality of their historical conditions. Articulating this non-Hegelian historical logic was the reason that Althusser looked to Freudian thought.

Beneath Althusser’s concern to shake off the Hegelian residue in Marxism, and with it the notion of an underlying unity to consciousness, was a more basic desire to eliminate historicism. Crucial to that was shedding of ‘the subject’ in history. For Althusser there is no historical ‘Subject’. Our subjectivity, what we experience as our subject-selves, is always emergent, the result of concrete conjunctural factors and forces that shape our circumstance and are beyond our control. Once our contingent subject-identities are constituted, we reach for an attachable essence by which we can root ourselves in the world. And so, we lapse into the universalising tendencies of bourgeois-humanism that seek always to maintain the historical moment ‘in stasis’ (and wedded to capitalist interest) as an unchangeable natural order and organised around the abstract concept of ‘Man’.

*‘Man’ is a myth of bourgeois ideology: Marxism-Leninism cannot* start *from ‘man’. It starts ‘from the economically given social period’; and, at the end of its analysis, when it arrives’,* it may find real men*. These men are the* point of arrival *of an analysis which starts from the social relations of the existing mode of production, from class relations, and from class struggle. These men are quite different from the ‘man’ of bourgeois ideology.* [[322]](#footnote-322)

For Althusser this rejection of bourgeois humanism was driven by imperatives that are both epistemological and political. Abstracting from concrete historical circumstance, speaking of ‘Man’ as an essence removed from its social relationships - as does Sartre, avers Althusser[[323]](#footnote-323) - is necessarily obfuscating and intrinsically inimical to a scientific understanding of both history and human action in the world. It is also dangerous to the destiny of humankind (and by inference, to the workers’ movement). This Althusser insists, was Marx’s meaning.

*Strictly in respect to theory* […] *one can and must speak openly of Marx’s* theoretical anti-humanism, *and see in this* theoretical anti-humanism *the absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation. It is impossible to* know *anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes. So any thought that appeals to Marx for any kind of restoration of a theoretical anthropology or humanism is no more than ashes,* theoretically*. But in practice it could pile up a monument of pre-Marxist ideology that would weigh down on real history and threaten to lead it into blind alleys.*[[324]](#footnote-324)

This makes Althusser’s stance plain: any tendency to essentialise humanity (or ‘Man’) draws upon bourgeois ideology and has no place within Marxism – properly understood. This has consequences for the place of key terms within Marxism. Here Althusser highlights what he sees as the paradox of Hegel’s influence upon the young Marx. Despite Hegel’s historical idealism - his cosmology based upon the self-unfolding of the Idea into manifold reality – there is for Althusser an implicit materialism in the emergent nature of the subject, forever developing out of concrete circumstance, and never ‘forever-fixed’. Regarding the term ‘alienation’ there is no prior subject ‘that *is* alienated’ (*qua* Feuerbach; *qua* Rousseau); rather alienation precedes the subject constitutively as its motive force. It is the historical process itself that is the subject - animated of course by real men and women with all their subjectivities, but with no eternal *S*ubject. This then, and paradoxically, was Hegel’s real legacy to Marx: the idea of the ‘process (history) without a subject’. It is also a notion that Althusser sees in Freud, declaring that it “underpins the whole of Freud’s work”.[[325]](#footnote-325)

Whilst Althusser acknowledges his debt to Freud, referring in one place to the ‘new continent’ that had been created by his work,[[326]](#footnote-326) it is the influence of Lacan in his theory of ideology that is most pronounced. Echoing Lacan’s Register Theory, Althusser tells us that, like the unconscious, ‘ideology is eternal’. By this he does not mean only that it transcends history and that it has always been with us, but rather that it is ‘everywhere’ and all encompassing, a kind of medium for all mental representations. Indeed, there is a double aspect to ideology for Althusser. Ideology is first the imaginary representation to the individual of their world, their conditions of existence. This is a familiar use of the word that describes the realm of religious belief, notions of order and natural justice, and so on. Although it is a realm that must always correspond to reality on some level, it is principally a sphere of illusion, mystification, and obfuscation of social relations.

*To speak in Marxist language, if it is true that the representation of the real conditions of existence of the individuals occupying the posts of agent of production, exploitation, repression, ideologization and scientific practice, and from relations deriving from the relations of production, we can say the following: all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.*[[327]](#footnote-327)

The direct influence of Lacan becomes more apparent in Althusser’s second aspect of ideology; its material existence in the world. Ideology for Althusser is not just a mental affair; it is also a practical matter. In Althusser’s schema belief and action are interdependent. Citing Pascal,[[328]](#footnote-328) he uses the example of the supplicant who kneels in prayer to believe. An ideology is a material practice that works within a world of rituals, obligations, and expected behaviours. Together these provide the ‘material ideological apparatus’ by which the individual exercises their belief as action-in-the-world. Ideology cannot exist in abstraction from human activity: and there is no other way it can work. Coming to his central thesis, whilst ideology can only exist for and through subjects, equally subjects must exist in and through ideology. Again, Althusser insists there is no Subject, and now no *subjects*, that can exist independently in abstraction from a specific ideology. The person lives ‘spontaneously’ in ideology; and ideology is constitutive of the subject, and *vice versa*.

Althusser further emphasises the pre-existence of ideology for the person. We do not choose our circumstances, of course. But more than this, in Althusser’s materialist thesis the ideologies that constitute the social world into which we grow and within which we conduct our lives, call upon us in many ways. With each beckoning we respond and in-so-doing become and confirm ourselves as subjects in that structure. This process is an ‘interpellation’. When a friend at the door says ‘It is me’ we answer in familiar fashion, when we bump into an acquaintance we greet one another with mutual recognition and when the policeman on the street calls ‘Hey, you there!’ we turn, not out of guilt, but out of a spontaneous understanding that the hailing is ‘for us’. And as we turn around, we become (once more) the subjects we are.[[329]](#footnote-329) This reality, of the subject’s insertion into the world, means that individuals are ‘always-already subjects’.[[330]](#footnote-330) The individual in other words does not create themselves; rather they are created as subjects by the ideological forces that interpellate them into a pre-existing social totality.

In his later work Althusser expanded upon the forces at play and the mechanisms involved. The repression that acts upon the individual as they are constituted in their society operates through Repressive State Apparatuses that rely upon violence. These include the police, the judiciary, the prison system and the military. However, they work in concert with ideological forces that operate though Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), together making up the psychological mechanisms at work within the person. Despite the reversal of nomenclature, the meaning here is closer to ‘repression’ in its psychoanalytical form. Althusser lists examples of ISAs ‘provisionally’ as follows: the Scholastic Apparatus; the Familial Apparatus; the Religious Apparatus; the Political Apparatus; the Associative Apparatus; the Information and News Apparatus; the Publishing and Distribution Apparatus; and the Cultural Apparatus.[[331]](#footnote-331) This conjunction of the use or threat of violence and the role of ideology makes up the conditions for interpellation to be effective in the creation and control of the subject in capitalist society.

A further consequence of the interpellated status of the subject is a distinction that follows between ‘the individual’ and ‘the subject’. The sense that the individual has of their own self-as-subject, that in some way belongs to them, is a delusion. This separation of the person and the subject brings us back once more to psychoanalysis:

*That an individual is always already a subject, even before he is born … is not a paradox at all. Freud shows that individuals are always ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects they already are, simply by noting the ideological ritual that surrounds the expectation of a ‘birth’, that ‘happy event ’… it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father’s Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable … It is clear that this ideological constraint and pre-appointment, and all the rituals of rearing and then education in the family, have some relation with what Freud studied in the forms of the pre-genital and genital ‘stages’ of sexuality i.e. in the ‘grip’ of what Freud registered by its effects as being the unconscious.*[[332]](#footnote-332)

Althusser is not making the obvious point that the neonate comes into the world through processes and structures they have not chosen. In fact, this entrance is a prelude to an ideological situation that will lay down enduring foundations of identity, socialisation and thought. Here the presence of Lacan is clear. We have seen that for Althusser (as for Lacan) there is no singular, fixed or eternal ‘subject’ that underlies either social or historical processes. But here we can further discern the influence of Lacan’s Register Theory in his explanation of the mechanisms at work.

In the pre-Oedipal phase interactions with others and crucially the Mother in the early years create, for Althusser, an ‘Imaginary’ realm. This precedes the Symbolic Order initiated by the successful resolution of the Oedipal Complex. It ushers social law into the behaviour and life-orientations of the young adult. And it prepares the way for the Law of the Symbolic with a thousand ‘Yes’s’ and ‘No’s’, acceptances and rejections and the entire range of “*empirical* modalities of this constitutive Order”.[[333]](#footnote-333) With the entrance of this Order into the life of the person also comes the Law of Culture, revolving around an external Subject that lies in wait, intending to ‘centre’ the subject in their ideological world. The Subject, a construction that whilst public in form is also responsible for moulding (or, *qua* Lacan, ‘writing’) the unconscious, may be ‘the nation’, ‘the state’, ‘God’ *etc.* The process is also ‘speculary’ with a ‘mirror-structure’ by which the subject can recognise their own image (present and future) reflected in the Subject, confirming their absorption within it and guaranteeing their place in the structure it creates.[[334]](#footnote-334) Althusser characterises this logic of socio-cultural internalisation as a ‘quadruple system of interpellation’.[[335]](#footnote-335)

*The duplicate mirror-image of ideology ensures simultaneously:*

*The interpellation of ‘individuals’ as subjects;*

*Their subjection to the Subject;*

*The mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally the subject’s recognition of himself;*

*The absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be alright: Amen –* ‘So be it’.[[336]](#footnote-336)

Lastly, the acceptance of the ‘order of things’ for which the Oedipal drama is responsible, has sexualising consequences. In this process and its final resolution, the person becomes fully ‘male’ or ‘female’. In the Oedipal phase the child tests out its imaginary fantasies against the reality of the Symbolic Register that anticipates its arrival. The child’s realisation of the impossibility of their wishes to rival the Father for the Mother’s affections, become resolved into the assumption of the right to eventually have what Mummy or Daddy have: masculinity (and so feminine attention in the form of a wife for the boy; and femininity (and so masculine attention in the form of a husband) for the girl. So, the ‘ideological-fixing’ of the person to their social order is simultaneously one of ‘sexual-fixing’. Ideology is not only constitutive of the individual subject, but also ‘sexed’ at its root.

*Slavoj Žižek*

Developing further our interest in the uses of psychoanalysis to restore the active ‘subjective side’ of history (and finding our way eventually back to the roots of Marxism) we will consider the important contribution of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek’s psychoanalytical influence also comes *via* Lacan. However, his chief project always has been the rethinking of the historical subject.

For Lacan the human subject was characterised by a ‘bar’ (*barre*), borrowed from Saussurean linguistics, that separates the signified object from the signifier representing it. In the Lacanian treatment of this relationship, the signifier is connected, not directly to the object (as in Saussure’s account), but rather to other signifiers in a chain that must be analysed to trace its object. During socialisation - of which this ‘chain of signification’ is constitutive - the human subject is split, fractured into parts by a Symbolic Register that imposes itself *via* the structuring family processes of neonatal and early infant development. The outcome is a Subject that is defined by what it *lacks* (or cannot access within its unconscious), rather than what it *is*. This ‘lack’, inaccessible to the conscious subject, coincides with Lacan’s Real, residing stubbornly beyond symbolic organisation, and troubling the conscious Self with its uncontrolled effects. And so emerges a weak, divided and ineffective Self that is reliant on an authorising presence (the Father), that it hopes can provide symbolic completeness, to root itself in the world. It is from this starting point that Žižek sets out to restore the Subject to its previously central place in European philosophy, and in real history.

Žižek, against the tide of late 20th Century and 21st Century Critical Theory and in idiosyncratic style (and *contra* Lacan), positions his work as a defence of the ‘I’ of the Cartesian cogito. His defence is of a Lacanian inflexion; drawing also upon Kant’s critique of Descartes in his discussion of the ‘Transcendental Analytic’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[[337]](#footnote-337) In that critique Kant rejects the notion of a Subject that is separate from the objective world. Rather, the Subject is always attached to, mediated by, and expressed through an object. A consequence of this is that the subject can never confront itself in some pure sense. This impossibility does not stop the subject striving to know itself, to see itself ‘as it is’. The result is Kant’s ‘Empirical Subject’, the subject-as-object or more intuitively the ‘Self’ that is the emergent construct from this struggle. However, tragedy awaits since the true Subject remains elusive, existing in the Lacanian ‘Real’, beyond the reach of the subject-as-Self that senses always what it cannot attain: that is, a true self-image. So, the Subject does not stand alone and is never identical with the Self. Rather, in the ever temporally forward subject-object movement of existence, it represents a ‘turning-back’, a ‘looking behind’ on the part of the Subject, a ‘crack’ or ‘crease’ in the ‘universal field of Being’.

This striving of the Subject to know itself doesn’t occur in a vacuum, but in a social world. In Lacan’s cosmology, this is organised as a Symbolic Register. As the Subject moves through its world, it asks of others ‘Che vuoi?’ (‘What do you want?’). This question is fundamental to the infant’s social development as it begins to navigate and negotiate the wants and commands of its parents and older siblings. In this early life process, the signifiers constituting the symbolic structure of its world become internalised and incorporated into cultural codes and modes of behaviour. These come to represent the ‘Big Other’ that embodies the norms demanded by society and towards which the developing child orientates itself. As it learns its place in the world however, and the disciplining structures to which it must submit, the Subject experiences its own opaque nature as the Lacanian ‘lack’; meaning the loss of *jouissance*. The object that it seeks, the full transparency of itself-to-itself, is now compensated for with a construct, an object that is inferred from the mystery of the Real, masking the Subject’s own creative agency from itself. This is the *objet petit à*, an object that is beyond capture; that is sublime to the Subject. This ‘sublime object’ becomes a metonymic representative of the *jouissance* that has been lost and the proxy by which the Subject will seek to secure itself in the world. Despite its mystery, it is a source of fascination and obsession, and its loss a source of terror. Žižek gives as examples of the *object petit à*, of the ‘sublime objects of desire’, God, ‘the king’ and ‘the nation’. For the Self they may include the sexual other, the precious object, the fetish; their ‘reality’ relying not upon their actual status in the world, but rather in the subject’s *belief* that they are real, and upon the performative behaviour they demand.

*The subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations. The point is that this mandate is ultimately always arbitrary: since its nature is performative, it cannot be accounted for by reference to the ‘real’ properties and capacities of the subject. So, loaded with this mandate, the subject is automatically confronted with a certain ‘Che voui?’, with a question of the Other. The Other is addressing him as if he himself possesses the answer to the question of why he has this mandate, but the question is, of course, unanswerable. The subject does not know why he is occupying this place in the symbolic network. His own answer to this ‘Che vuoi?’ of the Other can only be the hysterical question: Why am I [a teacher, a master, a king …]? Briefly: ‘Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying that I am?’* [[338]](#footnote-338)

The applications of insights from Lacanian psychoanalysis and German idealist philosophy to cultural and political analysis have been extensive and potent in Žižek’s prolific output. However, he insists in some of his most influential texts, that the ‘ontic’ (familiar experience) and the ‘ontological’ (the conditions of the possibility of experience) are separate realms and that the former cannot be derived from the latter.[[339]](#footnote-339) Despite this, in his discussions of types of political regime, as well as in his cinema critiques, there seems to be an affect from one to the other. The manipulations of the ‘sublime object’ by state regimes for instance, is illuminating for our understandings of the irrationalities of political behaviour. However, Žižek defends not only the Cartesian ‘I’, but also the ‘militant Subject’ that critiques, challenges and confronts the social limitations of the Symbolic Register. And so he reasserts the possibility of the Subject that breaches the illusory veil hiding it from itself, that approaches the truth lurking within the Real and that ‘traverses the fantasy’ so making the truly ethical act a concrete proposal.

*… what is so difficult to accept is not the fact that the true act in which noumenal and phenomenal dimensions coincide is forever out of reach; the true trauma lies in the opposite awareness that there are acts, that they do occur, and that we have to come to terms with them.* [[340]](#footnote-340)

Žižek’s mobilisation of key Lacanian concepts achieves a refocusing of the self as an authentic agent of historical action and ethical decision. Against the economistic tendencies of much of the Marxism of the Twentieth Century this was an interesting and welcome development that engaged the attention of academic discourses and the political debate of the social, democratic and liberationist movements of the 1990s onwards. Like the intellectuals of the New Left of the generation before him, he demonstrated the potential for fruitful engagement with aspects of left psychoanalytical theory.

Each of the figures we have considered here, and the discussions their works have supported, have illustrated aspects of our larger inquiry towards an account of social behaviour that has no reliance on biology. They have also brought different issues to the surface, reflecting the political character of their concerns, and addressing different oppressions and theoretical projects. Fanon used a socio-cultural framework as an alternative to Mannoni’s colonial-dependency complex. Mitchell refocused Freud’s categories through a Lacanian lens to arrive at a non-reductive account of women’s sexuality. For Althusser the interpellation of social hailing and the imperative command - the policeman’s shout, the boss’s instruction, the friend’s ‘Hello’, the baby’s cries, and so on - embedded the significations that structure the subject. And for Žižek, the sublime object created the concretisation of social formation and identification. All in their different ways pointed clearly and powerfully away from the biologistic assumptions for social theory.

However, the positive results of some of the political interactions we have considered here should not be taken to suggest a stable synthesis between Marxism and psychoanalysis. Their foundational categories are unalike, and whilst authentic Marxism remains alive to insights, science and discoveries that come from outside of its formal scope, it offers still a theoretical contribution to understanding human society and to the cause of revolution that is unique, and that must be evaluated on its own merits. Indeed, where psychoanalytic concepts have been employed within Marxism, this has usually been because of its Twentieth Century distortions, rather than anything we find at its original historical roots.

## The ill-starred quest for ‘synthesis’

In the 1950s and 1960s a coincidence of revolts, liberation movements and cultural experimentation was accompanied by the opening of new theoretical horizons within the New Left that emerged with them. Anti-colonial movements for national liberation, urban riots by blacks and the poor in the major urban centre of the US, and the hippie, student and anti-war movements together created a new spirit of liberation. The official Marxism of the established pro-Moscow European communist parties did not connect to these developments and even stood in their way. The political vacuum this created came to be filled with new ideas and a ‘new Marxism’ borrowing from other ‘critical’ theories, psychoanalysis included.

But if Marxism was to serve the authentic struggle for human freedom once more, it would have to be rescued from its disfigured form used now to justify the suppression of workers’ movements and the exploitation of workers under communism, not to mention the historical horrors of Stalinism. It was under this political imperative that sections of the counterculture in the West would turn to psychoanalysis. And so Marxism and psychoanalysis became once more entwined, but for a different purpose. There were variously attempts to explain the continuation of capitalism following the revolutionary surges of the 1960s, novel theorisations of the possibilities for social emancipation, and alternatives to the overthrow of capitalism. The 2000s and the 2010s saw the return of mass movements for liberation. The anti-globalisation movement that started with the Seattle protests in November 1999, and that led to the dramatic events of the anti-G8 protests at Genoa in 2001, the ‘Occupy!’ movement that flashed around the world from where it began in 2011 in New York, and the democratic revolutions of the Arab Spring of the same year, all called for new theoretical perspectives for these eruptive movements. One response came in the works of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000; 2004; 2009), that drew their inspiration from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2013a; 2013b) that critiqued traditional psychiatry. In their conceptual and political conclusions, and appeal to non-hierarchical and ‘rhizomic’ organisational forms of resistance, these latter strangely performative works were more ‘anti-Marx’ and ‘anti-Freud’ in their ‘atmosphere’ and evocative style. Nonetheless, they had grown from theoretical soil created by the encounter between Marxism and psychoanalysis, and the interplay of the critical contents of each.

The engagement of Marxism with psychoanalysis then has been of two broad historical kinds. When revolt has been in the ascendance some Marxists have looked to the Freudian tradition for concepts of personal liberation. When reaction has become dominant some have looked in a different way to psychoanalysis to explain the defeat of revolution or its failure to appear.

These types of engagement raise questions about Marxism itself, or rather the kind of Marxism influential in these historical epochs. Two historically dominant forms of Marxism have been: that of the ‘Second International’ of which the German Social Democratic Party which came into electoral prominence after the lifting of the Anti-Socialist laws in 1890, and which represented ‘official Marxism’ for more than thirty years, was the most notable political formation; and that of the ‘Third International’ which by the late-1930s had come to represent the ‘High Stalinism’ that marked the closing of the revolutionary opportunities of the first half of the Twentieth Century. As we have seen, each of these were problematic for theorisations of individual psychology. The political philosophy of the Second International revolved upon a belief in a gradual progress towards socialism; a philosophy in which the individual had little if any role, given that socialism could emerge *via* the state and without the necessary intervention of a historical subject. The Third International by the late 1930s, rested upon a Stalinised Marxism (Marxism-Leninism) that was inhospitable to the idea that the individual (other than the figures of Lenin and Stalin), had any special part to play in the historical process. And the swift decline of Soviet psychoanalysis after 1925 had seen the closing down of spaces for unfettered thinking in the psychological sciences.

Where mechanical forms of Marxism became the doxa of party teachings, whether those of socialist reformism within the liberal democracies of Western Europe, or of the type of Soviet doctrinal orthodoxy, eclipsing the subjective element, there we can say also that Marx would not have recognised the use of his philosophy of history.

There have been many efforts to ‘re-subjectivise’ these desiccated forms of ‘Marxism’ by incorporating conceptual elements from non-Marxist discourses. Various theorised integrations have been constructed from supposed commonalities between Marx and Freud. For Otto Fenichel this was *via* the ‘unconscious enthusiasms’ that underpin conscious strivings. For Wilhelm Reich it was the role of sexual repression in economic exploitation that was key. For Siegfried Bernfeld psycho-sexual development within the family was central to understanding the education system under capitalism. For Erich Fromm the abandonment of independent autonomy of the self was central to conformism within an oppressive class-based capitalist society.

At points during the histories of Marxism and psychoanalysis there has also been political cross-fertilisation between the two traditions. There have been figures in the socialist movement for instance who have paid attention to psychoanalysis, treating its central tenets with intellectual respect, even if cautiously so. Of these, the most notable is Trotsky, for whom psychoanalysis, although not established in its scientific status, nonetheless offered a rich seam of plausible hypotheses that ought not be dismissed on doctrinal grounds.[[341]](#footnote-341) And across the historical gallery of prominent names in psychoanalysis there have been many who allied themselves with left social democracy or stood in the camp of revolutionary socialism. Wilhelm Reich, Paul Federn, Siegfried Bernfeld, Otto Fenichel, Bruno Bettelheim for example, and others identified themselves as Marxists of one stripe or another.[[342]](#footnote-342)

The purported affinities between Marxism and psychoanalysis however are more apparent than real. When carefully excavated we discover usually that what appears to be a sameness between Marx’s and Freud’s treatment of a topic at the surface of things, in fact at a deeper level is an incompatibility. We will trace some major themes upon which Marx and Freud differ; themes that run to the core of their works and that must be considered as definitive of each, leaving their assessments of humankind ultimately incommensurable.

In his *Freudianism: a Marxist Critique* (1926),[[343]](#footnote-343) Valentin Vološinov characterised psychoanalysis as a species of ‘subjectivist psychology’ along with others based upon vitalist principles such as the *élan vital* of Henri Bergson, or the Will of Arthur Schopenhauer. No such thing as ‘the id’ he argued, or indeed the individual, could exist outside of society. Rather, what Freud termed the ‘unconscious’ was no more than the projection of social experience into the person’s psyche; the contents of the psyche being drawn from the objective world of the person but then treated as subjective in the processes of psychoanalytical therapy. What was ‘revealed’ in the therapist-patient encounter, through the patients’ speech-utterances’ – the only material for analysis – was the ideology of their behaviour, as they reported it in the therapy session. Vološinov rejected the idea and very existence of Freud’s ‘unconscious’, acknowledging only an ‘unofficial consciousness’ that is authentic to personal experience, as distinct from an ‘official consciousness’ that is infused with ideology and that shapes our normal behaviour.

Ultimately the ideas of Marx and of Freud are fundamentally dissimilar, and the theoretical categories that form the foundation stones to their philosophies quite different from, and even at odds with, one another. A brief survey of some central topics illustrates this.

Marx and Freud held different views of the relationship between appearance and reality for example. For Freud, whilst our conscious apprehension of the world is shrouded in the *post-hoc* rationalisations and dissimulations by which the ego protects itself from early life traumas, so too is our inner world blocked from our understanding. The id particularly, despite the instinctual drives that originate in it, is unknowable to us in a direct sense. Freud insists there is a radical divide between the self that we experience as ourselves, and the psychical substratum that underlies it, that is inaccessible to our consciousness. They are separate realms. Freud’s conceptualisations here, in the Kantian sense, are dualistic.

For Marx on the other hand ideology is used by a ruling class to mask its real material interests. Such concealing ideologies are propagated through organised religion, the media, the education system and so on. However, ideology cannot eclipse reality but only distort it in the minds of the exploited and oppressed (and indeed the exploiters and oppressors). Consciousness in Marx’s view does not exist in an experiential vacuum. Rather it interacts with experience of the social world in the life of the person. In other words, there is not an absolute divide between perceptions of the world itself and the ideas by which the person apprehends it. Marx’s conceptualisation is not dualistic; it is dialectical.

Also, in contrast to Marx, Freud has an ‘atomistic’ perspective on the relationship between the individual and their society. The individual is the monadic building block of society; society being the sum of its individualised parts. More than this, these individuals do not by themselves coalesce. Left to their own devices they would devour one another with material self-interest, selfish pleasure, conquest, and destruction. In Hobbesian style, a social order is needed to curb purely self-oriented motivations and behaviour. This is achieved with injunctions of self-control and neighbourly decency *via* the superego. Civilisation for Freud requires repression.

*We realized that the difficulty of childhood lies in the fact that in a short span of time a child had to appropriate the results of a cultural evolution which stretches over thousands of years, including the acquisition of control over his instincts and adaptation to society – or at least the first beginnings of these two. He can only achieve a part of this modification through his own development; much must be imposed on him by education.*[[344]](#footnote-344)

In one sense, Freud’s theorisations of human behaviour can be seen as a radicalisation of the notion of ‘the individual’ – a pivot of classical nineteenth century liberal thought. So, where John Stuart Mill for example brought the idea of ‘the individual’ from being an isolated construct to having a central place in his idea of industrial democracy, Freud went into the interior.[[345]](#footnote-345) Both then, in their different ways, took individualism to logical end points: for Mill to the end of individualism *per se* in socialism; for Freud into the depths of the individual psyche and its basal structure.[[346]](#footnote-346)

On this question Marx’s position is again different. For Marx, society stands over-and-above the aggregate of individuals that make up its population. It is greater than the sum of its parts. There is conflict, of course. However, this is the result of the intrinsic qualities of the social structure itself: its class-based nature; the economic exploitation that lies at its heart; the ways in which it pits individuals against one another in competition for employment and the resources needed to sustain life. These antagonisms are the creation of the social structure itself. For Marx, the starting point is always the social totality, of which the individual is a part and upon which they depend; the notion of an *a*social individual, primeval or otherwise, then no more than a fantastic imagining of bourgeois ideology. According to Marx, such a being could never have existed.

*The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole: in a still quite natural way in the family and in the family expanded into the clan; then later in the various forms of communal society arising out of the antitheses and fusions of clans.*[[347]](#footnote-347)

So, whereas for Freud the individual and society are counterposed, for Marx they are not. Instead, the type of society in which the individual is economically exploited, socially oppressed, and feels their alienation, is historically specific. The antagonistic relationships that characterise a society are necessary to it only; they are not universal features of human organisation. On that basis, it is possible to imagine a different type of society that fosters the free development of the full capacities and potentialities of the person. In this circumstance, unlike our social experience under capitalism, the individual grows and flourishes as the creation of a liberated society; and as a ‘social individual’ working with others towards their mutual benefit and fulfilment. Such a perspective is inconceivable within the anthropological pessimism of the Freudian paradigm.

Furthermore, very different assessments of the potential for liberation inform the two philosophies. For Freud, therapeutic treatments of neuroses rooted life-traumas could achieve a degree of relative emotional equilibrium for the person. This could be done by bringing to the surface the sediment of repressed psychical material that had been forced into the unconscious, revealing to the patient the source of their distress. Freud’s technique was ‘archaeological’ in character.

*As a rule the physician cannot spare the patient this phase of the treatment; he must necessarily make him re-experience a certain portion of his past life, and must see to it that he remains to some degree above it all so that he remains cognizant at every turn that what appears to be reality is in truth the refracted image of a forgotten past. If the physician manages to achieve this, then the battle is won; the patients accepts the validity of the interpretation, and the therapy – which wholly depends on this acceptance – can be successfully concluded.*[[348]](#footnote-348)

For Marx however, liberation happens only by engagement with the world the person inhabits, and ultimately by changing the world itself. The ideological filters that obfuscate reality are shed in a process of thoroughgoing change – of the social environment and of the person. The oppressive structures of the mind and of society, normally inter-dependent in non-revolutionary historical periods, are overcome together in a process of mutual transformation. Unlike the Freudian notion of neurotic complexes that are revealed to the individual as objects for analysis, Marx’s view of liberation is one of personal and collective change through social revolution.[[349]](#footnote-349)

*… this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.*[[350]](#footnote-350)

There is no common ground either between Freud or Marx in their respective interpretations of early human history. Freud’s attempts to apply his psychical theory to human history became his metapsychology. In his *Totem and Taboo* (1913),[[351]](#footnote-351) applying a biogenetic principle taken from the German zoologist and embryologist Ernst Haeckel, that ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’, Freud surmised that the symptomology of neurosis essentially re-ran humanity’s major developmental stages. Working outwards from the inner dynamics of the psyche, Freud theorised the overthrow of the authority of the father - important for the emergence of the properly regulated and socially successful mature person – as originating in an early human saga. He postulated a ‘primal horde’ comprising a lordly father, ruling over his sons and the women of the tribe. These jealous sons killed and ate their father, so establishing a ritual of inheritance, social power, and sexual entitlement. Reflecting upon how social morality might have been rooted in an original barbaric act, Freud says:

*By basing our argument upon the celebration of the totem we are in a position to give an answer: One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly. Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority. Of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired a part of his strength. The totem feast, which is perhaps mankind’s first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restrictions and religion. [[352]](#footnote-352)*

Freud saw this a real event that had happened (probably many times), and that created the generationally recurring battles of childhood development, adolescence, and maturation in the individual, and that had given rise to totemic religion. He would later apply this ‘foundation story’ in his attempts to explain the rise of monotheism by rooting it in the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt after the death of the pharaoh [Akhenaten](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhenaten) in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). In fairness to Freud, in these speculations he was not alone. Indeed, they represented a common theme in much nineteenth century anthropology, laced as it was with notions of linear progression from ‘primitivism’ to ‘civilisation’ and European ascendancy.[[353]](#footnote-353) Charles Darwin for instance in his *The Descent of Man* (1871) had also postulated a primal horde in which a dominant male monopolised the females of the group at an early stage of social evolution. And James George Frazer in his *The Golden Bough* (1890) talks about the killing of the ‘sacred king’ as a sacrificial murder in his typology of universal myths.

But in Marx there is no such narrative, whether meant literally or as myth; although there is indeed a periodisation of human history related to the level and type of economic and technical development of particular social structures. Each ‘mode of production’ engenders its own special cultures, beliefs, and types of rationality. The forms of consciousness that predominate in a society reflect the economic relations that provide its basic structure. According to Marxist anthropology also, during early human development - in contrast with Freud’s sexualised and masculinist blood-rite – it is the manipulation of nature and the codetermining evolution of ‘hand and brain’ that produce the material basis of early human societies. Here technique and labour upon the natural world are key to understanding culture and behaviour. In his essay ‘The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man’ (1876), Engels explained the evolutionary dialectic involved:

*By the combined functioning of hand, speech organs and brain, not only in each individual but also in society, men* (sic) *became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and were able to set themselves, and achieve, higher and higher aims.*[[354]](#footnote-354)

The sense of development and ascending achievement in this passage, suggests a picture of human beings as essentially adaptable, able to manipulate their environment and exploit the opportunities presented by nature. It is the opposite of a view of humanity as trapped within a recurring and cyclical prehistorical drama.

Considering the basic nature of humanity Freud’s thinking evolved across several phases of amendment of his modelling of ‘psychical structure’. We will summarise his thinking here, briefly revisiting our earlier discussion, to contrast it with Marx’s own on the question ‘human essence’.

Beginning with the id, this is a dark realm of basic demands, impenetrable to direct conscious apprehension. It is the root source of the instincts or ‘drives’; the unceasing appetites and desires that demand satisfaction. In his early works Freud described the drives as belonging to two broad areas that are universal to life: self-preservation; and reproduction. In *The Instincts and their* *Vicissitudes* (1915) Freud locates the self-preservation instinct in the ego; that part of us which contends with external reality, with the world. The reproductive instinct, the sex-drive, he locates within the unconscious. Each of these split and differentiate into second-order principles with their own consequences for psychological type and social behaviour.

However, the drives[[355]](#footnote-355) involved are not experienced directly. They are also complex, each comprising four parts. The instinct begins in the unconscious as a ‘pressure’, the basic demand for satisfaction. The ‘aim’ of the instinct is the satisfaction of the demand, and its means. The instinct will become fixed upon an ‘object’, whether in the world or in the body, to achieve its aim. And the ‘source’ of the instinct is how we experience it by the mental representations it creates, and in the organs that it stimulates.

As early as 1905 Freud had suggested that the connection between sexual instinct and the object of sexual interest wasn’t organic, the result of biological necessity. Rather it originated from personal factors and the contingencies of individual pathology; the connection being one of ‘soldering’ of the sexual object to the sexual impulse.

*Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together - a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attractions.[[356]](#footnote-356)*

In Freud’s developing model, the representations in thought (‘Vorstellungen’) of the impulses beneath drives no longer arose from a neuro-physical mechanism but rather had their own psychical origin. Moving away from the biologism of his earlier work, Freud came to see the ‘drive’ as existing at the interface between organic impulses and symbolic representation.[[357]](#footnote-357)

*The instinct appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.*[[358]](#footnote-358)

In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud altered his drive theory once more. The libido, the instinct for life (Eros) - differentiated into the sex-drive, the nurturing instinct, and the quest for personal affiliation - was now binarised with an opposing instinct: the instinct towards death (Thanatos) - differentiated into aggression, self-denial, and the urge to destroy. The equilibrating logic of this dual-instinct model was preserved in the tendency of the death-instinct to always bring the activity and achievements made possible by the energy of the life-instincts, back to a nullity; to a final stasis.[[359]](#footnote-359)

Belonging to the death instinct, and governing the interactions between the different active elements of Freud’s theory now was the Nirvana principle (also known as the constancy principle). This drove an essentially homeostatic mechanism always seeking a balance of demand and satisfaction. Where demand was unmet, the consequence would be need and striving towards the object that would satisfy that need, so restoring balance once more. Only the attainment of equilibrium then could bring satisfaction: the real source of pleasure.

*However this may be, we must perceive that the Nirvana principle, belonging as it does to the death instinct, has undergone a modification in living organisms through which it has become the pleasure principle; and we shall henceforward avoid regarding the two principles as one. It is not difficult, if we care to follow up this line of thought, to guess what power was the source of the modification. It can only be the life instinct, the libido, which has thus, alongside of the death instinct, seized upon a share in the regulation of the processes of life. In this way we obtain a small but interesting set of connections. The Nirvana principle expresses the trend of the death instinct; the pleasure principle represents the demands of the libido; and the modification of the latter principle, the reality principle, represents the influence of the external world.*[[360]](#footnote-360)

Freud’s model was now made more complicated by tensions between: the id and the ego; the ego and the superego; and the life and death instincts. It is Freud’s altered view of the ego however, and its relation to the unconscious that was of most consequence. He noted that the ego has its own type of unconscious. This resulted from its dealings with the world, and from the pressures of the superego. It was the product of repression, as the ego hid difficult experiences and painful memories from itself. Repressed material within the ego Freud now described as the ‘preconscious’, to distinguish it from the unconscious in which the id was located. Moreover, the ego, as the part that deals with external reality, was an organ of perception whilst also being connected to the id and its demands. This meant that the visual aspects of the ego’s repressed mental content were significant for psychoanalysis, as were the word-associations that identified them and by which they could be brought out of the pre-conscious and into consciousness in therapy. Furthermore, the ego as an organ that perceives external reality, projected itself onto the body, identifying itself with the entire person.

And the ego was now also the site of the formation of the superego, as objects of desire that it could not attain in the real world become internalised as ideal-objects within an ‘ego-ideal’ that precipitated from it. This psychical mechanism also became for Freud the explanation of gendering processes in the infant operating at the root of the Oedipus Complex.

So, throughout the various phases of Freud’s instinct theory and in each of his formulations, the origins of the instincts, located in the id, should not be understood in an obvious way as observable phenomena; they are prelingual, and so cannot be expressed straightforwardly in language. Rather, we know them indirectly through their somatic effects as ‘pressures’, and by the impressions they produce upon our consciousness. The id presses its demands upon the ego as mental representations, and it is by these that we experience their force and articulate them in language. Here the physicalist aspects of Freud’s system in this phase meet cognitive apprehension and language; neuro-mechanical forces becoming symbolic representations.

Ultimately for Freud, the forces driving human behaviour, whilst sublimated into symbolic forms in thought are still at their base non-rational, having a primordial origin that is lost in a pre-historical past. They are also trans-cultural, representing an anthropological continuity, to be found in every type of human society.

For Marx there is no essential human nature; or rather, what is essential to human being is the transformation of nature, and in the process, humanity itself. What is taken to be human ‘nature’ are in fact the modes of behaviour and types of social relationship that belong to a particular society, at a particular historical juncture. So, whereas for Freud the Oedipus Complex and the psychical processes that created it were trans-historical, for Marx there was no such anthropological constant. For Marx, the stable and identifiable aspects of cultural, social, and economic behaviour were relative to the historical period.”.

This difference between Freud and Marx was a consequence of the originating logics of their systems. For Freud, the structured psyche operated with its own internal dynamic, whilst drawing upon the social environment for its creative material. For Marx, it was the mutually transforming interaction of conscious labour and the resistant outside world that defined the relationship of humanity to nature.

In the 1830s, the question of ‘human essence’ had been a controversy amongst a group of philosophers - the Young Hegelians - of which Marx was one. In his *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Ludwig Feuerbach had applied an ‘inversion principle’ to argue that what we take to be ‘God’s essence’, is in fact is our own essence, refracted through a theological lens into the idea of a supreme divinity. The attributes of this divinity, those of self-consciousness and thought, the power to act upon the world and to love, were rarefied abstractions of a very human ‘species-essence’.

In Marx’s early theoretical work, this humanist insight became the concept of ‘species-being’, emerging from his theory of estrangement, or alienation. Species-being was what made human beings essentially human, more that is than their mundane activities. Self-consciousness, creativity and crucially the recognition of the species-being of others are the qualities of humankind that lift us out of the animal realm. Whilst class-society blocks the connectivity of the individual with the rest of humanity, the sense of this potential in the person becomes instead a feeling of loss, of a disconnect and of a striving to commune with others.

Marx’s reworking of Feuerbach’s philosophy was to become a critique that he would condense into eleven summary statements: *Theses on Feuerbach* written in 1845. For considerations of Marx’s view of human nature, we know the most important of these is the sixth thesis.

*Feuerbach* *resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.*

*In its reality it* *is the ensemble of the social relations.*[[361]](#footnote-361)

So, for Marx, there is no universal ‘human essence’ to be found within the isolated individual. Rather the individual and their essential characteristics emerge from the constellation of social forces, interactions and structural relationships that constitute the society in which they live and that has produced them. They are the result of chains of social cause and effect that connect them to a social totality. This is the very opposite of the Freudian framing of this relationship, in which society is the result of interactions between individuals and their separate psychologies.

It would be incorrect however, to conclude from this generalised account, that for Marx the individual was unreal; a marionette moved only by social strings. In fact, Marx does address aspects of mental activity that hint at a psychological theory. This is most evident in his discussion of conscious labour. In a celebrated passage from *Capital*, Marx explains the difference between the human process of labour upon the world, and the ways in which other living creatures work upon their environments.

*A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of their cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he* [sic] *erects it in reality.*[[362]](#footnote-362)

So, human labour is conscious and involves a conceptualisation of the work to be done, an idea of the intended purpose of the task at hand. An imagining of the object, to be transformed or to be created, is also required. ‘Labour’ must exist ‘in the head’ before it can happen in the world.

But this hides a deeper dialectic. For the object to exist in thought, to be worked upon or to be created, we require a notion of the self that exists in relation to it; the self that will conduct the labour to achieve the intended goal. The human being cannot perform labour without also becoming a self-conscious agent. The process is one of mutual transformation: of the object by the labouring subject; and of the conscious subject by the work it performs. The objectifying of the subject to itself involved in this dialectic is social. The relationships that make possible the accomplishment of the task reflect the society in which it will be carried out. To be successful, the subjective self must understand not only the material qualities of the object, and technical skills involved, but also these productive relationships.

This change of the self through its own labour – the ‘dialectic-of-self’ - is crucial to Marx’s understanding of ‘human nature’. In the process of transformation, the subject becomes the means by which the labour to be done will be realised; in envisioning the task, the self also becomes an ‘object-for-itself’. The intended object of production in turn determines the nature of the necessary labour; and therefore, the character of the work required. This all depends upon the existing technique of the historical epoch; the raw materials to hand; the tools already created; the skills that are needed; the types of productive and social relationships that prevail; and the knowledge and experience of the processes and materials involved. The determination of the self by the productive process is, once again, social.

To be clear, it is the productive process and the economic and social relations arising from it that structures the subject primarily, not *vice versa*. In-so-doing, it determines not only the person’s sense-of-self in their concrete social and historical setting, their cultural identity, and their instantiation within a concrete historical context, but also their sense-of-need. It is the objective potential and limitations of a society’s productive processes and technical capacity that creates the person’s externalised strivings, and therefore the aim of their labour. Needs that occur in one type of society, are inconceivable in another; with the appearance of a new kind of society, emerge also new types of need; including the sexual.

Again, this runs counter to Freud’s formulations. For Freud of course human needs are fixed and universal. Whilst the way the person endeavours to meet their needs varies with context, those needs themselves are historically constant; they do not change through time. Alternatively, for Marx the structuring of the self through labour, and more broadly through the form – the mode – of production that prevails, extends beyond their economic identification as a worker. It reaches into every aspect of life - cultural, aesthetic, gendered, sensual, sexual, and familial. The objective goal of labour whether individual or collective, has already and previously within a general economic form created both the need to be satisfied, and the means of satisfying that need; and therefore, the form – the mode – of consumption. They are co-dependent.

This interdependence of production and consumption is explored by Marx in the essays of the *Grundrisse* (written 1857-58).[[363]](#footnote-363) He identifies three ways in which production and consumption interact. Firstly, in the essential processes of each, they merge. Production involves the consumption, the decomposition, of raw materials (‘productive consumption’). Consumption makes possible the production of the human being, of the producer, and so also of the process of production (‘consumptive production’). Secondly, in their material (and historical) reality, there is not a simple identity; they are not merely ‘one and the same’ in an undifferentiated manner. They are distinct; however, they shape one another’s processes. Whilst production provides the object-of-consumption, so dictating the character of consumption, there also consumption provides the object-of-production with its destination; its ‘finishing-touch’. Thirdly, they are mediating of one another. As just stated, consumption is the definitive endpoint of the productive process. Consequentially, consumption provides the object-of-production with its intended purpose. Without consumption, the object-of-production would be inert and without human meaning. In this sense, it would not in fact be a ‘product’ at all. Conversely, the object that is produced creates the desire to consume. So, the process of production, in creating the want of what is produced, also creates the consumer; the need for the fruits of productive labour experienced in consumption. The mode of consumption then, far from being universal, emerges also as historically contingent, creating as it does the historical human subject under capitalism. In this discussion of the co-dependence of production and consumption, Marx makes an intriguing statement on this theme.

*Hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied with cooked meat eaten with fork and knife is a different kind of hunger from the one that devours raw meat with the aid of hands, nails and teeth.*[[364]](#footnote-364)

In this succinct and evocative sentence, Marx alludes to the place of human biology in relation to prevailing modes of production and consumption. Biology (here, ‘hunger’), in Marx’s view does not represent a fixed substratum underlying human culture; rather it is influenced by culture. Although it places absolute limitations upon the possibilities of human accomplishment, considering its role in consumption, production, and bodily experience, human biology cannot stand outside of human culture. So it is also with sex. Anthropologically speaking the sexual urge is a necessary and universal principle; a vital aspect of the materiality of human existence. It varies of course with personality, circumstance, age, and health. But in its generality, it cannot explain the interpersonal meaning of ‘sex’ in a particular cultural context, for a specific social group or individual. The sex-drive itself does not help us understand variance in sexuality, attraction, or gender orientation.

Finally, a critical difference between Freud and Marx lies in the practical consequences of their respective philosophies. The practice associated with Marx’s critique of class society arises from the struggle to overthrow it, so establishing a new era of classless communism. Marxist practice is primarily an endeavour to change reality itself; a ‘reality’ of course that is independent of the mind, and that will resist human consciousness where that is at odds with it. Marxism seeks the end of capitalism.

The practice of psychoanalysis is that of individual therapy, revolving around the relationship between the therapist and the patient. The classical set-up and layout of the therapy room, complete with the analysand’s couch and back-turned analysist’s chair, captures something of the structural isolation of the therapeutic encounter from society. However, it is the underlying logic of the psychoanalytic approach to the patient’s malaise that is important. Whilst there are tendencies within Freud’s cases to acknowledge larger social factors influencing behaviour over and above the internalisation of basic family dynamics, these are no more than observational case-notes. They are not integrated into his larger theory.

Freud’s technique is to bring the intra-psychical traumas of early life to the surface of consciousness, and to resolve the personal and emotional anguish they cause. The concern then is to manage the patient’s pain; it is not to propose an alternative to the bourgeois family structure that is the cause of that pain. So, psychoanalysis is above all a symptomology, or more precisely a programmatic approach to the amelioration of painful symptoms and the restoration of mental equilibrium and social function. Its measure of success is the effective regulation of the life of the patient, and their return to the conventions of normal routine. It is not the transformation of the social world, neither for the individual, nor of the whole of society - whatever the personal political affiliations of its practitioners.

This essentially conservative logic should not be taken to mean a lack of concern with the mental trauma in its wider societal sense. In fact, a concerted effort to achieve a socially based model for their practice was evident in the psychoanalytical profession in the years following the First World War. At the 5th International Psychoanalytic Congress in Budapest in 1918, two months before the Armistice, Freud called for the establishment of free outpatient clinics wherever means allowed. These would be freely accessible to those needing help for neuroses arising from the trauma of war. A dozen such clinics would become established - in the spirit of a ‘psychotherapy for the people’ - in Berlin, Budapest, Zagreb, London and other major European cities in the interwar years.[[365]](#footnote-365) Innovations in therapeutic technique were also apparent. In a professional relationship encouraged by Freud, Otto Rank and Sándor Ferenczi - a strong advocate of a democratised psychoanalysis – would refine the therapeutic methods to be used in the clinics, based upon a more active and interventionist role for the therapist. These clinics, really experiments in a social mental-health medical model, also often used brief-therapy techniques better suited to outpatient treatments and designed to meet the high volume demands of a public medical service. Many of the leading names in the profession gave their time freely and donated a portion of their salaries for these efforts. Initially Freud was hopeful the clinics would become state funded as part of a social democratic agenda of social reform.[[366]](#footnote-366) However, the limits to any more radical critique of the social forms of capitalism, and specifically of the bourgeois family, would become clear later with Freud’s professional and personal shunning of Wilhelm Reich, his former protégé, over the latter’s Marxist politicisation of psychoanalysis. Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytical Association at the 1934 Lucerne conference.

Ultimately, without an intention to overthrow the bourgeois family structure as the cause of individual pain and malfunction, and certainly not the larger social matrix of which it is a part, the conceptualisations and deeper logic of Freud’s psychoanalysis remain a complement to the oppressive structures producing the symptoms it seeks to ameliorate. At best it is an anodyne to the suffering of the powerless individual struggling to survive in an unforgiving and conflict-ridden emotional landscape. At worst it conspires with the oppressive social structures that give rise to the patient’s anguish, returning them to the social mainstream, able now to once more take up and maintain their proper place within it.[[367]](#footnote-367)

Again, this scepticism should not gainsay the humanism of psychoanalysis in its heroic early phase. Indeed, beginning with Freud himself, and continuing through the work of the major psychoanalytical figures of the 1920s and 1930s, a deep engagement with the human condition, and by extension with emancipation from the emotional shackles of bourgeois moralism, was clear. One particularly loyal figure to Freud’s legacy on this question was Geza Roheim, who searched for a pre-modern liberated sexual state amongst the Aboriginal Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara of Central Australia. For Roheim, this represented the opposite of the repressed bourgeois family, the root of all neuroses.[[368]](#footnote-368) The political commitment of many psychoanalysts of the 1920s and 1930s also was especially pronounced at the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute,[[369]](#footnote-369) founded in 1920. Its notable figures mixed Freud’s theories with social democratic, revolutionary Marxist or anarchist ideas. We should acknowledge also the courage of figures within the Left psychoanalytical community, who maintained their intellectual work during the Nazi era via the underground correspondences of the Rundbriefe coordinated by Otto Fenichel, who was by this time based in the US. However, the personal radicalism of many of the early pioneers was eclipsed by the absence of political critique for their therapeutic practice.

After the Second World War, many psychoanalysts who had fled the Nazi terror, found they had a new audience, as well as a market for therapy, in the US. These figures, anxious of their insecure émigré status, were often nervous of their former associations with leftism, and particularly Marxism, and either separated their personal politics from their therapeutic practice or jettisoned them completely. Psychoanalysis would also be taken up by the North American medical establishment, feeding into various types of programmatic patient treatment, though shorn of any larger social critique. Through the 1950s and 1960s psychoanalysis was to lose its previous political character. It became instead largely a fashionable, and often expensive palliative for the neuroses of the North American middle and upper classes.[[370]](#footnote-370) And we should note finally capitalist interest in - and abuse of - psychological theory and technique in the service of consumer manipulation, political influence, and social control.[[371]](#footnote-371)

Despite the incompatibilities involved, there have been prominent Marxists who have turned to psychoanalysis for theoretical insight. Taking a long view of the phases of these theoretical interactions, the limitations of different types of Marxism gives us one way of interpreting their engagements with Freud’s legacy; the interest of the key protagonists being driven as much by the shortcomings of their brand of ‘Marxism’ as anything else. At the Hegelian foundations of Marx’s own thinking however, there are the theoretical elements for a model of mind. Crucially, this is the dialectic-of-self, found within Hegel’s texts, fashioned as a ‘social materialism’ with the operation of ‘repression’ responding to real and perceived (and potentially misperceived) risks, and the challenges of survival for the person and social group in their natural or class-ridden social environment.

The diminution of the role, and by extension the liberation, of the person as a properly theorised possibility in a political and historical vision of wider social transformation, is one aspect of this problem. It results from the absence of a fully conceptualised framing of how the individual is constructed in their world. And yet at the philosophical roots of Marxism the elements of such a theorisation exist. It is these roots we will next explore, moving towards the Marxist model-of-mind we need, and which Marx’s early work makes possible. This will by way of a move away from the ‘Marxisms’ of the Twentieth Century, and a return to Marxism at its foundations. It will also require a pivot away from the Freudian understanding of repression, towards one that is closer to the originating categories of Marx’s early works.

**Part IV. Marxism, mind and farewell to ‘Nature’**

Finding the mind in Marx

There is no place in Marxism for psychologism that begins with the individual mind to understand history or society. However, Marxism emerged from the crisis of Hegelian philosophy, and as a result carries with it psychological themes. Indeed, the psychological mechanisms in Marx’s theorising of ideology in the 1840s – inversion, mystification, and universalisation – are comparable in theoretical status to those of Freud’s theorising of neuroses and dreams in the early 1900s – with processes such as condensation, displacement, *etc.* and with Herbart’s structural ‘repression’ of mental representations. They are inferred from observed phenomena: historical analysis and social relations in the case of Marx; neurotic symptomologies and dream narratives in the case of Freud; and ‘introspective technique’ in the case of Herbart. That one set of mechanisms belongs to the analysis of history, one to the therapist’s surgery, and one to empirical psychology is secondary for this point. All are aspects of observational understandings of the human mind based upon inferential constructs.

Marx did not develop an explicit model of the personal mind in the way of structure, or underlying articulation. In one sense this flows from his methodological starting point: the ensemble of social relations. Instead, Marxism begins with the whole of society and works back to the individual as an endpoint, the final node of a chain of social causalities. However, without a general model-of-mind the processes by which external social factors become integrated into the interior life of the individual cannot be brought into focus. Social effects can be finely traced and applied for the comprehension of real events and personal dramas, of course. And this is the substantive character of much left-leaning sociological work. However, without an account of the psychological mechanisms that internalise the influences entering the mental life of the individual, the forces creating the emergent human mind in its concrete aspects remain unresolved in analyses of social phenomena and historical change.

There are recurring questions and controversies within Marxism that are connected to this enduring issue. Adequately explaining the power of ideology to create deep mental rivers of irrationalism that fly in the face of reality, is one example. Fully accounting for the external and internal drivers of human sexual behaviour and gender, is another. Understanding the nuances of mental illness and individual pathology is yet another. Still, attempts to provide answers in these areas that rely on ‘complexity’ can act as a cover for this theoretical lacuna; and general appeals to a ‘dialectical’ take on things, evasions of the concrete matter at hand.

This issue has also been at the root of a historical fissure within Marxism itself, causing a bifurcation into two ‘Marxisms’: one that emphasises objective economic and structural causalities that are external to the individual; and another that emphasises instead the role of subjective agency and historical decision.[[372]](#footnote-372) Each historical iteration of these conundrums and impasses revolves on the missing ‘third term’ - the model-of-mind that is difficult to locate within Marxism. The elements required for the construction of a model-of-mind however are present within Marxism at its philosophical roots. The job of making explicit this otherwise implicit construction is helped by a conceptual reworking of the theoretical element of ‘repression’; a factor that is foregrounded in psychoanalysis, but unused in its psychological sense by Marx.[[373]](#footnote-373)

This use of repression to explain the formation of a mind works at the level of ‘strategy-for-survival’ as the individual grows towards their destiny within their ‘total society’. The emergence of personal identity within a community is one aspect of this, as some potential characteristics are eclipsed and pushed out of consciousness as possibilities for the person, whilst others become established as dominant, socially successful and rooted in personality: gender being one important example of this. In the language of psychoanalysis, as one behavioural mode becomes repressed as dangerous, another is introjected as likely to achieve success, these being the dual codetermining moments in specific mental constructions.

The operative processes here, revolving around perceptions and assessments of risk, constitute a type of materialism – ‘social materialism’ – that involves the repression of hazardous possibilities. The emphasis here is upon the socially strategic aspect of repression, acting as a regulatory mechanism within the social group, rather than it being understood as an individualised defence against trauma. It is also future oriented and no longer focused primarily upon the person’s historical pain.[[374]](#footnote-374)

The result is a type of mind that is premised upon the eclipsing of entire ways of thinking, believing, and feeling, and its appearance to its owner as natural. And the psychological material that is repressed need not have been entirely extinguished but rather may exist as a residual element that whilst lost to the person’s conscious mind, remains to create conflictual tensions and anxieties that are unfathomable to the person themselves. Finally, this must derive from a general model-of-mind that makes possible all of their specific mental traits.

To summarise, orientations towards the world involve assessments of risk, both existential and social. The imperative demands of survival, whether in body or in social role and position, entail navigations of treacherous terrain and strategies for the avoidance of harm and social threat. These in turn are premised upon decisions that are defining for the individual as much as for the group; so, forming primary strategies of social organisation and personal identity. From these, secondary and tertiary strategies emerge, that form the substance of group socialisation, familial interaction, and daily coping for the individual. Where some strategies become dominant, along with their accompanying behavioural modes and identifications, others that are incompatible with these must be repressed. The management of risk for the purpose of survival and success for the individual in their allotted social role, is a ‘social materialism’ that connects materialism at the historical scale with the creation of the personal mind.[[375]](#footnote-375)

**Transactions of the mind**

The first step towards a Marxist model-of-mind must be to position ‘mind’ as a historically relative phenomenon. With respect to capitalism, we are helped by Marx’s discussion of the co-dependence of capitalist ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ in the essays of the *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*: the *Grundrisse* (1857-8).

As we have seen, Marx sees production and consumption as two moments in a cycle of economic activity; moments that mediate one another, and that are co-determining. Whilst production in an obvious sense creates the goods that will take their places upon the capitalist market, it is consumption that gives them their ‘destination’. Without consumption the product of labour is inert, an object without meaning. So, whilst production creates the object, it is consumption that creates the commodity.

The distinction between production and consumption affects the human being as much as the commodity itself. Whilst in their labour - occupying their place in a capitalist chain of production - the individual is a worker, their role as consumer is positioned instead outside of productive processes. In their consumption they are a member of a community, part of a faith-group, a citizen (assuming a democratic polis), and so on. They are a person; impoverished, exploited and oppressed perhaps, but a person, nonetheless. And the consumer does not consume in a vacuum; rather, their consumption is contextual and is mediated socially, culturally, geographically, and ideologically. Moreover, consumption happens through a unit-of-consumption, that is reflected with tedious regularity today in advertising tropes. It may be the individual but is just as likely to be the young couple or the nuclear family. Within the logic of capitalism, consumption provides the domain in which the personal self is constructed.

Consumption is also transactional. Of course, there is the ‘corner shop-model’ of the relationship between the purchaser (the consumer; the private individual), and the seller (the supplier; the shop-worker), with a shop-counter between them. In reality of course, the ‘private’ individual is manipulated by a very public retail industry; and the ‘shop-worker’ is a proxy for the company that exploits them, and that has the major share in the price of the product at the end of a long chain of production and transportation. We should also add that the ‘counter’ is just as likely today to be a screen on a smartphone. But it is the transactional character of the relationship that is important, regardless of setting.

This transactionalism seeps into every aspect of our experience within the realm of consumption. In the most intimate area of human experience, sexual coupling, transactional interactions abound. From the early modern era, once the closed rural communities of late feudal society had been ripped apart, uprooted, and scattered by the enclosures of the early capitalist era, the opportunity to meet a partner more likely involved payment. Beyond the workplace (important of course) there has been ‘the dance’, ‘the fair’, ‘the outing’, ‘the lonely-hearts page’ and so on. Today, it would be the dating-site or other online encounter. Whilst some may hold out for the romantic encounter whilst walking in the park, the reality for most is that meeting one another is an activity that generates a profit for someone who isn’t there. And if the goal is to finally arrive at something stable, that works for the longer term, then the transactions involved go to new levels of entanglement, financial commitment, and indebtedness, as the successful couple take up their given role as a functioning unit-of-consumption.

This world of transactions is a difficult terrain, and the psychological contortions and alienated emotional states involved in navigating it are harmful to health and happiness. At every turn, human relating within capitalist society is mediated by commerce, ownership-relations and possessiveness. This is one explanation for the sub-cultures and alternative identities that emerge as strategies of avoidance of, and refuge from the unattractive prospect of consumption in the mainstream of capitalist society. The daunting challenge of conquering the obstacle-course that is the pathway to personal enjoyment of another, and fulfilment in a life of mutual endeavour, requires learnt knowledge and social skilling that for most begins in the second and third decades of life.

In this short-hand account of the coupling game, there is something to emphasise - its historically specific character. The sketch just given of course reflects the way of things as they emerged in the late Twentieth Century and early Twenty-first Century in western capitalist societies. For a fuller picture we would have to factor in changes to family structure, demographic change, cultural trends, human migration, *etc.* In each phase of such a historical timeline, changes in socialising structures, new types of livelihoods and widening cultural spaces would influence the strategies available for personal survival and success. Shifts have occurred from rural extended family structures to the familial anarchy of the early industrial era, to the urban nuclear family of the first decades Twentieth Century, through to the breakdown of that family type and the rise of increasingly work-oriented family formations of the later Twentieth Century, and on to the diversified family types of today. Each has provided strategies of gender and coupling that are either dominant over others suppressed by society and - for most - repressed out of consciousness, or that are emergent, escaping from under dominant strategies that previously eclipsed them.

All aspects of a mental structure are connected to its era. This means that where we talk about a *mode*-of-production, and a *mode*-of-consumption, we must also talk of a *mode*-of-mind that, whilst it is made possible by a general model-of-mind (or capacity-for-mind), is nonetheless historically specific. This will bring us shortly to a central component of our general model-of-mind: the dialectic-of-self.

**The variable mind**

Before a discussion of the dialectic-of-self, we will address the variability of the human mind. That the human mind *is* highly variable is a truism. It is a familiar enough observation in geographical and historical comparisons of human culture. However, what is proposed here is that the variability of the human mind is unlimited by its environment.

How can we understand such a claim? To do so, we need to consider more than the outward, phenomenal aspect of the mind, its manifest expression in social behaviour. Rather we require a hypothesis about its fundamental character. For that, we will describe the mind (and necessarily also the brain) as having self-organising totipotency. This means seeing the mind as autopoietic - something that can create its own operative rules, the principles by which it regulates itself, and psychical systems underlying conscious mental processes. The mind then is meta-logical, able to reconfigure not only the obvious processes of thought, but also the modes of thinking that make them possible within forms of rationality. The logic and systems of mind can themselves be altered, replaced, and jettisoned; or equally promoted into dominant mental forms, relegated to subordinate ones; or ‘folded’ within other logics and systems into densely organised psychical structures. There is also the mind’s propensity for abstraction from experience, interpretation, and symbolism, as well as its ability to resolve mental paradox by higher reasoning. The capacity for such variable patterning, recursion and parallactic arrangements in the assembling, disassembling, and reassembling of mental content is the basis, not only of human intelligence, creativity, and scientific thinking, but also of the structural flexibility of the mind in a historical sense, and of human adaptability itself. It also means that the range of conceptual possibility far exceeds the material possibilities of a human environment; this imaginative redundancy beyond practical tasks finding expression in religious ornament, artistic fantasy, scientific hypothesis and symbolism; this being also the meaning of ‘unlimited’ in this context.[[376]](#footnote-376) And there are types of synaesthetic neurodivergence that bring their own creative capacities and imaginative power, with ‘thinking’ in colours, spatial visualisations, and other multi-sensual ways. Moreover, we can infer types of variability that defy available linguistic description; ‘the mind’ then constituting a ‘front’ that can move ahead of explicit articulation. Finally, there is the ability of the mind to *fix* its underlying structures into the stable and enduring systems of thinking, cultural habit, and emotional regulation that we recognise as cultural-historical types, and psycho-mimetic symbolic representations of reality existing at the pre-conscious level. In other words, we must understand the general capacity of the human mind to create a historically specific mode-of-mind.

There is an affinity here between the ‘unlimited variability’ of the human mind and the notion of the ‘radical imagination’ found in Castoriadis’s schema. For Castoriadis the radical imagination is a source of primary mental representations that go beyond the ‘ensidic’[[377]](#footnote-377) (or ‘typical’) logic of normal conscious reasoning. In this formulation, beneath the structural aspects of the mind and the forms of thought that mirror the social interactions of the person in their world, there exists a creative spring of conceptualisations – a ‘magma’ of formless mental fluidity - that gives mind a general creative autonomy, so enabling it to produce those specific forms.[[378]](#footnote-378)

Moving once more to historical context, the character of ‘mind’ for each type of society, and the forms of thought that constitute it, is a matter of anthropological and archaeological investigation. Marx was interested in this topic, as his notes on non-capitalist societies found in the hundreds of pages of his *Ethnological Notebooks* (1880-1882)[[379]](#footnote-379) testify. At the most general level we can identify cyclical modes of thinking as compared to linear, object-related forms of knowledge compared to abstract and transferable types of reasoning, ways of thinking rooted in place compared with those associated with movement, and so on. In the ancient world for instance the notion of change at the centre of the prevailing cosmology was different from our own. So, in 4th Century BC Greece peoples’ sense of ‘future’ was essentially repetitive and did not stray far beyond agricultural cycles.[[380]](#footnote-380) And the mental ‘temporal scheme’[[381]](#footnote-381) of a society affects, not only culture but also cognition. The fact that the astronomers of ancient Greece believed the heavens to be timeless and unchanging meant that they did not record (did not ‘see’) extraordinary stellar events such as supernova and new comets, that were observed in other parts of the world.

We can also identify different kinds of human relationship that are the social aspects of the mode-of-mind of a type of society: ‘relationships’ with ancestors;[[382]](#footnote-382) inter-generational relationships; sex and gender relationships; kinship relationships; self-society relationships; and so on. What any one of these modalities presupposes of course are capacities for it to emerge and become fixed into an enduring mental type. But each are historically contextual, and represent adaptations to the contingencies, limitations and opportunities of their specific environments. But what of the general model-of-mind itself, and the organ that supports its super-adaptability – the human brain? How and when did these emerge?

Evidence of complex behaviour exists in the material record of Sapiens settlement sites from around 100,000 years. A leap in innovation appears along the coast of southern Africa at around 77,000 years with decorated ostrich shells, jewellery, red ochre, and the use of glue. There is also evidence of complex behaviour and possibly symbolic thought in the Neanderthal record in the form of aesthetic manufacture,[[383]](#footnote-383) tool decoration and at funeral sites.[[384]](#footnote-384) The general model-of-mind that characterises modern human beings may have come into existence on the approach to the Upper Palaeolithic period that begins about 50,000 years ago. In this phase, major continental migrations have already occurred, around 60,000 years ago, to reach Asia, Central Europe and Australia. Composite tools appear at sites in Africa from this period. Between 35,000 and 45,000 years ago Archaic Human Neanderthals and Denisovans have disappeared; and we are looking now at an exclusively Sapiens record.[[385]](#footnote-385) We see over this small window of archaeological time a ‘creative explosion’ or ‘Transition’ evidenced by the advanced character of ritualistic and cultural artefacts at excavation sites*.*[[386]](#footnote-386) The parietal art of the caves of Tuc d’Audoubert, Chauvet and Lascaux[[387]](#footnote-387) for example, depicting abstract patterns,[[388]](#footnote-388) petroglyphs and therianthropes,[[389]](#footnote-389) as well as hunting scenes, use types of symbolic expression that we can recognise as non-literal, as opposed to being simply object-based.[[390]](#footnote-390) Gravettian culture, associated with mammoth hunting, Venus figurines, the decorative use of red ochre and elaborate burial sites, appears in Europe at about 26,000 years ago. The emergence of symbolism and decoration will in turn have created the possibility of gendered identity for individuals - and so of cultures-of-gender. Conscious gender was now connected to differentiations of social and productive role, so becoming an element in the social organisation of the group.

The relative abundance of artefacts containing artistic decoration that transcends the technical skills required for hunting and tool-based manufacture found in the archaeological record of this period, suggests a leap in human cognitive capacity. We do not know the neurophysiological cause of this ‘cognitive revolution’. One hypothesis comes from Steven Mithen’s ‘cathedrals of intelligence’ model.[[391]](#footnote-391) Here, the ‘chambers’ of the ‘cathedral’ represent different types of intelligence: technical; linguistic; social; and natural-historical. Before the Transition, goes Mithen’s argument, these chambers were blocked from one another, with no communication between them being possible. At some point, and probably many, the neurological door-less walls that had separated these chambers came down, unleashing cascades of connections and pathways, releasing in turn new waves of generalisable intelligence, creative expression, and inventive capacity.

Whatever the neuro-physical basis of this shift, the changes involved and therefore the resulting biological (brain) substrate made possible new levels of variety and orders of human technique, socialisation, and cultural accumulation.[[392]](#footnote-392) It is the radical variability of the human mind that makes possible the dialectic-of-self that in turn creates, and continuously recreates, the mode-of-mind of a society. And it is this general property that allows the historically specific mind to come into existence.

## Generative repression and the ‘dialectic-of-self’

‘Repression’ as a term familiar in psychoanalytical discourses is most often understood as a mechanism by which the ego protects itself from past traumas. In this conceptualisation difficult and painful memories are pushed out of consciousness to maintain the stable emotional balance needed for normal life functions.

However, Freud, in his essay ‘Repression’ (1915), distinguished between a ‘primal repression’ (‘*Urverdrängung’)* and ‘repression proper’ (‘*Verdrängung* *an sich’*), only the latter being the type normal to daily life. Primal repression he saw as a more fundamental process that comes into effect at an early stage of neonatal development. This repression creates an original unconscious which is constitutive of all later secondary repressions. It works through the avoidance of pain and the ’keeping away’ of socially unacceptable desires before the emergence of consciousness, working to prevent the representations of dangerous instincts from entering self-awareness. Freud illustrates his meaning with the simile of not allowing an unwelcome visitor across the threshold of his home in contrast to having to order them out of his living room after they had entered.

But it is this first repression that now allows repression of the second type to work by ‘returning’ its mental derivatives back to their origin in the unconscious. This ‘return of the repressed’ provides a mechanism by which both types of repression work together to maintain the intra-psychical equilibrium needed for survival.

*“Probably the trend towards repression would fail in its purpose if these two forces did not cooperate, if there were not something previously repressed ready to receive what is repelled by the conscious.”*[[393]](#footnote-393)

Freud also emphasises the generality of this model, real repression taking many forms that are specific to the individual, as well as its ‘mobility’ meaning the constant and repeated activity required for repression to be effective.

Freud’s theorising combines mechanical metaphors to illustrate repressive processes with their more transformative aspects. On the one hand there is a ‘quota of affect’, the energy that remains after the instinct has become detached from the idea that represented it. This is the quantitative aspect of repression rooted in the energetics of Freud’s model. On the other hand, there is the transformation of instincts into new affects such as anxiety, ‘hysteria’ or obsessional neurosis in processes of ‘substitutive formation’. Here there is a dimension of qualitative change as instinctual energy is converted into new psychical manifests and somatic sensations.[[394]](#footnote-394)

*The vanished affect comes back in its transformed shape as social anxiety, moral anxiety and unlimited self-reproaches; the rejected idea is replaced by a* substitute by displacement*, often a displacement on to something very small or indifferent.*[[395]](#footnote-395)

Summarising Freud’s argument, primal repression produces a substratum of psychical material that has never been allowed to enter consciousness, creating in turn a foundational unconscious. This makes possible the myriad subsequent repressions of daily life and functioning, or ‘repression proper’. It also means that the processes of repression have a transformative character, by which the remaining energy of repressed instincts becomes converted into new expressions that enter personal experience and conscious life.

Freud was to develop this analysis further in his essay *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Here repression became crucial to the strivings of the ego to protect itself from the appetites of the id, and to the power of the superego in maintaining its moral authority. The result of this intra-psychical conflict, animated by the mechanisms of repression is a ‘dynamic unconscious’ made up of material has been pushed out of consciousness, but that remains as a troublesome unacknowledged presence.

But it is the transformative aspect of repression that is important here, though theorised by Freud a only as a bioenergetic conversion. It was the thread that Lacan was to fully develop and work into his theory of subjectivity. For Lacan repression plays a central role in early subject formation. Freud’s primal repression crucially creates a basal unconscious as the previously chaotic churn of sensations and images without any mental representations – the Real – begins to enter the domain of signification – the Symbolic. But repression then works by the attachment of symbolic representations to some organic impulses over others, the latter now out of reach of the signifiers that animate the life of the psyche. And so, the processes of symbolic representation themselves are only partially successful, making some urges resistant and ultimately foreign to consciousness. Finally, and importantly, incompatible representations themselves compete for their place in consciousness, with some pushed out and down into a realm of repressed signifiers. This suggests a distinctively Lacanian mechanism by which repression happens, making Lacan’s unconscious different from Freud’s in that it is structured in a lattice of meaning. The unconscious says Lacan, is ‘structured like a language’ and is constitutive of all later subjectivising processes.

We have already seen that during the Lacanian Mirror Stage, beginning possibly at around six months, the infant will develop an awareness of itself as the ‘image’ it finds reflected in the behaviour of others towards it. This self-image is unreliable and distorted through the myriad external influences that bear upon the developing psyche from the outside, the ego being the product, not of a self-constructive process, but rather of external intrusions. The Imaginary, the false self-image by which the person measures their place in the world and their ambitions for social improvement and position, once established, follows them throughout their adult lives from childhood.

In Lacan’s hands repression has now taken on a formative character, in that its operations are decisive in the structuring of the psyche, across all three of his registers: the Real (that which resists signification); the Symbolic (the realm of overt representation and explicit meaning); and the Imaginary (the person’s specular, and deceptive, self-image). It is no longer a merely a negative moment that manages trauma, but a generative principle in the creation of the human subject and its orientation in the world.

As we know, Žižek would also develop this line of thinking with his reworking of repression in the construction of ideologies masking the Real, the raw contradictions of social life, riven with injustice and disruptive political anger. This repression is also historical, creating a ‘repressed historical trauma’ that can return to consciousness as a collective expression of the truth of social relations and of social insurgency.

*“With the establishment of bourgeois society, the relations of domination and servitude are* repressed *formally, we are apparently concerned with free subjects whose interpersonal relations are discharged of all fetishism; the repressed truth – that of the persistence of domination and servitude – emerges in a symptom which subverts the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on.”[[396]](#footnote-396)*

Our understanding of repression by now has travelled a long way from the neo-Kantianism of Johann Herbart who had such an important influence on Freud. In that rendering, couched as it was in Newtonian conceptualisations of cause-and-effect, repression was no more than a quasi-mechanical apperceptive force. In these later theoretical developments repression is given a positive aspect, now positioned as an active principle in mental organisation, and as a source of political action.

Returning to the processes of subjective formation found at the philosophical roots of Marx’s foundational theorising, we have seen that conscious human labour relies upon a dialectic that creates an awareness of self. As the task of labour is envisioned, the self, orienting towards its end-goal, the product of the work-to-be-done, comes to see itself as an object. Thus, it duplicates itself in thought as it performs tasks in the world. This is the result of the mobilising and internalising of social and technical skills, social and cultural orientations, empirical and theoretical knowledge, and forms of belief, interpretation, and ideology.

This is the social character of labour in a specific historical context. It is the origin of self-consciousness as the human subject becomes a person in their culture. It is also pivotal for sexual identification as early realisations about economic and social destinies (and the consequences of failure) take on the gendered aspects special to each; gender again understood as having strategic meaning for technical function, family position and personal bonding.

Again, there is an outward resonance with Freud’s account of mental processes. Freud had proposed the process of introjection by which the ego internalises an object of its desire, to have and to own it within itself, within the psyche. This introjection of the object into the ego, comparable to Hegel’s ‘real within the ideal’,[[397]](#footnote-397) forms the basis of gendering attachments in Freud’s discussion. Abstracting from it, we can see a process of greater significance, as something that commands social and emotional regulation in the world, enculturation, and personal equilibrium; a mechanism by which the individual finds stable ground for the purposes of survival, social bonding, and life orientation. Freud’s concern, however, is not only with the desire to possess, but also the person’s need to *be*; their tendency to *become* therefore forming an identity in an autopoietic process of ego-idealisation.

The similarity is at first striking. It appears that a dynamic Marx recognised in human labour, Freud recognised fifty years later in gendering processes. As the human subject pushes out into the world, it incorporates representations of external reality into itself in a process of internalisation-introjection: for the purpose of labour in the case of Marx; and for the purposes of coupling and attachment in the case of Freud. In each of these accounts, the result is a separation of a subject (Marx) or ego (Freud), into a self-conscious subject or a superego, respectively.

We can see it in this way: the ‘subject’ internalises the world simultaneously as it reaches out into it, whether as an adult working upon nature or as an infant developing cognitively during normal growth. In the process an objectification occurs creating a ‘subject-for-itself’ by which the human subject comes to regard itself, and to know itself. It is the ‘intended self’ towards which it strives. The ‘I’ produces an ‘I*o*’ (‘*o*’ for ‘object’). The mechanism involved is necessarily historical, a relativising process that employs the culturally mediating artefacts to hand as it internalises productive and social technique. It is the site of mediation. It also represents a gendering process as the adolescent begins to intuit their future place in their society, and the social strategies needed if they are to succeed in the transitions required of them. And it is infused with ideology; all the mediating factors being culturally and socially specific and riven with contradictions and internal tensions that inevitably affect personal development and the dynamics of the social group.

However, there is a central difference between a Marxist understanding of the processes involved and the non-dialectical notion of ‘repression’ found in the Herbartian conceptual framework that recurs throughout Freud’s writings. There it worked in a mechanical fashion, pushing down unwanted mental content into a psychical mass, this then forming the sedimentary content of the individual unconscious.

With a Marxist lens however, we can resolve ‘repression’ differently as one moment in a more complex historical process that results in a transformation of this material into something new. To understand this better we will take a detour through the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that influenced Marx’s early theorising about subjectivity and history.

From the Kantian standpoint Johann Fichte in his *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* (1795)[[398]](#footnote-398) had suggested a groundless, ‘self-positing I’ that counterposed itself to the external world – including other selves - as its limit. In Hegel’s system however, the emergence of self-consciousness would be seen as involving an interpenetration of the consciousness of the subject with that of other subjects in an essentially historical process. So, in the *Phenomenology*, in a section called ‘Self Consciousness’, Hegel traces the logic of a primordial encounter between two conscious selves. Each recognising the self-consciousness of the other, they *vie* for dominance in an existential struggle in which one emerges as dominant – the master – and the other as subordinate – the slave.[[399]](#footnote-399) Now the slave in bondage must sustain its master, doing its bidding, providing for its appetites. In this first moment of a developing dialectic the master is unaware of this relationship as one of dependence. The slave however, becomes increasingly aware of its productive capacity and comes to realise itself through its own creativity and nascent power. The master, its existence a hollow sham of dormant creativity and unrealised potential, comes to sense its reliance upon the work of its slave. In this state the two co-exist in a historical pairing, each growing in awareness of the truth of their relationship.

In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) Marx critiques this dialectic. Whilst for Hegel the movements involved are those of thought, for Marx they reside in social reality. And the transformations involved are those of the slave’s work-upon-nature in their repressed state, the products they create the result of material processes and of labour; those products now alienated from them by the exploitation they suffer. Moving towards the revolutionary logic that would develop throughout his life-works Marx sees the root of this alienation in the form of private property itself, and in the very existence of capitalism. Marx would take this logic to its conclusion in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), with its call for the overthrow of capitalism and the end of all property relations.

At the heart of this dialectic is the concept of ‘sublation’ (‘*Aufheben’*), capturing its transformative character. Sublation here has both a negative and a positive meaning. So, whilst the sublated object is eclipsed, suppressed or negated, its essence also remains to become something new and resolved into a ‘higher’ unity with the forces that opposed it in the external world. The process is a dialectical one of destruction, preservation and creation. So, in the master-slave dialectic, the suppression (the ‘negation’) of the slave (the worker), becomes the origin of its emerging power to overthrow (a second ‘negation’ of the first ‘negation’) it’s master (the capitalist) in a historical move that resolves these dialectical tensions towards a higher realm of freedom for both. The transformations involved in these historical negations then usher in the era of communism.

And once more we return to our model of mind, but now with ‘repression’ understood differently, not merely as a negative and individual defence mechanism against a hostile world, but as historically transformative, and closer in meaning to ‘sublation’ in the Hegelian schema. It is now seen as the destructive moment in a larger dialectic that creates new manifests coming to the surface of the psyche in the host of feelings, expressions and orientations with which we began our inquiry. Whether these are pro- or anti-social, fulfilling or dangerous, happy or tragic, is a separate question, and would depend on perceptions and assessments of the risks faced, and the contingencies and circumstances of the life of the individual; and herein lies ‘politics’ at the levels of the person and of their society. They would also depend on the times of the person, the historical movements that shaped them, the social trends of their generation and the spaces for liberation they experienced. But the meaning of ‘repression’ has changed and is taken no longer as simply the obverse moment to introjection in a mechanical sense, producing only a sediment of forgotten trauma. It is now the cause of a creative unconscious producing personal feelings, social meanings and symbolic associations that daily influence the mind of the individual in ways they do not immediately comprehend. This was a phenomenon that Freud described in his cases but could never fully resolve in theory.

At a different scale, the transformative ‘negative’ character of repression now also associates it with ‘positive’ historical manifestations. So, the sexual repression of the 1950s gives us the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the social repression of women gives us the resistances of activist feminism, the repressions of the workplace give us the energy of the trade union activist, and the repressions of colonialism, give us the courage of the national liberation fighter. Always there is the conscious element, the minority who do not forget, who argue and agitate. But at the historical scale the forces released are the result of suppressed emotions and thoughts that have churned beneath the surface creating the conditions for cultural, political and social eruption.

And here there is a further change from Freudian libidinal ‘repression’. The repressive moment that occurs in the mind of the person striving to survive in their world, framed in the categories of the Hegelian roots of Marxism is now both a non-libidinal and a transformative dialectical force. And whilst Freud did move to symbolic theory, he was unable to successfully conceptualise the connections between the individual and larger society, blunted as his thinking was by an individualised Kantian framework and limited by the mechanistic paradigm that remained beneath his explicit theorisations; his efforts to explain history lapsing always into mythic romanticism or vitalist cosmology.

We have departed now from the psychoanalytic theorisation of repression by four orders. Firstly, our Marxist understanding of repression is primarily social in the sense of being strategic for the survival of the person in their social group; opposed that is from being theorised as an individualised intra-psychical defence mechanism. Secondly, and relatedly, it is a process by which the person anticipates the tasks ahead of them and the challenges they face; different therefore to being mainly focussed upon the distress and personal traumas of their past. Thirdly, repression in our model is not primarily about sexual or gendered identity (although it is important for each of those); unlike its use in the Freudian framework, it is primarily non-libidinal. And fourthly, it is one moment in a historical dialectic that involves transformations of repressed mental content, novel combinations of ideational material and symbolic reworkings that re-emerge with new meanings at the levels of society, group and individual; as opposed to a quasi-mechanical force that holds down and keeps troublesome mental content ‘out-of-mind’ in an irredeemably negative fashion. In our Marxist model-of-mind repression is no longer limited to the psychological pathology of the individual but is now theorised as part of a transformative dialectic, creating an unconscious that plays a vital role in the vast possibilities of the Sapiens mind for productive technique, cultural expression and varieties of gender and personality type.

The dialectic-of-self we have traced here, understood as a mediated process of activity and personal change, is close to Vygotsky’s theorising of the acquisition of the ‘psychological tool’ in the developing mind of the child or young person. Distinguishing this from the ‘technical tool’ by which the person works upon an external object, Vygotsky emphasises the total alterations of internal mental state and behaviour that psychological tools introduce as the person achieves self-regulation to become effective as a producer and social actor.

*The most essential feature distinguishing the psychological tool from the technical one is that it is meant to act upon mind and behaviour, whereas the technical tool, which is also inserted as a middle term between the activity of man and the external object, is meant to cause changes in the object itself. The psychological tool changes nothing in the object. It is a means of influencing one’s own mind or behaviour or another’s. It is not a means of influencing the object. Therefore, in the instrumental act, we see activity towards oneself, and not towards the object.*[[400]](#footnote-400)

The calculations of risk and survival involved in this dialectic represent a contextual social materialism, embedded within a more general historical materialism.

And finally, there is Vygotsky’s insight into the role of language acquisition in enculturation, and of ‘the word’ as the mediating artefact (of a special type) incorporating the symbolism and abstract thought by which the subject becomes a self-aware person, whilst simultaneously fixing the outcome of the dialectic-of-self as a stable social construction. Language then, would provide the mechanism by which some strategies of risk management and survival made dominant by the repression of others seen as less reliable or more risk-prone, are cemented into the social constructions that give solidity to social aggregations and total social structure.

We can visualise the basic process in the following way.

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Description automatically generated

I = The self, experienced as ‘I’

I*o* = The intended self, experienced as the ‘objective I’

Where this cycle is completed, where the I*o* ‘returns’ to the I, the process is one of ownership of self by the subject, of labour by the producer, of fulfilment, and even of liberation. Where this cycle is blocked the I*o* cannot return; it is externalised, owned, and manipulated by another. The result is exploitation and arising from this an alienation of the personal self, experienced in the realm of consumption, from the objectified self, lost now in the realm of production.

Moreover, this cycle, whether completed as personal fulfilment or frustrated in an alienated failure of fulfilment, also involves cognition: so, the person ‘sees’ the cycle in which they are enmeshed. How they see things will be a matter of interpretation: they may see things as they really are; or they may see things through an ideological lens that filters their understanding. And such interpretations will influence assessments of risk, calculations of success and survival, the strategic choices and behaviours that emerge, and the associated identifications that are either foregrounded as dominant or are repressed.

With this last point we move from a theoretical framework to an ‘empirical self’, that does not remain obediently within our categorical boundaries. This placing of the personal self within the mode-of-consumption does not mean that the person’s experience as a producer is not also involved in the formation of their life-orientation, identity, and gender. After all, it is the mode-of-production that gives rise to the mental templates belonging to a historical juncture. And of course, the world of work is often a major influence upon outlooks and personality. However, it is in their role as consumer that their personhood is socially-intended - and pressured - to develop. In work, the role of personality and ‘mind’ understood as authentic self, is suppressed to one degree or another. It is the tension this creates for the self in their roles within each domain, that provides the field of forces – and the repressions and transformations driving them - from which the empirical self emerges, either in flight from the world of work into identifications of family, region, religion or pastime; or as an embracing of work in identifications of vocation, profession, individual advancement, or trade union commitment.

In Freud, ‘repression’ is an explicit factor in personality formation. The repression of traumatic experience in his model-of-mind creates the ‘system pre-conscious’ - a mental sedimentation that remains as an active and disruptive psychological presence. Freud’s model began with studies of neurosis and his conceptualisations and terminology reflect this. However, detached from its original conceptual ecology, this construction suggests a realm of internal social determination that, whilst it is opaque to the conscious mind, creates psychological expressions that enter the person’s consciousness as transformed content that had been previously repressed, and is something they experience as a natural part of themselves; the rootstock of personality.

A screenshot of a computer

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

***r***= Repression

***sd i*** = Internal social determination

The historical nature of Marxism means that it can go much further in its application of repression as a psychological mechanism than Freud’s use of it, limited as that was to the individual. For Marxism, it supports a proposition; a mechanism by which a general model-of-mind can produce a specific mode-of-mind. This involves a reworking of the idea of ‘repression’ itself. Freud’s use of it is intrinsic to his libidinal model of the human psyche, and an unconscious rooted in early sexualised childhood trauma. However, that is merely one historical example of this dynamic, describing aspects of a particular family form. Repression, understood as having a transformative aspect, along with the unconscious that is its consequence, can be seen as a more fundamental psychical mechanism that makes possible many types of unconscious, and many forms of consciousness. It is no longer seen as essentially libidinal. Moreover, whereas for Freud repression provides an account of how painful experience is shut-out by the mind, for a Marxist model-of-mind that acknowledges its creative potential it can explain how a mode-of-mind can become embedded; in other words, it can help us explain the historical structuring of the mind.

The word ‘repression’ itself comes with the caveat that it may not properly describe what happens. The suggestion that something is actively ‘pushed down’ into a structure (that both Herbart and Freud called the unconscious) is only one way to visualise the mechanism involved. For Lacan repression was an intrinsically linguistic phenomenon. There may be some insight into the underlying neurophysiological process in the neural patterning of the ‘autistic-brain’ compared to the ‘allistic-brain’, with the former retaining regions of hyper-connectivity usually associated with early development in neurotypical people. The suggestion here would be that ‘repression’ is related to the ‘pruning’ of neural pathways as the person learns about and navigates a path through their social landscape.[[401]](#footnote-401) It may also be that repression is actually an aspect of memory.[[402]](#footnote-402) Then the mechanism could be a failure of integration of mental material, or perhaps a differentiation or gradient of degrees of integration of different types of mental material. And so troublesome repressed mental content would be the result of incompatibilities with other mental content in memory, or conflicting logics. This would also lead to the existence of a stubborn residue of unresolved, unintegrated, and forgotten (or half-forgotten) mental conflict, as opposed to a more structural notion with its suggestion of a metaphorical locked basement.[[403]](#footnote-403)

However repression works, as the mind engages with the world it learns through its calculations and navigations how it must organise itself. If all contents of mind are indeed intentional and outwardly oriented, including those arising from strategic imagination, this means the creations of the human mind will compete with one another for dominance. Just as one strategy will preclude another, so there will be irreconcilable possibilities for mental structure; some necessarily becoming repressed into a domain of submerged internal social determination, *sdi* (*‘i’* for ‘internal’). Simultaneously, an ideal-self will separate out in a process comparable to Freud’s ‘ego-precipitation’ by which the ego-ideal appears, and by which identity becomes established. This ideal self, the I*i* (‘*i’* for ‘ideal’),becomes the site of personal and group identity, infused by ideology, so cementing the person’s relationships with others and positioning them in the social totality. Moreover, the I*i* will vary in its relative social weight, cultural importance, and influence in the person’s life, depending upon the type of society and its culture, they were born into, and through which they have grown and developed.

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

ΔI*i* = The culturally relative ideal ‘I’

By a combination of conscious apprehension and realisation, and the unconscious repression of risky, unfeasible, and dangerous modalities of mind, one will become established as optimal for survival; this being the most basic aspect of the ‘materialism’ of historical materialism. This is the set of external and obvious social determinations arising from the modes of production and consumption that define a society; and that also historicise its specific mode-of-mind.

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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Although the true complexity of the structuring of the mode-of-mind will bring us to a limit where language fails us, we can still sketch some of the contours to its variability. We have already outlined the role of the mode-of-consumption as a historicising factor, and its consequences for the formation of the personal mind. And we have considered a dialectic-of-self and the role of repression within it.

But there are two further processes that organise the cultural variability of mental formation. Firstly, there is the range of forms of internalisation and introjection of the objects of the world, their groupings into mental complexes, and the ‘foldings’ and organisation of these mental representations into intra-psychical systems, and the symbolic meanings they bring with them from external culture. Secondly, there is the axis of ego-identification that defines a mode-of-mind. This means the creation of the I*i* from the I as it interacts with society, and its degree of importance in its society; its relative social weight. So, within mainstream western consumerism, capitalism works to position us as individuals detached from any collective society, with all the alienations, vulnerabilities and neuroses that follow from such a construction. It does so imperfectly and competes with other more collective identities that are part of the realities of class, culture, and community. Nonetheless ‘the self’, experienced in its consuming role, is a powerful psychological force in our lives. This contrasts with societies in which the I*i* that stands alone hardly occurs. Indeed, the absence of ‘individuality’, experienced as something separate and non-collective, has been well-documented in numerous anthropological studies. The range of configurations this makes possible emerges from the main aspects of our model – I, I*o*, I*i,* sd*e*, sd*i*, *etc.* – which have variable weighting to one another.

So, whilst the self is a powerful factor in human behaviour within a marketised capitalist society, it is not a historical constant. Indeed, it can be largely absent in the cultural traces left by early human societies. Marx and Engels in their later writings commented upon the ‘primitive communism’ of pre-capitalist clan and tribal societies. Examples could be found in archaeological evidence around the world. Engels particularly traced the cultural and sexual-pairing rituals of these communal, ‘gentile’ societies in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*[[404]](#footnote-404) (1884). Highlighting the suppression of common ownership by the rise of capitalism and imperialist powers, Engels wrote:

*It prevailed among the Germans, Celts, Indians — in short, all of the Indo-European peoples in primeval times; it was only recently suppressed by force in Ireland and Scotland, and although it is dying out, still occurs here and there in Germany today.*[[405]](#footnote-405)

The absence of individual or even family possessions in such societies points to a mode-of-mind free of the elevated ego characteristic of the self under capitalism; and so quite different to our modern-day experience of ourselves.

However it is configured, a mode-of-mind, with varying degrees of separation of individual identity from the collectivism of the tribe or clan, *etc.* must be ‘fixed’ into an enduring operational structure, embedded at an early stage of individual development, to internalise, introject and idealise correctly the material and cultural objects of the group. The mode-of-mind, once established, will align the child, the adolescent, and the young adult successfully towards their social position. It belongs to the type of society that it serves.[[406]](#footnote-406)

## Health, gender and sex

We have already seen how for the theorists of dialectical biology such as Rose *et al.* all aspects of human behaviour are at once biological and social. This is the result of their dialectical determinism which locates human behaviour at the ‘interpenetration’ of biological and the socio-cultural factors. It is the basis of their critique of the reduction of causal explanations of human behaviour to the genetic level. They have a great deal to say particularly about the reductionist therapeutic logic that has permeated psychiatric medical practice throughout its history. But the absence of a theory-of-mind *per se* frustrates a more thorough rejection of the misapplication of biology to human activity. The differentiated causalities of our model-of-mind however, help us to do this. They also introduce a ‘relative indeterminism’ into how we understand human behaviour. For whatever mode-of-mind emerges in each historical and social setting, we see the mind itself as real. In other words, whilst its origin is social, the result of familial and developmental factors that are introjected from the external world, it becomes nonetheless an ‘internal site’ of self-awareness, cognition, interpretation, understanding, struggle, and decision. It is authentic as a strategic and self-determining entity, albeit (apologies to Marx) never in circumstances of its own choosing.

Asserting the reality of mind here again rejects the eliminative materialism that was touched upon earlier. However, a differentiated social determinism that structures the mind gives us more to say about it as a social entity, and of the problems of mind rooted in social contradiction and conflict. For this purpose, specific mental content is treated here as ‘intentional’. In other words, there is an assumption that all ideas orientate towards the outside world; either directly in the normal sense of intended and obvious action, or indirectly in the sense of the mind’s working upon objects that have become internalised as ‘ideal-objects’ - including the social objects that are the introjected and mentalised versions of others from our lives, creating a social ‘theatre-of-the-mind’. This general proposition becomes especially important for accounts of mental illness, where the mind is split between conflicting and irreconcilable orientations towards the world, each triggering competing motor signals, and each of which demand fulfilment to the detriment or destruction of the other, whether in reality or within an imaginary, though still tortured, arena. It becomes more distressing, and even terrifying, to the person when such conflicted strivings – drawn from the paradoxes and contradictions of the social structures that have moulded them - are buried deep within the hidden recesses of a repressed unconscious.

In the first modern studies of psychosis, Emile Kraepelin (1856-1926) had pioneered an approach to the study of mental disorders premised upon neuro-physical abnormalities of the brain, that were biological both in operation and in origin. Specifically on schizophrenia, or ‘dementia-praecox’ as it was termed in his day, Kraepelin held to a neuro-physical and heritable conceptualisation. Freud differed from Kraepelin’s essentially biologistic framing of the condition, seeing instead it as a decomposition of the interior psychical structure of the person.

Today, the notion of the human mind as a quantifiable entity, amenable to measurement and determined ultimately by innate, biological structure remains a bedrock of modern psychology. This paradigm supports entire industries of psychiatric intervention and pharmacological treatment.[[407]](#footnote-407) However, the technological intensifications of social and personal life, and our experience of ourselves as we align with these trends, are associated with much contemporary unhappiness. Marx noted the ways in which such modernising developments make of the worker one cog amongst many, manufacturing for the market, but not for human need, so creating an alienation in which the human being becomes increasingly machine-like in their activity and physical processes;[[408]](#footnote-408) the tools we use and technological context we inhabit feeding back into the ways in which we think, process and conceptualise the world. And so, from the earliest scientific speculations, seeing the mind as trans-historical in nature - opposed to the historical relativity of the ‘model-of-mind’ hypothesis - has represented an obstacle to a social understanding of mental illness; the decontextualised framing of the person ultimately having reductionist consequences for how mental illness is understood in therapeutic practice.[[409]](#footnote-409)

The Kraepelinian paradigm today is supported by three main areas of research. Firstly, there are studies that assume psychosis to be the result of structural abnormalities of brain structure, such as enlarged frontal ventricles. Secondly, those that locate causes in imbalances of brain neurochemistry; specifically related to the dopamine-system of the mid-brain. Thirdly, those that point to cognitive disorders and social-perceptual mal-functions.[[410]](#footnote-410) In all cases the working assumption is that maladies of the mind are the result of defects of the brain.[[411]](#footnote-411)

Against the assumptions of the ‘Kraepelin model’ of the mind, the structural, neuro-chemical and cognitive effects associated with psychosis may in fact be correlative symptoms that have social roots, rather than being themselves causes. Social stressors as well as trauma and re-trauma (arising from triggering in the memory of previous painful episodes), may then themselves be causative in the observable features of brain and brain function.

An emphasis upon trauma as an alternative hypothesis to ‘brain disease’ to explain mental illness, returns us once more to the mind as social in origin rather than reducible to brain function. This accords also with a Marxist take on the question. The concept of ‘alienation’ in particular, bridges the divide between the external world and its structuring, and the felt experience of the person’s interior, daily life under capitalism. For Marx, alienation originated in the obscured economic relations of capitalist exploitation. Moreover, these economic relations were rooted in social conflict and psychological tension. On a Marxist understanding, this reality defines the experience even of the normal, well-adjusted, and outwardly ‘happy’ person. When crises of one kind or another, personal tragedy, and chronic anxiety and depression are added to the mix of factors that causally affect the individual’s state of mind, it is not difficult to understand why the mind goes awry for so many in capitalist society.

To complete this social hypothesis of mental illness, a further step is needed. Whilst external social causes of mental illness can be traced and studied by observation, their effects are not all the same order, generality or type. More to the point, whilst some may be obvious to the person, others will be hidden from conscious apprehension, buried in the recesses of their psyche. The tensions that become locked into this structural realm - originating from without, introjected into the shadowy realms of the mind, and repressed from everyday self-awareness - become sinks for psychological energy, disrupting psychic equilibrium and even erupting into shattering collapses of normal mental function.[[412]](#footnote-412) Here, social determinations operate at many levels of human experience, from the proximal cultural cues and pressures of life in their immediacy, to the more profound influences that have remained as traces of early life, of which the person is only dimly aware; or entirely unaware. These influences lurk in the realm of the repressed unconscious. They are the second type of social determination of our Marxist model-of-mind.

To finish on this question, hypothesising a social root for mental illness is not to diminish its horrible reality for so many people who suffer from mental health conditions under capitalism; and to characterise any type of human condition as a ‘social construct’ does not at all make it unreal. This question is addressed by Peter Sedgwick in his seminal writings on the topic. For Sedgwick, diseases of the mind are indeed social constructions; the result of value-based notions of health. In this sense however, they are on a spectrum that includes physical illnesses seen as constructions in just the same way. Putting it differently, mental ailments, whilst social in nature, are no less real for that. So, whilst the anti-psychiatrists he opposed tended to base their critique upon the idea of mental illness as a means of social control, operating through medicalised and manufactured definitions of normal behaviour, under Sedgwick’s unitary definition of health, covering both its mental and physical aspects, psychological disorders were recognised as involving real pain, and so worthy of sympathy and medical attention in the form of the psychiatry that he defended as a legitimate area of medicine.[[413]](#footnote-413)

The ‘second type’ of social determination we have already explored, arising from generative repression, is important also for explanations of gender and sex. Its significance lies once more in providing an alternative hypothesis to biology in the creation of ‘natural states’ within human experience.

From his earliest writings Marx emphasised a non-essentialist, and non-biologistic perspective on humanity. Marx also critiqued the ‘culture/nature’ dualism in the most influential philosophies and literary tropes of his time. For Marx this was a dialectical pairing, whose dual aspects developed in reciprocal fashion, each (as we have seen) reflecting the other. Although Marx has been criticised for holding to a hierarchical view of the relationship between culture and external nature,[[414]](#footnote-414) in which humanity, given the correct social and technological conditions, will transcend - or even *conquer* - it, in fact this misunderstands him. Rather, whilst Marx saw the relationship between the natural world and human culture as one of constant interaction, he saw labour as transformative of both.

*Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art – his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible – so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically man lives only on these products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc.*[[415]](#footnote-415)

However, this co-dependent relationship, did not refer only to external nature providing the material means of subsistence and survival, but also to the ‘nature’ of humanity’s relation to itself. So, since humanity always has some notion of its own nature – historically contingent, and relative to the prevailing modes of production and consumption – the individual’s relationship with others is conditioned by this conceptualisation. Herein, for Marx lies a measure of the level of emancipation of humanity both within any given historical mode, and in general; and conversely a measure of the degree of alienation of the individual - of themselves from others, and of themselves from themselves. In other words, a truly emancipated situation could only be said to exist where individuals consider one another as members of the human species in the fullest sense, striving towards the highest realisation of their mutual creative potential. Where instead the behaviour of individuals towards one another remains conditioned by fixed notions of natural behaviour, there also will instrumental relations prevail, in which the individual values others for the uses they may have for them.

This brings us to the question of relations between men and women. For if human emancipation is to be realised at all, it can only come about if all individuals, male, female, and others are equal. Where this is not the case, where notions and structures of inequality are wrapped in biologistic ideologies, there also will human alienation continue for the sexes, so degrading their relations. Where it is the case humanity - as a whole - can be free. Here is the point, for Marx, at which nature - including such basic animal drives as the reproductive - becomes now fully human; in other words, something that is no longer a fixed substratum, a ‘given’ that determines human behaviour as a matter of biological fate, but rather something that is thenceforth transformed by non-alienated labour and by interactions with others in a free social totality.

*In the approach to* woman*as the*spoil*and hand-maid of communal lust is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself, for the secret of this approach has its*unambiguous*, decisive,*plain*and undisguised expression in the relation of man to woman and in the manner in which the*direct*and*natural*species-relationship is conceived. The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the*relation *of* man*to*woman*. In this natural species-relationship man’s relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature – his own*natural*destination. In this relationship, therefore, is*sensuously manifested*, reduced to an observable*fact*, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature to him has become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man’s whole level of development.*[[416]](#footnote-416)

Earlier we saw how within capitalist society the creation of ‘the individual’, with their subjective and personal characteristics of gender, cultural identity, and sense-of-self, occurs *for them* principally in the realm of consumption; the result of a *mode*-of-consumption. As we have also seen, modes of production and consumption are co-dependent; and the character of work in a society also plays a decisive role in the creation of gendered roles within it; something that Marx and Engels comment upon frequently. And we have seen how the ‘empirical self’ in its real development, moves between these domains, though under external drives and pressures it does not control. Still, *for the person*, the realisation of their gender as something they experience spontaneously, and as ‘natural’ – or as disruptive as in the experience of body dysphoria - brings us once more to our mode-of-mind, and so also to the role of repression in its construction but now with respect to a pivotal issue, which is the relationship between gender and alienation. For if we are to say that relations between men and women - *i.e.* gender *per se*, rather than gender only in its bi-modal social or economic aspects - are historically specific rather than universal, then for any given type of society we must also explain the creation of men as individuals that feel themselves to be male, and the creation of women as individuals that feel themselves to be female. In other words, we must explain the strange phenomenon of statistical heterosexuality.[[417]](#footnote-417) And to do that, we must understand men and women as they form - or *are formed* - within their society.

Several of Freud’s publications focus on the origins of gender, alongside of his more general theorising of human sexuality. From 1899, with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud developed his theory of the Oedipus Complex in which the boy-child is consumed with jealousy against his father over his mother’s affections.

*He begins to desire his mother herself in the sense with which he has recently become acquainted, and to hate his father anew as a rival who stands in the way of this wish; he comes, as we say, under the dominance of the Oedipus Complex.*[[418]](#footnote-418)

Freud gives his most generalised account of gendering in his *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Here, identifications with either parent, played out respectively in the male child and the female child, comprise the competing forces that eventually fix gender in the person.

And there is Freud’s less well-known 1925 essay, ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes’. Here, Freud foregrounded the Castration Complex to account for the transference of pre-pubescent clitoral sexual pleasure in the girl-child, to vaginal sexual pleasure and receptivity in the young woman, within his general theory.

What Freud’s theoretical phases have in common is the element of repression, not only as the source of the unconscious (though it is that, of course), but also as an active factor that moulds the landscape of the inner self in its sexed and gendered aspects. It is this element of repression – and especially the way Freud applies it in *The Ego and the Id* – that, when resolved via Hegelian categories can complement Marx’s account of how the individual is formed in their society; providing us also with a model-of-mind that is sufficiently flexible to account for the varieties of cultural behaviour across historical time and geography.

Considering gender in relation to sex, the bodily sensations involved are forceful and even compulsive. For instance, there is the continuing relevance of the endocrinal system to human sexuality; and for cis-women and trans-men variations of the sex-drive in the different phases of the menstrual cycle. The eclipsing of oestrus and outwardly obvious ovulation represented an evolutionary break from breeding cycles in Hominidae and early human groups. The extended sexuality this made possible is also evident to a degree at least in some higher non-human primate species such as chimpanzees and gorillas. On this spectrum humans lie at the most extreme end, with the possibility of sex being present throughout the menstrual cycle. However, heightened sexual interest in the late follicular peri-ovulation phase of the human menstrual cycle is also well-documented and a commonly – though not universally - reported experience for cis-women. Experimental studies also show peaks of sex-related hormonal states - with high levels of oestradiol and low levels of progesterone particularly - associated with reported increases in sex-drive. This has led researchers to propose a cis-female ‘dual sexuality’, comprising conceptive (ovular) and non-conceptive (extended) phases that have different behavioural dynamics and motivations.[[419]](#footnote-419)

The experimental literature suggests two possible accounts of the endocrinal dynamics of human cis-female sexuality that are relevant to the debate in this highly contested field. Firstly, there is the idea that hormonal state directly affects libido, meaning that raised sexual interest in the conceptive phase is the result of an internal drive only. This uni-causal hypothesis would be an example of ‘reductive biologism’ in which organic impulses straightforwardly determine outward behaviour. Secondly, there is the idea of ‘incentive motivation’ in which hormones, rather than determining sexual behaviour, have a regulating function. Here hormones create dispositional states that moderate the behavioural outcomes of aspects of the external environment, such as attraction, relationship experience, social calculation, sexual opportunity, and so forth. This more complex hypothesis would be an example of ‘dialectical biologism’ in which organic and social factors are mutually influencing of one another. In cis-men too, levels of the sex-related hormones prolactin, oxytocin and oestrogen change during the lead up to the birth of the child, and in the months following, and are associated with ‘paternal feelings’ in the father’s emotional experience. Such feelings, it is important to note, again are not universal, can vary greatly in strength for individuals and across cultures, and can be entirely absent. Still, there is evidence of an endocrinal correlate to the paternal experience for many cis-men. The question of causal direction, however, again is not clear.

A speculative assumption underpinning many studies of the interactions of hormones and sexual behaviour is one of ‘Darwinian individualism’. With this evolutionary framing behaviour is seen as informed by a calculus of fitness and genetic advantage. In relation to extended sexuality in human beings, representing a relaxation of endocrinal control of sexual appetite, the reasoning is that this allows for bonding with a ‘caring mate’ that will invest in the family group, so maximising the prospects of long-term genetic success. Along with the expulsion of dangerous toxins or pathogens, this hypothesis may be relevant to the original evolution of a menstrual cycle in some simians and early hominids. The notion of such a genetic strategy however misses the significance of the nomadic character of early human groups. Animal breeding cycles are linked to seasonal and other cycles in habitats and ecological biomes; birth periods being timed optimally for food sources and migration patterns. The emergence of extended sexuality in humans broke this link, creating a relative independence of the cyclical dictates of nature. This leap will have been hugely consequential for the development of human capacity. Along with hominid bipedalism and the co-evolution of the brain and the hand in the Homininae line, changes in the female endocrine system were fundamental to the eventual evolution of modern humans; metabolism, form, capacity, and functional changes comprising the multiple dialectical processes involved. And crucially, survival would become dependent upon the viability of the group over and above individual advantage. From this point it was collective strategy and intelligence that was key, and group adaptability now the essential characteristic of human beings.

An issue for Marxism in the incentive-motivation model is that a primal impulse remains essential to sexual behaviour. It is of course mediated by a host of contingent factors. But it is essential nonetheless. If this holds, then what follows is a necessary acceptance that there exists in all women and men a natural drive to reproduce. Seen in this way, the entire range of sensations, appetites and desires involved in sex together represent a natural urge to have a child; therefore understood as an organic need along with hunger and thirst. Framing the sex-drive of modern humans like this means accepting the principle of maternal and paternal instincts that are ‘genetic’. It also creates a tendency towards heteronormative assumptions about the ‘natural purpose’ of sex even in its modern form.

However, there is another hypothesis that our model-of-mind hypothesis allows for, and one that avoids the naturalising tendency in theorisations of human sexual behaviour. It may be that sexual feelings associated with the endocrine system, are not the result of a residual evolutionary effect in cis-women and trans-men, an incomplete release from oestrus, but are substantively ideological. Whilst the bodily sensations involved are real enough, the ‘translation’ of these into modern sexualised perception and particular behaviours can be cultural. The effect we know is not universal. Moreover, behaviour can override and contradict these impulses. This suggests the possibility of an *a priori* mechanism hidden from consciousness, acting as an experiential ‘lens’ infused with ideology; the mental representations this creates in their turn leading to the sexual cues that organise personal orientation. In the manipulated sexualised culture of capitalist society, conversions of sensation into a particular behaviour then occur as a matter of involuntary reflex; impulses experienced spontaneously, and as ‘natural’. Whilst the basal biological processes are a given, the product of an ancient evolutionary line,[[420]](#footnote-420) the modern meaning of the behaviours correlated with them can originate in society, becoming part of the sexed unconscious *via* mechanisms of psychological repression. They are then the outcome of aggregations of ideologically organised and gendered responses, ‘returned’ to the sexual domain from which they evolved but now cemented into constructed cognitive fields and somatic experience in the familiarity of ‘sex’ in its modern – capitalist - form.

Where it is mental structure, whether hidden or unhidden from consciousness, that produces behavioural responses to organic sensations, rather than *vice versa*, there biology gives way to culture. Echoing Freud’s distinction between the ‘trigger’ that sets a bodily process in motion (a gendered cue or action) and its consequence (an arousal or sexual release), it is the space between that we need to understand. And here we will say it can be gender that organises outward sexual orientations and responses, and not the other way around. Whilst a moment of passion may be experienced as something that overcomes all inhibitions, the expression of spontaneous bodily impulses, that ‘moment’ in fact can have been created by years of childhood psychosocial influences, a saturation of sexual cultural cues, and decades of intergenerational cultural transmission and expectation.

And the moment of sexual climax itself, surely the most ‘natural’ phenomenon of all, has its political aspect and its concealed social dynamic, as was explored in the women’s consciousness groups of the 1970s. The dialectic of ‘I and thou’ in sex can be understood as revolving on the psychological deficits and needs created by the individualisation of capitalist consumption. Let us take a risk and put it this way: ‘In the instant of pleasure I give to/receive from you, I see the love you have for me, that allows me to love myself’ in a dynamic that compensates for the structural alienations of the person. But of course, there are different, personally specific, less happy, and darker versions of the orgasm complex than this, that bring into play themes of dominance and submission, control, abandonment, loss-of-self, the need for degrees of pain, fantasy, role-acting and even for an absent ‘audience’ or non-present ‘other’ for whom the sexual partner is a cipher. This most private experience also has its social aspect. And sex as an escape from the stresses of a person’s life and the worries of the times in which they live is captured in Otto Fenichel’s category of the ‘libidinisation of anxiety’.[[421]](#footnote-421) All these elements and more can be and are melded into the ascending pleasure cycles that lead to sexual release.

Considering parenthood, this is accompanied by powerful feelings of attachment, responsiveness and devotion for many – though again, not all – new parents. And we know these feelings are coincident with events in the brain. In the mother the limbic system, responding to the oxytocin and prolactin hormones and controlling emotional responses becomes more active. It deepens its neural connectivity with the pre-frontal cortex responsible for decision making and personal identity. The dopamine system becomes attuned to the baby’s behaviours, rewarding success and happy responses. And raised levels of activity in the **amygdala** and the **insula (both located in the cerebral cortex) aid social cognition.** And in fathers and male carers too, we see reductions in testosterone, increases in oxytocin and prolactin and resulting changes in the pre-frontal cortex that associate with caring behaviour.

But again, how we see all of these for our question is open to interpretation. The systems involved were already influenced by society long before reproductive age, and the behavioural responses and identities primed to become active by social commands during adolescence. The churn of feelings involved for the young person were presented to them as their destiny – motherhood for the girl and fatherhood for the boy – framed as natural and right by the society that seeks to orientate them. And with the arrival it is all confirmed – they are told – by the ‘spontaneous’ feelings they have for their baby to whose crying they will respond but as an interpellation, and not a genetic calling from a long-lost evolutionary origin. These changes are so permeated with culture in the hyper-commodified and moment-to-moment ideological messaging of consumer capitalism, and the pre-determined sex-roles involved, that framing them as ‘natural’ becomes a contrivance, a false homology that ignores the sheer scale, myriad layering and intensity of the socialisations involved. Their behavioural meaning now is better understood as a contemporary phenomenon, rather than seen as driven by primitive forces.

We cannot say that the outward forms of sex and reproductive behaviour straightforwardly reveal their social or personal meaning. For this we need analysis. And here an isomeric conceptual inversion is required;[[422]](#footnote-422) a different way of thinking about the mind from that of common-sense (or ‘folk-‘) psychology. For our conceptualisations are laden with ideology and naturalistic assumptions and, as argued here, neither the anatomy of sex nor its explicit acts dictate its specific significance. The assumption that sex in our capitalist present is a continuation of prehistorical sex is a stubborn one. However, when we look around us, we see the ubiquity of sex in all parts of our culture, used to manipulate opinion, create appetites and sell commodities. And we should mention the global pornography epidemic, fuelled by the internet; a phenomenon in which a Lacanian style extimate of an especially malicious type – sex as performance - colonises and enslaves the minds and behaviours of all involved, both producers and consumers, turning their subjectivity inside out and transforming their capacity for love into a manipulated and commodified object. These things are nothing to do with human reproduction. Now every aspect of our bodies, inside and outside, is marketised and offered back to us for sale. Even for the outwardly conventional couple planning their family, motivations – interpreted as natural parental urges – are rooted in the notion of the happy, successful and thoroughly commoditised home. Again, the drivers are not those of a primordial instinct but rather of consumption. The biological sex by which the continuation of the species occurs becomes the commoditised sex of life under capitalism. It is a different thing, ideologically packaged and re-presented as natural desire and parental instinct. So, (as Hegel might have put it) in the fruit’s calyx a trace of its ~~developmental~~ history may remain (or may disappear entirely), but the floral phase has ended; it is no longer relevant to the fruit’s ripening and the creation of the seed. Likewise, the ‘limit’ endpoint of ‘biological sex’ in the pre-human hominin line becomes the ‘origin’ of ‘encultured sex’ in behaviourally modern Sapiens groups and eventually of ‘commoditised sex’ today. Now, by removing the ideological rationalisations of our bodily experience and its naturalising mental representations (*re*-presentations), we reach a clearing in which real, but previously obscured social meaning can emerge. [[423]](#footnote-423)

In so doing we also bring social construction into better focus; seeing it now as involving involuntary bodily feelings and impulses that arise not from a primal substratum, but rather from unconscious structural contradictions and emergent cultural tides. Ideology it seems can access the autonomic nervous system. So, in this unitary conceptualisation, whilst sex must not be reduced to anatomy, equally gender must not be reduced to costume. Rather, although these are distinct categories, they do not stand apart on a behavioural spectrum, each flowing into the other in processes of actual physical experience and authentic emotional force, discovered – not ‘chosen’ - within the self. It is the society then - and not ‘biology’ – that generates the range of individual genders and personal sexual types that characterise it; and it is the society that sanctions the behavioural variations possible for each, making ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ matters of contested public legitimacy and legislative definition. And it makes them sites of personal and political struggle.

One influential theorisation of gender that aligns with our model-of-mind comes from Judith Butler in their *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Femininity* (1990).[[424]](#footnote-424) Butler emphasises the unstable nature of the gender/sex distinction. Sex, after all, they argue, ‘happens’ *via* gender in its social aspect. More than this, sex as *sexuality*, develops through gender, and in its outward representation is shaped by gender. In a manner that brings to mind Freud’s ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes’, they further suggest a view of sex (over and above anatomy) as constructed *by* gender; areas of the body being encultured as erogenous zones, infused with sexual meaning by the erotic codes of their society; anatomy then becoming the ‘site’ of sexual culture and behaviour, rather than its determination.

This leads Butler to question ‘woman’ as a reliable category within feminism. Indeed, Butler’s radicalism lies in their questioning of representational identity (what they call the ‘metaphysics of substance’) *per se*, for any understanding of sex, sexuality, or gender. Taking a cue from de Beauvoir, they argue that ‘woman’ is a category without a foundation.

*If there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather* becomes *a woman, it follows that* woman *itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.*[[425]](#footnote-425)

Here then, ‘sex’ – meaning to *be* a sex - is the ‘discursive pre-discursive’, or the ‘constructed unconstructed’. So, one’s sex, experienced as a ‘fact’, is the result of a historical (and pre-historical) layering of gendering processes that, over great spans of time, produces something that is felt as ‘natural’.[[426]](#footnote-426)

Crucially, Butler emphasises that this ideological sexing eclipses its own genealogy. For it to work we must experience our sex as *sui generis*, self-sustaining and emerging from its own ontological ground. And for that it relies upon repression. Seen as it really is, emerging from constructive social and psychological processes, and without a primary foundation, the sexual binarisation of ‘male’ and ‘female’ fails in its allotted role as a regulator of reproductive behaviour - and human reproduction. Its ruse is essential to its success.

On this latter point Butler is elsewhere critical of Althusser on the question of ‘interpellation’.[[427]](#footnote-427) For them, the hailing of the subject – ‘Hey you!’ - captures only the momentary and outward dimensions of a process that has a continuous and inward psychical complement by which the person becomes invested in their gendered and sexed identity. And here again repression is key. For whilst the obvious cues and prohibitions are plain to see, they can only be effective where they allow the person to be successful in their sanctioned identity. For that, complicating alternatives must be pushed out of consciousness. Once more, to perform is to believe.

Finally, Butler moves to a hard anti-essentialism in which the purported gendered interior is no more than a phantasm. Gender for Butler does not emerge from a pre-existent self, but rather through its performative aspects as a strategic social act. The body now becomes the ‘surface’ upon which gender is *inscribed* in pose, dress and decoration, and the vector by which it is incorporated into the life the person. Gender then, is not something that the person *has*, but rather that which they *perform* in time; and which becomes internalised from without *via* cultural processes.[[428]](#footnote-428)

On this last point there is some departure in what Butler says from what we have proposed for the model-of-mind as something that allows for a substantive self. Anti-psychological, behaviourist and eliminative positions in philosophy have already been criticised. Now we see that Butler seems to move in a similar direction as Skinner, Ullin and Dennett on the question of a stable interior; a self; or a *cogito*. Against this, we have recognised an authentic and deciding self; albeit one that is historical in origin and character. Butler’s nuanced position in fact does allow for a relativised notion of a gendered intra-psychic, performing agent, although many of their concluding statements on this topic lean towards its temporal, repetitive and outwardly performative aspects, rather than its presence as an enduring, internal - though always contextual - self.

With Butler we arrive at a position where, rather than sex being a natural substratum that is overlaid with gender, both categories are culturally – discursively – constituted, so blurring the distinction between them. Then gender, and by extension culture, can shape sex in its behavioural aspects; sex potentially becoming the result of gender, not *vice versa*. But what sense can we make of this with respect to human origins, and the proposition that this position appears to require; that with the invention of gender human sexual behaviour left behind its animal evolutionary past?

Whereas the material record of the earliest humans gives us a picture of how our pre-historic ancestors looked, travelled, and survived, there is little that gives such clues about sexual behaviour and the origins of gender. One type of evidence comes in the form of figurines and fertility symbols found at sites of early human settlement, identifiable by the exaggerated primary and secondary sexual characteristics they exhibit. Sites along the Danube are associated with ivory Venus figurines, from as early as 35,000 years ago,[[429]](#footnote-429) and then in relative abundance from around 25,000 years ago. Evidence for the importance of established gender roles for hunting and food gathering in the colonisation of new habitats by early humans comes from the symbolism of Aboriginal rock art and figurines found at habitation sites in Australia and Tasmania, dating back at least 40,000 years.[[430]](#footnote-430)

Here we can allow some scientific imagination. We will surmise for example, that for hunter-gatherer groups, pregnancy, neonatal care, and weaning would have been a matter of group survival. Moreover, the development of technique for hunting, cooking, and the manufacture of clothes, of course (we do know from the material record) required the fashioning and effective use of tools and the practical knowledge that made this possible; knowledge that needed to be transmitted to the youngest members of the group over the extended period of maturation that is distinctive of the human species. Hidden ovulation and female receptivity throughout the menstrual cycle also would have added to the problems of unregulated pregnancy and childbirth for social groups that had to withstand and overcome challenges of climate and sustenance during the great dispersals of the early Upper-Palaeolithic era. Under these circumstances it seems unlikely that the kinds of pansexualism observed in some higher primates would have been viable for the ancient Homininae groups from which modern humans emerged, or in the early nomadic bands as they moved into new and demanding environments.[[431]](#footnote-431)

From 50,000 years ago there is evidence of distinct gender identifications with productive as well as reproductive roles, in burial artefacts at palaeolithic sites. By around 35,000 to 45,000 years ago, during the Transition that saw the emergence of symbolic expression, humans had probably achieved a degree of control of child-birth at the level of the group: gender being crucial for this, along with related social roles and divisions of labour.[[432]](#footnote-432) Perhaps by this stage having a comprehension of paternity, humans had also learnt from brutal and fatal experience the genetic hazards of incestual sexual relations, leading to the near universal taboo of sexual union between close relatives. The emergence of consanguineous clan-type societies also would have raised the problem of inter-breeding; the exchange of women between clans, and the emergence of exogamous heterosexuality being a combined solution to that.[[433]](#footnote-433)

The general point here is that we are now talking about intelligent humans, dealing consciously with the challenges of survival they were faced with. Behavioural codes were obviously important for the maintenance of effective social relationships, supporting strategic orientations in the group’s natural environment. This would have required regulation and control in all areas of life, including the sexual. Here, we can plausibly imagine that the cultural organisation of ‘male’ and ‘female’ became necessary along with the productive and reproductive roles allotted to each. We are helped here by the customs of cultural transmission of gender by puberty rituals found until quite recently in forest and tribal societies. Colin Turnbull, in his influential anthropological work *The Forest People* (1961), described the initiation rites of the BaMbuti pygmy tribes of the Angolan Ituri Forest region for adolescent girls.[[434]](#footnote-434) During the *elima* the girls decorated their bodies, battled with the boys, and then entered a special house for some days, protected and defended by the older women. The boys would then seek to ‘fight’ their way into the house, only to be accepted if they had killed significant game such as an antelope. In other examples, the boys of the North American Quinault people would paint rocks with the water monsters they had seen in visions, and amongst the tribes of California pubescent youngsters would ingest hallucinogens such as jimsonweed, and paint rocks with images influenced by their visions – the girls painting representations of rattlesnakes (their spirit-helpers), and the boys painting circles, nested curves and human figures.[[435]](#footnote-435)

*A key aspect of these rituals is that the boys and girls focused on different entoptic phenomena. Both sexes would have had the neurological potential to see the full range of entoptics, and we may be fairly certain that the boys’ entoptic forms would have flashed in and out of the girls’ visions, and vice versa. But the guidance given by the shamans who were conducting the rituals encouraged each sex to focus on what were considered to be its appropriate images.* [[436]](#footnote-436)

In such delirious states these youngsters were being guided towards their gendered destinies.[[437]](#footnote-437) However, the dialectic-of-self underpinning our model-of-mind would already have been at work in the formation of adult influenced strivings of identification and possession. Amongst the BaMbuti people for instance, the skills involved in developing gendered roles emerged from play, the games becoming incrementally more serious with the approach to adulthood. With maturation beyond puberty this dialectic would have been closely intertwined with anticipations of social, cultural, productive, and reproductive functions, and the acquisition of the skills appropriate to each; ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles being learnt over the adolescent years. In the new and sometimes inhospitable landscapes that our earliest ancestors encountered, the gendered regulation of sexual behaviour, along with gendered technical skills and essential knowledge that were passed down from elders to youngsters, will have been of vital importance for the survival of the group.

Considering mental capacity, we know that the brain continues to develop certainly into a person’s early twenties. But puberty is also a stage of extremely rapid change, as neural networks proliferate at an extraordinary rate. This leap has consequences for the individual that go beyond general ability. Rather, many things are occurring at once, with the emergence of abstract reasoning, and the establishment of personal identity and social attachments. Human societies have long understood the significance of this formative period, laying out pathways for the child towards its future productive role, gender and social orientation. It is the ‘dialectic-of-self’ involved in the emergence of sex, that shapes outcomes for the individual, giving them their specific social and historical meaning; a dialectic that requires the repression of some possibilities in place of others that emerge as dominant.

Indeed, a distinction between early life ‘primary socialisation’ processes that are foundational for the person’s development, and ‘secondary socialisation’ processes that orientate the person for their future roles within their social group and wider society is long established in theories of social construction. These secondary processes occur during adolescence and are often also accompanied by rituals that intensify the transformations involved.[[438]](#footnote-438)

So, the pivotal moment of early human evolution was the emergence of ‘sociality’ itself. The ability of human beings to survive in extremely varying environments was connected to the emergence of the ‘social group’, with collective intelligence, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, shared technical ingenuity and bonds of solidarity. This moment represents the endpoint (the ‘limit’) of biological evolution, and the starting point (the ‘origin’) of cultural evolution; in other words, a moment of discontinuity made possible by the qualitative leap in intellectual capacity now superfluous to basic physical existence. Prehistoric music, ritual, dance, art and so on, can now be understood without reference to biology in their specific manifestations. Rather they are seen as arising from the creation of shared meanings that tied the individual to their group with bonds of collective memory, group-identity, common belief, shared imagination, storytelling and myth, and group love and sacrifice. For all of this, it was the emergence of psychical processes enabling ‘identification’ with others as a general human attribute, that made it possible for the human species to transcend biological evolution. Finally, a crucial aspect of human social attachment was the emergence of self-conscious ‘gender’, a topic given helpful illumination by the dialectic of ‘to have’ and ‘to be’ found in Freud’s key works.

Whatever the exact course of events, the central argument here rests upon a proposition, located at a limit-origin transitional boundary. The proposition is that the ‘limit’ in question represents the end of biological causation of human behaviour, over and above the limitations dictated by anatomy; and that the ‘origin’ represents the start of social and cultural causation for all aspects of human behaviour, including the sexual. This means not only a reversal of the biology-culture dichotomy that includes biology a cause of sexual behaviour in a historical context, but a setting aside of that dichotomy. ‘Biology’ here is no longer seen as a factor that explains human sex beyond its obvious mechanical aspects, even if framed as socially mediated; human sex now being attributed a socio-cultural, rather than a bio-cultural, character.[[439]](#footnote-439)

We can get a sense of the relevance of a gendered ‘mode-of-mind’ from Marx’s analysis of the rise of the patriarchal family following the conquest of clan-based societies by the early Roman Republic. In the *Ethnological Notebooks*[[440]](#footnote-440)Marx comments extensively upon the anthropology of his day. Johan Bachofen had proposed a ‘mother-right’ that had once prevailed in tribal, or clan, societies. This suggested these had a matriarchal and matrilineal character: an idea that was transmitted into 19th Century anthropology by Ludwig Lange, Henry Sumner Maine, and Lewis Henry Morgan. The societies traversed included the Iroquois of North America, the Hibernian Celts,[[441]](#footnote-441) the Kānaka Maoli tribes of Hawaii, and the Brahmin clans of India.

These consanguineous societies were more egalitarian than the state-based societies that would eventually replace them. Marx was interested in anthropological speculation about the changing social position of women resulting from this historical shift. However, his comments on the works of Lange and Maine were critical, insofar as these anthropologists tended to essentialise ‘the family’; seeing historically particular relations between men and women as natural.[[442]](#footnote-442)

Marx, along with Engels, was more sympathetic to the work of Morgan who treated the family as historical, and as something that varied (and radically so) from one epoch to the next. Here, a distinction between the comments of Marx and those of Engels on these anthropological models is needed.[[443]](#footnote-443) Whereas Engels tended to accept uncritically Morgan’s thesis of ‘mother-right’, Marx was more attuned to the contradictions of the place of women in clan-based societies, and indeed the probability of struggle within them.[[444]](#footnote-444) In fact the possibility of matriarchy and matrilineality in such societies is complicated by examples of inequality and, for the Celts in particular, it is likely that the position of women varied from one tribe to another.

The key theme here is the changing status of women in clan-based societies, as the relative egalitarianism that had prevailed in some was suppressed within emerging or conquering class-based states. Whether we consider the eclipsing of the Aegean tribes of the Homeric era by the city-states of the time of Plato and Aristotle,[[445]](#footnote-445) or the subsumption of the Celts under Roman law, there were changes to the position of women in each case. With the emergence of the patriarchal family specifically, rights of marriage-choice, inheritance, property-ownership, divorce, status within the marriage family, *etc.* were all lost or severely eroded.[[446]](#footnote-446)

In the case of 5th Century Athenian society, the hidden status of women was almost total, with women being exclusively restricted within the domain of the marriage home, along with children, concubines, servants and slaves.[[447]](#footnote-447) Moreover, the removal of boys from the gynaecium from the age of six, into and beyond puberty meant that outside of marriage men were rarely exposed to women socially or sexually; which goes some way to explaining the celebration of male homosexual love in the Periclean era.[[448]](#footnote-448)

In the case of the Roman Republic, the *patria potestas* - the Roman legislative code that provided the *paterfamilias* with his legal power – at its height in the era of the Punic Wars, gave the male patriarch nearly absolute rule over his family members. With respect to a wife this included entire rights to her dowry, the right to sell her and in certain circumstances (and with the agreement of her family) to end her life.[[449]](#footnote-449)

Physical repression will have been involved in the shift to these absolute patriarchies.[[450]](#footnote-450) However, this violence will also have resulted in internalised repression, by which new and extremely oppressive gender-relations became normalised; the new intra-psychical structures of men and women in Roman society cementing a triumphant and naturalised family norm, and with it a new mode-of-mind with respect to gender and sexual relations.

An erosion of the power of the Roman patriarch occurred over time by the incremental transfer of legal powers from the family to the state. With the development of trade and commerce, women were also found increasingly in occupations that, whilst they lay outside of legal sanction, were afforded *de facto* toleration in the developing Roman economy.[[451]](#footnote-451) The anomalous position of women in these economic roles was mitigated by a slow process of legal amendments that increasingly sanctioned the position of women-of-means as independent, affording some the status also as *personae* with a degree of legal entitlement.[[452]](#footnote-452)

These social, economic, and political processes would over time weaken the power of the patriarch. However, the women of the ancient world also had agency in changing their position *vis-à-vis* men. Whilst the female characters of Aristophanes *Lysistrata* provide a comedic picture of women withholding sex to prevent their men leaving for war, the play is revealing for what it suggests about how its audience understood the potential of women to act collectively. Indeed, it may have referred to real moments of resistance, long since lost from the historical record. In Rome, when women stormed the Forum in 195 BC, demanding the repeal of the *lex Oppia* that restricted their rights of adornment, Cato the Elder remarked “We have not kept our women individually under control; we now dread them collectively.”

In the *Ethnological Notebooks* Marx reflects upon the probable resistances of women to their unfree status under patriarchal law. Along with socially overt struggles likely to have accompanied both the implementation of patriarchal oppression, and its erosion, we can further hypothesise a psychical struggle, as different modes-of-mind clashed between groups and individuals, and within the interior life of the person.

In the modern era, we see the equivalent social and psychological processes with the emergence and historical development of capitalism. Each stage in the British context has created shifts in demographic patterns and family type with implications for gender norms. The break-up of the rural extended family with the enclosures of the late 18th Century was one stage, as its victims poured into the hellish conditions of the new industrial conurbations with little or no intact family structure. The rise of the small nuclear working-class family that could move for work, was another. The entry of women into the workforce in large numbers over the course of the Twentieth Century altered relations between the sexes, and the associated perceptions of legitimate gender roles. Each of these successive changes - from the large extended form of the family to the small nuclear form, and then to the single-parent family common today – has loosened previously rigid norms. The de-localisations and struggles involved have produced spaces for new identities (including dominant female, non-binary, and gender-fluid types) that compete with the traditional hetero-stereotyping of ‘dominant male – submissive female’ gender-relations. This has meant a cultural drift away from normalising binaries towards more complex alternatives. Always, the elements of our model-of-mind have driven the process, as the changing forces of the modes of production and consumption shape the dialectic-of-self, in turn creating conscious apprehensions of social roles and survival strategies; these then being shaped by interwoven economic and gender identifications in the mind of the developing person.

## History, self, and the return to Marx

**Tradition, repression and the collective unconscious**

For the historical aspect of our model-of-mind there is one more theme to explore. This is the way in which supressed collective memories resurface at times of new relevance, and often in periods of revitalised resistance. In each of the examples of mode-of-mind that have been discussed, repression has been an indispensable element. It is repression that eclipses possible modes-of-mind as unrealistic, unfeasible, or even dangerous; allowing some (or one) to emerge as dominant, to be expressed outwardly, as the person takes up their place in their social group. This mode-of-mind has been shaped by a dialectic-of-self that moves between the poles of a self (I) that is experienced moment-by-moment, and an anticipated self - the ‘objective I’ (I*o*) towards which they strive.

From this process emerges (‘precipitates’) an ‘ideal I’ (I*i*), representing an intended self the person strives to be. This ‘ideal I’ outwardly mirrors the processes of identification in the mind of the child, the developing adolescent later gravitating towards one parent or the other, or towards one significant adult or another. These intra-psychical processes are also interwoven with anticipations of a future self that are social, cultural, and economic in character; anticipations that reflect the modes of consumption and production of their society.

All of this involves the repression of psychical material that is problematic for the mode-of-mind that eventually emerges as dominant, or that must be hidden from the conscious life of the person for them to be successful in their society. The result is determinations that are known to the person only by their effects, whilst remaining unrecognised in any more explicit way. These internal determinations become crucial to aspects of their identity they experience spontaneously, and as intrinsically personal – gender and sexual identity being the most obvious examples. Where they contain unresolved tensions and ‘forgotten’ traumas, they may be sources of anxiety, disturbance, and unhappiness.

This repressed material however, although not normally consciously apprehended, does not disappear. Instead, it remains as an active force, hidden from consciousness. Transformed into new mental material, it can be expressed culturally and at the social level, as well as within the individual. Myth and legend for instance, can carry repressed memories of earlier cultures that are separated from a society even by many generations. In the *Ethnological Notebooks* (1880-82), Marx speculates that despite the unfreedom of women under the 5th Century Athenian state, collective memories of lost freedoms remained in the goddess stories of Hestia, Hera and Athene Pallas.[[453]](#footnote-453) Indeed, memories of historical traumas, or of great struggles and triumphs, are present in the oral traditions of pre-literate peoples and in the folk-lore of rural communities. Within urban societies, working-class traditions carry the memories of significant battles and victories from one generation to the next. These traditions may disappear, ‘forgotten’ from any conscious recollection within communities. And yet, with the eruption of new struggles, these traditions and their stories will reappear with a new relevance, revealing they had never been fully forgotten. Rather they had existed still in a repressed collective memory, awaiting their time once more. In the case of the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020, triggered by the murder of a black man by a police officer in Minneapolis, protests in the US and around the world became quickly about interpretations of history. Old grievances and local controversies that had been lost in the mundanities of daily survival in black America, were reignited as stories half-forgotten were reawakened with urgent and vivid relevance.

In these examples we see not only repression at work, and the creation of a collective repressed unconscious, but also how repressed material can ‘return’, reminding us sometimes with sudden force that it had never really disappeared.[[454]](#footnote-454)

Finally, there is an ethical dimension to these reflections upon a Marxist ‘model-of-mind’, the ‘mode-of-mind’ that is its consequence, and the role of repression within it. Our general model-of-mind is built upon a human mind that is totipotent in its capacity, characterised by a ‘radical variability’ that allows for imaginative possibilities that go far beyond the literal limitations of the person’s social, physical and technological environment. In this sense the human brain is seen as an organ of unlimited configurations of thinking, behaviour, theory, and hypothesis. This potential for creativity is intensive as well as extensive, reaching into all aspects of human behaviour and inter-personal relationships, as well as into outward behaviour directed towards the external environment.

We have also seen that the ‘dialectic-of-self’ ends in the intra-psychical structures of the person, becoming fixed into a mode-of-mind that enables them to function in their society, and survive the challenges they face. They are shaped by the social relations into which they develop, structures of the mind being isomorphic with the fixed social relationships that have produced them.

It is here we find an ethical imperative, underpinned by a co-dependence of fact and value. For where social relations are oppressive, the minds of all within the fixed social relationships involved are trapped within a social and psychical logic that is inimical to further creative development. For the oppressed the result is agonies of mind and of body, of course. For the oppressor the cost of their advantage and luxury is the loss of their creative freedom. Whilst our sympathies are entirely with the oppressed, it is worth acknowledging the self-deceptions and neurotic perversions of thought that characterise the mind of the oppressor. The resulting situation for humanity is one of debasement (value) and destruction (fact). Here our desire for a better world, interweaves with our notions of self and identity, understood dispassionately as constructed entities.[[455]](#footnote-455)

**Marxism, repression and liberation**

Key to the hypothesis developed here has been that the concept of repression, a central theoretical factor in the psychoanalytical tradition, once recast as one moment in a larger dialectic, is useful to a Marxist model-of-mind, helping to explain how a mode-of-mind emerges that is adapted to specific historical circumstances. The consequence is that the associated category of the unconscious must also be treated seriously within Marxism. This is not Freud’s libidinal unconscious. Rather it is a structural unconscious that precedes it analytically, and that makes it - and other iterations of ‘the unconscious’ - possible. The type of historical materialism that emerges, provides in turn a potentially fuller account of the dynamics of human subjectivity in the historical process.

However, it does something else in providing an account of how spontaneous feelings of identity, sense-of-self, gender, and so on, can be given without a reliance upon biology, whether reductive or non-reductive. Obviously, Marxism must be open to the science as it develops. But what has been presented is an alternative hypothesis, a way of understanding behavioural forms that does not rely on the pre-social structure of the brain, treating this as a material substrate rather than the causal locus of mind. Our position has been that the use of biology – particularly dialectical biology - within Marxism to explain for instance sexual behaviour, betrays the absence of a Marxist model-of-mind that is comparable to Freud’s modelling of the psyche. It is an absence that allows a naturalising bias to appear that is as unhelpful as it is unnecessary. Moreover, the kind of object that is ‘mind’ (relational) is different to the kind that is ‘brain’ (discrete), making the application of biology in causal explanations of specific social behaviours also a flawed proposition.

Revising the element of ‘repression’ familiar in psychoanalysis - adapted as ‘generative repression’ - allows for a conceptualisation of social determination that is differentiated; so, enabling its application to feelings and aspects of mental life that in their origin are obscure to the person themselves. These feelings and aspects may indeed be sexual; but they are not exclusively so, being modes of the unconscious made possible by a non-libidinal repression that is more fundamental. The dialectical process that makes this structural unconscious possible is anthropological, belonging to all behaviourally modern humans. Its specific contents, including the introjected social determinations that are hidden from the person but that shape their mental states, sexual desires, gender orientations, appetites and revulsions as a creative force are historical, belonging to contextual settings. This way of modelling the mind provides an alternative to naturalistic models used to explain mental processes and human behaviour.

There are also political consequences to this emended historical materialism. One important example is the question of self-determinations of gender and sexual identity. Whilst ‘gender’ might be acknowledged as something that the person can choose (male/female), ‘sex’ (man/woman) is a more contested terrain, in which stubbornly biologistic assumptions prevail. However, the distinction between gender and sex is an unstable one. Sex then, understood as involuntary drive, attraction, coupling and so on (rather than chromosomal state or anatomy), along with gender (cis, trans and non-binary), has been treated here as socially constructed, albeit with social determinations that are obscure, and that emerge from otherwise hidden recesses of a repressed unconscious. It also emerges within normalising social forms, crucially the family. This means it is a relativised phenomenon, subject to historical change.

This approach to an understanding of sex and gender can equally be applied to analyses of mental distress, and to forms of consciousness belonging to different types of society. It requires an account of what mind is at the general level. Such an account must explain not only the political control of mental life, but also the mechanisms by which external factors influencing the development of the infant, the child, the adolescent, and the behaviour of the mature adult, become internalised as spontaneous feelings and social orientations. This is what the hypothesis that has been proposed - the general Marxist model-of-mind that can explain the historically specific mode-of-mind - does; presented here as an alternative to the ‘biology-of-the-gaps’ where that is used to explain social behaviours that are otherwise difficult to understand for the person.

Moreover, a dialectic-of-self is involved that happens within a historical mode-of-consumption and its co-dependent mode-of-production. The dialectic-of-self orientates the person within their social group and environment, identifying *with* or *as* others as they develop. They also incorporate not only life perspectives, group identity, gender, and social place, but technical skills and knowledge. In that process, repression ‘pushes down’ (or ‘out’) some life possibilities in favour of others in the interests of success and survival. The result of this repression is that social factors, changed as they enter the hidden mental structure as representations in thought, become obscure to the person themselves, and experienced as ‘natural’. This produces a ‘social materialism’ operating as a third term between the individual and determinations at the larger historical scale.

And as we have seen, sex has a special role to play in that after a period of childhood preparation, much of this happens ‘all-at-once’ during puberty and becomes entwined with the gendered socialising processes of early adolescence as the individual begins to take up their place in the social group. So, this general model-of-mind, itself an aspect of our ‘general capacity’ for mind, allows for the emergence of historical *modes*-of-mind that explain the behavioural features of a society. In this hypothesis, biological inheritance plays no role beyond the material substrate it provides; it does not explain the specific structural forms of inter-personal life.

Ever since its emergence, whether seen as a purported science of humanity, or as a cultural movement, there have been Marxists who have allowed a space for psychoanalysis. The commitment to reaching into the recesses of the mind, and intolerance of the deceits and hypocrisies of bourgeois sentimentality about sex, the mind and the individual associated with psychoanalysis, have always attracted the attention of some within the Marxist tradition. The motivations have reflected their times. So, when the movement for social liberation and revolution has been on the rise, the appeal of psychoanalysis has been the emancipatory potential it offers. When reaction has been in the ascendant, some in the Marxist camp have looked to psychoanalysis for explanations they have struggled to find elsewhere. Usually this has also revealed distortions and theoretical shortcomings in the forms of Marxism politically dominant during much of the Twentieth Century.

The concerns that have motivated engagement with psychoanalysis here are relevant to some contemporary questions within the Marxist Left: around gender and self-identification; regarding the nature of mental illness; and about the use of ‘dialectical biology’ in explanations of human behaviour. The element of repression that has potential for Marxism is now shorn of its libidinal - and so Freudian - connotations, just as with the notion of the unconscious itself. The meaning ascribed to it is also closer to the notion of ‘sublation’ found in Hegel’s account of the origin of self-consciousness in *The Phenomenology* (1807). And it is non-Freudian in being dialectical in function, creating an unconscious that not only conceals unwanted representations of trauma, but also allows for new formations of thought, identity, expression and orientation in the world.

It is repression then, as a generative psychical principle, that sustains the dialectic between the model-of-mind enabling our creative, innovative, and productive potential, and the mode-of-mind that is the historical realisation of that potential. And it is the structural unconscious it creates that holds the inward mysteries of the self, understood now as entirely social in origin, whilst also opaque to the person themselves. These recesses are the social determinations - the external origins of which are lost from consciousness - known only as ‘always there’ by the person and experienced as natural.

With the Marxist model-of-mind we have achieved something important. Here is a way of understanding ourselves free of the insistence that on some level we must pay our respects to ‘Nature’. These intrusions are no more than ideological interventions intended to frustrate our imaginings of the unfettered potentialities of human expression. They are powerful and sustained by an industry of social mechanisms, cultural manipulations and institutional forces. Overturning them requires an entirely different way of thinking about the feelings and emotive reactions we discover within ourselves. Our model-of-mind allows us to do this. It has required a reframing of Marxism. For this we have considered the treatment of subjectivity by a different intellectual tradition, psychoanalysis. And we have paid careful attention to the concept of ‘repression’ within it, reworking the idea as part of a transformative ‘dialectic-of-self’. Aligning this refashioned ‘repression’ with the perceptions of social and existential risk, we have also created a ‘social materialism’ that clears away any trace of ‘biologism’ in Marxism whilst retaining its status as a materialist doctrine. The result is a solution to our quandary and a unique perspective on the ways in which we construct our identities and more generally on the forms of social behaviour that arise.

In all of this, it is not any ‘already present’ pre-social principle that makes us what we are in any specific cultural or personal way. Rather it is our *social* being – and our social being *only* - that ultimately explains our experience of ourselves; that is the Alpha and Omega of being human, and the source of our potential liberation.

# Postscript: summarising the Marxist model-of-mind; and ‘What next?’

To summarise, we can hypothesise a Marxist model-of-mind using the following elements seen as axes along which different aspects of the human mind can be mapped.

1. A specific **mode-of-production** and aco-dependent **mode-of-consumption** determine the historical field within which mental structure develops.
2. Mental structure emerges as a **mode-of-mind** that belongs to a concrete historical and social setting.
3. That a specific mode-of-mind can be derived from a general model-of-mind is the result of the **radical variability** (and adaptability) of the human brain.
4. This radical variability makes possible a **dialectic-of-self** by which the individual develops their ability to labour upon the world, and simultaneously to become a part of their society.
5. One aspect of this dialectic-of-self is the limitless range of ways in which the material and cultural objects of the natural and social environment can be **internalised**, **introjected,** and **conceptually** **organised** by the mind, in the process producing the ‘subject-for-itself’ (I*o*).
6. A further aspect of the dialectic-of-self is **identification** as the ‘ideal I’ (I*i*) emerges and splits from the subject (I); and the relative social weight of identification as a ‘separate (asocial) individual’ (ΔI*i*), against the ‘collective (social) individual’.
7. As the person develops into their material and cultural world along these axes they come to master **symbolic meaning** through the medium of language, moving from object-related understanding and communication to more abstract thinking and self-identity. The **inner speech** that precedes fixed word-associations, symbolic structure and social communication provides a fluid and pre-lingual substratum of meaning beneath formal and codified speech, culture, and behaviour, so enabling the mode-of-mind to happen.
8. The creation of a mode-of-mind with a social structure of internalisation-introjection and identity-formation – based upon the perception, evaluation and negotiation of many types of **risk** - leaves a sediment of mental material caused by **repression**, now reworked as one moment of a subjective dialectic continuing to work within the person and as a social force; it represents an area of **differentiated social determination** existing beneaththe more explicit influences of a society and its culture, and one that is opaque to the individual and their group.
9. ‘Social determination’ is familiar within Marxist social analysis based upon the tracing of external structural causes for mind-sets, social orientations, cultural beliefs and so forth. However, there are social determinations of different orders, some being opaquer than others. So, whilst outward social causes of internal affective states can be recognised and analysed as such, causes that become internalised or introjected to create a substratum of determinations within the life of the person that, whilst they have their origin in external social processes, can work as hidden forces that are experienced as ‘natural’. Once refashioned as part of a dialectical logic, the concept of ‘repression’, familiar in the psychoanalytical tradition, becomes a **‘generative repression’** makes this comprehensible as an alternative to the naturalising tendencies of dialectical biology when it is applied in discussions of human behaviour, and for topics such as **gender**.
10. Together these elements and processes constitute a **social materialism** that connects the creation of the person with the larger historical processes that create their times.

The Marxist model-of-mind can create different structures of mental life – modes-of-mind – that fit different forms of society, that are organised along lines of object-internalisation and identification. It is trans-historical in its general capacity to create the mode-of-mind; and historical in any of its actual modalities.

This has been for the most part a speculative discussion, and our model-of-mind is a hypothetical construct. It is not a tangible thing, that we can experience with our senses outside of its specifically contextual manifestations. The only measure of its validity will be its explanatory power when applied to real-world problems and controversies. But the advantage it offers lies in the potential illumination of human behaviour in its specific social and cultural forms that requires no appeal to biology, or to nature. It can for instance provide better clarity and a more stable grounding for Marxist responses to questions about gender and sex than dialectical biology. It can help in interpretations of history, especially those regarding social movements and collective memory. It suggests insight into various kinds of mental illness. It can also help explain attachments to types of identity and ideology that fly in the face of reason and self-interest based upon misperceptions of risk. And it can find applications in studies of cultural formation, social behaviour and group identification. But most importantly it carries always the potential for the full and free creativity of the human species, trapped in historically contextual structures of oppression and exploitation, but stirring always beneath those structures and never completely extinguished.

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1. Popper, K. (1962) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Marx too came under Popper’s critique in this regard. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Examples include: Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970); Germain Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970); Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970); and Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rush, F. (1980). Also, Masson, J. (1984). Masson’s allegations were later reframed as part of an ‘anti-Freud agenda’, in the context of interpersonal rivalries within the Washington arm of the Freud Archives in Malcolm, J. (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Crews, F. (2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The 1974 *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, published by The Hogarth Press runs to 24 volumes. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Michael, M. T. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Shedler, J. (2010). Pp. 98-109 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Bruno Bettelheim gives an account of the degeneration of the rule of the Hapsburgs and the emergence of a ‘culture of neurosis’ in Viennese society in his essay *Freud’s Vienna*. Bettelheim, B. (1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Paul Robinson in his book *Freud and His Critics* (1993) puts it well when he says “Like it or not, Freud virtually invented a new way of thinking about the self.” P.269. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Other key names in this movement have been Richard Lewin, Richard Levins, Steven Rose and Leon Kamin. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Marx, K. (1963). P.147. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Engels’ keen interest in science and his extraordinary scientific knowledge is discussed in J D Bernal’s essay *Engels and Science* (1935). Bernal emphasises Engels’ identification of the vindication of a dialectical understanding of the material world over and above the mechanical materialism of the Enlightenment era, evidenced especially by the emergence of organic chemistry and the qualitative chemical changes arising from additive alterations to molecular structure. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A naturalising tendency in theorisations of nature is evident in Alfred Schmidt’s 1962 *The Concept of Nature in Marx*. After a lucid account of the consequences of the capitalist form of production for the destruction of nature, Schmidt proffers a picture of progressive technical mastery over nature, and the *subordination* of nature under socialism, revealing an affinity on this question with the ‘official Marxism’ of the Soviet Union. Burkett, P. (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Marx, K. Capital Volume 1, quoted in Foster (1999) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This process in the development of western capitalism had its accelerated state capitalist equivalent in the Soviet Union of the 1940s under Stalin’s Great Plan for the Transformation of Nature. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Geras, N (1983) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Marx, K. (1969), pp.13-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The role of ‘the biological’ as a physical constraint upon human activity is assessed for its ethical implications by Callinicos, A., (2006: 184-5) in his discussion of Margaret Archer’s recognition of this factor for human morality. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The earliest confirmed evidence of Homo sapiens comes from the Jebel Irhoud site in Morroco. These fossils, whilst confirmed as Sapiens, also have archaic hominal features. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The Herto skulls from the Arfar region of Ethiopia are considered the earliest examples of anatomically modern human fossil remains. These have been dated as being between 160,000 and 154,000 years old. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The current scientific consensus is that this was the last great human migration from which we can trace our own anthropological lineage on all the populated continents. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Patterson, T. (2009), pp.15-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Animal bones with cut marks at the Dikika *Australopithecus afarensis* site in Ethiopia have been dated to 3.4 million years. Stone tools found at the Lomekwi site in Kenya have been dated to 3.3 million years. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Patterson, T. (2009), p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In recent decades, scientific leaps in soft tissue DNA analysis and forensic archaeology, and advances in archaeobiology and biological anthropology have yielded ever more detail about the evolution of body form, anatomy, diet and metabolism of early humans. This growing pre-historical evolutionary evidence offers insights into the development of human technical capability, the origins of the modern human brain and the capacity for sociality in the first human groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm> (History: Fundamental Conditions) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. As a counter to this ideological emphasis on selfish behaviour within evolutionary theory, we should note Peter Kropotkin who emphasised instead the selective role of cooperative behaviour and the advantages it gives to the species in his *Mutual Aid. A Factor of Evolution* (1902). Kropotkin, P. (2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Shocking revelations were published at the time of Lorenz’s award of the Nobel Prize, about his involvement in the war-time Nazi regime. He was awarded the prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1973 with Karl von Frisch and Nikolaas Tinbergen. He is referred to here because of the enormous influence he had in the post-War era in the field of ethology, the study of animal behaviour. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lorenz, K. (1972) [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *“But, to suppress the appetite, I deem  
    Impossible; the stomach is a source  
    Of ills to man, an avaricious gulph  
    Destructive, which to satiate, ships are rigg’d,  
    Seas travers’d, and fierce battles waged remote.”*

    Eumæus to Ulysses, Homer, *The Illiad*. Book 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This interpretation is influenced by the account of language provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his late work, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, posthumous). In this account, ‘the word’ is part of a ‘language game’; derived always from its social context. What is denied here is ‘private language’, not interior language or ‘self’. The fact of internal language is not in question, rather its origin. Wittgenstein, L., (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Geras, N. (1985). P.85 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Wild, S. (2013). P. 185 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The reference to the human face here is anthropological, the face seen as existing between the interior and the exterior, working at the boundary between inward emotion and outward sociality, and crucial to human group solidity. With Emmanuel Levinas we can also note the human face in its ethical aspect, as the limen at which the self sees and understands the humanity of the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Lewontin, R. and Lewin, R. (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Lewontin, R. and Lewin, R. (2009). Pp. 286-288 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Lewontin, R. (2000), pp. 48-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. This ‘constructionist’ view of evolution was the target of attack by Daniel Dennett in his *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (1995). There Dennett defended a reductionist philosophical view of evolution with an algorithmic understanding of natural selection as the basis of human consciousness, meaning and morality. Dennett, D. (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Rose, S., Lewontin, R. C. and Kamin, L. (1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. A particular target of their critique was the Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson, under whom Richard Lewontin had studied at Harvard University. Wilson’s 1979 publishing sensation, *Sociobiology, the New Synthesis*, in its 27th chapter, had put forward a genetic-determinist view of all aspects of human social behaviour. This chapter, Wilson’s application of behavioural evolution to humans, contains the priceless example of the male of the species going ‘out to work’ to bring home the family subsistence as a direct behavioural homology with the hunting of prehistoric males for meat. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Fox Keller, E. (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. This point is acknowledged by Lewontin and Lewin (2009), p.70. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. This differential understanding of change in nature, and the notion of rates of variability, was appreciated by Marx. Patterson, T. (2009), p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Rose *et al*. (1984). P. 276 [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lewontin, R. (1991). P.128. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Lewontin, R. and Levins, R. (2007). P. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Lewontin, R. and Levins, R. (2007). P. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Plato (2005). P. 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Williams, R., (1983). P. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Marcuse, H., (2013). P. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Theodore Adorno talked of the conceptual domination of the object by the word – reifying its identity - in his *Negative Dialectics* (1966). However, the apparent resonance between these ideas is belied by the critique of Hegel in Adorno’s thinking compared to the strong Hegelianism of Marcuse’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Marcuse, H., (2013). P. 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Marcuse, H. (1977). P. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (1970). P. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Skinner, B. F. (1972). P. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. This recalls the reported argument between Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, in which Jung compared Freud’s sex theory to attempting to explain the Notre Dame cathedral by studying the chemistry of the stones it is built from. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Parrington, J. (2021). Pp. 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Fractal patterns of scalar social groupings have also been observed in relation to the Dunbar Number that links neocortical size with group size in higher primates. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Parrington, J. (2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. A similar view is presented in Parrington (2021: 412), though focused particularly on the evolution of the brain of *Homo sapiens* from its hominin precursors and influenced by the Vygotskian theory of tool-based cultural mediation. Indeed, within the Vygotskian theoretical tradition there have been some who have argued for this type of ‘deep’ cultural mediation *e.g.* van der Veer, R. and van Ijzendoorn, M. (1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. A term coined by Gilbert Ryle in his characterisation of Descartes’ philosophy of mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. This account is based upon Chapters B (IV), and C (V, VI and VII) of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit (Mind)* (1807) (Pantianos Classics, 2016; 2018), and Chapters C (I and II) of his *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Continuum, 1990). The ‘dialectic-of-self’ contained in these passages, represents a leaning towards realism in the move from subjective to objective spirit. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Recent philosophical work has reintroduced atomism as essential to the materialist status of Marxism, and to materialism more generally, highlighting the ideological nature of belief in ‘the atom’ from the ancient world to the present. Cockshott, P., *et al* (20240 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Toscano, A., (2014). Pp. 1221-1240 [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. 2019 Nature study [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. For this point I am grateful to the marvellous 2025 BBC series *Human* presented by Ella Al-Shamahi. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Dunbar, R. (1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Lindenfors, P., Wartel, A. and Lind, J. (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hume, D., (1758; 2007), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford University Press. Pp. 12-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Hume, D., (1740; 1969). Pp. 57-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Place, U., (1956). Pp. 44–50 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The ideological and repressive character of Skinner’s ‘materialism’, and his programme ‘behavioural modification’, is discussed in Jacoby, R. (1997). Pp. 70-71 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Dennett, D. (1991). Pp. 110-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Saint Augustine, (1961), *Confessions*, Penguin. P. 212 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Jackson, F., (1982). Pp. 127-136 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Chalmers, D. (1996). Pp. 3-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Chalmers, D. (1996), P. 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Chalmers, D. (1996). Pp. 31-69 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Dennett, D. (1988) [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Dennett, D. (1996). Pp. 74-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Dennett, D. (1991). Pp. 285-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Dennett, D. (1991). Pp. 398-401 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Nikolai Petrovish in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* (1861) ponders exactly this question as he reflects upon the abstract and sterile materialism of Ludwig Buchner’s *Stoff and Kraft*, compared to the summer evening beauty of his garden. Turgenev, I. (1972. P. 131) [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Harari, Y. N. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Sohn-Rethel, A. (1973) [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. This interpretation echoes the idea of a ‘phenomenology of perception’ as coined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty against the transcendent notion of a free consciousness held by Jean Paul Sartre; part of the celebrated debate between these two giants of French phenomenology, both adopting different stances within the school of post-Husserlian philosophy. See Stewart, J. (1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. An emphasis on the institutional aspect here draws upon Bourdieu’s sociological ‘field theory’ under which individuals move within social and cultural fields that have their own distinct institutional dynamics. See Bourdieu, P. (1990) and Bourdieu, P. (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Fromm, Erich (1980). P.13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. What counts as ‘discoveries’ in Freud’s work varies across different commentaries. Along with those already mentioned we could also add: repression and the roots of morality in the suppression of early experiences (Reich, W. (1997), pp. 26-27.); the relevance of the suppression of sexual urges to woman’s oppression (Schneider, M. (1974), *Neurosis and Civilization. A Marxist/Freudian Synthesis,* Seabury Press. P21-22); and the ubiquity of neurosis, as well as the historical character of ‘the self’ (Callinicos, A. (1999), *Social Theory: A Historical Introduction*, London, Polity. Pp. 190-91) [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. This case – as one of different interpretive meanings within each system, rather than commonality of substantive cause - is put by Paul Ricœur in his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (1970), New Haven, Yale. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Hegel, G. W. F. (1977), Chapter IV, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Oxford: Oxford University Press [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Freud, S. (1933; 1966), ‘Lecture XXXV. The question of a Weltanschauung’ in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton. P.623 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1976). P.34 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) Freud locates the origin of religious belief in wish-fulfilment, the definitive aspect of religion being its origin in impossible desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Plato (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Bacon, F. (2008). Book 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Marx, K (1859 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The term ‘charaktermaske’, in fact appears as late as the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*, published in 1867. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Marx, K. (1852; 2022). P.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Freud, S. (1966), ‘Lecture XXXI. The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’, in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton. P.533 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Freud, S. (1966), ‘Lecture XXII. Some Thoughts on Development and Regression - Aetiology’, in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton. P.352 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. This constant and ‘given’ *i.e.* biological status of the id has been noted as a positive feature of the human condition by Lionel Trilling (1967). In this view the id, standing ‘outside culture’, is a realm that cannot be manipulated or controlled by it; representing then a residue of hope in an otherwise spiritually desolate world. Trilling here also observes Freud’s ambivalent assessment of culture generally, as something that the self is set against, “having been from the first reluctant to enter it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Marx, K. ‘Estranged Labour’ in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.* [Estranged Labour, Marx, 1844 (marxists.org)](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm) (accessed 6/12/2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Schneider, M. (1974). P25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Freud’s observations of the nervous tissue of lamprey eels are cited in the historically important paper by Cajal on the synapse. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Richard Lewontin in his *The Triple Helix*. *Gene, organism and environment* (2000), points out that metaphors for the mind have always been drawn from the most advanced technological developments of the time *viz.* the telephone switchboard, the hologram, the digital computer, the parallel processing computer, and the distributed processing computer (Lewontin, R., 2000; 74-5)*.* Stephen Rose makes this point also in his *The Making of Memory* (2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Freud, S. (1912; 1974). Pp. 227-238. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Freud, S. (1920; 1974). Pp. 50-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Freud, S. (1923; 1975). Pp. 46-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Freud. S., (1909; 1975). Pp. 231-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Freud, S. (1917; 1975). Pp. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Freud to Fliess, May 25, 1895, p. 129 in Bonaparte, M., Freud, A., and Kris, E. (Eds.), *The origins of psycho-analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, drafts and notes, 1887-1902*, (James Strachey, Trans.), London: Imago, 1954. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. ‘Hysteria’ is a long-discredited term of Victorian medicine, used to describe a host of symptoms in mentally ill women that are now understood as resulting from a range of quite different medical and psychological causes. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. The ‘Anna O’ of this case was Bertha Pappenheim, who would go on to become influential in social work theory and practice as well as a noted feminist. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Freud, S. (1899; 1991), *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991. P. 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Breuer, J. and Freud, S. (1895), *Studies on Hysteria*. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 2. London. Hogarth Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Freud, S. (1900). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. TheComplete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 5. P. 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Freud, S. (1895), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 6. London. Hogarth Press. P.275, n. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Freud, S. (1989), *The Unconscious,* in Gay, P. (ed.) *The Freud Reader*, Norton. Pp. 576-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Freud, S. (1911). P.213**-226**. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Freud, S. (1911). P. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Freud, S. (1905). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Freud, S. (1905). P. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Freud, S. (1900; 1953), Volume 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. In his essay ‘Freud and Literature’ (1940) the literary critic Lionel Trilling noted this Freudian formulation as representing a ‘mithridatizing’ phenomena in literature. This term, an essentially homeopathic one, refers to the repeated return to pain and trauma to create an anaesthetising effect for a character. Examples, Trilling explains, are found in Greek and Shakespearian tragedies. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Freud, S. (1923). P.34 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Freud, S. (1933). ‘The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’ in *The New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Lecture XXXI). The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 22. P. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Freud, S. (1926), *The Question of Lay Analysis*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 20 (1925-1926). P.222 [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. This was the basis of the ‘word-association’ technique employed by Freud in his practice with patients. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. With this polemic Lenin was dismembering a theoretical rival to Marxism within Russian social democracy, clearing the way for Marxist education and propaganda within the workers movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Lenin, V., (1972), *Materialism and Empirio-criticism. Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy.* Foreign Languages Press [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Lenin, V. (1972), p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Lenin, V. (1972), p. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Lenin, V. (1972), p. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Franck, Adolphe (1875), *Dictionnaire des sciences philosophiques,* Paris. Cited by Lenin. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Lenin was to revise his philosophical position in his *Philosophical Notebooks* (1916), a series of reflections written over 20 years, but crucially including papers written between 1914-1916, that were influenced by his reading of Hegel. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Pannekoek, A. (1938), *Lenin as Philosopher*, Amsterdam. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. In fact, Pannekoek’s phrase is ‘middle-class materialism’. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Pannekoek provides a full account of this distinction in his *Materialism and Historical Materialism* (1942). In that work, rejecting the notion that Marxism is concerned with a ‘matter-mind antithesis’, he says: *“The axiom of materialism, that the mental is determined by the material world, has therefore entirely different meanings for the two doctrines. For bourgeois materialism it means that ideas are products of the brain, of the structure and composition of the brain substance, in the last instance, of the dynamics of the atoms of the brain. For historical materialism it means that the ideas of man are determined by his social environment. Society is his environment which acts upon him through his sense organs.”* (Pannekoek, A. 1942, New Essays, Vol. VI, No. 2 Fall 1942). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. This is a theme that runs through all of Pannekoek’s philosophical writings. As early as 1907, in his essay *Socialism and Religion*, citing the Marxist philosopher Joseph Dietzgen, he writes: *“Our conception of things true and real is derived from our experience in the world, our conception of things good and holy from our needs. But these mental reflections are not mere mirrored pictures, which reproduce the object exactly as it is, while the mind plays a purely passive role. No, the mind transforms everything, which it assimilates. Out of the impressions and feelings, by which the material world exerts an influence upon it, it makes mental conceptions and assumptions.”* International Socialist Review, April 1907. In his *Society and Mind in Marxian Philosophy* (1937), he emphasis the social character of mind against those who held to the notion of innate ideas (Pannekoek, A., 1937, Science and Society, no. 4. Summer). [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Although not published until after his death by Engels in 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Marx, K. (1969), pp.13-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. *The Essence of Christianity*, a work of anti-religious humanism published by Ludwig Feuerbach in 1841, had a significant early influence upon Marx and Engels. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Lukács, G. (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Vygotsky, L., (1934; 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. In his *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (1830), Hegel posits an ‘immediate unity’ between ‘subjective spirit’ (psyche) and ‘objective spirit’ (orientation towards the world). [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. O’Brien, M. (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. The stratifications of reality, each irreducible to any other in the thinking of Cornelius Castoriadis, capture some of the meaning of the limit/origin limina given here. For Castoriadis, the emergence for instance, of humanity breaks the continuity with the nature from which it came, ‘leaning’ upon it to create its own world. Castoriadis, C. (2005). Pp. 229-237. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. This is comparable to the ‘*hyle*’ in Husserl’s phenomenology, the unmediated material of consciousness from which meaning is attributed to perceptual forms by sensory mental processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Vygotsky, L., (1934; 2012), Chapter 5. Pp. 52-81 [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Vygotsky, L., (1934; 2012), Pp. 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. A fascinating example of ‘wordless’ (non-verbal) meaning in enculturation and behavioural habituation is provided by Maurice Bloch in his account of the reproduction of kinship patterns in Zafimaniry communities. Bloch, M. (1998), Pp. 47-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. There is a similarity here to the idea of ‘rasa’, a wordless aesthetic sensibility that suffuses the artistic and literary works of an era, found in the Sanskrit text *Natya Shastra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. # Here we can note Freud’s perspectives on theatre, and particularly the character of Hamlet, in his discussion of the pleasure the audience finds in the partial release of repressed desire within the safe confines of ‘the play’, in his essay ‘Psychopathic Characters on the Stage’ (1960), Freud, S. (1960), pp. 144-148. Focusing upon stage performance *per se*, Otto Fenichel applies the similar principle of ‘partial instinct’ in his analysis of the actor’s motivations as unresolved infantile exhibitionism in his essay ‘On the Psychology of Acting’ 1952). Fenichel, O. (1960), pp. 459-464.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. For an illuminating discussion of Jameson’s use of historical ‘totality’ see Callinicos, A. (1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Jameseon, F., (1983) [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. We should note here the highly sexualised culture that characterised life in Vienna in the years that straddled the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, ubiquitous prostitution, and sexual crimes. McEwan, B. (2012). Pp14-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Williams, R. (1978). Pp. 121-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Jameson, F. (1984; 1992) [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. In the third part of his triadic *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences in Outline*(1830)), Hegel provides a psychology structured in the following way: Theoretical spirit, comprising ‘intuition’, ‘representation’, ‘recollection’, ‘imagination’, ‘memory’, ‘thinking’; and practical spirit comprising ‘practical feeling’, ‘drives and wilfulness’, ‘happiness’ and ‘free spirit’. Marx was familiar with Hegel’s psychology. Ikäheimo, H., (2016), ‘Hegel’s Psychology’ in Moyar, D. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel,* Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Marx, K. (1970). Henceforth referred to as *The Critique*. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Marx, K. (1970). P. 39 [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Marx, K. (1970). Pp. 8-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Marx, K. (1970). P. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Marx, K. (1845; 1976). P. 36 [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1845; 1976), *The (Critique of the) German Ideology* in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume 5, Moscow Progress Publishers. P.53 [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Labriola, A. (1896: 2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Other key works of this period include *The Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843) and *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847). [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Marx, K. (1994a). P. 263 [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Marx, K. (1994b), 'Economic Manuscript of 1861-63 (Conclusion): A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'. In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Volume. 34. (1861-63). Moscow: Progress Publishers. Pp. 457-58 [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Marx, K., (1990). *Capital*. London: Penguin. P.165. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Adorno, T., (1932;1984). Pp. 111-124 [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. (1997). P. 186-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Whitebook, J., (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. The similarities between Sohn-Rethel’s account of the origins of human subjectivity, and that of the psychologist George Herbert Mead, are discussed in Granberg, M. (2019). Granberg identifies the key point of difference between the two theorists in the place of departure to which consciousness returns, with Mead identifying this return with the *un*hidden social meanings that arise from inter-subjective processes. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. The role of rupture between formal institutional pedagogy and the social and cultural pedagogy in which it is situated as a cause of social revolt, is discussed by István Mészáros in his *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*, (1970), Chapter X. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. There is an echo here of Vygotsky’s theory of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) created by the adult for the child to develop through and into. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Bertram, G. W., (2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. See Jay, M., 1973. P.42 [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. The description coined by David Strauss. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. This view was foreshadowed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in his *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Kautsky, K., (1934) [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Kolakowski, L. (2005). P. 388 [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Bernstein, E. (1899), *Evolutionary Socialism. A Criticism and Affirmation*, (1899). New York: B.W. Huebsch. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924002311557>. Published in England as *Preconditions of Socialism* (1909; 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Stalin, J., (1938) [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Kolakowski, L. (2005). Pp. 902-913. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. In politics Benedetto Croce was a high-profile figure in Italian liberalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Glatzer Rosenthal, B. (1993). P. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Kolakowski, L. (2005). P.825. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. # Kon. I. (1995), *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: Sexual Politics from the Age of the Czars to Today*, The Free Press. P. 52.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Healey, D. (2001), *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*, University of Chicago Press. P. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. The ‘sexual release’ of the professional classes in Russia, with the emergence of political tolerance and democratic sentiment is the subject of Laura Engelstein’s 1992 book, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia.* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press]. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. # Carleton, G., (2005), *Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia Sexual Revolution in Bolshevik Russia*, University of Pittsburgh Press. P.2.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. # This is a theme explored by Eric Naiman (1997), tracing as he does the sexualised discursive patterns that inscribed the texts of contemporary literature and popular culture of the 1920s.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. # Carleton, G., (2005). P. 3

     [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Kolakowski, L. (2005). P. 830 [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. # Naiman, E. and Kiaer, C. (2006), *~~Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside~~*~~. Indiana University Press.~~ Pp. 154-182

     [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. # An influential text within the Komosol was *The Twelve Sexual Commandments of the Revolutionary Proletariat*, written by the Freudian Marxist Aron Zalkind, that promoted sexual abstinence in the interests of revolutionary discipline and comradeship.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Halfin, I. (2003). Pp. 96-147. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. # Miller, M. (1998). P. 54

     [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Angelini, A. (2008), P.369-388 [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Gonzáles-Rey, F. (2015). P. 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Miller, M. (1998). P. 28 [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Vygotsky, S., Lev, (2012); Vygotsky, S., Lev, (1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. In his 1921 report Osipov does credit the ‘steady work’ that Rosenthal was doing. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Rosenthall took her own life in 1921. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Husband of Vera Schmidt, the child psychologist. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Miller, M. (1998). P. 60 [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Also known as The Solidarity International Experimental Home. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Miller, M. (1998). P. 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Vasilyeva, N. (2000). Pp. 5-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Reich, W. (2012), *Sex-Pol: Essays 1929-1934*, Verso. P. 77 [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Tögel, C. (1989), Lenin und die Rezeption der Psychoanalyse in der Sowjetunion der Zwanziger Jahre. *Sigmund Freud House Bulletin*, 13. Pp. 16-27. Cited in Páramo-Ortega, R. (2015), Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Attempting a Brief Review of an Old Problem, *Annual Review of Critical Psychology (Marxism and Psychology)*, Vol. 12. P. 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Trotsky, L. (2009), *Literature and Revolution*, Haymarket. P. 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Miller, M. (1989). P. 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Trotsky quoted in Miller, M. (1989). P. 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Trotsky quoted in Páramo-Ortega, R. (2015). P. 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Trotsky, L. (2009). P. 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. (https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1932/11/oct.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. This situation, the result of the codified orthodoxy of Soviet Marxism, continued into the 1950s. In 1950 the ‘biologist’ Olga Lepeshinskaya, with a string of false and grandiose pseudo-scientific claims behind her, sensationally announced the successful production of living cells from inorganic substrates. With no further scrutiny, this absurd claim was hailed in *Pravda* as a triumph of ‘socialist science’ over ‘bourgeois science’. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. In 1941 he was given the State Stalin Prize for science. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Zalkind himself continued to be hounded for his earlier associations with psychoanalysis, disappearing sometime after the closing down of the field of pedology in 1936. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. ‘Sex-Pol’ was an abbreviation for the German Society of Proletarian Sexual Politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Reich, W., (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1997). Pp. 197-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Federn, P. (1919) [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Reich, W. (1972) [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. In *The Mass Psychology of Fascism,* first published in English in 1946, Reich lists four ‘discoveries’ of psychoanalysis: the unconscious; infantile sexuality; repression; and the origin of morality in the suppression of early childhood memory. Reich, W. (1997). Pp. 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Reich, W. (1972). P. 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Reich, W. (1972). P. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Reich, W. (1972). P. 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Reich, W. (1972). Pp. 53-54 [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Reich, W. (1980) [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Reich, W. (1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Bernfeld was later to turn against Reich for the latter’s communism and was instrumental to him being expelled from the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1934. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Bernfeld, S. (1929) [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Bernfeld, S. (1925a) [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Bernfeld, S. (1925b) [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. *Op Cit*. Pp. 41-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Fenichel, O. (1967). P. 298 [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Fenichel, O. (1954). P.261. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. See Trotsky, L (1944; 1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Fromm was to maintain an appreciation of Trotsky as a historical figure into the late 1950s at least. See Anderson, K. (2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Later republished as *The Fear of Freedom* (1942). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. *The Working-class in Weimar Germany. A Psychological and Sociological Study.* (1984). (Based upon a report from empirical work conducted in 1929: *German Worker 1929- A Survey and its Methods*). [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Fromm, E. (2001) [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. Fromm, E. (2001). P. 25 [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Fromm, E. (1962). Pp. 119-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Fromm was to develop the concept of ‘automaton conformity’ into the ‘marketing orientation’ (or type) in *Man for Himself* (1947). Pp. 67-81 [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. # See Burston, D. (1991), *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, Harvard University Press. Pp. 207-229.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. McLaughlin, N. (1999), ‘Origin Myths in the Social Sciences: Fromm, the Frankfurt School and the Emergence of Critical Theory’, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 24 (1). Pp 109-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Fromm, E. (2001). Pp. 247-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Fromm was to continue with this critical engagement with Freud’s work throughout his life and it was the subject matter of the last book he was to publish: *The Greatness and Limitations of Freud’s Thought* (1980). His critique covered the theory of the libido, the Oedipus Complex, character theory and Freud’s theory of the death instinct. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Fromm, E. (2003), *Man for Himself*, Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. Fromm, E. (1995), *The Art of Loving,* Thorsons [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Fromm, E. (1968), *The Nature of Man (Problems of Philosophy),* MacMillan USA. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Fromm, E. (2013), *To Have or to Be,* Bloomsbury Academic [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. See Fromm, E. (2011), *Marx’s Concept of Man*, Bloomsbury Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Fromm (E.). P.164 [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Jay, M., (1973), p.107 [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Marcuse, H. (1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Marcuse, H. (1998). P. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Ocay, J. (2009). P. 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Marcuse, H. (1998). Pp. 87-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Marcuse, M. (1991). P74. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Marcuse, M. (1991). P72. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. An observation made by Aronowitz (2013). P. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Garland, C. (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Marcuse, H. (2000). P.91. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. The material for this 1958 publication had derived from Marcuse’s work at the US Government’s Office for Strategic Services during the War. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Marcuse, H. (1958; 1969). P 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Despite the later uptake of Marcuse’s reworking of Freud’s libido theory by the post-war counter-culture there were those within the traditional North American Left who at the time of the publication of *Eros and Civilization* remained sharply critical of its individualised character *e.g.* Mattick, P. (1956). [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Lacan’s first attempt to present the ‘mirror stage’ had been thirteen years earlier at the 14th Congress. Before his ten minutes were up Lacan’s presentation was abruptly cut short by Ernest Jones who was in the chair: an early portent of Lacan’s difficult relationship with the mainstream of the international psychoanalytical community. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. For George Herbert Mead, the major theorist of symbolic interactionism, the continuous mental impressions, perceptions, and constructions of the other person are what make socially meaningful and empathetic relationships possible: the source of ‘sociality’. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Wiley, N. (2003). Pp. 501–513. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Lacan, J. (2002). P.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. The direct influence of Saussurian linguistic theory is evident here. So too is the anthropological structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss with which Lacan was deeply engaged in the 1950s. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Lacan, J. (2002). P.67. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Lacan, J. (1999). **P.48.**L'inconscient est structur� comme un language.L'inconscient est structur� comme un language.L'inconscient est structur� comme un language. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Homer, S. (2005). P69. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. NTS: is there a comparison with Marcuse to made here re: surplus repression? [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Lacan, J. (2002), ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ in *Écrites*, Norton. P. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. The ‘a’ standing for *autre* (‘other’). [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Fanon, F. (2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. McCoy, L. (2011). P.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. Fanon, F. (1967) [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Nursey-Bray (1972) for example has explored the tensions between the influences of Sartre and Marx within Fanon’s thought. (Nursey-Bray, P. (1972), ‘Marxism and Existentialism in the Thought of Frantz Fanon’, *Political Studies*, Vol. XX (2). Pp. 152-168). [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Fanon, F. (2001). P. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Fanon, F. (1990), P.57. Quoted by Faircheld, H. (1994), ‘Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* in Contemporary Perspective’, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25 (2). P. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950) [Publisher: Editions du Seuil. Paris],Mannoni had argued that the Malagasi of Madagascar had deep within their culture and social-psychology, a ‘dependency-complex’ that transferred to the colonial situation. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Fanon, F. (1967). P.12 [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Fanon, F. (1967). P. 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. Fanon, F. (1967). P. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. This is an observation made by Margaret Mead in her descriptions of the modes of sexual partnering and familial dynamics of the Samoan, Mundugumor and Trobriand peoples. Mead, M. (1950). Pp. 119-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Fanon, F. (1967). P. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Fanon, F. (1967). P. 165 [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Fanon, F. (1967). Pp. 161-164 [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Fanon gives us an example here of how a perceived and unreal ‘threat’ can become reified into something the self responds to just as powerfully as if it were real, so giving us an insight into the roots of irrationalism and reaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Examples that were especially influential were *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* by Anne Koedt (1970) and *The Politics of Orgasm* by Susan Lydon (1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. From the late 1990s onwards, the anatomical research of Helen O’Connell and others has established that the clitoris extends into the woman’s pelvic zone by several inches, where it connects fully with the vaginal muscles. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Mitchell, J. (1966), ‘Women: the Longest Revolution’, *New Left Review*. No. 40. This was republished with minor changes in Mitchell, J. (1971; 1977), *Woman’s Estate*. Pp. 75-96; 100-122; and 144-151. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Mitchell (1977). Pp. 81-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Mitchell, J. (1974). P.349. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Mitchell, J. (1974). Pp. 305-318. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Freud, S. (1925), *Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Differences Between the Sexes*. (<http://www.aquestionofexistence.com/Aquestionofexistence/Problems_of_Gender/Entries/2011/8/28_Sigmund_Freud_files/Freud%20Some%20Psychological%20Consequences%20of%20the%20Anatomical%20Distinction%20between%20the%20Sexes.pdf> . Accessed 14 March 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Cited by Mitchell, J. (1984). P. 267 [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. As often with Freud, his discussion of the repression of the clitoris can read strangely to the modern reader given the impact of the Woman’s Liberation Movement on awareness of its importance for female sexuality. We can only remind ourselves to understand Freud in terms of his historical and cultural context. We might do well also to keep in mind that the tension between active and passive sexuality remains a battleground in our culture today. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Mitchell, J. (1985) in Mitchell, J. and Rose, J. (1985). P. 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Mitchell, J. (1984), P. 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. Mitchell, J. (1971), *Women’s Estate*, Penguin. P. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 143 [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 243 [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (2009). P. 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Althusser, L. (2005). P.101 [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Althusser, L. (2005). Pp. 101-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Althusser, L. (1993). P. 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Althusser, L. (1978). P.59-63 [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Althusser, L. (2005). Pp. 229-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Althusser, L. (2006a). Pp. 182-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Althusser, L. (2001). P. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Althusser, L. (2001), ‘A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press. P. 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Blaise Pascal. 17th Century mathematician and Christian philosopher. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. Althusser, L. (1993a). Pp.44-51 [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Althusser, L. (1993a). P.50 [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Althusser, L. (2014). P. 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Althusser, L. (1993a). P.50 [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Althusser, L. (1996), ‘Freud and Lacan’ in *Writings on Psychoanalysis*, Columbia. P. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Althusser, L. (1993b). P. 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Goran Therborn was to develop Althusser’s mechanism of interpellation to comprise four axes: ‘inclusive-existential’; ‘inclusive-historical’; ‘positional-existential’; and ‘positional-historical’. Together these organise the ideological fields that direct the person towards their class location, economic role and personal identity. The process of ‘subjectification’ involved he coupled with ‘qualification’ by which the person becomes equipped to take up their ‘role’ within capitalist economic relations. Therborn, G. (1980) [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Althusser, L. (1993b). Pp. 54-55 [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Kant, I. (1999). Pp. 201-266 [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. ## Žižek, S. (2009a). Pp. 125-6

     [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Here we part company with Zizek with respect to the derivation of a mode-of-mind (with particular characteristics borne by the individual) from the model-of-mind (the abstract substrate that is the condition for specific mind to emerge.) [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Žižek, S. (2009b). P. 141 [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Ferguson, Iain, (2017). P. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Jacoby, R., (1983) [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Vološinov, V (1976) [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Freud, S. (1966), ‘Lecture XXXIV. Explanations, Applications and Orientations’, in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton. P.611 [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. For a discussion of Freud in relation to John Stuart Mill see Roazen, P. (2000), pp. 1-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Freud attempts to explain group identity in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) by an adaptation of his theoretical model. His explanation relies on the power of the superego becoming reduced by the libidinal bonds that hold the mass together, allowing the unconscious a free rein where normally its drives and appetites would be curtailed. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Marx, K. (1973), *The Grundrisse*. Penguin. P.84 [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Freud, S. (1920; 1974). P.13 [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Lichtman, R. (1986). Pp. 42-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Marx, K. (1976). P.53 [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Freud, S. (1913; 1919) [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Freud, S. (1913; 1919), *Totem and Taboo*, Brill. P.324 [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. The notion of ‘European ascendancy’ in academic anthropology, informed by notions of ‘racial essentialism’ survived well into the twentieth century. One example of this is *The Races of Europe* (1939) by the Harvard University anthropologist Carlton Stevens Coon. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Engels, F. (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Freud rarely uses the term ‘instinct’ (‘instinkt’), precisely because of its biologistic overtones. The term he typically uses in *The Instincts and their* *Vicissitudes* is ‘drive’ (‘trieb’) with a meaning closer to ‘desire’, cathected to an object-of-desire that it pursues. The rendering of ‘trieb’ as ‘instinct’ was the decision of Freud’s English translator, James Strachey. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Freud, S. (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works, 123-246 [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. This reading of Freud is emphasised particularly by Castoriadis who uses the term ‘*anaclisis*’ from Aristotle, to describe the relationship between mental representations and biological factors as a conditional ‘leaning on’, rather than one of origin. Castoriadis, C. (2005). Pp. 281-291. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Freud, S. (1915; 121-122) [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Freud’s flight into speculative biology and a type of vitalist cosmology caused consternation amongst even his most devoted followers, making *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* probably his most controversial theoretical work. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Freud, S. (1924). P. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Marx, K. (1969), pp.13-15 [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Karl Marx (2007a)*.* P.198 [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Marx, K. (1977). Pp. 88-94 [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Marx, K., (1977). P. 92 [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Danto, E. (2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Gaztambide, D. (2019). Pp. 35-37 [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Lichtman, R. (1986). P. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Roheim, G. (1925; 1971), *Australian Totemism: A Psycho-Analytic Study in Anthropology*, Routledge. Rohiem was not explicitly political beyond his fierce opposition to the bourgeois nuclear family structure, reducing all social and economic phenomena to psychological categories. Indeed, his framing of pre-modern - albeit non-repressed - societies as ‘primitive’, typical of the anthropology of this era, makes for uncomfortable reading today. For a discussion of Roheim’s work see Robinson, P. (1970), *The Sexual Radicals*, Temple Smith. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. The radical intellectual life of the Berlin Psychoanalytical Institute, and its contrast to the more conservative scene at Vienna around Freud himself, is discussed in Jacoby, R., (1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Jacoby, R., (1983). Pp. 21-27 [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Roberts, R. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. One of the great texts of European Marxist philosophy, Jean Paul Sartre’s *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) is precisely an attempt to reconcile this paradox. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Marx and Engels make occasional use of ‘Verdrängung’, meaning ‘repression’, or ‘displacement’, when discussing aspects of capitalist competition or the historical passing of historical economic forms. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. The possibility that repression is central to regulation in the social group may be related to the problems of social-overload and sensory-overload suffered by those who have autism or autistic-traits, where the demands of many social cues come so to speak, ‘all-at-once’ and without the filtering that repression allows for. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. There is a resonance in this type of risk-based social materialism for the creation of the person, with an aspect of the aleatory Marxism of the late Althusser, in which encounters, events and decisions are seen as central, and so contingency put in place of any reductive determinism or historical teleology. Althusser, L. (2006b) [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. An objection to this position is that the mind can do nothing beyond ‘natural constraints’ (Moll, I., 1991). This is a different way of saying that the mind exists as mental activity within the brain and expresses a resistance to a perceived drift into idealism. However, the hypothesis here is that the possibilities of the mind, rooted in the brain’s capacity for reconfiguration of its own ‘rules of thought’, allows concept formation to exceed the limitations of the materially possible. It is not a concession to idealism. Rather it is an aspect of materialism, properly understood. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. A compression of ‘ensemblistic-identitarian’. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Castoriadis, C. (2005). Pp. 369-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Krader, Lawrence, ed. (1974) [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Gruner. R., (1977: 36) [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Ladrièr, J.(1977) [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Lucien Lévi-Bruhl used the concept of ‘participation mystique’ to explain the active ‘presence’ of the dead in the culture of pre-modern societies. Lévy-Bruhl, L. (1912; 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Sykes, R. (2020). P. 238-264 [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. There is considerable current debate amongst palaeontologists about the interpretation of artefacts found at Neanderthal burial sites. Wild, S. (2023). Pp. 152-158 [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Wild, S. (2023). Pp. 187-191 [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Lewis-Williams, D. (2012). P.40 [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Geneste, J. M., (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Lewis-Williams, D. (2012) places explanatory significance on the abstract fixed-shape patterns that appear in the Palaeolithic record. He connects this with accounts of hallucinatory experiences under the influence of psychotropic drugs and intense ritual. His discussion is resonant with Karl Jung’s notion of recurring archetypes in myth and religion, and this is indeed where Lewis-Williams’ focus upon shamanism to understand parietal art comes into focus. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Imaginary entities, half-human, half-animal. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. This shift predates by approximately 40,000 years, the rapid rate of settlement that characterised the Neolithic Revolution of Gordon Childe’s periodisation in *Man Makes Himself* (1936). [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Mithen, S. (1996) [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Such modelling is compatible with Noam Chomsky’s theory of rapid language acquisition. Whilst the relevant neuronal pathways involved may be ubiquitous, the ‘Universal Grammar’ they support creates a vast linguistic flexibility, making possible the variety of languages we see today. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Freud, S. (1915). P147 [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Freud does suggest a generative role for ‘repression’ in earlier work such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), where it is described as a source of representational symbolism, and in the 1908 essay *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* that touches upon repression as the root of creative expression operating as a socially acceptable outlet for dangerous instincts. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Freud, S. (1915). P156 [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Žižek, S. (2024). P.22 [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. The overthrow of this Hegelian notion is the point upon which Marx’s materialism turns in his discussion of it in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Fichte, J. H. (2008) [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. The terms ‘Herrschaft’ und ‘Knechtschaft’ from the original text are also commonly given as ‘lordship’ and ‘bondage’ in English translations. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Vygotsky, L. (1930; 1997), paragraph 13. Pp. 85-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. Price, D. (2022). P.21 [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. A neurochemical model for this possibility is discussed in Parrington, J. (2021), *Mind Shift. How Culture Transformed the Human Brain*, Oxford. Pp. 178-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. The notion of ‘the unconscious’ as an entity, having properties, modes of action, and so on, along with that of ‘the idea’, is considered a strange one by Alisdair MacIntyre in his *The Unconscious. A Conceptual Analysis* (1958). There, he describes the status of the unconscious rather as an unobservable hypothesis, though one that ultimately lacks explanatory power, unable to create testable propositions, unlike more definitely scientific hypotheses such as that of ‘the electron’. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Engels, F. (1884; 1976) [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Engels, F. (1894; 1975), ‘Afterword’ to *On Social Relations in Russia*, in *Collected Works*, volume. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. The historical variability required of the mode-of-mind should be seen in the light of Marx’s own wide-ranging ethnological studies of the various developmental paths leading out of the ‘primitive accumulation’ stage of human society, to different kinds of class society. See Patterson, T. (2009), *Karl Marx, Anthropologist*. Berg. Pp. 119-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Ferguson, I. (2017). 42-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. This reality is conveyed wonderfully in the hilarious, though also tragic, factory scene in Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 film *Modern Times*. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Roberts, R. (2015). Pp. 38 & 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Bentall, R. (2010). Pp. 152-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. From the late 1940s onwards medical classifications of mental illness drew upon the Kraepelin model. These were: the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-6) published in 1948; and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) first published in 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Lichtman, R. (1986). Pp. 256-275. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Sedgwick, P. (1982). Pp. 37-8; and Sedgwick, P. (1981). Pp. 235-248). [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. See the discussion of feminist critiques of Marx on this question in Brown, H. (2012), pp. 11-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Marx, K. ‘Estranged Labour’ in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.* [Estranged Labour, Marx, 1844 (marxists.org)](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm) (accessed 2/7/2021) [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Marx. K. (2007b). P.101. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. The construction of heterosexual culture in early modern European societies is discussed in Tin, L. G. (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Freud, S. (1910), ‘A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume 11 (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works. Pp. 163-176. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Gangestad, S. and Dinh, T., (2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Dixson A. F. (2009) suggests examples of the loss of oestrus may have occurred 50 million years ago in some early simian primates. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Fenichel, O. (1939). Pp. 263–274. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. For Marcuse, what is given to us in ideology as the fixed structure of our experience is only the obverse ‘negative’ form of the unfixed and alternative possibilities of the truth of our social situation. *“This world contradicts itself. Common sense and science purge themselves from this contradiction; but philosophical thought begins with the recognition that the facts do not correspond to the concepts imposed by common sense and scientific reason—in short, with the refusal to accept them. To the extent that these concepts disregard the fatal contradictions which make up reality, they abstract from the very process of reality. The negation which the dialectic applies to them is not only a critique of conformist logic, which denies the reality of contradictions; it is also a critique of the given state of affairs on its own ground—of the established system of life, which denies it of promises and potentialities.”* Marcuse, H. (1960). P.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. This conceptual shift recalls the ‘eidetic reduction’ technique employed in Husserl’s phenomenology, in which all particular qualities are erased to reveal a fundamental and abstracted essence. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Butler, J. (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Butler, J. (2007), p.45. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Butler also explores the theorisation of ‘woman’ as ‘natural’ - meaning ‘of nature’, and not ‘of culture’ - in the work of Luce Irigaray who, in their critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis, highlights the positioning of ‘the feminine’ outside of Lacan’s Symbolic register, leaving ‘the masculine’ as the sole bearer of culture and universal representation. Irigaray, L. (1985), *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Butler, J. (1997). Pp. 106-131. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. See also Butler, (1988), “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” [[Document2 (mariabuszek.com)](http://mariabuszek.com/mariabuszek/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/BtlrPerfActs.pdf)] [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. The oldest so far in this region is the Venus of Hohle Fels, dated as at least 35,000 years old. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. See Balme, J. and Bowdler, S. (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Pansexual behaviour is evident in Bonobo chimps and is seen in other primate species, being a frequent means of calming intra-group tensions and maintaining social bonds [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. This is not to suggest that this early form of gendering was necessarily associated with structural oppression. Indeed, there are many evidenced examples of tribal societies in which gender-fluidity was accepted, and seen as positive within the norms and culture of the group. See Miles, L. (2020). And today there are several examples of non-binary gender identities that are accepted within their societies, including the Fa’afaine and Fa’afatama of Samoa, the Baklâ of the Philippines, the Muxe of Mexico, the Hijira of India and the Calabal, Calabai and Bissu of Indonesia. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. The kinship rites of clan-based and tribal societies that provided the empirical substance of the early structuralist anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss are important examples of this exogamous heterosexuality See Levi-Strauss (1971) [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Turnbull, C. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. The positioning of puberty-rituals as mechanisms of socialisation, following the pioneering work of Bronislaw Malinowski amongst the Trobriand islanders, was contradicted by Bruno Bettleheim in his *Symbolic Wounds. Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (1954). In that book Bettleheim theorises a mutual envy between the male and female adolescents, the puberty rite becoming then a resolution of the resultant tensions for the young male and female, and an establishment of the sexed-egos of both. Bettleheim, B. (1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Lewis-Williams, D. (2012), p.40. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. This splitting of gender recalls the wonderful tale of Aristophanes in Plato’s *The Symposium*. Here, Zeus splits in two the rolling bi-sexual spheres that constituted humanity, casting them forever asunder from one another, leaving them destined to roam through life in search of their lost other halves. This story is also cited by Freud in his *The Instincts and their Vicissitudes* (1915). [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1972) [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Even by the late medieval period there is evidence of a seasonality in childbirth with marriage and cultural celebrations of fertility timed around the necessary cycles of agricultural work, harvest, food supply, and optimal health. Such cycles also relied on predominant cultures-of-gender that reflected the imperatives of productive and reproductive necessity. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Marx, K. (1972) [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. The varied Celtic tribes of Western Europe in the pre-Roman era included the Iberian, Gallic, Anatolian, Alpine, Briton and Hibernian. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Brown, H. (2012), Pp. 177-209 [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Brown, H. (2012), Pp. 173-175 [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Within modern anthropology ~~the matter of~~ the place of women in Celtic societies is contested, and a current of opinion holds that any notion of an emancipated status for women is an idealisation of these societies. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Indeed, even between the Greek city-states, contrasts can be made, for example between the oppressed position of women in Athenian society, and the more socially and economically (though not politically) equal position of women to men in Spartan society. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. Lewis Henry Morgan identified five family types in his anthropological studies: consanguine (based upon group-marriage within the clan); punaluan (based upon marriage outside of the clan, but also involving sibling relationships); syndyasmian (based upon coupled-marriages, but without exclusive sexual relations); patriarchal (one man having many wives, and having lordly domination); monogamian (based upon coupled-marriages, and with exclusive sexual relations). [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Durant, W. (1966a). Pp.305-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. A speculation found in Durant, W. (1966a), p.302. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Durant, W. (1966b). P. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Miles, L. (2020). P.26. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Gibbon, E. (1987). Pp. 276-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Hemelrijk, E. A. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. Brown, H. (2012), pp. 160-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. This idea captures some of the meaning of the ‘Not yet conscious’ of the phenomenology of Ernst Bloch in his *The Principle of Hope* (1955). It is also different from Bloch’s category however, insofar as its content is that of collective and historical memory. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Here, underpinned by the notion of a ‘radical variability’ of the human mind, our model answers the challenge from Geras earlier alluded to. This is the need for an ethical content for Marxism, a foundation to a moral critique of the harm done to the human condition by capitalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)