

Herbert Marcuse's Early Critique of Idealism

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Herbert Marcuse's early essays and reviews written while under the tutelage of Martin Heidegger continue to suffer a poor reception. Even the most sympathetic of his critics widely focus on either his deviations from existing Marxist orthodoxy, or his failure to demonstrate the commensurability of Marxism and existentialism. Although both these concerns highlight important problems in Marcuse's work, this narrow focus of Marcuse scholarship neglects essential aspects of his early thought and tends to draw too hasty parallels between Marcuse and Heidegger. This thesis therefore attaches greater weight to Marcuse's own reception and understanding of a broader cross section of the concurrent intellectual milieu – particularly late nineteenth and early twentieth century debates as to whether idealist philosophy is portable to social science. I argue that by foregrounding Marcuse's early work against the backdrop of neo-idealism better illuminates Marcuse's concern with what types of truth claims inform political action, and how one might assess the validity of these claims.

Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
1. Introduction	1
2. Marxism and the Problem of Idealism.....	13
2.1 Lukács and Historical Validity	14
2.2 Marcuse’s Defense of Marxism Against Karl Mannheim.....	21
3. Historicity and the Search for Method.....	26
3.1 Heidegger and ‘Concrete Philosophy’	27
3.2 The Material Constitution of Historicity	32
3.3 The Validity of Marxist Claims within the Purview of Heideggerian Ontology ..	39
3.4 The Radical Act.....	43
4. Hegel’s Ontology	47
4.1 On the Alleged Misinterpretation and Broader Significance of Historicity in Hegel’s Thought	50
4.2 Motility and Life in Hegel’s Logic.....	54
4.3 Historicity in Hegel’s Phenomenology	59
5. Conclusion	64
References	69

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1. Introduction

As is now widely acknowledged, key concepts in Marcuse's more well-known mature work are already germinal in the essays written under the study of Heidegger, but his Hegel commentary which he had presented as his *Habilitationschrift, Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Philosophie der Geschichtlichkeit*, occupies a unique position in his individual intellectual development as a part of the ongoing process of elaborating a cohesive sociological vision for the young scholar. The still nascent idea of a “Critical Theory,” which is now synonymous with Marcuse’s colleagues at the Frankfurt School, had yet to wait until 1937 to be coined by Max Horkheimer in ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’, the same year as when Marcuse had first given any independent treatment to analogous concerns in his ‘Philosophy and Critical Theory’. Indeed *Hegels Ontologie* is part of a still continuing clarification of how material and theoretical worlds of economic, political and social experience are constantly and mutually implicated in one another. In this respect, the *Habilitationschrift* is a microcosm of the development of the thought of the young Marcuse at the cusp of the transformation of the social sciences in the early twentieth century.

However, Marcuse’s work, concurrent to and including *Hegels Ontologie*, continues to suffer a poor reception. The initial reaction to his work of this period ranges from rebukes against his deviation of orthodox Marxism to silence, and subsequent phases of Marcuse’s reception are no more sympathetic to his early phase¹. Moreover,

¹ Rayman (2005) offers a competent overview of the reception of Marcuse’s early work. For a shorter overview of the most acerbic early reactions to Marcuse’s essays of the late 20’s and early 30’s, c.f. Piccone and Delfini (1970, 41 fn. 18).

the most recent bibliography of Marcuse's work features a number of omissions of his important early essays², and although these have been collected in German volumes of his work (Marcuse 2004), Anglophone scholars have access to only an incomplete version of his corpus from this period³. With respect to *Hegels Ontologie*, only recently have Anglophone commentators come to appreciate it as a legitimate contribution to Hegel scholarship, (Dove 1989; McCarthy 1988; Pippin 1988) and although English-language scholarship has been growing since the 1987 Benhabib translation, scholars interested in Marcuse's work overwhelmingly focus on his more popular work of the 1960's. Indeed, even in its native tongue, the second German edition of *Hegels Ontologie* was published almost a decade after the height of Marcuse's popularity, with only limited scholarly attention (19 citations in total)⁴.

The somewhat acrimonious remark in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* captures this attitude quite succinctly: Marcuse had "endured a brief moment of notoriety in the 1960s when his best-known book, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), was taken up by the mass media as the bible of the student revolt" (Callinicos 2000, 525). Scholars have

² The Nordquist (2000) bibliography only includes Marcuse's early contributions to *Die Gesellschaft* that have been subsequently translated (before the publication of the bibliography, and thus omitting those subsequently included in Abromeit and Wolin's collected volume *Heideggerian Marxism* [2005] – c.f. fn. 3), with the exceptions of "The Sociological Method and the Problem of Truth" (Marcuse 1990) and "On the Critique of Sociology" (Marcuse 1992).

³ Moreover, the initial English translations of his early work have often been of poor quality. Aside from the frequent typographical errors and awkward renderings of Marcuse's prose, the initial translations published in *Telos* (Marcuse 1969; 1971) feature frequent mistranslations. Abromeit and Wolin's collected volume *Heideggerian Marxism* (2005) is much better in this regard, although it still omits 'Besprechung von Karl Vorlander: Karl Marx, sein Leben und sein Werk' (1929); 'Zur Wahrheitsproblematik der soziologischen Methode' (1929a, although this essay was intermittently translated and reprinted c.f. Marcuse 1990); 'Transzendentaler Marxismus ?' (1930a); 'Besprechung von Hermann Noack: Geschichte und System und System der Philosophie' (1930b); 'Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Hans Freyers Soziologie als Wirklichkeitswissenschaft' (1931); 'Zur Kritik der Soziologie' (1931a, also reprinted intermittently, c.f. Marcuse 1992), and 'Das Problem der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit' (1931b).

⁴ According to Google Scholar. Moreover, as Rayman, shows, this is concomitant with the declining interest in Marcuse from 1976 onwards (the most scholarship on Marcuse appeared from 1969, with twenty articles, reviews, and books referring to Marcuse, to 1976, where only 18 appear). Throughout the entire 1980's, scholarship on Marcuse declined from 156 in the 1970's, to 100 in the 1980's. (2005, 167 fn.1)

been keen to point out that Marcuse's popularity in the 60's is in part due to the fact that he shared little of the cynicism of his Frankfurt School colleagues about political action⁵, and much of the scholarship concerned with his early work has been occupied with demonstrating to what degree, if at all, his studies under Heidegger are responsible for this attitude⁶. However, it is curious that this has not concomitantly provoked more than passing interest in Marcuse's early understanding of political judgment⁷; if Adorno et al were less optimistic about the prospects for radical challenges to existing power distributions, it is certainly in part due to their less-than-sanguine evaluation of the capacity for judgment.

⁵ This is typified by Habermas' contention that although

Marcuse claimed negation to be the very essence of thinking – as did Adorno and Horkheimer; but the driving force of criticism, of contradiction and contest carried him well beyond the limits of an accusation of unnecessary mischief. Marcuse moved further ahead. He did not hesitate to advocate, in an affirmative mood, the fulfillment of human needs, of the need for undeserved happiness, of the need for beauty, of the need for peace, calm and privacy.” (Habermas 1988, 3)

⁶ Although Kellner (1985) is suspicious of any overarching continuity in Marcuse's thought, he nevertheless maintains that throughout his work, Marcuse "preserved the classical role of the philosopher as someone who is concerned with what is important in human life" (366); Schoolman (1980) contends that Marcuse is overall concerned with the individual and radical praxis; Jay (1982) locates this tendency in his theory of remembrance; Piccone and Delfini (1970) argue that Marcuse always remained an existentialist. Pippin (1988, 86-87) in contrast, argues that Marcuse never quite abandons his positions about historicity in his early work, and such a continuity is recognizable in the pessimism of *One Dimensional Man*.

⁷ Although it would be a misnomer to say that this tendency has been ignored completely, studies of this sort tend to focus on the decisionism of 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism'. Schmidt (1988) considers precisely this aspect of Marcuse's early thought, although he concludes that his early understanding of political judgment was ultimately a failure. Among his criticisms, he contends that "Marcuse does not investigate more closely the subjective and objective conditions of the proletarian revolution, just as he avoids going into substantive questions raised by Marxian social theory" (53). However, it is unfair to so readily dismiss this aspect of Marcuse's thought, especially because it is incompatible with the vernacular of 'subjective and objective' conditions (I discuss this in section 2). Rather, claims about Marcuse's understanding of judgment and the 'radical act' should take into account Marcuse's arguments about what kind of knowledge is presupposed by political judgment, and how one might recognize this knowledge to be valid. Although Schmidt's analysis is among the more attentive and careful studies of Marcuse's unsympathetic critics, the incompatibility of Marcuse's early work and any number of Marxisms is a familiar theme in the literature, c.f. Rayman 2005. Pippin (1988), in contrast, explicitly considers the aspects of validity and judgment in Marcuse's thought, and I discuss his interpretation in section 3. Jay (1982) considers this relationship within the confines of the concept of 'recollection', although his discussion of Marcuse's early work is limited.

This academic silence, however, is understandable. The narrowly social dimension of such problems tends to be obscured by arguments well outside of the purview of social science - his primary focus during this period is with outlining a more 'concrete' foundation for truth claims about science and society, particularly by furnishing an ontological explanation of 'historicity'. Although the disciplinary conventions of social science, and more narrowly, sociology, were by no means settled during the Weimar period (Lepsius 1987), the fact that Marcuse believes it necessary to defer to ontology is likely for many reason enough to expel his early corpus into the realm of mere historical curiosity. While it might seem anachronistic to accuse Marcuse of not anticipating the anti-foundationalism of later social thought⁸, any defense of Marcuse's early position must admit that the reasons for Marcuse's recourse to ontology are not entirely self-evident either. Besides the neologisms he borrows from both Hegel and Heidegger, the seemingly antediluvian of Marcuse's early project is further compounded by the fact that his only book of the period, his Hegel interpretation, deals with facets of Hegel's thought long abandoned by those wishing to rescue Hegel's contemporary relevance. Moreover, his reading of Hegel is 'creative' at best, and Marcuse himself acknowledges that he wildly departs from the letter of Hegelian philosophy.

I argue that foregrounding the problem of political judgment better illuminates the reasons why, in contrast to his more well-known work from *Reason and Revolution* and onward, his work as a student of Heidegger takes social theory to be subordinate to

⁸ As Bernstein (1988) has done in his rebuke against Marcuse for failing to "develop a dialogic concept of rationality" (26).

philosophy, and moreover, the political stakes of interpreting Hegel to have an ontology. Indeed Marcuse's lofty goals make more sense against the backdrop of 'the crisis of Marxism'⁹ as well as concomitant questions associated with the foundation and validity of political judgment- a question hotly contested by Marcuse's contemporaries, as it is now. A major theme of his early work - for the present purposes, beginning with his 1929 review of *Ideologie und Utopie* to *Hegels Ontologie* in 1932¹⁰ - is that knowledge of historical tendencies (particularly a knowledge which would approximate a Marxist understanding of these tendencies) is in some ways a necessary precursor to radical political action. This of course raises questions about whether the conditions of the validity of a judgment and those of social inquiry rest upon the same ground. Even despite the hindsight afforded to contemporary social thought by the collapse of the fact-value distinction, we are accustomed to distinguishing between specific norms for judging and conventions which best allow us to ascertain some degree of empirical

⁹ Douglas Kellner likewise interprets Marcuse's work to be a response to the 'crisis of Marxism' (1985; 1988). Kellner goes as far as to argue that "Marcuse's entire theoretical project" is to "reconstruct Marxism to take account of these developments [that put into question aspects of Marxian theory]". He conceives of Marcuse's earliest essays to be a response to the "'existential' and 'personal' dimension lacking in Marxism" (1988, 172; c.f. 1985, 90), and in turn found Heidegger to provide a philosophical foundation for Marxism. This is only true in the most roundabout sense. Although Kellner is correct in pointing out - as Marcuse himself does (c.f. Marcuse 1969, 12)- that Marcuse believes Heidegger to provide a philosophical foundation for Marxism, this 'crisis' is less about the inability of Marxism to come to terms with individuality, and more so with the practical problems associated with privileging circumspective over experiential knowledge. I explore this tendency in section 1. Further, Marcuse is careful to dissociate himself from any uncritical notion of individuality, especially in his review work (c.f. Marcuse 1930, 1931, 1931a). I discuss this further in sections 3 and 4. Kellner's misinterpretation is attributable to the broader trend of Marcuse interpreters being poor readers of Heidegger; Kellner for instance believes that Heidegger is interested in "universal-transcendental conditions" of values and ways of life (1988, 173).

Jacoby (1971, esp. 19-23) also situates Marcuse's early work within a 'crisis of Marxism', although Jacoby is narrowly concerned with the 'automatic' Marxisms of the Second and Third Internationals.

Piccone and Delfini (1970: 41) place Marcuse's essays under Heidegger within the context of 'automatic Marxism', although they likewise argue that Marcuse's fascination with Heidegger is a response to the internal debates of 'Western Marxism' as well.

¹⁰ Although Marcuse wrote *Hegels Ontologie* in 1930 (its publication only appears in 1932), the present work is concerned with Marcuse's essays written until 1932 in order to include the important essays written in 1931 (most notably, the second installment of *Zum Problem der Dialektik* (Marcuse 1931c).

veracity. Among the claims that I want to advance is that Marcuse had conceived these to rest on identical philosophical suppositions; the ‘veracity’ of a proposition about a social condition, for instance, is measured analogously to judgments based more explicitly on norms. However, this in turn raises questions as to “how is the ‘truth’ of the fundamental Marxist theses to be proven? To what an extent are these theses valid? And where must the critical analysis dealing with these questions begin?” (Marcuse 1969, 12). The immediate reception of Marcuse’s work has generally concurred that he had failed to cogently respond to this problem, questioning whether his project was either tenable or desirable - Marcuse himself later voicing analogous doubts about the enterprise (Marcuse and Olafson 1988, 96). I readily concede to Marcuse’s own self-criticism, although ultimately I am not especially interested with evaluating the plausibility of Marcuse’s approach, nor with bringing to light a new problem in the intellectual development of existentialist or phenomenological Marxism. Rather, I explore how Marcuse understands the relationship between how one can come to know broader historical ‘truths’, and how one ought to act on this knowledge. Certainly judgment and the validity of Marxism is a political problem, and a particularly acute one if situated against the backdrop of Soviet dogma. Nevertheless, I doubt that reading Marcuse in light of the problem of judgment might vindicate his anachronisms. Moreover, I am skeptical as to whether Marcuse scholarship can benefit from yet another study juxtaposing his work to the dogma of the Second and Third Internationals – excellent studies of this sort already exist. Rather, I argue, Marcuse’s understanding of judgment is more salient to the context of neo-idealism, especially that of the heterodox left and of the emerging social scientific conventions.

By ‘idealism’, however, I do not narrowly mean the historical iterations of idealism which would be familiar to Marcuse, beginning with Berkeley, German Idealism, and the subsequent idealisms of the twentieth century, as in the instance the Marburg and Heidelberg schools. Rather, I take idealism to describe broader intellectual phenomena concerned with deriving the conditions of validity -as well as concomitant methods for discerning what might be philosophically or sociologically valid - independently of the socio-historical reality where those judgments of validity occur, while still rejecting any mind- or- discourse-independent ‘truth’ (therefore distinguishing it from positivism). In more succinct terms, this can be understood as validity claims based on the identity of thought and being. Thus, as Gillian Rose (1981, 2-48) and Andrew Arato (1974) argue, figures as diverse as Weber and Durkheim are susceptible to charges of neo-Kantianism because they implicitly presuppose that the general conditions of validity are contingent on a purely contemplative subject¹¹. However, neo-Kantianism is not especially useful nomenclature for the present study. While the thinkers and problems Marcuse is responding to might well be understood to be ‘neo-Kantian’ in Rose and Arato’s sense, the term is sufficiently broad to encapsulate ideas which trace their lineage to any one figure of post-Kantian idealism. In this respect, though correct, ‘neo-Kantian’ is too awkward a category to describe, for instance, facets of Hegel’s thought or subsequent Hegelians like Dilthey; in this respect, I avoid using the term in order to distinguish between the phenomena of neo-idealism more broadly, and Marcuse’s contemporaries who advocate a more narrow neo-Kantianism (for instance, Max Adler).

¹¹ I concede that this is an especially reductive overview of both Rose and Arato (which is to say nothing of Weber and Durkheim), who both give detailed overviews of the variations of subsequent iterations of neo-Kantianism.

Moreover, the term ‘neo-Kantian’ is ultimately too confusing to use with respect to problems of judgment alien to the arguments advanced in Kant’s third critique - for instance, Lukács’ more Fichtean tendencies (Jay 1984, 105-107; 115)¹².

This thesis consists of four major sections. Section 2 clarifies further what is presently meant by ‘idealism’ in order to establish a paradigm for evaluating the development of themes elaborated concurrent to the writing of *Hegels Ontologie*, as well as *Hegels Ontologie* proper. As a student of Heidegger, Marcuse wrote a number of review essays concerned with pointing out the limits to existing understandings of social scientific validity and political judgment. As I will attempt to demonstrate, these critical reactions to both Marxist (Adler, Landshut, Vorländer, Lukács) and non-Marxist (Mannheim) thinkers highlight a set of consistent themes which preoccupy Marcuse during this period. Rather than providing a comprehensive exposition of Marcuse’s polemics against the neo-Kantians, I intend to overview Marcuse’s own understanding about the deficiencies of the social thought of his contemporaries, and moreover, how some of these are prevalent in neo-Kantianism and philosophical Marxism more broadly.

Despite the fact that Marcuse’s work cannot be reduced to any of the existing Marxisms of his contemporaries (‘automatic’, ‘scientific’, or otherwise), it is worthwhile to note that Marcuse conceived of himself to be working well within the tradition of Marxism, if only restoring the philosophical ground obscured by subsequent interpreters of the historical Marx. Thus, at least preliminarily, it ought to be pointed out that he held

¹² It must however be frankly admitted that Marcuse himself never categorizes these thinkers under the banner of ‘idealism’ (although certainly points to commonalities between them), and thus the notion of ‘idealism’ presently used is shorthand for a number of features common to a number of conflicting theories, which will be elaborated in the subsequent section.

certain Marxist— albeit heterodox— propositions about historical development and production to hold true (or at least that these must hold true in order to assert the validity of Marxism). However, this raises a number of questions about how one can take these to be more valid than any theoretical alternatives, especially considering that existing models of social scientific demonstrability are precluded from the outset. Marcuse himself attempted to answer these questions, in some conflicting and ultimately incommensurable ways. Nevertheless, Marcuse's essays under the influence of Heidegger betray a vision of what he takes to be a 'correct' approach to historical materialism. Section 3 will therefore focus on how Marcuse attempts to do diverge from the Marxist appropriations of idealism in his essays concurrent to *Hegels Ontologie*. In short, this section will address one of Marcuse's central preoccupations of his early period, namely the validity of Marxism. Largely, this section will be concerned with elaborating upon Marcuse's attempt to answer these questions by recourse to an analysis of 'historicity'. Because *Hegels Ontologie* is not explicitly political (and moreover, is expository), whereas his other work is especially preoccupied with the political dimension of method, this essay will consequently explore and anticipate the social gravity of the idea of 'historicity' developed in his *Habilitationschrift*.

Section 4 directly engages with *Hegels Ontologie* proper. In *Hegels Ontologie*, Marcuse attempts to remedy the insufficiency of idealist thought with an analysis of 'historicity'. In a rather free interpretation of Hegel, Marcuse attempts to demonstrate that Hegel himself, through outlining the philosophical foundation of 'historicity', had implicitly rendered – what is popularly understood to be his philosophy - the identity of a subject and their self-understanding in history, and by extension the privileged insight

into the Absolute, as philosophically untenable. What Marcuse means to show is that Hegel had already laid the foundations towards an idea of historicity whereby human activity cannot be understood at all through an appeal to the whole of hitherto history. Indeed, the censure of his early work may be in part attributed to his refusal to capitulate to existing understandings of the problem of how one knows, especially among the more philosophically-oriented Marxists capable of making sense of the dense prose of *Hegels Ontologie*. As Robert Pippin suggests (1988, 69), Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel was received with broad indifference by his contemporaries who would subsequently be called 'Western Marxists' because, unlike those who had returned to Hegel to broaden the understanding of such *en vogue* phenomena as alienation, for instance, Marcuse found them to be theoretically untenable. In fact, Marcuse means to show that Hegel's own work is paradoxically incommensurable with the idealist presuppositions of these notions. Such concepts are, of course, local to a particular epistemology, and I suggest that Marcuse's idiosyncratic reading of the *Logic* in *Hegels Ontologie* is meant to provide a bulwark against these idealist suppositions about both the validity of political judgment and social scientific inquiry; in short, Marcuse attempts to expel the idealism from Hegelianism. By recourse to typically Heideggerian motifs, he contends that Hegel had supposedly obscured the problem of the historical character of Being – and by extension for Marcuse, historicity – by focusing on the circumspective knowledge of the Absolute, and therefore is at least partially subject to the same critiques Marcuse levels at his contemporaries; according to Marcuse, the myriad bifurcations that speculative philosophy attempts to reconcile are themselves actually products of a subsisting unity of

historical *Dasein*. This is however only a preliminary account of Marcuse's project, and owing to the Heideggerian neologisms, quite vague.

From the outset, therefore, this section will address what Marcuse believes to be at stake in an interpretation of the *Logic*, and how this interpretative project fits with the rest of his early corpus. However, precisely because the work is a commentary on the *Logic*, this raises a number of interpretative difficulties and requires certain caveats about how Marcuse's reading of Hegel might be evaluated with respect to the arguments advanced in the preceding sections. Although it may be a euphemism to call Marcuse's commentary 'creative', contrasting Marcuse's Hegel and the letter of Hegel's *Logic* ultimately results in comparing Marcuse's reading of Hegel with my own, and is therefore futile in every respect except for highlighting my disagreements with Marcuse. Therefore, this section will be concerned with Marcuse's own explicit statements about Hegel's insufficiencies (as well as those of his later interpreters), provided that they share with the earlier criticisms of his contemporaries; those parts of Marcuse's commentary which can be otherwise taken as somewhat fantastic will be presented at face-value. Thus, the interpretative framework largely precludes discussions of how Marcuse strays from Hegel, as well as adjudicating between what 'kind' of idealist the historical Hegel might have been. Marcuse had hoped to find in Heidegger was the practical basis of philosophizing, an idea, which he suggests, finds its historical basis in Hegel; in short, there is an explicit continuity between Marcuse's early concerns with finding a 'concrete', practical foundation for social thought and his interpretation of the *Logic*. With this in mind, this section addresses several arguments which Marcuse advances, and which are salient to the broader claim that Marcuse attempts to rid Hegel of his idealism.

Finally, I conclude by overviewing how the earlier essays are prescient in elaborating the themes with which he is concerned with in his *Habilitationschrift*, and briefly consider the contemporary relevance of Marcuse's early critique.

2. Marxism and the Problem of Idealism

In the previous section, I had claimed that Marcuse's arguments can be most cogently foregrounded against a 'crisis of Marxism'. On one hand, this can be – and has been, c.f. Kellner 1985; 1988 - understood as the failure of the Marxism of the Second International although for Marcuse this crisis is broader than some various Soviet orthodoxies. Broadly, it can be phrased as a crisis of how one knows, although this requires a few preliminary remarks. Though it makes no sense to police the boundaries of Marxism more generally, Marxists must be able to demonstrate certain 'truths' about how capitalism functions. However, the question concerning what constitutes a 'valid' truth claim is itself an open question; claims about, for instance, any causal historical process first suppose an understanding about the relationship between theoretical knowledge (or consciousness) and social reality. Marcuse claims that posing the problem in terms of the relationship of knowledge and reality is itself problematic. In fact, he denies the validity of knowledge claims premised on 'the identity of thought and being' in both social scientific inquiry and in philosophy - between 1929 and 1931 Marcuse makes a number of spirited polemics against both the sociological method and advocates of neo-Kantianism¹. In the previous section I have been referring to inquiry that understands the

¹ Although largely unsympathetic to neo-Kantianism, the early Marcuse is attentive to its contemporary proponents, especially to the problem of the autonomy of the ego with respect to its social environment in a series of early essays and review pieces. Under these auspices, Marcuse criticizes Adler, Landshut, Vorländer, and Marks for not resolving the problem in a satisfactory manner. The neo-Kantian defense of an autonomous reason ultimately "deflects and detaches Marxism from the concrete affliction of the historical situation [translation author's own]" (1930a, 309) However, the positions of advocates of neo-Kantianism, as well as Marcuse's responses, are more complicated than can be presented here. For further discussion, c.f. Van der Linden (1988), Köhnke (1991); Marcuse's most pointed criticisms can be found in Marcuse (1930a).

conditions of validity to be dependent on a contemplative subject as a problem of idealism, although this is of course very anticipatory and does not fully explain why the autonomy of reason is either problematic or prescient to Marcuse's early work. While names like Vorländer and Adler have been largely forgotten, the relationship of thought and being is by no means limited to the Marburg, Baden, and Heidelberg schools; rather, this crypto-idealist criterion of validity has a much broader presence in the thought of Marcuse's contemporaries, and moreover, has further reaching consequences for social thought than those articulated by more narrowly neo-Kantians.

2.1 Lukács and Historical Validity

Beginning with Lukács, the specifically idealist suppositions of social thought had become a central preoccupation for a generation of Marxists who had made Hegelian idealism the lingua franca for theorizing social relations, Lukács' outline of proletarian consciousness in *History and Class Consciousness* becoming a debt of inheritance for the heirs to the title of 'Western Marxism'². By returning to the philosophical origins proper to Marxism, Marcuse's contemporaries aimed to articulate restore the validity of Marxist theory which had been waning under the institutionalized vulgarizations of the Soviet variant of Marxist orthodoxy³. The 1932 publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* subsequently granted textual legitimacy to the dissemination of Lukács' reading of Marx⁴, but *History and Class Consciousness* had

² Likewise, there is evidence to support that Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* is a calculated response to *History and Class Consciousness* (Goldmann 1977); Marcuse however rejects this idea and disputes (Marcuse and Olafson 1988, 96).

³ For a more elaborate discussion of the problem than can be provided here, c.f. Jacoby (1971)

⁴ Not only in the context of a broader Hegelian interpretation, but especially in Marx's discussion of *species-being*; although for Marx species-being is something that is itself determined in any given mode of production, a subsisting substratum of human creative capacity lent credence to the subsequent interpretations of reification as a type of

already gained considerable notoriety at the time of its publication with the future canon of Marxists influenced by Hegel, including Marcuse. It is difficult to overstate the significance of Lukács' thought with respect to subsequent developments in Marxist theory, and moreover, his influence on Marcuse is widely noted (c.f. Jacoby 1971; Arato 1972, 27; Jay 1982, 4-5; Feenberg 2005, 71-82; Abromeit 2004)⁵.

Certainly 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism' betrays a number of parallels to *History and Class Consciousness*, and I explore some of these in the subsequent section. However, there are certainly good reasons for contrasting Marcuse and Lukács' positions. First, as even Lukács himself acknowledges *History and Class Consciousness* falls well within the paradigm of neo-idealism (1971, xviii), for reasons I discuss below. Certainly Lukács is susceptible to the same criticisms Marcuse levels at his narrowly neo-Kantian contemporaries, and therefore serves as an excellent exemplar of the practical problems of neo-idealism, which Marcuse hopes to pre-empt in his own work. Moreover, Lukács is a more salient counterpart to Marcuse than other contemporaries who had found idealism to be portable to the methods of social science in that he had attempted to articulate how historical validity is commensurable with political efficacy. Finally, as I discuss in section 3, despite the similarities between Lukács and Marcuse, the latter attempts to dissociate himself from any connection between social

forgetting of the social origins of the human world. Marcuse's early work is especially concerned with this, and had argued as much in his review of the *Manuscripts* in the same year (Marcuse 1932), using the concept of species-being to extend reification to a perennial ontological condition of human activity.

⁵ Although some have called this into question, c.f. Piccone and Delfini 1970, 41; Piccone 1971, 9-11; Schoolman 1980). I cannot intervene in debates about intellectual history here, although I do make the modest claim that Marcuse is susceptible to the same problems as Lukács, especially in 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism' which I discuss in the following section.

scientific validity and political judgment advocated for in *History and Class Consciousness*. Presently we are less concerned with the extent and dimension of the sway of Lukács on Marcuse – or underestimating the influence of such thinkers as Dilthey for first articulating the vernacular of objective idealism⁶ – and especially not arguing that his earlier work was a staged polemic against some uniform dissemination of the contemporary place of dialectical thinking⁷.

Without referring to the broader theoretical innovations of Lukács thought, we turn to qualify Marcuse's above objections to idealist suppositions of social thought, of which Lukács' work is paradigmatic. Lukács' eminent essay, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', takes the discrepancy between the value-forms in *Capital* as constitutive of experiential consciousness under capitalism; reification is a product of the capitalist production process whereby social relationships are obscured by the relationships between things. Lukács had cited Marx's exposition of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital* as "the basic phenomenon of reification" (1971, 86) whose basis, he argued

is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people. (1971, 83)

⁶ For an extended discussion of the germination of this milieu, c.f. Arato (1974).

⁷ Indeed, it was the myriad interpretations of this relationship rather than the authority of Lukács which, at least in part precipitated Marcuse to outline his vision of how the dialectic attains knowledge in the two-part review essay of Siegfried Marck's *Die Dialektik in der Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Marcuse 1976); interestingly, in that study, Marcuse defends Lukács against Marck's criticisms of "value transcendence", maintaining that "this notion does not affect the meaning of Lukács' book which is not concerned with philosophical foundations, but aspires to a concrete dialectic". Nevertheless, he notes the major weakness in Lukács's work is "the concept of 'correct class consciousness'", noting that it is "a violation of the dimension of historicity, a fixation 'outside' of what happens from whence an artificially abstract connection with history must be produced" (1976, 24).

Marx had maintained that the labor power expressed commodities doesn't display itself in the material body of the commodity (1977, 138). The objective value of a commodity is expressed insofar as each commodity has in it an identical social substance, and therefore appears only in the social relation between commodity and commodity (Marx 1977, 139); the value of a commodity can only be measured in relation to another commodity where the value of a first (the relative value) is measured against the second (equivalent form); the value of a commodity is only actualized in exchange. "The relative value-form of a commodity [...] expresses its value-existence as something wholly different from its substance and properties [...] this expression itself therefore indicates that it conceals a social relation" (Marx 1977, 149). Lukács had followed Marx in identifying that the social process of labor becomes objectified in the commodity and appears as a distinct entity independent of the labor process; social relations are in turn mediated by the value-form of the commodity itself.

Lukács takes Marx's account of commodity fetishism to be constitutive of consciousness under capitalism whereby the idealizations of a society are epiphenomenal of the productive process, and in turn come to be instrumentalized in the calculable laws of capitalist production. The equivalence and calculability of abstract labor becomes a "category of society influencing decisively the objective form of things and people in society thus emerging, their relation to nature and the possible relations of men to each other" (1971, 88); these laws in turn take on a 'phantom-like' objectivity seemingly independent of the idiosyncrasies of the producer, which are, according to the rationalist logic of capital, merely incidental (1971, 88). Lukács distinguishes between the subjective and objective side of this process thusly:

Objectively a world of objects and relations between things springs into being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market)... Subjectively—where the market economy has been fully developed—a man’s activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article. (1971, 87).

By reading far too much continuity between Marx’s early philosophical writings and *Capital*, Lukács is able to reproduce the position of the early Marx as endemic to the capitalist production process, which is to say, conflating the ideal with an error of consciousness engendered by the objective world of things which is thereby opposed to it. And although Lukács views this process as reciprocal, in the sense that “the subjective mirroring of the objective process is an actual, operative moment of this process itself” (Lukács 2002: 52), alienation is far too much commensurable with mere ideology as simply a reification of consciousness by the commodity form. Immediate experience is limited by - as Lukács enumerates - atomization, rationalization, and deactivation, and therefore offers no insight into the process which produces the discrepancy between the experiential world and its material substructure.

Nevertheless, Lukács anticipates that the perceived autonomy of social laws is surmountable, provided that the proletariat can become cognizant of the fact that these alien laws are a result of human activity. However, according to Lukács, the social sciences as well as bourgeois philosophy cannot penetrate beneath the contingency of social laws and either presupposes them to be the conditions of thought in general, or otherwise properties immutably inherent in social relations. In order to compensate for the limitations of both experience and theory which is predicated on the ideological construction of that experience, thought must somehow penetrate beneath the pre-

reflective norms and customs which both condition and limit its capacity to comprehend the process of alienation under capitalism.

Lukács' solution is to outline a method which can offer a privileged insight into the causality of the productive process. Although Lukács acknowledges that there is no liminal space which would allow an Archimedean access to this causality, he nevertheless maintains that correct method can yield some degree of veracity in respect to the causal mechanisms of social relations. Because immediate experience is reified and therefore partial, Lukács posits the circumspective knowledge of a social totality as a corrective which would yield some comprehension of society:

Only in this context, which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a *totality*, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of *reality*. This knowledge starts from the simple and (to the capitalist world) pure, immediate, natural determinants described above. It progresses from them to the knowledge of the concrete totality, i.e., to the conceptual reproduction of reality. (1971, 104)

In this way, the correct understanding of the underlying social processes of capitalism is a prerequisite for praxis, and thereby practical activity is subsumed to correct method.

Lukács had introduced his magnum opus with the “scientific conviction” in the method of dialectical materialism: Even provided that all of Marx's findings would be proven false, genuine Marxist method would nevertheless yield a privileged relationship to history (1977, 1)⁸. Lukács' self-critique was in some sense therefore correct when he

⁸ This is not to say that Lukács is an idealist in the neo-Kantian sense; in fact, neo-Kantians like Cohen (1904, 38, cited in Smith 1992, 7) explicitly criticize epiphenomenalism as granting an insufficient role to the autonomy of reason. A further comparison of Lukács and neo-Kantianism cannot be attempted here. However, as Jay points out (1984, 105-107, 115), the immediate idealist predecessor of *History and Class Consciousness* is not Kant, but Fichte, although he fails to point out the presently salient commonality: In order to arrive at the historically specific causal determinations of consciousness, Lukács privileges a reflective faculty whereby the historical determinations of reflection can only be

had retroactively called his method a “relapse into idealistic contemplation” (1971, xviii); in its peculiar position of subject and object of history, proletarian self-consciousness will be a consciousness of the totality of capitalist production, and the burden of history will fall on the proletariat in this very moment when it becomes a class in-and-for-itself (Lukács 1971, 108).

Despite the novelty of Lukács’ approach, the idea of a ‘false-consciousness’ presumes a separation of ‘real’ and ‘ideal’ being (regardless of whether this ‘real’ being is something which can be ultimately comprehended in its ‘truth’). The subsequent section will explore the degree to which Marcuse is able to disassociate himself from the idealistic facets of Lukács’ thought, although I want to preliminarily highlight that the particular problem Marcuse attempts to resolve is the supposed disparity between individual - or ‘partial’ to follow Lukács - experiences of social phenomena, and a supra-experiential knowledge ‘adequate’ to the understanding of broader social or historical processes. Marcuse is critical of ‘universally valid’ approaches to sociology, and in particular, Marxism; such an enterprise amounts “to treating Marxism as an epistemologically underpinned, uncommitted scientific theory of the laws of motion of social life and in which political practice is regarded as secondary or is ignored altogether” (1990, 131). This approach “can offer no grounding of social experience, because through its methodical procedure, [they preclude] concrete reality upon which

arrived at formally through an intellectual process. However, such strong subjectivism, as even Lukács concedes, can only be one-sided and in turn, the anticipated commensurability of subject and object requires revolution (or Fichte’s ‘moral striving’). This tendency, however, cannot be explored further here. Rather, Lukács is taken as exemplary in order to broaden the analysis of idealism beyond the narrow scope of neo-Kantianism.

alone social experience can be based” (Marcuse 1930, 301, cited in Benhabib 1987, xiii-xiv).

2.2 Marcuse’s Defense of Marxism Against Karl Mannheim

Indeed, Marcuse further meditates on this seeming discrepancy in his review of Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia*. Published in 1929, Mannheim’s book provoked a widespread methodological and epistemological debate within German social science⁹. Although Mannheim’s study has many merits, the present discussion will focus narrowly on the aspect of his thought considered by Marcuse, namely, the universalization of Marx’s critique of ideology into the ‘sociology of knowledge’. Mannheim denies that any truth can exist independently of the values, position, and social context of where a knowledge claim is expressed (Mannheim 1948, 71), and moreover, he denies the possibility of a value-neutral social science which might be conducted independently of historically and culturally contingent norms and customs. He therefore raises a number of problems with the possibility of ‘class-consciousness’ and more or less correct understandings of history. Although certainly Lukács would concur with Mannheim that ‘class-consciousness’ is ‘only’ the local experience of the proletariat as a class, it is - with the aid of a more correct method – more valid than alternative viewpoints because it can best approximate a “conceptual reproduction of reality” (Lukács 1971, 104). I have been contending that Marcuse ultimately wants to deny precisely this claim – indeed, he applauds Mannheim for doing so as well (1990, 130-131) – yet this raises a number of alternative problems, namely:

⁹ The broader debates about Mannheim’s book cannot be recounted here, although the reader is encouraged to consult Meja and Stehr (1990).

if Marxism is shown to be an ideology just like the ideas of conservatism or democracy, does this not destroy Marxism's claim to validity, just as Marx himself, by revealing bourgeois thought as ideology, believed to have destroyed its validity claims? If Marxist theory is merely the formulation of a particular standpoint, from which a particular class necessarily experiences and interprets reality, can Marxism then still meaningfully claim to be a 'true' theory? And is not the analysis of capitalist society and the theory of proletarian revolution merely a one-sided representation of this reality, a historically unique perspective? From *its* perspective, does not the capitalist bourgeoisie have an equal claim to truth or falsehood? And a Marxist could add: is there a more dangerous interpretation and one more hostile to Marxism than one which thoroughly destroys the decisive unconditionality of the proletarian deed and leads to universal opportunism? (Marcuse 1990, 131)

Marcuse himself offers no particularly rigorous answer to these questions, "only a few
brief hints

[...] which nevertheless might initially suffice" (Marcuse 1990, 138), although these are developed elsewhere (and are further discussed in the subsequent section). First, Marcuse questions whether denying non-relational measures of validity also denies that Marxism can be more valid than various other alternatives. Marcuse takes Mannheim to be correct in demonstrating that various truth claims are local to a particular historical and social situation, although he is skeptical as to whether this would prevent these truth claims from being unconditionally valid (Marcuse 1990, 131). This may seem like a peculiar argument, although it is more cogent than it initially appears, and can be clarified as follows: Marcuse concurs with Mannheim that it is impossible to make validity claims about historical expressions of knowledge independently of the criteria and standards for evaluating what might be considered valid in any historical epoch; one cannot speculate upon a 'neutral' science or claims to validity which would be independent of the

aforementioned milieus¹⁰. Rather, all truth claims can only be assessed with respect to various historically determined modes of thought as well as criteria and standards of validity, and therefore, according to Mannheim, cannot be absolute.

However, Mannheim contends that one can still measure their cogency with respect to whether or not they are adequate to the norms and practices of a particular historical circumstance. This is to say that these claims presuppose “certain judgments concerning the reality of ideas and structures of consciousness” (Mannheim 1948, 86), and these judgments can be evaluated according to whether or not they are commensurable to the practices of a given historical situation¹¹. Anticipating a bit, Marcuse views the idea of validity predicated on evaluative judgments to be preferable to a circumspective understanding of validity (with of course a number of caveats). With respect to the question of validity, Marcuse contends that Mannheim makes a crucial error in measuring truth claims according to an a-historical notion of validity by implicitly holding knowledge claims to the standard of ‘reality’. According to Mannheim, truth claims are only expressions of social knowledge and ultimately refer back to the norms underlying any particular truth claims. Mannheim makes the further distinction that these norms are reducible to the way society is organized (i.e., the division of labor, rank, etc.), and accordingly are only partially true (i.e., true only with respect to local and contingent norms). However, Mannheim supposes that these partial perspectives are only

¹⁰ In fairness to Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* already anticipates this direction; he is only interested in the knowledge of a particular class in a particular historical period. However, a more detailed comparison of Lukács and Mannheim is outside of the purview of the present study and therefore cannot be attempted here.

¹¹ The example that Mannheim offers follows Weber’s discussion of the taboo against taking interest on loans; according to Mannheim, the observation of such prohibition belongs to a social structure based upon “intimate and neighbourly relations”, i.e., observable in pre-Capitalist Western societies. However, this precept becomes ideological when it becomes “virtually incapable of practical acceptance” (Mannheim 1948, 85)

aspects of some conceivable totality of perspectives accessible to sociology in a ‘dynamic mediation’, which is to say there is some ‘optimal’ truth accessible through the enumeration of partial truth claims (Marcuse 1992, 135).

Analogously, Marcuse questions whether it makes sense to take an “historical stage of existence simply as a given base and as an ultimate authority on questions of truth” (Marcuse 1990, 134). This argument is fairly straightforward (although his further suggestions become quite a bit more convoluted): There is no particular reason for present social practices to serve as criteria for the adequacy or inadequacy of truth claims; obviously this standard would preclude knowledge which aims to surmount present social configurations. In other words, it is unclear why positive claims about the present social situation – and moreover, their correspondence to the ‘reality’ of the situation – should be uniquely evaluated as either true or false.

Marcuse only provides a few suggestions about what this might imply, finally deferring to some schematic remarks about ‘historicity’. According to Marcuse, Marxism merely considers “a particular historical stage as an authority in *choosing* among various possibilities of verification” (1990, 134). Prior to exploring the more detailed explanations he provides elsewhere, I want to make a few anticipatory remarks about what is at stake in such an enterprise. Within the context of the present review, this can be best clarified with respect to the problem of some circumspective ‘truth of historical existence’. Marcuse’s criticism of Mannheim depends, at least in part, on providing some cogent alternative where Mannheim’s objections to Marxism would be only incidental to the way in which Marxist theory can be evaluated as ‘true’, and in turn, denies that truth claims need to be contingent on some more or less adequate judgment of what reality

consists of. Although he concurs with Mannheim that theories of validity which must 'correspond' to anything underestimate the degree to which all knowledge claims are practical, he denies that Mannheim goes far enough. In turn, he proposes (albeit confusedly) something which would be a non-reductive Marxist method where calling truth claims 'idealizations' – or alternatively, partial approximations of reality - would be, if not untenable then at least problematic. This somewhat illuminates Marcuse's cryptic insistence on the authority of "*choosing* among various possibilities of verification" (Marcuse 1990, 134); Marcuse wants to defend something like a theory of validity which is both evaluative in Mannheim's sense, although one which is not predicated on judgments concerning the adequacy or inadequacy of social knowledge to determinate historical practices. This is to say that he is proposing here a theory of validity premised on judgments of preference, as for instance in choosing between various social alternatives as more or less adequate to the needs and expectations of a particular individual or a class. This of course begs a number of questions which Marcuse regrettably does not answer in his Mannheim review, though this general tendency is evident in his early flirtations with Heideggerian existentialism, most notably in 'On Concrete Philosophy' and 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism', which will be discussed below.

3. Historicity and the Search for Method

Marcuse's main criticism of neo-idealism is that, if cultural idealizations are by-products of material historical development, then it is unclear as to how consciousness can yield any valid insight into this development beyond the local expression of this process. Such methods which presume that historical validity is inimical to lived experience tend to systematize the irreconcilability of knowledge and experience, and "can offer no grounding of social experience, because through its methodical procedure, [they preclude] concrete reality upon which alone social experience can be based" (Marcuse 1930, 301, cited in Benhabib 1987, xiii-xiv). Indeed, beyond precipitating his initial turn to Heidegger (Marcuse and Olafson 1988, 96), the inability for Marxist dialectics to come to terms with the 'concrete' remains a central preoccupation with the early Marcuse's search for method. Ultimately, Marcuse intends to reverse Marxism's regression into neo-idealism by returning it to its 'concrete' foundation in historicity, understanding such a foundation to be requisite of any valid understanding of contemporary historical circumstances. However, expressions like 'historical circumstances' are incomprehensible without recourse to the "boundaries of concrete historical conditions under which concrete existence exists, and in which this existence and the totality of the relationships in its world are rooted" (1969, 19).

For reasons outlined below, Marcuse conceives of historicity as irreducible to any number of historical phenomena, so that the comprehension of 'historical circumstances', cannot be adequately undertaken without inquiring into "the meaning of the Being of the historical", ultimately going as far as to conceive of Marxist philosophy as unintelligible

until the most general categories of human activity are comprehended (1969, 14). Presently, it is necessary to point out that Marcuse is uninterested in problematizing contemporary philosophical insights with an axiomatically supposed Marxist understanding of productive relations. Such an understanding first supposes the clarification of the relationship between knowledge and social reality – here it merely suffices to recall Marcuse’s reproach against the failure of his contemporaries to articulate this relationship. If one is to maintain the validity of Marxism, “the question arises concerning how is the "truth" of the fundamental Marxist theses to be proven? To what an extent are these theses valid? And where must the critical analysis dealing with these questions begin?” (Marcuse 1969, 12).

3.1 Heidegger and ‘Concrete Philosophy’

Marcuse contends that Heidegger, despite his shortcomings, had reformulated the foundations of philosophy and in order to maintain any philosophical validity social theory must understand itself in terms of “the highest point attained or attainable by bourgeois philosophy” (1969, 17)¹:

If we pay closer attention to his book, *Being and Time* than it seems necessary in the present context, it is because this work seems to us to indicate a turning point in the history of philosophy – the point where bourgeois philosophy transcends itself from within, and opens the way to a new, ‘concrete science’. (1969, 12)

According to Marcuse, ‘historicity’ has been a philosophical problem since Hegel, but only with Dilthey on it becomes a central problem; subsequently through “rigorous phenomenology, Heidegger finally raised and answered the question in its full and radical

¹ For a more comprehensive discussion about Heidegger’s influence on Marcuse, c.f. Abromeit 2004, 2010; Feenberg 2005; Wolin 2001.

significance” (1969, 12). In ‘A Contribution to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism’, his most explicit statement on method until 1937, Marcuse schematically outlines the claims Heidegger advances in *Sein und Zeit*, especially attentive to elaborating how Heidegger “opens the way for the demonstration of historicity as a fundamental existential determination – which we regard as the decisive point in Heidegger’s phenomenology” (Marcuse 1969, 14-15).

Anticipating a little, Marcuse contends that phenomenological inquiry into the experience of history can ultimately be revealing of the determining material conditions of that experience, although this requires further elaboration as to how he conceives of ‘historicity’. It is worth noting that as early as 1931, he believes that historicity is *not* an epistemology (1992, 20), though this is attributable to the fact that, as Smith points out (1992, 3-4) in ‘Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism’ Marcuse is occupied with the problems elaborated by Lukács. Conversely, during the period concurrent to the writing of *Hegels Ontologie* (as well as in *Hegels Ontologie* proper), Marcuse is far more critical of an epistemological basis for understanding of historical phenomena, as well as the (perceived) rationalist assumptions of epistemology more broadly. However, this is of course only a preliminary caveat and will be addressed in greater detail in the subsequent section.

The decisive methodological import of historicity is that Marcuse follows Heidegger in distinguishing between the ontic and ontological dimensions of history. The

former, what Schmidt calls ‘real history’², is the everyday experience of history as a causal relationship between events in time. This in turn reveals a ‘comportment’ towards Being (Heidegger 2008, H43), or the practical orientation which determines how anything in the ontic realm ‘is’ or experienced as meaningful (Heidegger 2008, H46). The ‘primordial roots’ of any understanding of history lie in the way in which where the world is meaningfully structured by the original phenomenon of ‘historizing’, although this requires a number of caveats. First, by using the expression Dasein, Heidegger dissolves the traditional understanding of subject and object, attentive to the fact that all consciousness is intentional consciousness, and moreover, there is no consciousness independent of determinate ways of navigating the world. Dasein signifies this unitary phenomenon of the way in which the world is co-constitutive of the way experience can be at all meaningful. Broadly, Heidegger means the ontological constitution of ‘historizing’ to entail the way in which the past exercises some effect on the present; the components of the unitary structure of Dasein (Being-in-the-World, Being-in) have a ‘heritage’ which is constitutive of the way the experiential world attains any sort of significance. In other words, things in the world can only be meaningful by virtue of the

² Schmidt (1988, 72) uses this term to imply history as sequence in time, in order to contrast the ontological foundation of history in Heidegger. Needless to say, the term ‘real history’ would be untenable for both Heidegger and Marcuse. Schmidt is however wrong in finding that “Marcuse uses the term ‘historicity’ indiscriminately to mean either ‘real history,’ or, in an uncharged sense, the ‘historical character of a thing’” (1988, 51); according to Marcuse, the former is rather a derivative form of understanding history. Schmidt does however take Marcuse to reproduce Heidegger’s division between ontological and ontic, so it is unclear from where he derives this error, although he is correct in the sense that Marcuse ultimately does defer to ‘real history’ (as a causal process) under the guise of historicity, despite his insinuations to the contrary (see discussion below).

Schoolman (1976), in contrast makes the converse claim, taking Marcuse - against the letter of his own statements on the matter - to dissolve such divisions. This likewise leads him to conclude that ‘real history’ and historicity are somewhat commensurable. Marcuse’s stark distinction between positivist approaches to history and historicity, as well as between the ontological and material conditions of historicity, should pre-empt such conclusions; a discussion of these tenets of historicity follows below.

way they are 'stretched into' the present. Historicity is the inherited character of the world, where this 'heritage' guides and constrains the existential possibilities of Dasein.

This is still quite vague and offers no insight into how the understanding of historicity might suggest preferable alternatives to either idealist or positivist understandings of history. Like Heidegger, Marcuse understands that every science is subject to a specific purview of experience and interpretation (or disciplinary conventions) which defines the scope of its inquiry, and therefore its understanding of historical circumstances. The inquiry into historical Being, therefore, cannot appeal to any set of beings or historical facts, and therefore holds that narrow disciplinary procedures distinguishing between various causal processes, or otherwise appealing to *res gestae*, cannot adequately describe what any historical phenomena 'is'; rather, all understandings of history or historiography are possible only insofar as they are derived from the ontological constitution of historicity. Moreover, Heidegger's understanding of Dasein excludes from the outset the presumption of a liminal space independent of the determinate ways in which individuals experience the world – such an approach can only provide a partial account of any historical phenomenon. Marcuse takes this practical foundation of philosophy articulated by Heidegger to be especially salient for 'concrete' science; if all historical knowledge is subsumed to the practical orientation, then the abstraction from, or the attempt to be neutral towards, invariably fails to comprehend what any historical phenomena 'is' (Marcuse 2005, 35; 1969, 13). This further problematizes any knowledge which presumes to approximate reality as if reality had some sort of independence from its lived experience, a point methodologically decisive for Marcuse. In opposition to an epistemology which finds experiential consciousness to

be susceptible to subjective distortions, Marcuse wants to show that historical claims based on experience uniquely have philosophical validity. Indeed, what Marcuse had hoped to find in Heidegger's work is a space for theory which neither privileges cognitive over experiential understanding nor reserves a space for the commensurability of theoretical knowledge and the nascent 'truth' of an historical situation. Whereas idealism holds that the temporal constitution of experience is an "an *a priori* form of intuition", and positivism approaches history as "empirical classification of objects", neither method is correct in describing the way in which history is an "inevitable and fundamental constitution of existence" (Marcuse 1969, 14). If the independence of a knowing subject from empirical reality is untenable, then iterations of idealism, which attempt to demonstrate the commensurability of historical 'fact' and cognition, are thereby likewise problematic:

Social arrangements, economic orders, and political formations together constitute the happening of Dasein and must be viewed from the perspective of this existence [*Existenz*]. If they are investigated from the outset as 'things,' with an eye towards their structure, their relationships, and the laws of their development, the observation (most likely undertaken with the model of natural sciences as their mistaken ideal) that result will be such that the meaning of these constructs cannot even appear. (Marcuse 2005, 39)

The understanding of 'historicity' as the ontological foundation of all understandings of history means that social science should be cognizant of how the object of its inquiry is constituted in a determinate way through the historical 'heritage' of the *Lebenswelt*. However, granting for the moment that recourse to Heidegger can provide a corrective – or more philosophically rigorous elaboration – to claims typical of for instance, neo-Kantian socialism, the practical basis for theoretical knowledge raises the questions of how the immanent content of individual experience is to have any wider social validity.

As Marcuse himself saw under his tutelage, the reduction to the most general characteristics of human existence is already itself an abstraction (2005, 39), leaving very little beyond an outline of historical experience in general. In Marcuse's words, the ontological structure of existence is never "related to a particular existence. *Concrete* existence always obtains in a *concrete* world, and a concrete world is related to a concrete existence...Existence is always concrete in a determined historical situation (spatio-temporal context)" (1969, 25). These particular forms of existence cannot be deduced from the categories of Heideggerian ontology, and therefore, Heidegger can say nothing about how these categories obtain in specific historical milieus. In short, Heidegger's practical basis for philosophizing can finally say nothing about specific human practice.

3.2 The Material Constitution of Historicity

The question of the 'concrete' historical forms of existence therefore requires an inquiry "directly to the material constitution of historicity" (1969, 19). Marcuse's own indications on what might be a more correct approach to historical materialism are notoriously esoteric, and the task of evaluating his proposed alternatives is unaided by the confused way in which he tends to use both idealist and Heideggerian jargon³. Above all, Marcuse's use of 'concrete' is the most nebulous entry in the vocabulary inherited from his predecessors, and the exposition of his understanding of the term is complicated by the fact that Marcuse presumes the concept to be self-evident, although there is little in the way of consistency in how uses the term throughout his early writings. Rather, depending on the context, he defers to specific hybrids of the Marxist, Hegelian, and

³ As, for instance, often using idealist terminology to explain a more Heideggerian position, ultimately concluding these terms and their traditional understanding to be philosophically untenable; c.f. especially Marcuse 1969.

Heideggerian meanings of the 'concrete', although nevertheless fails to address the discrepancies between the philosophical connotations of these earlier understandings. As is well-known, Heidegger's ontology supplies quite specific reasons for precluding the philosophical validity of idealist claims about the 'concrete', and Heidegger quite self-consciously rejects the Hegelian dimensions of the concept; moreover, Marcuse's Marxist contemporaries have diverging notions of what 'concrete' might entail, and Marcuse never outright settles the conflicts between them. Ultimately, Marcuse conceives of concretion to be inextricably linked to each of the ways he uses the term, although the letter of Marcuse's early work never gives any indication of a more comprehensive understanding of concretion. Rather, Marcuse tends to use the term in such a way where specific facet of the 'concrete' are developed into further philosophical claims depending on the context making the elucidation of some of Marcuse's positions especially challenging.

As far as I am able to ascertain in his writings until 1932, Marcuse uses 'concrete' in two different (although interrelated) ways and I anticipate that the discussion below will make their relationship apparent. These broadly imply a philosophically narrow conception of something analogous to 'specificity', and a reference to the determinate vantage point of any historical understanding. The latter usage denotes the way in which any local milieu determines what constitutes a valid historical claim, otherwise he uses it synonymously with the term 'predicament'. In 'Towards a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism', for instance, Marcuse contends that Heideggerian ontology provides a foundation for 'concrete science' – in other words, Heidegger provides an epistemological ground for the validity of historical claims in the determinate experience

of history. This understanding of concretion further constitutes a rubric under which Marcuse variously includes both the material conditions of existence and the existential possibilities of a given historical epoch; in the latter case concretion means how something resembling the categories of Heideggerian ontology obtain in specific historical milieus. Although it is true that iterations of this usage are especially prevalent in his expositions of Heidegger - his discussion in 'On Concrete Philosophy for instance, treats concretion as nearly synonymous with the existential analytic in *Sein und Zeit* - these parallels reveal very little about the broader aims of Marcuse's early work. Indeed, the failure to ascertain the concrete is common to his early reproaches against Heidegger, where Marcuse claims that though Heideggerian ontology is useful in elaborating the conditions of historical experience in general, it fails to say anything about the form of life in any given historical epoch.

Like the abstractions of Heideggerian ontology generally, this usage raises questions about whether it can accommodate any number of phenomena. Obviously, assessments about the 'concrete' conditions of any epoch require broader claims about how to evaluate possible determinants of an historical period, how these might be specifiable, and the degree of specificity implied by 'concrete'. (Marcuse 1987, 49)

Anticipating a little, Marcuse conceives that the dialectical method provides a solution to these problems, but an indication of how they might be rectified is somewhat recognizable in the second way he tends to use the concept of 'concrete'. This alternative use of the term says less about any number of specific entities existing in the world, but rather uses the concept as shorthand for their arrangement or relationship. This is admittedly quite broad, and further exposition must be attentive to the fact that Marcuse

understands the constitution and intelligibility of these relationships to be contingent on various forms of knowing. In this usage, concretion refers to the Hegelian understanding of ‘determination’ in general, using the concept in a way somewhat analogous to Hegel’s treatment of it in the *Logic*, and Heidegger’s understanding of the *Lebenswelt* as a referential totality. Appealing to this parallel between Hegel and Heidegger is of course not uncomplicated, and indeed, a nuanced appraisal of the relationship between ‘Determinate Being’ and ‘Being-in-the-World’ would require pages of qualification exceeding Marcuse’s total published output in his early period. For present purposes it suffices to observe that the Hegelian and Heideggerian connotations of ‘concrete’ in these instances tend to be exaggerated with respect to whatever context Marcuse invokes them, and moreover, Marcuse is ultimately interested in reconciling the two in such a way which, although fair to neither Hegel nor Heidegger, is unique to his own philosophical project.

A claim which purports to say anything about the ‘concrete’, according to Marcuse, requires some account of the arrangement of whatever is under consideration, although he is especially attentive to the practical or experiential dimension of this arrangement. In order for anything to be determinate (or to be some spatially and temporally finite thing with qualities), it must be constituted relationally, and moreover, dialectically- in the most superficial sense it requires that there is an extensive list of things that it is *not*. Specificity, in this case, does not entail a judgment about an adequate degree of complexity (i.e., matter, money, productive relations, society broadly conceived); rather, knowledge is concrete to the degree in which it exhausts the relationships that constitute any determinate thing. This of course says nothing about the

sense of concretion which is lacking in Heidegger, namely, the specific relationships which constitute existence in a particular historical situation. After all, such a claim is almost self-evident, and can be extended to anything found in phenomenal consciousness – books, trees, and so on. However, concrete does not uniquely imply tangible objects or sense-data. Rather, by ‘concrete’, Marcuse is interested in a more comprehensive structure of relationships which constitute the way in which any social phenomena is intelligible. This is further qualified by the fact that this concreteness is historically determined by the ‘material constitution’ of historicity, or that these relationships are local to, and structured by, determinate historical forms. Phenomenology ultimately fails to apprehend how this might be the case, although Marcuse extends the productivist tendencies of the early Heidegger to entail that this ‘material constitution’ is a product of human activity⁴. The *Lebenswelt*, according to Marcuse, is contingent on both the natural environment, and the determinate way in which a given society manages to reproduce itself. Reproduction “gives drive and direction to social strength in its continuous self-renovation. Society is initially concerned with its material needs required for self-preservation” (1969, 8). Unsurprisingly, this reproduction is ultimately traced back to the means and relations of production (1969, 9), though Marcuse recognizes that his account

⁴ Heidegger is therefore in some sense correct when he contends that:

Reversing Hegel’s idealism in his own way, Marx requires that being be given precedence over consciousness. Since there is no consciousness in Being and Time, one could believe that there is something Heideggerian to be read here! At least Marcuse had understood Being and Time in this way. (Heidegger 2003, 52, cited in Feenberg 2005, xv)

Although Heidegger’s understanding of Marx is tenuous at best, he is astute in recognizing that Marcuse had problematized the supervening cognitive process in the “the materialist conception of history” by the categories of Heideggerian ontology. However, Feenberg (2005) argues that the derision in the comment is misplaced, rightly contending that the productivist metaphysics which came to be a central object of criticism for Heidegger after the turn were already discernable in *Sein und Zeit*.

of historicity cannot axiomatically assert the priority of social reproduction, as if the content of experience were epiphenomenal of some productive substratum. Rather, historicity is concerned with

purely phenomenal priority. In terms of the straightforward givenness of historical existence, self-concern that expresses itself in production and reproduction is the 'primordial' existential attitude. This does not imply any ontic-temporal priority, as though first there is pure production and reproduction, and then 'cultural' and 'spiritual' attitudes and objective domains (1969, 27)

Marcuse position here is that reproduction is always the reproduction of a determinate *Lebenswelt*, of which material and cultural realities are co-constitutive of. Therefore, "existence, as being-in-the-world, is simultaneously 'material' and 'spiritual,' 'economic' and 'ideological' (these terms merely indicate traditionally differentiated domains of inquiry)" (1969, 27). Decisively, granting priority to any of these realms exogenous to the way they are phenomenally experienced has no philosophical validity. Rather, an exhaustive account of any historical phenomena requires one to "locate it historically", "indicate its roots in an historical existential situation" and "also ask whether the given is thereby exhausted, or whether it contains an authentic meaning which, although not a-historical, endures through all historicity" (1969, 22).

Pippin's interpretation of the implications of Marcuse's understanding of historicity is helpful in clarifying this point: an event "is what it is only in relation to its past and that nothing in the human world can be intelligible except as a thoroughly historical phenomenon; its very being involves it in some historical story without which it would not be what it is". Gesturing towards how Marcuse resolves competing descriptions of what a modern factory 'is' in 'On the Problem of the Dialectic', Pippin points out that the radical implications of the idea of historicity is "the denial that

alternate descriptions of monopoly capitalism – this set of productive and consuming relations, etc. – could tell us what this form of life is” (1988, 72)⁵. However, considering that Heideggerian ontology provides no foundation for adjudicating between competing claims about historical validity (Marcuse 1969, 18)⁶, historicity seems to likewise be insufficiently ‘concrete’. Rather, it only allows one to point to generalities about social reproduction, so much so in fact that, despite his reservations about Lukács, Marcuse was able to find in *History and Class Consciousness* an implicit ontology:

I read Lukács before Heidegger, Korsch, too, I think. Both are examples of how to see more in Marxism than a political strategy and a fixed political orientation [*Zielsetzung*]. There is in both what you called ontology; it refers to a more or less implicit ontological foundation in Marx. (Marcuse, Habermas, et. al 1978, 126)

It is peculiar that Marcuse should find in Lukács an ontological argument, especially considering that the early reception of *History and Class Consciousness* widely recognized the text to be a critique of the ontological suppositions of Soviet productivism (c.f. Lukács 1977)⁷. Marcuse is rather straightforward about what he means by ontology – in both the above-cited later interview as well as in his earlier essays – his position is that ontology is coterminous with the historical character of concrete existence⁸. Lukács

⁵ ‘On the Problem of the Dialectic’ is of only limited help, as Marcuse drastically alters his position and offers a more robust understanding of ‘totality’. I find it doubtful that Pippin’s explanation adequately replicates Marcuse’s position in ‘On the Problem of the Dialectic’, and rather take Marcuse to be arguing the exact converse in that essay (in that he does make some accommodations for alternative explanations). However, despite my disagreement with Pippin in this regard, I take his exposition to be especially helpful in clarifying the arguments advanced in ‘Towards a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism’.

⁶ As Marcuse would only recognize *ex-post*, it is equally amenable to both Marxism and Fascism c.f. Marcuse and Olafson 1988; Marcuse 1991. ‘On the Problem of the Dialectic’ is of only limited help, as Marcuse drastically alters his position and offers a more robust understanding of ‘totality’. I explore this in connection with *Hegels Ontologie* in the subsequent section.

⁷ Although Lukács towards the end of his career concurs with Marcuse in maintaining that in order to gain any insight into how Marxist theory is applicable to contemporary society, an elaboration of ontology of the practical orientation of Marxism is required (c.f. Lukács 1978).

⁸ Lukács, following Marx quite closely, advances a more tempered claim, namely that the life-world is a product of human activity and therefore discernable as historically constituted.

maintains that society is a product of the mode of production in any given historical circumstance, as do of course Marx and Korsch, and in this sense *History and Class Consciousness* is commensurate with Marcuse's vision of ontology. However, if such 'concrete philosophy' is amenable to any number of Marxist theories, this prompts concerns about how Marcuse's vision of historicity develops any advances over his predecessors. Obviously Lukács' contention that the experiential world is merely a refraction of the productive substratum of social relations is untenable for Marcuse, absolving social theory of the task of immanent analysis except by detour through its relationship to the architectonics of production. Marcuse's alternative in proposing these relations to be interdependent expressions of the *Lebenswelt* seems to imply only that these relationships limit or guide existential possibilities, without being able to elaborate in any detail about how they do so specifically, to say nothing of any specific power relationships which would be of interest to Marxism⁹.

3.3 The Validity of Marxist Claims within the Purview of Heideggerian Ontology

Indeed, Marcuse takes Marxism to be a necessary supplement to Heidegger's limitations. He contends that Marxism can more faithfully grasp the 'concrete' conditions of the production process, provided these are to be understood within the horizon of historicity. Nevertheless, Heidegger's ontology as espoused in *Sein und Zeit*, even with

⁹ Something which Marcuse himself recognizes: "in terms of existential attitude, there is no understanding between the world of the modern bourgeois of advanced capitalism and that of the peasant or of the Proletarian" (1969, 18)

Marcuse's qualifications, grants limited philosophical ground to allowing any one theory a privileged insight into determinate 'ontic' conditions, and as a result, Marcuse's justifications for appealing to Marxism are unpersuasive. As Marcuse recognizes, even to claim that the writings of the historical Marx are contemporaneously relevant "seems to contain a dogmatic presupposition", namely, the validity of his initial insights, as well as some uniformity between the present historical situation and that of the nineteenth century. The converse claim rests on equally tenebrous suppositions, presupposing a classification of historical periods which "is possible only after the predicament has been demonstrated. Such a classification, in fact, if it claims to be more than a mechanical chronology must be based on the relationship between the documents and the predicament" (1969, 5). Similarly, Marcuse dismisses the possibility of deferring to any collective understanding of existential possibilities out of hand, as these tend to obscure the 'authentic' comprehension of historicity. Once again borrowing from Heidegger, the prevailing understanding of history is limited to its ontic expressions. Rather, if Marxism is to be more 'correct' than alternative understandings, it is contingent on a degree of reflexivity about "the vantage point of both meaning and method of the search" (1969, 14). However, this response is seemingly question-begging as well, supposing the present historical predicament to already be intelligible. Marcuse finally declares the privilege of Marxism somewhat axiomatically. For Marcuse, Marxism is more attractive than alternative approaches for two reasons: it superficially resembles the type of method supposed by the analysis of historicity ("its object is historical and is dealt with

historically”), and it can supplement the abstractions of ontology in examining the material conditions of historical existence¹⁰. The problems of the latter claim are already anticipated by Marcuse’s reproach against Heidegger, and without recourse to the ‘concrete’, the first point is susceptible to the same criticisms.

In addition to Marcuse’s own reservations, it should be reiterated that Heidegger’s analysis cannot accommodate any insights about any specific ‘beings’; these are rather ontic facts which tend to metaphysical thinking and the forgetting of the question of Being¹¹. Horkheimer’s (1982) observation that bourgeois philosophy precludes any insights about its own material conditions seems to be apt in this instance, and attention “to the highest point attained or attainable by bourgeois philosophy” (Marcuse 1969, 17) is from the outset doomed to failure¹². One should be attentive to the fact that Marcuse’s interpretation of Heidegger is prompted by the fact that the validity of Marxism to be irresolvable without recourse to a comprehensive vision of how truth claims can be measured or assessed. Marcuse’s inability to give an adequate account of how material conditions of existence are specifiable is less of an inevitable inheritance from Heidegger, and more so due to his failure to specify “how is the ‘truth’ of the fundamental Marxist theses to be proven” (Marcuse 1969, 12)¹³. Indeed, Marcuse is instead occupied with

¹⁰ These two aspects of Marxism are to be the foundation of the dialectical method. Although he introduces the dialectical method just as axiomatically as his reasons for endorsing Marxism, his advocacy of the dialectical method is no less problematic, as discussed briefly below.

¹¹ This is Heidegger’s contention anyway. See especially his discussion on Marxism in his “Letter on Humanism” (1993).

¹² Indeed, this is a staple of critical commentaries of Marcuse’s work written while studying under Heidegger. However, these are of uneven quality. A significant portion of these either misrepresent Heidegger’s positions, or tend to overstate Heidegger’s significance in Marcuse’s early work. The most nuanced of these is by far Schmidt’s analysis (1988).

¹³ It should be further noted that Marcuse grants Heidegger the philosophical authority to resolve this claim in a rather circular argument. Presuming that Heidegger had achieved the pinnacle “attainable by bourgeois philosophy” already

demonstrating resemblances between Marxist theory and Heideggerian ontology. While the fact remains that it is impossible to deduce the local material conditions of existence from ontology, it does not seem to necessarily preclude the philosophical grounding of a theory concerned with more ‘ontic’ truths, despite the fact that Marcuse himself fails to articulate some generalizable connection.

Despite this evident shortcoming, the question concerning a privileged Marxist insight into productive relations prompts some reflection on Marcuse’s project more broadly conceived. As I have endeavored to show, Marcuse wants to distinguish between the ‘material constitution of historicity’ and the generalization of contingent historical phenomena (as for instance, symbolism in Spengler’s historicism would be to Marcuse). While Marcuse denies that one can have any knowledge of how things ‘really’ are (as opposed to how any political or historical circumstances are experienced by individuals under those circumstances), he nevertheless believes that knowledge of historical tendencies is in some ways a necessary precursor to radical political action or the ‘radical act’.

supposes a vision of the development of historical knowledge, ostensibly what the understanding of ‘historicity’ is to problematize. Moreover, this title is variously shared with Dilthey (2005a, 2005b, 1969) (Dilthey’s privilege is moreover decisive in *Hegels Ontologie* [1987]). Although Pippin (1988) rightly contends that Marcuse uses Heidegger’s *Existenz* and Dilthey’s *Leben* synonymously, Benhabib (1987) points out that despite his confusion of the two terms, his understanding of both philosophers shows a radical incommensurability between their respective understandings of historicity. Indeed, Dilthey’s understanding of historicity is ostensibly to provide a corrective to some of Heidegger’s shortcomings. Such an evaluation is impossible if Heideggerian ontology is the ground upon which philosophical claims are evaluated, and rather implies some touchstone exogenous to both Dilthey and Heidegger which would be able to adjudicate between diverging understandings of historicity.

3.4 The Radical Act

The following problem arises: historical relationships are not plainly evident in everyday experience, or, as the adage goes: “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided” (Marx 1975, 804). The problem, of course, is that insofar Marcuse understands certain historical ‘truths’ to compel revolutionary activity, he must clarify how they are ‘hidden’ or ‘obscured’ in non-revolutionary situations (or otherwise, why they are less compelling in non-revolutionary circumstances). In fairness to Marcuse, this ‘knowledge’ cannot be reduced to a circumspective understanding of historical relationships, and moreover, he denies the mutual exclusivity of theory and practice. However, he cannot completely dissociate himself from the binary of true and false consciousness, or some analogue which would posit higher and lower forms of truth, and indeed, makes precisely such an evaluation in his exposition of a ‘revolutionary situation’. The “direction and goal [of the radical act] must arise from and be directed to history” (1969, 8). Moreover, the

radical action must come about (from the agent's standpoint) as a concrete necessity *of* concrete human existence, and it must (from the standpoint of the social world (*Umwelt*) be necessary *for* concrete human existence. The sphere of the concrete necessity for this undertaking is history. All determinations of radical action are part of the basic determination *of historicity*. (1969, 7)

Marcuse’s point is essentially this: Historical epochs provide an horizon of existential possibilities. Reiterating the discussion above, these possibilities are ultimately traceable back to the process of social reproduction, and each generation can understand that the various possibilities of their historical reality are a product of their own doing. Marcuse is adamant that this necessity is not something demonstrable in any conventional sense, but requires a personal (or existential) evaluation; such an evaluation cannot be true or false

but is rather an individual act of judgment (i.e., that this particular historical reality is intolerable), although each individual act of judging is limited by a particular historical horizon. Nevertheless, ascertaining the necessity of radical activity requires ancillary clarification which would inform such judgment (Marcuse 1969, 8) or otherwise it would be historically inevitable; in judging *this* historical reality to be intolerable, one must first explain what ‘this’ reality consists of. This is to say that in order to come to terms with the ‘necessity’ of an historical situation, one must appeal to a supra-phenomenal account of why one’s existential possibilities are the way they are- clearly this raises the same problems of adjudicating between different conceptions of history. In order to do so, Marcuse posits materialist dialectics as a corrective to Heideggerian phenomenology. As discussed above, he does so rather axiomatically, taking phenomenology to be objectionable on Marxist grounds (which he had in turn intended to formulate on Heideggerian grounds in the first place), although it is worth pursuing further what sort of knowledge this method is to yield.

Reiterating the discussion above, for Marcuse, historicity is the inherited character of the world which he understands as ‘heritage’; this heritage guides and constrains the existential possibilities of Dasein. Marcuse contends that, in order to adequately assess any historical phenomena, one must defer to the way historical reality is existentially ‘relevant’, or how historical realities are relevant ‘for me’. Ostensibly, in special historical circumstances, this heritage would compel revolutionary activity. In this instance, this would require an evaluative judgment (i.e., “living under the present circumstances is no longer a viable possibility for me”), and moreover, Marcuse wants to maintain that this judgment would be valid only to the individual making it. In order to

clarify the necessity of radical action (Marcuse still maintains some fidelity to the idea of ‘class consciousness’), the material constitution of historicity must be elaborated through dialectics. There are a number of instances where Marcuse vacillates between Heideggerian and subjectivist position strongly resembling that of Lukács, appealing to the possibility of thought approximating the causal process underlying historical development. In ‘Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism’ he writes: “The new generation becomes the subject of history only when it grasps and recognizes itself as the object of history — when it acts through an understanding of its own unique historical situation” (1969, 9-10). The contradiction in the passage quoted, as well as the general idea of a ‘material constitution of historicity’, is that historicity is essentially valuative, whereas despite Marcuse’s insistence to the contrary, the aim of materialist dialectics is to demonstrate a value-neutral structure of experience (i.e., conditions are the way they are because *xyz*, independently of any individual experience), a proposition which he explicitly denies having any validity (1969, 23; 2005, 38)¹⁴. Evidently, the evaluation of historical necessity, as well as proving the validity of Marxism, both require one to infer supra-phenomenal ‘truths’.

Despite the fact that such a value-neutral ‘truth’ resurfaces regardless of Marcuse’s own self-understanding, he further dissociates himself from a position which regards a ‘correct’ understanding of broader historical processes to be a necessary precursor to political action in his later essays. Although it is unwise to speculate on

¹⁴ In the cited ‘On Concrete Philosophy’, Marcuse contends that a phenomenological reduction alone (he uses the instance of a factory) would be able to demonstrate the integration of an economic system, although it is unclear what such a reduction would be able to say specifically about any economic system, and moreover, whether it would be able to say anything causative about it.

whether Marcuse himself understood this to be a problem in his own work, his subsequent reviews of Landshut and Marck, as well as *Hegels Ontologie*, ameliorate at least some of the difficulties of the 'Contribution' as well as in 'On Concrete Philosophy' and are worth further attention.

4. Hegel's Ontology

Marcuse's stated aims for *Hegels Ontologie* are quite grand - his correspondence, his concurrent writings, and indeed the introduction to the study variously indicate that the *Habilitationschrift* attempts to find in Hegel a precedent for his concurrent preoccupation with the social dimension of 'historicity' (1987, 2); an attempt "to disclose and to ascertain the fundamental characteristics of historicity" (1987, 1); "a preliminary contribution to an analysis of the internal relationship between Aristotelian and Hegelian ontologies" (1987, 104); to illuminate a connection between Marx and Hegel (cited in Benhabib 1987, xii)¹; and to demonstrate that there is no variance between Hegel's metaphysics and critical philosophy (1976, 26). As has been suggested in the preceding sections, the latter two points are ultimately only explicable for Marcuse under the rubric of historicity, although this relationship is not immediately intelligible without an excursus to Marcuse's exploration of the idea of 'heritage', as well how one could derive a 'genuine' understanding of inherited forms of knowledge, and moreover, how they might be fruitfully applied to contemporary problems (in such a way where the interpretation of Hegel, for instance, might be conceived of as politically meaningful).

Moreover, Marcuse curiously believes that this 'genuine' understanding of philosophical problems like historicity, the dialectic, or historical materialism is

¹ Benhabib reproduces a postcard Marcuse had sent to Karl Löwith dated July 28, 1931, made available to her from a Mr. Jürgen Dinter, Antiquar für Philosophie. The text is reproduced below:

It is true that a longer work of mine on Hegel will appear this fall: it is an interpretation of the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as foundations for a theory of historicity. The *Hegel-Marx* question is not explicitly addressed, although I hope this interpretation will throw some light on this connection. Neither does this work contain a critical discussion of Heidegger nor is it intended to do so. Rather, the whole is a necessary preparation for articulating the fundamental nature of historical happening.

attainable by returning to their 'original' historical meaning. The appearance of Siegfried Marck's *Die Dialektik in der Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Marck 1929) had given Marcuse the opportunity to extensively meditate on this subject; in thematizing in the use of dialectics throughout a cross-section of pre-war philosophy, and elaborating upon the critical use of dialectics following Hegel, Marck's work was prescient to Marcuse in that it had raised the opportunity to consider a genuinely critical use of dialectics in opposition to the wanton use of the concept in the twentieth century. The first volume, concerned broadly with an overview of dialectical method in early twentieth century philosophy raises the question of the validity of dialectical thinking in general. If the dialectic is only a formal law of contradiction, simultaneously legitimizing Soviet orthodoxy and displacing disparities between reality and cognition, then it is unclear to what extent the dialectic yields any privileged relationship to social knowledge; the "term dialectic, and its conception, have received such abuse through usage in contemporary philosophy and in Marxist theory and practice the attempt to capture its original meaning has become unavoidable" (Marcuse 1976, 13-4). Granting that the dialectic can still demand a position within contemporary thought, the broader confusion about the social efficacy of philosophy must be reconciled with its original historical function. Such a treatment

is justified by the central position that the dialectic occupies within Marxism, and through the insights which could be obtained if one considers contemporary philosophy from a dialectical perspective relating philosophy to contemporary society, and to the entire socio-historical situation. (Marcuse 1976, 12)

Marcuse's investigation is therefore especially salient to the present discussion in revealing how antecedent treatments of the dialectic are ultimately authoritative in

adjudicating between diverse understandings of the concept. If the restorative function of intellectual history is at all salient to reanimating the critical role of the dialectic (and by extension historicity or Hegel's 'ontology'), it is only insofar as antecedent thinkers had a privileged insight into its 'genuine' function. Marcuse's understanding of historicity, at least in this respect, entails that one can neither suppose an Archimedean point according to which an authentic authorial intention or that some analogous a-historical facet of these intellectual currents is recoverable (nor can it conversely presume an epistemic closure between historical periods). Rather, the predecessors to modern thought are intelligible only through the purview of contemporary discursive categories, which in turn entails that these past insights have some 'living' relevance. Similarly, in *Hegels Ontologie*, Marcuse writes that his interpretation

has definite presuppositions from which it proceeds and which reflect the changed history of the problem today. Such an interpretation must reilluminate all that was a living reality for Hegel, corresponding to the completely different situation out of which his philosophy originated, and which precisely because of this difference has remained unarticulated. (Marcuse 1987, 3)

Marcuse raises the same question he does about Marx in 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism': How can we accept the salience of historical texts as a living reality in our own time? An interpretation of a philosophical text, as well as its plausibility will ultimately depend on the degree to which "one considers contemporary philosophy from a dialectical perspective relating philosophy to contemporary society" (1976, 12).

In 'On the Problem of the Dialectic', Marcuse subsequently traces the intellectual history of dialectical thinking from Platonic thought, claiming that Plato had "understood the meaning of the dialectic in its most fundamental sense" (1976, 14); if Plato was able

to understand the function of the dialectic, it is only because its contemporary usage is derived from this original understanding, or to borrow from Whitehead, the “safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (1979, 39). Marcuse contends that the historical development of a philosophical concept, in this case the dialectic, cannot be understood as a sequence of philosophical debates. Rather, subsequent iterations of dialectical thinking can be seen as ‘developments’ only insofar as they problematize the dialectic in such a way which surpasses the horizon of their predecessors. Following how Marcuse traces this intellectual history is instructive in this case: Marcuse argues that, because Plato had relegated the dialectic to his world of Ideas, he was unable to grasp how historicity is constitutive of the movement of Being, and under these auspices, Marcuse believes there to be no such genuine development from the Platonic dialectic until Hegel. Although one might consider someone like Plotinus, for instance, to be a curious omission, Marcuse considers the intermittent appraisals of the dialectic to be unable to surpass the Platonic paradigm. This is to say that even though the *Enneads* may have surpassed the nuance or rigor of Plato, ultimately Plotinus is beholden to the limitations of the Platonic dialectic.

4.1 On the Alleged Misinterpretation and Broader Significance of Historicity in Hegel’s Thought

The discussion in ‘On the Problem of the Dialectic’ illuminates the broader project of *Hegels Ontologie*. According to Marcuse, Dilthey presents the most advanced vision of historicity, defining “the basis and limits of this problem” (1987, 1), although ultimately, he fails to clarify certain suppositions of his project. In ascertaining the concept of Life as the center of historicity, Dilthey apparently fails to grasp “the

characterization of the motility of Life in terms of the unity of the I and the world (Nature and Spirit), the ontological meaning of this unity, the definition of historical Life as that mode of being which ‘actualizes’ all that is, the determination of Life as Spirit and of its world as the ‘world of Spirit’” (1987, 2). The problems of historicity, motility, and Life will be returned to below, although presently any further exposition requires a further elaboration of Marcuse’s self-understanding of this project.

Marcuse contends that these unclarified presuppositions in Dilthey’s work are the residue of Hegelian ontology. As Pippin points out (1988, 68), it is anachronistic to speak of Hegel’s concern with historicity; although *Geschichtlichkeit* is found in various places in Hegel’s corpus, the concept only acquired a philosophical significance with Dilthey. However, this strikes me as being precisely the point. Despite the fact that Hegel himself had failed to rigorously explore the significance of historicity, Marcuse contends that Dilthey’s understanding had never eclipsed the horizon of Hegelianism. Further, Dilthey’s limitations are due to assumptions about Hegel’s system which are either misunderstandings, or to a failure to explore the ramifications of these assumptions. Because Dilthey presents the most advanced understanding of historicity thus far, and because “the basis of the current tradition of philosophical questioning about historicity” rests on Dilthey, it is imperative to investigate the unstated philosophical assumptions of Dilthey’s successors, as well as how these constrain their understanding of social phenomena. Nonetheless Marcuse’s own introductory statements never explicitly clarify the implications of the contemporary confusion about historicity. Certainly his earlier essays are more precise in pointing to the ramifications of these misinterpretations as well as pointing to how these might be remedied by a return to a more foundational

understanding of historicity, although these too only elliptically suggest broader consequences for the social sciences.

The question of what is at stake in Marcuse's reading can perhaps be best clarified as follows: First, Marcuse denies that historicity can be reduced to a static collection of mental rules and guidelines. However, it is worth reiterating that Marcuse likewise concedes that abstract formulas outlining broader laws of historical development -or a grand purposiveness to history i.e., the Cunning of Reason- deflect from any 'concrete' understanding of an historical situation. If both supra-historical understandings of historical development (i.e., a reductive formal law of history) and heavily subject-centered accounts of this development are untenable, the question arises as to whether there are any plausible alternatives. In the above section, it was shown that Marcuse's own articulation of historicity does not fare much better than either of these approaches. While Marcuse certainly has a less reductive understanding of historicity than a rigid epiphenomenalism (i.e., he denies that reality is merely a series of exemplary cases of a broader historical narrative about reason or productive relations), he nonetheless identifies the process of historical development to be exogenous to the way actors in that process understand themselves. Furthermore, he identifies the activities and practices of any historical epoch as somehow 'caused' or 'determined' by a broader historical process (in this case, social reproduction).

Because present understandings of historicity (as well as, according to Marcuse, Marx's, c.f. Marcuse 1992, 1976) can be traced back to Hegel, one way to ameliorate the problem would be to investigate what philosophical assumptions inform Hegel's theory of historicity, and evaluate whether or not these assumptions are plausible. In other

words, one would be claiming that the problems with which any account of historicity must face are due to Hegel. In some way, this is in line with what Marcuse intends to do in *Hegels Ontologie*, although his more central claim is that problematic accounts of historicity owe more to misunderstandings of Hegel by subsequent interpreters than the historical Hegel himself. In this respect, Marcuse contends that it makes more sense to return to Hegel, and to consider those aspects of his thought which have been ignored or denied. More succinctly put, Marcuse asks what sort of claims must be true in order to advance a thesis about historicity – implying, of course, that contemporary understandings are able to propose adequate versions of historicity independently of those claims.

An exploration of Hegel's early articulation of historicity as a philosophical problem is therefore a corrective to the implicit philosophical suppositions (as well as errors and misinterpretations) of early twentieth century historical thinking. This requires, according to Marcuse, a complete reinterpretation of the *Logic*; traditional interpretations of Hegel's historical thought typically focus on the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and in turn interpret the *Logic* and *Phenomenology* in this light. Therefore it is implied, these interpretations neglect historicity in favor of a philosophy of history. This elliptical distinction between history and historicity is raised here only to preliminarily suggest a number of quite surprising conclusions Marcuse draws about Hegel's system: First, Marcuse denies that the Hegelian dialectic can be understood as progressively correcting certain untenable assumptions about consciousness until some eventual conceptual

understanding of the ‘Absolute’². Moreover, he finds that the interpretations of Hegel that narrowly focus on the progressive approximation of duties, customs, and social practices to their ‘truth’ throughout the course of human history to especially obfuscate what Hegel understands by historicity (and by extension, certainly distances him from Mannheim). Rather, by ‘Absolute’, Marcuse understands Hegel to be articulating a foundation for the historically contingent experience of ‘reality’. As Marcuse phrases it, the Absolute “does not signify a vague epistemological ‘correspondence’”; it is an “ontological rather than epistemological identity” (1987, 188). Moreover, Marcuse contends that Hegel himself had misunderstood this crucial aspect of his system by understanding the ‘Absolute’ as “the universal form of being” to likewise be “the highest and truest form of being” (1987, 183)³. In short, the Absolute, as understood traditionally as the final affirmative moment of Hegel’s system, is by Hegel’s own logic, an untenable conclusion.

4.2 Motility and Life in Hegel’s Logic

Nevertheless, Marcuse makes further, otherwise thought-provoking claims, which must be omitted in the present discussion (as in the instance of the relationship between the Aristotelian categories *kinesis*, *dynamis*, and *energeia* to Hegel’s *Bewegtheit*⁴). Despite the fact that Marcuse’s conclusions - in typical Hegelian fashion - are bound to the processual aspects of the exposition, the following truncated exposition is justified by the interest of not missing forests for trees, and above all a concern with brevity.

² To my knowledge, this has been first pointed out by Pippin (1988, 73)

³ Marcuse is, however, ready to point out that Hegel only makes this error in his later work, and has a much more comprehensive account of the Absolute in his early writings, especially in the *Phenomenology*. This aspect of Marcuse’s interpretation will be discussed further below.

⁴ Feenberg (2005, 47- 70) offers an excellent account of this relationship, as well as how it reveals a number of parallels between Hegel, Heidegger, and Aristotle.

Therefore, I sacrifice comprehensiveness where it might encroach on intelligibility, and instead focus on those aspects of Marcuse's interpretation most salient to the claims advanced in the preceding paragraph: the difference between historicity and history, and the concepts of Life and motility.

The latter concept is perhaps the most central to Marcuse's interpretation. The best way to make sense of motility is as follows: First, positing any determination requires the exclusion of everything that such a determination does not consist of; it is impossible to speak of anything determinate without reference to its other. Such determinations do not merely presuppose some static list of everything which they are not, but that which is excluded is also a property of the determination in question. However, this act of exclusion is a 'moment' of any such determination, which is to say that determinations are not 'simultaneously' what they are not, but are ceaselessly in a process of transition. Marcuse makes two important claims about this process: First, that in describing motility, Hegel is making an ontological claim, or that this flux is constitutive of all determinations, and secondly, according to Marcuse, Hegel's decisive insight is to realize that this development follows from "an earlier stage of its existence", or that each development demonstrates that the previous form is a decisive aspect of the present; dialectical development can only be "comprehended as it has come into being and as it is becoming" (Marcuse 1976, 18).

This latter point will be returned to. Presently the conclusion to be drawn is from the major claim that this motility is ontological, or a fundamental determination of what things are. This does not seem to be an especially iconoclastic conclusion- at least with respect to the broader argument I claim he is to be developing – especially because

Marcuse's analysis is narrowly expository and does not account for the ramifications of this understanding of motility. However, the reference to 'things' advances too far in the discussion; there is nothing in this account of motility which would imply the simultaneity of these 'moments', and this is the decisive point. A poignant illustration would be to consider that 'things' are identified through their properties, and there is nothing in Marcuse's discussion which would imply a stability of identification. More pointedly, there is nothing to imply that any one 'thing' can be simultaneously any of its properties; motility, in this instance, is a perpetual coming and passing away of various qualities. Recalling the discussion in the section above, Marcuse's central difficulty is in proposing how one might distinguish between specific historical processes which determine what a form of life 'is' in any historical epoch - productive relations under capitalism, for instance - and contingent historical phenomena. The present articulation of motility seems to dovetail in the latter direction, where motility is an essential property of all beings and therefore belongs outside the realm of human history (1987, 176). This account would deny one the capacity for making any positive claims about productive relations, 'the material constitution of historicity', or social antagonism in general; in short, it denies all stable identities.

In *Hegels Ontologie* as well as 'On the Problem of the Dialectic' (1976, 27; 1988, 154), Marcuse makes a distinction which would seemingly ameliorate this difficulty: Although all beings are constituted by this motility, only those beings with the capacity of conceptual thought can initiate motility through their activity (whereas it is something that occurs in inanimate objects, for instance, passively [c.f. 1987, 158, 177]), and moreover, can enjoy the stability of 'equality-with-self-in-otherness', which is guided by

Hegel's understanding of 'Life'. Very preliminarily, Life can be understood to be something like an horizon which stabilizes the intelligibility of various relationships; things are intelligible only by virtue of 'participating' or being meaningfully arranged within a specific historical horizon (Marcuse 1987, 316)⁵. With reference to the discussion of things and qualities above, this can be further articulated as follows: Life is the horizon which determines the way in which particular identities can be said to be simultaneous groupings of various properties. This is quite confusing as until now, the discussion has centered on 'micro-units' of intelligibility, or how the most basic determinations of being can be made. However, the analysis can be broadened to higher or more elaborate associations to include the way any one thing might be understood to be what it is. In 'On the Concept of the Dialectic', Marcuse illustrates this point with specific reference to an industrial factory; the significance of the above-mentioned factory is intelligible only within the context of certain social practices and historically conditioned habitual knowledge. Participation in these practices allows one to distinguish a factory as "a place that one enters reluctantly and leaves wearily" or "a source of great profit" from "an accumulation of stones, iron, people, etc." (1976, 20)

However, this is very introductory and in *Hegels Ontologie* Marcuse is not entirely helpful in further clarifying what he understands by 'Life'. Marcuse's tenebrous prose is especially problematic because the subsequent discussion of Hegel's failure to fully

⁵ This is the same distinction Rosen makes (1974, 34), gesturing towards Marcuse's interpretation, between historicity and history; the former "is not an eternal order in the classical sense, but changes its essential shape, or what counts as order, in accordance with a pulsation-process of emergence, in such a way as to give rise to human history by 'opening' or defining the horizons within which human history occurs. The process of the opening or defining of horizons within which human history occurs". In contrast, because Hegel takes the process of this emergence to be entirely intelligible, he abandons the distinction between the 'Absolute' and its accidents and is thereby able to demonstrate the rational development of history.

develop the concept of 'historicity' is contingent on his understanding of Life. The first main point to draw from Marcuse's exposition is that Life is a social process; Marcuse discusses this idea of Life in terms reminiscent of his explanation of 'social reproduction' in the 'Contributions' (1987, 158-159, 161), although it would be overly hasty to draw any further parallels. It is especially difficult to exposit what Marcuse means by Life here because, although Marcuse describes it as an activity of the species, one cannot ascribe to it any particular agent or subject. The best way to clarify what Marcuse means here is perhaps to reiterate that in the most general terms, Life is merely the process of creating stable identities. The difficulty of course is that any one description of 'who' or 'what' does so presumes the anterior activity of Life. So although according to Marcuse this has definitive anthropological suppositions (i.e., it is a social process, it is a mode of being in the world, etc.), any description of what these may be requires one to invoke an historically contingent aspect of this process (Marcuse 1987, 162; 168; 169). In the same way it would be impossible of distinguishing between Life as generative of 'material' or 'ideal' realities – this would be only to presume some historical milieu where such distinctions are specifiable⁶.

The main implication is that ironically, this would preclude any conceptual understanding of an 'ontology' or trans-historical 'cause' of the way Life might create stable meaningful horizons, as any one such description defers only to a particular 'accident' of the way Life is meaningful. The conclusion that Marcuse draws from this

⁶ In a gesture to Heidegger he defines Life as productive of 'facticity' (Marcuse 1987, 265), and Benhabib identifies his discussion of Life as 'objectification' to be a process as analogous to how Dilthey defines 'objectifications' (1987, xxvi). Although certainly not identical, these shorthands are quite helpful in clarifying what exactly is meant by Life.

understanding of Life with regards to Hegel's system is that this would deny any privilege to cognition or any one particular 'mode' of Life; Marcuse insists that Hegel does a disservice to the rest of his system by conflating the Absolute Idea with the "highest and most true form of being" (1987, 183). It is necessary however to point out that the persistent theme in *Hegels Ontologie* is that this confusion about Life and cognition persists throughout Hegel's entire corpus, and moreover, perseveres in more developed understandings of historicity like Dilthey's (Marcuse 1987, 322-323). Marcuse is not entirely successful in drawing this distinction. On the one hand, he denies any conceptual understanding of this process, while nevertheless a major thesis of his interpretation requires that Life be defined in anthropological or crypto-materialist terms⁷ - in his interpretation of the *Phenomenology* for instance, Marcuse defines desire and labor as categories of Life. I will not dwell on this here, although this distinction provides a better vantage point from which to evaluate the difference between history and historicity.

4.3 Historicity in Hegel's Phenomenology

According to Marcuse, Hegel has a more comprehensive view of history and historicity in his early writings, particularly in the *Phenomenology* with respect to Spirit.

⁷ Or the parallels he alludes to between this supposedly Hegelian understanding of Life and Dilthey's own gloss on the concept, as well Heidegger's understanding of *Dasein* and *Existenz*. Indeed these similarities have provoked dispute among interpreters. Pippin, for instance, (1988, 71) maintains that Marcuse uses the term synonymously with Heidegger's *Existenz*, and Feenberg (2005, 53-54) similarly interprets 'Life' to be analogous to Dasein's relation to Being. Conversely, Benhabib (1987, xxi) claims that although Marcuse's himself might have taken the two terms to be near-identical, he tends to vacillate between Diltheyan and Heideggerian understandings of historicity. The central difference is that Pippin's interpretation stresses the subjective, existential aspects of Life, and ultimately concedes that Marcuse allows for some (albeit very limited) claims about human finitude and potential in the vein of Heideggerian ontology (1988, 78). Benhabib argues that it is problematic to foreground the Heideggerian aspects of Life because Marcuse's explication does not allow historicity to be derived from individual temporality (19787, xxix). The narrow concerns of the present analysis, however, allow me the privilege of not needing to adjudicate between these interpretations.

Clearly the relationship between Spirit and history in the *Phenomenology* is quite multifaceted, though as Marcuse himself acknowledges the problems of Spirit *in* history and Spirit *as* history are outside the purview of the present discussion (Marcuse 1987, 299) and will not be elaborated upon here. Presently it should be noted that Marcuse finds it regrettable that “the entire post-Hegelian discussion of historicity has primarily oriented itself toward [a] secondary and derivative concept of history in Hegel’s work” (1976, 323), namely, the succession of shapes of Spirit, which we turn to now. Marcuse draws attention to the *Phenomenology* where Life - here defined as Self-Consciousness - develops into Spirit. Life makes this transition into Spirit when its activity can be generalized among a ‘people’ (1987, 196); this is to say that Life becomes Spirit when customs, duties, and practices are shared by a society. This is merely the ‘external’ aspect of Spirit, or Spirit as it actualizes itself in human history. According to Marcuse, this understanding of Spirit identifies Life only when it convalesces into generalizable historical patterns, and therefore, cannot tell the whole story. Namely, it necessarily omits the generative aspect of Life; Life “could at the most serve as a presupposition or an enabling condition of [...] history” (Marcuse 1987, 194). In less cryptic terms, Marcuse is accusing thinkers like Dilthey for ignoring the materialist presuppositions of Hegel’s historical thought, at least in the *Phenomenology*. More pointedly, Hegel himself suppresses this aspect of his thought by identifying a stable or final end of history. This may seem like a strange reproach – after all, Marcuse himself notes that the crypto-materialism of Hegel’s thought is readily specifiable - yet this is only one aspect of Marcuse’s interpretation. Strongly related to this first argument is that Marcuse identifies

Hegel's philosophy of history to be dependent on an ontology, and specifically his particular understanding of historicity.

As alluded to above, Marcuse identifies historicity with the processual aspect of the development of the *Logic*, although he is particularly attentive to the conclusion of the 'Doctrine of Being'. Schematically, his interpretation can be outlined as follows: Recall any positing includes what it is 'not', so that a positing of Being always also includes nothingness. Clearly 'nothingness' or 'not-Being' is never present, though nonetheless this 'nothing' is constitutive of Being, or the essence of Being. It follows from this that any present being implies a 'not-being' in its "atemporal" past, so that "Being can only be what it is immediately in the present through recollection (*Erinnerung*)" (Marcuse 1987, 68). Now Marcuse identifies historicity with Life, which better clarifies why any discussion about a particular form of life will necessarily gloss over historicity. More to the point, historicity is a foundational and permanent character of beings, which thus denies the type of stasis involved in an end of history.

Reiterating the discussion above, Marcuse's interpretation is, at least in part, meant to clarify some of the implicit assumptions of the post-Hegelian discussion on historicity. The materialist and ontological presuppositions have already been discussed above, although one must be careful to avoid conclusions about what Marcuse's position is on all of this, or take the above to be indicative of his own views. Most prescient to the discussion of idealism is certainly the contention that Life is 'irreducible' or beyond conceptual understanding; because Marcuse identifies the 'subject' of history - for lack of a better term - as 'ineffable', it seems that anything like a potential class consciousness is self-defeating. My own view is that this is not necessarily the case, and Marcuse does not

see a problem in holding Life to be a pre-discursive process while simultaneously giving it various materialist and anthropological qualifications, though the argument Marcuse is advancing here is somewhat better or ‘more’ historicist than that in the ‘Contributions’ - particularly if one is to consider the respective positions on social reproduction in both pieces. Certainly Marcuse still holds a productivist position in *Hegels Ontologie*, though with some ambivalence; the discussion of Life in the *Logic* precludes holding labor to be a permanent aspect of human life. Admittedly, Marcuse vacillates between holding ‘human life’ to be the subject of history, and taking ‘human life’ to be a contingent aspect of historical development. The latter view seems to be more in line with his 1931 review of Landshut’s *Kritik der Soziologie*, although he does still understand historicity in terms of Dasein. I cite an exemplary passage here:

[historicity] is primarily in transforming and in being transformed that existence (*Dasein*) is historical. Historicity as [the] ontological motility [of *Dasein*] does not unfold with or towards [*Dasein*], but is itself this unfolding and only this unfolding (*Geschehen*) (Marcuse 1992, 26)

The question of ‘who’ or ‘what’ is the subject of history in these pieces is raised only to further consider what sorts of knowledge claims this ‘who’ or ‘what’ can make. It is worth highlighting that Marcuse denies the legitimacy of any final comprehension of history in both the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*, while further attention to his claims about historicity pre-empts any ultimate conclusions on this score: Instead of successively better self-understanding throughout history, Marcuse speaks of ‘recollection’ of previous forms of Life, and it is not immediately apparent if or how either of these concepts are distinct. Pippin (1988, 78) claims that the essential component of this recollection is “the extent to which subjects can and do understand the

‘totality’ of that period *as* their own historical doing, and thereby actively *assume* the role of subject”. In this case ‘recollection’ would be merely a disguised idealism, and I think this is partly true: Marcuse (1987, 323) claims that historicity is defined by Hegel “as that exceptional mode of the self-relation of self-consciousness to its own motility”, which certainly corroborates Pippin’s reading, although Marcuse himself is careful to distinguish recollection from any psychic phenomenon (Marcuse 1987, 68).

5. Conclusion

Although ultimately it might make little sense to police the boundaries of Marxism, it is worthwhile to note that Marcuse leaves very little room for saying anything about productive relations, or social antagonism in general, points which seem to me to be decisive for Marxism. However, this prompts some reflection on why Marcuse is not particularly successful during this period. On one hand, Heideggerian ontology is not particularly amenable to ‘real history’, although this is not the whole story. As Adorno (1932) had pointed out in his review of *Hegels Ontologie*, identifying particular, local historical phenomena with a permanent feature of humanity or some such subject is particularly a-historical, and with respect to the narrow problem of validity the problem is more poignant: The evaluation of any expression of historical knowledge according to some fundamental character of history is necessarily reductive, and moreover, evades the type of ‘concreteness’ that Marcuse had hoped to ascertain. This is particularly true of the ‘Contributions’, although as we have seen *Hegels Ontologie* is more ambivalent in this regard. The problem arises how best to consider this aspect of Marcuse’s early corpus. It is well known that Marcuse would come to disavow Heidegger (Marcuse and Olafson 1988), although whether Heidegger had any sustained influence on Marcuse’s later work is a subject of continued debate¹. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Kosík, and Tran Duc Thao had combined Marxism and phenomenology with greater success than Marcuse’s early experiments. Moreover, the collapse of the fact-value distinction seems to have resolved the problems of ‘proving’ Marxism. Finally, if current scholarship is any

¹ C.f. Abromeit 2004, 2010; Feenberg 2005; Wolin 2001 for excellent studies on the subject.

indication, Hegel's *Logic* seems to be poorly equipped to give any solutions to the salient problems of social and political thought

However, this is not to suggest that Marcuse is 'merely' concerned with the intellectual debates of the last century, and even if this were the case it would be hasty to assume that these debates have been substituted entirely by newer ones. In order to evaluate Marcuse's early work, it is useful to direct the titular question in Croce's well-known study *What is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Hegel?* (1985), toward Marcuse. It should be preliminarily noted that in *Hegels Ontologie*, 'Marcuse's Hegel' is far removed from Croce's 'dead Hegel'. This is to say that Marcuse disassociates 'his' Hegel from the facets of Hegelianism that Croce's paradigmatic study finds to be objectionable; namely, epiphenomenalism and the rigid hierarchy which places philosophical cognition above all other domains of knowledge². Pinkard (2007, 128) suggests that Croce's emphasis on the individual, as well as his dispute against the more systemic aspects of Hegel's thought, lays the foundation for the existentialist interpretation of Hegel in France; however, despite the fact that Croce's criticisms of the *Logic* anticipate the eroding interest in Hegel's mature philosophy in Europe, these parallels to Croce's study are raised in order to indicate that Marcuse's interpretation is much fresher than its subject matter would suggest.

² The present study, however, neglects to discuss the relationship of spirit and nature, which is a major point of contention in Croce, Marcuse, and indeed the Frankfurt School more broadly. C.f. Jacoby 1971. However, this is not to say that Marcuse and Croce fundamentally concur; indeed, there are major differences between Marcuse and Croce's thought. Particularly, Croce makes the distinction between thought and action, retains the affirmative moment in Hegel's thought, and is well within the tradition of conventional idealism (this is of course to say nothing of his discussion of distinction and opposition).

Contrary to the widely-held contention among his contemporaries, Marcuse suggests that Hegel's contemporary relevance does not need to be recovered at the expense of his metaphysical aspirations; rather, he recognizes that attempts to separate the problem of 'historicity' from the seemingly antediluvian concerns of Hegelian metaphysics is revealing of the implicit philosophical assumptions of early twentieth century social inquiry. Indeed, regardless of whether Marcuse successfully outlined the unstated philosophical assumptions of the concept, the question as to whether the advocates of an attenuated Hegelianism are able to plausibly ground his concepts independently of the more 'anachronistic' facets of his thought is certainly 'living' in contemporary Hegel scholarship; Michael Rosen's work, for instance, answers this question in the negative (1984). I think the more presently salient problem that Marcuse highlights is how post-Hegelian discussions about historicism are not quite able to simultaneously hold Hegel's seemingly contradictory theses on history: On one hand, Hegel presents an extra-historical law of historical development (for instance, that reason realizes itself progressively throughout human history), and conversely, reason itself is historical. In other words, while the criteria and standards of validity may be local to an historical epoch, presumably their development is merely an iteration of a supra-historical reason. This is not to suggest that this is necessarily a problem for Hegel, as Marcuse himself acknowledges, though as Allen Patten shows (1999, 27-34) this is a problem for contemporary Hegel scholarship, particularly for scholars who advocate a historicist interpretation of *Sittlichkeit*. Regrettably Marcuse does not pursue this line of thinking further.

So while on first glance it would appear as if Marcuse's Hegel presages something like the mid-century French reception of the *Phenomenology*, there are definite aspects of *Hegels Ontologie* which problematize anything like a humanist or anthropological interpretation of Hegel. Marcuse's reading, as we have seen, makes it quite difficult to show that Hegel is pointing to some sort of a-historical subjectivity which is implicit or 'nascent' in various historical epochs. In this same regard, Marcuse seems to have anticipated the infatuation with the Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts in the 1930's as much as the reception of the more flexible historicism of the *Grundrisse*, which was only to be discovered much later³. However, one must be careful not to overstate this point. Shortly after *Hegels Ontologie*, Marcuse wrote a review of the 1844 Manuscripts, and his interpretation is well within the purview of Heideggerian ontology. It is necessary to reiterate that Marcuse had hoped to reformulate the broader foundations of Marxism in order to restore its practical dimensions and to accommodate lived experience. Above all, Marcuse's concern lies in eroding the priestly authority of the theoretician and furnishing a foundation for describing social phenomena; ironically, Marcuse believed that this aim requires an exposition of one of the most impenetrable books in the Western canon. Moreover, as Schmidt has pointed out, deducting a philosophical foundation for Marxist practice may well very be an impotent gesture (1988, 63). This privilege of praxis is in any case contingent on demonstrating the commensurability of Marx and Heidegger, and there are good reasons to seriously doubt that Marcuse was successful. Nevertheless, beyond providing merely a footnote to the

³ For an especially comprehensive treatment of the rediscovery and reception of the *Grundrisse*, c.f. Musto 2008.

history of ideas, Marcuse points to a problem which eclipses the work of his contemporaries and issues a permanent imperative to social inquiry: “Recovering the ground for genuine commitment without which no human history can long survive, can only be achieved by entering into history, not going beyond it” (Marcuse 1990, 138).

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