

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE ANTI-THESIS OF RELIGION: MARX, MATERIALISM, AND THE
MAKING OF AMERICAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
WILLIAM UNDERWOOD

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2024

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Introduction.....	1
1. True Americanism in the Godless Institution.....	37
2. Religious Studies in Service of the Cold War Crusade.....	97
3. In the Name of Lesser Gods: Fetishism, Materiality and the Dilemmas of History.....	172
4. Materialism and Supersessionism: On Marx's "Christian Question".....	229
5. By Way of Thought: Materialism without Reconciliation.....	281
Conclusion.....	350
Bibliography.....	358

Abstract

“The Antitheses of Religion: Marx, Materialism, and the Making of American Religious Studies” critically examines the category of materiality in the study of religion through a new interpretation of the field’s formation in the twentieth-century United States. Combining historical and philosophical approaches, I seek to understand why we conceptualize materiality in the ways that we do, how our concepts have been shaped by the field’s peculiar American history, and what alternative perspectives that history has foreclosed.

The historical argument of the dissertation focuses on the period between World War I and the early 1960s. In these decades, I argue, a culturally potent discourse of “anti-materialism” facilitated the successful entry of religious studies into US colleges and universities. Stitching together intellectual critiques of scientism, religious anxieties over secularism, and opposition to left-wing radicalism, anti-materialism provided religious studies’ proponents with an indispensable rhetorical idiom through which to argue, successfully, that academic instruction in religion was necessary to combat the corrosive effects of cultural secularization and shore up the spiritual foundations of American civic life. This process of disciplinary formation had enduring effects on religious studies. Most notably, it encoded within the field a contextually specific antipathy to methods and perspectives associated with “materialism”—an antipathy insistently expressed in the dichotomous terms of Cold War spiritual conflict. In light of this history, I take up one theoretical avenue foreclosed by religious studies’ Cold War origins, namely, a long-overdue encounter between religious studies and the Marxist theoretical tradition. Through an extended reading of the Marxian corpus, I adumbrate a materialist approach designed to address the contradictions that confront the study of material religion today.

The dissertation is divided into two parts, each corresponding, respectively, to the historical and constructive dimensions of the project.

Chapter 1 examines the emergence of the movement for an academic study of religion in the decade following World War I, taking the National Council on Religion in Higher Education as a privileged lens through which to understand the development of the academic study of religion and the role of anti-materialist discourse in that process. Chapter 2 follows this history into the period of the Cold War. Fortified by a friendly cultural climate, new sources of funding, and a flourishing educational ecosystem, religion scholars and their allies oversaw the creation in this period of a vast disciplinary infrastructure on the presumption that education in religion would re-sacralize, and therefore strengthen American democratic ideals. Chapter 3 clarifies the consequences of this history for the contemporary field. Here I turn my focus to the surprising resurgence of interest in the concept of the fetish among religion scholars, taking the revived discourse on fetishism as a distillation of the successes and enduring challenges confronting religious studies “material turn.”

Chapters 4 and 5 take up Karl Marx as a theoretical interlocutor for the study of religion. Chapter 4 examines Marx’s fitful attempts to articulate a critical materialist position in the mid-1840s, focusing on his repeated use of figures of Jews and Judaism as the rhetorical levers facilitating his break with contemporaneous forms of criticism and reorientation toward a nascent materialism. Chapter 5 turns its attention to *Capital* and its preparatory manuscripts, locating in the latter a trenchant self-critique of the positions discussed in Chapter 4 and a new understanding of materialism as a critical strategy concerned above all else with the genesis and reification of social form. The conclusion brings this materialism to bear on methodological questions in the contemporary field.

Acknowledgments

I owe my first thanks to my advisor Ryan Coyne, who has been an unyielding source of support and an exemplar of intellectual virtuosity for the last near-decade. Ryan has the truly rare ability to make his students excited about their own work. Through moments of uncertainty, his confidence has been the difference in bringing this dissertation to a conclusion. Sarah Hammerschlag saw this project for what it could be before anyone else. When I feel myself lacking for vision, I turn to her: her critical lucidity and uncanny tendency to ask just the right question at the just right time have been indispensable. Angie Heo was my first instructor in all matters material. Her genial skepticism has kept me sharp, and forced me to continually specify what I mean by that, exactly. Sarah Imhoff said yes to being on my committee without knowing me or what she was getting into. In spite of that, she's given more to this project than I had any right to expect. Her guidance in navigating archives, chapter arguments, and packing lists for job talks has kept me grounded and hydrated through some of my most trying times.

Throughout my graduate career I've benefited immensely from the bustling intellectual ecosystem that is the University of Chicago Divinity School. From my first day in Chicago, Juliana Locke, Charlotte Heltai, and Ramzi Nimr were steadfast friends and conversations partners. The staff and community surrounding Grounds of Being, especially Greg Chatterley, Kylie Zane, Lili Baldwin, Lily Grossbard, Jake Sirota, and Sophia DeVita, gave me an anchor point (in addition to a wage and an office) for long stretches of graduate school, and contributed mightily to the communal solidarity within Swift Hall. For similar reasons I owe thanks to Graduate Students United and our formidable cadre of Divinity School organizers. Countless members deserve recognition, but I am constrained by interests of space to single out three: Andrew Kunze, Kellan Klaus, and Sarah Levenstam. For their instruction and encouragement, I thank Dan Arnold, Curtis Evans, Matthew Harris, Richard Rosengarten, and William Schultz. And for all sorts of others reasons: Joel Brown,

Nathan Hardy, Americia Huckabee, John Howell, Anita Lumpkin, Mimi Halpern, and Courtney Wiersema.

I was fortunate to present and receive feedback on several chapters in workshops at the University of Chicago, including the Philosophy of Religions Workshop, Religions in America Workshop, and Religion, Theory, and Interpretation Workshop. I am grateful to Rebekah Rosenfeld, Hannah Ozmun, and Morgan Kincade for organizing these, as well as for the specific ways in which they pushed my thinking forward. The American Examples working group at the University of Alabama offered a peerless venue for methodological reflection. Thank you to all of my cohort mates, and to Michael Altman for taking a chance on an unconventional participant. During the final year of writing, the Martin Marty Center's Junior Fellows Program provided a desperately needed space to share and discuss work after years alone in my home office. I was all the luckier to do so with a talented group of colleagues: Andrew Atwell, Kirsten Collins, Kristi Del Vecchio, Curtis Evans, and Sam Gee.

This project also benefited from the graciousness and expertise of archivists at the University of Chicago, the Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives at IUPUI, the Presbyterian Historical Society, and Cornell University. A special thanks to Angela White for her continued interest in the project after my visit to Indianapolis. In addition to the Martin Marty Center, I was lucky to receive further financial support from the University of Chicago's Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture and the University of Chicago Divinity School, the latter of which provided me a dissertation completion fellowship and a number of travel grants.

Four colleagues deserve special mention. As I've learned, one inevitably writes a dissertation alone. Thinking, however, is a collective endeavor, and in my seven years of Ph.D. work Samuel Catlin, Kirsten Collins, Mendel Kranz, and Matthew Peterson have formed the intellectual and social nucleus through which all of my thinking has occurred. It would be impossible to overstate their

influence. Each of them has read chapter drafts and job documents, brainstormed half-formed ideas just beginning to strain for coherence, and lightened the many burdens that accompany this work. There is not a single idea I have that does not carry their imprint.

Finally, I owe an inestimable gratitude to my family, whose love and faith in this endeavor buoyed me throughout the writing process. And to Daly—more than anyone else, this would not have been possible without you. You are a force of nature, or rather many: the sun rising on my face in the morning, the wind at my back, the earth underneath me. Every page of this dissertation is a testament to your devotion.

Introduction

In a January 1953 review of the edited collection *American Education and Religion*, American philanthropist and former Yale administrator Anson Phelps Stokes observed a growing concern in American public life for “two vital religious issues.”¹ The first such issue was broadly civic in nature. As Stokes presented it, over prior years Americans as a whole had become increasingly aware of “the need for emphasis on religion in our life to strengthen moral standards and true democracy.” The second was closely related, distinguished from the first as means to an end. In order for religion to perform its democratic vocation, Stokes wrote, it would be necessary to ensure that young Americans be educated in democratic religious principles. Given the high proportion of American children and adolescents who attended public schools, this meant above all else “providing instruction in religion for public-school students.” As Stokes put it, “some constitutional way must be found by which public-school pupils may be exposed at least to the religious spirit and ideals which underlie the fundamental American charters of freedom.” This wasn’t a new concern by any means. In the collection under review, contributors located a recurrent preoccupation with the symbiosis of religion, democracy, and public schooling across the history of the United States, from the 1786 Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom to the 1925 Supreme Court decision in *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* that struck down an Oregon law mandating public school attendance. Stokes nonetheless insisted on the special contemporary relevance of the problem. Specifically, the two twin imperatives which he documented—to educate young Americans in “the religious spirit” and thereby fortify the spiritual sources of democracy—had gained salience in response to a novel external threat, namely, “the fear of Russian communism and the realization that among its basic evils are the antitheses of religion—crass materialism and totalitarianism.”

¹ Anson Phelps Stokes, “God’s Place in the School,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1953, BR7

Stokes' review and the collection on which it commented were two minor contributions to a larger conversation concerning religion, education, and democracy in the postwar United States. In the decade following the end of World War II, US political leaders, philanthropic organizations, religious bodies, and educators like Stokes together promulgated a vision of American democracy as a spiritually-laden system, grounded in "Judeo-Christian" commitments to the inherent dignity of the individual and the transcendence of the divine.² Such interpretations had circulated since the early decades of the twentieth century, but they acquired new salience against the backdrop of the Cold War. Confronted with the specter of atheistic communism, American civic life underwent a profound and deliberate sacralization in these years, evident in growing rates of religious participation, new symbols of public piety, and sustained campaigns against the perceived secularization of American society. These endeavors were particularly intense with regard to education. As one of a flurry of major postwar reports on education stated, America's schools were "custodians of the culture and the main instrumentality for its perpetuation."³ That observation imposed a clear set of responsibilities: if education was the primary domain of cultural reproduction, and that culture entailed an irreducible spiritual element, it fell to the schools to cultivate it.

This was no less true in the case of higher education. Writing in 1955, Brooklyn College professor Howard W. Hintz argued that "Higher education is in many ways the cornerstone not only of the whole educational system, but of the entire culture. It produces not only the future teachers, scholars, and administrators at all educational levels, but the leaders in every other

² See, for instance, The President's Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy, a report*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 11. K. Healan Gaston, quoting a 1953 *Time* formulation, glosses this position as a belief in "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 154. I also credit Gaston with first calling my attention to the Stokes review above.

³ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education: The Basic Principles* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1947), 13.

dimension of the social order.”⁴ It was all the more important, therefore, to create opportunities for religious instruction at this level. In his contribution to *American Education and Religion*, University of Florida President J. Hillis Miller pressed exactly this point. The secularization of American culture and education had led to “moral depravity in the culture and to wickedness in the high and low places where men live and move and have their being.”⁵ In this context, he reasoned, “there must be some way to orient the entire university to the need for dealing with the moral, ethical, and spiritual values of man.”⁶ Yet if higher education occupied a “strategic position” in American society, that position was also an embattled one.⁷ For although American colleges faced fewer legal constraints in offering religion courses, they constituted a particularly inhospitable environment for the moral project which Hintz and Miller envisioned. There were a number of reasons for this—Hintz for his part listed disciplinary specialization, curricular fragmentation, and doctrinaire scientism, while Miller additionally stressed the lack of preparation for studying religion at the post-secondary level and the dearth of well-trained teachers. At bottom, though, both agreed that resistance to religion in the university boiled down to what Hintz called the “secularization of life in the Western world,” a process which had stacked the deck in favor “of other rival secular philosophies of life.”⁸

Stokes would surely have agreed with Hintz and Miller. Although his review article focused narrowly on the problems of primary and secondary education, by 1953 he had been active for some three decades in a network of organizations seeking to promote the study of religion in American colleges and universities—a group including the Hazen, Danforth, and Rockefeller Foundations, the

⁴ Howard W. Hintz, *Religion and Public Higher Education* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn College, 1955), 16.

⁵ J. Hillis Miller, “Religion in a State University,” in F. Ernest Johnson, ed. *American Education and Religion: The Problem of Religion in the Schools* (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1952): 93-111, 102. This J. Hillis Miller was the father of the more famous literary critic of the same name.

⁶ Miller, “Religion in a State University,” 107.

⁷ Hintz, *Religion and Public Higher Education*, 16.

⁸ Hintz, *Religion and Public Higher Education*, 13.

National Council on Religion in Higher Education, the ACLS and Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, and various ecumenical Protestant entities.⁹ These groups shared Hintz's and Miller's assessments of the centrality of higher education, as well as their diagnoses of its contemporary degeneracy. In response, they proposed the systematic integration of religion courses into existing college curricula: "at a minimum," per Hintz, "courses in the history of great classical religions, and in particular of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in comparative religion, in the philosophy of religion and in great religious literature with courses in the Bible possibly receiving the major emphasis."¹⁰ Such courses were to be taught by professors holding Ph.D.'s in religion, trained in humanistic and social-scientific methods, and employing a non-sectarian definition of religion as the affirmation of "an overwhelming reality that transcends the flux of events and constrains men toward the true and the good."¹¹ In brief, they proposed what in 1948 Clarence Prouty Shedd called simply "the academic study of religion."¹² As envisioned by its proponents, such a discipline would instruct students in "our Hebrew-Christian heritage and our American democratic faith."¹³ It would do so in concert with a comprehensive program of general education promoting a "positive and reverent

⁹ In addition to serving as the Secretary of Yale University (the institution's second-highest administrative position) from 1899 to 1921, Stokes was the founding Chairman of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education. Stokes was also an heir to the Phelps-Stokes fortune. In 1924, he became the president of the board of the Phelps-Stokes fund, through which he conducted work that later intersected with the NCRHE and Hazen Foundation (discussed in Chapter 2).

¹⁰ Hintz, *Religion and Public Higher Education*, 27. At the University of Florida, where Miller had a say in the matter, this meant the inclusion of instruction in the religious elements "of our cultural heritage" as part of the school's gen-ed curriculum, as well as the existence of an independent Department of Religion.

¹¹ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 7. Quoted in Hintz, *Religion and Public Higher Education*, 7. This reported is also quoted extensively in *American Education and Religion*.

¹² Clarence Prouty Shedd, *Religion in the State University* (New Haven: Hazen Foundation, 1948), 23.

¹³ Shedd, *Religion in the State University*, 21.

attitude toward religion.”¹⁴ And it would do so in the overarching context of the American Cold War, in opposition to what its advocates named “materialism.”

I. What’s the Matter?

It would be hard to imagine a version of religious studies more out of step with the contemporary field. Over the last thirty years, the study of religion has undergone a profound reorientation away from the attitudes and sense of cultural mission that motivated Stokes and his contemporaries. Frustrated with the field’s historic prejudice toward elite Protestantism and its near-exclusive focus on questions of religious meaning, successive generations of scholars have attempted under the broad heading of the “material turn” to shift religious studies’ focus away from hermeneutics and interior subjective states to those dimensions of religion which historically have been treated as secondary. Matthew Engelke provides an emblematic view: “Religion is not always about belief or the problem of meaning, nor can religion always be recognized as something discrete in culture and society.”¹⁵ Prioritizing such hermeneutical approaches can only provide a partial representation of religion, at best.¹⁶ As such, participants in the material turn rightly contend that it is necessary to join questions of meaning or religious belief to “the study of objects, spaces, images, and all the practices that put these items to use in order to arrive at a more robust account of how religion works in the lives of its adherents and in the societies that shape and are shaped by a religion.”¹⁷ This corrective requires more than a simple substitution of objects: practices in place of creeds, things in place of texts, laity in place of religious elites. It further demands that we learn to

¹⁴ F. Ernest Johnson, “Summary and Conclusions,” in *American Education and Religion*: 187-203, 199.

¹⁵ Matthew Engelke, “Material Religion,” in Robert Orsi, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 210

¹⁶ Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, “Introduction,” in Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, eds. *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012): 1-23, 7.

¹⁷ “Editorial Statement,” *Material Religion* 1.1 (2005), 5.

ask different questions of those objects, and that we not treat material sources as so many other varieties of text. Rather than ask what things, places, or practices *mean*, we must learn to ask what they *do*, what agency they possess, and how they affect, sustain, or produce religious subjectivity and states of belief.¹⁸ The material turn thus calls for nothing less than a fundamental revision of religious studies' basic object and theoretical problematic. Only on this basis, it is argued, can we approach religion in ways adequate to its full diversity and complexity.

Advocates of the material turn date the field's endemic biases to the nineteenth century, when the study of religion first coalesced in the Victorian science of *Religionswissenschaft*. It was in this period that forerunners of the modern field including E.B. Tylor defined religion as *belief in spiritual beings*.¹⁹ Though Tylor and his contemporaries claimed wide-ranging empirical observation as the basis for this definition, its evident neutrality concealed a normative dimension. Specifically, by identifying religion as a matter of belief, Tylor produced in form of a definition a highly parochial standard against which the relative development of different religious traditions might be measured. Not incidentally, this standard had the effect of authenticating a certain representation of Protestantism as the paradigm of the taxon "religion." That paradigm then organized a teleological classificatory system in which the historical progress of religion was identified with the gradual detachment of spiritual entities from material objects.²⁰ In this schema Northern European Protestantism came to constitute the apex of religious development, distinguished from all other

¹⁸ David Morgan "Materiality, social analysis, and the study of religions," in David Morgan, ed. *Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 72. Cf. S. Brent Plate, "Material Religion: An Introduction" in S. Brent Plate, ed. *Key Terms in Material Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015): 1-8, 4; Kevin Schillbrack, "The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of Religion* 99.2 (2019): 219-227, 223.

¹⁹ Engelke, "Material Religion," 210; David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 2; Meyer and Houtman, *Things*, 2; Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie, "Introduction: The Body of St Cuthbert" in Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie, eds. *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 1-13, 6-7.

²⁰ Engelke, "Material Religion," 211. As he puts it, "Tylor produced a version of what we might call crypto-Protestantism as a theory of religion." Cf. Meyer and Houtman, *Things*, 6.

religions by virtue of its abstraction, spirituality, and universality. At the opposite pole was primitive religion, defined for its part by “a tenacious attachment to the base materiality of the object and, by the same token, to its physical immediacy, its incidental nature, and its radical finitude.”²¹

The belief-centric definition of religion that conceptually anchored the historic study of religion thus incorporated and relied on a set of hierarchical distinctions including spirit/matter, subject/object, and universality/particularity. That it did so indicates the enmeshment of turn-of-the-century *Religionswissenschaftler* with what Engelke calls a “a more basic intellectual dynamic” associated with the European Enlightenment and its representative thinkers. For these as for Tylor, the history of religion was similarly understood as an evolutionary development from primitive forms marked by contingency and materiality to higher forms associated with progressive universality and abstraction, culminating in the supersession of religion as such in mature human reason.²² The scientific classification of world religions was part of this Enlightenment project: an outgrowth and contributor to the articulation of a genetically Protestant secular reason, from which it derived both its philosophical presuppositions and cultural legitimacy. By the same token, it inherited the legacy of political and intellectual violence through which this model of reason was sustained. Just as Tylor’s definition of religion inscribed a normative Protestantism as the essence of all religion, so too did the Enlightenment-era model of philosophical reason subtending that

²¹ Tomoko Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (April 2005): 242-267, 248.

²² Engelke, “Material Religion,” 211-212. This latter move is virtually ubiquitous in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, but for particularly stark examples see: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “The Education of the Human Race” in H.B. Nisbet, ed. *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 217-240; Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, Revised Edition*, eds. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Johann Gottlieb Fichte, “Concerning the Difference Between the Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy,” in Daniel Breazeale, ed. *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 185-215; G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

definition encode a geographically, religiously, and racially specific subject as the bearer and telos of universality. The anti-materialism constitutive of modern reason and the forms of religion which it recognizes as legitimate thus harbors a motivated identification of non-white, non-Christian people and their religions as illegitimate or historically defunct, and therefore in need of reform (or, as the case may be, eradication).

As such, materiality may be taken to designate far more than the physical existence of particular objects or the pre-conceptual status of empirical sense-data. Condensing the predicates of particularity, contingency, and heteronomy in an exemplary way, the concept of materiality encompasses the entire field of denigrated others in relation to which modern reason and the modern study of religion have constituted themselves. It is for this reason that the material turn has assumed such wide-ranging application and critical depth. In re-orienting the field toward materiality and those modes of religiosity that text- and belief-centered approaches have tended to occlude, the material turn has matched the ostensive breadth of the concept of materiality in its pejorative uses. Under the heading of material religion and related terms, scholars have undertaken pioneering studies of lived religion and religious practice,²³ ritual,²⁴ the use of religious objects,²⁵ space,²⁶

²³ David Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); David Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

²⁴ Gregory Schopen, *Bones Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

²⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Meyer and Houtman, eds. *Things*; Julius Bautista, ed. *The Spirit of Things: Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); David Morgan, *The Thing about Religion: An Introduction to the Material Study of Religions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

²⁶ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005); Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012); Isaac Weiner, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

religious bodies and affects,²⁷ the interpenetration of religion, economy, and consumer society,²⁸ religious media and material culture,²⁹ semiotics,³⁰ and the exercise of power along lines of race and gender.³¹

And yet, the semantic flexibility of “matter” or “materiality”—a product of the terms’ historical portability as a weapon of polemic, and in many ways a strength of the material turn—has also generated persistent contradictions concerning what we mean by “material,” exactly, and how

²⁷ Sarah Coakley, ed. *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Susan Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Sally M. Promey, ed. *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Paul Christopher Johnson, ed. *Spirited Things: The Work of ‘Possession’ in Afro-Atlantic Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); John Corrigan, ed. *Feeling Religion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes, eds. *Sensual Religion: Religion and the Five Senses* (Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox, 2018).

²⁸ Patricia Speyer, *The Memory of Trade: Modernity’s Entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Matthew Engelke, *God’s Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Julie Chu, *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁹ David Morgan, *Icons of American Protestantism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Emilio Spadola, *The Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Birgit Meyer, *Sensational Movies; video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Laurel Kendall, *Mediums and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings, and Masks in Asian Places* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Jinah Kim, *Garland of Visions: Color, Tantra, and a Material History of Indian Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

³⁰ Webb Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things,” *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 409-425; Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

³¹ Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

one should go about studying “material” religion. “In one way or another,” Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman observe, “championing materiality signals the need to pay urgent attention to a real, material world of objects and a texture of lived embodied experience.” Beyond that, however, materiality remains a remarkably undertheorized term: “a gap exists between the promise of concreteness that makes the turn to ‘things’ and the notion of ‘materiality’ appear so attractive, on the one hand, and our still rather meager understanding of and lack of agreement about what we mean by ‘matter’ and ‘materiality,’ on the other.”³² In what does materiality consist? How should it be understood in relation to meaning—as its opposite? its ground? its essence? Is materiality independent of and inassimilable to cognition? If so, how do we conceptualize that which definitionally exceeds conceptuality? How do we study and write about it?

Let us consider a recent example. In his contribution to the volume *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, David Morgan provides an indicative encapsulation of the material turn’s “promise of concreteness” and the way in which that promise differentiates it from various methodological alternatives. There, Morgan identifies two basic orientations to the interpretation of materiality, which he glosses in turn as “politics” and “poetics.” A political approach to material religion opts to explain religious phenomena by reference to the social—to the various relations (economic, cultural, etc.) that converge on and give significance to a particular religious object. There is something to be said for this method, Morgan concedes: how people relate to things and places “is always a social activity working within economies and cultural politics.”³³ Yet this rendering of materiality is incomplete. Taking J.Z. Smith as emblematic, he finds that a political understanding of materiality tends to efface the very qualities it’s meant to capture. In reinterpreting Eliade’s concept of sacred space as “location within hierarchy,” for example, Morgan finds that

³² Meyer and Houtman, *Things*, 4.

³³ Morgan, “Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religion,” in David Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 55-73, 63.

Smith obviates the physical or aesthetic dimensions of space, treating it solely as a “metaphor” within a structuralist system of linguistic difference.³⁴ For Morgan, as a result, materiality requires that we move beyond questions of social or political significance; materiality further concerns the autonomy of material entities and their irreducibility to discursive appropriation. It is this aspect that a “poetic” approach is meant to capture.

At fundamental issue in the alternative of politics and poetics is the epistemic distinction between human beings and the world which Smith’s approach might be said to presuppose. More precisely, Morgan suggests, the reduction of material things or places to their social determination reiterates the constraints of Western epistemology stemming from Kant, whose restriction of certain knowledge to objects of possible [human] experience instituted an “incalculable gulf” between the autonomous rational subject and the world in which it finds itself.³⁵ Morgan’s own poetic approach is galvanized by a rejection of these constraints.³⁶ As he says outright, “There is not a deep ontological split between the universe and human beings.”³⁷ That basic assertion organizes his study of material “things” (his preferred term, adopted from Martin Heidegger as read by Bruno Latour), which he musters as the antitype to the determination of material entities as “objects.” Objecthood, he argues, describes an entity insofar as it has been appropriated for human purposes. An object names a “a certain, specifiable entity, with an identifiable function and name,” always already put in conceptual or practical relation to a sovereign human subject.³⁸ An object is knowable, it can be

³⁴ David Morgan, “Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions,” 62.

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 63.

³⁶ In this he is not alone. Sonia Hazard, for instance, argues that “Religionists tend to care about material things only in so far as they bear an anthropocentric reference, that is, as they offer insight into human experience, thought, culture.” For here, the material turn remains frustrated until we abandon the priority of the subject altogether. It is only on that basis, she writes, that forms of “new materialism” attuned to the “materiality of things themselves” can come into view—See Sonia Hazard, “The Material Turn in the Study of Religion,” *Religion and Society* 4 (2013): 58-78, 64.

³⁷ Morgan, “Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions,” 73.

³⁸ David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 3.

classified and manipulated, put into motion, used, etc. Thingness, on the other hand, designates that in the entity that “resists becoming reduced to a useful object.”³⁹ It is the ultimate independence of the entity, its capacity to resist human structures of appropriation or phenomenality, or to phenomenalize only in the form of incompleteness—in short, the thing-in-itself. This status dictates an altered approach on the part of scholars. Specifically, what Morgan finds in the irreducibility of the thing is a kind of counter-intentionality. As he puts it, “the recalcitrance of matter does not simply mean resistance to human will. In a much larger sense it means the tendency of matter to behave in certain ways, depending on its physical features and the environments in which this or that kind of material is found.”⁴⁰ When he says that the object *resists* its signification, therefore, we must read that verb in as active a sense as possible.

There is an open question in Morgan’s work, and in the material turn more broadly, about how literally to interpret a statement like this, and, relatedly, how to posit the place of scholarly interpretation with respect to religious phenomena. Is the attribution of agential causality a matter of faithful description? A case of “taking religious seriously”? Or does this attribution provide a real premise for explanation? On the one hand, Morgan frequently underscores his relative distance from the perspective of Object-Oriented Ontology and New Materialism, which are unambiguous in their passion for the immediate. Yet he routinely argues that a poetic approach to religious materiality is *not* simply another kind of conceptualization of matter—it’s not a discourse of the object, party to a metadiscursive epistemic position associated with post-structuralism. In attending to the non-discursive materiality of religious things among the traditions we study, there is a methodological passage to the thing itself.

³⁹ David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 4-5.

⁴⁰ David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 48.

Take Morgan's description of the Virgin of Paris. Spared destruction in the fire at Notre-Dame in 2019, the statue of the Virgin was subsequently endowed with "miraculous" signification by Notre-Dame's rector in recognition of its unlikely survival. Morgan quotes rector Patrick Chauvin: "at the time of the fire, the vault of the cathedral completely crashed. There were stones everywhere but she was spared. She could have naturally received the vault on her head and have been completely crushed." He then continues in his own voice: "But that did not happen. As a result, her survival had come to serve as assurance of the eventual return of the cathedral itself, along with the faith it embodies."⁴¹ Here we have a description about how a religious object becomes imbued with religious and cultural significance—a political description. That's not all, though. Morgan goes on: "The Virgin of Paris is a special thing precisely because it defied the entropic nature of reality."⁴² In this way, that is, by virtue of its resistance to the natural and calculable force of entropy, it provides one example (of six, in the text) in which religious objects have "exerted their effects through a system of belief."⁴³ But we might ask: is this actually an instance of that? And what would it require of us to agree? The "effect" in question here is a meaning-effect—of the "eventual return of the cathedral itself, along with the faith it embodies." As Morgan narrates it, that effect, achieved in the sentiments of Parisian Catholics, is exerted *by the object*, by virtue of its persistence, *through* a system of belief. The object is the causal agent, the system of belief its means, the meaning its product.

Here the boundary between description and explanation evaporates, for to put the object in the position of cause in this case, even in the attenuated form in which Morgan does, requires that we ascribe to it the defiance of the "entropic nature of reality" named above. In brief, it requires us to believe in miracles. Why? Because in order to see in this tableau the agency of the thing, we *cannot*

⁴¹ David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 10.

⁴² David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 11.

⁴³ David Morgan, *The Thing About Religion*, 18.

see its persistence as a non-miraculous event. If we accept Morgan's terms, we cannot explain the statue's non-destruction as the (retrospectively) inevitable result of a chain of mechanistic cause-and-effect, i.e., as a natural event. Such would be the reductive, or political interpretation, which would say that the statue did not in fact "def[y] the entropic nature of reality," and that its now-miraculous status is an effect not of the object, but of the system of belief that endows it with significance (notice the appearance of a third possibility, neither intentional agent nor blind mechanism, but structure). In this alternative reading, the thing would be a concentration of social determinations, the relevant subject the system of beliefs. One could still say that the thing possesses intention. To do so, however, would require that one not conceive intention in terms of self-identity or authorship, but as a function—a distributed, iterative effect of a given (linguistic, social, economic) structure.⁴⁴ Choose what you will here, but what we see in this example is that Morgan's valorization of the poetic over against the political does not simply call our attention to a feature of religious materiality that political interpretations occlude. It operates in contradiction to those interpretations, and finally makes them illegible.

There are two major problems here. First is what I have just mentioned: that the attribution of innate agentive efficacy to the "thing" forecloses a reconciliation of political and poetic approaches within the material turn. Even if one were willing to accept that, however, there is the additional problem that Morgan's conceptualization of materiality is also incapable of sustaining its own definition in isolation. This is the second, and more serious issue. As we've seen, Morgan is insistent that that the thing is irreducible to discursive or social appropriation. This is a genuine materialist insight, and it laudably decenters approaches that perceive materiality as only a distraction or (at best) the sign of a more fundamental, immaterial religious meaning. In this instance, however,

⁴⁴ See Peggy Kamuf, *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), esp. ch. 7.

that insight is prelude to an untenable conclusion. In spite of Morgan's repeated claims concerning its instability or self-withholding character, when we turn from Protestant theology and linguistic absolutism to pay attention to the thing, we find that it gives itself up immediately. This feature is by no means unique to Morgan. Commenting on a wide range of contemporary theoretical movements that reject the Kantian epistemological turn, Rosalind Morris argues that "the valorization of emergence, immanence, and indeed of ontology, which is to say Being" that we find in such work "seems not merely to smuggle back the presence (things in themselves) that Kant had said could not be accessed, but to avow it, and ironically, to avow its knowability."⁴⁵ It is perhaps for this reason that the material turn's strange, unobjectified things end up looking so familiar. For when we learn that "things are powerful, compelling, living agents that touch us, scare us, calm us protect us," it feels like looking in the mirror.⁴⁶ What we end up with is a stridently anti-subjectivist materialism coinciding with absolute humanism. The thing in itself isn't just knowable: it's a person just like us.

This is not to suggest that the scholarship comprising the material turn universally suffers from such inconsistencies. It is only to point out, along with Meyer and Houtman, that a lack of theoretical clarity concerning the questions listed above—what do we mean by materiality? how does it relate to questions of meaning? and how do we study it?—has lead the material turn into intractable conceptual contradictions that undermine, sometimes fatally, its legitimate methodological aspirations. One is reminded of Stuart Hall's complaint concerning certain "materialist" projects of the twentieth century: "If you let a materialist idea alone for just a moment, you find that it has slid over to idealism."⁴⁷ In the case of the material turn, credibly materialist

⁴⁵ Rosalind Morris, "After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique," in *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 318.

⁴⁶ David Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions," 73.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: a Theoretical History*, eds. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 85.

projects—the critique of meaning- and text-centered approaches to the study of religion, the denaturalization of a deracinated (and thus normatively white) Enlightenment subject, and the exploration of human beings’ implication in non-human agential networks—resolve into naïve positivism, pure description, or pathos-heavy appeals to extra-rational experience and the immediacy of being. In every instance, such projects are possible only via the surreptitious reinstatement of an idealist identity of consciousness and being. This move is no less pervasive for being disavowed at every step.

Here we can begin to draw this argument back toward the history of American religious studies to which I alluded at the outset. The impasse in which the material turn finds itself, I suggest, is a product of the historical narrative through which it articulates its own intellectual and political significance. I have already provided a version of this narrative, and in any case it is immediately familiar to any current student of religion. Drawing from the cluster of genealogical studies that remade the field between the 1980s and first decade of the millennium, it recounts how the generic concept “religion” emerged from the twin streams of European colonialism and European Enlightenment; how it encodes a Protestant ideal of “true religion” as spiritual, rational, and private; how that ideal has grounded Eurocentric systems of classification and comparison that distort or denigrate modes of religiosity that do not conform to elite expressions of Protestantism; and how the material turn, by upending European modernity’s conceptual hierarchies, permits us to both better understand and do greater justice to actually existing religion.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ This consensus is shaped by texts including: Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in Mark Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 269-284; Peter Harrison, *“Religion” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers ([1998] Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007);

This narrative is broadly speaking true. Yet in marked contrast to the historical complexity and theoretical sophistication of figures like Smith, Asad, and Masuzawa, the programmatic literature of the material turn has metabolized their insights as a set of untenable generalizations concerning the intractable Protestantism of religious studies and the static binaries of its Enlightened philosophical heritage. We might cite any number of examples to this effect.⁴⁹ Already more than a decade ago Kathryn Lofton lamented that one could scarcely “think of a book or article written on the study of religion that has not invoked the ‘problematic legacy’ of Plato, Paul, reformed Protestantism, phenomenology or the Enlightenment. Mentioning the infectious negativity (those preferential hierarchies or anti-liberal liberalisms) of such bloc specters has become shibboleth.”⁵⁰ What work does this shibboleth do? As a whole, such characterizations of “Western thought”—recited compulsively in the programmatic literature of the material turn—conflate a wildly heterogeneous field of divergent historical traditions as a single philosophical perspective, namely “dualism,” which is said to be so pervasive as to be synonymous with philosophy as such. The imprecision of such a claim has significant consequences. When the real shortcomings of the study of religion are chalked up to a transhistorical conceptual dominance of spirit over matter, mind over body, or subject over object, correctives end up taking the form of a reversal of that dominance: a encompassing anti-philosophical inversion that simply dispenses with philosophical abstraction and the problem of conceptuality altogether, while incidentally leaving philosophy’s underlying logics perfectly well intact. The ease of this gesture, often couched in the language of “re-enchantment” or in worryingly Orientalizing appeals to marginalized identity positions, should lead us to be skeptical

Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ Many of the texts already discussed would suffice. See Engelke, “Material Religion,” 211-212; Kevin Schillbrack, “The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religion,” 220.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Lofton, “The Body (Under Review): On Manuel Vásquez’s *More than Belief*,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24 (2012): 482-496, 493.

of redemptive appeals to that which resists philosophical capture and of neat inversions of inimical hierarchies. It should also lead us to wonder what gets left out in this story.

II. Anti-Materialism in American Religious Studies

The present study begins from the premise that this historical account is insufficiently precise, and moreover that the specific ways in which it is imprecise in fact explain the theoretical contradictions that presently beset the material turn. I wager the following: if it is indeed true that the modern study of religion reiterates an endemic anti-materialism inherited from the canons of European Protestantism and Enlightenment thought, this *does not occur as a simple repetition*.⁵¹ Such a reiteration must instead be understood in relation to the intellectual and political dynamics peculiar to the study of religion in the period of its institutional consolidation. Pursuing this understanding requires that we turn our attention away from the European Enlightenment or Victorian-era *Religionswissenschaft*, attending rather to the historical site where the study of religion achieved its most widespread, durable, and influential form, namely, the twentieth-century United States.⁵²

In this dissertation I critically engage the material turn through a genealogy of anti-materialism in American religious studies since World War I. Between the 1920s and early 1960s, a culturally potent and rhetorically flexible discourse of anti-materialism facilitated the successful entry of the academic study of religion into American colleges and universities. In this period, a dedicated and well-connected network of educators, philanthropic organizations, and religious groups

⁵¹ Cf. Michael Bergunder, "What is Religion? The Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014): 246-286.

⁵² This is only one contribution to complicating our understanding of the history of anti-materialism in Western thought and the study of religion. An equally important task would be a closer interrogation of the philosophical tradition so frequently invoked as the material turn's antitype. It is not at all clear to me, that is, that figures like Descartes, Kant, or Hegel, to name only three, actually conform to the stereotypes in which the material turn traffics. Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that the traditions of thinking for which these thinkers stand in were far more heterogeneous and contentious than religionists often appreciate.

promoted collegiate instruction in religion as one vector of an idiosyncratic American civic nationalism. In the vein signaled by Anson Phelps Stokes, they argued that education in religion was necessary to combat the corrosive effects of cultural secularization and shore up the spiritual foundations of American civic life.

Anti-materialism provided the indispensable rhetorical idiom through which these arguments acquired force. A discrete discursive formation, anti-materialism stitched together a set of discourses on secularization, American nationhood, anti-communism, and Protestant mission, facilitated rhetorical substitutions and combinations across those discourses, and made certain statements and institutional projects legible. The academic study of religion was one such project. Capitalizing on the tremendous multivalence of “materialism” in American culture, supporters of religious studies welded together intellectual critiques of scientism, anxieties over secularization, and political opposition to left-wing radicalism in a single religio-political synthesis. That synthesis provided the study of religion with its governing cultural purpose and endowed the nascent enterprise with the disciplinary traits necessary for its independence in university contexts. This process of disciplinary formation had enduring effects on religious studies. Most notably, I argue, it encoded within the discipline a contextually specific antipathy to methods and theoretical perspectives associated with “materialism”—including naturalism, empiricism, and historicism—an antipathy insistently expressed in the dichotomous terms of anticommunist spiritual conflict.

In reconstructing this history, I build on the work of contemporary scholars who have revised our understanding of the peculiar trajectory of religious studies in the United States. Until recently, conventional accounts of the genesis of American religious studies date the field to 1963, when the Supreme Court’s majority decision in *Abington v. Schempp* distinguished between the teaching *of* religion and teaching *about* religion, thus providing a legal warrant for the academic study of religion in state educational institutions. Following that decision, the story goes, the study of

religion moved from denominational and private institutions into tax-supported state colleges and universities, reforming itself in the process on a secular and pluralist basis. As Sarah Imhoff argues, this founding narrative has provided religious studies with an image of itself as the product of genial processes of cultural liberalization, a self-validating account that aligns the discipline with the methodological agnosticism and political progressivism of other disciplines in the university.⁵³ Favorable as it may be, however, this story is a false one. Like many Supreme Court decisions, *Schempp* was downstream of existing cultural and political changes. It was the culmination, rather than the beginning of a set of dynamics that long predated it. As one piece of evidence, we might observe that the distinction for which *Schempp* serves as a metonymy—that between the teaching *of* and *about* religion—was already in widespread use well before 1963. In fact, it was sufficiently commonplace that Anson Phelps Stokes invoked it in the review that opened this introduction, quoting the phrase from the National Education Association’s 1951 report *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public School*.

More importantly, as Imhoff and Russell McCutcheon have convincingly demonstrated, although *Schempp* gave significant momentum to religious studies’ advocates, it by no means created legal sanction for the study of religion in tax-supported schools.⁵⁴ Already by 1950 at least sixty

⁵³ Sarah Imhoff, “The Creation Story, or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love *Schempp*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84.2 (2016): 466-497. For examples of this narrative, see Kathryn Alexander, “Religious Studies in American Higher Education since *Schempp*: a Bibliographical Essay,” *Soundings: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 71.2/3 (1988): 389-412; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 103-4; Bruce Lincoln, “The (Un)Discipline of Religious Studies,” in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 131-136, 133-4. For a more tailored critique of the pluralist account, see Lucia Hulsether, “The Grammar of Racism: Religious Pluralism and the Birth of the Interdisciplines,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86.1 (2018): 1-41.

⁵⁴ Imhoff, “The Creation Story”; Russell McCutcheon, “‘Just Follow the Money’: The Cold War, the Humanistic Study of Religion, and the Fallacy of Insufficient Criticism,” *Culture and Religion* 5.1 (2004): 41-69; “Not Nearly Critical Enough”: Studying Religion as Part of the Humanities” in *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

percent of state universities and land grant colleges offered instruction in religion for academic credit, many in independent religion departments.⁵⁵ What this tell us is that religious studies cannot be understood as the result of a single court decision; much like *Schempp*, the institutionalization of the field was the product of longer-simmering processes in American society and culture. The dramatic expansion of American higher education after World War II, new emphases on “integrative” educational paradigms, and the widespread currency of religious interpretations of American democracy all contributed to the germane conditions in which the study of religion flourished. The convergence of these conditions, in turn, can be attributed to the catalyzing cultural and economic incentives of Cold War anticommunism. Imhoff and McCutcheon are again indispensable on this point. Stretching religious studies’ origins back to the 1940s and 1950s, they both argue that the consolidation of the field in its modern form was the result of the political and cultural significance granted to religion in the Cold War United States, as well as to the financial resources—both public and private—that accompanied that significance. In this way, Imhoff and McCutcheon have together disclosed the “repressed family secret” of the field’s Cold War history, conclusively showing that public and private funding sources either explicitly or indirectly galvanized by anti-communism were responsible for the growth of religious studies and its entrance into college curricula, and that the figures administering these funds envisioned the study of religion as an integral contributor to the Cold War struggle.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Clarence Prouty Shedd, *Religion in the State University* (New Haven: Hazen Foundation, 1948). These included recently created departments at flagship campuses in Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, Oregon, and Illinois, which joined a spate of new undergraduate departments at elite private schools, including Princeton (1938), Yale (1947), Penn (1949), and NYU (1950). See also Virginia Corwin, “The Teaching of Religion,” in *Liberal Learning and Religion*, ed. Amos Wilder (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951). Corwin estimates the number of state colleges offering instruction in religion at eighty percent, significantly higher than Shedd’s more conservative figure. Cf. Robert Michaelsen, “The Study of Religion: A Quiet Revolution in American Universities” in *The Journal of Higher Education* 37.4 (April 1966): 181-186.

⁵⁶ McCutcheon, “Just Follow the Money,” 55-56; Imhoff, “The Creation Story,” 485.

This institutional history is only one part of the story, however. Although determining whether there existed public and private funding responsible for the growth of religious studies is a necessary task in interrogating the influence of the Cold War on the discipline, there remains the unanswered question of whether the field's research agendas, methods, and guiding ideology express a similar influence, and to what extent that influence remains operative beyond the epoch of the Cold War itself.

This dissertation addresses that second set of questions through the lens of anti-materialism. To do so, I widen the historical frame beyond the Cold War proper. Although the movement to create an academic study of religion in the United States accelerated dramatically in the postwar years, that success was only possible on the basis of an institutional and ideological infrastructure which had been assiduously created over the prior three decades. Part 1, comprising Chapters 1 through 3, thus examines the role of anti-materialism in the creation of American religious studies beginning in 1919 and continuing through the 1960s. In this time period, I ultimately argue, the academic study of religion coalesced as an agent of Anglo-Protestant American nationalism. Whether articulated in the terms of post-WWI True Americanism, Cold War anticommunism, or liberal multiculturalism, "America" as both a normative ideal and system of state apparatuses regulated the intellectual and institutional development of American religious studies. It was precisely this mutating nationalist ethos, articulated via the language of anti-materialism, which controlled the dialectical interplay between religious studies' confessional and academic commitments. Religious, and more specifically ecumenical Protestant conceptions of American nationalism permitted the study of religion to transform its confessional demands into civic ones, thereby shedding the appearance of sectarianism without abandoning religion itself.

Chapter 1 examines the emergence and maturation of this non-sectarian study of religion in the 1920s and 1930s. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, I argue, the discipline's

early advocates capitalized on a widespread sense of civilizational crisis to produce new arguments for religion's educational importance. These advocates included the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), Council of Church Boards of Education (CCBE), Religious Education Association (REA), and—most importantly—the National Council of Religion in Higher Education (NCRHE).

Together, these groups advanced the idea that religion was a “first ingredient to any true Americanism,” and thus a necessary corrective to dangerously secularized college curricula. I focus in particular on the NCRHE, using the group as a privileged lens through which to understand the development of the study of religion in the interwar period and the role of anti-materialist discourse in that process. In this chapter we see that the most important distinguishing feature of anti-materialism, in contrast to related discourses of anti-secularism or anticommunism, was its capacity to join politics or even metaphysics with the finer points of method. In this role, anti-materialism permitted professional religionists to hold in tension two contradictory arguments: that religion could and must be studied in a non-sectarian scientific manner, i.e., with established methods borrowed from the human and social sciences, and that doing so would necessarily produce a moral experience that inoculated against *scientism* and its degenerative cultural effects.

This argument produced limited gains in the 1920s and 1930s. In the early years of the Cold War, however, it permitted religious studies' most dedicated and effective advocates to successfully promulgate the study of religion as a vital element in the American war on communism. Chapter 2 follows their efforts. There, I continue to track the work of professional organizations like the NCRHE and Council on Graduate Studies in Religion (CGSR) while also investigating the salient role of private foundation—in particular the Danforth and Hazen foundations—in both funding religious studies departments and coordinating the public identity of the field. During this period, religious studies made its most enduring connections with higher education and the imperatives of the American state. Fortified by a friendly cultural climate, new sources of funding, and a flourishing

educational ecosystem, religion scholars and their allies oversaw the creation of a vast disciplinary infrastructure on the presumption that education in religion would re-sacralize, and therefore strengthen American democratic ideals. In the process, the discipline of religious studies conceived itself as the intellectual engine guiding a comprehensive system of moral edification. In order for religious education to be made available to American students at every level, it was necessary to articulate a suitably non-sectarian conception of the term, develop curricula on that basis, and train instructors capable of teaching religion in non-confessional settings.⁵⁷

Anti-materialism remained an indispensable element in this process. In the first place, the rhetoric of anti-materialism established a durable link between educational secularization and the specter of Soviet authoritarianism, thereby providing the study of religion with readily legible cultural legitimacy. As figures from John C. Bennett to Mircea Eliade would argue, Sovietism was the inevitable logical outcome of unrestrained intellectual secularization: avowals of the purely material makeup of the cosmos were only one short step from the gulag. As in earlier decades, moreover, this same anti-materialism informed the discipline's intellectual identity and its case for institutional autonomy. That the study of religion could provide the cultural antidote to materialism was only possible because the discipline approached its object in resolutely non-materialist ways—an orientation that would prove determinative even as the field self-consciously refashioned itself on a secular and multiculturalist basis.

At first glance this historical argument is perfectly assimilable to the historical narrative recounted in Section 1 above. Indeed, in its explicit Protestant Americanism, imbrication with structures of empire, and militantly spiritualist interpretation of religion, the Cold War study of religion as described here is virtually identical with the caricatures of Enlightened idealism that material religion scholars ritually invoke. Yet I argue exactly the opposite. When put side-by-side and

⁵⁷ See J. Hillis Miller, "Religion in a State University" for one version of this argument.

examined in detail, the material turn and its Cold War antecedent exhibit a discomfiting degree of continuity. The sweeping disavowal of Western anti-materialism characteristic of the material turn does nothing quite so well as preserve crucial elements of this more proximate anti-materialist ethos. Specifically, in its antagonistic conception of materialism and idealism, its insistence on matter's irreducibility, and its selective canon of materialist thinkers, the material turn presents itself as anti-materialism's direct inheritor.

We have already seen one vector of this continuity in the previous section. There I argued that the characteristic gesture of inversion which one finds across the material turn is effectively a rotation in place, one that shifts the priority of terms in its inherited binary without challenging that binary's double-sided framework. Chapters 1 and 2 allow us to better understand where we inherit that framework *from*. It may well be that it's simply "built into" Western thought, and thus that we get it from Plato, or Paul, or everyone, but most recently, in the study of religion, we inherit it from a Cold War context in which this double-sided framework was reified as an absolute spiritual-political antithesis.

This helps us specify what else gets preserved in the material turn's inversion. Most troubling on this count is the tendency for the material turn to reproduce religion's irreducibility in its anti-subjectivist appeal to the irreducibility of the object. Why, exactly, must the materiality of religion appear in the mode of a Latourian assemblage, a repository of Presence, a "hyperobject," or a living, agential counter-intention? Why does the material turn take recourse to ontology rather than problems of knowledge or politics? Or better yet—what is the effect of this decision? And what goes uninterrogated in the process? Chapter 3 takes up these questions in detail. There I move away from an investigation of anti-materialism in US religious studies, attending instead to the widespread *adoption* of avowedly materialist perspectives among religion scholars in the late twentieth century. I turn my focus in particular to the surprising resurgence of interest among scholars of religion in the

concept of the fetish, taking this revival as a distillation of the successes and enduring contradictions attending the “material turn.” Chapter 3 historicizes the term’s renaissance against the backdrop of methodological debates that gripped the discipline in the 1980s and 1990s. Within this context, I argue, the fetish-concept has come to perform a dual role, providing both a critical lens through which to exhume the study of religion’s colonialist heritage and a constructive principle for materialist perspectives. Through close readings of two early adopters of the concept—Charles Long and Tomoko Masuzawa—I demonstrate that fetish discourse, particularly in its constructive aspect, has in fact facilitated the reinstatement of an Eliadean hermeneutic position under the guise of its explicit disavowal. I conclude by arguing that discussions of fetishism are exemplary of wider theoretical antinomies in the study of religious materiality, antinomies which are explicable on the basis of the history I narrate in the first two chapters.

Finally, the material turn’s reliance on anti- or post-critical vocabularies for the maintenance of religion’s irreducibility alerts us to a third point of continuity with Cold War anti-materialism, perceptible only in a conspicuous absence in the turn’s intellectual canon.⁵⁸ In attempting to articulate positions adequate to the study of materiality, scholars in religious studies and in the human sciences more broadly have mobilized a subterranean counter-tradition in the history of

⁵⁸ This dissertation does not deal explicitly with the convergence of the material turn with “post-critical” approaches in the humanities and social-sciences. In religious studies, that convergence has been facilitated by the reception of figures like Bruno Latour, as well as others who emphasize the substance of material objects in contrast to the perceived tendency of critical methods to reduce all phenomena to cynical interest. This anti-critical disposition has taken a number of other forms, but in every instance a common fatigue with what is called “critique” or “Theory” intersects with the perpetual discourse of crisis in the humanities to generate a warrant for a return to the facts, objects, and meanings neglected or suppressed by critique. For important articulations of this position, see Bruno Latour, “Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225-248; Ian Hunter, “The History of Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Autumn 2006): 78-112. I tend to side with more critical evaluations of these arguments, including: Frederic Jameson, “How Not to Historicize Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 34.3 (Spring 2008): 563-582; Patricia Stuelke, *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

philosophy, one shaped by figures such as Democritus, Spinoza, and Deleuze rather than Descartes, Kant, and Saussure. It is this counter-tradition that purportedly enables us to think *away* from the strictures of Western epistemology and its injurious scholarly consequences. Curiously absent from this canon is Karl Marx and the traditions associated with his name. Why curious? Marx's absence is noteworthy at the outset for his status in the history of philosophical materialism—he is along with Spinoza one of its two most important modern exemplars. More significantly, however, it stands out because of his analogous intellectual position and set of animating concerns: Marx, too, embraced materialism as a means of traversing the Kantian aperture separating subject and world, in a historical context dominated by the great systems of philosophical idealism, with a firm insistence on this materialism's emancipatory political ramifications. He did so, I will further argue, in such a way that uniquely distills the difficulties confronting contemporary efforts to adopt a secure materialist footing. In short, Marx offers himself as an intuitive interlocutor for scholars seeking to comprehend modern thought's disavowal of materiality and carve out positions that avoid reproducing that disavowal anew. That this offer has not been accepted, or even recognized, is testament to religious studies' enduring Cold War pedigree, and to our still-partial comprehension of the “antitheses of religion” in relation to which the field has been constructed.

III. The Missed Encounter with Marx

My first task in this dissertation is to reconstruct the history of anti-materialism in American religious studies. Taking up Marx's hitherto neglected offer is the second. Yet retrieving Marx for this purpose is no easy task, for doing so requires that we dislodge nearly a century of sedimented consensus that Marx is not only useless, but an active impediment to the scholarly study of religion. As Alberto Toscano observes, even in those sectors of religious studies concerned with religion as a “factor of social change and mobilization, Marx is treated as a marginal reference at best, a ‘dead

dog' at worst."⁵⁹ And how could he not be? We all have a short encyclopedia entry in our minds for "Marx on religion": Marx the militant atheist understood religion in Feuerbachian terms as the paradigmatic form of alienation and a tool of social domination—"the opium of the people"—to be critiqued and successfully overcome with the humanist insight that "*man makes religion*, religion does not make man."⁶⁰ Such is the distillation of Marx that we find in Daniel Pals' *Nine Theories of Religion*, for example. There, he tells us straightforwardly that Marx conceives religion as alienation, or in less technical terms as "pure illusion...an illusion with most definitely evil consequences."⁶¹ This approach to religion is then taken as indicative of Marx's wider theoretical commitments. Drawing almost entirely from a set of occasional texts written between 1842 and 1845, which he claims were "truly decisive for the rest of [Marx's] life," Pals argues that the Marxian conception of religion is undergirded by two major principles that operated across his entire corpus: "(1) the conviction that economic realities determine human behavior and (2) the thesis that human history is the story of class struggle, the scene of perpetual conflict in every society between [the rich and the poor]."⁶² In short, economic determinism and historical teleology. No wonder Pals concludes that this framework is "overly simplified." Indeed, the flagrantly totalizing style of Marx's thought leads Pals to identify Marxism as less a theory of religion than a religion itself: "Communism offers a system of doctrine with authorized interpretations. It has its own ceremonies, sacred places, and sacred persons. It has missionaries...it has conducted persecutions more fearsome even than those of the

⁵⁹ Alberto Toscano, "Beyond Abstraction: Marx and the Critique of the Critique of Religion," *Historical Materialism* 18.1 (2010): 3-29, 3-4.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in *MECW* 3:175-187, 175; *Zur Kritik der Hegel'schen Rechts-Philosophie. Einleitung* in *MEGA* I.2: 170-183, 170. This digest has not changed in substance since Reinhold Niebuhr's introduction to the collection *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

⁶¹ Daniel L. Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*. Third Edition (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 126.

⁶² Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 116.

Middle Ages or Wars of Religion.”⁶³ Irrationality, violence, particularism: Marxism isn’t just a religion, it’s a bad one.

To the extent that this kind of reading has been complicated, it is by reference to the rest of the paragraph where the “opium of religion” quip appears. This is the path taken by more careful readers of the 1844 “Introduction” such as Andrew McKinnon and Terry Rey. Religion isn’t only the opium of the people, they remind us.⁶⁴ It is also “the *protest* against real distress...the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions.”⁶⁵ This complication yields a more ambivalent, and thus more complex understanding of religion than that which Daniel Pals finds in Marx: “In Marx’s claim that religion is both ‘*expression* of’ and *protest* against’ suffering,” Rey writes, “we see at work the dialectic that runs through his entire philosophy.”⁶⁶ Methodologically speaking, this resolves into the injunction to “pay careful attention to the social and economic forces behind the global resurgence of religion in our age” and “listen attentively to Marx’s ever-trenchant critique of the dehumanizing market forces of global capitalism.”⁶⁷ Yet even in Rey’s more textured reading it remains unclear why one would need to turn to Marx for this: for him as for Pals Marx remains a theorist of religion as alienation, for whom religion can only ever be understood as an epiphenomenal expression of more basic social dynamics.

⁶³ Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 114. One has to wonder what “theory of religion” is at work in a passage like this.

⁶⁴ Andrew W. McKinnon, “Opium as Dialectics of Religion: Metaphor, Expression and Protest,” in Warren Goldstein, ed. *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 11-29; Terry Rey, “Karl Marx on Religion” in Richard King, ed. *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017): 127-134. See also John Molyneux, “More than Opium: Marxism and Religion,” *International Socialism* 119 (Summer 2008); Roland Boer, “The Full Story: On Marxism and Religion” *International Socialism* 123 (Summer 2009).

⁶⁵ Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction,” 175 [171].

⁶⁶ Rey, “Karl Marx on Religion,” 132.

⁶⁷ Rey, “Karl Marx on Religion,” 133.

There are two major problems with this received interpretation. The first is a matter of rigor. In reifying Marx as a Feuerbachian theorist of alienation, figures like Pals and Rey freeze our attention on a small selection of early texts—the unpublished “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” “On the Jewish Question,” the *1844 Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology* (these last two also unpublished)—as the definitive statement of Marx’s thought, in relation to which later works, most notably *Capital*, are treated as bulky extenuations. Doing so neglects the crucial ways in which Marx’s thought transformed between the mid-1840s and latter periods of his career. Most important for readers in religious studies, it means ignoring his explicit disavowal of Feuerbach, and thus his explicit disavowal of the philosophical framework in which his early critique of religion was voiced. To read the Marx of *Capital* as a theorist of alienation, one would have to demonstrate the persistence of the framework of alienation beyond the mid-1840, and do so, moreover, over the objections not just of Marx but also a substantial tradition of interpretation that avers the opposite. This is by no means impossible—a number of influential interpreters have argued this exact position—but it demands the patient reconstruction of Marx’s thinking and its evolution, in context, over a heterogeneous body of work that spans decades. This is not what one finds in the infrequent treatments of Marx among religionists. Instead, the emphasis on Marx’s early writing functions to excuse misrepresentation of other texts and non-engagement with relevant scholarship, as when Daniel Pals describes *Capital* as a compendium of empirical data designed to show “how the facts of economy activity support his materialist view of history,” or dismisses this same compendium on the basis of its “labor theory of value.”⁶⁸

This tendency toward (what I consider to be) misreading is only a symptom of the second effect of our received wisdom on Marx, however, which is to lead scholars to forego further reading

⁶⁸ Daniel Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, 117; 138. The attribution to Marx of a Labor Theory of Value plays an equally important role in J. Lorand Matory’s celebrated book *The Fetish Revisited*.

entirely. If Matthew Day is correct that “there has long been a modest consensus that everyone, in principle, should know *something*” about Marx, what we know in religious studies, beyond the bare bones of the theory of alienation, is that this theory is inadequate.⁶⁹ To the extent that the field has metabolized Marx, therefore, it has done so in such a way that Marx is read as always already having been surpassed—by Weber, by Durkheim, by any theorist who takes religion more seriously as an autonomous zone of human experience.⁷⁰

This non-engagement is not absolute. On the Marxist side of the equation, figures including David McLellan, Michael Löwy, and Roland Boer have each sought in different ways to develop more complex understandings of religion from a Marxist starting-point. That work has largely been normative in orientation, however, geared toward the practical rapprochement of Christianity and socialism, especially in Latin America.⁷¹ Within religious studies, on the other hand, Bruce Lincoln’s Gramscian ideology-critique has offered an important example of what it might mean to study

⁶⁹ Matthew Day, *No Bosses, No Gods: Marx, Engels, and the Twenty-First Century Study of Religion* (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2023). 1. See also Matthew Day, “Marxism,” in Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁰ Cf. Toscano, “Beyond Abstraction,” 3-4. Toscano suggests that one might interpret this phenomenon as the revenge of the sociology of religions on Marx.

⁷¹ David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion: A Description and Assessment of the Marxist Critique of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1997); Michael Löwy, *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1996); Roland Boer, *Criticism of Earth: On Marxism and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Boer especially has performed invaluable labor in documenting both Marx’s more substantive engagements with religion and his casual use of religious allusions. All of these commentators correctly emphasize the ambivalence of religion in Marx’s and Engels’ work, though they also undersell Marx’s tenacity as a critic of religion and overstate his general interest in the topic. Boer, for instance, gets *far* too much mileage out of an essay written by Marx on the Gospel of John for his *Gymnasium* examinations, reading the essay as a sincere engagement with Christian theological problems rather than a required answer for a test. Arendt van Leeuwen goes even further in his Gifford Lectures on Marx, reading in the same essay an expression of sincere Christian commitment on Marx’s part. See Arend Theodoor Van Leeuwen, *Critique of Heaven* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2002). One could extend this category to include liberation philosophy/theology as well, an extension which would have to begin with the work of Enrique Dussel.

religion in a broadly Marxist framework.⁷² Lincoln himself stands in relative isolation, however. As others have taken up his method, his concept of ideology has in many cases become detached from the epistemic humility so vital to Lincoln's work, functioning all too often as an epithet or antitype in a (supremely ideological) binary of science and false consciousness.⁷³ Criticisms aside, moreover, each of these trajectories has had only a limited impact on the field as a whole. On balance, when we find Marx in the study of religion we continue to find him in his most superficial and easily discarded forms—as economic reductionist, vulgar empiricist, or cynical anti-fetishist. Occasional exceptions notwithstanding, Matthew Day is correct that religious studies “has *never* had a noteworthy ‘Marxist’ contingent.”⁷⁴

In the latter half of this dissertation, comprising Chapters 4 and 5, I propose one version of how we might begin to treat Marx as a theoretical interlocutor in the contemporary study of religion. I stage this long-overdue encounter via an extended critical engagement with the Marxian corpus. Through a series of careful readings, I identify in Marx a constant struggle—and instructive, recurrent failure—to accomplish a set of tasks that exercise the material turn today, namely, the interrogation of inherited theological and philosophical hierarchies, the adoption of a rigorous materialist perspective, and the joining of theoretical reflection to emancipatory practice.

Chapter 4 begins this constructive labor. Here, I examine Marx's fitful attempts to articulate a critical materialist position in the mid-1840s, focusing on his repeated use of figures of Jews and

⁷² Especially I am thinking of: Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁷³ On this problem, see Tyler Roberts, “Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion,” *Religion* 85.3 (July 2005): 367-389; Nancy Levene, “Marx's Eleventh Thesis and the Politics of the Study of Religion: Lessons from *The Sacred is Profane*,” *Journal of Religion* 98.2 (April 2018): 224-246.

⁷⁴ Day, *No Bosses, No Gods*, 1.

Judaism as the rhetorical levers facilitating his break with contemporaneous forms of criticism and reorientation toward a nascent materialism. In the period in question, I argue, Marx identifies a logic of Christian supersessionism at work in radical German critique and attempts to disarm that logic through a hyperbolic reversal of its Pauline conceptual hierarchies. In the process, his vision of a genuinely materialist criticism becomes inextricable from a critique of Christian supersessionism. Having reconstructed this complex critical strategy, at the end of Chapter 4, I argue that Marx leaves us with the imperative to conceptualize what I call a “materialism without reconciliation,” that is, a materialism no longer animated in any form by the post-Kantian desire for the unity of subjective and natural purposiveness.

Although I deal extensively with the Marxian critique of religion, especially in Chapter 4, I am less interested in Marx’s explicit treatments of religion than in the thorny set of problems which religion represents—the nature of social abstraction, the power and epistemic limits of critique, and the formidable antinomies confronting any prospective materialist method. Beginning in the late 1840s, Marx largely ceases to address these problems through the lens of religion. That does not mean, however, that the “criticism of religion is in the main complete,” as Marx announced in 1844. Indeed, if we read Marx’s early writing in the way that I suggest, it becomes possible to interpret his later critique of political economy as an extended revision of his earlier critique of religion and a theorization of its failure.

Chapter 5 advances our understanding of Marx’s materialism along this line, examining its ongoing articulation in two further textual sites: the unpublished manuscripts now known as *The German Ideology*, and *Capital* and its preparatory materials. Dealing first with *The German Ideology*, I argue that as Marx breaks with Feuerbach the problem of the “Christian Question,” i.e., the tendency of critical thought to reproduce the operative conceptual hierarchies of Christian anti-Judaism, transforms into a problem associated primarily with empiricism. Against conventional

interpretations of *The German Ideology* which locate in its chapter on Feuerbach the authoritative declaration of “historical materialism,” I argue that *The German Ideology*, in its attempt to take a step outside philosophy, instead constitutes a flagrant regression to idealism. This insight provides the starting point for my analysis of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*. In *Capital*, I argue, materialism comes to name a critical strategy concerned with the genesis and reification of social form, which operates by reconstructing and bringing to crisis an empirically given conceptual totality. In this strategy, crucially, there is no passage from thought to matter, abstraction to reality, or illusion to truth. As such, it is never quite precise to think of materialism as a method. Instead, as I conclude, *Capital* performs materialist critique as an allegory of the impossibility of method as such.

It is in this way that Marx most forcefully recommends himself to the contemporary study of religion. Crucially, Marx does not function in this dissertation as a dogmatic authority who solves our problems for us. He does not offer a systematic theoretical resolution of the material turn’s contradictions which can be lifted out of his work and applied indiscriminately in the present. It is rather in his failures—and even more so in his estimable rigor in theorizing his failures—that Marx becomes important for us. Instead of answers, what we gain in returning to Marx is a more precisely stated set of questions concerning materialism and its constraints.

As I formulate these questions, I follow a diverse lineage of Marx’s readers who refuse to treat his work as a coherent theoretical whole, bequeathed to posterity, for which Marx himself provides the essential hermeneutic keys. In particular, I am indebted to interpretations issuing from the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* including those of Michael Heinrich, Hans-Georg Backhaus, and Helmut Reichelt, Louis Althusser and his students, deconstructive readings of Marx offered by Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman, and the critical readers of Althusser in left-wing Anglophone cultural

studies, most importantly Stuart Hall.⁷⁵ All of these share the assessment of Marx formulated by Alfred Schmidt: “Important as Marx’s understanding of his own works may be, it often lags far behind what Marx offers in the way of theories in his material analysis.”⁷⁶ Marx is often unaware, or not fully comprehending of the tremendous insights which his work contains; he can be similarly obtuse to his own blind spots and contradictions (in both of these ways he’s much like the rest of us). In order to understand what’s happening in Marx’s texts, then, we not only have to read him, but in many instances read him against himself. Accordingly, I approach Marx’s corpus as a series of occasional texts which differ substantially in their underlying problematic and degree of completion, and which are marked as much by discontinuity, discrepancy, and unfinished beginnings as by the critical perspicacity and global comprehension often attributed to Marx’s thought. Reading Marx in this way relieves the impossible burden of explaining away inconsistencies in Marx’s thought or trying to distinguish the authentic from inauthentic Marx. It allows us to read inconsistencies *as inconsistencies* in ways that reveal the insuperability of certain theoretical obstacles or the insufficiency of Marx’s own conclusions.

I should clarify, finally, that my goal in this project is not to impose Marxism as a theoretical master discourse for the study of religion. I do not think that Marx provides a full intellectual repertoire for understanding religion, or for that matter anything else. Nor do I think that a collective embrace of Marx or Marxism will solve all of our intellectual problems, much less save the twenty-first study of religion from declining enrollments or institutional austerity measures.⁷⁷ I

⁷⁵ On this last point, I echo Lucia Hulsether’s *Capitalist Humanitarianism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), which gives us a sterling model of the kind of approach I’m trying to get at. In particular, the second chapter of Hulsether’s book provides an example of how one might conduct a form analysis on the model of *Capital* in relation to the social abstractions one encounters in the study of religion.

⁷⁶ Alfred Schmidt, “On the Concept of Knowledge in the Criticism of Political Economy” in Golo Mann et al., *Karl Marx, 1818-1968* (Bad Godesberg: Inter Nationes, 1968): 92-102, 94.

⁷⁷ Cf. Day, *No Bosses, No Gods*.

strongly believe that Marxist approaches should be complemented by psychoanalytic, deconstructive, genealogical, phenomenological, and—yes—even anti-subjectivist or object-oriented methods. By the same token, however, these latter approaches are incomplete, if not actively mystifying when not supplemented by Marxist analyses of social form and political-economic power. My conclusion will drive this point home, bringing the model of Marxian materialism developed in Chapters 4 and 5 into explicit conversation with the contemporary field.

Chapter One

True Americanism in the Godless Institution

“It is only when we conceive of the Church’s work in this complete way that the vision arises before us of a process by which the world shall be literally soaked in Christianity; a world in which Christian truth and the might of the Christian spirit shall be brought to pervade the entire life of the entire world of men.”

—William Mackenzie, “The Church and Religious Education”

In the years immediately following the end of World War I, a dedicated cadre of religion professors, university administrators, private philanthropists, and ecumenical Protestant activists undertook an organized effort to introduce the study of religion into American colleges and universities. Over the next four decades, they channeled their efforts into the creation of professional associations, publishing endeavors, and ultimately university departments, accomplishing by the early 1960s the consolidation of religious studies as a recognized discipline within the American academy. That result was anything but foreordained in the early decades of the twentieth century. For many observers in the 1910s and 1920s, indeed, American colleges and their students appeared wholly impervious to religion. Particularly in the state universities, “smelling of the soil and the mine and the shop,” as religious educator Robert L. Kelly symptomatically phrased it, higher education seemed to do nothing so well as foster indifference to religion, whether conceived in intellectual or more traditional confessional terms.¹

In response to this situation, groups including the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), Council of Church Boards of Education (CCBE), Religious Education Association (REA), and

¹ Robert L. Kelly, “The State University and the Christian College,” *Christian Education* 9.1 (October 1925): 11-13, 12.

National Council of Schools of Religion (NCSR) promoted collegiate instruction in religion in service of a religiously defined civic nationalism, arguing first that American democracy required certain kinds of spiritual capacities, and second that education in religion would ensure their perpetuation. Northwestern religious education professor George Herbert Betts provided an emblematic statement of this view in 1920. Evoking a civilizational crisis marked by rampant individualism, class conflict, and interethnic hostility, Betts argued that only religion, as operating through the colleges, could ameliorate contemporary forces of national disintegration. “Religion,” he wrote, “is a strong, unifying, organizing force in the individual...it is a powerful social bond...it promotes morality, unselfishness, and the will to render service to others. It enhances national good will, allays class suspicion, and increases confidence in the motives of other peoples. Religion tends to supplant a materialistic with a spiritual philosophy, and thereby cultivate national idealism.” Summarizing religion’s contributions in the rhetoric of American patriotism, he concluded: “Religion is a first ingredient to all true Americanism or any other true national spirit.”²

In making arguments such as these, proponents for the study of religion made an assertive claim on the religious character of the American nation and its basic continuity with the principles of ecumenical Protestantism. American democracy, they contended, entailed a set of spiritual commitments exemplified in the federative spirit of the ecumenical movement, including toleration of difference, self-sacrifice, and a belief in the infinite dignity of individual persons grounded in their resemblance to the divine. In order to ensure the reproduction of those virtues—and thus the continued vitality of American democracy in a period of global crisis—it was necessary to provide systematic education in their religious wellsprings, not only in private denominational settings, but more crucially in America’s state colleges and universities as well. Yet religious education as

² George H. Betts, “The Curriculum and the College Department of Religion,” *Religious Education* 15.5 (1920): 257-263, 260.

conducted in the Sunday School or denominational college could not simply be repurposed for this end. Owing to the constraints of state constitutions, university charter restrictions, and academic suspicion of religion as a force of indoctrination, proponents for college curricula in religion were compelled to reformulate what it meant to study religion, how religion coalesced with the wider imperatives of the modern university, and what a sufficiently academic approach to the topic contributed to the civic wellbeing of the nation.

This chapter argues that anti-materialism provided an indispensable conceptual grammar in which the campaign for the academic study of religion acquired coherence and cultural significance. Evoking at once Anglo-Protestant norms of true religiosity, debates about the roots of Western culture, and emerging anxieties concerning educational secularization and political radicalism, the idiom of anti-materialism synthesized an otherwise disparate set of political and intellectual positions in service of a single claim, namely, that education in religion was necessary to combat the disintegrating cultural forces threatening American society and revivify its Protestant religious character.

In the 1920s, myriad spokespeople and organizations adapted this semantic matrix to define religion's place in the modern university. Most influential, however, was the NCSR, founded by Yale Biblicist Charles Foster Kent in 1922 and renamed the National Council on Religion in Higher Education (NCHRE) in 1924. More than any other group, the NCHRE pioneered the creation of an academic, non-sectarian study of religion on a national scale—a study of religion that would be equal to its disciplinary counterparts in rigor of training, methodological sophistication, and (consequently) intellectual authority. That vision required a fundamentally different approach from the interdenominational model of groups like the CCBE. In order to successfully enter and remake the “godless institution,” religion had to undergo a process of redefinition, standardization, and specialization in keeping with the mores of modern scholarship. To this end, the NCRHE

conducted studies of undergraduate religion instruction, published bulletins on legal questions and methodology, and, perhaps most importantly, funded doctoral work for a generation of religion scholars trained in humanistic and social-scientific approaches. Between 1922 and 1942 alone, the NCRHE sponsored graduate training for over two hundred doctoral students, practically effecting the creation of a new class of religion scholars in the nation's universities. "By 1946," Dorothy C. Bass writes in one of the few treatments of the group, "thanks in part to the council's efforts, a sizable increase in the academic study of religion in fact had occurred."³ With that increase came

³ Dorothy C. Bass, "Ministry on the Margin: Protestants and Education" in William R. Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 48-71, 59. The NCRHE has received surprisingly superficial attention in the secondary literature on the study of religion in the 1920s. D.G. Hart, for his part, notes the NCRHE's graduate fellowships program and relationships with private donors like the Edward W. Hazen Foundation and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., but concludes preemptively that "the greatest success of Kent and the NCRHE was to lend support to the creation of the schools of religion." This is a strange remark, for the NCRHE only supported the creation of schools of religion for the first two years of its existence, and moreover the schools of religion model itself had largely expired (except at select institutions like Iowa) by the 1930s. Conrad Cherry and Dorothy C. Bass come closer to the real significance of the Council. Cherry's treatment of the group in *Hurrying Toward Zion* correctly views the NCRHE as providing "a set of tactics by which Protestant university divinity schools sought to influence American higher education" well beyond the 1920s, while Bass additionally notes that the NCRHE "call[ed] forth a network of concerned educators who, well into the 1960s, dominated Protestant reflection on the religious and ethical dimensions of higher education." Cherry's text also employs what I have found to be the single most useful resource for reconstructing the history of the Council, a type-set history and compendium of personal recollections of the NCRHE distributed to the group's membership on its fiftieth anniversary. I was lucky to find that document, on which I rely heavily in the next two chapters, in MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34, Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, 1939-1997, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (hereafter MC Papers). As valuable as their respective treatments are, however, neither Bass nor Cherry fully situates the NCRHE vis-à-vis wider developments in ecumenical Protestantism in the interwar years; nor do they sufficiently emphasize the methodological significance of the group's work for the discipline's long-term history. D.G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 81; *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). See also George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), esp. Chapter 18.

“the establishment of new traditions,” as the Council Yearbook phrased it already in 1924, traditions that would eventually coalesce into the academic study of religion as we know it today.⁴

In this chapter I use the NCRHE as a lens through which to understand the discursive and institutional development of the study of religion in the interwar period and pinpoint the role of anti-materialist discourse in this process. I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of religious education in divinity schools, theological seminaries, and state universities in the interwar years.⁵ Instead, I direct my attention to one significant corner of that historical field—the push for an explicitly non-sectarian study of religion fitted to the United States’ public universities—and attempt to map the ideological forces which shaped it. Section one opens by situating the NCSR/NCRHE within the wider orbit of American ecumenical Protestantism in the post-WWI moment. Although the NCRHE promoted a version of the study of religion irreducible to Protestant confessional concerns, it was itself a part of the institutional and interpersonal networks which comprised the United States’ “Protestant establishment,” as was the academic study of religion as such throughout this era.⁶ When Charles Foster Kent formed the NCSR in 1922, that is,

⁴1942 *Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education* (New Haven: National Council, 1942); 1923-1924 *Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education* (Ithaca, NY: Barnes Hall, 1924), 11.

⁵ Others have done this already. In addition to Hart and Cherry, there are numerous histories of Protestantism and higher education, including: Robert T. Handy, *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestants and American Higher Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994); John H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶ On the idea of the Protestant Establishment, see William R. Hutchison, “Protestantism as Establishment” in *Between the Times*: 3-18. The NCRHE’s membership and funding sources reflect this. It enjoyed early funding from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Dodge family, two establishment pillars. Cleveland E. Dodge, who was instrumental in founding the NCRHE, was the grandson of William E. Dodge Jr., a major backer for evangelical missions in the nineteenth century and briefly the president of the Evangelical Alliance. His second cousin was Anson Phelps Stokes, who appeared in the Introduction, and was Chairman of the NCSR’s inaugural General Advisory Committee. The NCRHE also played a role in *reproducing* this establishment. Among those whose graduate work it sponsored in the 1920s and 1930s, one finds a number of major twentieth-century Protestant figures, including Edwin E. Aubrey (Kent Fellow ’25), Clarence Prouty Shedd (K’26),

he did not do so in isolation; the NCSR was created in a ferment of ecumenical concern with American education as one front in a global field of Christian mission. By the end of section one, I argue that this ferment constituted what I call an ideology of “ecumenical true Americanism,” a progressive nationalist ethos that modified existing paradigms of American nationhood through ecumenical models of spiritual unity. Section Two examines the NCSR/NCRHE in light of this context. Focusing on a speech which Charles Foster Kent delivered at the University of Michigan in 1923 and subsequently published as the NCSR’s second official bulletin, I isolate and interpret anti-materialism as an organizing theme among religious studies’ proponents. In the course of that interpretation, I find that Kent’s curious focus on “materialism” signals the NCSR’s continuity with interwar ecumenical Protestantism, the institutional and cultural milieu from which the group emerged.⁷ Section three considers the practical endeavors and intellectual development of the

Henry Pitney Van Dusen (K’32), Benjamin Mays (K’34), Robert L. Calhoun (Post-Doctoral Fellow ’38), and more. For a full list of fellows as of 1955, see *Fellows of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education: Directory, Fall 1955* (New Haven: National Council, 1955).

⁷ Ecumenical Protestantism first emerged as an identifiable movement in American religion in the nineteenth century, and sought to overcome doctrinal differences in pursuit of shared practical work. The earliest such cause was mission work (in 1810 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions brought together Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the German Reformed churches), but over the course of the century ecumenical impulses fed a bewildering variety of projects and organizations, including the American Bible Society, American Tract Society, YMCA/YWCA, various temperance leagues, and international groups like the Evangelical Alliance, Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, and World Student Christian Federation. By the early 1900s, ecumenical cooperation in social work and theological rapprochement fed more durable forms of church unity. The most important of these was the Federal Council of the Churches in Christ in America. Founded in 1908 after an extended process of interdenominational discussion and local experimentation, the FCC brought together roughly thirty Christian denominations for the coordination of unified work on social problems. Beyond that practical work, the FCC represented to its members a theological leap forward as well. As described by FCC General Secretary Samuel McCrea Cavert in 1920, the FCC, by virtue of its anti-sectarian character, stood for a fuller realization of the “very nature of Christianity itself.” Through the example of its unity, that is, it bore witness to “one God who is the Father of us all, to one Master who is our common Lord, to one Spirit who inspires us all.” See Samuel McCrea Cavert, “The Federal Council: An Interpretation,” in Samuel McCrea Cavert, ed. *The Churches Allied for Common Tasks: Report of the Third Quadrennium of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1916-1920* (New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1921): 9-18, 12.

NCRHE from 1924 into the 1930s, examining in particular how anti-materialism informed the group's vision of religious studies as an academic discipline. Section four, finally, carries the chapter's narrative to the Great Depression, when exogenous economic pressures combined with fractures over the question of secularism to arrest the discipline's momentum. I conclude by summarizing the state of the academic study of religion in the mid-1930s before projecting the itinerary of Chapter 2.

I. True Americanism with Ecumenical Characteristics

At the beginning of the 1920s, ecumenical Protestants in the United States saw themselves at a world-historical inflection point. In the final year of World War I, Student Volunteer Movement executive secretary J. Lovell Murray provided an emblematic statement of this viewpoint. "We are fast leaving behind us the world order to which we have been accustomed," he wrote. "Evolution has turned to revolution. The transformations through which we had been passing before the War have become swift and violent. New tides keep rising and old traditions and institutions continue to wear away. The world is being shaken to its foundations."⁸ Idioms of crisis were nothing new among American Protestants. Indeed, they had been prevalent since before the turn of the century, giving impetus to both modernist and conservative theological innovations as well as the Protestant Social Gospel.⁹ During the war and its immediate aftermath, however, such language became far more

⁸ J. Lovell Murray, *The Call of a World Task in War Time, Part I: The Demands which are being Made in these War Years for a New Expression of International Christianity* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1918), 1. On the history of the Student Volunteer Movement, see Michael Parker, *The Kingdom of Character: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1886-1926* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America and American Society of Missiology, 1998). On the impact of the war in particular on the SVM's work, see Nathan D. Showalter, *The End of a Crusade: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and the Great War* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1998).

⁹ On more theologically liberal Protestants, see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), esp. chapter 5; Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, The Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation* (Wilmington, Del: ISI Books, 2003). On the rhetoric of civilizational crisis among theologically conservative Protestants: George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 153-164.

prevalent. In the years after the war's outbreak, American Protestants witnessed the virtual collapse of the international ecumenical movement and with it, at least momentarily, the teleological hopes for a Christianized global order which had animated the movement before 1914.¹⁰ The impact of the war in Europe was exacerbated by a series of developments internal to the United States. The war at home witnessed the dramatic expansion of the state's repressive apparatuses, which were employed to subdue expressions of dissent and discipline labor unrest which threatened wartime production.¹¹ After the war, class conflict and racial violence escalated dramatically. In industry, labor militancy and political radicalism surged in 1919, inspired both by limited gains in the trade union movement and the foreign example of the October Revolution. Deploying a newly potent rhetoric of anticommunism, state and federal governments mustered troops to crush strikes, arrested or killed labor organizers, and deported hundreds of foreign-born radicals, most infamously in the Palmer Raids of 1919-1920.¹² At the same time, southern African-Americans and Caribbean immigrants

¹⁰ Nothing captures the sense of trauma which attended these events better than the first report on the war published by the Carnegie-funded Church Peace Union, which called the war in 1914 an "Armageddon" and described its details in matching apocalyptic terms. See Church Peace Union, *The Collapse of Civilization* (New York: Church Peace Union, 1914). On the history of the Union, its experience of the war, and the events of the Konstanz conference in August 1914, see Gamble, *The War for Righteousness*, esp. chapter 4.

¹¹ Jennifer D. Keene, *The United States and the First World War, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2022). Certain labor groups like Samuel Gompers' American Federation of Labor benefited from a more potent strike weapon and federal mediation of labor disputes. At the same time, however, more radical entities like the IWW were subject to new forms of legal restriction and physical coercion, including criminal syndicalism laws, deportation, and targeted violence by the Justice Department and licensed volunteer groups. For a summary account of these developments, see also David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

For more specific studies on the role of anticommunism in these crackdowns and the sources of American anticommunism in the prewar period, refer to: M.J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Nick Fischer, *Spider Web: The Birth of American Anticommunism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

¹² On the development of new techniques of targeted deportation: Kenyon Zimmer, "The Voyage of the *Buford*: Political Deportations and the Making and Unmaking of America's First Red Scare," in Kenyon Zimmer and Cristina Salinas, eds. *Deportation in the Americas: Histories of Exclusion and Resistance* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018).

who had settled in northern cities during the Great Migration were subject to a massive spike in vigilante violence and state repression.¹³

Small wonder that figures like Murray felt the ferment of apocalypse. That grave presentiment had a flipside, however. As disturbing as the earth-shuddering changes brought on by the war were, they also represented an opportunity. In the same text, Murray continued:

“Conjectures multiply as to the character of the new era, but that there will be a new era is beyond conjecture—a new set of living conditions, a new scale of values, a new alignment of social elements, a new arrangement of human relationships, a new basis of international life. To the mind of the Christian this means that the Kingdom of God is moving forward in the earth.”¹⁴

Here too Murray spoke on behalf of his ecumenical contemporaries. As much as World War I represented a challenge to ecumenical Protestantism, it also offered unprecedented occasions for leadership. In the short period of U.S. involvement in the war, the ecumenical FCC successfully positioned itself as what Robert A. Schneider calls an “informal religious establishment,” interceding between the federal government and the United States’ Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups to facilitate the appointment of military chaplains, conduct studies and ministries in army camps and wartime industrial communities, and propagandize on the spiritual significance of the American war effort.¹⁵ At the war’s conclusion, as a result, the ecumenical movement brimmed with a confidence

¹³ On the flourishing of religio-racial movements in the early twentieth century, see Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* (New York: NYU Press, 2017). On the investigation and repression of the Black religious groups during the War, see Theodore Kornweibel, “If God be for you, who can be against you?” Persecution and Vindication of the Church of God in Christ during World I” in Sylvester A. Johnson and Steven Weizman, eds. *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9.11* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017): 32-54.

¹⁴ Murray, *The Call of a World Task in War Time*, 1.

¹⁵ Robert A. Schneider, “Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century” in *Between the Times*: 95-121, 96. See also John F. Piper, *The American Churches in World War I* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985); Gene Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Gamble, *The War for Righteousness*; Robert T. Handy, *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

that outpaced even its darkest diagnoses of the contemporary world's troubles. At a public meeting of the FCC-led General War-Time Commission of the Churches (GWCC) in September 1918, for example, head of the British Free Church Council A.T. Guttery interpreted the war in triumphant terms as the violent closure of a moribund, un-Christian world order. "I believe that through this war religion is going to have the great chance of history," he predicted. "People tell me this war means that Christianity has failed. The very opposite is true. It means everything else has failed—materialism, politics, science, economics, imperialism. They have failed, and I want the churches to win for their evangel the right to a hearing. Never had we such opportunities, great as our problems. Never was the chance so great."¹⁶ Guttery's American colleagues were eager to meet the moment. Through a near-endless array of organizations, commissions, and sub-committees, ecumenical Protestants sought to bring Christian influence to bear on international relations, industrial democracy, ethnic and racial conflict, and education. For Union theologian William Adams Brown, who served on the GWCC and helped run its Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook, the post-war work for American Protestants would be immensely complicated in practice, but in principle its aims were simple. Speaking at the final meeting of the GWCC in April 1919, he said directly: "We see today that there is one task of home mission, that is, Christianizing America, and that is our only point of departure for the greater task of Christianizing the world."¹⁷

1991); John A. Hutchison, *We Are Not Divided: A Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York: Round Table Press, 1941).

¹⁶ A.T. Guttery, Address at a Public Meeting of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches, September 24, 1918. Folder 11, Box 70, FCC Papers. The General War-Time Commission was the most important institutional vehicle for American religious work during World War I. Though not officially affiliated with the FCC, the FCC took the lead in its organization and leadership throughout the course of the war. For more on the Commission's origins, war-time work, and significance, see Piper, *The American Churches in World War I*, chapter 2; Handy, *Undermined Establishment*, chapter 7.

¹⁷ William Adams Brown, Address at Meeting of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches, April 29, 1919. Folder 12, Box 70, FCC Papers.

This vision of Christianization suffused the political and social work of the Protestant churches in the interwar years, grounding campaigns in international relations, industrial conflict, and race relations.¹⁸ Increasingly, ecumenical Protestants saw these arenas as interconnected. Beginning in the 1920s, as Michael Thompson has argued, “socially concerned Protestants discovered international life as their newest sphere of reform.”¹⁹ Capitalizing on existing networks established during the heyday of Protestant missions, ecumenical leaders traveled abroad in ever greater numbers in these years. As they did so, they developed a shared political and religious consciousness that superseded national borders, linking the foreign and domestic in what Gene Zubovich has named an ideology of “Protestant globalism.”²⁰ This perspective had transformative intellectual and political effects. At the intellectual level, ecumenical internationalists (or globalists) insisted on the entanglement of domestic and global affairs, adopting expansive concepts such as “world order” or “human rights” that subverted the ideological underpinnings of European empire and eschewed the nation as a privileged frame of reference. Anti-nationalism in thinking yielded a progressive domestic politics. As William Adams Brown’s comment indicates already in 1919, globally-minded Protestants saw the Christianization of international relations as dialectically related to the Christianization of the United States. In order to create a Christian world order founded on collective responsibility and the dignity of human personality, that is, Protestants would need to reconstruct the United States as well. To that end, groups like the FCC conducted anti-lynching

¹⁸ In his final report on the work of the Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook in 1921, William Adams Brown identified those three domains *in particular* as areas where Christians had failed and where Christian principles would have to be applied going forward. See “The Church Facing the Future. Report of the Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook” in *The Churches Allied for Common Tasks*: 35-54.

¹⁹ Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 3.

²⁰ Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right*, 5.

campaigns, lent support to labor organizing, and opposed the worst iterations of anti-Asian immigration restrictions.²¹

Yet Brown's comments also disclose two other important features of ecumenical politics. For Brown as for his contemporaries, Christian internationalism remained an indelibly Christian project. Undoubtedly, ecumenical Protestants were vocal avatars of interwar anti-imperialism, anti-racism, and economic democratization. That they were, however, was as much the result of evangelistic commitments as social or political ones. This was not a contradiction in the minds of such Protestants. Far from it. As Andrew Preston argues, "Because Christianity was assumed to be the repository for the destiny of humanity and Protestantism the repository for true Christianity, ecumenists did not detect a contradiction between Protestants supremacy and the coming 'of a

²¹ On the questions of labor and immigration, ecumenical Protestants were more progressive than their conservative or right-wing counterparts, but we should be careful not to overstate their liberalizing influence. In the case of labor organizing, ecumenical groups stressed "industrial democracy" as a solution to class conflict. "Industrial democracy" was not identical to what socialists discussed as the democratization of economic life, however. It aimed rather to extend principles of *formal* democracy to the economic realm through moral regeneration. For many ecumenical Protestants, a workable solution to the exploitation of labor was something like management-labor cooperation, rather than striking. In the case of immigration restrictions, it's undoubtedly true that ecumenical groups like the FCC opposed the racist tenor of immigration debates leading up to the Johnson-Reed Act. It's also true that they opposed that legislation's quota system, which reduced immigration of different national groups to 2% of their population as of the 1890 census. Yet the Federal Council of Churches did endorse highly restrictive quota systems for immigration such as those of the 1921 Sterling Bill, which proposed a quota based system allowing "annually only so many law-abiding immigrants of any national or racial group as may be capable of being so ...and as may be also capable of becoming assimilated by communities of English-speaking type, and wholesomely incorporated into the body politic within a reasonable time." In 1926, *liberalized* quotas endorsed by Sidney Gulick, Secretary of the FCC's Department of International Justice and Goodwill from 1914 to 1934, would have permitted 150, 100, and 100 annual immigrants from Japan, China, and India, respectively. On the FCC's labor policies, see The Committee on the War And the Religious Outlook, *The Church and Industrial Reconstruction* (New York: Association Press, 1921). On the FCC's anti-racism and its growing recognition in recent scholarship, see Andrew Preston, "The Limits of Brotherhood: Race, Religion, and World Order in American Ecumenical Protestantism," *American Historical Review* 127.3 (September 2022): 1222-1251. I draw my discussion of the FCC's positions on immigration from materials concerning immigration and naturalization in: Folder 8, Box 11; Folder 18, Box 33; Folder 14, Box 35, FCC Papers.

universal brotherhood and a cosmopolitan religion.”²² This position was broadly consistent with pre-war Christian imperialism. What changed is that in the wake of World War I European empire and the European nation-state no longer seemed viable as leading agents of global Christendom. In Europe itself, Udi Greenberg writes, “the brutal conflict between Europeans, the subsequent rise of Bolshevism, and the proliferation of new nation-states across Central Europe all indicated the collapse of Christianity as Europe’s spiritual center.”²³ In its collapse, Christianity had given way to unchecked atheistic secularism, which European Protestants identified in virtually every current event: “According to this line of thought, the era’s dominant ideologies—nationalism, communism, social democracy, and capitalism—were all products of a “materialist” and antispiritual vision of the world, which Protestants had no doubt would spread violence, tyranny, and social chaos.”²⁴ The situation appeared less dire on the other side of the Atlantic, as we’ve already seen. Even so, European anxieties over spiritual decline had major ramifications in the United States as well. By the beginning of the following decade, the most important document of Protestant missions in the twentieth century would name “materialism, secularism, naturalism” as Christianity’s most pressing adversaries across the globe.²⁵

²² Andrew Preston, “The Limits of Brotherhood,” 1233.

²³ Udi Greenberg, “Protestants, Decolonization, and European Integration, 1885-1961” in *The Journal of Modern History* 89.2 (June 2017): 314-354, 328.

²⁴ Greenberg, “Protestants, Decolonization, and European Integration,” 329.

²⁵ William Ernest Hocking, *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen’s Inquiry After One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932). Hocking singled out communism in particular as a threat to world religion, both in *Re-Thinking Missions* and in a subsequent text on *Evangelism* published three years later. In the former, he wrote that the “chief foe” of all the world’s religions “is not Christianity, but the anti-religious element of the philosophies of Marx, Lenin, Russel.” (Hocking 1932, 32-33). In *Evangelism: An Address on Permanence and Change in Church and Mission* (Chicago: A Movement for World Christianity, 1935), he developed that argument in much the same terms: “...the challenge to belief in God offered by Russia today is a deeper challenge than that of the older atheism. It is an experimental atheism, not merely a personal negation. It is a national atheism, carrying itself out consistently, or trying to, into all institutions. It is an atheism flanked by a powerful social philosophy and carried on a wave of a responsible passion for mankind” (12).

Christian internationalism thus coincided with antisecularism to shape ecumenical visions of a post-WWI world. Unlike in Europe, however, even vocally internationalist American Protestants were not so quick to dispense with the nation. This is the last insight which William Adams Brown provides us. For Brown, the Christianization of the non-European world would not provide the premise for the conquest of secularism in the metropole, as in the minds of European ecumenicists and some American missionaries. Rather, the Christianization of the world would be resultant of the antecedent Christianization of the United States. Although American ecumenical writing before and during the war consistently deplored the evils of nationalism, leading figures in the movement nevertheless maintained a shared conviction in the providential role of the United States and its special affinity with Protestant principles. During the war itself, according to Robert Handy, “numbers of the most widely heard religious voices speaking for an unqualified nationalism and ready to revile the enemy were on the liberal side of the theological spectrum.”²⁶ Expressions of such nationalism varied in terms of intensity and chosen religious metaphor. Figures like Lyman Abbott and Samuel McCrea Cavert portrayed the war as a quasi-religious conflict between Christian democracy and German paganism—a war, as Abbott put it, to “make the world safe for Christianity.”²⁷ Others such as Oberlin President Henry Churchill King read the war in terms of Christian typology, analogizing between America’s “reluctant” participation and Christ’s sacrificial atonement on the cross.²⁸ In either case, the extension of Christianity was seen as coextensive with American internationalism. American armies marched with the cross ahead of them, as one popular cliché put it, laying the way for a world-wide renewal of Christian evangelism.

²⁶ Handy, *Undermined Establishment*, 165.

²⁷ Gamble, *The War for Righteousness*, 162-167; Abbott quoted in Handy, *Undermined Establishment*, 164.

²⁸ Henry Churchill King, “The Spirit of Our Intercession,” in Charles S. Macfarland, ed. *The Churches of Christ in Time of War: A Handbook for the Churches* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1917): 13-23, 17.

Shailer Mathews, one of the leading avatars of theological modernism and at the time dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, distilled this convergence of liberal internationalism, antisecularism, and American exceptionalism in a series of lectures at the University of North Carolina in May 1918. Titled *Patriotism and Religion*, the lectures argued strenuously for the legitimacy of Christian patriotism on the grounds of a providential interpretation of American history. Other Protestant figures saw a mere affinity between American republicanism and Protestant religiosity, such that one could endorse patriotism granting certain conditions of national behavior. Mathews deepened this relationship considerably. In his estimation, patriotism and religiosity were in fact inseparable, both homologous, organic outgrowths of innate national character. As he argued, the two together constituted “the expression of a nation’s inner life. If the morale of an army is a key to victory or defeat; the national soul is the explanation of national features and international struggles.”²⁹ That inner life, in turn, corresponded to a definite stage in the progressive work of providential history. The history of civilization, as Mathews narrated it, presented itself in quasi-Hegelian terms as a teleological history of nations, each of which provided “a laboratory in which definite cultural ideas have been developed” and thus a waypoint in the realization of God’s kingdom.³⁰

Reified in this way, nationality became the criterion differentiating good from bad patriotism—and *mutatis mutandis* good from bad religion. Patriotism in one instance could be an unqualified evil; in the other Christian fidelity. Thus Mathews could say of Germany that “the continuity of the German God and the ancient tribal god is unbroken. The religious leaders of Germany are taught to speak in the name of God when they publicize the policies of the Kaiser. The German nation is the nation of the ‘old German God.’”³¹ On the other hand, America’s peculiar

²⁹ Shailer Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 6.

³⁰ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 40-41.

³¹ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 16.

national character ensured that patriotism in its case aligned with the interests of true Christianity. America alone was a nation founded on the ideal of sacrificial service, Mathews argued, and thus alone a nation capable of shouldering international leadership in the post-war world:

“We may wholeheartedly declare that we stand for a nation that has a mission; that dares to help other nations who are in distress and is determined to right wrongs it may have done. This is the patriotism of the future: a loyalty to a nation which by its own existence and purpose seeks, not only to make the world safe for democracy, but to make democracy safe for the world. The millions of fathers and mothers who see their sons wept into the maelstrom of war have no conflict with their consciences. These sons are not the creatures of the will to power, but of the will to serve. Our patriotism dares glory in its outlook and its hope because it knows that the triumph of our land is the triumph of the cause of a better humanity.”³²

In interpreting America through the lens of Christian providence, Mathews drew on longstanding motifs of American religious nationalism. Since well before the Civil War, American identity had been defined by the convergence of whiteness, Protestantism, and political republicanism. Participating in the American polity demanded that one possess certain virtues—rationality, self-sacrifice, autonomy, industriousness—all of which were tightly linked with racial whiteness and Protestant religiosity. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the religious and racial character of American republicanism became more explicit and self-reflective. European and Asian immigration, the Mexican, Indian, and Civil Wars, Black emancipation, and the extension of American empire overseas combined to produce what Matthew Frye Jacobson dubs “variegated whiteness,” a more finely textured system of racial classification in which Anglo-Saxons, rather than whites as such, embodied the traits required for republican self-government.³³ Racial Anglo-Saxonism meshed seamlessly with the religious and civic dimensions of American nationhood. For those who promoted Anglo-Saxonist ideology, myths of pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon democracy and

³² Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 76.

³³ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

the primitive English church lent racial solidity to religious visions of American destiny, while Protestant providentialism, in turn, provided Christian sanction for Anglo-Saxonist theories of racial purpose. This synthesis provided a powerful ideology for American power at the turn of the twentieth century. Within an immanentist framework of providential history, Anglo-Saxons, by virtue of their racial proclivities to republican virtue and pure spiritual Christianity, were destined to civilize, and thereby Christianize the world.³⁴

Mathews' lectures exhibited the influence of this discourse. Elaborating on Americans' national affinity for democracy, he clarified: "democracy is more than an ideal. It is a discernible development of institutions. As such, it should be regarded historically, not theoretically."³⁵ It would be wrong to think that anyone, regardless of their historical or national situation, was capable of acceding to its precepts. Indeed, "as a development of institutions it has not been symmetrical in different nations. In practice democracy must be described as the development of the rights of Englishmen into the rights of humanity." Lest there be any mistake as to what his reference to

³⁴ On the racialization of American nationhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. ([1986] New York: Routledge, 2014); Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Gary Gerstle, *Working-class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Paul Kraemer, "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War," *Diplomatic History* 30.2 (April 2006): 169-210.

On the role of religion in processes of racialization and American imperialism, see Matthew McCullough, *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish-American War* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); Edward J. Blum, *Reforming the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

³⁵ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 25.

Englishmen meant, Mathews clarified: “Not programs but genetic development has been the method by which democracy as the world actually possesses it has become the precious heritage of humanity.”³⁶ This Anglo-Saxonist interpretation of democracy transformed Mathews’ internationalist vision of a democratic world order. For if democracy was a genetic product of Anglo-Saxon history, and “in democracy alone can the immanence of God be expressed in the terms of human experience,” it required only a short syllogistic step to conclude, as Mathews did, that the advance of Anglo-American civilization measured the advance of true religion.

Yet if Mathews rehearsed the basic theses of Anglo-Protestant Americanism, he did so in relation to a distinctive set of others. Over prior decades, similar iterations of Anglo-Saxonism had tended to define American nationhood by juxtaposition with groups such as the Irish, Catholics, African Americans, American Indians, Eastern European Jews, Filipinos, or Cubans. Mathews on the other hand, dispensing with the Germanomania that often marked Anglo-Saxonist discourse, asserted that the pure antitype to Anglo-American Christian democracy spoke with a distinctive “German accent.”³⁷ That it did so suggested new coordinates for normative definitions of American identity. In the first place, we’ve already seen Mathews describe German religiosity as a kind of proto-religious tribalism. It was that tribalism, per Mathews, which endowed German patriotism with its highly nationalist and militaristic character. It also linked German religiosity to what for Mathews was the nationalistic religion par excellence, namely, Judaism. “No religion has so consistently worked out its concepts in the laboratory of politics” as “the Hebrew religion,” Mathews wrote. “Jewish messianism was a transcendentalized hope of national supremacy, a religious faith eager for human and divine brutality.” In this way Judaism, referred to always in the past tense, constituted “an ancient forerunner of the Teutonic confidence that its Old Ally, God, will

³⁶ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*.

³⁷ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 103.

give power to the German people to crush its enemies, terrorize them by indescribable brutalities, and spread over the world Teutonic *Kultur*.”³⁸ In contrasting the Christian self-sacrifice of Anglo-American democracy with the tribalism, militarism, and “Teutonic efficiency” of German religion, Mathews staged the war and its outcome within the hierarchical oppositions of Christian supersessionism: universalism over particularism; freedom over heteronomy; spirit over flesh. Moreover, supersessionism gave substance to the national exemplarity of the United States, which became in Mathews’ discourse a nation without nationalism, a paradoxical polity whose very particularity consisted in universality.³⁹

No sooner did Mathews articulate this vision of Anglo-American exemplarity, however, than he found it threatened by another rival in turn: Bolshevism. Running through Mathews’ lectures one finds an anticipatory defensiveness toward the intellectual and political claims of socialism, which, itself an internationalist tradition, presented a distinctive challenge to incipient paradigms of ecumenical internationalism. Mathews betrayed an acute awareness of this challenge. “At the outset of any attempt to estimate the worth of patriotism we are met by the denial of the legitimacy of the feeling itself,” he observed. That denial was personified by the “orthodox socialist.” In contrast to the patriot, who retained a measured affirmation of the historical significance of nationality, “the line of cleavage which [the orthodox socialist] would establish runs between economic classes and not

³⁸ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 19; 21.

³⁹ Michael Thompson misses this important point in his otherwise illuminating portrayal of Christian internationalism in the interwar period. Thompson insistently argues that ecumenical internationalism in these years was distinct from either Wilsonian or Cold War American internationalism, and that it was distinct precisely insofar as it “rejected outright the notion that God’s universal cause could be seen as immanent within the nation’s cause” (Thompson 2015, 4). Certainly that would be true in the case of other nations. The key difference between other nations and the United States, however, is that identified here by Mathews: American nationhood is fundamentally non-nationalistic. As such, it remained uniquely viable as a vehicle for Christian internationalist aspirations.

between political entities. To that end he would abolish national loyalties,” and in their place “would have established an internationalism based on the world-wide union of workingmen.”⁴⁰

Socialism had an obvious appeal for “intelligent patriots,” as Mathews readily acknowledged, all of whom “must have some sympathy with many of the ideas which socialist internationalism seeks to embody.”⁴¹ In its evident denial of particularism, commitments to economic justice, and progressive understanding of history, in fact, international socialism resembled nothing so closely as American ecumenicism itself. It is for this reason perhaps that Mathews seemed unsure of how to dispense with it. At moments in his lectures socialism, especially its Bolshevik variant, received condemnation for its naïve utopianism; elsewhere for its overly stringent pacificism. Ultimately, however, Mathews dealt with socialism according to the prevailing trend in American political discourse, connecting it with the list of negative predicates previously ascribed to Germans.⁴² That process of transposition unfolded in two complementary ways. In terms of concrete historical connections, Mathews argued, socialism was directly complicit with German militarism—not only in its pacificism but as its literal agent. Mathews would only hint at “how far [Bolshevism] had been financed by Germany.”⁴³ Of American socialists he was less circumspect: “Here the movement has been so thoroughly organized by German sympathizers that it has become an outstanding center of opposition to war by the United States...Organized socialism in America has turned itself into anti-Americanism, condemning a war of national self-protection and pleading for peace in speech self-betrayed by its German accent.”⁴⁴ Beneath those empirical ties, moreover, socialism also displayed

⁴⁰ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 37.

⁴¹ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 37.

⁴² This was as true for American Protestants as for the Bureau of Investigation or the National Association of Manufacturers. Per Gamble, “Bolshevism, of course, was of immediate concern to the church in the postwar era. And the new peril replaced the German menace in the minds of many of the clergy. With Germany defeated, Bolshevism became the latest embodiment of evil and the preeminent threat to world peace and security” (Gamble, *Undermined Establishment*, 229).

⁴³ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 38.

⁴⁴ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 38.

the anti-democratic traits which German militarism exemplified. In its “economic materialism,” specifically, socialism inherited and amplified the “materialistic tendencies of German education,” and with them the systems of autocratic manipulation which cultural and religious materialism enabled.⁴⁵

Within *Patriotism and Religion*, then, Mathews defined Christian patriotism and the internationalism which it supported in opposition to a religio-political lineage of Hebraism-Germanism-Bolshevism.⁴⁶ He was not alone in doing so. Although Mathews stood out for the intensity of his rhetoric and his explicit anti-Judaism, his interpretation of Christian internationalism was widely shared among his peers, and helped to solidify the “intermestic” political perspective of ecumenical Protestants in the years after World War I.⁴⁷ Harry Emerson Fosdick, for example, reproduced Mathews’ argument concerning the Christian exemplarity of American democracy and its antithetical relationship to global variants of socialism. In a 1918 pamphlet titled *The Church’s Message to the Nation*, he defined Christian democracy as a practice of spiritual unity that, in its fullest realization, assimilated individual, business, and state relationships to a Christian fraternal ideal. What that looked like in its particulars became clear in contrast to socialism, which for Fosdick represented yet another form of autocratic class rule, no different in its ethos from the autocracy of

⁴⁵ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 122-23.

⁴⁶ There is something odd about the simultaneous affinity and repulsion that American Protestants felt for Bolshevism in these decades, and in particular in how they expressed that ambivalence in effectively supersessionist terms. My hypothesis, which I cannot even begin to argue here (it’s possible it isn’t arguable at all), is that for European and American Protestants Bolshevism represented the *wrong* kind of universalism by virtue of its materialism; it constituted a supersession of particularism without the attending spiritualization or inwardization. In this way there’s a latent Judeo-Bolshevik thesis even among liberals like Mathews, indeed even among Christian socialists and communist sympathizers. Bolshevism was supersessionism gone horribly wrong—a Jewish supersessionism instead of the proper Christian kind. That specter, importantly, can only become fearful when Christian universalism is constrained to the horizon of the nation, the borders of which Bolshevism flagrantly threatens. Unfortunately there isn’t space or warrant to pursue this any further.

⁴⁷ Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right*, 13.

European monarchs. “The trouble with the czar,” he wrote, “is not, first of all, that his rule is efficient or inefficient, honest or corrupt, benign or harsh, but the that the whole idea is wrong. He represents class rule.” The very same could be said of the Bolsheviks: “The trouble with the ‘Reds’ is not their motives are good or evil, the wrongs they fight against real or imagined, the ends they seek well intentioned or malign, but that the whole idea is wrong.” As in the case of the czar, “They represent class rule.”⁴⁸ Within the United States, those two poles of autocratic domination found figural correlates in the unrestrained capitalist, who like the Kaiser claimed national resources as private property, and the I.W.W. member, who, “as identical in spirit as different in form,” was nevertheless “seeking for class rule.”⁴⁹

This rendering of socialism as autocracy helped specify the distinctiveness of Christian social teaching both internationally and in the domestic sphere. Socialism, in spite of its superficial affinities with Christianity, was among what William Adams Brown called the “soldier’s theor[ies]” of social organization, a conquering ideology premised on the assumption of irreconcilable differences of interest between classes.⁵⁰ Christianity on the other hand was a “teacher’s theory,” which inculcated social *unity* through moral and educational uplift. The difference between the two was not absolute. Ecumenical Protestants, like many American liberals throughout the 1920s, nurtured strong affinities for socialist politics. That held even in the case of Bolshevism: the left edge of the ecumenical movement repeatedly defended the Russian revolution against its many American critics, and—like other American liberals in the early 1920s—conducted trips to the Soviet Union,

⁴⁸ Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Church’s Message to the Nation* (New York: Association Press, 1919), 12.

⁴⁹ Fosdick, *The Church’s Message to the Nation*, 14. In some sense, “class rule” as a type is in turn analogous with the peculiarly ecumenical bogeyman of sectarianism, to be discussed in the following section.

⁵⁰ William Adams Brown, “The Contribution of the Church to the Democracy of the Future” in *Religious Education* 13.5 (1918): 343-347, 343.

reporting glowingly on its accomplishments in the American Protestant press.⁵¹ Nevertheless, even the most radical representatives of American Protestantism maintained that Soviet communism provided only an approximation of an ideal democratic order which Christianity alone could achieve.

At the dawn of the 1920s, the political outlook of ecumenical Protestantism was thus defined by the idiosyncratic convergence of liberal internationalism, Protestant triumphalism, antisecularism, anticommunism, and an enduring conviction in the historical exemplarity of the United States. These coordinates defined the ideology of what we might call an ecumenical Protestant nationalism, or, using the language of George H. Betts, an ecumenical True Americanism. In her recent monograph *Black Scare / Red Scare*, Charisse Burden-Stelly identifies “True Americanism” as a crucial ideological bulwark of twentieth-century American politics. Emerging during and after World War I, True Americanism constituted a “legitimizing architecture” for a new anticommunist mode of governance, consisting in a range of “rationalizing discourses, political narrations, reigning ideology, legal instrumentalities, and social practices.”⁵² True Americanism had multiple permutations. At its most strident, it employed discourses of democracy, freedom, and citizenship to obfuscate race and class antagonism, sacralize American free enterprise, and sanction repressive action at every level of American government. It was in this terrain that figures like A. Mitchell Palmer, J. Edgar Hoover, and New York’s Lusk Committee operated—the tactical and spiritual predecessors of Cold War McCarthyism. Yet True Americanism also had a more liberal

⁵¹ On liberal responses to the Russian Revolution, including those of liberal Protestants, see Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962); Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). For a more focused treatment of the left-wing of the Protestant Social Gospel in these years, see Doug Rossinow, “The Radicalization of the Social Gospel: Harry F. Ward and the Search for a New Social Order, 1898-1936,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15.1 (Winter 2005): 63-106. On Protestant missionary Sherwood Eddy’s guided seminars to the Soviet Union and other countries and their influence on young Protestants in the 1920s, see Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right*, 24-30.

⁵² Charisse Burden-Stelly, *Black Scare / Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 225.

face. At its progressive left edge, True Americanism emphasized social unity as the precondition of democracy, pursued tutelary, rather than punitive programs of Americanization, and retained the exemplarity of the United States without yielding to outright jingoism.

Ecumenical True Americanism inhabited precisely this progressive nationalist niche. This was an unusual kind of American nationalism, to be sure. As we've seen in the case of Mathews, ecumenical nationalism inherited significant elements of America's civic and racial nationalist traditions, but transformed those elements through a mediating ideology of Christian supersessionism, *itself* modified by the federative structure of American ecumenicism. Between these discursive influences, ecumenicists came to identify the special character of the United States in a capacity to overcome competing particularisms—whether of class, race, or religious denomination—not by abolishing them, crucially, but by suspending their antagonism in federal models of unity-in-difference. This had profound effects on wider visions of American nationhood. In the first place, it substantiated claims of a proprietary relationship between ecumenical Protestantism and the American nation. Having themselves perfected a federalist model of cooperation across difference, ecumenicists were uniquely positioned to exert a leading influence on the nation as a whole. Moreover, insofar as ecumenical Protestantism displayed an ideological affinity with the structures of American democracy, it constituted the religious ideal to which all other American religions should approximate. To be religious in a democracy was to be religious in keeping with not simply Protestant, but *ecumenical* Protestant norms.⁵³ That modification of American nationalism went hand-in-hand with a second, more diffuse transformation. By routing American identity through an

⁵³ Up to the 1940s, according to David A. Hollinger, even the most liberal American Protestants never doubted their privileged relationship with American identity. As he writes in *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013), “the leaders of ecumenical Protestantism in the 1940s took for granted that their churches had a unique role to play in guiding the united States—and the world—toward an ideal political order, and they displayed no doubt that Christian principles should be the foundation of such an order” (60).

ecumenical discourse of Christian supersessionism, figures like Mathews, Fosdick, and Brown overlaid the conceptual hierarchies that organized American politics with those of supersessionist typology. The effects of this were clear in ecumenical dismissals of socialism. It was only because of the prior conflation of democracy and Protestantism, of American and Christian internationalism, that the opposition between democracy and socialism could be rendered in terms of the latter's particularism, Hebraism, or materialism.

This outlook, in turn, defined ecumenical endeavors in education, which groups like the FCC viewed as among the most important dimensions of the multi-front struggle named by William Adams Brown. For many ecumenicists, in fact, education served as a synecdoche for domestic work as a whole, naming in brief the national counterpart of Protestantism's evangelistic world mission. If we transpose that insight into the language of William Adams Brown above, we might say that the Christianization of America was before all else a task of education. Such a perspective shines through in a number of major postwar documents written on behalf of official ecumenical bodies. In 1919, for example, Robert E. Speer, head of the GWCC's Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook, gave expression to this view in a pamphlet written in the name of the committee. From the perspective gained in the aftermath of the war, he wrote, "the whole problem of the Church is now more clearly seen to be one of education. We have to bring every available resource to bear to make the pulpit, the Sunday School, the day school, the university, the theological seminary, all our educational factors, efficient in carrying out the great task of the Church in training men and women in Christian character."⁵⁴ The FCC's Committee on Methods of Cooperation spoke in similar terms

⁵⁴ Robert E. Speer, *The War and the Religious Outlook* (New York: Association Press, 1919), 26-27. The pamphlet in question was one of nine pamphlets and four major reports published by the FCC's Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook between 1918 and 1921. First convened in April 1918, the CWRO was created by the Administrative Committee of the FCC and Executive Committee of the GWCC with the broad mandate of articulating the war's essential religious significance—"to study those great spiritual implications and those practical questions that have to do with the outlook for religion after the war." Together, the committee's publications attempted to

in their report for the Council's third quadrennium in 1920. Singling out education and evangelism as the "two problems on which our churches for their very life's sake must work unitedly," they called for a comprehensive interdenominational strategy to deal with "the threefold educational problem: first, of recovering their place in higher education for the spiritual ideas essential to the very existence of the Christian view; second, of supplementing our secular public education by religious teaching; and, thirdly, of maintaining and elevating religious education in the Christian home and church."⁵⁵ These documents envisioned ecumenical programs in education, including at the college level, as indispensable vectors for the movement's progressive religious nationalism. It was within this affective and institutional matrix that the NCSR began its work.

II. "The Air was Saturated with Materialism": Educational Secularization and the National Council of Schools of Religion

On January 26, 1923, Charles Foster Kent delivered an address to more than three hundred religious and civic leaders gathered at Detroit's Hotel Statler to celebrate the formal inauguration of the Michigan School of Religion. For Kent, then Yale's Woolsey Professor of Biblical Literature and president of the National Association of Biblical Instructors, the event was tantamount to a coronation. In the fall of 1921, while delivering a series of lectures at six state universities in the Midwest, Kent had received an invitation from George W. Stewart, dean of the graduate school at the University of Iowa, to develop a proposal for an independent, non-sectarian school of religion adjacent to the university.⁵⁶ At the time, the rough model for independent schools of religion had

digest the impact of the war and outline the Protestant churches' responsibilities in areas including industrial reconstruction, foreign and home missions, women's work, and federative church unity. As a collective body of work, they are exemplary of the dynamics which I describe in this section. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the General War-Time Commission of the Churches," March 6, 1918, Folder 10, Box 70, FCC Papers.

⁵⁵ "The Present Interdenominational Situation; Report of Committee on Methods of Cooperation" in Samuel McCrea Cavert, ed. *The Churches Allied for Common Tasks*: 19-28, 24-25.

⁵⁶ *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 1: The Origin, Organization, and Aims of the Council* (New Haven, 1922), 5; Charles Foster Kent, "The Curriculum of a State university

already achieved some modest popularity. In 1893, the Disciples of Christ had sponsored their first Bible Chair at the University of Michigan; by 1909 they were doing the same at Virginia, Texas, Kansas, and Missouri. Those individual chairs became the germs for more ambitious interdenominational projects in ensuing years. At Missouri, where the university had granted credit recognition to the denominational chair in 1906, the Disciples developed plans for a fully interdenominational program, where Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and even Catholic and Jewish religion chairs would offer instruction under a shared institutional umbrella.⁵⁷ When Kent took his trip across the Midwest in 1921, nine such interdenominational schools were already operating in proximity to state universities across the country.⁵⁸ Kent's model drew heavily from these examples. Skirting state constitutional and university charter restrictions on public funding for religious instruction, Kent formulated a plan for the Iowa school that would meet the need for a coordinated curriculum in religion by deftly combining university and private resources. Unlike existing schools of religion, however, Kent eschewed direct denominational support. Individual private donors would supply necessary funding for the school's physical plant and new instructional staff.

School of Religion" in *Christian Education* 6.7 (April 1923): 349-355. This story is told in more florid detail in Marcus Bach's highly sentimental and factually unreliable *Of Faith and Learning: The Story of the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa* (Iowa City: The School of Religion State University of Iowa, 1952): 41-49. One can also find discussions of the origins of the Iowa School in a surprisingly large primary and secondary literature. A non-exhaustive list includes: George F. Kay, "How Far can a State University Go in Teaching Religion," *Christian Education* 12.3 (December 1928): 158-161; Edward W. Blakeman, "Religion at State Universities," *Religious Education* 25.4 (1930): 326-331; Clarence Shedd, *The Church Follows its Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938): 190-194; Robert S. Michaelson, "The Iowa School of Religion (As seen from the inside)," *Religious Education* 52.2 (1957): 130-132; Seymour A. Smith, *Religious Cooperation in State Universities: An Historical Sketch* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1957): 19-26; Peter Laipson, "And the Walls Came Crumbling Down: the Michigan School of Religion, 1920-1930," *Michigan Historical Review* 21.2 (Fall 1995): 93-123. Kent's Midwestern campaign receives brief treatment in the two most thorough histories of the study of religion in the United States: Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion*, 46-51; D.G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion*, 84-87.

⁵⁷ Clarence Prouty Shedd, *The Church Follows its Students*, 25-27.

⁵⁸ These were: the University of Texas, University of Oregon, University of California (with two such schools in Berkeley and Los Angeles, respectively), University of Kansas, University of Nebraska, University of Missouri, University of Illinois, Indiana University, and Ohio University.

Meanwhile, the university would permit existing faculty to teach courses at the school and incentivize student participation by offering course credit.

Over the two years separating his visits to Iowa City and Detroit, Kent publicized this template as a national model for quasi-departments of religion throughout the country's "godless" state universities.⁵⁹ By 1922, his vision had gained institutional form in the National Council of Schools of Religion (NCSR). Founded with the endorsement of the ecumenical Council of Church Boards of Education (CCBE) and boasting the participation of major Protestant figures including Harry Emerson Fosdick, William Adams Brown, and mining magnate Cleveland E. Dodge, the NCSR aimed to support nascent schools of religion, facilitate information-sharing between them, and provide measures of curricular standardization. The founding of the Michigan School of Religion was the group's most noteworthy achievement to that point. Tethered to the nation's most prestigious state university, the Michigan School exemplified the possibility of providing academic instruction in religion to state university students. In his speech, Kent articulated the importance of the school in precisely those terms. Over the prior century, he argued, religion had disappeared from state college curricula as a result of a negative polarization of religious conservatism and secularization. With the application of "exact scientific methods" at institutions like the Michigan School, however, that antagonism could be overcome.⁶⁰ Without sacrificing the moral valence of religious education, Kent hoped to produce something like a modern discipline of religion—one adequate to university standards of scientificity, and thus to the unique demands of twentieth-century life.

Yet even as he advanced a scientific ideal of religion beyond confessional limits, Kent framed that ideal's purpose in the cultural terms of an anxious Protestant nationalism. As he

⁵⁹ NCSR, *Bulletin Volume 1*, 3.

⁶⁰ Charles Foster Kent, "The New School of Religion," January 26, 1923, 11.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074723134&seq=1>.

rendered it, the School was a response to a thoroughgoing civilizational crisis for which religion alone could provide a solution. “Whatever be our religious training or point of view,” he said, “we will all agree as students of history that religion has been the only force that, in the hour of crisis, has saved civilization from collapse.” In 1923 religion was again called to perform that role, this time through the intermediary institutions of the university: “Only as the strong and dauntless men of all faiths work together and, through our great universities, satisfy the demands of youth and train them to go forth and teach humanity the moral and spiritual laws of the universe, can we save our civilization.”⁶¹ Yet to Kent’s frustration—and to the frustration of colleagues working in the ministry, denominational bodies, and higher education—the universities were failing in this task. As he framed things, in the “ninety tax-supported universities and colleges in America,” one found “the anomaly of great institutions of higher learning which teach almost every known subject from psychology to folk and aesthetic dancing and the physical and moral culture of pigs and hens,” and yet refused to teach religion.⁶² Could one be surprised, Kent asked, that in such conditions “crime and corruption are rampant, thousands of homes wrecked by selfishness, democracy a partial failure and human civilization tottering?”⁶³

⁶¹ Kent, “The New School of Religion,” 12.

⁶² Kent, “The New School of Religion,” 13.

⁶³ This complaint was a fixture of public writing on religion and culture in the first three decades of the century. Its basic contention—that the secularization of American education obstructed the religious wellsprings of American life—unified Protestants across denominational and theological lines, providing cause for the creation of major ecumenical undertakings like the Religious Education Association (created in 1903 under the oversight of University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper) and the United Council of Church Boards of Education (created in 1911 and comprising individual boards of education associated with Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, Friends, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, and the Presbyterian Church, USA). On the history of the former group, see Stephen A. Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1983); for contemporary accounts of its founding and development: Theodore Gerald Soares, “History of the Religious Education Association,” *Religious Education* 23.7 (1928): 61-63; Orville L. Davis, “A History of the Religious Education Association,” *Religious Education* 44.1 (1949): 41-54.

Kent's focus on education was not only a product of his own vocational position; it reflected a much broader preoccupation with the schools in contemporary American life. Between 1900 and 1920, the percentage of American high school age adolescents quadrupled, matched by a nearly equal statistical leap in rates of college attendance.⁶⁴ This major expansion in school attendance coincided with an expansion of school functions. By the 1920s, public school instruction had broadened well beyond the sparse curricula of nineteenth-century common schools, providing students training in subjects like personal hygiene, public health, and various technical vocations in addition to more traditional subjects. In this way, public schools came to constitute an essential institution of social reproduction on a mass scale. In the words of Luther A. Weigle, then professor of religious education at Yale and one of the twentieth century's most influential American Protestants, the public schools constituted "a miniature world, full of real experiences, real opportunities, real interests and real social relations."⁶⁵ It is because of this new status that schooling became such a flashpoint for political conflict in the twentieth century, for in producing a "miniature world" for their students the schools seemed fated, through those same students, to recreate the wider world in their image.⁶⁶ For Weigle, the consequences of this transformation were ominous: "when schools undertake to afford to children a transcript in miniature of life itself...when such schools, I say, ignore or slight religion, there is but one conclusion for sensible children to draw."⁶⁷

This condition was felt to be particularly dire at the postsecondary level, due largely to the advanced stage of secularization that appeared to have already metastasized across the country's

⁶⁴ Thomas D. Snyder, ed. *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993).

⁶⁵ Luther A. Weigle "The Secularization of Public Education," *Religious Education* 21.1 (1926): 90-95, 92.

⁶⁶ See Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the American School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

⁶⁷ Weigle, "The Secularization of Public Education," 93.

leading colleges and universities. As Julie Reuben has written, the eighteenth-century model of a liberal college curriculum anchored by courses in religion or moral philosophy had been displaced well before the 1920s, superseded by new curricular models and philosophies of education associated with modern research universities like Johns Hopkins, the University of Chicago, and the University of Michigan.⁶⁸ Although university presidents continued to emphasize the place of religion in higher education as a foundation for ethical life, religion no longer provided a unifying criterion capable of integrating college instruction or reconciling the various faculties of the university. This crisis of purpose had significant ramifications for forms of instruction in religion. Seemingly incapable of meeting criteria of scholarly scientificity and prohibited from conducting more traditional doctrinal instruction, religion lost its academic standing and morphed into an extracurricular domain for student enrichment. At best, it was able to carve out a limited niche in in pre-professional education programs.

In his discussion of state university education, Kent adroitly tapped these potent cultural currents, weaving together anxieties over democratic citizenship, educational secularization and broader transatlantic narratives of societal declension. He did so in a highly specific way, however, unifying this field of topics through an encompassing discourse on *materialism*. The language of materialism provided Kent with a powerful idiom with which to evoke the dangers of irreligious education. In their emphasis on technical training, Kent argued, public universities reduced the elevating aims of education to mere means of material accumulation. In the process, they reduced their students as well. “With marvelous skill we have taught youth the habits of butterflies, beetles, and ants,” he lamented. “Our chief emphasis has been the placed on training super-insects that can gather and store away material possessions. But of the things of the spirit which differentiate [them]

⁶⁸ Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

from insects and brutes, we have taught them little.”⁶⁹ In an expanded version of the address published as the second *Bulletin* of the NCSR, Kent developed this line of argumentation, multiplying his references to materialism, materialistic tendencies, or material resources as he did so. In one dense and indicative passage, Kent narrated the history of American education as little more than a headlong plunge into materialism:

Deprived of the inspiration of sane religious instruction, education became increasingly utilitarian and materialistic. The rich contributions of science, which at first were largely physical, and the quick mastery of the vast natural resources of America fostered these materialistic tendencies. The air was saturated with materialism. Following the example of their elders, students naturally elected the courses that promised material success. In college and university religion and ethics were largely neglected or despised.⁷⁰

Kent’s diagnosis was not an isolated, one-off comment in the orbit of the NCSR. In a 1941 history written to commemorate the organization’s twentieth anniversary, the Council’s eleventh *Bulletin* described the conditions of the early twenties in similar language: “a secularized and materialistic educational system, a Protestantism which was torn by sectarianism and fundamentalist-modernist controversies, and a complex of ethically disintegrating forces let loose by the War, combined to create a situation in which students were left without effective guiding principles of conduct.”⁷¹ Nor were Kent and his immediate collaborators alone in this assessment. For many religious educators, the erosion of religion’s status in higher education was inextricable from the corrosive advance of materialism as a defining civilizational ethos. O.D. Foster, University Secretary for the CCBE and founding figure in the Iowa School of Religion, described the tensions

⁶⁹ Kent, “The New School of Religion,” 10.

⁷⁰ Charles Foster Kent, *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 2: Filling the Gap in Modern Education* (New Haven, 1923), 5.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074842306&seq=3>.

⁷¹ *National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Volume 11: Two Decades: The Story of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education (Founded by Charles Foster Kent)* (New York: National Council, 1941), 6. Accessed in Edwards Family Papers, #1484. Division of Rare Books and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Box 10.

surrounding university education in terms of an overarching conflict between materialism and idealism. In a 1921 article for *Christian Education*, Foster wrote:

As valuable as the University is to the Commonwealth as the alma mater of its skilled workers and artisans, it succeeds in its larger mission only in the proportion to its ability to ‘shoot’ this materialistic subject matter through and through with idealistic motives and purposes. But this the University, because of its legal restrictions, finds it difficult to do. It cannot and should not teach religion, the mother of idealism.⁷²

Together, these twin depictions of the “materialistic” point of view pervading American universities endowed the study of religion with a multidimensional urgency. What “materialism” meant, however, was far from self-evident. Even within these two short passages, the authors’ working definitions of materialism are incredibly slippery, evoking at once the physical connotations of applied sciences, moral condemnations of avarice, and metaphysical commitments concerning the relationship between spirit and matter. Such terminological confusion was precisely the strength of the idiom, however, lending anti-materialism its discursive generativity and rhetorical force. One sees this clearly in the case of Kent. In his bulletin, the concentrated repetition of “materialist” and its variants allowed him to disregard the major conceptual differences separating the word’s discrete registers of meaning. The sequence of “materialistic...materialistic... materialism...material” permitted Kent to link claims about undue curricular emphasis on the sciences to a cultural Jeremiad on American irreligion through a strategy of resonance and insinuation. In this way, the materialist, i.e., concrete practical focus of the natural sciences was made to entail a materialist, i.e., immanentist and atheist metaphysics, with a materialist, i.e., selfish and unethical set of behaviors as the result.

What are we to make of this, exactly? Why did Kent endow the language of materialism *specifically* with this kind of rhetorical centrality? With what resonances? And what effects?

⁷² O.D. Foster, “Religion in American Universities,” *Christian Education* 4.9 (June 1921): 3-69, 57.

In making anti-materialism a central element in the NCSR's case for religion's curricular significance, Kent invoked at least three distinct registers of Western discourse on materialism. At its widest, his opposition between materialism and true religion reiterated the hierarchical distinction between purposive spirit and mechanistic matter inherited from the canons of Western metaphysics and the history of European colonialism—discussed at length in this dissertation's introduction. That philosophical schema had emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when intra-European contests over the meaning of true religion collided with the emerging discourse on African “fetishism” issuing from Afro-Portuguese commercial zones along the Gold Coast.⁷³ Within this latter context, European commentary on indigenous West-Central African religious practices produced what William Pietz calls “a theoretical materialism quite incompatible and in conflict with the philosophical tradition”: a complex apprehension of objects premised on the sharp distinction between a uniform, natural order of mechanistic causality, on the one hand, and a supersensuous order of purposive action on the other.⁷⁴ This metaphysical distinction between natural and supernatural domains contributed in turn to the articulation of two related, though not isomorphic trajectories for ideologies of European domination. The first of these was explicitly Christian. Caricatured conveniently as the capricious, irrational attachment to material objects, African fetishism came to represent the radical other of European Christianity. In that role, it anchored a teleological classification of religions that progressed from so-called primitive nature religions to the

⁷³ There is now a voluminous literature on the history of the spirit/matter distinction in Western thought and its intersection with colonialism. For a synthetic narrative of this convergence that is particularly attentive to its inscription in European discourse on religion, see Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015). I will deal more fully with the topic of the fetish and its recent resurgence in the study of religion in the third chapter of this dissertation.

⁷⁴ William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17, 6.

universalist, spiritualist ideal realized by Protestantism.⁷⁵ At the same time, the confusion of natural and supernatural orders of causality typified by fetishism (though also characteristic of Catholicism and aberrant forms of lay religion) provided the definitional antitype for the space of natural and human sciences that developed in Europe from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, ensuring in its negativity the relative *scientificity* of the European subject in addition to its religious superiority.

This was by far the most abstract set of meanings attached to Kent's "materialism." To the extent that it informed the term's salience in the interwar United States, it did so only via a set of more proximate and influential discursive intermediaries. Indeed, we might be quick to point out that Kent's target in the NCSR bulletin was not African fetishism, Jewish particularism, or Catholic superstition, but precisely that scientific materialism which colonial discourse on the non-Christian other helped generate in the first place. That observation signals the second connotation of materialism at work in Kent's text. As I've just narrated, the European discourse on religion between the fifteen and nineteenth centuries generated two kinds of claims for European hegemony: the first forthrightly Christian, the second scientific. These two claims were in many ways mutually amplifying. It was the compatibility of empirical methods of scientific inquiry with elite norms of proper Christianity that gave the former spiritual sanction and the latter its unique claim to rationality. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, the subjection of Christianity to methods of historical inquiry generated profound tension between rational and religious accounts of European cultural identity. As European thinkers cast doubt on scriptural authority, the historicity of miracles, and the uniqueness of Christianity with respect to Judaism, that is, it became

⁷⁵ Tomoko Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (2000): 242-267, 248. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" in Mark Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 269-284, 277.

increasingly difficult to maintain the strict identity between Christian truth-claims and those of secular reason.⁷⁶

In response, European and American commentators generated new paradigms of Christian identity and its relation to European civilization. Among the most important was that of English critic Matthew Arnold, who beginning in the 1860s reinterpreted Western culture as the hybrid product of two distinct heritages: Hellenism and Hebraism. For centuries, Arnold argued, Christianity had effectively synthesized these two, unifying Hellenism's rationalism, emotive complexity, and aesthetic refinement with Hebraism's sense of moral rectitude. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the combined processes of European modernity had dealt an irrevocable blow to Christianity as a noetic authority and cultural sealant.⁷⁷ That they were capable of doing so was the result of a dramatic excess of Hebraism in Western culture, evident in both modernity's drive for practical power (Arnold defined Hebraism itself as "energy driving at practice") and Christianity's legalistic, dogmatic insistence on its own claims to historical factuality. Arnold linked these two explicitly in 1879, writing of modern society, "here is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it."⁷⁸ What Western societies required was a source of social cohesion capable of replicating Christianity's balance of Hellenic and

⁷⁶ Among the most salient examples are the critiques of miracles offered by Spinoza, Locke, and Hume, debates over the historicity of scripture such as the *Fragmentenstreit* and the Biblical criticism of D.F. Strauss and Bruno Bauer, and the Kantian restriction of major points of Christian doctrine to the status of practical postulates. In the course of these disputes, the repeated exposure of Christianity to the problems of its own historicity narrowed its areas of authority in a dramatic way: first to morality and ethics, and then to aesthetics and feeling.

⁷⁷ Samuel Catlin, "The Rest is Literature: Midrash and The Institution of 'Theory' in America," Ph.D. Diss. (University of Chicago, 2022): 119-127; K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2019): 24-25.

⁷⁸ Matthew Arnold, introduction to *The Hundred Greatest Men*, quoted in Catlin, 119-120.

Hebraic impulses.⁷⁹ It was in response to this need that Arnold proposed poetry as Christianity's secularized substitute, a pseudo-Christian successor to Christianity's social function.

Arnold's account of cultural Hebraism exerted a powerful hold on American humanists in the interwar years.⁸⁰ For those concerned with the degenerative effects of educational fragmentation, in particular, he gave authoritative sanction to the idea that the humanities—and in particular the study of literature—could provide a source of cultural unity capable of mediating the relationship between individual, university, and nation.⁸¹ That argument dovetailed effectively with contemporary models of general education, which, as in the case of Columbia's new Contemporary Civilization sequence, sought to create a uniform basis of higher education through instruction in the "Western heritage."⁸² Initiatives such as these provoked significant enthusiasm among the advocates for religion in higher education, who viewed both the Arnoldian revival and the general education movement as offering openings for their own curricular incursions. In contrast to Arnold and his readers in literary studies, however, proponents of the collegiate study of religion were not interested in identifying religion's secularized successor. If Western societies required a source of cultural unity, such advocates reasonably surmised, why opt for a counterfeit?

⁷⁹ Catlin argues that the language of 'balance' in Arnold's argument in *Culture and Anarchy* belies the basic point that such balance is only possible through the hegemony of the Hellenic over the Hebraic, not through a perfect equanimity of the two. The Hebraic-Hellenic identity of European culture, therefore, is fundamentally supersessionist—an overcoming and taming of Hebraism in the name of a parochial nineteenth-century image of Protestantism.

⁸⁰ Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 32-39.

⁸¹ For a comparative interpretation of "culture" and its mediating function between these entities, see Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁸² Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 39. The Columbia general education program was a product of the First World War. In 1918, the US War Department created the Students Army Training Corps, which mobilized colleges to quarter and instruct officers-in-training. As part of this program, the War Department mandated that conscripts take a course in "War Issues," taught by college faculty, which contextualized the conflict within European history as a cataclysmic battle between Europe's democratic future and its autocratic past. That "War Issues" course provided the template for Columbia's program, as well as a host of other general education initiatives. On the history of the "War Issues" course, see Gilbert Allardyce, "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course," *The American Historical Review* 87.3 (June 1982): 695-725

The NCSR adopted something resembling this position in their public-facing literature. In the same 1923 bulletin in which he described the “materialism” engulfing American universities, Charles Foster Kent also produced a complex historical argument mirroring that of Arnold to explain that condition’s genesis. For Kent, educational materialism was not attributable to the mere absence of religion in American culture. It was instead the product of a negative cycle in which patterns of illiberal religiosity fed academic secularization, and vice versa, each producing in the other the conviction that religion and scientific reasoning were fundamentally irreconcilable. “Until a little after the middle of the last century,” Kent wrote,

religion continued to be one of the chief subjects taught in practically every higher institution of learning. Then, with the deeper study of Nature, came the sciences and scientific method. Ever since they have been regnant in our American colleges and universities. They have brought manifold blessings to mankind and have infinitely more to contribute, but they cannot fill the gap left when the study of religion was either quietly dropped from the college curriculum or relegated to a secondary place.⁸³

Importantly, the “silent but fatal transfer of emphasis in modern education” was not the inevitable result of the ascendance of the natural sciences. It was instead a response to the unyielding religious conservatism which met that ascendance in the nineteenth century. “Unfortunately the teachers of religion at first refused to adopt the test methods and to accept the positive results of scientific investigation. In clinging to its old dogmatic methods and to a philosophy formulated when the Ptolemaic system was still universally accepted, they committed a fatal crime against reason and the youth of America.”⁸⁴ It was only because of this compulsive sectarian reaction against science that individual states prohibited religious instruction in institutions of higher education. Given the context in which they were written, therefore, constitutional provisions against tax-supported sectarian teaching in states like Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota were in fact entirely justified. Confronted with the intense sectarianism of the era, Kent concluded, “it was inevitable that

⁸³ Kent, *Bulletin Volume 2*, 4.

⁸⁴ Kent, *Bulletin Volume 2*, 5.

this perversion of religion should be placed under the ban in all but the strongly denominational colleges.”⁸⁵ Kent’s dialectic of sectarianism and secularization mirrored the Arnoldian diagnosis of cultural Hebraism, according to which the ills of industrial society were exacerbated, rather than addressed by rigid adherence to religious factuality. So too did Kent’s solution. In light of that history, he wrote, a return to sectarian stridency could only exacerbate the problems afflicting American education. What education in religion required—and what the NCSR was intended to provide—was an idea of religion capable of mediating and responding to the epistemic and spiritual challenges of modernity, incarnated in a non-sectarian institutional form.

For all their similarities however, Kent’s language also modified Arnold’s thesis in a significant way. Specifically, his restatement of Arnoldian dogmatism as the problem of *sectarianism* transposed Arnold’s argument into the domestic framework of American ecumenicism, a movement defined above all else by its fervent anti-sectarian ethos. Though not reducible to the ecumenical movement, the NCSR was an outgrowth of it, and it consequently exemplified the latter’s federative spirit. Indeed, the very model of the “school of religion” as an appendage to the state universities developed as part of a wider ecumenical Protestant project to redress the perceived secularization of American schooling described above. For concerned groups including the FCC, CCBE, REA, and International Council of Religious Education, the schools of religion were a direct extension of educational initiatives including Sunday Schools, the weekday religious school, vacation bible schools, and time-release religious education for public school students—the crowning component of a comprehensive educational vision that could complement and equal public schooling in a harmonious system of dual power.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Kent, *Bulletin Volume 2*, 5.

⁸⁶ The scope of ecumenical proposals for comprehensive religious education programs in this era is often breathtaking. In 1917, for example, the International Sunday School Association adopted an educational policy that sought “the establishment of community schools of religious education” in “*every city of over 10,000 inhabitants on the North American Continent*” (my emphasis). As

By interpreting materialism as the historical counterpart to religious sectarianism, Kent intellectually reinforced these existing institutional ties, localizing the term's broader connotations within the ideological parameters of interwar ecumenical Protestantism. Indeed, if we look back at the documents produced by key members of the ecumenical movement in the years following the end of World War I, one finds the same discourse on materialism facilitating the same kinds of discursive links between politics, religion, and education that we see so clearly in Kent. In Samuel McCrea Cavert's introductory comments in the FCC's third quadrennial report, for example, Cavert framed the "task of Christian education", like Kent, as an antidote to materialism. "In a world in which the forces of materialism are beating against the church and tending to destroy any Christian view of life," he wrote, "only the most effective consolidation of the impact of Christianity upon society can avail," by which he meant, specifically, the concerted development of "opportunities for character formation through the public school" and the supplementation of Sunday-School programming with weekday religious education.⁸⁷ Shailer Mathews, not incidentally a member of the NCSR's Committee on Educational Policy, extended Cavert's ideas to university education, augmenting the meaning of "materialism" as he did so. Situating the work of religious education in the framework of Christian Patriotism, Mathews anticipated Kent's laments practically word for word:

"For a generation and more our schools have colleges have been increasingly emphasizing scientific attitudes and methods. Little by little we have seen the old humanistic education give way to the study of the physical forces of nature. Language have gradually been forced to retreat from their earlier primacy, and in their place has come a study of phenomena that

they described it, "these schools," of which there would have been thousands, "are but a part of a complete system of religious education which will rest down upon the citizenship of the nation and will conserve the true spirit of democracy." See "Third Annual Report of the Committee on Religious Education of the Massachusetts Federation of Churches," November 18, 1918. Folder 14, Box 18. RG 18, Federal Council of Churches Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter, FCC Papers).

⁸⁷ Samuel McCrea Cavert, "The Federal Council: An Interpretation," in *The Churches Allied For Common Tasks*, 13-14.

can be understood without recourse to personality. It would perhaps be too much to say that our education has become materialistic, but it has certainly grown less idealistic.”⁸⁸

How does this shared anti-materialist language affect our understanding of Charles Foster Kent’s invocations of materialism? And what might that tell us about the ideological formation of American religious studies in the interwar years?

Up to this point, I have argued that anti-materialism established the semantic matrix in which the NCSR promoted the study of religion in American higher education, permitting Kent and his colleagues to link contemporary anxieties concerning democratic citizenship, educational secularization, and Western decline within a single argumentative idiom. I have further argued that this idiom shaped the curricular and cultural purpose of the nascent discipline—more specifically, that it tethered the study of religion to ideologies of European hegemony and hierarchical systems of religious classification. If that’s true, however, if the study of religion as envisioned by Kent *did* in fact restate those deeply embedded historical biases, it did so only via the intermediary dynamics of American ecumenical Protestantism. The specificity of Kent’s usage suggests a distinct trajectory of anti-materialism in the American context, and indeed a distinct trajectory for the American conceptualization and study of religion. In Kent’s handling, though also in the wider context of American ecumenical Protestantism, anti-materialism was not simply an expression of an underlying metaphysics or “Protestant ontology” (though it may also have been that). By articulating itself within the governing logic of anti-materialism, the study of religion sutured itself institutionally and—more importantly—intellectually to the ecumenical movement and the antiseccularist Protestant Americanism which it espoused. Importantly, this remained a relatively muted dimension of the discipline’s self-image in the 1920s. Instead, as we will see, the NCRHE specifically sought to strike a careful balance between its anti-seccularist cultural purpose and its aspirations to scientific

⁸⁸ Mathews, *Patriotism and Religion*, 121.

credibility. In articulating the study of religion as an academic discipline, that is, we do not find figures like Kent or his more actively involved colleagues making the strident sorts of claims that circulated in broader ecumenical discourse. The following section examines the claims they did make, and how the discursive formation of Americanist anti-materialism shaped the disciplinary features which the academic study of religion took on.

III. The Establishment of New Traditions

By 1924, the NCSR abandoned the interdenominational model of religious education institutionalized in the schools of religion, adopting a more encompassing vision of religious studies under the new name of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education (NCRHE). This was a dramatic about-face for the organization. Only two years before, Kent and his financial supporters regarded the schools of religion as a promising effort to provide religious instruction at state universities and contribute to the development of a mature, intellectually sophisticated religiosity among American college students.⁸⁹ In the NCSR's third bulletin, however, Kent painted a radically different picture, conducting an extended discussion of the University of Illinois to illustrate the fundamental *insufficiency* of the same schools of religion which he had championed over the prior three years.

Illinois as Kent described it could boast a bustling religious ecosystem. In its students, leadership, and surrounding community, Illinois greatly exceeded the typical moral character of a large American university. Champaign-Urbana followed the old style of Sunday observance, the Illinois athletic department discouraged student gambling and alumni payments to football players,

⁸⁹ *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 1*, 1-2; Kent made a similar argument in his plenary address to the National Association of Biblical Instructors (NABI) in 1922. See Charles Foster Kent, "The Curriculum of a State University School of Religion."

and less than one percent of the Illinois student body suffered from venereal disease.⁹⁰ Illinois was similarly outstanding for the high rate of activity of organized religious groups on campus. A number of religious associations and foundations, including the Wesley, Disciples, McKinley, Newman and Hillel Foundations (founded at Illinois in 1923) ministered to Illinois students, more than half of whom were weekly church attendees.⁹¹ Moreover, the university was enthusiastic in granting course credit to students who elected courses sponsored by the various religious foundations. In short, Illinois was a sterling example of the integration of educational and religious purposes. “Here the churches and denominations are doing their finest work. The work is well manned, organized and generously financed. It is indispensable to the religious life of the university and the state.”⁹²

It was because of this that Illinois’s failures were so concerning. In spite of “all their carefully organized activities,” Kent wrote, “the religious workers at the University of Illinois are keenly alive to the fact that they are only partially meeting the religious needs of its students.” Nowhere was this more clear than in the denominations’ curricular work. Illinois enjoyed a diverse range of course offerings in Biblical literature and religious history, offered not only by Protestants, but also Catholics and (even rarer) Jews. Yet “however strong be the spirit of co-operation—and it is nowhere stronger and finer than at the university of Illinois—divided denominationalism can never adequately and permanently meet the demands for thorough, systematic instruction in the history, literature and science of religion.”⁹³ For Kent the problem was with the very idea of religion which a

⁹⁰ Charles Foster Kent, *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 3: Religion at a Great State University; Based on the University of Illinois Survey* (New Haven: National Council of Schools of Religion, 1924), 4.

⁹¹ Kent, *Bulletin, Volume 3*, 8. For a detailed discussion of religious organizations in operation at the University of Illinois between 1900 and 1930 see Shedd, *The Church Follows its Students.*, 205-211.

⁹² Kent, *Bulletin, Volume 3*, 9.

⁹³ Kent, *Bulletin, Volume 3*, 9.

cooperative denominational model reproduced. No matter how many different denominations or different faith traditions participated in the Illinois system, the sum result of their efforts would be the conviction among students that “religion” referred to the tradition of their upbringing, and that instruction in that tradition, as signaled by its institutional separation from the rest of the university, was not a “department of human knowledge deserving of their time and serious attention.”⁹⁴

Kent’s study of the University of Illinois demonstrated that the paradigm of the school of religion was incapable of responding to the historical dialectic of sectarianism and secularization and the “strong materialistic trend in our modern education” which that dialectic had produced.⁹⁵ This conclusion had major ramifications for the NCSR’s work. From an institutional perspective, Kent became convinced that the study of religion had to forego direct denominational sponsorship. What students needed was not Sunday School for adults, but “systematic instruction in the history, literature, psychology and philosophy of religion.”⁹⁶ This was a daunting prospect in the early 1920s. As D.G. Hart has commented, the study of religion was a “decentralized, rag-tag affair” in these years.⁹⁷ To the extent that it existed at all, it did so in the form of general courses in Bible, Biblical Literature, or Biblical History. A Council survey of religion courses offered in state colleges and universities during the 1922-23 academic year found that 210 of 292 total courses were in Biblical literature and history, with the significant majority of an estimated total enrollment of just under eight thousand located in those courses.⁹⁸ Surveys of denominational and independent schools yielded similar results. Information gathered from 269 denominational and independent schools from academic year 1923-24 indicated that over forty thousand students enrolled in bible courses

⁹⁴ Kent, *Bulletin*, Volume 3, 9.

⁹⁵ Kent, *Bulletin*, Volume 3, 3.

⁹⁶ Kent, *Bulletin*, Volume 3, 9.

⁹⁷ Hart, *The University Gets Religion*, 80.

⁹⁸ Charles Foster Kent, *Bulletin of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*, Volume 4: *The Undergraduate Courses in Religion at the Tax-supported Colleges and Universities of America* (National Council on Religion in Higher Education, 1925).

that year, with 6,500 enrolled in Ethics courses (the next largest subfield), and History, Philosophy, and Psychology of religion *combining* to enroll 3,003 (roughly 11 enrollments per surveyed institution).⁹⁹ The striking enrollment figures for Bible courses were largely attributable to the fact that such courses were required, rather than to student interest or the quality of instruction. In many cases such courses were taught by chaplains or local ministers. Even when full-time faculty or college presidents performed this duty, they rarely employed a systematic approach.¹⁰⁰

The NCRHE undertook a wide range of activities designed to impose order on this disorganized field. These included the production of educational materials for existing departments and instructors. The NCRHE developed model curricula for undergraduate religion programs, for instance, and formulated standards for hiring professors. In addition, the Council assembled a formidable corps of standing committees, tasked with forming field Bibliographies on the following five areas: History, Philosophy, and Psychology of Religion; Biblical History, Literature, Archaeology, and Religion; Religious Education; Devotional and Inspirational Literature; Missions and Social Service. Each committee was staffed by five full-time faculty, and aimed to produce authoritative lists of relevant literature comprising up to four hundred and fifty volumes apiece.¹⁰¹ They paid particular attention to developing resources for teaching in non-Christian religions, convening a special “Study of the Great Living Religions,” staffed by major comparativists including

⁹⁹ National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *Bulletin of the National Council in Higher Education, Volume 6: Undergraduate Courses in Religion at Denominational and Independent Colleges and Universities of America* (Ithaca: The Cayuga Press, 1927).

¹⁰⁰ At Hamilton College, for example, president and prolific hymnologist Melancthon Woolsey Stryker taught an annual lecture course on the Epistle of James required for every first-year student, culminating in a one-on-one oral exam in which students recited passages from memory. Amos N. Wilder, “Reminiscences of Weeks of Work,” MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34, Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, 1939-1997, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (hereafter MC Papers).

¹⁰¹ NCSR, *Bulletin Volume 1*, 9.

Robert E. Hume, Ernest Hocking, and Eustace A. Haydon, to produce syllabi for undergraduate instructors.

Most importantly, though, the NCRHE began to direct the majority of its resources to funding graduate work in the study of religion. This had already been a stated point of emphasis for the NCSR—in the group’s first bulletin Kent named financial assistance for prospective doctoral students as a desideratum—but by 1924 it became their main preoccupation. In the early 1920s, the majority of college religion instructors continued to be ministers, possessing at best a B.D. degree from a denominational seminary. Only rarely did a religion professor boast a Ph.D., and of this small number even fewer were qualified to teach beyond topics in Christian ethics and Biblical literature.¹⁰² This not only created insurmountable staffing challenges for the NCSR’s ambitious program. The disparity in credentials between religion instructors and their peers also made it difficult, if not impossible, for the study of religion to gain intellectual credibility in academic spheres.

¹⁰² Very few institutions offered a Ph.D. in fields pertaining to religion in this period. The vast majority of Ph.D. holders in such fields came from five institutions: Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, Yale, and Boston University. Arrangements for Ph.D.’s in religion or adjacent fields differed across these institutions, though one important commonality was that student enrolled in the university’s divinity school could only obtain a Ph.D. from a separate graduate department, upon recommendation of their divinity school. The bulk of such Ph.D.’s were issued in philosophy or various philological departments such as Semitics, Greek, or Indo-Germanic languages (the latter at Chicago), with a small number granted by comparative religion programs as well. It was not until the 1920s that it became possible to obtain a Ph.D. in what we would more readily call a religion department. Yale, for instance, established a Ph.D. program in religion in its graduate school in 1920; Harvard did so in 1934 after establishing a Th.D. at the Divinity School in 1914; Columbia created a Ph.D. program in the Philosophy and History of Religion, administered jointly by Columbia’s philosophy department and Union Theological Seminary, in 1923, with Union itself adding a Th.D. program in 1924. At Boston University, the School of Theology regularly recommended candidates for doctoral work in the Graduate School. I’ve collated this summary from a number of sources, including: Harold Remus, “Origins” in Claude Welch, *Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal* (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971): 113-134; Robert L. Kelly, *Theological Education in America: A Study of one Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924); *Union Theological Seminary Bulletin* 6.4 (May 1923); *Boston University Annual Report of the President of the University* 11.30 (Nov. 1922); *Boston University School of Theology Catalogue and Announcements* 8.2 (January 1919); *Yale University Bulletin* 24.2: *Doctors of philosophy of Yale University, with the Titles of Their Dissertations, 1861-1927* (November 1927); *The University of Chicago Divinity School Circular of Information* 21.4 (February 1921).

In June 1923, the Council secured twenty-thousand dollars in initial funding, largely from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation, to create the National Fellows in Religion program.¹⁰³ The program had an immediate impact, drawing over one hundred and sixty applicants for its inaugural class. For the initial twenty-four Fellows who received the award, inaugural fellow Julius Seeyle Bixler recalled, this funding “could mean...the difference between graduate study or some wholly other form of occupation.”¹⁰⁴ The same could be said of the programs in which they enrolled. In its early years, virtually all Kent Fellows (the program was renamed following Kent’s death in 1925) enrolled at Union-Columbia, the University of Chicago, Harvard, or Yale. Though relatively minor in terms of overall outlays, the Kent Fellows had the near-immediate effect of subsidizing these graduate programs, and with them entire fields of academic study. Specifically, the Council, through its Kent Fellows program, sought to incentivize and encourage areas such as philosophy, psychology, and comparative history of religions, all of which it emphasized in its fellowship criteria.¹⁰⁵ As stated in the Council’s 1923-1924 *Yearbook*, “the training of the National Fellows also means the establishment of new traditions. None of the graduate schools of our American or foreign universities is thoroughly equipped for this work.”¹⁰⁶ The Council’s representatives worked closely with relevant graduate programs to rectify that problem. In 1928, they reported that Council members had “aided in the adjustment of courses at these graduate centers, with a view to the more

¹⁰³ National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1923-1924 Year Book of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education* (Ithaca, NY: Barnes Hall, 1924). The Council would continue to work closely with the Rockefeller family and its myriad enterprises in coming decades. Among other areas of cooperation, in its early years the Council worked closely with the Rockefeller-funded Institute of Social and Religious Research to tailor instruction in religion to undergraduate needs.

¹⁰⁴ Julius Seeyle Bixler, “Notes on the Early Years,” MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34. The stipends offered by the NCRHE compare favorably with Ph.D. programs operating today, and that’s after significant stipend gains in recent years due to graduate worker unionization campaigns. In 1925, the NCRHE set stipends for unmarried students at \$1,000, and \$1,600 for married students. The latter, nearly \$30,000 in today’s money, still outpaces many programs in the field.

¹⁰⁵ National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1923-1924 Year Book*.

¹⁰⁶ National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1923-1924 Year Book*, 11.

effective training of the Fellows of the council for the work which lies before them.”¹⁰⁷ By that year, the NCRHE had appointed and sponsored eighty-five fellows through the program, thirty-nine of whom were already employed as university faculty, administrators, or chaplains.¹⁰⁸

The development of new traditions mentioned in the Council’s 1924 *Year Book* required more than the sponsorship of graduate students and the creation of new departmental offerings. It further required a fundamental revision in how religionists conceived their basic object. It would no longer suffice to discuss “religion” within a denominational, or even interdenominational Christian frame. In the words of Charles Foster Kent, religion would have to be studied “not as a diversified bundle of denominational creeds, “but as personal and kinetic, as man’s total reaction to his environment, or more positively, as his active desire to live in harmony and intelligent co-operation with the supreme spiritual Force and forces in the universe.”¹⁰⁹

The NCRHE developed this approach to the study of religion along two theoretical lines. In the first place, the group continued to argue for religion’s inclusion in college curricula as a source of cultural unity and moral edification. Throughout the decade, the Council maintained that one of its two primary purposes was to support universities’ interest in character formation among their students. As they described their work in 1928, the Council remained committed to inculcating religious sentiment (broadly understood) among American students. It was this commitment that informed even their sponsorship of promising graduate students, whom they regarded as future role models as much as scholars:

The Council believes that religion is best represented and interpreted by persons to whom religion is an matter of personal concern and experience...The Council aims, therefore, to discover among recent graduates of our Universities and Colleges men and women who propose to spend their lives in academic work, who wish to specialize in those fields which

¹⁰⁷ The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1928 Year Book* (Ithaca: Barnes Hall, 1928), 7.

¹⁰⁸ The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1928 Year Book*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1928 Year Book*, 3.

are primarily concerned with religion, and whose characters and lives exemplify their chosen fields of study and service.¹¹⁰

The Council's focus on character education preserved their concern for national culture developed in the immediate post-war years. According to Heather A. Warren, the rise of character education in the 1920s was intimately linked to interwar concerns over the health of American democracy. In programs and studies sponsored by groups like the REA, ISSR, and National Education Association, educators repeatedly voiced the conviction that character education directly contributed to the wellbeing of the nation. For these commentators, "churches and societies could educate either for democracy, which required the responsible exercise of individual liberty, or autocracy, which depended on obedience and docility."¹¹¹ The NCRHE made such connections perfectly evident in their own literature. They emphasized, for example, that "The conditions prevailing in our student population reflect and emphasize the moral and religious confusion existing in our American life as a whole," and that their work in educating students constituted a "line of contribution to the whole cause of religion in America."¹¹²

At the same time, the NCHRE promulgated an older argument that had been in circulation in the United States since the 1890s, namely, that religion could be studied *scientifically*, with the same premises and methods as any other discipline in the university. This argument had once supported the creation of departments of Semitic Languages, Biblical Literature, and Comparative Religion at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1922, however, when the NCSR came into existence, administrators at major US research universities had largely abandoned that promise, shifting the topic of religion into the hands of campus chaplains and denominational groups.¹¹³ The NCRHE

¹¹⁰ The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1928 Year Book*, 4.

¹¹¹ Heather A. Warren, "Character, Public Schooling, and Religious Education, 1920-1934," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 7.1 (Winter 1997): 61-80, 63.

¹¹² National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1925-1926 Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education* (Ithaca: Barnes Hall, 1926), 4.

¹¹³ Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 132.

made its revival a central focus, repeatedly emphasizing the possibility that religion could be studied on the same footing and with the same sophistication as the natural and social sciences. Kent argued this exact point in 1924: “If the science of religion, like the other sciences, rests upon the eternal foundations of reality and can be studied with the same scientific methods and exactness that are demanded in all other fields of human research, then the history, literature, philosophy and psychology of religion will ultimately find an important and even leading place in the curricula of our state universities.”¹¹⁴

What did it mean to study religion scientifically? Kent’s seemingly straightforward argument—that religion could be studied with a scientific ethos and scientific methods by rooting religion in the “eternal foundations of reality”—entailed a dense set of subsidiary claims concerning the respective definitions of science and religion, as well as the relationship between those terms. We’ve already seen the basically phenomenological definition of religion which Kent sought to propose. Though it vacillated between an anthropological and supernatural renderings of religious experience, it nevertheless made the individual human the proper domain of investigation. As for science, Kent presupposed a capacious idea of the term, using the word to denote the gathering of empirical facts and the formation of objective judgments on such facts via hypotheses, principles, and universal laws.¹¹⁵ This definition curtailed and clarified the meaning of the “science of religion,” delimiting its object within the realm of human experience and distributing its constituent tasks among a series of academically legible subfields—here the history, literature, philosophy, and psychology of religion. How exactly these disciplines were to operate together wasn’t clear in Kent’s

¹¹⁴ Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 7.

¹¹⁵ Kent’s empiricist definition of science cohered with a much longer American Protestant conception of proper science, which valorized figures like Francis Bacon and the philosophical tradition of Scottish Common-Sense Realism. On Protestant ideas of science and its coherence with Christian religiosity, see Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*.

bulletin. However, a 1925 dissertation written by Kent Fellow Herbert L. Searles provided a more systematic vision. Reiterating Kent's Jamesian phenomenological definition, Searles divided the study of religion between two areas of empirical investigation: the individual experience of their "deepest sense of reality," on the one hand, and the visible social forms through which that experience achieved expression, on the other. "The science of religion will then become a study of those facts and experiences in human life and society which are conditioned by this relationship with and attitude toward reality," he argued.¹¹⁶ Within these parameters, the psychology of religion would provide empirical data and judgments on individual religious experience, while the history of religion and its subsidiaries (philology, archaeology, ethnology) would guarantee the historical data required to make generalizable comparative or philosophical claims.¹¹⁷

The NCRHE revised its prior historical and legal positions in support of this new scientific paradigm. As we saw in section one of this chapter, a constant refrain of religious educators in the 1910s and 1920s was that religion could not be legally taught in state colleges and universities—thus the tortuous administrative and financial structure of the schools of religion. In 1925, however, the NCRHE commissioned Herbert Searles to conduct a comprehensive study on state-level proscriptions against tax-supported religious instruction. Surveying constitutional provisions, legislative history, and state Supreme Court decisions, Searles arrived at a major conclusion which broke with existing consensus on the topic. "An examination of the provisions cited," he argued, "will show that the chief purpose of the framers of the state constitutions was to prohibit sectarian teaching and influence, and not to prevent the teaching of religion in the public schools of the

¹¹⁶ Herbert Leon Searles, *The Study of Religion in State Universities* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Studies in Character, 1927), 13.

¹¹⁷ The importance of philology and ethnology for this project cannot be overstated. Union historian of religion Robert E. Hume, for instance, emphasized that it was only with the discovery, translation, and publication of the "sacred scriptures of the various religions of the world" that any "apparatus for a scientific study of the religions of the world" was conceivable. See Robert E. Hume, "A Course of Study in the History of Religions," *Christian Education* 6.7 (1923): 361-374.

United States.”¹¹⁸ Searles’ conclusions immediately altered the NCRHE’s analysis and strategies vis-à-vis educational materialism. In 1922, Kent had argued that state proscriptions on religious instruction were justified responses to nineteenth-century sectarianism; now he argued that those proscriptions were immaterial. In 1924, the Council lauded Searles’ research as demonstrating conclusively that “a majority of the constitutional and legal provisions supposed to make religious instruction impossible are directed against sectarianism, but not against religion itself.”¹¹⁹ That argument transformed even the Council’s assessments of basic facts. Where Kent had once inveighed against the lack of provision for instruction in religion in American universities, he now found, in an even more striking reversal, that in fact every course that *should* be in a department of religion was *already* being taught in a majority of America’s tax-supported institutions.¹²⁰ Combined with the Council’s argument for religion’s scientific status, this new position gave weight to the idea that religion instruction need not be administratively separate from the undergraduate college, and that its proper institutional form, therefore, was not the school of religion but the department.

The scientific study of religion fit uncomfortably with moral and aesthetic arguments for religion’s educational value, for if the former presupposed the essential similarity of religion to other human phenomena, arguments from edification averred the opposite—that religion was a *unique* object of study, one that imparted a specific value to its student otherwise absent from the modern university environment. Moreover, while claims for the scientificity of religious studies adopted an irenic posture toward the natural and social sciences, those for its moral importance voiced open opposition toward scientific hegemony and its deleterious cultural effects. These manifest points of friction notwithstanding, advocates for the study of religion were able to hold both positions in an

¹¹⁸ Herbert Leon Searles, *The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Bulletin, Volume 5: State Constitutional and Legislative Provisions and Supreme Court Decisions Relating to Sectarian Religious Influence in Tax-Supported Universities, Colleges and Public Schools* (1926), 5.

¹¹⁹ National Council on Religion in Higher Education, *1923-1924 Year Book*, 3.

¹²⁰ Kent, *Bulletin, Volume 4*.

uneasy synthesis. That they were able to do so was the result of the ongoing salience of ideological anti-materialism, which permitted the NCRHE and its fellow travelers to distinguish between scientific method and the materialist metaphysics which an undisciplined extension of that method tended to authorize. Within the terms of this argument, a *truly* scientific approach to religion had the effect of combatting ideological scientism in the university. By attending seriously to the undeniable significance of religion as an empirical fact of human existence, that is, the study of religion alerted us to the insufficiency of mechanistic or materialist interpretations of the universe. The scientific study of religion achieved something like William James' epiphany in his study of mystical experience—that mystical forms of consciousness, verifiable through empirical study, “forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.”¹²¹ Properly conceived, then, scientific method in the study of religion facilitated student exposure to an aesthetic and moral dimension of reality which would, automatically as it were, provoke what NCRHE president Herbert E. Hawkes called “an aesthetic awakening of the mind to beauties before undreamed, which is as real and important as the rational awakening that ought to come through a study of the social sciences.”¹²²

By the end of the 1920s, the NCRHE had established a compelling framework for the academic study of religion, one which would endure, with varying success and important alterations, for the following four decades. Situating their project within the discursive formation of anti-materialism, the Council and its allies had produced a historical narrative which endowed religious education with moral and social urgency, as well as a multi-dimensional account of religion's disciplinary integrity capable of authorizing its entry into diverse institutional contexts. This latter account provided a flexible intellectual identity for the study of religion. The discipline's claim to

¹²¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002), 388.

¹²² Herbert E. Hawkes, “Religion in a Liberal Education,” *Christian Education* 9.6 (March 1926): 211-221, 216.

scientificity sustained its methodological parity and disciplinary autonomy. Its moral influence on the character of students, meanwhile, made religious studies indispensable for the goals of general education, and therefore a crucial element in broader visions of national-cultural unity.

IV. Depression, Decline, and New Paradigms in the Study of Religion

The NCRHE's two-part vision for the field achieved modest institutional gains in the 1920s and 1930s. At Bucknell University, the Department of Religion, reconstituted in 1925 under Kent Fellow Charles M. Bond, became an integral part of the college's required liberal arts curriculum, taking over a required course in the school's History of Western Civilization sequence.¹²³ At Princeton, in turn, proponents of the academic study of religion achieved a major victory in 1935, when a faculty special committee recommended the creation of an undergraduate department of religion within the university's liberal arts curriculum.¹²⁴ By and large, however, the academic study of religion, as measured by departments, courses, and enrollment, remained static in the first decade of the NCRHE's existence. Though public advocates for the study of religion like Clarence Prouty Shedd touted advances in the number and variety of courses offered, particularly in state institutions,

¹²³ In a plan for the department presented to the Bucknell faculty in 1933, Bond presented the study of religion in terms that encapsulated the arguments of the NCRHE. Within the college's gen-ed program, a course on the history of religion would survey the world's "great religious cultures" with emphasis on the Western religious tradition. In higher level courses on philosophy of religion, psychology of religious experience, history of religion, and Biblical literature, students would then learn to study religion from the perspective of scientific method. In doing so, finally, they would finally begin to "go beyond the scientific method to the use of other methods such as, reflective thinking, intuition, and mysticism," and in the process achieve "those conduct patterns which intelligent belief has discovered, which dynamics faith has motivated, and which honest worship has sanctified." Charles M. Bond, *The Liberal Arts College Functioning in the Field of Religion: A Case Study* (New York: National Council on Religion in Higher Education, 1935), 25; 31.

¹²⁴ The report of the committee stated, "We are free to pursue the study of religion as an element of liberal culture and as one of the humanities. Except as such, this Committee must refuse to recommend any religious instruction whatsoever as part of the curriculum of the University." The department officially formed in 1946 under the leadership of Kent Fellow George F. Thomas. See *Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1935); Robert Michaelsen includes a discussion of the Committee in *The Study of Religion in American Universities*.

gains in enrollment from the early 1920s to mid-1930s were modest. In 1936, for example, a survey sponsored by the Council of Church Boards of Education found that 74 of 116 surveyed state and municipal institutions offered courses in religion, with enrollments in such courses totaling 8,257 (of 154,041 students enrolled in these schools, roughly 5%).¹²⁵ Comparing these results with a survey conducted by the NCHRE in 1922-23, the authors concluded optimistically that “the situation today is greatly improved,” noting in particular that as of 1936 there were only two states in which students attending tax-supported institutions could not find courses in religion, compared to seven in the earlier study.¹²⁶ In the NCRHE survey, however, rates of enrollment were nearly identical: in 41 state universities and colleges which provided necessary data, religion courses—including courses sponsored by denominational agencies and schools of religion—garnered 4,709 total enrollments in schools with student populations of 124,423.¹²⁷ There are reasons to be skeptical of both studies, but even appraising their data with adequate skepticism we can conclude that the causes for optimism on the part of the authors of the 1936 survey (who took the prior survey as authoritative) were overstated.¹²⁸ That the situation was in fact more ambiguous is further supported by more

¹²⁵ Gould Wickey and Ruth A. Eckhart, “A National Survey of Courses in Bible and Religion,” *Christian Education* 20.1 (October 1936): 9-45.

¹²⁶ As they note, however, this did not mean that all state institutions in the other forty-six states provided instruction in religion. If one generalizes from their responses, in fact, only two-thirds of state colleges and universities offered religion courses, and this number dropped considerably when including state teachers’ colleges.

¹²⁷ Charles Foster Kent, *Bulletin, Volume 4*. I’m not including here survey data from state teachers’ colleges, agricultural colleges, and mining colleges, which, as in the case of the later study, lowers the statistical presence of religious studies even further.

¹²⁸ Among the myriad problems, the 1936 survey overrepresents certain regions with higher rates of enrollment in religion courses, in particular the Southeast, thus presenting a distorted image of higher education nationally. The 1923 NCRHE survey, in turn, dramatically miscounts the number of the enrolled students at surveyed institutions, combining “college” and “undergraduate department” enrollments rather than distinguishing them as part and whole. In Kent and Burrows’ counting, for example, the University of Michigan is counted as enrolling 50% more undergraduates than its actual total student population across all schools in 1925. To be fair, this isn’t totally his fault. Both surveys rely on self-reported data. Wicky and Eckhart don’t include responses to their questionnaire, but Kent and Burrows do, and we can see from them that many respondents didn’t understand the college/department distinction either. I’ve tried to narrow the pool of data in the

pessimistic contemporary accounts, the presence of which indicate that sanguine assessments of the field's growth were perhaps as promotional as they were descriptive. Beatrice Allard Brooks, in an otherwise positive appraisal of the curricular opportunities afforded by New Humanist educational philosophy, described in 1938 "the gradual disappearance from the Liberal Arts curriculum of required in courses in Religion," while Chicago-trained theologian Bernard Eugene Meland argued that even university administrators—typically among the study of religion's strongest proponents—had largely ignored religion as an integral component in liberal arts programs.¹²⁹

At the same time, the precarious intellectual equipoise pioneered in the NCRHE was threatened by the growing popularity of more combative strains of antiseccularist sentiment among American religionists. Even as powerful formations with ecumenical Protestantism had pushed for a more central role of Christianity in American civic life, as we saw in section one, that antiseccularism had been tempered by cooperative alliances of liberal Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, who throughout the 1920s endorsed more robust interpretations of American secularism as a defense against the most reactionary identifications of Americanism and Protestantism. As this latter position diminished, by the mid-1930s a powerful coalition of (largely) Protestants and Catholics began to actively organize against secularism as an urgent threat to American democracy. Autochthonous antiseccularism gained even greater currency as a result of international developments. Foreign

NCRHE survey to schools that correctly reported enrollment, correcting some (as in the case of Michigan). Nevertheless, it would be wrong to take either of these as more than approximations of the national state of the discipline.

¹²⁹ Beatrice Allard Brooks, "The Place of the Study of Religion in the Liberal Arts Curriculum in the Light of Recent Theories of Higher Learning," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 6.4 (1938): 187-194, 187; Bernard Eugene Meland, "The Study of Religion in a Liberal Arts College," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 5.2 (April-June 1937): 62-69, 63. It's worth noting that figures like Robert Maynard Hutchins, Norman Foerster and Irving Babbitt did not always reciprocate the enthusiasm which religious educators had for their conservative educational philosophies. Robert Maynard Hutchins, for instance, explicitly rejected religion as a principle of curricular unity in favor of 'metaphysics'—a far cry from the avowedly Christian perspectives voiced in outlets like *Religious Education*. Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 97.

totalitarianism, first publicized as such in the US in 1927, demonstrated for many Protestants the dangers of taking church-state separation too far. If religion was proscribed access to public institutions and centers of cultural production, even more liberal Protestants began to argue, pagan or atheistic forms of totalitarian violence were sure to follow.¹³⁰

Within this context, the more assertive, anti-secularist threads already evident in earlier anti-materialist discourse gained greater credibility, while artful articulations of the relationship between religion and scientific method became expendable. Writing in *Religious Education* in 1931, Kent Fellow Sylvanus M. Duvall voiced this more combative position. Describing theological liberals' promotion of religious education as "at best partial and inadequate," he asserted that religion is in fact "the primary task, about which the curriculum, life and entire resources of the college must be centered."¹³¹ Duvall's criticism of theological liberalism was indicative of the new climate. In putting liberalism front and center, Duvall called into question not only the curricular strategies which liberals employed, but moreover the very definition of religion which those strategies presupposed. One year later, REA Vice President George Johnson elaborated the conclusions of this criticism for the group's work: "if the Religious Education Association has any reason for existence at all, I would say then that it is its sacred duty to labor to restore religion to its rightful place in our American educational program." Drawing bold distinctions between this position and the older liberalism of the REA, he clarified that "by religion I do not mean mere social service. Religion is fundamentally the relation between man and his Creator and the sooner that thinking men spook this nonsense of religion without God, the better for all of us...Whenever man refuses to have God in his knowledge, like the Romans of old, to use the words of St. Paul, he is 'delivered up to a reprobate sense.'¹³²

¹³⁰ Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 64-67.

¹³¹ Sylvanus M. Duvall, "Religion in Higher Education," *Religious Education* 26.1 (1931): 13-17, 13.

¹³² George Johnson, "Consequences of Education Without Religion," *Religious Education* 27.6 (1932): 515-517, 517.

The NCRHE itself remained largely immune to this kind of militant Christian exclusivism. The vision of religious education promulgated by the Council throughout the 1930s continued to aim at reconciling education with a relatively inclusive understanding of religion that exceeded confessional boundaries, at least to some extent. Extending fellowships to Black, female, Jewish and atheist students (though always a very small minority), and encouraging the study of non-Western religions, the NCRHE maintained what Kent Fellow Virginia Corwin described as a decidedly “anti-denominational and anti-theological” thrust.¹³³ Executive director Dick Edwards described the Council’s animating ethos in similarly pluralist terms. Speaking to a Council meeting in 1931, he underscored the panoply of diverse identities and perspective represented in the group: “we have included in our Fellowship Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and some of no ecclesiastical affiliation, men and women, colored and white, and those whom the world calls ‘poor’ and ‘rich.’ Conservative and liberal in theology, static and radical in social philosophy, subject-centered and experience-centered in education, reserved and aggressive religious method,—all are here and here with equal right of full expression.”¹³⁴ In 1934, the Council felt that articulating its distance from Neo-Orthodoxy was sufficiently important to alter its statement of purpose. The updated statement affirmed its solidarity “with those people who are seeking to preserve and critically reinterpret in the light of modern conditions the heritage of insights and spiritual resources embodied in religion.”¹³⁵

In spite of its ideological clarity, the NCRHE was incapable of successfully prosecuting this vision of the study of religion in the 1930s. By the close of the 1920s, the NCRHE, in spite of its relatively small size and meager funding, had become the most influential entity promoting the academic study of religion, producing a tightly knit cadre of religion scholars who, because of the

¹³³ Virginia Corwin, “The Lisle Years,” MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34, MC Papers.

¹³⁴ Edwards Family Papers, #1484. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Box 10.

¹³⁵ *Bulletin*, Volume 11, 27.

group's insistent focus on theoretical and methodological problems, exerted inordinate emphasis over public discussions on the discipline.¹³⁶ Reliant on private donations, however, the NCRHE narrowed its activities to a minimum during the depression.¹³⁷ Between 1931 and 1937, the group abandoned its publishing endeavors entirely, and its primary focus—promoting future faculty—dwindled to near non-existence. In 1932, the Kent Fellows program reduced stipends by fifty percent and appointed only *two* fellows; in 1933 they appointed none. By 1934 the group's budget was less than a fifth of its 1929 level, and funding to help Fellows attend the annual Weeks of Work—a staple of the organization's program since 1924 and its most important source of in-group cohesion—was cut entirely.¹³⁸ No other group was capable of filling the vacuum. Members of the ACLS Committee on the History of Religions would attempt to take a leading role in coordinating doctoral programs and disciplinary standards in the mid-1940s, but at this point the Committee's only formal responsibility was to administer a small endowment for an occasional series of lectures. The Council on Graduate Studies in Religion (the product of that effort) would not exist until 1948, and even then lacked sufficient funding to undertake major initiatives on its own.

Together, this cluster of phenomena altered the discursive field in which groups like the NCRHE promoted the study of religion in higher education. During the first half of the 1920s the NCSR/NCRHE and its allies established an elaborate conception of religious education capable of sustaining a delicate balance between the discipline's scientificity and its claims of moral edification.

¹³⁶ The Council was particularly influential in NABI and its journal (initially the *Journal of the Association of Biblical Instructors*, then *Journal of Bible and Religion*, now *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*). At the time of *JABP*'s first issue, the president of NABI was a Kent Fellow (James Muilenburg K'23), as was its secretary-treasurer (Carl Purinton K'24) and associate editor (Millar Burrows K'23). This pattern held over the following decade. In 1942, the editors of both the *Journal of Religion* and the *Journal of Bible and Religion* were former Kent Fellows.

¹³⁷ In only two years from 1930 to 1932, private gifts dropped to almost a quarter of their 1930 level: from \$72,800 to \$19,303.

¹³⁸ MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34, MCC Papers. Fellowship funding would not return to its pre-Depression amount until 1952, when the Council successfully solicited saving financial support from John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the Carnegie Foundation.

Initially, this vision acquired embodiment in the peculiar institutional model of the state university School of Religion, but, as new legal, cultural, and institutional opportunities emerged over the course of the 1920s, frustrations with that institutional paradigm led the NCRHE to pursue new horizons of curricular integration. That goal remained out of reach during the 1930s—a result of economic depression and fractures within the liberal ecumenical movement that had constituted the study of religion’s social base—but the model of religious studies pioneered within the NCRHE persevered in a small number of institutional redoubts. When the United States formally entered World War II in 1941, that model would once again become viable, providing a template that would prove amenable to yet another crisis of democracy, another Red Scare, and another ideological transformation of higher education in the Cold War epoch.

Chapter Two

Religious Studies in Service of the Cold War Crusade

On November 11, 1950, representatives of nine leading American universities gathered at the Men's Faculty Club at Columbia to discuss the state of the academic study of religion. The occasion was the third annual meeting of the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion (CGSR), a voluntary organization of ten institutions offering graduate work in religion leading to a Ph.D.¹ The Council had first convened in 1947 under the auspices of the ACLS Committee on the History of Religions.² As envisioned by its principal organizers, University of Chicago President Ernest Cadman Colwell and Vanderbilt Chancellor Harvie Branscomb, the CGSR would provide a venue through which to formalize standards and policies in the graduate study of religion, thereby raising the academic standing of religion and addressing inconsistencies among the field's leading institutions.³ The topics which the CGSR arrogated to itself were myriad: ideal administrative

¹ At the time, these were: Yale, Harvard, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia, Union Theological Seminary, Duke, Vanderbilt, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Michigan. This was not an entirely representative group, though it did include the largest and most elite of such institutions. Between 1940 and 1952, the University of Southern California, Boston University, Yeshiva University, Northwestern, the University of Pittsburgh, and the University of Iowa also granted Ph.D.'s in the field of religion. By the late 1950s USC, Boston, Northwestern, and Iowa would participate in the CGSR, as would McGill, Princeton, Drew University, and the Claremont Graduate School.

² The Committee on the History of Religions (CHR) was a standing committee of the ACLS, formed in the 1930s to administer an endowment for a series of annual lectures and advise the ACLS on a host of other issues pertaining to the field.

³ Letter from Ernest Cadman Colwell to Bernard M. Loomer, 25 October 1951. Brauer, Jerald. Papers., Box 31, Folder 14. Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (hereafter Jerald Brauer Papers). For Colwell, the CGSR would deal with what he called the "drift toward shoddy work in some of our Eastern institutions." Colwell had the "seminary-factory" at Yale in mind in particular, which in the 1940s was granting 25-30 Ph.D.'s *per year* and thereby overpopulating the field of eligible religion Ph.D.'s for hire. Other participants agreed with Colwell's assessment of the field. Vanderbilt Chancellor Harvie Branscomb bemoaned that undergraduate instruction in religion was largely "in the hands of many individuals whose approach was not academic," while Herbert W. Schneider, summarizing the May 1947 meeting in which the CGSR was formed, wrote: "so evident were the deficiencies in the graduate study of religion and so varied the standards and requirements for graduate degrees in this field that the Conference proposed the organization of [the CGSR] with the help of which the situation might be

structures at different institutions, formats for qualifying exams, language requirements, market demand for Ph.D. graduates, fellowship funding, publication of textbooks, and the explication of standard subfields. Taken comprehensively, these tasks entailed nothing less than the definition of a discipline of religion—the imposition of academic form on a field that even in 1950 remained decentralized and of dubious academic credibility.

In spite of the scale of this project, by the fall of 1950 members of the CGSR felt assured that they had taken modest steps forward. Between 1948 and 1950, for instance, the group successfully administered a national survey of requirements and practices in graduate religion departments. That alone was enough to imbue the November 11 meeting with a heightened sense of ambition. Now that they had determined the institutional contours of Ph.D. instruction in religion, Columbia professor Herbert W. Schneider proposed, the Council ought to undertake a “clear definition of the field of Religion,” incorporating both the results of the completed survey and a new, comprehensive analysis of all qualifying examinations and dissertations written in the field over the prior decade. Such a growing sense of purpose and capacity extended to the market for religion faculty in American colleges. Members of the council noted with satisfaction that demand for Ph.D.’s in religion was more than sufficient to place new graduates. “Furthermore,” secretary Samuel Enoch Stumpf recorded in the minutes, “the group felt that there are various reasons for expecting the demand for these Ph.D.’s to increase, such as, for example, the new openings being made in State Universities and the general feeling in many quarters that religion has a strategic contribution to make in the current ideological struggle.”⁴

remedied.” See: University of Chicago. Office of the President. Hutchins Administration. Records, Box 14, Folder 8, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (Hereafter Hutchins Administration. Records).

⁴ “Minutes for Meeting on 11 November, 1951.” Hutchins Administration. Records, Box 15, Folder 1.

The CGSR's November 1950 discussion encapsulates the confluence of political, educational, and cultural forces that converged to reshape the study of religion in the postwar United States. In the two decades following World War II, religious studies underwent a sustained period of disciplinary expansion and consolidation.⁵ As Stumpf's notes indicate, this was the result, first, of unprecedented demand for college teachers. Before World War II, higher education was largely an elite affair, reserved for the wealthy or those pursuing careers in specialized fields like ministry, education, and medicine. After the war, by contrast, colleges and universities became central to US culture and political economy, driven by unprecedented investment from both state and private sources. Direct federal funding for tuition payments and student living expenses under the GI Bill supported a massive surge in college enrollments, amplified by state-level investment in public university systems such as those in California and New York. Soaring undergraduate populations mandated the expansion of graduate programs, themselves funded by new fellowships and research grants from both public and private entities.⁶

Religious studies grew along with this rising tide. As enrollments expanded, groups like the CGSR and NCRHE found that existing fellowships and placement services were insufficient to meet

⁵ This observation itself contradicts canonical accounts of the discipline's history in the United States, which narrate religious studies' emergence in the 1960s as the product of progressive forces such as secularization and pluralization. For examples of this account, see: Kathryn Alexander, "Religious Studies in American Higher Education since *Schempp*: a Bibliographical Essay," in *Soundings: an Interdisciplinary Journal* 71.2/3 (1988): 389-412; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 103-4; Bruce Lincoln, "The (Un)Discipline of Religious Studies," in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 131-136, 133-4. For responses and corrections to this narrative, see my discussion of Sarah Imhoff and Russell McCutcheon's recent work in the introduction.

⁶ Joel Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), esp. Chapter 5; Ellen Schrecker, *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021): 11-33; 214-238; Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Stuart W. Leslie, *The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial Complex at MIT and Stanford* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

the demand for qualified instructors in religion.⁷ The rapid creation of religious studies chairs and departments in state universities, which already educated almost half of the country's college students, heightened that demand. Already by 1950 at least sixty percent of state universities and land grant colleges offered instruction in religion for academic credit, many in independent religion departments such as those recently established at flagship campuses in Louisiana, Florida, Oregon, North Carolina, and Illinois.⁸ With this expansion came professionalization. By the late 1940s, the NCRHE's dream of producing a generation of Ph.D.-trained instructors in religion had largely been realized: in their 1948 survey the CGSR applauded that doctoral degrees had become standard, while others noted with approval the gradual displacement of Biblical studies by sociology, philosophy, and history of religions.⁹

The sudden viability of religious studies in the US academy was not reducible to the general expansion of higher education after the war, however; nor could it be chalked up to the cogency of the discipline's own apologias. Those arguments became compelling to university administrators, faculty senates, and state legislators who had long ignored them only within the cultural and political context of the Cold War—the “ideological struggle” astutely, if euphemistically invoked at the CGSR's 1950 meeting. In the early Cold War period, running roughly from 1945 to 1962, US

⁷ John M. Moore, “The Council's Years at Swarthmore,” MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34, Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, 1939-1997, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.

⁸ Clarence Prouty Shedd, *Religion in the State University* (New Haven: Hazen Foundation, 1948). These joined a spate of new undergraduate departments at elite private universities, including Princeton (1938), Yale (1947), Penn (1949), and NYU (1950). See: Virginia Corwin, “The Teaching of Religion,” in Amos Wilder, ed. *Liberal Learning and Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951). Corwin estimates the number of state colleges offering instruction in religion at eighty percent, significantly higher than Shedd's more conservative figure. Cf. Robert Michaelsen, “The Study of Religion: A Quiet Revolution in American Universities” in *The Journal of Higher Education* 37.4 (April 1966): 181-186.

⁹ “Digest of 1948 Survey,” Hutchins Administration. Records, Box 15, Folder 1; *The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950* (New Haven: Hazen Foundation, 1950), 37; Corwin, “The Teaching of Religion,” 190.

political leaders, media outlets, and religious groups together reified the United States' geopolitical rivalry with the Soviet Union as an intractable conflict between two warring spiritual systems. On one side was the atheistic and materialistic quasi-religion of communism—a “new fanatic faith,” as members of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff wrote in April 1950, “antithetical to our own” and seeking “absolute authority over the rest of the world.”¹⁰ On the other: a sacralized vision of American democracy grounded in the “Judeo-Christian” religious tradition. Religious framings of the Cold War permeated American society in these years. In the realm of foreign policy, tight associations between democracy and religiosity inspired new models of America's global mission, while also shaping how, and with whom the United States pursued regional alliances. Domestically, the sacralization of American democracy and its opposition to Soviet communism contributed to a nationwide surge in public religiosity—visible in climbing rates of religious participation and new symbols of governmental piety—and with it a concerted effort by religious groups to combat the perceived secularization of American life.¹¹

¹⁰ “National Security Council Report, NSC 68, 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security',” April 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191>.

¹¹ Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2012). For a peerless interpretation of “Judeo-Christian” rhetoric and its relation to Cold War antisecularism, see: K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). For a useful compendium of public statements linking religion and American national identity, see: Jeremy T. Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009). On the international dimensions of this dynamic: Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). This body of work represents a novel and welcome interest in the religious dimensions of the Cold War, which Cold War scholarship virtually ignored until the late 1990s. For an overview and analysis of that omission, see: Dianne Kirby, “Religion and the Cold War—an Introduction,” in Dianne Kirby, ed. *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002): 1-22.

Proponents of religious studies eagerly exploited the opportunities created by this conjuncture. In assorted volumes, articles, and conferences, they capitalized on religious conceptions of American democracy, arguing that the study of religion would educate students in “the wellsprings of faith” and thus instill in them a reverence for the American way of life.¹² The discipline’s major funding sources reinforced this disciplinary identity. In the 1940s and 1950s, private groups like the NCRHE, Edward W. Hazen Foundation, and Danforth Foundation sponsored publishing endeavors, graduate and post-graduate fellowships, even entire *departments* on the presumption that education in religion would re-sacralize, and therefore strengthen American democratic ideals. The field of religion was permanently shaped by these dynamics. Even as the Second Red Scare subsided in the late 1950s and religion scholars turned their attention to non-Western religious traditions, they did so with the theoretical problematics, methods, and purposes acquired during the height of anti-communist mania.

This chapter tracks that process in detail, examining how the anticommunist ideological struggle of the American Cold War enabled the spread of religious studies in American universities and influenced its defining disciplinary features. Continuing the narrative begun in chapter one, I focus on a relatively small network of ecumenical Protestant educators and philanthropic organizations, who, as in the 1920s and 1930s, continued to be the study of religion’s most active and well-connected constituency. In sections one and two, I focus on the idea of “ideological struggle” invoked by the CGSR, delineating how exactly religion scholars and their colleagues understood the Cold War and its bearing on their work. As in Chapter One, I situate the discipline within the institutions and personal networks of American ecumenical Protestantism. In the early Cold War period, I argue, religious studies continued to mature as one vector of an ecumenical civic

¹² George F. Thomas, “The History of Religion in the Universities,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 17.2 (April 1949): 102-107, 104.

nationalism that linked Cold War anticommunism and domestic antiseccularism as two aspects of a single, global struggle. What distinguished this ideology after World War II was less its specific components than their relative weight and cultural salience. In particular, the growing cognizance of political “totalitarianism” emboldened antiseccularist and anticommunist tendencies within the study of religion, shifting how religion scholars and their backers mediated the contradictory demands of edification and scientificity. In section three, I show how religious studies’ anticommunist cultural vocation intersected with prevailing trends in American educational philosophy to shape the field’s defining object, constituent subfields, and methodological precepts. This section focuses especially on the image of religious studies as promulgated by the discipline’s leaders. The work of such leaders image exerted a major influence on how religion was studied and taught, as dissertations written in the field demonstrate. I do not however attempt to examine instruction in religion departments or conduct reviews of discrete subfields, restricting my investigation to the rhetorical links that joined the study of religion to wider cultural and political tendencies. Section four tracks the effects of this history beyond the peak of the anticommunist fever. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the same organizations and individuals who had established the study of religion as an agent of Cold War Americanism abandoned nationalist language altogether, deliberately reorienting the study of religion toward the study of non-Christian religions and a more tolerant, multiculturalist ethos. As they did so, however, they preserved the disciplinary structures of the Cold War field, along with the paradigm of spiritual combat in which those structures had taken shape.

I. The Most Self-Conscious Form of Secularism

“Is democracy rooted in religion?” So asked a group of educators called together in Del Monte, California in 1942 at the invitation of University of California President Robert G. Sproul and the Edward W. Hazen Foundation. At the time of the meeting, the question had more than hypothetical significance. Alluding to the Second World War, which the United States had entered

only two months before, the group's statement observed that "an unmistakable aspect of recent international conflicts is repeated attack upon the doctrines and institutions of the democracies."¹³ This aspect was joined by two others: "continuing bitter attacks upon churches and religious leaders," and "the destruction or suppression of colleges and universities."¹⁴ Suffering sustained attacks from common enemies, educators, religious leaders, and partisans of democracy were forced to consider what they shared in common, how the respective fates of religion, education, and democracy were intertwined, and how to present a common front against their common totalitarian foes. For the liberal educator in the United States, every one of these facts posed "inescapable problems," but at bottom one set of questions supervened: "Are our democratic institutions dependent upon the Judeo-Christian tradition? Is the historical relationship of democracy and religion in our civilization incidental or essential? Is the faith of each unique or are they identical?"¹⁵ At stake was not only the shared fate of religion and democracy. For the group of anonymous educators gathered in Del Monte, the clarification of these issues would also determine the future of American higher education.

In linking American democracy and the "Judeo-Christian tradition," the educators who participated in the Del Monte conference echoed a much wider cultural discourse on the religious roots of Western values. Beginning as early as the 1920s, a diverse spectrum of Protestants, Catholics and Jews had identified democracy, and in particular its American variant, as a spiritually laden system fundamentally opposed to forms of "totalitarianism" then emerging in Europe. During the Second World War, such language spread rapidly, anchoring American self-understanding in a reinvigorated ideology of providential election. Religious, political, and intellectual leaders all

¹³ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion* (Haddam, CT: Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1942), 12.

¹⁴ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 12-13.

¹⁵ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 13.

contributed to this development. Catholic and Jewish leaders adopted religious interpretations of democracy to establish their American bonafides and, in the case of Jews, push for US intervention against Nazism. Political figures including Franklin Roosevelt positioned the United States as a protector of Christian civilization against German paganism. Neo-Orthodox theologians including John C. Bennett, Henry Pitney Van Dusen, and Reinhold Niebuhr leveraged their positions in universities, the Federal Council of Churches, and US wartime agencies to articulate a more militant vision of Christendom capable of fighting for Western democratic ideals. Though described in different terms—those of “Judeo-Christianity,” the tripartite model of Protestant-Catholic-Jew, or more exclusivist forms of Protestant nationalism—by 1945 the substantive link between American religion and the country’s democratic institutions was a matter of national consensus.¹⁶

The proliferation of such arguments led religious educators and their allies to adopt new intellectual and institutional strategies. During the late 1920s and 1930s, as we have seen, the movement for the study of religion fractured between two major contingents: an accommodationist group emblemized by the NCRHE, which stressed the essential congruity between the study of religion and other academic disciplines, and a more militant anti-secularist contingent, which argued that the study of religion was inassimilable to the amoral ends of the modern university—and that this incongruence was its greatest virtue. During the 1930s, economic depression prevented either group from achieving much institutional success, eviscerating the philanthropic and denominational funding sources on which the study of religion relied. Intellectually, however, the 1930s witnessed a

¹⁶ K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America* esp. Chapter 3; David Zietsma, “‘Sin Has No History’: Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937-1941,” *Diplomatic History* 31.3 (June 2007): 531-565; Mark Edwards, “‘God Has Chosen Us’: Re-Membering Christian Realism, Rescuing Christendom, and the Contest of Responsibilities during the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 33.1 (January 2009): 67-94; Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), esp. Chapters 1 and 2; Kevin Schultz, *“Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to its Protestant Promise”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

slow shift away from the moderate balance of antiseccularist and academic-facing positions developed by the NCRHE. The growth of anti-seccularist sentiment, accelerated by anxieties over political totalitarianism and a renewed investment in the religious sources of Western civilization, created openings for more combative visions of religious studies to flourish.

The Hazen Foundation provides an illustrative example. Founded in 1925, the Hazen Foundation sought for the first decade of its existence to promote Christian character development among American youth, with particular attention to college students. Hazen's interest in the religious values of college students was consistent with wider Protestant concerns discussed in Chapter 1, but, like many ecumenical organizations, it accepted the divorce of higher education from Christian religiosity as a virtual *fait accompli*, focusing its efforts on student counseling, student ministry, and pre-collegiate religious education in Sunday Schools and time-release programs. There were important exceptions to this. Notably, the Hazen foundation provided \$38,225 from 1925 to 1939 to help fund the NCRHE's Kent Fellows and its annual Weeks of Work.¹⁷ This was nevertheless an exception. By and large, the foundation focused its efforts on individual student wellbeing within the secular constraints of higher education, rather than challenge that secularism head on.

Beginning in 1933, however, Hazen increasingly directed its attention—and money—to religion as a corrective to the perceived failures of secular education. In 1934, the foundation sponsored the famed Theological Discussion Groups at Yale, whose biannual meetings became a crucial site for the development of American neo-orthodoxy. They also funded a series of “Hazen Books on Religion,” which aimed to present an intellectually compelling vision of the Christian faith

¹⁷ “The Edward W. Hazen Foundation: Activities, September 29, 1925-December 31, 1939.” Edward W. Hazen Foundation Annual Reports. MSS 005. Foundation Center Historical Foundation Collection. IUPUI Philanthropic Studies Archive, Indianapolis, IN (hereafter Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005).

adapted to the intellectual challenges facing contemporary college students.¹⁸ By 1940, these initiatives had taken precedence over the foundation's interests in pre-collegiate Christian character development and campus ministry. As the Foundation itself narrated retrospectively in 1950, "the place of religion in higher education had become increasingly ambiguous" over the course of the 1930s.¹⁹ Reflecting and exacerbating the secularization of American society, they elaborated, religion had been exiled to the periphery of both the university curriculum and the daily lives of typical college students. In 1940 these accusations carried a weight which they had lacked in prior decades. No longer was religion itself the only victim of educational secularization. Insofar as universities displayed hostility, or even indifference to the cultivation of religion among their students, groups like the Hazen foundation argued, they undermined democracy itself, granting their prestige and influence, however inadvertently, to the proto-totalitarian tendencies of modern secular life.²⁰ In order to reverse this slide toward democratic decline, it would be necessary to draw religion back from the academic margins, where it subsisted in voluntary student organizations, counselors'

¹⁸ The Theological Discussion Groups met biannually at Yale and then Pacific Theological Seminary (beginning in 1934 and 1939, respectively) and included Protestant luminaries such as Bennett, Niebuhr, Georgia Harkness, Paul Tillich, and longtime FCC General Secretary Samuel McCrea Cavert. They further included a number of other figures at the center of discussions concerning the academic study of religion, who were involved with both the Hazen Foundation's subsequent publications and the ongoing work of the NCRHE and CGSR: Virginia Corwin (Kent Fellow '26), one of the first Kent Fellows and a contributor to the 1951 edited volume *Liberal Learning and Religion*; Amos Wilder (K'28), who edited that volume; Edwin E. Aubrey (K'25), who published one of the Hazen Pamphlets on Religion and Higher Education in 1952, created the graduate program in religion at Penn, and served on the CGSR; Harvie Branscomb, who pushed for the creation of the CGSR in the 1940s; Union Theological Seminary Dean Henry Pitney Van Dusen (K'32), who served on the CGSR as well as the FCC's Commission for a Just and Durable Peace; Yale theologian Robert Calhoun (PD'38), who wrote the first Hazen pamphlet on religion and chaired the FCC's Commission on the Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith in 1944.

¹⁹ "The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950." Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005.

²⁰ *Conversations on Religion and Higher Education*, 12. Many of the Hazen Books on Religion emphasized the connections between education, religion, and the survival of democracy.

offices, and—at best—elective courses. For the sake of democracy, religion would need to be the animating center of the academic enterprise as such.

That project involved both institutional and ideological dimensions. Along both tracks, the Hazen foundation continued the work initiated by Charles Foster Kent and the NCRHE in the 1920s, almost always in partnership with a group of organizations and foundations including the NCRHE, CGSR, American Council on Education (ACE), and Danforth Foundation.²¹ Together, these groups engaged in deliberate projects of institution building conceived to fortify the study of religion with adequate personnel, materials, and administrative support. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the NCRHE continued to fund graduate study in religion through its Kent fellows program, which, supported by funding from both the Hazen and Danforth foundations, included 472 members by 1957.²² They also supplied the field with instructional resources. Hazen funded two separate sets of readers on world religions: one with the CGSR, covering a range of topics including Buddhism, Islam, ancient Egyptian religion, and varieties of Christianity; the other a series of three teaching textbooks on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.²³ The Hazen and Danforth Foundations

²¹ The Danforth Foundation was founded in 1927 with a focus that overlapped significantly with those of the Hazen Foundation and the NCHRE: education, religion, and character building among young people, as well as professional development for college teachers. By the 1950s, William Danforth, Sr. and many members of the St. Louis-based foundation had become close with the NCRHE. Over the course of that decade, that relationship became more formal. During 1961-1962, support for the Kent Fellows program was transferred from the NCRHE to the Danforth Foundation, which continued to maintain the Kent Fellows alongside its own fellowship program many years thereafter. Following the transfer of the Kent Fellows program, the NCRHE continued to be active: publishing a number of volumes, planning conferences, and coordinating three separate fellowship programs over the course of the 1960s.

²² They also ran a placement service designed to ensure their Fellows' success in seeking faculty positions. In 1957, the Council reported positively that forty-seven different institutions had sought the NCRHE's direct assistance in filling sixty-four vacancies, and that all Fellows needing new positions for the 1956-1957 academic year had been successfully placed. See: "Report of the Executive Director for 1956-1957," MSS 029, Box 7, Volume 44, Merrimon Cuninggim Papers.

²³ These manuals were designed to cover underdeveloped fields of instruction, research, and publication within the study of religion and related fields. The first volume of the CGSR series, *Buddhism—a Religion of Infinite Compassion*, by Clarence Hamilton, appeared in 1952. The three volumes published together with the NCRHE were all edited by Kenneth W. Morgan: *The Religion of*

additionally supported a series of conferences on teaching religion to undergraduates, running biannually from 1951 to 1962.²⁴ Danforth, for its part, provided direct grants to pay the salaries of religion professors to help incentivize universities to create religious studies departments. In 1959 alone, Danforth disbursed \$837,000 to cover staffing costs in such departments across the country.²⁵

Alongside these major institutional initiatives, groups like Hazen and the NCRHE sought to adumbrate a convincing ideological justification for the academic study of religion. In pamphlets, collected volumes, editorials, and conferences, figures affiliated with this cluster of organizations continued to develop a multipronged justification for the study of religion capable of addressing the concerns of university administrators and faculty in other fields. As they did so, they transformed the earlier arguments of Charles Foster Kent and his colleagues in response to the changing political and intellectual climate of the 1940s. The Hazen Foundation's publication of the Hazen Pamphlets on Religion provides a controlled textual corpus in which we can see these changes unfold.²⁶ As

the Hindus (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1953); *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism interpreted by Buddhists* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956); *Islam—the Straight Path: Islam Interpreted by Muslims* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958). On the CGSR-Hazen series, see: D.H. Daugherty to Ernest Cadman Colwell, April 26, 1950. Hutchins Administration Records, Box 14, Folder 8; Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1951-1952. Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005. On the series of volumes edited by Morgan: Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1953-1954. Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005; John W. Nason, "The Council's Years at Swarthmore," MSS 029, Box 8, Volume 34.

²⁴ The conferences in question were held at Haverford in 1951 and then biannually in 1953 (Denison) and 1955 (Ohio Wesleyan). After 1955 the Danforth Foundation took on primary responsibility for the conferences, funding them again in 1958, 1960, and 1962. See: "1944-1962: Council Programs." Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, MSS 029. Box 8, Folder 34.

²⁵ "Danforth Foundation Annual Report, 1959," Foundation Center Historical Foundation Collection. IUPUI Philanthropic Studies Archive, Indianapolis, IN (Hereafter Danforth Annual Reports, MSS 005). On the Danforth Foundation's role in funding the study of religion during the Cold War years and the particularities of their arrangements with universities, see: Imhoff, "The Creation Story."

²⁶ The Pamphlets on Religion and Higher Education were the first and largest series of Hazen Pamphlets, which additionally covered topics in International Cultural Cooperation (Series II) and Student Counseling (Series III). From 1942 to 1952, the Hazen Pamphlets published thirty volumes, concluding with Edwin E. Aubrey's on *The Religious Element in American Higher Education*. D.G.Hart briefly discusses the Hazen pamphlets in *The University Gets Religion*, 107-108.

envisioned by the project's organizers, the Hazen pamphlets would put forward a diverse, but cohesive statement on the significance of religion for liberal education and the methods by which to ensure its place on college campuses.²⁷ Early volumes indicate the increasing centrality of religious interpretations of American democracy for the study of religion. In "The Place of Religion in Higher Education," written in 1941 before being re-published in 1942 as the second Hazen Pamphlet, Yale theologian Robert L. Calhoun gave expression to this process of transformation. There, he described the contemporary situation and educational purpose of religion in words that could have been written by Kent himself, first asking, "With civilization cracking, why trouble ourselves just now about higher education?" And answering:

"Because without the things it stands for, there is no civilization worth the name. Civilized living is possible only for people at once disciplined and free. Such people are naturally not shut up in universities[...]But it remains true that the primary aim of unregimented colleges and universities is to help produce disciplined, free persons equipped to live in the complex, high-speed world of today. To this end, they need religion, and religion needs them—or at least the things they stand for: trained intelligence, free inquiry, a critical temper, a clear-headed world outlook."²⁸

Calhoun's presentation of religion and its educational value neatly recapitulated the arguments of Charles Foster Kent and the NCRHE in the 1920s.²⁹ Here again we find allusions to civilization crisis, condemnations of intellectual specialization, and laudatory depictions of religion's integrating power. So too did Calhoun's text rehearse Kent's analysis of the relationship between vulgar sectarianism and irreligious materialism. In joining integrative unity to academic excellence, he wrote, true educational inquiry could not but purge both religious tribalism and more secular forms of devotion, the latter of which pressed scholars and students "into the service of gods that cannot

²⁷ "The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950." Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005.

²⁸ Robert L. Calhoun, "The Place of Religion in Higher Education," in Jacques Maritain et al., *Religion and the Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941): 63-71, 63.

²⁹ This resonance is hardly surprising. Calhoun, like Kent, worked at Yale Divinity School and had extended contact with the circle of scholars surrounding Hazen and the NCRHE over the course of the 1930s.

bear the light of critical inquiry.”³⁰ Yet this repetition of Kent’s earlier argument modified the latter in a minor, but crucial sense, indicating the shift in terrain that confronted the academic study of religion at the dawn of the 1940s. “Christianity,” he continued, “for all the spottedness of its record in relation to such inquiry, shines by contrast with these newly god-intoxicated secularisms.”³¹

Christian scholars associated with the NCRHE had long argued that the academic study of religion was in some sense more scientific than science. In the 1920s, for instance, Kent and Herbert L. Searles had both argued that *truly* scientific approaches to the study of religion effectively countered the ideology of *scientism* which slavish devotion to science entailed. What differentiated Calhoun’s rendition was his transposition of that claim *away* from academic scientism to a new set of “god-intoxicated” rivals. “By their very nature,” he elaborated, such “secularisms” “are constrained to shun thoroughgoing inquiry, since they seek to maintain as authoritative mythical truth various doctrines—the master race, the classless Utopia, the decadence of peace-loving peoples—that are doctrines contrary to known or probable facts. Their myths depend on the elevation of partial realities and relative values into absolutes.”³² Here, Calhoun signaled the ascendance of a new set of defining others in relation to which the study of religion was beginning to articulate itself. Though he maintained the antisecularism established in prior decades, his allusions to “the master race, the classless Utopia” welded that antisecularism to the religio-political polarity between American democracy and the twin specters of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism.

Five years earlier, John C. Bennett had anticipated Calhoun’s link between secularism and totalitarianism in the first volume of the Hazen Books on Religion, a series intended specifically to define the “main points” of a Christian philosophy of life as adapted to the needs of college students

³⁰ Calhoun, “The Place of Religion in Higher Education,” 70.

³¹ Calhoun, “The Place of Religion in Higher Education,” 70.

³² Calhoun, “The Place of Religion in Higher Education,” 70.

(this was a separate publishing endeavor from the pamphlets).³³ In his contribution, titled *Christianity—and Our World*, Bennett informed his college-aged audience that they inhabited a markedly different world than their parents—a world that posed strenuous challenges to inherited models of liberal Protestant faith. “For the past generation,” he wrote, “it was possible to be sincerely Christian and yet fit easily into civilization. The world seemed to be a hospitable place for the development of Christian faith and the realization of Christian ideals.”³⁴ Even where Christian ideals conflicted with the course of secular developments, it had seemed plausible that the latter could be disciplined in accordance with Christian ends. Things looked dramatically different in the mid-1930s. Not only had Christianity lost ground in its work to win the Kingdom; hostile forces were swiftly overtaking it. “On every continent,” Bennett narrated, “the lines are being drawn sharply.” In Asia and Europe, most pressingly, communist and pagan-fascist movements adopted openly hostile positions against Christian democracy. These militant forms of totalitarianism were only the most visible outgrowths of a wider civilizational shift, however, one which afflicted North American societies as well. For Bennett, the manifest political conflicts then gripping Europe were in fact products of an underlying movement toward secularism in progress around the world. Bennett put the matter bluntly: the totalitarian state was, simply put, “the result of the secularization of life,” “according to which life is organized apart from God, as though God did not exist.”³⁵

³³ “Hazen Activities September 29, 1925-December 31, 1939,” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005. The Hazen Books on Religion boasted a roster of authors rivalling that of the Hazen pamphlets in the next decade, including Bennett, Georgia Harkness, Henry P. Van Dusen, and the father of American East Asian studies, Kenneth S. Latourette. In their twenty-fifth anniversary report in 1950, the Hazen Foundation described the purpose of these books rather differently, eschewing the language of Christian living and instead describing the volumes as providing “scholarly, attractive, and inexpensive books for young people in the general field of religion.” See: “The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950,” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005.

³⁴ John C. Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World* (New York: Association Press, 1936), viii.

³⁵ Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 50; 1.

In addition to putting a stronger point on the secularism-totalitarianism link which Calhoun would invoke in 1941, Bennett also gave it a more systematic interpretation. Secularism, as he described it, constituted a comprehensive metaphysics, entailing at once theological, anthropological, and natural scientific positions. Opting to define secularism in philosophical, rather than political or sociological terms, Bennett asserted that secularism's first principle was the nonexistence of God. This could be averred openly, as in the Soviet Union, or unconsciously, as in many liberal Protestant churches. In either case, secularism treated human ideals and human causes as the highest objects of possible devotion. Paradoxically, though, secularism's prioritization of human ends resulted in the metaphysical diminishment of actually existing human beings. By denying the reality of divine transcendence, Bennett argued, secularism inevitably denied the analogy of divine and human personhood which grounded ethical maxims of human dignity. Together, these two connected principles constituted secularism's divergence from the premises of American democracy, which presupposed the infinite worth and essential equality of human beings, made in the image of God, as the transcendent sanction for guarantees of civil liberties.³⁶ On the question of philosophical anthropology, by contrast, secularism could answer only that "man is the product of a blind cosmic process (or processes)—a blind process which does not know what it is producing, which doesn't know the difference between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, persons and things."³⁷ That

³⁶ This political-theological language is ubiquitous in ecumenical Protestant and liberal Catholic writing in the period. Gregory Vlastos, for instance, argued in his own Hazen Book that common commitments to the essential dignity of every person established the link between Christianity and democracy. The Del Monte group maintained the same, claiming that democracy was at once a faith in human potentiality and an institution which enshrined that faith in representative government. As Gaston writes, the most succinct version of this viewpoint was "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," codified notably by *Time* in 1953 along with the principles of "the essential dignity of man" and "the right of the individual to hold and administer private property." See: Gregory Vlastos, *Christian Faith and Democracy* (New York: Association Press, 1939); *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 14-15; Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America*, 154.

³⁷ Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 1-2.

approach to human beings bespoke a materialist comprehension of the world in which human beings existed. “It matters little whether we think of this process in mechanical terms or in vitalistic terms,” per Bennett. In either case, the result was the same: the systematic reduction of existence to its physical and calculable dimensions.

Interpreted in such encompassing philosophical terms, secularism could no longer be reduced to its visible political expressions. It could however be attributed to a discrete set of cultural and political transformations, all of which, critically, had gained significant ground in American public life. Intellectually, for instance, secularism grew from “our one-sided emphasis upon science,” which, *qua* scientism, reduced human and cultural phenomena to those planes of existence readily explicable according to natural scientific procedures.³⁸ The result was the practical banishment of religion from respectable academic study, especially in public schools, and a widespread “bias of mind to which religion seems to have no organic connection with the major interests of the educated man.”³⁹ Immanentism, or materialism at the level of academic inquiry had its cultural counterpart in the materialistic habits of the affluent West: “our lives are so cluttered with things,” Bennett wrote, “that it is not strange that there has been some atrophy of our spirits.” Finally, materialism in philosophy and culture were matched and augmented by radical political movements. “The antireligious bias of the radical social movements in many countries, and especially of communism,” affirmed the epistemic authority of science and valorized material wealth as the highest end of human societies. At this point in Bennett’s analysis, interestingly, fascism fell out of the picture altogether. Though un-Christian, to be sure—more un-Christian than communism even—fascism’s hysterical and nationalistic paganism fit awkwardly with the more rationalist rendering of secularism which Bennett had provided. Communism, on the other hand, remained

³⁸ Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 2.

³⁹ Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 2.

front and center. In its spiritual content, the latter epitomized the modern world's divergence from Christianity. It was, as Bennett summarized, the militant culmination of that divergence: "the most self-conscious form of secularism."⁴⁰

Bennett's text performed a two-part maneuver that would prove normative for promotional writing on the academic study of religion over the following two decades. In the first place, Bennett followed predecessors like Kent and O.D. Foster in his use of the language of materialism, which allowed him to magnify phenomena like educational secularization, academic scientism, or conspicuous consumption as expressions of a global metaphysical conflict between Christianity and secularism. In comparison to Kent and Foster, however, Bennett was far more explicit in the political ramifications of his analysis. Where the former figures linked intellectual and cultural materialism to Americanist political ideology through the technique of metaphor, Bennett—in the second step of his argument—made such connections overt. Secularism, understood in well-established anti-materialist terms, was for Bennett the logical and historical progenitor to political totalitarianism, represented in its most extreme form by communism. By extending Kent's anti-materialism in this explicit political direction, Bennett extended the salience of religious studies as well. Although the discipline's advocates had already argued that instruction in religion would ameliorate the degenerative effects of cultural secularization, that argument lacked force in academic contexts where secularism's dangers were far from self-evident. Now, however, the specter of totalitarianism and the religious interpretations of democracy which it helped popularize gave antisecularism greater appeal. Insofar as secularism was allowed to run rampant in the United States, its opponents could argue, it would erode the "Judeo-Christian" religious ethos that rooted democratic institutions, and consequently imperil those institutions themselves.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 15.

⁴¹ It should be noted that Bennett was not a militant anti-communist—certainly not in the manner of Whittaker Chambers or the John Birch Society years later. Like other ecumenical

Together, Bennett and Calhoun demonstrate how anti-totalitarian interpretations of the religious substance of American democracy shaped the ideological arguments advanced in support of the academic study of religion in the 1930s and early 1940s. Over those years, such arguments became ubiquitous among religious studies' most vocal promoters. Within the Hazen pamphlets alone, almost every entry incorporated some version of Bennett's and Calhoun's patriotic antisecularism. One year after Calhoun's pamphlet, for instance, Colby College president Julius Seeyle Bixler argued that education in democracy could not succeed unless it cultivated democracy's religious dimensions. The health of democracy required an educational approach emphasizing the purposes which religion, democracy, and education shared—what Bixler clumsily called “education under the guidance of religion with democratic ideals.”⁴² The Del Monte group pushed the case even harder. Like Bixler, the authors argued that democracy shared significant traits with American religion: as a kind of faith, democracy meant esteem for human beings and their potential; as an institution, it meant decentralized, representative government. Beyond these important affinities, however, democracy was also genealogically tied to religion. Dismissing arguments that democracy had arisen out of eighteenth-century political conflicts or the ideals of the Enlightenment, they instead located the roots of Western democracy in the Reformation. As a result of this history, it was fair to say that “The rise and development of American democracy is unintelligible apart from the Judeo-Christian tradition,” here meaning its Protestant variant.⁴³ Education for democracy should reflect that fact. This did not mean inviting churches onto the campuses or filling out the chapel

Protestants populating the academic circles around Hazen and the NCRHE, Bennett nurtured strong affinities for socialist politics, in particular on issues concerning labor and racial equality. As he wrote for another Hazen volume in 1951, in fact, even full-blown communism was less an unqualified religious evil than a quasi-Christian heresy: a “compound of half-truth and positive error,” containing at once a genuinely Christian commitment to a more just social order and a fatal overconfidence in its own ability to deliver. See: John C. Bennett, *Christianity and Communism* (New York: Haddam, 1951).

⁴² Bennett, *Christianity—and Our World*, 18.

⁴³ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 14.

schedule. The prerequisite to democratic education was instead a “positive, comprehensive plan of education which takes adequate account of the place of religion in culture” and dispensed with obstructing doctrines of secularism.⁴⁴ “In any culture,” they wrote, “higher education must acquaint students within the religion or religions dominant [therein].” In the United States, that meant acquaintance with “the Judeo-Christian tradition, which nearly all of them share.”⁴⁵

Arguments such as these valorized the study of religion as the custodian of American democracy and its inalienable religious content. During the early Cold War, that conscious politicization of the discipline would have significant effects, not the least of which was the dramatic expansion of religious studies’ institutional footprint. Enlivened by a friendly political climate, flourishing educational ecosystem, and the strength of ecumenical Protestantism (with which religious studies continued to be intertwined) groups like the NCRHE, Hazen Foundation, and Danforth Foundation would successfully oversee the creation of religious studies departments in universities across the country as anticommunist bulwarks and engines of religious patriotism—agents in the “ideological struggle” tellingly invoked by the CGSR in 1950. Just as important, that process of politicization would redefine what the study of religion entailed: its educational and cultural purpose, yes, but also its methods, its theoretical problematic, even the object “religion” itself.

Before narrowing our attention on that disciplinary scene, however, it is worth considering in detail the wider ideological context in which these developments unfolded. In order to understand the kinds of discursive opportunities which American anticommunism and religious interpretations of American democracy created, it is necessary to first understand how professional religionists understood the convergence of democracy and religion in the early Cold War period, and how that

⁴⁴ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 12.

⁴⁵ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 17.

conception departed from earlier models of this same convergence. For that reason, the following section momentarily brackets this chapter's focus on the academic study of religion. Following the pattern set in Chapter 1, I turn to examine the ecumenical Protestant milieu with which the study of religion was enmeshed and distill its distinctive position on communism. Doing so will allow us to return to the study of religion in section 3 with a better grasp on the political forces that shaped it.

II. Finding the Protestant Line on Communism

In March 1946, the Federal Council of Churches convened an emergency plenary meeting in Columbus, Ohio to formulate a unified Protestant statement on the postwar world. The proceedings were defined by an air of urgency. The report on "The Churches and World Order," drafted by John Foster Dulles's Commission on a Just and Durable Peace and adopted unanimously by the assembly on March 7, expressed that urgency in no uncertain terms. "The time is short," it declared. "Even now before the dust and rubble of the Second World War have been swept away, new and more powerful weapons of destruction are being forged...A world of fear, hatred, cruelty, misery, and violent death is closing in on the prospect of a world of fellowship and love."⁴⁶ In the face of such encroachment, Protestant leadership was imperative. "Through the centuries," the report continued, "the Christian church has met the test of desperate times. It has shown that they can be turned to victorious account through the power of God, in Jesus Christ." Global institutions existed that might secure international cooperation, control atomic power, and guarantee human rights. It fell to the global Christian fellowship to ensure that they did so, however. Only Christianity, and again, especially, Protestantism, could act so as to "make this power decisive for the regeneration of mankind."⁴⁷ Such claims were self-aggrandizing, but they had important backers. Speaking at the

⁴⁶ "Report to Federal Council on 'The Churches and World Order,'" *New York Times*, March 8, 1946, 4.

⁴⁷ "Report to the Federal Council on 'The Churches and World Order,'" 4.

same conference on March 6, Harry Truman said much the same, calling on ecumenical leaders to develop spiritual solutions to domestic and global crises. “There is no problem on this earth tough enough to withstand the flame of a genuine renewal of religious faith,” he declared. “And some of the problems of today will yield to nothing less than that kind of revival.”⁴⁸

The Columbus assembly provides a vivid illustration of the links between ecumenical Protestantism and American internationalism at the end of World War II. Already among the most influential constituencies in the United States, ecumenical Protestants were eager, as they had been after World War I, to exert their cultural influence to shape American policy and create a more Christian postwar order. During the war, ecumenical Protestants in the FCC again developed a sprawling institutional apparatus to do just that: creating commissions, study conferences, and lobbying offices to strengthen existing social programs and develop greater influence over the American policy-making process.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most important such entity was the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace—the focus of this section. Founded in 1940 under the leadership of John Foster Dulles, the CJDP assumed the monumental responsibility of plotting the FCC’s position on the entire range of issues relevant to the postwar peace. Its membership reflected its ambitions. In addition to representatives from major Protestant organizations like the Foreign Missions Council of North America, National Council of Church Women, and International Council on Religious Education, the Dulles commission enjoyed the participation of a who’s who of midcentury Protestant luminaries: John C. Bennett, G. Bromley Oxnam, Reinhold Niebuhr, William Ernest Hocking, Robert Calhoun, and Georgia Harkness, among others. In its years of conferences, committee meetings, and public statements, the CJDP developed a comprehensive Protestant

⁴⁸ Harry S. Truman, “Address in Columbus at a Conference of the Federal Council of Churches,” March 6, 1946. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/52/address-columbus-conference-federal-council-churches>

⁴⁹ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, Chapter 22; Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, Chapter 1; Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right*, Chapters 2 and 3.

political framework that intertwined global and domestic politics through supranational discourses such as that on human rights—what Gene Zubovich has called an ideology of “Protestant globalism.” This global perspective defined ecumenical politics in the Cold War era, connecting foreign initiatives to domestic anti-racism, anti-poverty programs, and women’s rights in a dialectic of international and domestic liberalism.⁵⁰

It is within that “intermestic” dialectic that the academic study of religion would come to flourish. It would do so, however, not beneath the umbrella of liberalizing concepts such as that of human rights, but instead as part of another, less flattering supranational ecumenical discourse: anticommunism. During the 1940s, anticommunism was an integral component in ecumenical visions of postwar order, which consistently counterposed Protestant principles of democratic internationalism to communism’s inhumanity and bent for domination. Indicative of that significance, from 1944 to 1946 Dulles’s CJDP sponsored a subcommittee on Russia dedicated exclusively to examination of the Soviet Union. Known informally as the “Russian group,” the subcommittee’s objectives mirrored the wider ambitions of its parent commission, and of American Protestantism writ large. As described by Paul B. Anderson, one of the group’s initial organizers, the committee on Russia would seek to “arrive at a good understanding of the peculiar aspects of the Soviet Union which may influence the course of international relationships,” and on that basis “express an American Christian conviction regarding Russia and the peace.”⁵¹ Over three years of deliberation, the committee’s participants conducted extensive study of Russian history, communist theory, and contemporary Soviet politics.⁵² Their collective assessments of communism changed

⁵⁰ Zubovich, 13; 99.

⁵¹ Paul B. Anderson, “Letter to Luman J. Shafer,” January 17, 1944. Folder 18, Box 40, RG 18, Federal Council of Churches Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter, FCC Papers); Paul B. Anderson, “Russia,” 1944, Box 40, Folder 10, FCC Papers.

⁵² At its outset, the group included Anderson, John Foster Dulles, Roswell P. Barnes, W.W. Hess, Elmore McKee, A.J. Muste, G. Bromley Oxnam, C.H. Tobias, F. Ernest Johnson, Charles W. Lowry, Walter W. Van Kirk, and Luman J. Shafer. Later participants included Reinhold Niebuhr,

significantly in the process. During the interwar period, many ecumenical Protestants nurtured strong sympathies for socialist politics, particularly on matters of labor and race relations, and viewed Soviet economic policies with genuine favor.⁵³ By 1946, when the group issued its “Statement on Soviet-American Relations,” its members had come to the unanimous conclusion that communism and American democracy were irreconcilable—and that their opposition was religious in nature. Like the Protestant discourse on human rights, ecumenical anti-communism as expressed by the CJDP traversed global and local domains. It did so with decidedly nationalistic consequences, however. By interpreting the U.S.-Soviet rivalry as an intractable conflict between two warring spiritual systems, the Russian group linked international communism to domestic antisecularism in a peculiar form of ecumenical Protestant nationalism, the unseemly flipside of Zubovich’s liberal “Protestant globalism.” It was this Cold War ecumenical nationalism that overwhelmingly defined religious interpretations of American democracy among mainline Protestant groups. Those interpretations, in turn, helped establish the ideological ground in which the academic study of religion flourished.

At the time of its first meeting in February 1944, the CJDP’s Russian group contained a range of divergent views on communism and postwar cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Paul Anderson, in a memorandum prepared for a group discussion, wrote optimistically of the significant common ground between communism and Protestantism. In spite of their undeniable disagreements, he wrote, both shared “the common purpose of seeking man’s

John C. Bennett, and Henry Pitney Van Dusen. [Could include more here on the stuff that they were reading, which is actually pretty interesting.]

⁵³ Several participants in the Russia group could boast sustained contact with communist movements in the 1920s and 1930s. Anderson, for his part, was in Moscow during the October Revolution in 1917. G. Bromley Oxnam had visited the Soviet Union in 1926 as part of a Christian student study group. Though skeptical of Marxism, his wariness was tempered by his own socialist inclinations and distaste for the Orthodox Church. Niebuhr, for his part, had organized the Fellowship for Socialist Christians in the early 1930s. On Oxnam’s Soviet tour, see Zubovich, 25-30.

welfare on earth, and the interpretation of that welfare as meaning physical wellbeing, employment which shall be not only remunerative but an outlet for the urge of creativeness, leisure for repose, recuperation and self-expression other than provided for in employment, education both for vocation and intellectual enjoyment, and reasonable security against misfortune and impairment of earning capacity.”⁵⁴ Anderson’s sanguine assessment of the possibilities for Christian-communist agreement was shaped by his own experiences with Russian communists. He had been in Russia in the early stages of the Bolshevik Revolution, and as late as the mid-1940s recalled the “stirring of a mighty power” he felt in the months following October 1917, as well as the personal dynamism of Lenin.⁵⁵ Yet his attitude also reflected broader wartime amity toward the USSR. On April 2, 1944, the *New York Times* breathlessly reported that the Soviet Union had officially revised Marxist doctrine so as to “remove ideological obstacles to collaboration.” In September of the same year, a University of Chicago economist announced after a trip to Moscow that economic differences between the two nations were minimal when compared to the “ideal of a free democratic welfare society” which united them.⁵⁶ Even in matters of religion Anderson was optimistic. Parroting White House talking points on Soviet religious freedom, he argued that Soviet citizens could freely practice religion, and that that they were doing so in ever greater numbers.⁵⁷ Growing Soviet piety and

⁵⁴ Paul B. Anderson, “Russia,” 1944, Box 40, Folder 10, FCC Papers.

⁵⁵ Paul B. Anderson, “The Religious Situation in Russia,” 1944, Box 40, Folder 10, FCC Papers.

⁵⁶ “Communist Dogmas Basically Revised,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1944, 7; “U.S. Aid for Soviet in Peace Studied,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1944, 14.

⁵⁷ Paul B. Anderson, “An Appraisal of the Position of Religion in the USSR during the War,” February 23, 1943, Box 40, Folder 8, FCC Papers; See also: “The Place of Religion in the USSR.” On Roosevelt’s efforts to convince Americans of Soviet liberality toward religion, see Andrew Polk, “‘Unnecessary and Artificial Divisions’: Franklin Roosevelt’s Quest for Religious and National Unity Leading up to the Second World War,” in *Church History* 82.3 (September 2013): 667-677.

democratization, coupled with wide areas of Protestant-communist consensus, augured favorably for postwar collaboration, which Anderson concluded was “both desirable and practicable.”⁵⁸

Other members of the Russian group were somewhat less certain. Reinhold Niebuhr, for instance, reacted poorly to Anderson’s document, commenting that the latter’s account was both insufficiently sophisticated and overly credulous with regard to actual Soviet practices.⁵⁹ Differences between the United States and Soviet Union were more deeply ingrained than Anderson appreciated. Rather than efface the real enmity that existed between the two powers, he suggested, the group should honestly grapple with how limited cooperation might proceed in spite of it. Niebuhr’s reservations were mild compared to those of A.J. Muste. Muste, a former Christian socialist and famed head of the pacifist Fellowship for Reconciliation, found something “profoundly disturbing” in Soviet politics and the “approach to life” which they revealed.⁶⁰ In his own paper distributed for group review, Muste argued combatively that communism constituted a “profound menace to the Jewish-Christian and the democratic faith and way of life.”⁶¹ Combined with historic forms of Russian nationalism and Soviet military power, he predicted, communism would exit the war bent on aggressive and immediate expansion. At best, Soviet-American cooperation could yield an uneasy armistice. “Certainly there is nothing here on which to build durable peace.”⁶²

Muste and Anderson represented the two poles of opinion on Soviet politics and postwar cooperation within the Russian group. Between them, however, there was agreement on one crucial point, namely, that communism and Christianity were irreconcilably divergent doctrines. Where one stood on the question of collaboration was a matter of determining just how far they diverged, and

⁵⁸ Anderson, “Russia,” 1944.

⁵⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr to Walter W. Van Kirk, November 6, 1944, Box 40, Folder 8, FCC Papers.

⁶⁰ “Minutes,” April 11, 1944, Box 40, Folder 18, FCC Papers.

⁶¹ A.J. Muste, “Russia in World Affairs,” 1944, Box 40, Folder 10, FCC Papers.

⁶² Muste, “Russia in World Affairs.”

with what consequences; that they did so was not in question. Muste stated this conviction publicly in the pacifist journal *Fellowship*. Superficial similarities notwithstanding, he argued, communism and “Jewish-Christian pacifism” pursued radically different ends, with similarly different means, on the basis of diametrically opposed principles: “communism, especially in its Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist form, carries to its logical conclusion the process begun under latter-day capitalism and imperialism of reversing the Christian doctrine that ‘the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.’” Aligning untempered forms of capitalism and communism in an unholy modern synthesis, Muste argued that in either case human beings were “degraded and made a cog in a machine.” This degradation was more thoroughgoing under communism, however. Capitalism at least maintained in principle the value of the individual. Communism disregarded individuality altogether, reducing human beings entirely to the byproducts of inexorable natural processes. Other committee members concurred with Muste. In a group meeting in April 1944, F. Ernest Johnson remarked that the conflict between Soviet planning and capitalist free enterprise was in truth a conflict between belief in human freedom and a mechanistic determinism.⁶³ Even Paul Anderson ultimately agreed, tracing both communism and fascism to German religious critics like Marx, Ludwig Feuerbach, and David Friedrich Strauss. Whether on the basis of principle or practice, the group agreed, any examination of Christianity and communism could result only in “a clear conviction of irreconcilability.”⁶⁴

For members of the Russian group, communism was less a political tradition of class struggle or a distinctive mode of production than a spiritual doctrine. In this conviction, they drew on existing interpretations of communism which had been popular among Anglophone intellectuals since the publication of Harold Laski’s *Communism* in 1927. In the latter, Laski presented

⁶³ “Minutes,” April 11, 1944, Box 40, Folder 18, FCC Papers.

⁶⁴ “Minutes,” May 15, 1944, Box 40, Folder 18, FCC Papers.

communism—specifically its Marxist variant—as a logically coherent system rooted in economic determinism and boasting its own theories of history, social development, and economics. Unlike those disciplines, however, communism lacked a capacity for self-criticism. Defined by epistemic overconfidence and an invincible sense of moral rectitude, communism resembled nothing so much as a new religion, albeit an implacably irreligious one. “Anyone who deals with modern communism is dealing with a new religion which has to win its spurs.”⁶⁵ Like “the followers of Mahomet [*sic*], the Ironsides of Cromwell, the Calvinists at Geneva,” communists possessed unyielding faith in Providence, a fanatic evangelist zeal, and the willingness to use violence for the propagation of their beliefs.⁶⁶ Others developed this interpretation along the same lines. In a 1931 essay titled “The Religion of Communism,” Reinhold Niebuhr argued that communism was essentially religious both in the type of claims it advanced and the way in which it did so. Communism displayed “metaphysical pretensions” which removed it from the domain of political or scientific worldviews; at the same time, “the degree of ardor, not to say fanaticism, with which it spreads its doctrines in the world, and, where it is in power, makes facts conform to them, could never be achieved by a scientific worldview.”⁶⁷ Nor could it be achieved by a Western one. Adding a dimension of comparative religious chauvinism absent in Laski’s text, Niebuhr argued that it would be wrong to locate communism’s appeal in economic or political causes. Implicitly rejecting Marxist methods of historical explanation, he argued that communism’s success instead “has its real roots in the Russian soul, with its bent for religion.”⁶⁸ Communism was not only a religion. It was an *Asiatic* religion:

⁶⁵ Harold Laski, *Communism* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1927), 52-3.

⁶⁶ Laski, *Communism*, 52.

⁶⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Religion of Communism,” *The Atlantic*, April 1931.

⁶⁸ Niebuhr, “The Religion of Communism.”

underdeveloped, irrational, and—in its disregard for individual conscience—prototypically totalitarian.⁶⁹

Religious interpretations such as those of Laski and Niebuhr were highly influential in ecumenical Protestant circles, as they were in Anglophone culture more broadly.⁷⁰ For the subcommittee on Russia, they conveyed the crucial idea of communism's comprehensiveness as a religious/metaphysical system—and thus its *comprehensive incompatibility* with cultures of the Protestant West. That incompatibility had multiple dimensions. Most obviously, Christianity and communism differed on the question of theism. That disagreement was only the most provocative indicator of more thoroughgoing metaphysical differences, however. Communists denied more than a personal God; they denied transcendent reality altogether. As a result, critics argued, communists could regard the world and its inhabitants solely within the terms of mechanism. For Marxists, one commentator remarked, “the spiritual qualities of matter are but an ‘epiphenomenon,’ a foam on the beer, a product of the fundamental reality of a given period.”⁷¹ This naturalist orientation limned the entire communist worldview, dictating Marxist positions on nature, history, and philosophical anthropology. At every level such positions were antithetical to Christianity. Economic determinism ignored the fact of human freedom. Historical materialism denied God's providential workings. Even communist egalitarianism could not be squared with Christianity. When the World Council of

⁶⁹ Communism is a remarkably portable religious category for Niebuhr. In the course of the essay, he analogizes between communism and a number of supposed religious traditions, including “Asiatic” religion, “Mohammedanism,” and Catholicism. In every case, the analogies serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, they illustrate the irrationality and insuperable foreignness of communism with respect to Western Protestants; on the other hand the similarity of various religious traditions to communism becomes a technique of interreligious polemic. More than anything, that is, communism becomes a means of demarcating Protestant from other religious traditions and measuring its superiority.

⁷⁰ One would have to add to this pair Nicolas Berdyaev, whose 1937 book *The Origin of Russian Communism* similarly emphasized Russian communism's Asiatic religious character.

⁷¹ Matthew Spinka, “A Christian Critique of Communism,” address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania, January 5, 1949, Box 29, Folder 19, FCC Papers.

Churches considered the points of conflict between Christianity and Marxism at its inaugural 1948 meeting, they asserted that the “materialistic and determined teachings” of communism, however qualified, were flatly “incompatible with belief in God and with the Christian view of man as a person, made in God’s image and responsible to him.”⁷²

This spiritualist interpretation of communism provided the premise for a series of meetings of the Russian group in the summer of 1946, the intent of which was to produce a public statement outlining the FCC’s position on Soviet-American relations on the basis of a draft document prepared by CJDP head John Foster Dulles. In the process, the Russian group outran the relatively narrow task with which it began, articulating an expansive political vision for which the group’s interpretation of communism as a quasi-religious materialist metaphysics was indispensable. With their insistence on communism’s essentially religious character, it became all but impossible for even the most cautious members of the Russian group to maintain distinctions between the spiritual and political dimensions of American-Soviet rivalry. The Soviet Union, as the bearer of actually existing communism, became itself a spiritualized entity; *mutatis mutandis* the United States did as well. As a result, the still-nascent Cold War ceased to be a purely political struggle localized in places like Greece, Turkey, or Germany. It extended to near-infinite locales of spiritual or metaphysical struggle, among the most important of which were American churches, homes, and—of course—schools.

The full scope of America’s contest with Soviet communism was perfectly evident to John Foster Dulles. Three days before the subcommittee’s first drafting meeting on June 6, Dulles published a strident anti-communist assessment of Soviet foreign policy in *Life*, in which he argued that Soviet communism represented an intolerant philosophical system diametrically opposed to

⁷² Quoted in G. Bromley Oxnam, “How the Protestants Fight Communism,” 1949, Box 63, Folder 24, FCC Papers.

what he laconically called “our faith.”⁷³ The referential ambiguity of Dulles’s claim—what is our faith? Who does it belong to?—intentionally blurred the political and religious commitments of the United States, assimilating both to a single national piety. The “common faith” shared among Americans was not exclusively religious, that is, at least not in any conventional sense. Rather, the “faith” which Dulles invoked traversed the religious and political boundaries which Americans were accustomed to draw, rooting the United States’ civil libertarian tradition in a Christian personalist esteem for the individual human being. Dulles clarified that connection in a follow-up article one week later. “The overriding and ever-present reason for giving freedom to the individual is that men are created as the children of God, in his image. The human personality is thus sacred and the State must not trample upon it.”⁷⁴ This religious conception of the person was evident in the nation’s founding documents. Equally obvious was its absence in the Soviet Union, where the consequences were dire. “If a society ceases to be a religious society or if it falls under atheistic leadership, as in the case of the Soviet Union, then it is both logical and practical to treat human freedoms like the freedoms of wild animals.”⁷⁵ Dulles’s argument exemplified how religious conceptions of Soviet communism mandated certain kinds of political conclusions. Having appraised communism as at bottom a religious phenomenon, that is, he was compelled to reinterpret the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States in similarly religious terms. The result was twofold. At the geopolitical level, Dulles absolutized the emerging lines of Cold War conflict. International peace may have been possible, he acknowledged, but genuine reconciliation was not. At the domestic level, Dulles’s religious assessment of communism facilitated an exclusivist Christian claim to American

⁷³ John Foster Dulles, “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It,” *Life*, June 3, 1946: 113-126, 113.

⁷⁴ John Foster Dulles, “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It, Part II,” *Life*, June 10, 1946: 119-130, 120.

⁷⁵ Dulles, “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy, Part II,” 120.

democracy itself. In Dulles's hands, American democracy was not only a political tradition, but a political-theological one, requiring a specific religious culture to sustain its continued existence.

Dulles stood out for his frank willingness to identify Protestant religious principles with American civic nationalism. Other Protestant leaders were somewhat more hesitant. Indeed, though many shared Dulles's view of communism as a quasi-religious system, that interpretation could be mustered to serve an array of different ends. For some ecumenical leaders who worked alongside Dulles in the CJDP, in fact, defining communism as a spiritual, rather than political-economic system allowed them to *differentiate* Americanism from Christianity and thereby stake out critical positions on elements of US policy. Such positions were relatively common in the discussions of the Russian group. On June 6, for instance, John C. Bennett opened discussion of Dulles's draft statement by challenging its belligerent anti-Sovietism. The first task of the committee should not be to advance existing criticisms of the Soviet Union, he argued, but rather to comprehend why the U.S.S.R. feared the capitalist West, why they might object to models of representative democracy, and why, most importantly, they had such success in promulgating communism abroad. Union president Henry P. Van Dusen agreed, taking Dulles to task for his feeble criticisms of American economic inequality. If the United States and its Protestant leaders were serious about combatting global communism, the surest method of victory was "a really strong democratic program of life which can be a substantiation of Christian principles."⁷⁶ Dulles found these suggestions frustrating, complaining that his colleagues were suggesting he write a Soviet propaganda document. Nevertheless, each subsequent draft of his statement gave greater voice to American self-criticism, a clear sign of the group's desire to maintain its independence from the interests of the American state.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "Minutes," June 6, 1946, Box 40, Folder 14, FCC Papers.

⁷⁷ Ecumenical protestants strove to maintain that independence during the early Cold War, sometimes doing so in the face of formidable nationalist sentiment. In the 1940s and 1950s, some

In spite of their best efforts, members of the Russian group including Van Dusen and Bennett struggled to maintain distinctions between Protestant moral principles and American political realities. In their preparatory work leading to the publication of the FCC statement in October 1946, the group's participants routinely collapsed the differences between Protestantism and the United States, either identifying the two directly or grouping them beneath larger third concepts.⁷⁸ Their final statement formalized this elision. Adopted and published by the FCC's executive committee on October 19, the "Statement on Soviet-American Relations" promulgated an

ecumenical groups took adversarial positions on the atomic bombings in Japan, US belligerence toward China, and racial segregation. David Hollinger and Gene Zubovich have provided the most important interpretations of ecumenical internationalism as a liberalizing and anti-nationalist force in American politics, in, among other texts: Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right*; David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World But Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). It should be noted, however, that ecumenical Protestants frequently aligned with US policy initiatives as well, in some cases pushing American politics *rightward*. The FCC endorsed the doctrine of nuclear deterrence in 1950, for example, and heartily supported the US war in Korea, helping in the latter case to launder the war as a United Nations "police action." William Hutchison provides a more textured and restrained interpretation of American Protestantism and its relation to the American state that reflects these complicated realities. Rather than bifurcate between "conservative" (read: bad) evangelicalism and "liberal" (read: good) Protestantism, as is tempting, he instead distinguishes between multiple forms of Protestant conservatism. One of these is more full-throated, embodied most strikingly in the political conservatism of fundamentalism and its neo-evangelical progeny. The other, more moderate conservatism *also* responds adversely to religious, ethnic, and political change, but does so less through open reaction than through concern for *social unity*. In its quest to serve as the custodian for a unitive American political theology, "liberal" ecumenicism matches this model exactly. If ecumenical Protestantism was indeed a progressive, albeit limited force in American politics and culture, as Hollinger and Zubovich maintain, it was *also, at the same time and to the exact extent* a method for the rearticulation of Protestant hegemony in up-to-date terms. See: William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: the Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); William R. Hutchison, ed. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989); William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁷⁸ See, for instance: "Minutes," June 6, 1946, Box 40, Folder 14, FCC Papers. Conflations between the United States and Protestantism didn't just appear in 1946. For earlier instances of this confusion in Russian group documents, see also: A.J. Muste, "Tentative Outline of Questions Before Russian Sub-Committee," June 8, 1944, Box 40, Folder 18, FCC Papers. For evidence of how these elisions figured in Dulles's drafts, see: John Foster Dulles, Redraft of commission statement on Soviet-American relations, August 1946?, Box 40, Folder 14, FCC Papers.

official ecumenical line that reified the religious antithesis of communism and Christianity, sacralized American democracy, and stated an ecumenical Protestant claim to both national and global leadership in the postwar world. The group's conflation of political and metaphysical oppositions is evident at the very outset of the document, which begins with a general statement of Christian principles drawn from two conferences on the Churches and World Order held in Cleveland (1945) and Columbus (1946). Prefaced with the mild statement that "the beliefs which we hold as Christians are different in many essential respects from those of the Soviet leaders," the two quotations adumbrate an ecumenical vision of global politics in which the theological axioms of God's sovereignty and saving mercy ground a postmillennialist commitment to universal social improvement.⁷⁹ "Our dedication," the statement quotes,

"is to the progressive realization of the dignity and worth of man in every area of life—political, economic, social and religious—to the world-wide achievement of man's individual freedom, under God, to think, to believe, and to act responsibly according to the dictates of his own conscience. This, we believe, is indispensable if God's will for man is to be fulfilled."⁸⁰

The citations from Cleveland and Columbus reaffirm the religio-political vision of ecumenical Protestantism: that human beings, insofar as they are created in the image of god, are of infinite worth as individuals and thus must be guaranteed individual freedoms regardless of race,

⁷⁹ Comparing this language with the drafting committee's earlier efforts reveal the moderating effect of the revision process. The version drafted following the June 6 meeting of the subcommittee read: "Soviet leaders have beliefs and practices which are different form, and incompatible with, those of the American people. Communist philosophy is materialistic. The Soviet form of government is a dictatorship. Soviet economy is an extreme form of state socialism." Another version drafted for discussion on October 10 moderated that language somewhat, dropping "incompatible" and eschewing specification, but maintaining the former's polemical air: "Let us not delude ourselves. The beliefs which we hold as Christians are different in many essential respects from those of the Soviet leaders." By the time of publication, of course, only the second sentence of this framing remained. See: Redraft of commission statement on Soviet-American Relations, August 1946?; "Draft statement on Soviet-Western tensions," September 1946?, Box 40, Folder 14, FCC Papers

⁸⁰ "Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia," *New York Times*, October 19, 1946, 6.

class, or other social condition. Within the context of the statement, that affirmation acquires new meaning, now constituting one pole of Soviet-American tension, which is now refigured as a conflict between the Soviet Union and Christianity. For although many Soviet citizens share Christian beliefs, the statement reads, and although there exist “points of contact” between communism’s economic program and the social teachings of the church, “Marxist communism in its orthodox philosophy stands clearly opposed to Christianity.”⁸¹ On this point the statement recapitulates the course of Russian group discussions, presenting communism as a quasi-religious system making claims not only on the distribution of economic power, but on the existence of God, the nature of the world, the mechanism of universal history, and the ontological status of human beings. Marxism is “atheistic in its conception of ultimate reality and materialistic in its view of man and his destiny. Its utopian philosophy of history lacks the essential Christian notes of divine judgment, divine governance, and eternal victory. Its revolutionary strategy involves the disregard of the sacredness of personality which is fundamental in Christianity.” Such differences appear to be insoluble. Certainly they cannot be resolved by “compromise or surrender of faith by Christians.” In the face of a political-spiritual system possessing messianic confidence and universal aspirations, “continuing tensions are unavoidable.”⁸² This apparent conflict between two competing universalist faiths delimits and orders the now-subordinate rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union, with each nation functioning in some sense as the concrete bearer of the religious system with which they’re politically aligned.

The symbolic transposition of the rivalry between US and USSR into religious terms was facilitated by a multipart connection between Protestantism and Americanism. That connection obtained first, and more superficially, at the level of demography. Though the statement allowed for

⁸¹ “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6.

⁸² “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6.

some measure of religious diversity, acknowledging that “Not all Americans hold the Christian faith or hold it to the same extent,” it also maintains that *enough* Americans hold sincere Christian beliefs that they will experience Soviet-American tension in a broadly Christian way—and thus that the Protestant convictions outlined above provide an empirical approximation of *American* convictions as well.⁸³ More important is the spiritual consonance that obtains between Protestantism and American political traditions. Beyond the demographic footprint of Christianity in the United States at any given time, that is, Protestantism and American democracy share a set of ideological commitments and corresponding institutional forms borne of a proximate history that make the two mutually reinforcing. Rather than identity, it would be more appropriate to discuss this relationship in terms of an elective affinity. Without claiming that democracy is exclusively the genealogical product of Protestantism (though in its American form it certainly bears the latter’s causal historical influence), the statement on Soviet-American relations heavily implies that the two exhibit natural resemblances and tendencies which lead them to converge and reinforce one another.⁸⁴ Here, that elective affinity produces a unified “way of life,” defined by two major characteristics. The first is toleration: respect for the right of each individual “freely to choose his belief and carry out its implications” without interference or compulsion. Toleration in turn presupposes a more fundamental ethical maxim, namely, the “sacredness” of the individual human person similarly

⁸³ “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6.

⁸⁴ “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6. I draw the concept of an “elective affinity” from Max Weber, in particular from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. I don’t mean to use this as an explanatory concept myself. In the case of the ecumenical Protestants discussed here, Weber’s concept nicely captures the assertion of a relationship between two terms—here democracy and Protestantism—their relative independence, and the ambiguity of the causal mechanism that determines their relationship. On the complicated history and meaning of the phrase in Max Weber’s work, see: Andrew W. McKinnon, “Elective Affinities of the Protestant Ethic: Weber and the Chemistry of Capitalism” *Sociological Theory* 28.1 (March 2010): 108-126; Michael Löwy, “Le Concept d’affinité elective chez Max Weber,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 127 (July-September 2004): 93-103.

described in the Cleveland and Columbus statements.⁸⁵ Institutionally, this affinity took the form of federalism, an organizational model which allowed for diversity among constituent members without sacrificing unity of purpose or cooperative action.

Within the FCC statement, this set of shared qualities credentialed the United States and its Protestant majority, together, for global leadership in the postwar world. For if peaceful coexistence was possible, it was so only on the basis of a system of mutual toleration which the Protestant West, and the United States in particular, had developed to its fullest extent.⁸⁶ “The American nation knows the method of tolerance,” the document argued. “Our people have used that method—even though imperfectly—for 160 years.”⁸⁷ As a result, American Protestants shouldered primary responsibility for instructing the world in its use. Just as Protestants had pioneered the American system and its guarantees of freedom of conscience, per the FCC statement, so too would they pioneer a global system ensuring the same. Confronted with an international situation analogous to the chaotic religious diversity of the early American republic, American Protestants were called to reprise their ancestors’ role as the vanguard of democratic principles. They “ought to be the first to diagnose the true nature of the present problem and see how it can be solved,” and in turn to “go forward with courage and with confidence that under Divine guidance we may today serve mankind as our forebears served our nation.” U.S. global leadership—one might say hegemony—thus provided the indispensable condition for the development of a world order consistent with Protestant principles. The extension of those principles, by the same token, provided religious

⁸⁵ In his speech at the Columbus conference, President Harry Truman endorsed this same idea, arguing that American democracy evinced a faith in “individual freedom” that both drew form and superseded the three historical faiths—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish—that for him comprised American religiosity.

⁸⁶ Andrew Preston argues that American federalism provided the model for the most ambitious ecumenical dreams of world government following World War II, including those of John Foster Dulles. See Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 387.

⁸⁷ “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6.

sanctification for the exercise of American global power. In the FCC's vision of postwar Protestant globalism, religious anti-communism bound Americanism and Protestantism so closely as to be inextricable.

That international position had direct domestic corollaries. As was the case in ecumenical initiatives including the world order movement and the campaign for the United Nations Human Rights Commission, mainline Protestants interpreted the global struggle against communism as superseding national boundaries and national frames of interpretation. In order to ensure a global order based on human rights and international toleration, the United States had to do more than contest the communist menace abroad; it also needed to do so at home. The domestic front looked drastically different than the international one, however. Unlike their conservative counterparts, ecumenical Protestants were unconcerned by the prospect of a communist movement gaining power in the United States. Georgia Harkness dismissed the possibility outright, stating simply that "West of Russia and east of the Orient" communism was incapable of mounting any frontal attack.⁸⁸ Nor was there any danger of communism gaining ground in a slow-moving war of position. In a predominantly Protestant country, G. Bromley Oxnam claimed, "the soil is enriched by liberty and the atmosphere cleaned by truth," so much so that communism was simply incapable of taking root. "Ever since the Reformation," he expanded, "Protestantism has been preparing people to resist tyranny." First against Catholicism, now against communism, Protestants were safely equipped to withstand totalitarian advances.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Georgia Harkness, *The Modern Rival of Christian Faith: An Analysis of Secularism* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), 11.

⁸⁹ G. Bromley Oxnam, "How the Protestants Fight Communism," 1949, Box 63, Folder 24, FCC Papers. Oxnam's anti-Catholicism indicates the way in which Protestants continued to use anti-communism as a tool of interreligious polemic in the vein established by Niebuhr in 1931. For Oxnam, this was a product of Protestantism's history: born in a struggle against *religious* totalitarianism, i.e., Catholicism, Protestantism nurtured a love for liberty that since distinguished Protestant countries from all others. More or less explicitly aligning Catholicism and communism, he concluded that, while countries like Italy displayed a worrisome susceptibility to communism, in

Yet effective anticommunism on the global level still required domestic action along two related fronts. In the first place, to ensure that communist actors adhered to principles of international toleration which they did not (and could not) sincerely hold themselves, they had to be convinced that Western democracy had sufficient popular support that methods of sabotage or infiltration would be self-defeating. Proving that point demanded sincere recommitment to democratic ideals *within* the United States. As the FCC statement enjoined, “The American people must make their democracy work. Racial intolerance, discrimination, and oppression are a standing negation of democracy and Christian morality. Only as we establish a good society at home can we expect that our society will have a spiritual appeal to the masses of mankind.”⁹⁰ In addition to the end of racial discrimination, the statement highlighted as well the need to ensure religious toleration, respect for human rights, and an equitable distribution of resources—in short, a progressive domestic program sharing political sympathies with the struggles of labor and the Civil Rights Movement. On their own, however, those kinds of political commitments were insufficient. For as we have seen, ecumenical Protestants and their allies understood democracy as more than a political ethos or form of government. Democracy was, at bottom, a spiritual system grounded in the recognition of the

“freedom-loving Protestant lands lies the real barrier to Communist expansion.” Catholicism wasn’t alone in this religious failure. In a report prepared for the World Council of Churches meeting in 1948, John W. Sadiq argued that Indian susceptibility to communist incursions was a result of its passivity and “indefinite theology,” the two of which traits combined to make Hinduism less resistant to communist claims. On the other hand, Islam and Catholicism had proved relatively impervious to communist overtures; this was not, however, because of their difference from communism so much as from their similarity. Totalitarian systems themselves, Islam and Catholicism were, by virtue of their own intolerance, immune to the rival intolerance of communism. Similar assessments dot ecumenical Protestant writings on Chinese religion and Buddhism, each of which were regarded in orientalist terms as insufficiently virile to put up a defense against communism. See: John W. Sadiq, “The Influence of Communism on the Christian Community with Special Reference to Christian Youth,” October 27, 1948, Box 29, Folder 19, FCC Papers.

⁹⁰ “Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia,” 6.

analogy of divine and human personhood. As such, any serious recommitment to democratic ideals was possible only on the condition of widespread spiritual regeneration.

At this point ecumenical anticommunism coincided with domestic antisecularism. This was the more conservative face of “Protestant globalism” at the outset of the Cold War. By conflating the political rivalry between United States and Soviet Union with a religious conflict between Protestantism and secularism, ecumenical Protestants brought the Cold War home, leveraging anticommunist fervor in a bid to sacralize American institutions. Per K. Healan Gaston, “as the United States took the helm of Western civilization and sought to beat back totalitarianism, many cultural commentators”—the Federal Council of Churches among them—“insisted that it could fulfill its appointed tasks only if Americans rejoined the religious fold, trading skepticism, secularism, and religious liberalism for more traditional forms of theism and greater church-state cooperation.”⁹¹ For ecumenical Protestants, church-state cooperation meant Protestant involvement in a wide range of government activity, including foreign policy and diplomacy, industrial politics, and race relations. Above all else, however, it meant greater cooperation in the domain of education.

III. It All Hangs Together: Integral Education and the Discipline of Religion

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, ecumenical Protestants and their organizations mobilized to introduce religious education in American public schools. Working alongside Catholics and some conservative Jews, they argued, as religious educators had for decades, that classrooms were an essential site for the reproduction of democracy, and that religion was an indispensable element in

⁹¹ Gaston, op. cit., 152. This rhetoric had dangerous repressive consequences for religious minorities, atheists, and advocates for church-state separation. It is no accident that McCarthy’s various committees, the FBI, and HUAC disproportionately targeted Jews. On the complicated question of antisemitism in the FBI and other investigative bodies, see: Sarah Imhoff, “Hoover’s Judeo-Christians: Jews, Religion, and Communism in the Cold War,” in Sylvester Johnson and Steven Weitzman, eds. *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017): 121-133.

that process. This work was hampered by interreligious division—liberal Protestants continued to denounce public funding for parochial schools, while Catholics feared Protestant indoctrination in “common-core” public religious education and Jewish groups like the Synagogue Council of America opposed released-time education as inculcating religious sectarianism.⁹² Nevertheless, by the early 1950s, religious groups had succeeded in winning religious curricula for public schools, teacher-led recitation of non-sectarian prayers, and—particularly important for promoters of higher-level religious education—extensive training programs preparing public schools teachers to discuss religion in class. This coalition’s victories were capped in 1952 by the Supreme Court decision opinion in *Zorach v. Clauson*, which permitted New York’s released-time religious education program and encoded in its majority opinion a religious conception of the United States, declaring famously that “we are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.”⁹³

The Court’s opinion in *Zorach* is indicative of the changing political context in which religious groups made claims on American education. In the high years of the Cold War, ecumenical Protestants and college religion professors were no longer the only constituencies committed to cultivating the spiritual commitments undergirding American democracy. So too were the nation’s educational leaders. Already during World War II, American educators and governmental leaders identified educational institutions as indispensable instruments of American state power. Echoing the wartime mobilization of American schools during World War I, entities including the U.S. Office of Education Wartime Commission, National Education Association, and Educational Policies Commission attempted to consolidate the operations of the United States’ innumerable local school

⁹² In 1947 and 1948, FCC General Secretary Samuel McCrea Cavert attempted to organize representatives of the Synagogue Council and the National Catholic Welfare Conference to develop a concrete course of action for the promotion of in-school religious education, but was stymied for precisely this set of reasons. See: FCC Papers, Box 18, Folder 14.

⁹³ *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952). Quoted in Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 141.

districts in service of wartime needs. This included activities designed to inculcate patriotic sentiment as well as targeted vocational training. Students planted victory gardens and recited the pledge of alliance; they also learned specific technical skills to prepare them for employment in industries vital to national security.⁹⁴ The advent of the Cold War only intensified these wartime dynamics. In the latter half of the 1940s, America's schools became one of the most important sites at which anticommunist actors including ecumenical Protestants waged the domestic Cold War. In keeping with President Harry Truman's loyalty-security program, which in 1947 authorized FBI investigations of government employees and established anticommunism as the official ideology of the U.S. government, suspected communist teachers were hounded from the profession.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, the U.S. Office of Education developed curricula such as the "Zeal for Democracy" program, a national social studies curriculum designed to instruct students in the evils of communism and promote Americanization.⁹⁶

Religious interpretations of American democracy such as those advanced by the FCC's Russian group were vital to these developments. Such influence was evident in the flurry of reports on American education issued over the course of the 1940s, all of which centered religiously inflected ideals of democratic citizenship. Among the most important of these, Harvard's *General Education in a Free Society*, adopted a personalist conception of American democracy as the foundation and telos for a universal program of general education. The Harvard report was a

⁹⁴ Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 70-71.

⁹⁵ Many states simply adopted Truman's program at the state level, with thirty mandating loyalty oaths for teachers by 1950. Influential liberal commentators endorsed this expansions of state repressive power, including Sidney Hook and James Conant. The latter, perhaps the most important American educator of the twentieth century, encouraged the Education Policies Commission to officially endorse barring communist teachers from the profession. On liberal anticommunism and the hunt for communist teachers, see: Hartman: 73-89.

⁹⁶ The official title of the "Zeal for Democracy" program developed under Commissioner John W. Studebaker was "Education to Implant the Ideals and Benefits of Democracy and to Reveal the Evil Character and Tactics of Communism."

carefully crafted piece of educational philosophy, designed to mediate between Deweyan theories of child-centeredness, emerging progressive paradigms of “life adjustment,” and the conservative conviction that education should foster discipline.⁹⁷ In his introduction, Harvard President James Conant invoked the personalist ideal as the means of doing so. The problem of general education, he wrote, was first and foremost “the continuance of the liberal and human tradition.”⁹⁸ Without denigrating progressive education or the acquisition of practical skills, he nevertheless argued that “even a good grounding in mathematics and the physical and biological sciences, combined with an ability to read and write several foreign languages, does not provide a sufficient educational background for citizens of a free nation.” Such an education could produce skilled workers, to be sure, but not self-governing ones. The rigors of American democracy required that citizens achieve maturity not only in technical ability, but also in emotion, aesthetic judgment, and morality. Democracy demanded *complete* human beings. The work of democratic education was to produce them.

Conant’s introductory comments indicate the general direction of the Harvard Committee’s report, which universalized, and thus democratized an attenuated version of the aristocratic ideal of integral humanistic education popularized by Irving Babbitt, Norman Foster, and Robert Maynard Hutchins. Like these figures before them, the Harvard Committee narrated the history of American education as a slow process of intellectual fragmentation. As American colleges introduced disciplinary specialization, electives, and concentrations, they lost the sense of intellectual unity that once gave meaning to the educational enterprise. Such vocationalism in the colleges had downstream effects on primary and secondary education. If the purpose of education was technical mastery in a narrow domain of expertise, why waste time with an inefficient common curriculum?

⁹⁷ On the educational debates of the postwar years, see Hartman, *Education and the Cold War*.

⁹⁸ *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1945), viii.

Students destined for college should focus on academic subjects—specifically those that they would study at higher levels; students destined for wage work should prepare themselves for labor. For Conant, this kind of educational approach was in flagrant contradiction with the principles of democracy. At the social level, such an approach reified class distinctions by channeling students into stratified social roles and depriving them of a sense of shared identity. At the individual level, it robbed the majority of students of the kind of holistic education necessary for self-governance and political participation. In both cases, educational fragmentation risked democratic degeneration. If students left college morally stunted, they would behave in stunted ways as citizens. By extension, the nation would lose the moral and intellectual balance which allowed democracy to function.

The Harvard Committee thus linked the challenges of disciplinary specialization to those of democratic citizenship, unifying disciplinary, personal, and political integration as three aspects of a single educational goal. That explicit politicization differentiated the Harvard report from earlier philosophies of integral learning. To be sure, commentators like Babbitt and Arnold before him viewed education as something like the custodian of national culture, and thus of the nation itself. That relationship remained relatively abstract, however, operating through the intermediary of spirit rather than the U.S. education commission. During and after World War II, groups like the Harvard commission saw the nationalist dimensions of liberal education as something to be mobilized in explicit forms of state and private organization. Liberal education was not anything so vague as the spirit of the nation; it was to be an ideological apparatus of the national state.⁹⁹ This transformation in the purposes of integral education disqualified a number of traditional candidates as viable principles of (national) educational unity. Christianity, for instance, was out of the question. So too was “the tradition of Western culture,” which was both too staid and too remote to effectively

⁹⁹ Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 233-34; Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 83-88.

address contemporary life.¹⁰⁰ Neither could any single discipline do the job. Scientific method failed to do justice to the real sources of human commitment. Aesthetic experience, though vital, was similarly one-sided. What was needed was an overarching principle sufficiently flexible to encompass the variegation of modern life, but strong enough to impose order and direction on that diversity. The Harvard committee identified such a principle in the nation itself:

“It is evidently to be looked for in the character of American society, a society not wholly of the new world since it came from the old, not wholly given to innovation since it acknowledges certain fixed beliefs, not even wholly a law unto itself since there are principles above the state. This logic must further embody certain intangibles of the American spirit, in particular, perhaps, the ideal of coöperation on the level of action irrespective of agreement on ultimates—which is to say, belief in the worth and meaning of the human spirit, however one may understand it. Such a belief rests on that hard but very great thing, tolerance not from absence of standards but through possession of them.”¹⁰¹

“Americanness” here displaces both religion and Western civilization as the governing framework for general education, doing so in a remarkably seamless fashion. In this passage alone, the Harvard committee musters American national identity to seamlessly reconcile tradition and novelty, pragmatism and rationalism, morality and law. Yet it manages the task only by recuperating the functions of “Western culture” and Christianity under new names. Indeed, “Americanness” or “the American spirit” are defined so narrowly as to be virtually coextensive with the very principles which the Harvard report discards. We should be well equipped at this point to recognize the committee’s sleight-of-hand. As described by the Harvard Committee, the American spirit has two defining elements: an “ideal of cooperation on the level of action irrespective of agreement on ultimates,” which is to say a principle of toleration, and a more fundamental commitment underwriting that, namely, “belief in the worth and meaning of the human spirit.” These were, of course, *precisely* the two characteristics that defined the elective affinity between Protestantism and

¹⁰⁰ *General Education in a Free Society*, 39.

¹⁰¹ *General Education in a Free Society*, 41.

American democracy as identified by groups like the Federal Council of Churches. If the Harvard Committee secularized the ideal of educational integration by rooting it in America's national character, it did so only by sacralizing the latter in the very same breath.¹⁰²

The Harvard report was not exceptional in this respect. In 1946, President Truman established the President's Commission on Higher Education under the chairmanship of ACE president and former U.S. education commissioner George F. Zook. In its six-volume report, issued the following year, the Zook Commission promoted a vision of American higher education as integral to the functioning of democracy in a time of global crisis. As in the case of the Harvard report, *Higher Education for American Democracy* viewed America's educational system as a privileged vehicle for the reproduction of American democracy. Distinguishing the functions of education in democratic and authoritarian societies, the Zook report argued that in the United States educational institutions served to promote social cohesion in addition to producing knowledge, and that they did so by inculcating democratic virtues among a heterogeneous population. Such virtues included habits of social responsibility, self-reliance, and cooperation. At the college level in particular, they also included self-conscious reflection on the meaning of democracy itself, which the Zook commission defined in unmistakably personalist terms: "the fundamental concept of democracy is a belief in the inherent worth of the individual, in the dignity and value of human life. Based on the

¹⁰² This explains the continual recurrence of allusions to Christianity or the Hellenic/Hebraic streams of Western culture throughout the remainder of the report. In their general philosophy of American education, for instance, the committee claims that "religious education [and here they specifically mean religious education in "the spirit of Protestantism"], "education in the great books, and education in modern democracy...work together to the same end, which his belief in the idea of man and society that inherit, adapt and pass on" (45-6). Later, when suggesting discrete courses for a collegiate program of general education, they included a survey philosophy focus that approaches Western culture as "a lake fed by the streams of Hellenism, Christianity, science, and democracy," all of which entail "the principle of an ordered and intelligible world, the ideas of faith, of a personal God, of the absolute value of the human individual, the method of observation and experiment, and the conception of empirical laws, as well as the doctrines of equality and of the brotherhood of man" (211).

assumption that every human being is endowed with certain inalienable rights...democracy requires of its adherents a jealous regard, not only for their own rights, but equally for the similar rights of others.”¹⁰³ *Higher Education for American Democracy* developed an impressive, comprehensive framework to promote this democratic ideal, including a federally administered plan of graduate fellowships, the nationwide elimination of tuition fees for the first two years of study in all public institutions, and a suite of anti-discrimination measures targeting gender and racial inequality. These concrete proposals were never implemented.¹⁰⁴ The report succeeded, however, in lending executive

¹⁰³ The President’s Commission on Higher Education, *Higher Education for American Democracy, a report*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Higher Education for American Democracy*, 102. It’s important to note that federal funding to higher education was dramatically increasing in this period. Prior to 1935, federal funds amounted to less than 5 percent of the annual operations of American higher education, including aid to land-grant institutions and those institutions supported entirely by the federal government. This began to change during the Great Depression, when the federal government provided, among other things, aid for the construction of campus buildings under the WPA, support for educational programs under the civilian conservation corps, and provision of work scholarships for students. During the depression, however, many university administrators, particularly at the wealthier private schools, remained wary of federal support, fearful that the ideological transformations associated with the New Deal would threaten the independence of private universities. Rather than seek federal support, then, private colleges instead cultivated relationships with private philanthropy and industry. In 1940, private philanthropy accounted for one-fifth of university incomes, exceeded only by student fees and state-level appropriations. During World War 2 higher education became permanently integrated with the federal government, though even then that relationship was mediated by federal contracts rather than direct grants. That funding model integrated American universities as ideological and repressive status apparatuses, as suggested by the President’s Commission on Higher Education, but did so in ways at odds with the Commission’s more democratizing impulses. The contract model favored universities with elite campus facilities and political connections, so much so that *eighty percent* of federal research contracts totaling nearly a billion dollars in 1960 went to only twenty universities (many of them the usual private suspects). Among those universities—again, by far the most prominent in the sector—federal receipts accounted for up to eighty percent of their operating budgets. It also promoted entrepreneurialism as the model of academic inquiry, either directly or indirectly guiding resources to those disciplines (or methods) that could effectively fund themselves. Finally, the contract model of federal funding further determined the relationship between students and the federal government. Rather than offer scholarships or direct grants to undergraduate and graduate students, the federal government instead provided money to universities to ensure low-interest student loans (the major exception was the G.I. Bill). In short, the President’s Commission on Higher Education proposed a financial and institutional model for American higher education that was never adopted; its ideological dimensions, on the other hand, were integrated within the set of unequal financial relationships which had been pioneered during the war. The Zook Commission report includes a detailed history of federal funding in higher education. For a more

prestige to the idea that higher education had a role to play in the perpetuation of American democracy, and that that role included dedicated instruction in “the democratic way of life.”

Together, the Harvard and Zook Commission reports outlined a role for American colleges as ideological arms of the state geared to the production and dissemination of American democratic identity, the latter defined in the distinctively personalist terms of ecumenical Protestant nationalism. Religious educators eagerly embraced this idea, which allowed them to create educational capital from their claims on American democracy and distinguish themselves from the study of literature, which had historically enjoyed priority as the master humanistic discipline. The Hazen pamphlets made constant allusions to integral models of liberal education for precisely this reason. Hazen president Paul J. Braisted wrote expectantly that demands for educational integration would have no choice but to make room for the study of religion. Interpreting curricular disintegration through an anti-secularist lens, he wrote: “secularism makes for fragmentation in the grasp of knowledge rather than a coherent world view. The present widespread demand for synthesis in knowledge and in higher education is a tacit acknowledgment of this consequence of the secularization of education.”¹⁰⁵ Ordway Tead, Chairman of the Board of Higher Education in New York City, converted this argument for religion’s *place* in the curriculum into a claim for its dominion. Education could not impart a unified view of life so long as universities themselves were not unified. All instruction had to proceed “out of a reasonably coherent and vitalized frame of reference.” Targeting the siloed character of specialized disciplines, he continued: “Our studies are not simply discrete disciplines of material selected by departmental faculties for intellectual gymnastics. They are

recent account of federal funding in higher education and its effects, see the peerless account offered in Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). On the failure to implement the recommendations of the President’s Commission, see John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chapter 7.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Judson Braisted, *Religion in Higher Education* (New Haven: Hazen, 1942), 12.

rightfully to be viewed and carried on as scenes in the unfolding human drama set against a cosmic background, in which the student sees himself as at once spectator and performer and realizes his dual role under the aegis of eternity.”¹⁰⁶

The pamphleteers at Hazen were supported by their colleagues in the American Council on Education. In 1944, two years before ACE president George Zook oversaw the President’s Commission on Higher Education, the ACE, together with the interfaith National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), sponsored a joint committee to analyze and define the relationship between religion and public education in the United States. In its 1947 report, the committee exploited links between philosophies of educational integration, democracy, and anticommunism to push for more explicit religious instruction in American public schools, including at the university level. Like the Harvard committee, the ACE committee contextualized its proposals with reference to a global crisis of democracy, arguing that only education which addressed the entire human personality could succeed “at turning out young democrats.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike their peers at Harvard, however, the ACE group preserved a role for religion in this process. “Religion at its best has always been an integrating force,” they wrote, “a spiritual tonic for a soul wracked by fear and cringing weakness.”¹⁰⁸ That contemporary educators pressed the case for integral education without considering religion as a resource—or rejecting it outright, in the case of the Harvard report—was narrow-minded, at best. At worst, efforts to enact philosophies of educational integration on wholly secular grounds risked exacerbating the spiritual anemia already afflicting American schools, and weakening American democracy in the process. For the ACE committee, “the democratic faith” in personal dignity could not be successfully sustained if detached from its religious sources. Though

¹⁰⁶ Ordway Tead, *Toward First Principles in Higher Education: A Dynamic Quest for Unity* (New Haven: Hazen, 1948), 18.

¹⁰⁷ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education: The Basic Principles* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1947), 13.

¹⁰⁸ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 48.

the report stopped short of repudiating secular defenses of democracy, they cast doubt on the viability of such defenses over the long term. Such defenses were “unconsciously trading on ‘borrowed capital’ that has been furnished by the religious tradition of the culture.” Without active tending, the religious endowment that provided democracy’s cultural capital would wither.¹⁰⁹

The ACE report made explicit the insinuations of the Harvard and President’s commission that instruction in Americanism entailed an irreducible spiritual component. Beginning in the fall of 1945, the ACE, together with the Hazen Foundation and the NCRHE, began to press that case directly to university faculties as part of its program of Faculty Consultations on Religion. Conceived together by Swarthmore (and NCRHE) president John W. Nason and Paul J. Braisted, the program of faculty consultations were intended to serve multiple purposes: to gauge faculty attitudes toward religion, stimulate greater inclusion of religious topics in general education programs, and gather information for ongoing activities of the three sponsoring agencies.¹¹⁰ Participants in the program situated it firmly within the ideological nexus of democracy and liberal education. Writing in 1949, Methodist theologian and program consultant Albert C. Outler described the consultations explicitly as a response to demands for integral education. Citing both the Harvard and President’s Commission reports, he wrote, “It is generally agreed that the older education failed to provide men with a unified vision of life or an integrative focus for human knowledge. It failed adequately to stimulate deep and dynamic loyalties to humane and self-transcending values, intellectual or

¹⁰⁹ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 46-7.

¹¹⁰ The steering committee for the program included, in addition to Nason and Braisted, Colby College president Julius Seelye Bixler, Wesleyan president Victor L. Butterfield, J. Hillis Miller, Sr., then New York’s Associate Commissioner of Education. Nason and Miller were also members of the ACE/NCCJ committee on religion and public education. On the Program of Faculty Consultations, see: Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, MSS 029. Box 8, Folder 34; “The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950.” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005; John W. Nason, “Religion in Higher Education: The Program of Faculty Consultation,” *The Educational Record* 27.4 (October 1946): 422-432; Albert C. Outler, “Colleges, Faculties, and Religion; an Appraisal of the Program of Faculty Consultations on Religion in Higher Education, 1945-48,” *The Educational Record* 30.1 (January 1949): 45-60.

moral.”¹¹¹ If educators had not yet recognized the importance of religion for correcting that failure, circumstances were propitious for them to do so. Between enrollment growth, increased student interest, and favorable attitudes toward religion at the national level, “the evidence accumulates that the influence of liberal religious attitudes and ideas is *waxing* in American intellectual life.”¹¹² John W. Nason shared Outler’s assessment. In his own report on the program in 1946, he invoked the tenets of ecumenical Protestant Americanism to suggest that the need for religious instruction was so convincing as to be virtually self-evident:

“The Hebraic-Christian tradition is a part of the cultural heritage of Western civilization, and the understanding of that civilization is no more possible without some knowledge of its spiritual ancestry than it would be without some concept of the role of modern science. If for no other reason, this should suffice to justify courses of solid content and scholarship devoted to the bible, to the development of Christian thought and institutions, and to comparative religion.”¹¹³

From 1945-1948, the ACE, Hazen Foundation, and ACE made this argument to faculty and administrators on fifty-three college campuses.¹¹⁴ Each consultation lasted three days, during which a consultant or pair of consultants would speak to a general meeting of faculty on the theme of religion in higher education before conducting small group discussions with interested faculty, administrators, and separate student groups.¹¹⁵ In their addresses to a given institution’s faculty,

¹¹¹ Albert C. Outler, “Colleges, Faculties, and Religion,” 45-6.

¹¹² Outler, “Colleges, Faculties, and Religion,” 58.

¹¹³ John W. Nason, “Religion in Higher Education: The Program of Faculty Consultation,” 427.

¹¹⁴ These fifty-three included an impressive diversity of institutional types and geographic location. The consultations covered flagship state universities (Iowa, Oregon, Maine, Vermont, Colorado), elite private colleges (Brown, Wesleyan, Dartmouth, Amherst, Pomona, Reed), and regional privates, teachers’ colleges, HBCUs, and junior colleges. In spite of its consultants’ concentration in the northeast, the program conducted more than half of its visits in the Midwest, Pacific Coast, and Southern states. Outler’s report includes a full list of institutions visited from 1945 to 1948. After 1948, the NCRHE continued to offer consultation services with Hazen funding to interested universities. They continued the program until 1965, when it served as the basis for Robert Michaelson’s *The Study of Religion in American Universities: Ten Case Studies with Special Reference to State Universities* (New Haven: The Society for Religion in Higher Education, 1965).

¹¹⁵ George F. Thomas, “Council Publications and Faculty Consultations,” MSS 029. Box 8, Folder 34; Outler, “Colleges, Faculties, and Religion,” 51-2.

consultants impressed on their audiences two major points: a sense of responsibility of *all* professors for the intellectual and moral well-being of their students, regardless of discipline, as well as a confidence in the possibility that religion could be taught in academically legitimate ways. George F. Thomas, who oversaw the creation of Princeton's religious studies department in the 1930s, described his own approach as an attempt to balance these two discrepant points. At these meetings, he later recalled, "I would usually point out that, since religion has had an influence upon all aspects of society and culture, professors in the sciences, social studies and humanities (as well as in the Department of Religion) have a responsibility to deal with its impact upon their respective fields." He was careful to specify that "the approach to religious facts and ideas should be critical and scholarly and that students should be left free to respond to religious claims in their own way." At the same time, he would maintain that the study of religion had a purpose that exceeded a strictly academic purview. As important as it was to encourage students to think critically about religious questions, it was even more important to provoke an existential decision on them.¹¹⁶

Thomas's recollection illustrates the contradictions which the faculty consultations struggled to contain. On the one hand, religion was to be taught critically, scholarly—consistent with the mores of the broader university community. On the other hand, religious studies made claims that seemed to supersede its domain of disciplinary authority, both on the character of their students and the prerogatives of other disciplines.¹¹⁷ These contradictions characterized the study of religion itself

¹¹⁶ Thomas, Council Publications and Faculty Consultations."

¹¹⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that program consultants encountered such considerable resistance during their visits. Although many summarized their meetings as amicable and worthwhile, their accounts also disclose adversarial confrontations with faculty skeptical of what they considered "special pleading" on the part of the religionists. In almost every instance, Outler wrote, "the intellectual atmosphere of the college visited was heavily influenced by a pervasive secularist and positivistic standpoint." Most often this standpoint showed itself in naivete or indifference concerning the curricular claims of religion. Frequently however it manifested in open hostility from faculty who "revealed the most archaic and regressive notions about the contemporary religious situation," slandering liberal religion as "'superstition,'" 'prescientific benightedness,' and 'an emotional crutch,' both useless and dangerous.'" See: Outler, "Colleges,

as much as its relation to the rest of the university. For if it was evident that religion *should* be taught, *how* it was to be taught was far less obvious. Neither the ACE report nor the program of faculty consultations recommended sectarian instruction in academic settings; nor did they recommend parallel instruction along the released-time model of the schools of religion.¹¹⁸ Yet they also dissuaded secularist approaches. The ACE report denied that teaching religion from a historical and empirical perspective would accomplish the results that religious education intended to achieve: “The current interest in religious education will not, and should not, be satisfied with acquiring a familiarity with religious history or even a familiarity with religion as empirical fact in community life.”¹¹⁹ As in the case of education for democracy, the point was not only to produce objective knowledge by “learning about” religion. The more important point was to generate practical commitments. “Where this is not going on,” the report quipped, “something less than an adequate education is occurring.”¹²⁰

To insist on the moral dimension of religious education *without* sectarian structure put the ACE in a strange position. For ultimately what the report proposed was religious indoctrination, but in no religion in particular—indoctrination in religion as such. It might be a straightforward matter to indoctrinate young people in a particular religion: in that case an instructor could draw from existing institutions, traditions, doctrines, practical precepts, and the social networks that made their teaching stick. What did “religion” teach? What did it enjoin? What preparation or institutions qualified one to study it? And with what methods? Non-sectarian religious education would have to contend with these questions at every level, but primary responsibility for doing so devolved on religion instructors at college and graduate levels. Defining the kind of religion that could be taught

Faculties, and Religion,” 52. See also: Nason, “Religion in Higher Education: The Program of Faculty Consultation,” 431.

¹¹⁸ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 26; 37.

¹¹⁹ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 28.

¹²⁰ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 28.

in public schools was a process that flowed downward—from graduate programs in religion, first, to teachers’ colleges and undergraduate programs, and only then to high-school students.¹²¹ In order that the American educational system perform its task of producing young democrats, that is, American schools would need to be staffed by teachers capable of teaching “religion” in suitably interfaith terms—teachers who had been trained to do so in teachers colleges by religion professors holding Ph.D.’s in the study of religion. In this way, an anticommunist civic logic for religious instruction in public schools justified the creation of an entire disciplinary ecosystem capable of defining religion, mapping the subfields in which it would be studied, and articulating the methods which those subfields would employ.

Most fundamental to this project was defining religion itself. On this point the ACE was willing to offer a provisional position:

“In simple terms religion implies an ultimate reality to which supreme allegiance must be given. To this ultimate reality men have from time immemorial given a name—God. The religious man finds warrant for all of his conceptions of worth, of right, of duty, and of human destiny in this relationship to this ultimate reality. There is a wide difference in the ways in which men define this concept of God, ranging from higher personal to abstract philosophical terms; from emphasis on the transcendent to emphasis on the immanent; from a frankly supernatural conception to one that endows the cosmos itself with spiritual purpose and power. However, religion affirms overwhelmingly a reality that transcends the flux of events and constrains men toward the true and the good.”¹²²

As defined “in simple terms,” religion entailed two basic affirmations—one metaphysical, the other moral. Metaphysically, religion affirmed and named the bare fact of a reality that transcends the empirical world. Its moral component flowed directly from that metaphysical position. By virtue of its ultimacy, the reality which religion affirmed was also practically normative for religious people. Its recognition entailed an automatic obligation—at its broadest, to

¹²¹ The ACE report identified departments of religious education in teachers’ colleges and divinity schools as particularly important for producing and disseminating the outline for nonsectarian religious instruction.

¹²² American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 7.

approximate the transcendent order which religion alone discloses. These affirmations were sufficiently capacious as to encompass every conceivable kind of religion. There was room within their terms for theistic religion, non-theistic supernatural religion, and even forms of natural or rational religion. Such capaciousness was crucial, for it distanced the committee's definition of religion from any particular confessional stance. Religion here did not require a specific list of theological beliefs, doctrinal affirmations, or institutional forms. Indeed, it definitionally exceeded them. As the conduit for human beings' experience of "ultimate reality," religion was always excessive with respect to its traditional or institutional expressions.

That ultimacy then dictated the terms in which religion would have to be studied. In the first place, the ubiquity of religious phenomena as defined by the ACE report demanded that religion scholars employ a full complement of humanistic and social-scientific approaches. For Smith professor Virginia Corwin, religious studies was tasked with elucidating the nature of particular historical religions beyond Christianity, using philosophical, historical and sociological approaches to do so. Only this kind of composite, multidisciplinary approach could elucidate the "intellectual structure of concepts and insights, the basic non-rational experiences, and the way in which the religions have functioned in society."¹²³ Insofar as religion was a part of human culture, its students were compelled to use the tools which other cultural disciplines had developed. Those tools could only do so much work, however. For many commentators, the sheer superfluity of religion defied humanistic or social-scientific efforts to comprehend it. As the Del Monte document remarked, "the major difficulty with [religion's] myriad definitions is that the reality continually overflows all the thought forms designed to explain it."¹²⁴ If the reality of religion could not be captured in any sectarian form, that is, neither could it be explained within the frames of secular knowledge.

¹²³ Virginia Corwin, "The Teaching of Religion" in *Liberal Learning and Religion*: 169-196, 177.

¹²⁴ *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*, 6-7.

Translated into the language of culture, we might say that religion was more than simply one part of culture: it was the source of culture itself. The ACE report made this point emphatically. “A vital religious faith permeates every cultural good and influences every aspect of life. To those who take it seriously, religious faith is the spiritual foundation of social and indispensable to an enduring social structure.”¹²⁵ As such, religion required a perspective mirroring its unique cultural object—a perspective that both included and exceeded other humanistic, social-scientific, and natural-scientific approaches.

During the 1940s and 1950s, religion scholars and their allies struggled to define that perspective with any actionable specificity. More often than not, the methodological distinctiveness of the study of religion was articulated in strictly negative terms instead. In his 1942 Hazen pamphlet, Paul Braisted forewent a detailed exposition of the methods constitutive of the study of religion, instead enumerating the kinds of methodological positions that were clearly improper to it. He emphasized naturalism and historicism, both of which “agreed that the processes of history, and of human activity, are self-contained, self-explanatory and self-sufficient.” Reiterating the arguments of John C. Bennett and Robert Calhoun, he attributed these attitudes to a materialist academic dogma, namely, “the dogma that only the material has reality and that knowledge can be derived solely from sensory experience.”¹²⁶ Edwin E. Aubrey shared this position. Both scientific and humanistic methods in the academy presupposed a parochial, mechanistic view of reality, he argued. That view had its purposes. Any wise person would surely recognize that science provided “the most coherent picture available of the world.” Yet the scientific picture was also incomplete, falsified by any number of experiential data, especially those called “religious.” “As theologians would say,” Aubrey argued, “there are limitations of both sin and finitude which restrict us in the endeavor [of

¹²⁵ American Council on Education, *The Relation of Religion to Public Education*, 12.

¹²⁶ Braisted, *Religion in Higher Education*, 11.

scientific objectivity]. It is to the credit of religion that it freely recognizes these limitations. This in itself is a corrective. This corrective is part of the discipline of religious studies.”¹²⁷ For Aubrey, religious studies’ chief contribution was existential rather than noetic. At its best, the disciplinary corrective which it imparted to its students was not a body of knowledge or set of critical tools, but the simple conviction that “it all hangs together.”¹²⁸

Aubrey’s distillation of religious studies’ key insight, though impossibly vague, provides an apt summation of the discipline’s identity as it had developed during the 1940s. Emerging from the combined efforts of groups like the Hazen Foundation, NCRHE, ACE, and CGSR, religious studies took shape not so much as a discipline—certainly not in any conventional sense—but rather as the corrective to disciplinarity, a master principle of educational integration that supervened all forms of special knowledge and imposed on them a common moral telos. That telos was conceived in the unmistakable terms of ecumenical Protestant nationalism. Attributing to the university a pervasive secularist character, religion scholars consistently argued that such secularism would diminish the moral capacities of their students, unfit them for citizenship, and imperil American democracy. That internal threat was described in perfect congruity with the external threat of communism. Although religion scholars rarely addressed communism outright, they played on anti-communist rhetoric continuously: in their consistent anti-secularism, assertions of democracy’s “Judeo-Christian” character, and pointed invocations of materialism. The relatively rare occasions on which religious studies’ advocates spoke of communism by name made this ideological strategy plain. In his 1951 review of the collection *American Education and Religion*, for instance, Yale professor and inaugural NCSR member Anson Phelps Stokes wrote straightforwardly that instruction in religion was authorized by two contemporary realities: “fear of Russian communism and the

¹²⁷ Edwin E. Aubrey, “*Scientia*, Scientific Method, and Religion” in *Liberal Learning and Religion*: 27-55, 43; 54-55.

¹²⁸ Aubrey, “*Scientia*, Scientific Method, and Religion,” 55.

realization that among its basic evils are the antitheses of religion—crass materialism and totalitarianism.”¹²⁹

It was only within this ideological matrix that the academic study of religion acquired the intellectual coherence, cultural heft, and institutional solidity that had escaped its proponents in prior decades. As a result of the successful marriage of religious studies with Cold War nationalism, Clarence Shedd could happily report by 1948 that “state universities are more concerned today about religion than they have been at any other time during the present century.” In contrast to 1926, the year Shedd was elected as a Kent Fellow, there was “widespread concern, discussion and experimentation. Many things that ‘couldn’t’ be done’ are being done and, when done intelligently and well, they have the general support of the voting constituency of the state as well as of all religious groups.”¹³⁰ Yet the Cold War context in which religious studies began to flourish imparted more than just friendly conditions for growth. As we’ve seen over the course of this chapter, Cold War anticommunism intensified religious studies’ longstanding antisecularism and tied the discipline’s fortunes to the sacralization of the country’s political and educational institutions. In the mouths of its most vocal public advocates, religious studies was a means of patriotic indoctrination in the spiritual sources of democracy. That vocation had significant effects on how religion was researched and taught. In the first place, it endowed the discipline with an endemic (and now well-documented) Protestant bias. In the 1940s and 1950s, the academic study of religion was dominated by Protestant scholars in Protestant institutions. As late as 1963, no Catholic or Jewish institution had been invited to join the CGSR, in spite of the fact that at least five such institutions offered doctorates in religion throughout the 1950s (Catholic University, St. Mary’s College, Woodstock

¹²⁹ Anson Phelps Stokes, “God’s Place in the School,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1953, BR7.

¹³⁰ Shedd, *Religion in the State University*, 5.

College, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University.)¹³¹ At the CGSR's annual meeting on October 19, 1963, reports prepared by Krister Stendahl and Cyril C. Richardson (both theologians working at Protestant seminaries/divinity schools), dissuaded the Council from extending invitations to Catholic University, Woodstock College, Jewish Theological Seminary, or Hebrew Union.¹³² Reasons varied by institution: in the case of Woodstock and Jewish Theological Seminary, Stendahl and Richardson expressed doubts concerning the scholarly rigor of the programs (of JTS, Richardson wrote bluntly that its degrees were "of such a character that a representation of that institution on the Council would not be appropriate").¹³³ At Catholic University, the problem concerned the field itself. There, although there were doctoral students in religious studies, the University had not yet created a full "program" due to concerns over placement. Their reasoning was instructive. Per Stendahl, "at the present time it is apparently hard to envisage positions in this field for Catholic laymen."¹³⁴

The Protestant domination of religious studies extended to the work which such institutions sponsored, which dealt almost exclusively with Christian (and to a lesser extent Jewish) topics. Although figures like Clarence Shedd and Virginia Corwin touted the professionalization of American religious studies and its evolution toward non-confessional, non-Christian fields of study, a significant majority of dissertations written between 1940 and 1952 continued to deal with topics

¹³¹ Those five, which should not be read as a comprehensive list, were (Catholic University of America, St. Mary's College, Woodstock College, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University. In the fall of 1963, Marquette University began a doctoral degree in Religious Studies, and Jesuit Pacific College was in the planning stages of doing the same. In Canada, Laval University, also Catholic, offered a doctorate in religion. In the leadup to the forming of the CGSR in 1947, Ernest Cadman Colwell at least considered the inclusion of Catholic University, Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union, and Dropsie, but deferred on all four. Ernest Cadman Colwell Ernest Cadman Colwell (presumed), Untitled Note, 1947?. Hutchins Administration Records. Box 14, Folder 8.

¹³² "Minutes for Meeting," October 19, 1963. Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 45, Folder 1.

¹³³ "Minutes for Meeting," October 19, 1963. Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 45, Folder 1.

¹³⁴ "Minutes for Meeting," October 19, 1963. Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 45, Folder 1.

in Bible, church history, ministry, or the overwhelmingly Protestant fields of philosophy of religion/theology/ethics. Across all fields, Christianity and (to a lesser extent) Judaism dominated. In this same period, only ten of 425 Ph.D. dissertations in the field of religion addressed religions other than Christianity and Judaism, and three of those were written on ancient Greece. Little would improve on this front over the course of the decade.¹³⁵ In 1959, only three of fifty-seven dissertations then underway at Yale dealt with religions other than Christianity or Judaism. At Chicago the proportion was even lower. In the fall of 1960, only four of sixty-seven dissertations at the institution were being written in History of Religions—then the catch-all field for non-Western religions—two of which dealt with the history of comparative religion in continental Europe.¹³⁶

Religious studies' status as a Cold War belligerent also determined the theoretical and methodological parameters in which religion was understood. As we saw in the ACE report and numerous Hazen pamphlets, religion, by virtue of its transcendent status and capacity for moral edification, exceeded historical, sociological, or psychological forms of explanation—all of which were essentially materialist in character. In fact, as Edwin Aubrey argued, the study of religion *corrected* such approaches, providing them with intellectual, moral, and even political direction in a context of global crisis. Those parameters were themselves described in insistently agonistic terms. This is a more difficult legacy to pin down, but it may be the most determinative for the discipline's subsequent development. As a whole, religious studies understood itself during the early years of the

¹³⁵ In 1950, the Hazen Foundation provided a grant to a joint committee of the CGSR and NCRHE to collect and publish the precis of every Ph.D. dissertation written in the study of religion over the prior decade. The survey limited itself to religion programs, eschewing dissertations written on religion in departments like history, literature, or anthropology. Ultimately the committee identified 513 dissertations written in religion Ph.D. programs between 1940 and 1952, of which they were able to gain details for 425. On the dissertations themselves, see: Council on Graduate Studies in Religion, "Doctoral Dissertations in the Field of Religion, 1940-1952: their titles, locations, fields, and short précis of contents," *The Review of Religion* 18 (1954). On the process of conducting this study, see: Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 31, Folder 14.

¹³⁶ "Yale University Dissertations in Progress" and "Uncompleted Dissertations, Divinity School," Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 45, Folder 1

Cold War as a belligerent in the ideological struggle against communism. Its academic identity was indelibly shaped by that idea. Throughout the material surveyed in this chapter, religion scholars and their allies consistently articulated the mission of the study of religion in relation to various scenes of combat. The purpose of the study of religion was not simply to know, analyze, or even exhort. Its purpose was to struggle: against historicism, against secularism, and communism. Even as the study of religion moved away from its myopic focus on Christianity and Americanist public identity, it preserved a combative and binary attitude toward its disciplinary and spiritual rivals. Like ecumenical anticommunists (and indeed American anticommunists more broadly), professional scholars of religion interpreted their myriad struggles as so many aspects of a single metaphysical conflict: more prosaically, that between religion and secularism; at its grandest, between spirit and matter as such. Even as the study of religion disidentified from Cold War forms of religious nationalism, it retained that agonistic vision of itself as engaged in spiritual combat—and the conviction that its opponent was materialism.

IV. After the War

By 1960, the overt patriotic tenor of American religious studies all but disappeared. Throughout the 1940s, religion scholars and their supporters had promoted the study of religion as an integral mechanism for the production of morally upright young democrats, steeped in the Judeo-Christian tradition of American democracy. That argument, advanced within the broader anti-secularist tide of the 1940s and early 1950s, had allowed religionists to successfully establish the study of religion as part of the Cold War university system—success which could be measured in ballooning course enrollments, new departments and Ph.D. programs, and steadily growing demand for new religion professors.¹³⁷ By the mid-1950s, however, the same figures and groups who had

¹³⁷ According to UChicago Divinity professor Robert M. Grant, demand for new Ph.D.'s in religion grew consistently from 1946 to 1955, outrunning the rate of growth in supply of Ph.D.

pioneered this openly Americanist vision of religious studies began to disavow it. In a report on a recent survey of dissertation precis prepared for the CGSR's 1955 annual meeting, Brown Biblicist William J. Robbins commented with concern that the survey disclosed a near-universal "avoidance of non-Jewish Christian fields" among doctoral candidates.¹³⁸ Robbins was joined in his concern by the Hazen Foundation. Over the course of the 1950s, Hazen steadily deemphasized the anti-secularist, ecumenical nationalist language of its earlier projects. In its biannual report for 1959-1960, the Foundation argued that the most pressing problem confronting higher education in coming years was no longer secularism or the degradation of democracy, but rather the need to "surmount the over-long parochial preoccupation with the western tradition in the course of studies for undergraduates."¹³⁹ Gone were the strident claims to moral custodianship over the nation's democratic character. Religious studies appeared to be entering a more chastened, pluralist era.¹⁴⁰

The gradual reorientation of the study of religion toward non-Christian traditions coincided with a series of transformations in the Cold War political milieu in which the study of religion had flourished. During the latter half of the 1940s, the U.S. foreign policy establishment, much as the

holders in that decade. Grant's comments align with reports from the NCRHE concerning the success of its placement service and their inability to meet university requests for recommendations. See: R.M. Grant to Jerald Brauer, October 27, 1962, Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 45, Folder 1.

¹³⁸ William J. Robbins, "What we can learn from the published Precise of Doctoral Dissertations in the field of religion, 1940-1952." Jerald Brauer Papers, Box 31, Folder 14.

¹³⁹ "Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1959-1960." Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005. Hazen's biannual reports over the course of the 1950s indicate this shift in emphasis. In 1952, the Foundation listed its four primary interests as student character development, the place and effects of religion in higher education, international and inter-cultural cooperation, and the resources of education and religion in effecting harmonious industrial relations. By 1958 religion had fallen out of the Foundation's official list of interests, displaced in the Foundation's higher ed activities by "World Culture in the Undergraduate Curriculum."

¹⁴⁰ Even those groups that continued to employ the language of Judeo-Christianity and education for democracy felt compelled to qualify their endorsements. In their 1962-1963 annual report, the Danforth Foundation maintained that part of their purpose was to "*emphasize the humane values of the Judeo-Christian tradition* and of a free, democratic society based on that tradition." That being said, they clarified, "the Danforth Foundation's interest in religion is not sectarian, its interest in democracy is not political, and its interest in the values of both is not propagandistic."

academic study of religion, was largely preoccupied with a series of crises internal to “Western civilization”: the civil war in Greece, the reconstruction of Germany, and the rising tide of communism in Eastern Europe, Italy, and France. By 1950, however, decolonization movements in South and Southeast Asia, the communist victory in China, and most destructively the advent of war in Korea compelled the United States to shift its focus decisively toward the global South, which Americans increasingly viewed in binary Cold War terms.¹⁴¹ Over the following five years, the United States pursued regional security pacts in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, toppled governments in Guatemala and Iran, and supported efforts by European allies to reimpose colonial rule in Indonesia and Vietnam. As they did so, the country’s foreign policy establishment sought the creation of new knowledge apparatuses concerning places which had been virtually nonexistent in the American mind only one decade before.¹⁴² The most important expressions of this impulse were area studies departments, which emerged as part of U.S. military intelligence during World War II and flourished in the postwar period. Importantly, however, regional expertise also required religious knowledge. The spiritualization of the Cold War and reification of the United States’ own “Judeo-Christian identity” consistently led U.S. foreign policy-makers to view non-Western cultures in terms of transhistorical religious identities. Extending the spiritualist interpretation of Western democracy to other religio-political contexts, figures like John Foster Dulles consistently reduced the behavior and interests of global South countries to stereotypical religious proclivities: India, for instance, was susceptible to communism because of Hinduism’s polytheism and religious passivity, whereas Muslim Pakistan, which joined the U.S.-led South East Asia Treaty Organization as a charter

¹⁴¹ Mark Philip Bradley, “Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962,” in Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1: Origins* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 464-485.

¹⁴² The exception was the Protestant mission field. David Hollinger tells the striking story of Protestant missionary Kenneth Landon, who was recruited by the OSS in 1941 to provide expertise on Thailand and found, upon his arrival in Washington, that the government’s only intelligence files on Thailand were four articles written by him. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 187.

member in 1954, could be expected, by virtue of its jealous monotheism, to be an anticommunist stalwart.¹⁴³ Elsewhere in Asia, the United States consistently backed Christian leaders in majority non-Christian countries for similar reasons.¹⁴⁴ In this way, American policymakers globalized the paradigm of spiritual struggle which defined the American Cold War, conceiving the U.S. alliance system as a *religious* international against communism as much as, or more than a capitalist one.

Religion scholars were closely attuned to these developments. In 1949, George F. Thomas argued for greater attention to the History of Religion in American universities as a response to contemporary developments. “The period of western cultural domination of the world is over,” he wrote. “Is it not time for our universities to recognize that it is vitally important for young Americans to study the religion and ethics underlying Oriental cultures no less than the political and economic factors upon which our social scientists usually fix their attention when they concern themselves with the East?”¹⁴⁵ Thomas was particularly concerned with the responsibilities of religion scholars. For the prior two decades, he argued, departments of religion had confined themselves to a near-exclusive focus on Christianity. That focus was legitimate in its time: “the religious and moral confusion of our time and the threat of secularism to our civilization have made it necessary for us to find our way back to the wellsprings of faith that have given meaning to the lives of our fathers.”¹⁴⁶ Now, however, the “reaction of the East upon the West” imposed new demands on religionists. In addition to inculcating a greater appreciation of the Western tradition among Western

¹⁴³ Andrew J. Rotter, “Christians, Muslims, and Hindus: Religion and U.S.-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954,” *Diplomatic History* 24.4 (Fall 2000): 593-613

¹⁴⁴ Although other factors than religion played into such decisions, it’s noteworthy, as Seth Jacobs points out, that Ngo Dinh Diem, Chiang Kai-shek, and Syngman Rhee were all Christian. In Vietnam at least, Jacobs has shown that the “delimitation of what did and did not constitute a ‘real’ religion materially regulated the manner in which the United States selected its anti-communist surrogate.” Seth Jacobs, “Our System Demands the Supreme Being’: The US Religious Revival and the ‘Diem Experiment,’” *Diplomatic History* 25.4 (Fall 2001): 589-624, 604.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas, “The History of Religion in the Universities,” 102-107, 103.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, “The History of Religion in the Universities,” 104.

students—the ongoing desirability of which was not in question—teachers of religion must *also* develop a greater sympathy and appreciation for non-Christian religious insights. Doing so had clear geopolitical consequences. “Even if it proves impossible to take more than a few halting steps towards a world community in our time,” Thomas concluded, “it is essential for western Christians to make common cause with eastern peoples of other faiths in the world struggle against secularism and it may well be that the fortunes of democracy abroad depend upon the outcome of this struggle.”¹⁴⁷

Thomas’s position had wide resonance among religionists and their supporters. In the early 1950s, a spate of initiatives came into being which were designed to extend the study of religion beyond its narrow Western-centric focus. I’ve already mentioned the two series of readers on world religions for which Hazen provided funding in the early 1950s: one planned by the CGSR, which published its inaugural volume on Buddhism in 1954; the second coordinated by the NCRHE and Kenneth W. Morgan, who edited three volumes on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam between 1953 and 1958. In their biannual report for 1955-1956, the Hazen Foundation described the latter series as a contribution to interreligious cooperation between the peoples of East and West: “It is a truism to say that the point of view of the adherents of a religion is essential if others are to understand its meaning, or to say that knowledge of the religious faith of an Asian people is essential if Westerners are to come to know and understand them, and yet such knowledge is relatively scant, and this viewpoint is too widely neglected.”¹⁴⁸ In addition to these, Hazen, Danforth, and NCRHE (renamed the Society for Religion in Higher Education (SRHE) in 1962) all channeled resources to training new specialists capable of teaching those traditions. Under the leadership of Kenneth W. Morgan, who edited the NCRHE’s volumes on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the three groups sponsored

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, “The History of Religion in the Universities,” 104.

¹⁴⁸ “Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1955-1956.” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005.

a new set of post-doctoral fellowships specifically for undergraduate teachers of Asian religions beginning in 1963.¹⁴⁹ In the same years, Hazen expanded its fellowships program for students from the global South. The Aggrey Fellows program, created jointly by Hazen and the Phelps-Stokes Fund to sponsor graduate study in the United States for students from Africa, began in 1959-1960 at the height of African decolonization, and specified in its criteria that it would support students pursuing careers conducive to future projects of “nation building.”¹⁵⁰ Though the latter had no explicit connection with the study of religion, it signals the global turn which the field and its supporting infrastructure were taking, the timing and stated rationale of which illustrate the extent to which that turn proceeded step-for-step with the evolving parameters of the American Cold War.

The discipline’s expanding interest in non-Christian religions and new esteem for non-Christian interlocutors was undoubtedly a sanguine, liberalizing development in the field. It was also consistent with the discipline’s responsiveness to the interests of the American state. As in earlier years, that responsiveness involved significant methodological correlates. Thomas’s 1949 article already gestured at the forms which those would take. As religious studies quietly abandoned Judeo-Christian exclusivist rhetoric in favor of a more global, interreligious perspective, its public apologists increasingly leaned on the subdiscipline of history of religions to define the discipline’s

¹⁴⁹ In 1963, Morgan secured two \$25,000 grants from the Hazen Foundation and the Fund for the Study of the Great Religions of the World to create these fellowships. In 1965, the Danforth Foundation dispersed \$300,000 to expand and continue the program. By 1968, the Post-Doctoral Fellowships for Undergraduate Teachers of Asian Religions had sponsored fifty-five scholars, including funding to research and teach in Asia. See: “The Society—the First Decade 1962-1973.” Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, MSS 029. Box 8, Folder 34; “Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1963-1964.” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005; “Danforth Foundation Annual Report, 1964-1965” MSS 005.

¹⁵⁰ Hazen Foundation Biannual Report, 1959-1960.” Hazen Annual Reports, MSS 005. The Hazen Foundation had operated the Hazen Fellows program since 1943. The program funded Southeast Asian students pursuing graduate study in the United States. Hazen’s partnership with the Phelps-Stokes fund was in large part a straightforward geographic extension of the existing Hazen Fellows program.

methodological identity.¹⁵¹ In 1959, Jerald C. Brauer, then dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, wrote that the contemporary moment was an auspicious one for the history of religions, which promised to become not only a guiding light for religious studies but “one of the pre-eminent disciplines in university life.”¹⁵² That status was a direct result of the same historical developments named by Thomas:

“The world’s religions are everywhere resurgent. For the first time in modern history, Christianity, the predominant faith of the West, is faced by reinvigorated Eastern religions. This development can be explained only partially by the rising Eastern nationalism. The fact is that Western man cannot understand or appreciate the Asian peoples unless he has some knowledge and understanding of their religions. This in itself puts history of religions on a new footing in the modern university. It is no longer merely an interesting, esoteric, but respected pursuit. The history of religions is now necessary to apprehend our world situation and ourselves.”¹⁵³

For Brauer and others, the history of religions offered a number of advantages over existing approaches to the study of religion. First was its cosmopolitanism: for a field eager to widen its focus, history of religions provided the only expertise in religious traditions other than Christianity and Judaism. Equally important was the history of religions’ aura of scientificity. In the same volume in which Brauer’s preface appeared, Joseph M. Kitagawa, one of the subfield’s few practitioners in the United States, wrote that history of religions had three essential qualities: “a sympathetic study of

¹⁵¹ History of Religions first entered American universities at the end of the nineteenth century, promising a unified science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) capable of comprehending the nature of religion and mapping its historical variations. From 1890 into the 1920s, it continued to have a place in a small number of elite universities: at the University of Chicago, George Goodspeed and A. Eustace Haydon led a dedicated department of comparative religion, while at Harvard the ecumenical philosopher William Ernest Hocking sought a unified theory of the world’s religions from the 1920s into the 1950s. Even during its heyday, however, History of Religions depended on the mood of intellectual Protestantism for its existence. During the 1930s and 1940s, the flourishing of neo-Orthodoxy, coupled with the existential concerns of the war, created an environment ill-disposed to the history of religions, which withered as a result. See: Joseph M. Kitagawa, “Humanistic and Theological History of Religions with Special Reference to the North American Scene” in *Numen* 27.2 (December 1980): 198-221.

¹⁵² Jerald C. Brauer, “Preface,” in Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa, eds. *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), vii.

¹⁵³ Brauer, “Preface,” viii.

religion's other than one's own...an attitude of self-criticism, or even skepticism, about one's own religious background. And third is the 'scientific' temper."¹⁵⁴ These qualities made the history of religions particularly well-suited to facilitate the inclusion of the study of religion among the other humanistic disciplines of the university. In his 1963 volume *Religion, a Humanistic Field*, for instance, NCRHE fellow Clyde Holbrook adopted the language of the history of religions to demonstrate the suitability of religion to humanistic learning. Over recent years, he argued, religion scholars had convincingly proven that religion was not reducible to its confessional, or even theistic expressions, and thus that instruction in religion need not have an overt religious purpose. Against those who nevertheless saw indoctrination in every religion course, Holbrook appealed to the authority of religious phenomenology, which demonstrated that religion was a thoroughly human phenomenon: religion, he argued, indexed at once a fundamental quality of human experience and the structures through which that experience was articulated. "Conceived in these terms," i.e., the terms of religious phenomenology, "religion finds its principal aims of instruction and scholarship consonant with those of liberal education. Emphasis falls upon informative, appreciative, and critical purposes rather than upon the stimulation of devotional attitudes or the inducement to doctrinal conformity."¹⁵⁵

The edited volume *Religion*, published as a companion to Holbrook's book, reinforced the history of religions' exemplary role. Intended as a representative overview of the field of religion, the collection included six constituent fields: history of religions, placed first, followed by early Christianity, the history of Christianity, Theology, Christian Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion. Within this division, history of religions shouldered the study of all "non-Hebraic-Judaic-Christian

¹⁵⁴ Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America" in *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987): 3-26, 14-15.

¹⁵⁵ Clyde Holbrook, *Religion, a Humanistic Field* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 36-7.

religions” as well as religious studies’ humanistic pretensions. With the resurgence of history of religions, Philip H. Ashby wrote:

“No longer was religion solely in the province of the theologian or historian whose views issued primarily from the perspective of his own religious tradition and its accustomed categories...Religious phenomena that were familiar and strange, enticing and repellent, apparently structured and apparently chaotic, possibly ennobling and possibly debilitating, perhaps containing ultimate truth and perhaps nothing but fantasy—all were now to be approached as empirical fact without preconception of their value.”¹⁵⁶

In this way, history of religions effected a break with more confessional or theologically-minded iterations of the study of religion. Yet that break was less complete than its publicists would have preferred to admit. As different as it was in stated purpose and topical foci, the history of religions also recapitulated a number of features of religious studies as it had coalesced in the postwar years: its Christian norms, deep-set anti-materialism, and ethos of spiritual combat. Nowhere was that more evident than in the work of the subfield’s most famous practitioner. In the first issue of the journal *History of Religions*, published in 1961, Mircea Eliade conceded that religion was a historical and human phenomenon, and thus that its expressions must be studied within their economic, social, and cultural contexts. “There is no such thing as a ‘pure’ religious datum, outside of history,” he wrote. “Every religious experience is expressed and transmitted in a particular historical context.”¹⁵⁷ Yet that labor of contextualization was only preliminary to more vital forms of interpretation. Reminiscent of Paul Braisted and Edwin Aubrey years before him, Eliade maintained that religion superseded its mere historical or social determinations. As he explained in his preface to *Shamanism*, “although the historical conditions are extremely important in a religious phenomenon (for every human datum is in the last analysis a historical datum they do not wholly exhaust it [*ne*

¹⁵⁶ Philip H. Ashby, “The History of Religions,” in Paul Ramsey, ed. *Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 29-30.

¹⁵⁷ Mircea Eliade, “History of Religions and a New Humanism,” *History of Religions* 1.1 (Summer 1961): 1-8, 6.

l'épuise pas entièrement].¹⁵⁸ In his idiosyncratic language, every religious phenomenon was a “hierophany,” or manifestation of the sacred, a composite datum containing at once “some modality of the sacred” as well as the historical form in which that modality was revealed.¹⁵⁹ Methodologically, that two-part incarnational structure required a two-part approach on the part of the historian of religion.¹⁶⁰ First: to “integrate the results of ethnology, psychology, and sociology” with a single synthetic perspective. Second: to go beyond them, to “reveal the deeper meaning of all these religious phenomena, to illuminate their symbolism, and to place them in the general history of religions.”¹⁶¹ Only the historian of religion was capable of this, for only the historian of religion was willing to suspend the materialist assumptions of the human sciences and treat the religious phenomenon “*as a religious phenomenon [en tant que fait religieux]*”—on its own terms, and within its metaphysical premises.¹⁶²

Like his immediate predecessors in American religious studies (he arrived at the University of Chicago from France in 1956), Eliade linked the methodological and metaphysical, “conjoin[ing] this morphological understanding of history with an ontology that rejects the historical.”¹⁶³ Like those predecessors too, he politicized that link in ways resonant with the Cold War context in which

¹⁵⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1951. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xx; *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951), 9.

¹⁵⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (1959. London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 2; Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'Histoire des Religions* (Paris: Payot, 1959), 16.

¹⁶⁰ I use the term “incarnational” intentionally. As much as Eliade’s work is defined by its encyclopedic focus on non-Christian, “primitive” religions, it nevertheless takes the incarnation as the essential model for every phenomenon that it treats. Eliade tells us as much himself. Detailing the paradoxical structure of the hierophany in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, he writes that “one might even say that all hierophanies are simply prefigurations of the miracle of the Incarnation, that every hierophany is an abortive attempt to reveal the mystery of the coming of God and man.” Eliade, *Patterns*, 29 [38].

¹⁶¹ Eliade, *Shamanism*, xix [9].

¹⁶² Eliade, *Shamanism*, xxi [10].

¹⁶³ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Acknowledgements: Morphology and History in Mircea Eliade’s *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1949-1999), Part 2: The Texture of the Work,” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 80-100, 94.

he wrote. As Stephen M. Wasserstrom has written, Eliade conceived his scholarship and literary work in unmistakably militant terms, as weapons to be deployed in a cultural and religious battle for the modern West.¹⁶⁴ More specifically, the history of religions provided an antidote to the West's hypertrophied sense of historical consciousness, which denied the transcendental significance of human events and thus robbed human beings of the power to make meaning in the face of the "terrors of history." That historical consciousness first appeared with the advent of Judaism, according to Eliade, but it reached its logical extreme in modern philosophies of historicism—Marxism most notable among them.¹⁶⁵ At its most polarized, then, the cultural battle in which Eliade was engaged was one between the history of religions and Marxism. Indeed, if one purpose of the history of religions was to contribute to the emergence of a "new humanism, on a world-wide scale," Marxism was its primary antagonist. As Eliade contemplated elsewhere, "it could be that Marxism and the materialist interpretation of history were the last trial of man...To think like a materialist or Marxist means giving up the primordial vocation of man. Consequently, to disappear as man."¹⁶⁶ It would be a step too far to take Eliade as a simple synecdoche for religious studies as it entered the 1960s. He was, however, the most influential figure within a subfield that defined the public image and methodological agenda of North American religious studies for the following three decades, and that facilitated the transformation of religious studies into a respected, non-

¹⁶⁴ Stephen M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17-18.

¹⁶⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1949. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), xxiii. The link between Judaism and Marxism in Eliade's work deserves a much fuller treatment than I can give here. Among other noteworthy consequences, it should transform how we understand his supersessionist use of the term "Judeo-Christian," which he conjures in texts like *The Myth of the Eternal Return* to domesticate or dispel the specter of Judeo-Bolshevism specifically.

¹⁶⁶ Eliade, *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957-1969*, trans. Fred H. Johnson, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 86. Quoted in Anne T. Mocko, "Tracing the Red Thread: Anti-Communist Themes in the Work of Mircea Eliade," in Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, eds. *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 285-306, 287-88.

confessional academic field.¹⁶⁷ As such, it is significant that so much of the Cold War study of religion was reproduced in his work.

Significant in what way, though? What does that mean now for us? Until relatively recently, it has been a point of common knowledge that religious studies originated in 1963, when the Supreme Court's decision in *Abington v. Schempp* gave judicial imprimatur to teaching *about* religion as a legitimate academic enterprise. Over the last two chapters, we've witnessed a different history unfold. The quest for an academic, non-sectarian study of religion in the United States began as early as 1922, when Charles Foster Kent and the NCSR first organized in support of religion departments at public colleges and universities. By the time that *Schempp* was issued, that quest had largely succeeded. If anything, in fact, *Schempp* was a mark of that success, the resolution of a campaign that had already won the creation of religion departments in state universities across the country.¹⁶⁸ Those victories were not the product of processes of liberalization, however—certainly not in any unalloyed sense. In the four decades separating the respective foundings of the NCSR and AAR, the study of religion established a lasting niche in American higher education as an ideological state apparatus geared to the reproduction of a religiously marked American national identity. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, it pitched itself as a tool of social cohesion and spiritual regeneration, linking fears of ethnic radicalism with a campaign against educational secularization. During World II and the Cold War, in turn, religious studies positioned itself as a contributor to the United States' war on communism and the custodian of the nation's democratic religious character. Only sustained inculcation in the United States' "Judeo-Christian" heritage would ensure future

¹⁶⁷ Wasserstrom, op. cit., 3; Bruce Lincoln, "The (Un)Discipline of Religious Studies," in *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012): 131-136.

¹⁶⁸ As Imhoff puts it, "the dictum in *Schempp* is the expression of an existing position rather than the establishment of a new one." See Imhoff, "The Creation Story," 473.

generations' commitment to democracy, its proponents argued. And only religious studies was capable of performing that work.

It would be easy enough to accept this history and move on. It would be easy even to accept the extended version of that history as I've told it: that the Eliadean history of religions was a continuation, rather than departure from the midcentury study of religion and its Cold War ideological commitments. The Cold War is over, after all. So is the heyday of the Chicago School. Even granting the transformational significance of Cold War era funding sources for the growth of religious studies, it would be possible to maintain, as Donald Wiebe does, that "there is absolutely no indication that Cold War concerns with issues of national security or the protection of western interests ever took precedence over the intellectual integrity of research and scholarship in the field," and thus, that it isn't something we need to worry too much about.¹⁶⁹

In the course of the last two chapters, I've begun to address Wiebe's objection by investigating the extent to which ideologies of American religious nationalism, of which ecumenical anticommunism was only one, influenced the shape of religious studies in the period of the field's consolidation. This investigation has centered the public rhetoric and organizing work of religious studies' most outspoken public leaders, focusing in particular on the discourse of anti-materialism. As I've argued repeatedly, a polemical and highly mutable concept of materialism anchored the discursive matrix in which the study of religion flourished. Reappearing in the work of figures from Charles Foster Kent to John C. Bennett to Mircea Eliade, anti-materialism threaded together the scholarly, political, and metaphysical commitments of the field, defining at once its cultural vocation in American society and its claims to disciplinary integrity. What remains is to follow out the

¹⁶⁹ Donald Wiebe, "Religious Studies in North America During the Cold War," in *The Academic Study of Religion During the Cold War*, ed. Iva Doležalová, Luther H. Martin, & Dalibor Papoušek (New York: Peter Lang, 2001): 280.

consequences of that discourse in the present.¹⁷⁰ The Cold War history of the field may well be religious studies “repressed family secret,” that is, but the disclosure of that secret only matters to the extent that it addresses us in the accusative—as a problem whose symptoms are still with us, a problem we have yet to solve.¹⁷¹ Those symptoms are the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁷⁰ In addition, a fuller, if not to say adequate version of this argument would follow the influence of this rhetoric in discrete contexts of teaching and research, including careful studies of departmental curricula and comprehensive literature reviews of specific subfields, especially sociology of religions, the study of religion in America, and history of religions, the last of which I’ve broached in foregoing pages. For various reasons I was unable to conduct that kind of fine-grained analysis in this project. I hope to do so for future revisions of it.

¹⁷¹ McCutcheon, “Just Follow the Money,” 49.

Chapter Three

In the Name of Lesser Gods: Fetishism, Materiality, and the Dilemmas of History

“This is as much to suggest that perhaps what should be calling our critical attention above all in the history of a concept—or more properly, the history of the epistemic regime embodied by a concept—may be precisely what disappears or what becomes unrecognizable, rather than what finally comes to appear, or the question of the when, where, how, and why of such an appearance.”

—Tomoko Masuzawa, “Theory Without Method: Situating a Discourse Analysis on Religion”

“Method is the absolute, unique, supreme, infinite force, which no object can resist; it is the tendency of reason to find itself again, to recognize itself in every object.”

—G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*

Over the prior two chapters, I have argued that the study of religion achieved its institutional and intellectual niche in US higher education as an indispensable vector for the production of a normative paradigm of American national identity. Beginning in the immediate aftermath of World War I, as we have seen, advocates for the non-sectarian study of religion capitalized on fears of civilizational disintegration to argue for religion’s curricular importance, identifying instruction in religion as a vehicle for social cohesion and the reproduction of democratic virtues. During the Cold War era, in turn, religious studies made an even more durable connection with the ideological and material structures of American nationalism, positioning itself as a strategically significant contributor to the United States’ global war on communism—what in 1950 members of the Council on Graduate Studies in Religion euphemistically called “the current ideological struggle.”¹ Integral to this process was a multidimensional and highly flexible discourse of anti-materialism. Anti-materialism established the ideological and methodological parameters in which the study of religion

¹ University of Chicago. Office of the President. Hutchins Administration. Records, Box 15, Folder 1, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

flourished, providing religionists with a public-facing account of the discipline's cultural significance as well as a sophisticated methodological identity addressed to other academics.

This chapter shifts our attention away from the history of anti-materialism in US religious studies, attending instead to the widespread *adoption* of avowedly materialist perspectives among religion scholars beginning in the last two decades of the twentieth century. I do not provide an exhaustive genealogy of those perspectives, often grouped under the heading of the “material turn” in religious studies. Nor do I map the entire range of scholarly movements which the material turn has helped generate. Instead, I detail one narrow, but emblematic strand of theoretical reflection on materiality among scholars of religion: the resurgent discourse on the concept of the fetish.

Over the last ten years, the twin concepts of fetish and fetishism have become unlikely topics of interest for the study of religion. Defined by Charles de Brosses in 1760 as “the worship...of certain terrestrial and material objects,” fetishism has long been discredited as conceptually imprecise, empirically groundless, and politically reprehensible.² As Wyatt MacGaffey wrote of the concept in 1977, the notion of fetishism was “an embarrassment” to serious scholars: “It implied that African peoples were too immature to perceive the world correctly; intellectual error led them to the moral error, in Christian opinion, of Idolatry.”³ It is striking, therefore, that the fetish has not only reemerged, but that it has done so as a focal point of critical reflexivity along explicitly decolonial, materialist lines. In this novel capacity, the fetish and fetishism have served as organizing loci for a growing number of books and book chapters, essays, conferences, and courses, providing scholars with overlooked conceptual resources for historicizing the study of religion,

² Charles de Brosses, “On the Worship of Fetish Gods: Or, A Parallel of the Ancient Religion of Egypt with the Present Religion of Nigritia,” trans. Daniel H. Leonard in Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard, eds. *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 44-132, 45.

³ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Fetishism Revisited: Kongo ‘Nkisi’ in Sociological Perspective.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 47.2 (1977): 172-184, 172.

interrogating its categorical presuppositions, and articulating alternative understandings of religion irreducible to the term's traditional Eurocentric significations.⁴ By performing this set of functions, the fetish distills the premises and aims of the material turn in religious studies, concentrating in exemplary fashion the latter's account of the discipline's history, its analysis of the discipline's shortcomings, and its projected set of methodological correctives.

In this chapter I capitalize on that exemplarity, isolating the contemporary retrieval of the fetish as a privileged lens through which to historicize the material turn and examine its enduring theoretical tensions. I do so by contextualizing more recent writing on fetishism within a longer trajectory of disciplinary transformation. Specifically, I interpret the ongoing revival of fetish-talk against the backdrop of debates that roiled the discipline in the 1980s and 1990s amid the decline of Eliadean hermeneutics as religious studies' methodological center. Within that context, two commentators appropriated the fetish as a concept of interest for religious studies: historian of religion Charles Long and intellectual historian Tomoko Masuzawa. In the period of methodological

⁴ See, for example: J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Morris and Leonard, *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*; William Pietz, *The Problem of the Fetish*, eds. Francesco Pellizzi, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Ben Kafka (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022); David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); Jennifer Reid and David Carrasco, eds. *With This Root about My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020); Jay Geller, "Fetish/Fetishism/Fetishization" in Robert A. Segal, Kocku von Stuckrad, eds. *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (published online, 2016); J. Kameron Carter, "Anarchē; or, the Matter of Charles Long and Black Feminism," *American Religion* 2.2 (2021): 103-135; Rafael Vizcaíno, "Liberation Philosophy, Anti-Fetishism, and Decolonization," *Journal of World Philosophies* 6 (Winter 2021): 61-75; Sarah Hammerschlag, "A Poor Substitute for Prayer: Sarah Kofman and the Fetish of Writing," in Constance M. Furey, Sarah Hammerschlag, and Amy Hollywood, *Devotion: Three Inquiries in Religion, Literature, and Political Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021). One could add to this list recent translations of European volumes on fetishism, including: Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (1993; Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Hartmut Böhme, *Fetishism and Culture: A Different Theory of Modernity*, trans. Anna Galt (2006; Boston: de Gruyter, 2016); Alfonso Maurizio Iacono, *The History and Theory of Fetishism*, trans. Viktoria Tchernichova and Monica Boria (1985; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016). To put an exclamation point on this list, "fetish" has become sufficiently important that it merits inclusion in the forthcoming second edition of *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, a dramatic indication of its changing status in the field.

disorientation following the decline of the “Chicago School,” both Long and Masuzawa turned their attention to the fetish as a conceptual locus through which to undertake a critique of the Western study of religion and jettison the subject-position which it instantiates. They each did so, moreover, in conversation with the historicist transformation of religious studies then underway, adapting contemporaneous work on the fetish in anthropology and cultural studies to exorcise the study of religion’s colonialist history and articulate what both considered to be materialist positions in the field.

In neither case is this process seamless, however. Together, Long’s and Masuzawa’s interpretations of the fetish allow us to perceive a structural ambivalence between the fetish’s critical and constructive functions—an ambivalence that, as I will argue, redounds on the wider discourse concerning history and materiality in which both figures were participants. Following a brief survey of the literature on the fetish in the first part of the chapter, I turn my attention to Long and Masuzawa in turn. Reading Long’s uses of fetishism alongside his concurrent preoccupation with cargo cults, I argue that Long’s valorization of matter as a principle for the study of religion restates an imperializing Eliadean hermeneutic under the cover of its explicit disavowal. At the same time, however, Long’s relapse into the methodological comforts of morphology discloses an important insight, namely, that the problem of materialism is simultaneously a problem of historical consciousness—of the subjective positions we occupy vis-à-vis history and the uses to which we put it. In sections four and five, I explore that insight through the work of Masuzawa, leveraging her own discussions of the fetish to adumbrate an alternative mode of historical consciousness, and with it the premises of a distinct (if not entirely new) materialism.

I. The Problem of the Fetish

Recent writing on fetishism among religion scholars, as almost all writing on the topic in the last four decades, draws heavily from William Pietz's three essays on "The Problem of the Fetish," published in the journal *RES* over a three year period from 1985-1988. Pietz's three essays undertake a fundamental reassessment of the fetish, reconstructing the concept's history and articulating a general theoretical definition on that basis. In what has become the authoritative account, Pietz traces the genesis of the fetish to the "cross-cultural spaces of the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."⁵ Within this novel social formation, the idea of the fetish provided a conceptual means of managing the conflict between "radically heterogeneous social systems" and their inassimilable determinations of value.⁶ More specifically, the European accusation of African fetish-worship accounted for the difference between European and West African valuations of material objects by attributing this difference to an error on the African side—a basic miscalculation of the real value of objects rooted in a more fundamental misunderstanding of physical causality.⁷ The fetish thus catalyzed the "articulation of a theoretical materialism quite incompatible with the philosophical tradition" historically regnant in pre-colonial Christian Europe.⁸ In opposition to fetishism, European merchants and thinkers posited a uniform order of material causality unmodulated by cultural difference—a concept of nature which would become the basis for the natural sciences and capitalist exchange, as well as an ideological pillar of European imperialism.⁹

⁵ William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17, 5.

⁶ Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 7.

⁷ William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, III," in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105-124, 111.

⁸ Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 6.

⁹ This extends to the formation of the new human sciences of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including those of philology and ethnology on which the study of religion would be grounded. As Rosalind Morris elaborates in "After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation,

Pietz's account discloses both the centrality of the fetish-concept to the European philosophical tradition and the fragility of the order which this concept sustains. It is because of this twofold determination—at once indispensable and hopelessly brittle—that the fetish has drawn such critical attention, beginning in the early 1990s with the enthusiastic reception of Pietz's essays in anthropology and cultural studies. In her introduction to *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, published in 1993, Emily Apter emphasized precisely this dual character, hypothesizing that “fetishism appeals to disparate fields and sensibilities first and foremost because the etymological origins and philosophical history of the word itself point to the artifice (*facticus*) present in virtually all forms of cultural representation.”¹⁰ Apter here joins the word's derogatory connotations of fakery to the historical contingency of the European theoretical tradition. The analogy is discomfiting. Exploited in this way, the fetish—by definition a fabricated, material substitute for an original transcendent referent—unfixes the same systems of signification which it anchors as a term of denigration, revealing an aporetic indistinction between original and substitute, immanence and transcendence, or true and false consciousness. Precisely *because* of its discursive promiscuity and recursiveness, the fetish becomes a tool of critical renewal, naming a point of dislocation or even crisis in hegemonic discourses of philosophy, sexuality, political economy, and comparative religion. As a result, it acquires significant political potency. In Apter's words, the fetish “speaks in the name of colonized, lesser gods.”¹¹

Comparativism, Critique,” in Morris and Leonard, *The Returns of Fetishism*, from its initial generalization in de Brosses's 1760 *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches*, ‘fetishism’ performed a set of indispensable stabilizing functions, “at once designating an assemblage of practice and belief and, with it, an epistemic structure,” while simultaneously providing an anchor and medium for comparative practice and the “new kind of humanism” which that practice presupposed (133).

¹⁰ Emily Apter, “Introduction,” in Emily S. Apter and William Pietz, eds. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 2. *Fetish as Cultural Discourse* was one of three major collections of essays on fetishism between 1990 and 1998. The other two included a published volume and a special edition of a journal. See: *Etnofoor* 3.1 (January 1990); Patricia Spyer, ed., *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹¹ Apter, “Introduction,” 4.

The fetish serves a similar set of functions in the study of religion. Take J. Lorand Matory's recent monograph *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*. On the basis of William Pietz's canonical genealogy, Matory interprets the history of the fetish-concept as disclosive of the contingency of Eurocentric racial, religious, and intellectual hierarchies. By inhabiting the original scene of intercultural contact in which the fetish was named and generalized, he contests the myth that "European social theory is a disembodied and socially neutral articulation of truths about all times and all places."¹² Against that self-serving mythology, he musters a set of sources from the other side of colonial discourse: the "ideas embodied in Afro-Atlantic altars" and in the objects called fetishes.¹³ Matory isn't the only scholar to appropriate the fetish for such purposes. Sylvester Johnson, for instance, has recently rehabilitated fetishism as denoting an alternative assemblage of theory and social practice—what he calls a "materiality"—while Rafael Vizcaíno has adopted Pietz's history of the fetish to overcome Eurocentric renderings of Afro-Atlantic religions in liberation philosophy.¹⁴ Nor does Matory's strategy of reversal exhaust the concept's fecundity. For Sarah Hammerschlag, working with a different archive and different set of theoretical commitments, this same history provides an occasion to interrogate the subject-position of the Western scholar and its desire to "announce oneself as the true seeker of the real thing."¹⁵ In every case, renewed attention to the fetish enables a two-part project: the production of more robust genealogies of the study of religion and the recovery of alternative comportments which the discipline's dominant trajectory has suppressed.

¹² Matory, *The Fetish Revisited*, xvii.

¹³ Matory, *The Fetish Revisited*, xviii.

¹⁴ Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 58; Vizcaíno, "Liberation Philosophy, Anti-Fetishism, and Decolonization."

¹⁵ Hammerschlag, "A Poor Substitute for Prayer: Sarah Kofman and the Fetish of Writing," in *Devotion*, 113.

As much as it shares with earlier adoptions of the fetish-concept in other academic domains, however, the uptake of fetishism among scholars of religion has been modified in important respects by its specific disciplinary context. Two observations are germane here. The first is that the two concentrated moments of fetish-talk just discussed are separated by roughly two decades, give or take. Although virtually every new discussion of the fetish makes reference to Pietz and rehearses his history of the concept, that seemingly obligatory citation belies a noteworthy temporal lag between the first spike in discussions of fetishism in the early 1990s and the more recent spike in the 2010s. That on its own could be waved away—two decades is hardly an eternity in cycles of academic publishing. It could be, at least, except that that temporal lag coincides with more significant discontinuities in theoretical approach and disciplinary location. The first iteration of fetish-talk represented here by Pietz and Apter unfolded largely within the scholarly milieux of anthropology and cultural studies, and was saturated by Marxist and Freudian vocabularies. The latter iteration, by contrast, is marked by proximity to the study of religion and a stated hostility toward Marxism and psychoanalysis—precisely the traditions in which Pietz himself was trained.¹⁶ Matory is exemplary in this respect, too, but again he’s not alone. Bruno Latour, whose 1993 *Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* was translated into English in 2010 and has become a major touchpoint for contemporary discussions of the fetish, is equally pugilistic when discussing critical theory and its sources.¹⁷ Stefanos Geroulanos and Ben Kafka inadvertently testify to this gap in their introduction to the 2022 edited volume of William Pietz’s essays, where more recent writing on fetishism merits

¹⁶ At the time of writing his three essays on the fetish, Pietz was a doctoral student in the History of Consciousness program at UC-Santa Cruz, where he worked with Hayden White, James Clifford, and Angela Davis, among others. For more detail on Pietz’s doctoral education and intellectual trajectory, Francesco Pellizzi’s foreword in Pietz, Pellizzi, Geroulanos, and Kafka, *The Problem of the Fetish*.

¹⁷ Most (in)famously: Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” in *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (2004): 225-248.

no mention. Instead, they comment that excitement over the fetish-concept “seems to have peaked in the final decades of the twentieth century,” beginning in the 1970s and *ending* in the 1990s.¹⁸

We are dealing with two distinct discourses on the fetish, whose shared set of citations conceal a more fundamental set of discrepancies. Consequently, we cannot understand the contemporary surge of interest in fetishism among religion scholars by assimilating that interest to wider conversations in the human sciences—conversations from which religionists themselves were strikingly absent.¹⁹ Instead, we must interpret discussions of fetishism such as those of Matory, Johnson, and others as the outgrowth of endogenous developments within the study of religion over the last three decades.

How then did the concept of the fetish re-enter religious studies? In what contexts, and to what ends? References to the fetish or fetishism were rare among religion scholars in the last decades of the twentieth century, but they weren’t nonexistent. In a 2000 review of the recently-published *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, for instance, comparative religion scholar David Chidester invoked a spate of recent writing on fetishism as examples for “an emergent horizon for the study of religion that might be called a new materialism.”²⁰ Chidester opposed this “emergent horizon” to another, more prominent trajectory which he identified across *Critical Terms*’ twenty-two entries: a self-reflexive, philosophically inclined preoccupation with theology or its shadow, evident especially in editor Mark Taylor’s introduction. When surveyed as a whole, Chidester argued, “*Critical Terms* creates the initial impression that the basic interest of Religious Studies are cultural, literary,

¹⁸ Pietz, Pellizzi, Geroulanos, and Kafka, *The Problem of the Fetish*, xiv.

¹⁹ So absent in fact that Jay Geller, in a 1997 review of *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, wrote that the most notable thing about the volume for readers of *Religion* was that it had nearly nothing to say about religion at all, that it transposed the concept *out* of the history of religions entirely. See: Jay Geller, “Idols, Fetishes, and Foreskins: the Other of Religion,” *Religion* 27 (1997): 117-122.

²⁰ David Chidester, “Material Terms for the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.2 (2000): 367-79, 374.

aesthetic, and philosophical rather than political, social, economic or material.”²¹ In order to locate sources to “recast religion as a category for analyzing materiality,” Chidester looked elsewhere, naming William Pietz, unsurprisingly, but also: Arjun Appadurai, whose edited collection *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* tested the possibilities of a “methodological fetishism”; Peter Pels, whose cited essay “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy” had recently appeared in the volume *Border Fetishisms*; and Charles Long, who, after being introduced to Pietz’s work in 1990 by Jay Geller, had begun to emphasize the fetish in his work on interculturalism.²² In search of a “manifesto for a new materialism in the academic study of religion,” Chidester found the fetish to be its most vital conceptual resource.

Chidester’s invocation of the fetish discloses two crucial features of the concept’s revival in religious studies. First, Chidester makes clear that work on the fetish and fetishism was tightly linked to the concurrent spread of interest in material religion. Indeed, when elaborating on his “new materialism,” Chidester lists a set of topics which we can readily identify as interests of the wider material turn: “the body, the senses, gender, sexuality, location, exchange, power relations, and other material conditions.”²³ For Chidester at least, the concept of the fetish distilled the historical

²¹ Chidester, “Material Terms,” 373-4. Another, less charitable reviewer argued that the book would be of utility only to “that community of scholars who have already accepted most of the major postmodern assumptions that inform the book’s authors.” See: Frank G. Kirkpatrick, “*Critical Terms for Religious Studies* by Mark. C. Taylor,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38.2 (1999): 320-321, 321.

²² Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5; Peter Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy,” *Border Fetishisms*: 91-121. On Jay Geller’s introduction of Long to Pietz, see: Tatsuo Murakami, “After Fetishism: The Study of Religion in the Age of the Commodity,” in *With This Root About My Person*: 51-62, 51.

²³ Chidester, “Material Terms,” 374. Cf. “Editorial Statement,” *Material Religion* 1.1 (January 2005): 4-8, where the editors of the journal name “objects, spaces, images, and all the practices that put these items to use” as topics of interest (5); Kevin Schillbrack, “The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religions,” *The Journal of Religion* 99.2 (April 2019): 219-227: “Scholars of religion who make this turn focus primarily on the physical body, on ritual objects and spaces, and on the role of institutions and practices in shaping people’s embodied dispositions and modes of attention” (219); Sonia Hazard, “The Material Turn in the Study of Religion,” *Religion and Society: Advances in*

genealogy of the study of religion foundational to this turn, the methodological desiderata which it pursued, and the political consequences of its myriad interventions.

Second, his review sheds light on the state of the academic study of religion at the moment when the fetish became salient. In evoking an opposition between a theologically- and materially-minded study of religion, Chidester rehearsed a narrative of disciplinary change that had already become entrenched by the time of his review—so entrenched, in fact, that we find it in Mark Taylor’s introduction to *Critical Terms* as well. We discussed this narrative at length in the introduction, but to rehearse it quickly again: religious studies had long been dominated by Christian (in particular Protestant) scholars working in Christian institutions and equipped with Christian conceptions of religion. Enlivened by the creation of religion programs in public universities and the influence of radical anti-colonial movements, however, scholars of religion had begun to “rethink not only *which* religions were to be studied but *how* they were to be studied” as well.²⁴ The discipline, in short, was in a period of fundamental transformation—a transformation which both *Critical Terms* and Chidester’s review were effectively vying to direct.

In order to fully grasp that transformation, we have to throw one more development into the mix. In addition to the influence of anti-colonial movements and the entry of religious studies into public universities, the most immediate cause for the disciplinary disorientation in which *Critical Terms* was published was the collapse of Eliadean hermeneutics as North American religious studies’ methodological center.²⁵ Beginning in the 1970s and picking up steam through the 1980s and 1990s,

Research 4 (2013): 58-78: “Here, ‘material turn’ refers to the claim of material things—objects, practices, spaces, bodies, sensations, affects and so on—to a place at the center of scholarly inquiry” (58).

²⁴ Mark C. Taylor, “Introduction,” in Mark C. Taylor, ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 1-19, 12.

²⁵ William E. Paden makes this clear in his own review of *Critical Terms*, in which he clarifies both the value and distinctiveness of the volume by juxtaposition with the sixteen-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion*, published under Eliade’s editorship in 1986. Of *Critical Terms*, Paden writes, “The terms, on their own, shorn of given, a priori theoretic value, become the vehicles for reflection

a wide cohort of religion scholars undertook the immense task of dislodging Eliadean styles of interpretation from their place of preeminence in the discipline. Contributors to this revolt argued that approaches associated with the “Chicago School” in history of religions effectively exempted religion from anthropological, psychological, or sociological explanation. In doing so, they functioned principally to safeguard the disciplinary autonomy of religious studies—and with it the integrity of religion itself. For Donald Wiebe, among others, this amounted to a “theological agenda in the study of religion,” one which reproduced a Christian theological idealism in both its object and methods of study.²⁶ Against the perceived ahistoricism of the “Chicago School,” figures associated with new groups like the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) insisted on the salience of concrete historical data for understanding and, more controversially, explaining religious phenomena.²⁷ Often adopting the language of materialism, scholars across the field shifted collective attention from questions of religious meaning to the practices, objects, bodies, and economies through which such meanings are created and sustained.

These debates concerning the historicity of religion and its study constitute the backdrop against which recent writing on fetishism must be interpreted. In what Christian Wedemeyer calls the “unfilled void left in the study of religion” by the demise of phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches, the fetish entered the scene as a principle of methodological reorientation, reprising

and self-awareness, as though we had to start the world of religious studies all over again from linguistic scratch—after the banishment of the ostensibly overdetermining regime of ‘myth, ritual and the sacred.’” See: William E. Paden, “*Critical Terms for Religious Studies*,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11.2 (1999): 193-197, 195.

²⁶ Donald Wiebe, “Postulations for Safeguarding Preconceptions: The Case of the Scientific Religionist,” *Religion* 18 (1998): 11-19, 13.

²⁷ See, for instance: Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: the Discourse of Religion and Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 193-4; J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). On the formation of NAASR, see: Luther H. Martin and Donald Wiebe, “Establishing a Beachhead: NAASR, Twenty Years Later” in Luther Martin and Donald Wiebe, eds. *Conversations and Controversies in the Scientific Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 36-41.

(although in reverse) its once-foundational role.²⁸ The next three sections will scrutinize that reorientation in detail, first via the work of Charles Long. For Long, as we will see, engagement with the fetish-concept enacts a method of “crawling back” through the Western philosophical and scientific traditions. By returning to the colonial frontiers in which Western rationality originated, it becomes possible, according to Long, to bracket that rationality and retrieve alternative epistemic positions from the other side of the contact zone. The fetish thus constitutes a “new *arche*” for the study of religion—a new origin story and source of purpose for a field seemingly bereft of center. Whether and how the fetish can sustain that function are the questions to which we turn now.

II. Fetish, Matter, and the Forms of the World

Charles Long’s adoption of the fetish-concept in the 1990s was in many ways a natural extension of a scholarly project which he had assiduously pursued since the early 1960s. Trained as a historian of religion at the University of Chicago Divinity School under Joachim Wach, Joseph Kitagawa, and Mircea Eliade, Long had always been drawn to scenes of intercultural contact such as those in which the term “fetish” was coined. Within those scenes, his work dealt insistently with a set of themes now central to discussions of fetishism, and indeed the study of religion more widely: the exercise of colonial power, the production of modern epistemic categories, and the historicity of concepts of religion. In the introduction to his 1986 collection *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Study of Religion*, Long described the interpretation of religion as a distinctively modern discipline arising from the political and epistemic transformations associated with colonial contact. Anticipating accounts of the field’s history which have since become common, he there emphasized the “complex relationship between the meaning and nature of religion as a subject of academic study

²⁸ Christian K. Wedemeyer, “Introduction I: Two Scholars, a ‘School,’ and a conference,” in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xxv.

and the reality of the peoples and cultures who were conquered and colonized during the same period.”²⁹ Long’s work interrogates this relationship through studies of religion in sites of transculturation. In the modern world’s “hundreds of contact zones,” he writes, we witness the emergence of “new forms of language and knowledge, new understandings of the nature of human relations, and the creation and production of new forms of humanity community.”³⁰ Focus on these contact zones has political as well as intellectual significance, for in reconstructing the genesis of the West’s defining conceptual structures, we confront their contestation as well. This, in turn, suggests the silent presence of alternative trajectories of modernity. In the “interstices of this contact situation,” Long might say, other primordia can be apprehended.³¹

Pietz’s theorization of the fetish dovetailed neatly with this existing field of interests. Yet Long’s engagement with Pietz also occasioned a transformation of his project. Most importantly, it introduced materiality as a major preoccupation of Long’s work for the first time.³² If there is a single point unifying contemporary interpretations of Long’s interest in fetishism, it is this: that Long’s adoption of the fetish led to a systematic reinterpretation of his basic concepts and problematic within the language of matter/materiality/materialism. Tatsuo Murakami observes that Pietz’s essays led Long to reframe the problem of modernity *as such* as the “problem of modern materiality.”³³ Such a reframing fundamentally altered the center of gravity in his work, overlaying

²⁹ Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Study of Religion* (Aurora, CO: Fortress Press, 1986), 4.

³⁰ Charles H. Long, “Transculturation and Religion: an Overview” [2004] in *The Collected Works of Charles H. Long: Ellipsis* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018): 145-56, 149.

³¹ Charles H. Long, “Religion, Discourse, and Hermeneutics: New Approaches in the Study of Religion” [2007] in *Ellipsis*: 183-195, 186.

³² Though Long mentions matter and materiality in selected essays included in *Significations*, this constellation of terms does not occupy a central place in his work until after his encounter with Pietz.

³³ Tatsuo Murakami, “After Fetishism: The Study of Religion in the Age of the Commodity,” in Jennifer Reid and David Carrasco, eds. *With This Root About My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2020): 51-62, 51. Cf. J. Kameron Carter, who introduces Long’s interest in fetishism in the following terms: “Scattered

the organizing oppositions that had long interested him—“primitive civilized, colonizer/colonized, and more generally, the West/non-west other”—with the fundamental binary of “spiritual/material.”³⁴ Thus we find Long writing already in 1991, “in one way or another, all of our pressing problems might be subsumed under some notion of materiality. Whether we are talking about ecology, gender, or ethnicity, the issue of matter or materiality is to the fore.”³⁵

This new preoccupation with matter had consequences both for Long’s interpretation of history and the recuperative project which that history enabled. Through the period of time covered by *Significations*, Long had largely addressed problems of cultural contact through the framework of *interpretation*. Within that framework, what we see in colonial contact zones, for Long, is the unequal collision between opposed, integral frameworks of meaning-making. Take Long’s writing on Melanesian cargo cults, for one example. In a 1974 essay titled “Cargo Cults as Cultural Historical Phenomena,” Long drew on a growing anthropological literature concerning millenarian cargo cults in Papua New Guinea as a distillation of the interpretive problems posed in colonial encounter.³⁶ In cargo cults, Long witnessed the co-presence of a number of processes constitutive of modernity: the fact of intercultural contact, the production of a systematic, hierarchical interpretation of indigenous difference by Western colonial powers, and, crucially, the *simultaneous* production of indigenous counter-interpretations of this same encounter.³⁷ Though Long is attentive to the ways that

throughout Long’s writings, particularly those published after his signature work *Significations*...is a consistent and, I dare say insistent, line of argumentation about a new imagination of matter internal to which is a new *archē* of Being (human) inaugurated with the emergence of the Atlantic World.” See: Carter, “Anarchē,” 121.

³⁴ Murakami, “After Fetishism,” 53.

³⁵ Charles H. Long, “Matter and Spirit: A Reorientation” [1991] in *Ellipsis*: 345-47, 346.

³⁶ Charles H. Long, “Cargo Cults as Cultural Historical Phenomena,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 3 (September 1974): 403–14

³⁷ For the classical literature on cargo cults, see: F.E. Williams, *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf District* (New York: AMS Press, [1923] 1978); Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of “Cargo Cults” in Melanesia* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth* (New York: Blackwell, 1969). For critical evaluation of the term in Western anthropology, see: Lamont Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from*

economic, political, and military power structure this agonistic scene, his focus in this essay is nevertheless on questions of epistemology and hermeneutics. Generally speaking, Long there sees Western interpretations of indigenous religion operating through the figure of the primitive. At once simplistic, aberrant, and historically defunct, “primitivism” permits the Western observer to domesticate indigeneity by rendering it as anachronism, thereby inscribing it within a historical teleology culminating in the West. This teleology grounds the hierarchical systems of religious classification that recur in Western discussions of religion, from the limited model of supersessionism to more global taxonomies. For Long, cargo cults defy this model, inscribing the Western other in an indigenous framework of religious interpretation and thus reversing the order of signification which colonialism entails.

We’ll have occasion to return to Long’s writings on cargo cults later in the chapter. For now, it suffices to say that his early discussion of the phenomenon exhibits the centrality of semiotic questions in his pre-fetish work. How then did Long’s focus on the fetish alter this style of interpretation? In the first place, Long’s adoption of the fetish from Pietz transformed his historical analysis of modernity, reframing the genesis of the modern West in terms of a novel conceptualization of matter. From within the trading zones along the Gold Coast, according to this perspective, European merchants, missionaries, and observers helped produce a dualistic conception of the world as divided between two distinct domains: a supersensuous order of spirit, on the one hand, and a mechanistic system of nature, on the other. This understanding of nature depersonalized matter, rendering it an inert, qualitatively uniform substance whose sole reality consists in its

Melanesia and Beyond (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993); Nancy McDowell, “A Note on Cargo Cults and Cultural Constructions of Change,” *Pacific Studies* 11.2 (March 1988): 121-134. For a recent reclamation of the term that includes an overview of the term’s history, see: Ton Otto, “What Happened to Cargo Cults?: Material Religions in Melanesia and the West,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 53.1 (March 2009): 82-102.

exploitability—its “technological and commodifiable use-value.”³⁸ In doing so, it provided the metaphysical premises for the natural sciences as well as capitalist exchange.³⁹ The fetish constituted the basic antitype for this emerging idea of nature. In contrast to the latter’s systematicity, fetishism names a disordered form of thinking and degenerate system of social valuation, one that confuses the proper relationship between the orders of spirit and matter and ends up attributing spiritual efficacy to mundane material objects. This concept performed indispensable work for European commentators. When levied as an accusation, fetishism explained the heterogeneity of African systems of valuation in such a way as to affirm European intellectual and political-economic superiority. As Long describes it, “the notion of the fetish, taking place within the interstices of the economic ordering of the Atlantic world, becomes an almost perfect foil for the creation of a modality of matter that had no inherent value; the only value accruing to this form of matter was its exchange value.”⁴⁰ From what Pietz calls “a cross-cultural perspective of infinite degradation,” the European discourse on fetishism comes to define the meanings of right religion, science, economy, and sexuality, all hinging on the universal validity of what is in fact a highly idiosyncratic concept of matter.⁴¹

In this way the fetish constitutes what Long calls an alternative *arche* of modernity. His use of the Greek word is telling. In Long’s handling, the fetish functions both as a discrete moment of genesis and a germ-seed of the future. This multivalence indicates the second way in which Long’s interest in the fetish transforms his earlier mode of interpretation. When Long seizes on the fetish as an alternative *arche*, he not only recasts Eurocentric narrations of history in a more critical light; he

³⁸ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, II,” 38.

³⁹ Briefly: only by levelling the qualitative differences between numerically distinct objects does it become possible to trade commodities as equivalent repositories of value. The locus classicus for this process of abstraction remains Marx’s discussion of the value-form of the commodity in the first volume of *Capital*.

⁴⁰ Long, “Religion, Discourse, and Hermeneutics,” 188.

⁴¹ Pietz, “the Problem of the Fetish, I” 14.

simultaneously indicates a heretofore unrecognized trajectory for intellectual and political development. The fetish, by returning us to the primal scene of Western epistemology, calls our attention to other conceptualizations of matter, other paradigms of knowledge, and other modes of social organization. “There are other traditions in the world,” Long reminds us, “traditions of indigenous and colonized cultures, and traditions of creolizations, those traditions that I refer to as the ‘cultures of contact.’” Such cultures are not relics of a “mystical and hoary past,” despite what the language of *arche* might imply. In Long’s handling, instead, the term becomes a future-oriented magnitude—“an alternative vector of modernity” capable of sustaining an “alternative stylistics of knowledge” to those inherited from Europe.⁴²

What would be necessary to realize this potentiality is an alternative “imagination” of matter, to use Long’s repeated idiom. Over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, this template of imagination became central for Long, providing the lens through which he continued thinking the cluster of concerns surrounding fetishism, coloniality, and the study of religion. If the conceptualization of matter as inert substance had provided a key ideological premise for practices of domination, Long wagered, then it must be possible to reimagine matter as a technique of resistance. Within the field of religion, that meant using matter as the fulcrum for a reconstruction of the study of religion along decolonizing lines. Some elements of this project leap out immediately: a topical focus on colonization and its influence on the study of religion; abandoning the *a priori* privilege of European metaphysical positions; illuminating indigenous practices of counter-signification. Yet a number of questions impose themselves just as promptly: in what could an alternative imagination of matter consist, exactly? What would it mean to approach matter *not* as a uniform physical substance subject

⁴² Charles H. Long, “Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion: Outline for a new Orientation to Religious Meaning” in Jennifer I.M. Reid, ed. *Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the Work of Charles Long* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004): 167-180, 178-79.

to regular laws of causality? And how might such a concept of matter translate to methodological reformation in the study of religion?

Although Long nowhere provides a systematic elaboration of this “stylistics of knowledge,” we do find a number of useful indicators peppered across writings from the 1990s and 2000s. In “Religion, Discourse, and Hermeneutics,” for instance, Long revisits the earlier topic of cargo cults to describe the mode of exchange which a novel understanding of matter would entail. “It is clear,” he writes, “that matter and materiality have not lost their inherent value for the cargo cultist; while dominated by Western power, they have not totally succumbed to the Western notion of abstract instrumental value as the reigning mode of exchange.”⁴³ In “Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion,” in turn, he links this non-capitalist mode of exchange to an alternative epistemology, one for which matter would designate “the inherent power in life” rather than nature’s passivity.⁴⁴

Already in these two passages we see Long sketch the defining contours of an unfamiliar idea of matter as it arises from cultures of contact. That idea has three salient features. First is the language of repetition—“have not lost”; “opening again”—which communicates that whatever meaning Long wants to divine in matter is in some sense *anterior* to its Western signification, whether as stuff of exchange or object of manipulation. Second is the vitalist inflection which Long gives to matter. In place of matter’s connotations of bare physical substance, Long endows the term with *life*, a term that provokes one to envision matter as pulsing, active, even animate—predicates denied it by the natural sciences and philosophy.⁴⁵ Last is the repeated use of the word “inherent” to describe a value, meaning, or power innate to living matter. This usage targets the determination of matter as either use- or exchange-value native to the categories of capitalist political economy, suggesting a

⁴³ Long, “Religion, Discourse, and Hermeneutics,” 189.

⁴⁴ Long, “Indigenous People,” 178-9.

⁴⁵ There are of course noteworthy exceptions to this, an indication that perhaps Long’s rendering of the Western intellectual tradition, often rendered simply as “the Enlightenment,” is not as finely textured as it might be.

modality of material existence resistant to processes of valorization. Together, these characteristics provide a rough draft of the concept of matter which Long's use of the fetish brings into view. In provisional terms, we might say that this concept of matter, animated by a diverse range of indigenous theoretical and ritual practices, restores to matter a fundamental, underlying vitality that traverses dualistic distinctions of spirit/matter and restores to the world a structure of unity effaced in the epistemology and modes of production of the West.

These are helpful guidelines, but they remain gestural. Moreover, they do not tell us why Long singles out the faculty of *imagination* as our point of access to matter, or what the characteristics of that faculty are. In his 2000 essay "Mircea Eliade and the Imagination of Matter," however, Long gives a more sustained presentation of imagination as a methodological technique. Here, he goes beyond allusions toward various "alternatives," conducting a replicable interpretation of matter that gives the concept considerably greater substance. It's for that reason that this essay has been the focal point for the most ambitious constructive appropriation of Long's understanding of matter—that of J. Kameron Carter, who mines the text for "counter-creative reimaginings of matter that are anarchic from the reigning terms of order."⁴⁶ For Carter, Long's reading of Eliade provokes an encounter with the opacity of black religion that shatters the racialized and sexuated significations of matter endemic to the West. By running up against the limits of representation, the imagination of matter which Long draws from Eliade points beyond the alternative *arche* represented by the fetish to "an-archic" poetics nurtured by non-representable modes of existence.⁴⁷

Like Carter, I'm interested in the limits which Long's essay confronts, and how his imagination of matter attempts to represent that which by definition escapes techniques of representation. I interpret these limits very differently, however. Where Carter reads Long as

⁴⁶ Carter "Anarchē," 105. See also J. Kameron Carter, *The Anarchy of Black Religion: A Mystic Song* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).

⁴⁷ Carter, "Anarchē," 108.

enabling access to a quasi-transcendental anarchy underwriting our epistemic, religious, and representational orders, I argue the opposite. Long's effort to unveil the "life and integrity of matter" does not generate a new orientation to the world, strictly speaking. What it discloses, instead, is the insoluble ambivalence of the very project which the "imagination of matter" names.⁴⁸

Long's essay takes the form of an extended rereading of Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. His approach mirrors the systematic structure of Eliade's opus itself, which follows a logic of descent from the most to least universal cosmic forms before passing on to the symbols that mediate the religious expressions of discrete societies. Long focuses principally on the primordial religious experiences of natural forms such as those of sky, moon, sun, water, and stone. It is in these experiences, for Long, that human beings stand in their most immediate relationship with the forms of nature, their consciousness being directly determined by the intuition of the world. An example may be useful. Early in his chapter on "The Sky and Sky Gods," Eliade prefaces his empirical descriptions of historical sky-cults with a discussion of the "religious significance of the sky as such."⁴⁹ "There is no need to look into the teachings of myth to see that the sky itself directly reveals a transcendence, a power and a holiness," he writes. "Merely contemplating the vault of heaven produces a religious experience."⁵⁰ That experience has a structural isomorphism with the sky itself. Religious interpretations of the sky, that is, share with the sky the essential characteristics of transcendence, infinity, and restraint. It would be wrong in fact to call these interpretations at all: "such contemplation is the same as revelation."⁵¹ Eliade's description of stone hierophanies (a description reproduced by Long) evinces a similar pattern: "Its strength, its motionless, its size and its strange outlines are none of them human; they indicate the presence of something that fascinates,

⁴⁸ Carter, "Anarchē," 121.

⁴⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), 38.

⁵⁰ Eliade, *Patterns*, 38.

⁵¹ Eliade, *Patterns*, 38.

terrifies, attracts and threatens, all at once.”⁵² This sentence itself is materially indicative of the structure of the hierophany. With incredible economy of language, Eliade moves immediately from the truism that stones are hard to an insight concerning the inner structure of the sacred and our religious experience thereof. In confronting the hardness of stone, even secondhand via Eliade’s text, we undergo an experience of the *mysterium tremendum*, and with it encounter a universal modality of the sacred made manifest in the stone’s natural form.

What these descriptions help us perceive, according to Long, is a “primary and primordial intuition of matter.”⁵³ That in itself is a surprising claim, for it makes the unfashionably universalist argument that human beings share a basic structure of religious intuition dictated less by history than by a common experience of nature. It opens onto an even more contentious idea, however. For Long, this structure of intuition does not produce a Kantian insight concerning the transcendental categories of perception or understanding; it demonstrates instead a fundamental ontological unity between matter and human consciousness:

“the specific intuition of human consciousness is always correlated with an *a priori* form of the world. It is the universality of matter itself in all of its several forms, rather than simply the inner working of the human consciousness epistemologically or psychologically which is the source of the religious consciousness. Mind and phenomena go together. The Kantian epistemology which has ruled our knowledge of ‘things-in-themselves,’ leaves us with the abstractions of consciousness proceeding from the vague intuitions and traces of the things-in-themselves, those things we can never know. For Eliade the very structure of the religious consciousness is predicated on a form of the world which is present as a concrete form of matter.”⁵⁴

Drawing on Eliade’s comparatively restrained descriptions of discrete natural hierophanies, Long here generalizes the revelatory symbolic structure of sun, moon, or stone cults to describe

⁵² Eliade, *Patterns*, 216; cited in Charles H. Long, “Mircea Eliade and the Imagination of Matter” [2000] in *Ellipsis*: 117-127, 118.

⁵³ Long, “Mircea Eliade,” 119.

⁵⁴ Long, “Mircea Eliade,” 119.

matter *as such*. As with those other religious symbols, the symbol matter constitutes an undifferentiated unity of the conceptual sign “matter” and its signified—matter itself, matter as such, the transcendent referent to which the sign aspires. As such, the symbol “matter,” as opposed to the mere sign, bypasses the epistemic difficulties of signification altogether. One could not fabricate a more striking point of opposition with Long’s earlier work, which dealt so centrally with problems of semiotics that *Significations* included as an epigraph Ferdinand de Saussure’s dictum that “the bond between signifier and signified is arbitrary.” The symbol, no mere sign-structure, unifies life and representation within a single, organic form, making palpably present what non-symbolic language (signification) always defers. In the process, it also unifies the disparate faculties of consciousness, such that the symbolic *imagination* of matter dictates and encompasses matter’s rational *comprehension* as well.⁵⁵

What does this mean for us? Epistemically speaking, the ramifications are of epochal significance. As Long’s negative allusion to Kant indicates, symbolic imagination overcomes the distinction between things as they appear to us and things-in-themselves, permitting knowledge of the latter without historical or cognitive mediation. Inasmuch as Long takes Kantianism as a synecdoche for the intellectual comportment of the West, we can extrapolate further: Long’s logic of the symbol, by asserting the necessary link between sign and signified, mind and world, *undoes* the process of abstraction constitutive of Western philosophy and, by virtue of the causal links asserted earlier, of capitalist exchange as well.⁵⁶ In this way, “the rediscovery of the life of matter as a

⁵⁵ On the structure of the symbol and its difference from the Saussurean model of the sign, see: Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): 187-228.

⁵⁶ By definition immune to the differentiation of the object into concrete thing and bearer of value, the symbol is uncommodifiable. It demarcates a domain of objectivity and experience utterly resistant to abstraction, equivalence, and circulation, coming to serve as the unlikely premise of something like a non-capitalist use-value economy, in which the value of an object would in some way be coextensive with the object itself. This ideal of a use-value economy has had a long life in certain strands of Marxism, and more recently in academic anthropology. For perhaps the most

religious phenomenon” endows matter with an ontological significance comparable only to the Sacred itself. Not merely a distinctive style of religiosity, the “life of matter” denotes an alternate structure of knowledge, sociality, and indeed being as such, irreducible to the “dehumanizing and terroristic meaning of history.”⁵⁷

For J. Kameron Carter, the engagement with Eliade in this text helps produce an utterly novel, “*an-archic*” account of matter, one that interrupts the totalizing intellectual and political structures of Western modernity. Perhaps. But we might do well to question just how anarchic this conceptualization is, exactly, how novel it is, and whether it’s capable of sustaining the political purposes which it is being asked to bear.⁵⁸ To do so, I want to shift our attention away from Long’s explicit discussions of materiality, looking instead to his writing on a closely related concept: cargo cults. Already a topic of interest in the early 1970s, cargo cults almost invariably accompany Long’s invocations of the fetish in his writings on materiality. Indeed, the topic of cargo cults constitutes one of two “twin polestars” organizing Long’s materialist interpretation of contact—the other of course being the fetish.⁵⁹ Long tells us as much himself. In a 2008 address to the American Academy of Religion, he narrated his interest of the terms as essentially continuous, recasting his interest in cargo cults as anticipating the account of religious materiality which we find in Pietz.⁶⁰ As much as the fetish modifies Long’s project by centering problems of matter and demoting questions of

important instance, see Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁵⁷ Long, “Mircea Eliade,” 119.

⁵⁸ One possible direction would be to interrogate the supposed innovation of Long’s anti-Kantianism. From a certain perspective, attempting to traverse the Kantian distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumenon* appears to be a major transgression of the defining epistemic premises of modernity. From another perspective, European philosophy has done virtually nothing else since 1781. The nature and purposes of Long’s project might look very different if we put him alongside Fichte, Schiller, Schelling, and Hegel in addition to fetishists and cargo cultists.

⁵⁹ David Chidester, “Mapping Oceans: Charles H. Long, Colonialism, and the Study of Religion,” in *With This Root About My Person*, 4.

⁶⁰ Charles H. Long, “How I Changed My Mind or Not,” in *Ellipsis*: 417-424, 420.

signification, then, it does so within a theoretical framework predating Long's interest in fetishism by more than two decades. His interpretation of cargo cults, therefore, offers a particularly fruitful opportunity to re-examine his adoption of the fetish and the imagination of matter which it enables. Such is the task of the following section. By interpreting Long's fetish within the longer trajectory of his writing on cargo cults, we can pin down exactly what is at stake in his reclamation of religious materiality, and what kind of interpretive position it generates for the study of religion.

III. The Secret of the Cargo

Long's earliest and most important engagement with the religious phenomenon known as cargo cults comes in the essay "Cargo Cults as Cultural Historical Phenomena," cited earlier in this chapter as exemplary of his interests in interpretation. Initially delivered as the 1973 Presidential Address to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religions, the essay identifies cargo cults as what Long would later name a "paradigmatic basis for the 'origin' of a modern meaning of religion."⁶¹ In the address, Long emphasizes the heterogeneity of cargo cults to Western concepts of religion. The cargo cult, he writes, is a "specific type of religious experience. It is specific in its manifestations...specific again in its precise definition of salvation and cargo, and it is again specific because it occurs at a point of cultural contact, such contact defining a disequilibrium between the cultures involved."⁶² The language of disequilibrium is crucial for Long, alerting us to the essentially dialectical character of the dynamic in question. Dialectical, that is, in the sense that what initially appears as an absolute opposition between two integral cultures gives way in the process of transculturation to a relative contradiction jointly mediated by the respective conceptual structures of either party. That process of mutual mediation can in turn generate new, syncretic cultural

⁶¹ Charles H. Long, "Understanding Religion and its Study" (2018), in *Ellipsis*, 290.

⁶² Long, "Understanding Religion and its Study," 290.

identities—a crucial possibility for Long—though it also produces new oppositions, including that between the retrospectively reified positions of ‘native’ and ‘Westerner.’⁶³ The epistemological and political possibilities implied by this account of transculturation are of course the focus of Long’s later engagement with the fetish. In this earlier essay, however, he helpfully narrows the significance of this dialectic by insisting on its *religious* character, a classificatory move that pulls us out of the wider field of dialectical thinking into the domain of Eliadean hermeneutics and its “dialectic of hierophanies.”

It’s at this point that we can begin to work out the significance of Long’s later reliance on Eliade in his imagination of matter. Implicitly invoking his dissertation advisor alongside Gerardus van der Leeuw, Long first asserts as an axiom that all religious experience is concerned with a “Somewhat” that takes the form of a “*highly exceptional and extremely impressive ‘Other.’*”⁶⁴ In interpreting the cargo cult as a religious phenomenon, therefore, we have to ask what “Somewhat” constitutes the object of the cult, and how that object confronts the cargo cultist specifically as an Other. “From the point of view of the indigenous culture,” he answers, “the vague somewhat is that scientific, industrialized Western culture with its religious ideology,” represented in the form of a personal Other by the Europeans themselves. In encountering the European, then, the future cargo cultist is confronted with a quasi-divine Other, whose appearance is “subsumed under an indigenous structure of apprehension” in such a way that renders that Other comprehensible while simultaneously effecting a profound alteration in the indigenous religious culture.⁶⁵

⁶³ For Long, it is important that we always remember that “West” and “indigene” do not predate contact—they are not essential identities that first exist and then come into conflict. Rather, as Jay Geller has remarked, the problematics of contact are always “anterior to categorization.” See: Jay Geller, Long Contact with *Significations*” in *With This Root About My Person*, 17.

⁶⁴ Long, “Cargo Cults,” 405.

⁶⁵ Long, “Cargo Cults,” 405.

In this way, Long transposes the Eliadean dialectic of the sacred into the relationship between European and indigene. Such an analogy had already been suggested by Eliade himself, who in the first issue of *History of Religions* (a volume to which Long also contributed an essay) adapted Rudolf Otto's conception of the sacred as the *ganz Andere* to describe the historian of religion's encounter with primitive cultures, glossing that encounter as a meeting "with 'the foreign,' the unknown, with what cannot be reduced to familiar categories—in short, with the 'wholly other.'"⁶⁶ This transposition has multiple consequences within Long's short essay. In the first place, it permits Long to recognize cargo cults as an authentic vector of modernity. Although Long's imposition of Eliade's schema may appear to relegate Melanesian cargo cultists to a secondary position with respect to a transcendentalized West, the initial effect of its application is instead to assign indigenous culture the capacity for historical fabrication, the power to *make* history rather than simply suffer it. Moreover, insofar as this capacity is itself grounded in an independent cultural system, it inscribes the "vague Somewhat of Power" represented by the European within a properly indigenous dialectic of mythic past and historical present, thereby metabolizing the figure of the European on indigenous terms.

Yet what is this indigenous culture informing the cargo cultist's creative appropriation of European contact? And what kind of resistance does it actually enact? When we examine Long's interpretation of his chosen anthropological reports, we find very little of the culturally specific language of the Melanesians. What we discover instead is a pronounced tendency toward generalization. When Long pivots to discussing the cultural background that shaped cargo cultists' reception of Western culture, for example, he does so by somersaulting into a universal comparative

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," *History of Religions* 1.1 (Summer 1961), 3. See also: Mircea Eliade, "Cargo Cults and Cosmic Regeneration" in Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed. *Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970): 139-143.

register, writing of a religious expectation of the return of a *deus otiosus* common to religions across the globe, including the “so-called higher religions of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.”⁶⁷ On the basis of this commonality, he continues:

“The coming of Europeans has only intensified this original notion of return and renewal. Within the non-European primitive cultures, this return and renewal was localized within the tribal unity and was interpreted in cosmic rather than historical terms. It was one of the cycles of the eternal return, a mode of renewing the cosmos and time...The Western impact on the primitive cultures of the world should be seen from the point of view of this mode of apprehension.”⁶⁸

In this passage, Long subsumes the cultures of Melanesian islanders—themselves famously heterogeneous—into the general taxon “non-European primitive cultures,” a grouping defined by an emphasis on tribal unity and a non-linear experience of temporality as perpetual repetition of mythic archetypes. He thereby subordinates his concern with the specificity of cargo cults to a universal religious morphology, which dictates *a priori* the forms in which any particular religious phenomenon can appear. Extensive citations of anthropological material notwithstanding, Long approaches the phenomenon of cargo with the intuitive method of the historian of religions, as defined by his teacher and colleague: “to reveal the deeper meaning of all these religious phenomena [*nous révéler le sens profonde de tous ces phénomènes religieux*], to illuminate their symbolism, and to place them in the general history of religions.”⁶⁹

By intuiting the general meaning of cargo cults in line with the overarching patterns of ‘primitive’ cultures, Long transforms the empirical phenomenon at issue into one localization of a universal religious type. In the process, he universalizes the inter-cultural contestation which cargo cults represent. What first appeared as an empirically unique case of transculturation becomes a

⁶⁷ The concept of the *deus otiosus* figures prominently in Long’s dissertation “Myth, Culture, and History: An Inquiry into the History of West Africa,” Ph.D. diss., (University of Chicago, 1962).

⁶⁸ Long, “Cargo Cults,” 406.

⁶⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xix; *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l’extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951), 9.

quasi-metaphysical conflict between the historical consciousness of the modern West and the cosmic consciousness of the New Guinean. Here too the terms of analysis are provided beforehand, for the conflict which Long discovers is a spiritual struggle between modern historical consciousness and cosmic religious consciousness which Eliade evokes throughout his published corpus.⁷⁰ When we read Long's address alongside Eliade's aforementioned 1961 essay in *History of Religions*, it's difficult to avoid the impression that Long's discussion of cargo cults is in part the elaboration of a research itinerary suggested by Eliade himself. That itinerary would be to fulfill the "true cultural function" of *History of Religions* by initiating a global intercultural dialogue, one intended to provoke in turn the emergence of a "new humanism, on a world-wide scale."⁷¹ The echoes of that project recur in the themes, concepts, and general tenor of Long's address, from his reliance on the idea of archaic temporality to his invocations of a spiritual crisis of the West, the latter signaled by oblique references to the "terror of history" and the "creation of new human beings, neither New Guineans nor Westerners."⁷² Even Long's choice of topic signals this influence, taking up his colleague's prior identification of cargo cults as a privileged example disclosive of the spiritual power inhering in "primitive religious movements."⁷³

Long's work in this address cannot be identified *wholly* with Eliade, as we'll shortly see. Yet there is substantial continuity between the two in their shared analytic and stated aims. This continuity is worth emphasizing, for it contradicts Long's effort to leverage the "acentric and seemingly anomic situation" witnessed in the phenomenon of cargo cults as a means of provoking a similarly anomic situation in the human sciences, one which would permit the radical

⁷⁰ See, for instance: Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 156.

⁷¹ Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," 3.

⁷² Long, "Cargo Cults," 411.

⁷³ Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," 6.

provincialization and perhaps revision of the epistemic, religious, and political order of Western domination.⁷⁴

In what way? Even if we wince at the midcentury history of religions' anachronistic language, is it not still the case that his discussion of cargo cults provincializes Western patterns of interpretation and denaturalizes its normative religious orientation? This may be true up to a point, but only if we specify what we mean by the West, and what comes in its place. If we follow out the consequences of this kind of engagement with non-Western cultures in Eliade's work, for instance, we find that the figure of "archaic" or "primitive" religion is less a mechanism for theoretical decolonization than a concealed means of reasserting the interpretive authority of the Western scholar-subject. More specifically, in attributing to "archaic man" a religious consciousness "defined," as Tomoko Masuzawa writes, "by his singular—'monolithic'?—preoccupation with the *arche*," Eliade establishes a vicarious point of contact with the irreducible, transhistorical origin of religion.⁷⁵ Through the historical reconstruction of "archaic" or "primitive" religion, that is, it becomes possible to speak authoritatively about the Sacred itself.⁷⁶

What does this project mean for "archaic man," or in this case, the cargo cultist? As we've seen in Long's essay, history of religions' characteristic focus on non-Western religious forms intends to facilitate the recognition of the capacity for creative, history-making action in non-

⁷⁴ Long, "Cargo Cults," 412.

⁷⁵ Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 167.

⁷⁶ There's significantly more to be said about this method and how exactly it achieves this result. For a concise presentation of the method of Eliadean history of religions, see Eliade's preface in *Shamanism*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xix; *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951). For two major critiques of Eliadean morphology that are influential for my own interpretation, see: Jonathan Z. Smith, "Acknowledgements: Morphology and History in Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1949-1999), Part 2: The Texture of the Work," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 80-100; Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, especially: 162-176.

Western cultures. This is the premise for Long's interpretation of the latter as "modalities of modernity" distinct from that of the West. This history-making activity is of a curious sort, however, for in Long's work as much as Eliade's it consists less in making history than annulling it. The creativity of the cargo cultist ultimately consists in the "abolition of time" as we think of it, accomplished "through the imitation of archetypes and the repetition of paradigmatic gestures."⁷⁷ Strangely enough then, the historical creativity of "archaic man" consists in their total *lack* of historical consciousness, at least as we conceive it. This leads to an even more curious conclusion: that the creative culture of New Guinean cargo cultists has no historical meaning for them. The anomic interpretation which Long attributes to them has meaning *only* for the Western observer who is capable of viewing these phenomena historically, which is to say outside of the repetition of mythic archetypes that forms the cargo cultists' experience of temporality.⁷⁸ As a result, the scene of cultural contact that supposedly exceeds and delimits Western structures of comprehension is reinscribed as a conflict internal to the West—that between the West's claim to absoluteness, on the one hand, and the intolerable historicity of the order on which that claim is premised, on the other.

I've relied mostly on Eliade's work in making this point, but Long's conclusion to the "Cargo Cults" address effects the same act of inscription. Bringing his discussion home, he writes: "Just as the study of non-Western and especially primitive religious expressions gave us not only an objective view of the life of others, at the same time this so-called objective view told us something about the inner life and subjectivity of the investigator."⁷⁹ What the study of non-Western religious expressions announces, specifically, is an experience of alienation at the heart of Western culture, the effect of which is that "there is no longer that privileged position that is the West or America."⁸⁰ All

⁷⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 156.

⁷⁸ Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime*, 167.

⁷⁹ Long, "Cargo Cults," 413.

⁸⁰ Long, "Cargo Cults," 413.

well and good, except that this alienation, as he says, has less to do with the empirical non-Western other than with the cataclysms resulting from the redoubling of Western historical consciousness on itself. What else are we to make of Long's subsequent elaboration? "Just as the explorations of Westerners from the fifteenth century to the present violently forced millions of human beings and hundreds of other cultures into the dangerous and terrifying reality called history, we are experiencing the descent of America into the reality of the myth; for the Westerners, history-making reality has lost its effectiveness."⁸¹ It would be possible of course to interpret this as the product of contact, as the belated blowback of colonialism on the West. Even if that's the case, however, that ricochet is thinkable for Long only as the result of a process always already underway in Western consciousness—"the impact of the accretions of the West upon the West"⁸²—a paraphrase of Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis that "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology."⁸³

The reduction of religion's historicity through the intermediary of "primitive" or "archaic" man entails one final corollary. While other scholars, preoccupied with the "admittedly urgent and indispensable work of collecting, publishing, and analyzing religious data," never rise above the historically and geographically delimited view that such isolated data can provide, the historian of religion distinguishes themselves by a panoramic perspective corresponding to the universality of their object.⁸⁴ That is, by positing a universal religious object irreducible to its sociological, economic, or political contexts, they simultaneously posit their own interpretive position as equally universal, equally irreducible. In this way, "historiographical consciousness" is at once avowed and superseded—avowed as a significant trajectory of the West, to be sure, and as the necessary prelude

⁸¹ Long, "Cargo Cults," 413.

⁸² Long, "Cargo Cults," 413.

⁸³ Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xviii.

⁸⁴ Mircea Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," 2.

to morphological interpretation, but superseded by the historian of religion, whose privileged intuition of Being, gained via the intercession of “archaic man,” permits the reconciliation of individual autonomy and cosmic consciousness necessary for a “new human dimension...making its first gentle gesture.”⁸⁵

The interpretation of “primitive” or “archaic” religious orientations that Long here performs has as its ultimate function the displacement of Western historical consciousness—not however by decolonizing modes of thought from the periphery so much as by a kind of transhistorical religious consciousness already identified and systematized by the discipline of comparative religion. That process involves, in successive stages, the transposition of the paradigm of absolute alterity into the encounter with the empirical other, the correlate reification of that empirical other *qua* Other, and the conceptual abstraction of that alterity from its all-too-recognizable human bearer. Through the disciplinary apparatus of the history of religions, that alterity then becomes exploitable as a source of knowledge, as well as an inoculation against the corrosive effects of historicization or critique.

In the opening epigraph to this chapter, Tomoko Masuzawa enjoins us to attend to “what disappears, or what becomes unrecognizable” in the history of a concept. Up to this point, I’ve done the opposite, asking after the mode in which the fetish reappeared within the study of religion—its “when, where, how, and why,” in Masuzawa’s words. In the course of that investigation, we’ve seen that the fetish-concept emerges in a distinctive way in the study of religion beginning in the 1990s. It does so among a relatively limited group of historians of religion, including Charles Long and David Chidester, and facilitates a materialist, decolonizing reorientation of the study of religion following the decline of phenomenological approaches in the field. Since that time, other scholars have taken up the project initiated by Long. Within the study of Black religion in particular, contemporary scholars including J. Kameron Carter and J. Lorand Matory, albeit in different ways, have drawn

⁸⁵ Long, “Cargo Cults,” 414.

from Long's discussions of the fetish constructive concepts of matter that push the limits of the disciplinary transformation known broadly as the "material turn." When, where, how, and why.

What then disappears? What becomes unrecognizable in the course of the fetish's constructive rehabilitation? One major thread that stitches together the texts and thinkers discussed in this chapter is that the fetish permits a radical decentering of the subject-position of the West: its authority, its epistemic or taxonomic categories, its characteristic modes of questioning, and the normative idea of the human which it enforces. Such is the explicit purpose of Long's work, as we've seen. So too does it define other writing on the fetish which I've mentioned. When J. Lorand Matory describes the forms of social organization instantiated by fetishes, he does so by opposing them to the hierarchical "*distinction* between the subject and object" that governs Enlightenment thought.⁸⁶ In contrast to the latter, the practices of fabrication and exchange that characterize fetish religion instantiate a distributed form of subjectivity marked by embeddedness in networks of human, nonhuman, and material actants. The ideal Cartesian subject disintegrates, dissolved into the circuits that have always already constituted it.⁸⁷ Matory himself remains skeptical, if at times unevenly so, about affirming either account without qualification. Others have been less circumspect, including J. Kameron Carter, who breaks with Long's account of matter *only* in his desire to rid Long's concept of its residual humanism.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Matory, *The Fetish Revisited*, 4; 165

⁸⁷ On this point, Elizabeth Pérez makes the interesting suggestion in her contribution to a retrospective roundtable on J. Lorand Matory's *Black Atlantic Religion* that Matory's work meets the demand for post-Eliadean comparison. See: Elizabeth Pérez, "Toward an Inventory of Influence: Biography and Belonging in Sustained Dialogue with *Black Atlantic Religion*," *Journal of Africana Religions* 6.1 (2018): 104-113, 106-108.

⁸⁸ Carter, "Anarchē," 134. We might note the way this echoes Sonia Hazard's call, discussed in this dissertation's introduction, for scholars of material religion to abandon the subject as a foundational category in favor of seeing "how real things really work in reality" (Hazard, "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," 66).

The risk in such projects is that when the subjective position of interpretive mastery disappears it is not so much abandoned as obscured. This is exactly what happens in the method of morphological interpretation which Long takes over from Eliade. Through its symbolic unity with the *a priori* forms of nature, Long tells us, individual religious consciousness undergoes a process of radical decentering. Eliade puts an even stronger point on things. In the religious experience of “archaic man,” we find that an encounter with real being is possible *only* on condition of the annihilation of individuality, on recognition of the “transitoriness, or the secondary character, of human individuality as such.”⁸⁹ This is as true for the scholar as for the archaic religionist. In order to disclose the meaning of even the humblest religious hierophanies, the historian of religion has to effectively efface themselves, allowing the sacred to reveal itself in the course of its presentation.⁹⁰ And yet this act of scholarly self-effacement does nothing so effectively as establish beyond contest the absolute authority of the interpreter, an interpreter who conveniently has disappeared from the scene. *This* then is the result of Long’s appropriation of the fetish. In the gap created by the historicist critique of Eliadean hermeneutics, the fetish betrays its potent critical function. When linked to a concept of matter defined by non-discursivity, accessible only to faculties of intuition or imagination, the fetish facilitates the restitution of a methodological position which the genealogical interventions of the late twentieth century had seemed to preclude. This restitution is all the more effective for being performed as critique.

IV. Structure, Sign, and Play in the Study of Religion

Long’s interest in the problematics of contact is not entirely reducible to this tendency, however. Already in 1973 his work contains a remainder, a striking countercurrent discordant with the otherwise seamless synchrony of hermeneutic interpretation. As I noted above, Long’s interest

⁸⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 46.

⁹⁰ Eliade, “Shamanism,” xxiii [12].

in cargo cults in his AAR address stems from the capacity of such phenomena to provoke an “acentric and anomic situation in the sciences of man.” Clarifying that anomia, he continues in the address: “in the attempt to understand human life, the prestige of the Western scientific apparatus is no longer an adequate tool. In some way the object of the study, other cultures, must be participants in the study as subjects and objects. The methodological problem of cultural contact is itself an aspect of a cargo-cult.”⁹¹ At first glance, this passage is perfectly assimilable to the critical reading of Long I have already offered, in which I argued that the history of religions runs on the evocation and domestication of precisely this kind of “acentric and anomic” situation. What distinguishes this passage and demands its closer interrogation is the unexpected citation that immediately follows, which Long presents as a simple paraphrase. He writes, “in methodological terms Jacques Derrida has described this situation as follows,” thereafter reproducing a long passage from Derrida’s essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.” I include the full passage in its original form, inserting in brackets the sections which Long passes over with ellipses.⁹²

“There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place. Everything begins with the structure, the configuration, the relationship. The discourse on this acentric structure, the myth, [that is,] cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. [In order not to short change the form and the movement of the myth, that violence which consists in centering a language which is describing an acentric structure must be avoided.] In this context, therefore it is necessary to forego scientific or philosophical discourse, to renounce the *epistèmè* which absolutely requires, [which is the absolute requirement] that we go back to the source, to the center, [to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on.] In opposition to *epistèmic* discourse, structural discourse on myths—*mythological* discourse—must itself be *mythomorphic*.”⁹³

⁹¹ Long, “Cargo Cults,” 412.

⁹² There are handful of minor infidelities in Long’s citation which I don’t mark here, opting instead for the published version of Derrida’s text that Long would have had in front of him.

⁹³ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 257.

This is Long's first public reference to Derrida. The affinity would stick: allusions to deconstruction recur throughout his published work, invoked repeatedly as a parallel discourse to Long's own work in the study of religion.⁹⁴ In the "Introduction" to *Significations*, for example, he identifies deconstruction as roughly synonymous to his own method of "archaic critique," writing: "I am attracted to Jacques Derrida's *deconstruction*, because it seems to be a philosophical mode akin to what I mean by 'crawling back' through one's history."⁹⁵ Here and in other contexts, Long's accumulated allusions to deconstruction establish a commonality between the two projects that comes to seem natural. In the context of his early discussion of cargo cults, however, the quoted passage is less clarifying than confounding, introducing an element which cannot be assimilated to Long's otherwise Eliadean discourse. That friction is evident from the first two lines of the passage, which flagrantly contradict Eliade's insistence on linking morphology to metaphysics. Why then does Long go out of his way to include it? What are we to make of this citation, and moreover of Long's enduring enthusiasm for deconstruction?

Published in English in 1972, "Structure, Sign, and Play" was originally delivered seven years before Long's AAR address at "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," a symposium convened at the John Hopkins Humanities Center in the autumn of 1966. In the essay, Derrida interrogates what he identifies as a problematic "event" in the history of the concept of structure, with structure here referring to a coherent and systematically organized totality governed by a unique principle or center. This concept of structure, per Derrida, is coeval with Western philosophy and science, the history of which can be narrated as a "series of substitutions of center for center," from

⁹⁴ Carolyn M. Jones Medine poses the question of this relationship in her essay "Ellipsis: Deconstructive Practice in the work of Charles H. Long," *American Religion* 2.2 (January 2022). In her discussion, however, she does not note the importance of "Structure, Sign, and Play" for Long. She instead relies on Derrida's essays "Ellipsis" and "Faith and Knowledge," two texts which to my knowledge Long does not cite anywhere in his published corpus.

⁹⁵ Charles H. Long, *Significations*, 9.

the Platonic *eidos* to the theological concept “God” on to Hegelian *Geist* and beyond.⁹⁶ Within this history, the event to which Derrida calls our attention consists in a simultaneous *rupture* and *redoubling*, initiated at the moment when the “structurality of structure” begins to be thought (more prosaically, when the concept of structure begins to be questioned rather than assumed). That interrogation involves recognizing that the coherence of structure is undermined by an insoluble contradiction. On the one hand, structure by definition must be centered; yet in order to provide the stability necessary for structure, the center which is (of course) *at* the center of a structural totality must not belong to that totality as one of its component parts. “The structure has its center elsewhere,” Derrida observes. The result is that the center is and is not the center, is and is not itself. One might observe an affinity here with the foregoing discussion of the history of religions, for which the Eliadean concept of the Sacred performs exactly such a role. This contradiction, importantly, is endemic to structure; it has “always already begun to proclaim itself” in the history of the concept.⁹⁷

Granting the perennial nature of this dynamic, Derrida observes that the structurality of structure has begun to make itself felt in a particularly salient way in “our own” era, broadly speaking. Among the human sciences—the topic of the conference—Derrida singles out one as occupying a privileged site for examining this occurrence: ethnology. “One can in fact assume,” he writes, “that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a de-centering had come about: at the moment when European culture—and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and its concepts—had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference.”⁹⁸ There is an obvious affinity between Derrida’s description of this moment and that provided by Long, who similarly identifies a destabilization of

⁹⁶ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” 249.

⁹⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” 249-50.

⁹⁸ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” 251.

Western metaphysics in the scene of ethnological contact. Moreover, the two share a like assessment of the consequences: if Western rationality can no longer be assumed as universally normative, it is incumbent on the European ethnologist to subject their inherited concepts to criticism and revision. That isn't a straightforward task, however. Insofar as ethnology remains a European discourse, it cannot abandon European ethnocentrism with a simple wave of its hand. The Western conceptual apparatus continues to impose itself, whether we want it to or not. The question for Derrida then becomes how to orient oneself within this inevitable inheritance, how to exploit that tradition in service of its deconstruction.

Derrida becomes important for Long insofar as he outlines a method capable of sustaining this orientation. Such is the purpose of the citation in question, which details one possible response to the decentering of European hegemony. In its original textual setting, that response is the method of *bricolage* developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Outlined in *The Savage Mind*, *bricolage* names a practice of adopting and using whatever cultural or conceptual means are found at hand based on their situational utility alone. Lévi-Strauss contrasts this method with the figure of the engineer, who unlike the *bricoleur* would possess the capacity to fabricate their own means and materials in service of a quasi-metaphysical unitary intention. The *bricoleur*, by contrast, operates within a finite field of heterogeneous conceptual oddities. Inverting the scientific order of structure and event, they embody the “necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined.”⁹⁹ Crucially, this method is itself “mythomorphic,” patterned on the discourse of myth as described by ethnographers of so-called primitive cultures. Citing Lévi-Strauss through Derrida’s mediation, Long encourages his audience of religionists to adopt a similar approach. By following this method, he suggests, we might relinquish the desire for absoluteness which plagues Western paradigms of knowledge and cross-cultural interpretation.

⁹⁹ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” 255.

One effect of this adoption is an orientation toward the origin of religion entirely distinct from that of the study of religion in its Eliadean or earlier forms. Although Eliade's work emphatically rejects the search for a *historical* origin of religion characteristic of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century study of religion, it preserves the discursive function of the origin in its positing of a universal and transhistorical religious *essence*, which contains within itself the archetypal precedents for historical religious forms and ensures the apodicticity of religion's systematic study.¹⁰⁰ The method of *bricolage*, on the other hand, in dispensing with the ideological construct of the absolute origin, or *arche*, abandons in the same gesture any claim to perfect knowledge *vis-à-vis* the ethnographic data in question. As Derrida writes, "The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author," in any case the absence of a principle of perfect structural unity.¹⁰¹ For Long, then, *bricolage* would entail the abdication of the basically transcendent position long-occupied by the Western scholar-interpreter, forcing the scholar of religion, for example, to stake themselves as the ante prerequisite for any possible knowledge.

Long's reference to Derrida introduces a profound ambivalence between two conflicting methods: a mythomorphic *bricolage* associated with Lévi-Strauss and a hermeneutics of myth associated with Eliade. Premised on the detachment of truth from method, the first refuses to claim a privileged origin or center from which to interpret religious phenomena. As Long elaborates five years later (with reference again to "Structure, Sign, and Play"), "centered rational notions of epistemology must be seen as heuristic devices and not as somehow ontological givens."¹⁰² Heuristic devices can be bracketed, contested, or discarded; ontological givens cannot. Within the "Cargo Cults" essay, however, ontological givens abound, as they do in his later discussions of fetishism and

¹⁰⁰ Mircea Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion" in *History of Religions* 4.1 (1964): 154-169, 167.

¹⁰¹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," 287.

¹⁰² Charles H. Long, "Human Centers: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions," in *Significations*, 73.

the imagination of matter. In both contexts, Long's reliance on forms of interpretation associated originally with the history of religions permit him to recuperate the identity of truth and method by surreptitious appeal to myth's universal ontological referent. That method, as we've seen, facilitates the restoration of the subject-position of the West through the intermediary figure of the primitive, whose reified alterity vicariously ensures the authority of its uniquely qualified interpreter.

Long's writing on the fetish stages, rather than resolves this ambivalence. Yet his early address on cargo cults also signals another way to inhabit the contradictory situation which discussions of material religion confront. Specifically, his unexpected citation of "Structure, Sign, and Play" draws our attention to another textual locus. With it, he draws our attention as well to another history of religion, another conception of materiality, and—sure enough—another fetish.

In a curious echo of Long's address, Tomoko Masuzawa, in her 2007 essay "Theory without Method: Situating a Discourse Analysis on Religion," repeats Long's analogy between the study of religion and "another navel" of historic importance in the history of the human sciences, namely, the 1966 conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man."¹⁰³ Masuzawa, like Long, recognizes in Derrida's description of the crisis of structuralist anthropology a generalizable crisis affecting the human sciences writ large. So too does she understand this crisis as having particular salience within the study of religion. In my earlier discussion of the edited volume *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, I called attention to the widespread adoption of historicist, self-reflexive approaches within the study of religion in the 1990s. Those approaches, exemplified by essays like J.Z. Smith's "Religion, Religions, Religious," posed fundamental questions concerning the viability of the study of religion and the intelligibility of its basic concepts. Smith himself raised such questions concerning the object "religion," denying the term's first-order provenance altogether. Little matter

¹⁰³ Tomoko Masuzawa, "Theory without Method: Situating a Discourse Analysis on Religion," in Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka, eds., *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21st Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 173-204, 174.

that he enthusiastically endorsed its continued use; interrogations such as those of Smith permanently altered the terrain on which scholars of religion worked. Masuzawa's reading of Derrida addresses precisely this situation. "What choices do we have," she asks, "when the operational—if not to say foundational—concepts or schematic apparatuses of a science hit a snag of this sort, momentarily—if not indefinitely—disabling the interpretive work, as the whole operation seems to be besieged by doubt, suspicion, and umbrage?"¹⁰⁴ At stake here is what was at stake in Charles Long's imagination of matter. Whither religious studies after the abandonment of the Sacred?

For Masuzawa, following Derrida, there are two possible reactions to this experience of disciplinary suspension. The first consists in a "systematic and historical questioning" of the founding concepts of philosophy (or some other discourse) in order to "deconstitute them."¹⁰⁵ As Masuzawa notes, this is more or less what we now call deconstruction—the approach tied most closely to Derrida. The second option is *bricolage*, the heuristic adoption of conceptual tools on the basis of practical utility, rather than theoretical apodicticity. We're already familiar with this approach, which corresponds to the method of Lévi-Strauss. Juxtaposed with "deconstitutive" analysis, the method of the *bricoleur* involves the preservation of a "double intention": "to preserve as an instrument something whose truth value [Lévi-Strauss] criticizes."¹⁰⁶

Masuzawa's initial exposition of "Structure, Sign, and Play" should make us pause. In "Cargo Cults as Cultural Historical Phenomena," Charles Long mined Derrida's essay for a deconstructive orientation to the study of religion. That orientation, he told us, first in "Cargo Cults" and again in *Significations*, was the mythomorphic practice of the *bricoleur*, the method of "double intention" described here by Masuzawa. To be sure, the practice of *bricolage* has affinities with deconstruction. Derrida himself is insistent on that point. Yet the two positions are not identical. In "Structure, Sign,

¹⁰⁴ Masuzawa, "Theory Without Method," 176.

¹⁰⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," 254.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," 254.

and Play,” in fact—in the very passage which Long cited at length—Derrida uses Lévi-Strauss less as a model than as a counterexample. On closer examination, Long’s stated enthusiasm for Derrida is not an enthusiasm for Derrida at all, but rather enthusiasm for Lévi-Strauss *as described* by Derrida. Why would Long silently pass over the first, “deconstitutive” option that appears in “Structure, Sign, and Play” in favor of the second? Particularly given the continued importance of deconstruction as a synonym for his own project, why would Long read that text in the way that he does? This decision may strike us as strange, but Masuzawa argues that this is in fact the more natural inclination:

I believe it is this second path, the manner of critique specifically ascribed to Lévi-Strauss in this context, that is generally, nearly automatically, assumed to be taken whenever the foundational concepts of a discipline are called to account, whenever an investigation into the history of these concepts is proposed or performed. The other possibility—namely, the first option just mentioned (though unelaborated) by Derrida—does not seem to be recognised at all.¹⁰⁷

What renders deconstruction unrecognizable as a critical path? Aligning her own work with the Derridean approach, Masuzawa argues that the almost obligatory appeal of the Lévi-Straussian alternative is attributable to the demands of disciplinary knowledge, demands expressed in the bifurcation of critique into two distinct moments, arranged almost always as a couple: theory and method. According to the logic of this bifurcation, theory represents a negative, destructive moment, the razing of conceptual structures. Method, on the other hand, refers to the “constructive or restorative moment” that follows in its wake.¹⁰⁸ Method speaks in the name of knowledge; it is the mechanism by which disciplinary knowledge is produced and the authority of a discipline preserved.

That these two moments are consistently paired together indicates something crucial for Masuzawa about the work of theory within academic disciplines—in this case religious studies.

¹⁰⁷ Masuzawa, “Theory Without Method,” 177.

¹⁰⁸ Masuzawa, “Theory Without Method,” 178.

When joined to method, she argues, the critical function of theoretical work inevitably subordinates itself to its opposite. Method is a taming gesture, the means by which disciplinary apparatuses reconstitute themselves after their premises have been called into question. Accordingly, Masuzawa writes, “within the constraints thus laid down by this two-stage framework...a theoretical deliberation would be judged woefully incomplete if measures were not taken to conserve, reform, or reconstitute the vital instruments of scholarship, or if no new alternatives were proposed *after*, and *in addition to*, a critique.”¹⁰⁹ Method asks “so what?” of theory—and it demands an answer. Furthermore, the pivot from theory to method enforced by this demand reconstitutes the subject who wields such disciplinary instruments. This is, for Derrida, one problem with the delicate balance struck by the *bricoleur*. As imperative as it may be to de-transcendentalize the concepts of a discipline, the transformation of concepts into mere instruments nevertheless presupposes the hand that wields them, as well as the intention that directs their use.¹¹⁰

Masuzawa’s reading of “Structure, Sign, and Play” thus diverges from Charles Long’s restorative appropriation of Lévi-Strauss. In doing so, it allows us to finally pinpoint not only the fact, but also the source of the ambivalence that traverses Long’s work. At issue is the demand for methodological recuperation that joins Long’s critical and constructive uses of the fetish. This implied demand accompanies virtually every invocation of the fetish in his work, converting every negative, which is to say critical moment into the premise of a new positivity. In “Indigenous People, Materialities, and Religion,” for example:

¹⁰⁹ Masuzawa, “Theory Without Method,” 178.

¹¹⁰ In the context of what was then her ongoing work on the history of the world religions paradigm, Masuzawa argues that the preservation of this subject-position and its conceptual instruments amounts to a kind of a complicity with the “occlusion of the strongly racist manoeuvres of the nineteenth-century reconstitution of ‘Europe,’ the concealment that the final twentieth-century establishment of the pluralist regime so effectively achieved” (Masuzawa, “Theory Without Method,” 198).

The Indigenous as empirical reality and hermeneutical epistemological principle lies at the in-betweenness of all the binaries created in the modern world and it does not opt for any side of these binaries. The meaning of ‘the indigenous’ could define not just a new epistemology but another and alternate stylistics of knowledge that moves us away from the distanced, objectified, positivistic, and rationalistic styles of knowledge ushered in by the Enlightenment ideologies.¹¹¹

Or in “Transculturation and Religion,” where Long discusses both fetishes and cargo cults before concluding: “From places such as these a more authentic sense of humankind’s place in the world might be forged.”¹¹² Or, lastly, in *Significations*, where the same comportment is visible years before its formulation via the fetish:

I perceived that there was a structure for the universal in the human world that, though created from Enlightenment understandings of the human venture, expressed an opening for the authentic expression of others. Religion thus became the locus for a meaning that carried an archaic form; it was a root meaning and could thus become the basis for radical critical thought.¹¹³

Masuzawa focuses our attention on the recurrence of this motif, requiring us to ask: What is it that drives this gesture? What desires animate and are satisfied by the immediate passage from critique to the formulation of positions beyond, alternative to, or otherwise than inherited categories of thought? Why have such desires come to converge on the fetish, itself a privileged name for the condensation of heterogeneous and contradictory demands? And the answer: that what is at stake in constructive uses of the fetish is not only the demand for a new *arche* in the study of religion, but the unarticulated demand which we saw emerge earlier—that for the reclamation of the Western subject in the wake of its critique, with all of its knowledge, with all of its power.

Masuzawa thus reformulates the problem of the fetish as that of historical consciousness as such. Writing in a similar vein in the conclusion to *The Invention of World Religions*, she warns that critical genealogies of the study of religion cannot be satisfied with the “exorcism of an undead

¹¹¹ Long, “Indigenous People,” 170.

¹¹² Long, “Transculturation and Religion,” 154.

¹¹³ Long, “Introduction,” in *Significations*, 8.

Christian absolutism,” with the excavation of certain concepts’ or approaches’ buried Christian norms and their subsequent discarding.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the triumphant banishment of “sundry varieties of crypto-theology scurrying in the tribunal of science” may do nothing so effectively as perform a set of gestures honed specifically to restate Europe’s “imperial subject-position” in secular—and therefore admissible—guise.¹¹⁵ Without dismissing the necessity of historical knowledge in its typical sense, Masuzawa problematizes precisely the kind of recuperative gesture which we’ve seen recur throughout this chapter, where the identification of heterogeneity in the origin of Western reason gives way to the reification of heterogeneity itself as the renewal of metaphysics. Criticism calls for something else, Masuzawa admonishes us, “something far more laborious, tedious, and difficult: a rigorous historical investigation that does not superstitiously yield to the comforting belief in the liberating power of historical consciousness..”¹¹⁶ This would be the “descontitutive” analysis which Long passes over in his reading of “Structure, Sign, and Play.” And where else might such an analysis begin, but with the fetish?

V. We Other Victorians: Fetishism Avowed and Disavowed

Masuzawa’s career-long interrogation of the historicist ideology underwriting the identity of the West constitutes the backdrop for her own engagement with the fetish-concept, which occurs principally in her 2000 essay “Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth

¹¹⁴ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 328.

¹¹⁵ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 327. Such is the overarching argument of *Invention*, in which Masuzawa tracks the way in which the world religions paradigm, as an ostensibly irenic discourse of secularization and pluralist toleration, facilitated the production of European identity as a “harbinger of universal history” in place of its Christian-triumphalist claims to supremacy in prior centuries. Through this process, European hegemony defined itself as both embodying *religion* and its opposite—secularity—a double-move that at once renders European Christianity as the paradigm of all religion and European secular consciousness as already *beyond* religion. One result of this process, as we’ll see, is the scientific study of religion and its successors.

¹¹⁶ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 328.

Century.”¹¹⁷ As indicated by its title, Masuzawa’s essay focuses on a moment of destabilization in the history of fetish-discourse. Long employed in European ethnology, philosophy, and comparative religion, the concept of “fetishism” became a topic of clamorous dispute and official proscription in the late Victorian era, with early luminaries of the emergent science of religion denouncing its continued use on the grounds of its ostensive ambiguity and manifest theoretical contradictions. This opinion constituted a point of unity among scholars otherwise divided in their positions concerning the origin and nature of religion, with figures including F. Max Müller, E.B. Tylor, and Andrew Lang all inveighing against the concept and producing alternative theories to supplant it. In this way the period would seem to mark an inflection point, a relatively clean transition from an era in which fetishism-theory predominated to one characterized by a series of more credible, intellectualist successors, for instance those of primitive totemism or animism.¹¹⁸ From a contemporary perspective, Masuzawa writes, one would be hard pressed not to come away with the impression that, “even by Victorian standards...the notion of fetishism was already embarrassingly outmoded, something rather more reminiscent of certain older habits of thought than a critical tool of the emerging scientific discipline.”¹¹⁹ By all accounts, that is, the question of fetishism was settled.

Given the historic centrality of the fetish-concept to the articulation and reification of these fields, its apparent vilification in Victorian comparative religion comes as something of a surprise. Less surprising is the ineffectuality of that official proscription. For in spite of its manifest impropriety, Masuzawa observes that “talk of fetishism is in fact everywhere in the Victorian literature, in ethnography as well as in the history of religions.”¹²⁰ The case of Max Müller is typical.

¹¹⁷ Tomoko Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (2000): 242-67.

¹¹⁸ Such is the narrative provided by E.E. Evans Pritchard, for one example. See: E.E. Evans Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 20.

¹¹⁹ Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality,” 242.

¹²⁰ Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality,” 243.

In spite of his own unambiguous hostility to the theory of primitive fetishism, we find him repeatedly compelled to address the topic in lectures and published writing. Thus, his inaugural Hibbert Lectures of 1878 address the question “Is Fetishism a Primitive Form of Religion?”, as do his annual Gifford Lectures from 1888-1891. Beyond these two public venues, Masuzawa writes, “Müller was to continue to address, if only incidentally and obliquely, the problem of fetishism for another two decades, which is tantamount to saying until he died.”¹²¹ If death gave Müller relief from the problem of fetishism, his colleagues weren’t so lucky. Fetishism remained an explicit topic of proscription and debate well into the twentieth century.

Masuzawa thus confronts us with a contradiction—that between fetishism’s official obsolescence and its empirical domination—and a consequent question: “Given that the theory of primitive fetishism reputedly had already lost much of its credibility—or, perhaps more to the point, its respectability—by the 1870s, what was doing the ‘dominating’ in the name of ‘fetishism?’”¹²² One possible explanation would center the volatility of the concept itself. Famously difficult to pin down, the word ‘fetish,’ Pietz tells us, has always been “discursively promiscuous and theoretically suggestive, forever becoming ‘an embarrassment’ to disciplines in the human sciences that seek to control its sense.”¹²³ Any attempt to police the word’s popularity would thus consist in an impossible game of discursive whack-a-mole, suppressing one improper usage only to watch another spring up elsewhere. This explanation has the benefit of accounting for scholarly exhaustion with the concept, as well as explaining the typical strategy employed to circumscribe its use: an etymological recitation designed to fix the word’s proper meaning, a historical exposition of its original context of use in spaces of intercultural contact on the Gold Coast, and a proprietary denunciation of its

¹²¹ Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality,” 245.

¹²² Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality,” 246.

¹²³ Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” 5. See also: Wyatt MacGaffey, “Fetishism Revisited,” 172.

indiscriminate generalization.¹²⁴ Yet that complaint, reiterated in attempted restrictions of the concept's use up to the present, concedes too much to the rhetoric of those hostile to fetishism's continued employment.¹²⁵ As injudicious as the *use* of 'fetishism' may well have been, its *definition* was perfectly straightforward for the generation of *Religionswissenschaftler* who attempted to excise it from the discipline of comparative religion. Within the field of comparative religion, the meaning of fetishism remained that which de Brosses had formulated a century before: "the worship...of certain terrestrial and material objects."¹²⁶ Far more problematic than the definition itself was the concept's claim to veridicality, the idea that "fetishism" actually referred to any existing religious comportment (to say nothing of the great variety of religious practices that de Brosses subsumed under it).

Masuzawa's formulation of the question suggests another way to understand this contradiction and the "mode of domination" proper to the fetish-concept.¹²⁷ In asking after what dominated *in the name* of fetishism, she draws our attention away from the explicit discourse on fetishism and its meaning, suggesting instead an economy of repression and return that, if not strictly thinkable as actual pathology, nevertheless exhibits a strong structural analogy with it. In this sense the discourse on fetishism is itself fetishistic, in the idiosyncratic technical sense that Freud gives the term. For Freud, the fetish-object constitutes a substitute for the mother's (absent) penis. In fixating on the fetish, itself fraught with attraction and horror, the male subject is able to resolve his psychic turmoil by way of an elaborate ruse, one that permits him to simultaneously maintain and

¹²⁴ This "familiar mantra of *Religionswissenschaft*" has been remarkably consistent since its enunciation in the nineteenth century, remaining an almost compulsory fixture of writing on the fetish even among those who are interested in appropriating the concept for critical use (Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 244). In its more restrictive disciplinary function, the repetition of this mantra constitutes one movement of what Morris's "relentless vacillation" quoted in the introduction to this chapter (Morris, "Preface," viii).

¹²⁵ See: Robert Pool, "Fetishism Deconstructed," *Etnofoor* 3.1 (January 1990): 114-27, 114; Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, 8.

¹²⁶ Charles de Brosses, "On the Worship of Fetish Gods," 45.

¹²⁷ Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 246.

give up his belief that his mother does indeed have a penis.¹²⁸ In this way, he negotiates the conflict between a reality he cannot avoid (the perception of his mother's genitals) and an equally insistent wish (that she have a penis) by satisfying the original wish in a displaced perception of the mother's penis as another object entirely.¹²⁹ Most importantly, by resolving this tension (even if in a non-normative psycho-sexual equilibrium), the fetishist is able to quell the fear that he too might be castrated, that his own possession of the phallus is threatened.

Ever attentive to dynamics of disavowal in the study of religion, Masuzawa similarly perceives in the compulsory return of fetish discourse a fragile negotiation of an underlying psychic tension. As in the case of Freud's patient, the curious attachment to (in this case) the concept of the fetish maintains the stability of the subject in response to a threatening perception. Whatever that perception is, whatever reality underlies this cycle of repression and recurrence, cannot appear as overt, as least not to the patient. It manifests instead only in substitutive form, distorting and reshaping the conscious discourse of *Religionswissenschaft* around it.

What is it, then, that underlies the manifest discourse on fetishism? What does the preoccupation with fetishism inadvertently disclose? Furthermore, why is it at this particular moment that we see this turmoil irrupt? For Masuzawa, the key to understanding the strange status of fetish discourse in the Victorian period lies in the concept of fetishism itself, which for all parties involved denotes an undeveloped, capricious attachment to material things. In Masuzawa's rendering:

¹²⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927), trans. James Strachey, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* XXI (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: 1961): 152-157, 154.

¹²⁹ Freud's analysis of the fetish ultimately manifests a more general structure of disavowal [*Verneugnung*], a point he makes more forcefully in a later essay. See: Sigmund Freud, "The Psychical Apparatus and the External World" (1940), trans. James Strachey in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* XXIII (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis: 1964): 195-204.

Fetishism's lowly character is evidenced above all by a tenacious attachment to the base materiality of the object and, by the same token, to its physical immediacy, its incidental nature, and its radical finitude. The fetish is materiality at its crudest and lowest; it points to no transcendent meaning beyond itself, no abstract, general, or universal essence with respect to which it might be construed as symbol.¹³⁰

It is, again, because of this strict identification with materiality that fetishism can be mustered as the political and intellectual antitype of Enlightenment reason, securing by contrast the relative spirituality, maturity, and autonomy of its European Christian counterpart. If the projective discourse of fetishism holds this hierarchy in place, however, it also betrays its conceptual instability. As we've been told again and again in this chapter, that slipperiness is an ineradicable feature of the concept's history. From its coining by de Brosses, whose generalization of fetish-worship as the origin of *all* religion already implicates Christianity with the specter of its own material origins,¹³¹ through its Marxian transposition into the critique of political economy, and on to Freud's adoption of the term as a designator of pathology, the concept of fetishism displays an unsettling tendency to implicate the European subject whose privileged status was meant to be protected by its use.

For the *Religionswissenschaftler* surveyed by Masuzawa, this threat was acutely felt in the way that the very accusation of fetishism seemed to recapitulate the phenomenon it described. That is, if fetishism bespeaks a category error on the part of the fetishist, by which they wrongly attribute independent agency to a material object, the theory of fetishism *repeats* this error. For someone like Max Müller, Masuzawa writes, the very "notion that a purely material object could *in and of itself* generate a non-material power/entity is an illogical—indeed impossible—idea."¹³² This is the traditional grounds for the denigration of the so-called fetishist, of course, but even to call a fetishist a fetishist requires one to hold exactly this idea: "If one wants to claim that such an irrational,

¹³⁰ Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 248.

¹³¹ Daniel H. Leonard, "Introduction: Fetishism, Figurism, and Myths of Enlightenment," in *Returns of Fetishism*: 1-39, 24.

¹³² Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 252.

spontaneous generation of the immaterial/spiritual from the material cannot take place in the exterior world of nature, then one must be prepared to recognize that it cannot happen in the interior world of the savage mind either.”¹³³ In Müller’s treatment, what had been a principle of differentiation becomes a point of commonality, blurring the lines between materiality and spirituality, universality and particularity, and, most troublingly, European and African.

This dissociative capacity of the concept of fetishism is precisely what is at stake in the hostile fixation on theories of primitive fetishism among Victorian scholars of religion. If the discourse on fetishism is to be read symptomatically, that is, what that symptom reveals is an acutely felt instability in the epistemic, religious, and racial order historically anchored by the fetish-concept. Resulting in part from the “explosion” of anthropological and philological data in the nineteenth century,¹³⁴ this anxiety reflects an “atrophy of confidence” in European claims to universality, particularly those based on the uniqueness of Christianity.¹³⁵ The result is that we find the European subject in a position reminiscent of Freud’s fetishist, torn between a painful reality—the fact of its own materiality, its own historicity—and a counter-wish—to transcend that historicity in something resembling the form of absolute spirit. If the concept of the fetish had once provided the means of negotiating that tension, providing a substitutive object in relation to which the European subject could guarantee its own universality, however arbitrarily, the widespread condemnation of that concept indicates a failure of its fetish function.

Importantly, however, the discarding of the fetish-concept doesn’t mean that European scholars of religion were suddenly willing to grapple with the irrationality of European hegemony and its colonialist history. Reconciliation with reality is not on the table. Instead, Masuzawa’s line of

¹³³ Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality,” 252.

¹³⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 179-96, 187.

¹³⁵ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 311.

interpretation suggests that the abandonment of *this* fetish (the concept of fetishism) is only one visible sign of a process of displacement, through which the fetishistic function of the prior discourse is reconstituted elsewhere—namely, in the newly regnant discourse of fetishism’s condemnation. By disavowing the material origins of *any* religious tradition, figures like Müller, Tylor, and Troeltsch years later initiated a process through which the “Eurohegemonic claim” was transferred from one context to another, refiguring the challenge of historicity to Christian exemplarity on entirely different grounds.

Without fully recounting the history of that transposition, we can nevertheless distill its basic conceptual movement. In the first place, the defense of religion’s essential spiritualist character involves the universalization of a generic concept “religion” that unites, rather than hierarchizes the various determinate religions. This generalization is practically inextricable from a second maneuver, namely, a protective gesture by which religion is demarcated as “an essential and irreducible aspect of human life,” a domain of experience that traverses particular historical or geographic conditions and thus is immune to the kinds of historicizing that threatened the dogmatic claims of Christianity.¹³⁶ We should recognize these two maneuvers from earlier sections of this chapter. Indeed, by reforming the study of religion along these lines, scholars like Müller, Tylor, and Troeltsch years later did not only provide new language for a more circumspect discourse of European hegemony. In the process, they generated what Masuzawa calls “an altogether different

¹³⁶ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 325. In the discourse of world religions—the discourse which of course draws Masuzawa’s sustained attention—those steps are joined by a third, which reifies determinate traditions as integral expressions of this underlying universal experience, such that each religion becomes interpretable as the unique expression of a given collectivity’s spiritual “genius.” In order to hold this pantheon and its underlying concept of religion in place, such collectivities end up being defined along racial lines, with race’s connotations of immutability, biologism, and heredity providing rhetorical stability for an ahistorical religious taxonomy.

kind of discursive tradition: an idealist history of the spiritual—i.e., the History of Religions as we know it today.”¹³⁷

Masuzawa’s invocation of the History of Religions “as we know it today” dramatically widens the scope of her argument, implicating the more proximate disciplinary context of North American religious studies and its Eliadean trajectory in particular. Following this comment, we might venture that this iteration of the History of Religions, much like its disciplinary ancestors, gets off the ground through a preemptory disavowal of fetishism as well. There is in fact textual evidence for this. If we look again to the opening chapter of *Patterns*, we find that Eliade establishes the universality of the incarnational model of the hierophany by asserting that *all* religious phenomena share this basic structure, even those “queer hierophanies” formerly labeled “fetishism.”¹³⁸ Eliade goes out of his way to make this point. Discussing the “so-called ‘worship of stones,’” he insists that in such worship “it is not a question of actually worshipping the stones.” Rather, “the stones are venerated precisely because they are not simply stones but hierophanies, something outside their normal status as things,” something that is sacred only insofar as it “embodies (that is reveals), something other than itself.”¹³⁹ Fetishism, i.e., the worship of material objects *as material objects*, is ruled out altogether, its Tylorian reinterpretation becoming axiomatic for Eliade’s hermeneutics. Where popular opinion in the nineteenth century quipped that “Nations ignorant of God, contrive a wooden one,” Eliade retorts: “God is free to manifest himself under any form—even that of stone or wood.”¹⁴⁰

Masuzawa’s argument extends beyond explicit mentions of fetishism within the tradition, however. At stake in her narration of the history of fetish-discourse is not only the peculiar career of

¹³⁷ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 253.

¹³⁸ Eliade, *Patterns*, 11.

¹³⁹ Eliade, *Patterns*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 49; Eliade, *Patterns*, 11.

a singular concept, but the nexus of problems which it has tended to carry in its wake: the relationship between materiality and ideality, the contingency of Western knowledge and its subjective avatar, the antinomies of historical consciousness, and the determination of each of these by the legacies of colonial power. Detachable from the historic discourse of Eurocentric anti-fetishism, the dynamics of the fetish prevail in any discourse that would disentangle the knowing subject from its material and historical contingency—even those that do so through an *avowal* of the fetish, a valorization of matter, or an appeal to the “redemptive power of historical consciousness.”¹⁴¹ This is of course what I’ve argued in relation to Long, but the point bears considering even beyond him and the delimited disciplinary context in which it appeared. It should remind us to proceed cautiously whenever the fetish is identified not merely as an instrument of critical reflexivity, but as in some way revelatory of more salutary epistemologies or modes of being.

How then does one manage the double-bind of the fetish? How do we occupy a critical position with respect to the study of religion and its underlying metaphysics—one that neither instantiates its position of interpretive mastery or believes itself capable of simply waving it off? How do we cultivate appropriate skepticism toward the demands of method (demands which are not only those of knowledge but of its capitalization) without denying the legitimacy of its claims?

For Masuzawa, as for Long, any adequate strategy would fall under the name materialism, an orientation to materiality as that which confounds conceptual totalization and remains inassimilable to prevailing terms of order. Unlike Long, however, Masuzawa does not conceive this orientation in a profession of fetishism or a symbolic experience of the pure forms of the world; she refuses the temptation to attribute to matter its own innate vitality. Neither does she opt for a vulgar, atomistic materialism, according to which “the entire gamut of ideational phenomena” would be reduced

¹⁴¹ Masuzawa, “Theory without Method,” 202.

entirely to effects of their material ground.¹⁴² Masuzawa's materialism is of another kind. Surveying the range of spiritualist and materialist alternatives to epistemic dualism on offer in Victorian England, she contends that each of these positions is contradictory: the atomist who maintains the exclusivity of causality according to nature cannot but posit a mysterious power of generation inherent to matter; the spiritualist who believes in the existence of immaterial forces capable of inhabiting otherwise inert material objects cannot substantiate that claim except through the observation of matter's unsanctioned vitality. "There is an unmistakable symmetry between these positions," she observes: "either seemingly dead matter turns out to be intrinsically or potentially animate, or immaterial spirit comes to possess, disrupt, and intervene in the otherwise quiescent (dead) material world."¹⁴³ The option between spiritualism and materialism is undecidable—in either case, the attempt to reduce the problem of the relation between idea and matter to one of its constituent terms simply reproduces the initial contradiction.

Neither dualism, nor idealism, nor materialism. What then? Concluding her essay, Masuzawa suggests another possibility, one which passes under the name "materialism," but of a distinctive sort. "There is still a little room for an alternative speculation," she writes, "a wager, an idea to be thrown into the fray." Such a speculation "has an affinity with what might be described as dialectical materialism, or, before this term was coined in the late nineteenth century, what Engels called 'Marxist materialism'...and what was for Marx simply a 'new materialism.'"¹⁴⁴ What that means for Masuzawa is a shift away from the attempt to resolve the alternative of spiritualism and materialism within existing philosophical parameters. Instead, the Marxian materialism which draws her interest would ask after the processes through which materiality and ideality have become arrayed in their present positions, with materiality as "dead matter" and ideality as active, immaterial subjectivity.

¹⁴² Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 254.

¹⁴³ Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 260.

¹⁴⁴ Masuzawa, "Troubles with Materiality," 261.

Within the confines of this essay, that position yields the hypothesis that the epistemic categories of our epoch are themselves effects of commodification, a position similarly endorsed by both Pietz and Long and essentially distilled in Alfred Sohn-Rethel's claim that "the socially necessary forms of thinking of an epoch are those in conformity with the socially synthetic functions of that epoch."¹⁴⁵ This version of Marxian materialism presents its own set of problems, but Masuzawa's "alternative speculation" nevertheless suggests a theoretical direction for navigating the problem of the fetish and the seemingly insoluble double-binds it generates. Following through on her wager will be the task of the remaining two chapters.

¹⁴⁵ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 4.

Chapter Four

Materialism and Supersessionism: On Marx's "Christian Question"

"so steht unsere Kritik mitten unter den Fragen, von denen die Gegenwart sagt:
That is the question."

—Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's
Philosophy of Law. Introduction"

In August 1844, en route from Manchester to his family's home in Barmen, Friedrich Engels stopped in Paris for ten days for his first extended meeting with Karl Marx. Although the two were familiar with each other's work, these meetings represented their first chance at serious collaboration. They took advantage of the opportunity, quickly planning a short, polemical pamphlet against what they called "critical criticism"—the post-Hegelian philosophy promulgated by the circle of radical Berlin intellectuals orbiting their former colleague Bruno Bauer. *The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Criticism* wouldn't appear until the following February (by which time it had expanded considerably), but the two collaborators were in sufficient agreement on its argument that they could write the foreword together while Engels was in Paris. For Marx and Engels, the purpose of the work was clear: *The Holy Family* would undertake a thoroughgoing attack on the crypto-Christian abstraction characteristic of Bauer's work and a defense of the philosophical humanism associated with Ludwig Feuerbach. The foreword's first lines defined the field of conflict accordingly: "*Real humanism* has no more dangerous enemy in Germany than *spiritualism* or *speculative idealism*," they wrote, "which substitutes 'self-consciousness' or the 'spirit' for the *real individual man* [*wirklichen individuellen Menschen*] and with the evangelist teaches: 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing' [*Der Geist ist es, der da lebendig macht, das Fleisch ist kein Nütze*]."¹ The struggle

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Criticism* in MECW 4, 2; MEW 2, 7.

for real humanism thus took the form of a confrontation between two opposing sets of cognate principles: on the one side, speculative idealism, self-consciousness, and spirit; on the other real humanism and the actually existing individual human. These oppositions were joined and summarized by a final pair, drawn from the Gospel of John: spirit and flesh.

Here, the New Testament figures of *Geist* and *Fleisch* stand in as a shorthand for the matrix of hierarchical oppositions that organize and enforce intellectual mystification, political absolutism, and social inequality. This isn't an isolated metaphor in Marx's writing in the period. In "On the Jewish Question," *The Holy Family*, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, and *The German Ideology*, the relationship between Jew and Christian informs Marx's thinking on a series of other oppositions, including those of state and civil society, political and human emancipation, property and poverty, and intellectual and manual labor.² Though Marx commits himself to serious philosophical and empirical study of each of these contradictions, their dynamics are thinkable for him only to the extent that they reiterate the Christian antagonism of spirit and flesh. These latter figures control the analogical process through which Marx attempts to unify his critique of speculative philosophy, the analysis of

² Recent scholarship has called into question the authoritative status and textual integrity of *The German Ideology*, and in particular its most famous chapter, "I. Feuerbach." Scholars including Terrell Carver, Gareth Stedman-Jones, and Sarah Johnson have successfully argued that *The German Ideology* is something of an editorial Frankenstein, one that has been forced to perform ideological functions that it cannot possibly sustain. I agree with this group of readers that *The German Ideology* does not constitute a single, completed text, that it certainly does not constitute a comprehensive articulation of "historical materialism," and that the historical focus on "I. Feuerbach" has obscured the centrality of Marx's engagement with Max Stirner in 1845-6. That said, I find it perfectly acceptable to refer to *The German Ideology* as a coherent *project*, if not a polished *book*. Marx and Engels intended the relevant manuscripts for publication as part of a common critique of Young Hegelian philosophy and German socialism, first in a two-volume quarterly and ultimately in a single monograph. By the time they abandoned the project in 1847 after a year's fruitless search for a new publisher, the majority of the eighteen existing manuscripts were ready for publication, and had been for some time. Provided that it's read carefully, *The German Ideology* remains tremendously important for readers of Marx and Engels, and deserves, if not its authoritative status, a privileged one. See: Terrell Carver, "The German Ideology Never Took Place," *History of Political Thought* 31.1 (Spring 2010): 107-127; Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness & Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 192; Sarah Johnson, "Farewell to *The German Ideology*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83.1 (January 2022): 143-170.

the political state, the identification of the proletariat as a revolutionary class, and the reconciliation of individual human beings with their species-essence [*Gattungswesen*]. Beyond their indispensable critical function, moreover, figures of Judaism and Christianity end up structuring Marx's political project as well: where speculative philosophy has valorized the spirit to the denigration of the flesh (with all that that entails), materialism necessitates the reversal of this hierarchy and the resolution of spirit into its profane, embodied source. A critique of Christian supersessionism thus provides the philosophical intelligibility and normative force for *reale Humanismus* and its political correlate, communism: "the *genuine* resolution [*wahrhafte Auflösung*] of the conflict between man and nature and between nature and man—the true resolution [*wahre Auflösung*] of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species."³

This chapter will interrogate the relationship between this "genuine resolution" and Marx's critique of Christian supersessionism from the summer of 1843 to the spring of 1845, a period bookended by the writing of "On the Jewish Question" and the notebook entry "Ad Feuerbach." In the period in question, Marx attempts to break with the German philosophical tradition and the restricted, crypto-theological emancipation which it promises—first in the name of a Feuerbachian humanism, but ultimately in a "new materialism" intended to dispense with both the speculative-theological character of idealism and Feuerbach's abstract anthropology.⁴ In the course of this developing materialism, Marx stumbles onto the figure of Judaism as a unique point of dislocation in Christian-philosophical discourses of transcendence. Beginning with "On the Jewish Question" and continuing through the 1844 "Introduction," *The Holy Family*, and the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Judaism becomes the key conceptual operator facilitating Marx's critique of abstraction in its religious,

³ Karl Marx. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in *MECW* 3, 297; *MEGA*² I.2, 389. Translation altered.

⁴ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* in *MECW* 5, 5; *MEW* 3, 7.

political, and economic forms. In this process, the possibility of Marxian materialism becomes inextricable from the critique of Christian supersessionism, which Marx identifies as the essential gesture of post-Kantian philosophy and the evidence of its thoroughgoing Christian prejudice.⁵ When Marx evokes the Christian language of spirit and flesh as he does in *The Holy Family*, he does so in the context of this critique.

Investigations of Marx's use of figures of Jews and Judaism largely ignore this trajectory of Marx's work, focusing in isolation on his short, two-part essay "On the Jewish Question," published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in early 1844.⁶ More narrowly still, these readings have tended to focus on the highly contentious second part of the essay, where Marx deploys a number of anti-Jewish stereotypes in considering the "social element that has to be overcome in order to abolish Judaism [*um das Judenthum aufzuheben*]."⁷ In response to Marx's stark, even shocking language, readings of the second part of "On the Jewish Question" have been polarized by a single concern: that of Marx's purported anti-Semitism.⁸ Beginning with Edmund Silberner's 1949 essay "Was Marx

⁵ I agree with Alberto Toscano that Marx's successive criticisms of Bauer, Stirner, and Feuerbach represent a "critique of the critique of religion." Where Toscano interprets this as a Kantian delimitation of the Enlightenment critique of religion's conditions of efficacy, however, I want to focus instead on Marx's suspicion that these forms of criticism are not only ineffective, but complicit in reproducing specifically Christian forms of abstraction under the mask of emancipation. See Alberto Toscano, "Beyond Abstraction: Marx and the Critique of the Critique of Religion," *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 3-29.

⁶ The most important exception is Jay Geller's masterful reading of Marx in *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011). There, Geller examines in detail a number of "Jew-associated" signifiers in Marx's corpus. Geller is less interested in "On the Jewish Question" than I am, in part because of exhaustion with the essay's secondary literature. Where our readings differ more substantially is in my thematizing of supersessionism as an explicit methodological problem for Marx.

⁷ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" in *MECW* 3, 169; *MEGA*² I.2, 164.

⁸ For scholars who want to read "On the Jewish Question" for other purposes—for the critique of political emancipation, its connection with Marx's critique of Hegel, or simply as a data point in Marx's intellectual development—the second part of the essay tends to be avoided. As Wendy Brown comments, emphases on these other purposes may themselves be a means of responding to and avoiding the problems presented by the second part of the essay. See: Wendy Brown, "Rights and Identity in Late Modernity: Revisiting the 'Jewish Question'" in Austin Sarat

an Anti-Semite?”—which reads the essay as Marx’s desperate attempt to distance himself from his Jewish heritage—scholars of Marx or of Judaism have either followed Silberner in attributing to Marx a corrosive anti-Jewish animus⁹ or taken a deflationary strategy, downplaying the significance or uniqueness of Marx’s evident anti-Jewish language as typical for the time,¹⁰ an early attempt to shift from the discourse of theology to sociology,¹¹ or merely “an extended joke at Bauer’s expense.”¹² To the extent that other texts in which Marx addresses the Jewish Question have been invoked, they are most often mustered as proof texts, either to condemn or exonerate Marx of the charge of anti-Semitism.¹³ In either case, focus on Marx’s personal disposition concerning Jews and Judaism, warranted by the language of the text but given its real urgency by Marx’s historical stature, have prevented Marx’s readers from inquiring about the function of this rhetorical strategy or its evolution in subsequent work. Although questions concerning Marx’s use of anti-Jewish tropes and their mobilization in the history of anti-Semitism remain important,¹⁴ so long as the personal figure

and Thomas R. Keams, eds. *Identities, Politics, and Rights* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁹ Edmund Silberner, “Was Marx an Anti-Semite?,” in Ezra Mendelssohn, ed. *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 361-401; Silberner, *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sozialismus vom Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1914* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1962); Robert Misrahi, *Marx et la Question Juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); Paul Lawrence Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wanger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Miriam Leonard, *Socrates and the Jews: Hellenism and Hebraism from Moses Mendelssohn to Sigmund Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Hal Draper, *Marx’s Theory of Revolution, Volume 1* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019).

¹¹ Michael Maidan, “Marx on the Jewish Question: A Meta-Critical Analysis,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 33.1 (1987): 27-41; Yoav Peled, “From Theology to Sociology: Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx on the Question of Jewish Emancipation,” *History of Political Thought* 13.3 (1992): 463-485; Elad Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti-Anti-Semitism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020).

¹² David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

¹³ See, e.g., Shlomo Avineri, *Karl Marx: Philosophy and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

¹⁴ For more on the history of anti-Semitic appropriations of Marx’s comments, including by Wilhelm Marr and Hitler, see Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*. For the history of Marxist efforts to grapple with the anti-Semitic dimensions of “On the Jewish Question”: Traverso, *The Jewish Question*.

of Marx and his psychological motivations remain central we are constrained in our ability to understand the texts in question.¹⁵ The philosophical and political problems that preoccupied Marx remain indeterminate, as does the peculiar significance of the Jewish-Christian dynamic in relation to them.

Against such approaches, this chapter will interpret Marx's figures of Jews, Judaism, and Christian supersessionism as the governing terms through which he develops his critique of the "Christian-Germanic dogma" and first broaches the set of positions that have since been grouped under the heading of "historical materialism." At moments within and against the dominant trajectory of post-Kantian philosophy, Marx articulates and abandons a series of positions on the basis of this motivating critique, culminating in the break with Feuerbach announced in the *Theses on*

¹⁵ Condemnations of Marx's anti-Semitism have often taken recourse to psychological explanations, attributing to Marx a burning self-hatred that exploded into consciousness in "On the Jewish Question." There are multiple sources for this argument, including Silberner's writing on Marx, Theodor Lessing's 1930 study *Der jüdische Selbsthaß*, and Albert Künzli's 1966 *Karl Marx: eine Psychographie*, but ultimately the evidence is conjectural. Silberner, for instance, argues that Marx *cannot but have* felt an intense combination of loathing for his father's cowardice and a consuming desire to annihilate the final remnant of Jewishness he felt within himself. There is no evidence for this, or for the other psychological conditions identified in Marx. Though Heinrich Marx (with whom Karl remained quite close until the former's death in 1838) clearly resented the necessity of conversion, opposing it on Enlightened grounds and delaying both his own conversion (1819) and that of his children (1824, when the oldest were preparing to enter school), it seems to have been an untraumatic event for multiple generations of Marxes: the Marx family—Karl included—remained in close contact with their Jewish relatives in Trier and the Netherlands, Karl himself maintained friendships and collaborations with other Jews during his adult life, and his daughter Eleanor enthusiastically avowed her Jewish ancestry. A close examination of the biographical evidence weighs heavily against accusations of a closely held anti-Semitism. This doesn't mean that one can't condemn Marx's use of anti-Jewish figures or their subsequent appropriation. Nor does it mean that Marx didn't dismiss and disdain religious Jews. It does however preclude psychological innuendo and *in particular* the more fanciful Cold War-era variants that depict Marx as Nazism's spiritual vanguard. The portrayal of Marx as self-hating Jew remains a popular refrain in contemporary scholarship. For one recent example, see J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). Recent biographical work undertaken with the newly available resources of the ongoing *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* project should allow scholars a more certain footing with respect to these questions. Of particular relevance is Michael Heinrich's peerless *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019).

Feuerbach and *The German Ideology*. Far from remaining constant, Marx's uses of Judaism mutate considerably in this short period, their protean character matching Judaism's portability as an antitype in German philosophical and political discourse.

This larger context is crucial. That Marx can exploit figures of Judaism in the way that he does is the consequence of Judaism's unique status in the German philosophical tradition, which consistently deploys Judaism as a metonym for historical contingency, particularity, and political or spiritual heteronomy. From the original *Aufklärer* to the Young Hegelians, this metonymic function permits the Jewish-Christian opposition to float free from its concrete historical referents, grafting onto and determining any number of other conceptual binaries. The persistence and centrality of this operative opposition indicates that anti-Judaism has more than an accidental significance.¹⁶

David Nirenberg puts it bluntly: Judaism is not simply one object among others, but the object of critique *par excellence*. Critical thought is “produced by thinking about Judaism.”¹⁷ As criticism renews itself in successive projects or generations, therefore, it does so by first producing figures of Judaism or Jewishness as its proper objects. The Young Hegelians are no exception to this trend.¹⁸ In reviving a certain legacy of Enlightenment critique, Young Hegelian thinkers from Arnold Ruge to Marx himself reproduced that legacy's axiomatic supersessionism as well. Even as they attempt to break with that tradition on the basis of its purported crypto-Christianity, thinkers like Bauer, Feuerbach and Marx struggle to dispense with its anti-Jewish undercurrent and reproduction of a secularized Christian chauvinism.

¹⁶ Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 208.

¹⁷ David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013), 5. Importantly, this figural or critical anti-Judaism is indissociable from the violence against actual Jews which it intentionally or inadvertently authorizes.

¹⁸ For Nirenberg, in fact, they illustrate it in an exemplary way. It's no accident, he argues, that the “Jewish Question” was popularized by figures like Bauer, who identified themselves not only as critics but “critical critics.” This symptomatically excessive identification with the role of critic corresponds for Nirenberg to their excessive preoccupation with Jews and Judaism.

Marx's critique of Christian supersessionism is both inextricable from and heterogeneous to this tradition, constituting the criterion of his inclusion in the post-Kantian canon as well as his differentiation from it. In the first place, this critique expresses Marx's commitment to the Enlightenment project, positioning him well within the lineage of post-Kantian thought and its commitment to the task of reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] between subjective freedom and natural purposiveness, a task left tantalizingly unrealized by the Kantian critical project and the *Critique of Judgment* in particular.¹⁹ Though he subjects the exemplars of this tradition to withering criticism, he nevertheless shares their assessment of the intolerability of Kant's distinction between the domains of sensible and supersensible, as well as their desire to overcome it. In this sense, as Étienne Balibar has provocatively argued, Marx is indeed "the last great representative of German idealism."²⁰

At the same time, the Marxian critique of religion becomes the occasion for his separation from idealism, every renewal of which he sees as substituting an imagined or allegorical unity of subject and reality where in fact an underlying disunity obtains. In this act of subreption, thinkers including Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Bauer, and even Feuerbach repeat what Marx regards as a fundamentally theological gesture perfected by Christianity: the resolution of freedom and necessity in a merely imagined representation of their ultimate identity. The "Christian-Germanic dogma"²¹ culminating in Hegel and repeated by the Young Hegelians promises emancipation, but can deliver it only in the domain of thought. So long as *actually existing people* continue to live in conditions of exploitation and domination, Marx will argue, such emancipation remains illusory. Similarly, so long

¹⁹ I follow Eckart Förster and other recent commentators in this narration of post-Kantian thought. See: Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Karen Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁰ Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 2017), xviii.

²¹ See, for example: HF in MECW 4, 85; MEW 2, 89. Marx refers to the *christlich-germanischen* worldview, dogma, bond, and so on throughout the work of this period, and in particular in *The Holy Family*, where the ligature uniting Christianity and Germanness is among Marx's primary targets.

as critique attempts to accomplish emancipation on the basis of the quintessentially Christian opposition of spirit and matter, it can only reproduce the religious, mystifying problematic which it claims to abolish. To articulate a genuinely emancipatory criticism on materialist grounds thus requires the identification and abolition of Christian supersessionism—not only in theological form, but as it operates within the methods of criticism as well. As such, because of the historical exemplarity of Judaism within the canon of German critique, any effort to break with that canon must think in relation to Judaism, and learn to do so differently.

Marx's deployment of figures of Judaism must be read against this philosophical background. As Jay Geller argues, Marx's references to Judaism are neither transparent nor *sui generis* in their associative density. Rather, they serve as the means by which Marx "expropriate[s] and redirect[s] a Jewish-associated morphemic semantic field" in service of "a developing materialist analysis."²² Reading Marx in this light constitutes the first task of this chapter. Beginning with "On the Jewish Question," I will attempt to determine why Marx is so preoccupied with figures of Judaism, how these figures function as the conceptual lever for his critique of German philosophy, and how they thereby contribute to his reorientation toward materialism. In considering these questions, a new set of problems will impose itself, for what we find is that Marx's repeated employment of figures of Judaism is motivated less by the success of his critique than by its recurrent failure. My second task will be to examine this series of critical breakdowns. In understanding why Marx's critique continually short-circuits, I argue, we come to understand more fully how forms of theological or philosophical abstraction insinuate themselves in even the most strident materialist projects, and what it might require to advance a materialism uncontrolled by Christian supersessionist forms.

²² Geller, *The Other Jewish Question*, 198.

Section I: On the Christian Question

At its most narrow, “On the Jewish Question” is a review of two texts written by Bruno Bauer: *Die Judenfrage*, first published in Arnold Ruge’s *Deutsche Jahrbücher* in 1842, and “On the Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free,” published in George Herwegh’s *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz* in 1843.²³ From this vantage, however, it addresses a much wider field of debate concerning Jewish emancipation in Germany, one that had undergone a series of significant transformations in the decades immediately preceding Bauer’s and Marx’s respective interventions. Long-dominated by the paradigm of “civic improvement” [*bürgerliche Verbesserung*] inherited from Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, according to which Jews would be granted civil rights on condition of their “regeneration,” debates over Jewish civic equality shifted as states across Europe repealed or eroded rights granted to Jews during the Napoleonic era. In light of these changing conditions, the terms of *Verbesserung* tacitly accepted by proponents of Jewish civil equality no longer seemed plausible.²⁴ Beginning in 1828, therefore, the paradigm of regeneration gave way to one of unconditional emancipation [*Emanzipation*], which rejected the terms of regeneration and shifted the focus of the Jewish question from the supposed deficiencies of Jews to the deficiencies of the states that would deny them rights.²⁵ In this process, Jewish emancipation became a central

²³ Bruno Bauer, “die Judenfrage,” *Deutsche Jahrbücher* 274-282 (1842) republished as *die Judenfrage* (Braunschweig: Friedrich Otto, 1843); Bruno Bauer, “Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden,” in Georg Herwegh, ed. *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz* (Zürich und Winterthur: Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs, 1843), 56-71. I cite the latter text from: Bruno Bauer, *Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, ed. Hans-Martin Sass (Frankfurt a/M: Surhkamp, 1968): 175-195. *Die Judenfrage* has been partially translated into English, while the shorter essay “On the Capacity” is fully available. See Bruno Bauer, “The Jewish Problem,” trans. Helen Lederer in Lawrence S. Stepevelich, ed. *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 187-197; Bruno Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free,” trans. Michael P. Malloy, *The Philosophical Forum* 8 (1976/77): 135-149.

²⁴ David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5.

²⁵ Although Ludwig Börne had already used the term *Emanzipierung* in an 1816 pamphlet supporting the rights of Frankfurt’s Jews, it first caught on in 1828 during debates over the status of

issue for German liberals regardless of religious conviction, indexing as it did liberal ideals of benign universalism and a religiously neutral state.²⁶ It is because of its exemplary position vis-à-vis contemporary discussions of religion, secularism, and law that the question of Jewish civic equality drew such constant, heated attention in the period leading up to the 1848 revolutions.²⁷

Marx himself was well aware of this debate, and as early as 1842 identified Jewish emancipation as a prism through which to address the relationship between religion and political conditions more generally.²⁸ “On the Jewish Question” follows through on this impulse, fulfilling Marx’s earlier suggestion to Arnold Ruge—“that religion should be criticized in the framework of criticism of political conditions [*der Kritik der politischen Zustände*] rather than that political conditions should be criticized in the framework of religion”²⁹—by situating the problem of Jewish emancipation squarely in the center of contemporary political debates. Where in 1842 he approached the Jewish question primarily as a means of puncturing the Christian character of the Prussian state, however, by 1843 the problem took on a more far-reaching significance. Informed by his criticism of Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and his studies of constitutionalism in France

Jews in the Württemberg Landtag. Wilhelm Krug first used the anglicized “*Emanzipazion*” that year, after which point it spread through the writings of Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, and Gabriel Riesser. By 1834, even anti-Semites were using the term, a tacit admission of the new hegemony of the paradigm of emancipation. I draw here on the work of Jacob Katz, who traces the term to contemporary debates over Catholic accession to parliament in England (thus the anglicized form of the word, which by 1843 Marx uses simply in its English spelling), a genealogical link that connected the struggle of German Jews with a host of other contemporary struggles. See: Jacob Katz, “The Term ‘Jewish Emancipation’: Its Origin and Historical Impact,” in Alexander Altmann, ed. *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

²⁶ On the longstanding exemplarity of the Jewish question in German politics and culture, see Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*, 7-9.

²⁷ Per Eichstädt’s Nazi-era *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der Judenfrage*, roughly 2,500 published titles addressed the topic of Jewish equality between 1815 and 1850. Cited in David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 149.

²⁸ Karl Marx, “Letter to Dagobert Oppenheim” in *MECW* 1, 391; *MEGA*² III.1, 31. For a concise narration of the genesis of Marx’s eventual essay, see *MEGA*² I.2 (Apparat), 650.

²⁹ Marx, “Letter to Dagobert Oppenheim, 391 [31].

and North America, Marx now identified the Jewish question as a weapon with which to critique the form of the political state *as such*, and with it the character of contemporary civil society.

This constitutes the main thrust of Marx's argument in the first part of "On the Jewish Question," where he attempts to demonstrate that the fully developed representative state (as it exists, for example, in the state constitutions of the United States), far from overcoming or abolishing religion, in fact generalizes a specifically Christian form of alienation as the condition of political life.³⁰ "Where the political state has attained its true development, man—not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life*—leads a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life."³¹ In the democratic state, that is, all questions of empirical existence are formally annulled—the inequalities of birth, wealth, or social status disappear in the equality of one's participation in the state. Yet the political state annuls these distinctions only by asserting that they do not have political relevance: when the state declares private property, education, or occupation to be immaterial, it nevertheless permits their non-political salience, even their priority. The interpellation of the individual in the democratic state thus effects a fundamental division within each person: as a *citoyen*, they are free, equal, and sovereign; as a *Bürger* they remain unfree, unequal, and subordinate.³²

For Marx this is a paradigmatically religious condition—more specifically a Christian one.³³ Developing Feuerbach's concept of religious abstraction from *The Essence of Christianity*, Marx argues that just as Christianity promises a merely allegorical freedom through the mediation of Christ, so too does modern society promise such an illusion of freedom through the mediation of the

³⁰ For more on Marx's identification of the United States as the fully developed political state, and the way in which this identification inadvertently exposes the normative whiteness underwriting political emancipation and Jewish assimilation, see Ben Ratskoff, "Improbable Spectacles: White Supremacy, Christian Hegemony, and the Dark Side of the *Judenfrage*," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 39.1 (2020): 17-43.

³¹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 154 [148-9].

³² Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 154 [149]. See also: Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, in *MECW* 3, 77; *MEGA*² I.2, 86.

³³ Brown, "Rights and Identity in Late Modernity," 99.

democratic state.³⁴ In this sense, Marx's essay is as much about Christianity as it is about Judaism. More precisely, as Ben Ratskoff argues, "Marx's text discloses the 'Christian question' for which the Jewish one serves as a mask."³⁵ Ratskoff, taking inspiration from Gil Anidjar's paraphrase of Carl Schmidt that "*all significant concepts of the history of the modern world are liquidated theological concepts*,"³⁶ unpacks Marx's Christian question as one concerning the democratic state's rearticulation of Christian subjectivity and its characteristic subordination of (Jewish) flesh to (Christian) spirit.³⁷ Marx's answer to that question, in turn, would consist in something like Feuerbachian humanism—the recognition of human alienation, the clarification of its true meaning, and the reclamation of an original anthropological unity.

This is not the only significance of the Christian question in Marx's text, however. What I argue here is that this question imposes itself in an additional case: beyond our paradigms of emancipation and the forms of subjectivity they presuppose, the Christian question further implicates the method of criticism through which political emancipation is discursively constituted in contrast to forms of religious alienation. In this sense, Marx is closer to David Nirenberg's position than Nirenberg might concede. Nirenberg credits Marx with understanding that the Jewish question is "as much about the basic tools and concepts through which individuals in a society relate to the world and to each other, as it is about the presence of 'real Judaism and living Jews in that society.'"³⁸ For Nirenberg, however, Marx is too willing to think this Jewishness in literal terms—to accept the

³⁴ Marx consistently uses the language of allegory to describe the imagined unity of society within the political state, both in "On the Jewish Question" and throughout the "Kreuznach Manuscript." In the latter text, he further describes this function as the "*romanticism* of the political state, the *dreams* of its substantiality [*Wesenhaftigkeit*] or its harmony [*Übereinstimmung*] with itself" (*MECW* 3, 93; *MEGA*² I.2, 102). Cf. Brown, "Rights and Identity in Late Modernity," 96.

³⁵ Ratskoff, "Improbable Spectacles," 23.

³⁶ Gil Anidjar, *Blood: A Critique of Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), viii. Cited in Ratskoff, "Improbable Spectacles," 25.

³⁷ Ratskoff, "Improbable Spectacles," 26.

³⁸ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 3.

anti-Judaism endemic to critique and thus to concern himself more with eradicating this Jewishness than with exposing the intellectual mechanisms that project Jewishness as an object of criticism. Certainly it's true, as Nirenberg writes, that Marx was uninterested in writing a "critical history intended to make his contemporaries more reflective about the association" of Judaism and capitalism.³⁹ But in exploiting these habits of thought, Marx is not simply reproducing the anti-Judaism characteristic of critique (though he certainly risks that); like Nirenberg, he is investigating and attempting to disarm criticism's tendency to produce itself as the overcoming of Judaism, and thus as a kind of Christianity.

In the infamous second part of "On the Jewish Question," that method of criticism is identified with the work of Bruno Bauer and his philosophy of self-conscious freedom, but in his limited criticism of Bauer Marx implicitly indicts the Enlightenment critical tradition as a whole, of which Bauer is only a late, egregious representative. There, Marx attempts to reconfigure the relations between religion, critique, and emancipation through a hyperbolic reversal of the terms of Christian anti-Judaism sustaining Bauer's argument and his vision of *Kritik*. In doing so, Marx identifies, though only allusively, a possible itinerary for a genuinely emancipatory criticism that finally breaks with the Christian supersessionist character of German philosophical critique, and thereby with the abstract, crypto-Christian modes of freedom which it insistently promises. It is on this level of Marx's text, and hence on the second part of "On the Jewish Question," that I want to focus in the following reading.

This interpretation departs from existing readings of this part of the text, both in isolation and in its relation to its less problematic counterpart. Typically, the transition between the first and second parts of "On the Jewish Question" is read in terms of a secularization of Marx's approach—a shift from the terrain of theology to that of sociology, from the consideration of Judaism as a

³⁹ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 4.

religion to a social phenomenon, and from the horizon of political emancipation to that of human emancipation.⁴⁰ Elad Lapidot, for instance, has argued recently that Marx counters Bauer's theological treatment of the Jewish question by focusing instead on Jews as a "concrete sociological phenomenon."⁴¹ Marx, that is, having dispensed with Bauer's theological formulation of the Jewish Question in the first part of the essay, now turns to the real thing: Jews as they are, concrete actors embedded within the social dynamics of emergent capitalism.

Such an approach presents a number of difficulties, however. In the first place, there's very little that resembles sociology or a concrete analysis of historical conditions in the second part of the essay. Indeed, if one were to try to identify something like a proto-materialist method in "On the Jewish Question," one would find it in Marx's analysis of constitutional debates in the first part of the essay, rather than in the second. Moreover, the absence of any such empirical concreteness is particularly acute in his treatment of Jews, something that commentators including Lapidot have frequently noted.⁴² Although Marx supposedly deals with 'real' Jews as opposed to 'Sabbath,' i.e., religious Jews, "Marx's text is so theologically charged that rather than being a description of empirically given 'real' Jews, it can be more appropriately read as *positing* the theological, Christian

⁴⁰ Yoav Peled makes the strongest and most careful version of this argument. In his essay "From Theology to Sociology," he contends that Marx's essay "is not, as frequently asserted, a simple restatement of Feuerbach's 'anthropological' notion that religion is a reflection of human interests and human alienation taken in the abstract. His claim, rather, is that in order to understand the Jewish question, one has to analyse the social-historical role played by the Jews in European society" (474). Peled's essay has the two great merits of attending carefully to Marx's actual language in the text, and reading Marx in close proximity to Bauer, but I think that he's overly sanguine about Marx's attention to the Jews' "concrete social-historical activity," and has to read the Marx of 1843 in anticipation of Marx's more mature writings in order to sustain that position.

⁴¹ Elad Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*, 243.

⁴² See also Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism*, 152. Shlomo Avineri has similarly advanced this argument in a number of published texts on Marx's essay. Marx's characterization of Jews in "On the Jewish Question" shares this apparent superficiality with his description of the proletariat in the "Introduction," which, compared to Engels' writings on the English working class, is strikingly devoid of concrete descriptions of really existing proletarians.

concept of ‘the Jews,’ and then suggesting a corresponding *social* phenomenon.”⁴³ To make matters even worse, when Marx *does* offer empirical descriptions of the social phenomenon of Judaism, he focuses on Christians as much or even more than Jews themselves, identifying, for example, the Christian New Englander as the avatar of modern Judaism.⁴⁴ As for the thesis that Marx is shifting from the horizon of political emancipation to that of human emancipation, this may be true, but it’s equally true of the first part of the essay, and tells us nothing about how exactly that shift is supposed to occur. Does the movement from political to human emancipation consist in a progression? A radicalization? A simple redeployment of the criticism of religion or political abstraction against a new target?

Something else is going on here—something that has proven resistant to prior efforts at interpretation. In order to understand the relationship between the first and second parts of the essay, and thus what Marx is after in the second part, we have to proceed carefully, line by line, attending to Marx’s language and the apparent contradictions of his argument without presuming too quickly that we understand what he’s talking about. As Elisabeth de Fontenay has written, the internal heterogeneity of Marx’s text derails every straightforward reading.⁴⁵ The second part of “On the Jewish Question” in particular is written in a cipher, enunciating every word in three registers at once—the first a criticism of Judaism on the basis of standard anti-Jewish tropes, the second a criticism of civil society on the basis of the semantic ambiguity of the German word *Judenthum*, and the third—most interesting to me here—an ironic criticism that directs the essay’s rhetorical anti-Judaism toward Bruno Bauer as the exemplar of German critique’s surreptitious Christian character. In making sense of “On the Jewish Question,” we have to resist the urge to reduce the text to any of

⁴³ Lapidot, *Jews out of the Question*, 246-7.

⁴⁴ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 170-1 [165].

⁴⁵ Élisabeth de Fontenay, *Les Figures Juives de Marx: Marx dans l'idéologie allemande* (Paris: Galilée, 1973), 26.

its registers (whether in condemnation or exoneration), while also attending sufficiently closely to his interlocutors in order to discern when Marx is speaking in his own voice or when he is parroting another.

Marx introduces the second part of “On the Jewish Question” with an implicit repetition of the title of Bauer’s essay, “On the Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free,” before writing his first words: “It is in this form that Bauer deals with the relation between the *Jewish and the Christian religions*, and also with their relation to criticism [*Kritik*].”⁴⁶ Marx suggests here that the question concerning the relative fitness of Jews and Christians for freedom—the putative subject of Bauer’s text—belies the essay’s real topic, namely, the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and critique. The capacity of Jews and Christians to become free, that is, cannot be determined on the basis of political traditions or social forms. For Bauer, as Marx reads him, “their relation to criticism *is* their relation ‘to the capacity to become free’” (my emphasis).⁴⁷ If there is a shift between Marx’s essays, I suggest we locate it here, in the shift from the *topos* of freedom to that of critique. Where the first part of “On the Jewish Question” interrogates the concept of political freedom that undergirds Bauer’s attitude toward Jewish emancipation, his review of Bauer’s second essay focuses on the mode of criticism intended to facilitate that freedom.

That Marx positions his own essay in relation to Bauer’s concept of *Kritik* clarifies the terrain on which “On the Jewish Question” is operating. In order to understand *how* it’s operating, however, and to what ends, we have to first examine the form of criticism that it attempts to combat. How then does Bauer characterize criticism in “On the Capacity”? How does criticism mediate Jews’ and Christians’ fitness for freedom? What does the imposition of this standard mean for Jews in particular?

⁴⁶ Marx, “On the Jewish Question, 168 [163].

⁴⁷ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 168 [163].

Echoing a host of German critics before him, Bauer first clarifies the vocation of critique in contrast to its principal rival and target—religion. Echoing a broadly Feuerbachian argument, Bauer describes religion as a kind of fantasy in which humanity realizes its highest aims in an inverted form. Religion, he writes, “is the contradiction which must deny everything towards which it strives. It must chimerically fortify what it wants to deny and refuse what it promises to give.”⁴⁸ What religion arrogates to human beings in a spiritual sense it denies them in a practical sense. “It wants to give Freedom and equality, and denies them,” establishing instead “an economy of inequality and unfreedom.”⁴⁹ The function of criticism here consists in dissipating religious deception and thereby restoring to human beings their consciousness of themselves as free and equal members of a universal species. In doing so, Bauerian criticism imposes an accompanying demand. If human beings are indeed free and equal, for instance, then they must live as free and equal. Free self-consciousness, accomplished through the criticism of religion, “does not flee, does not raise itself into the fantastic reflection of this world. Rather, it fights its way through the world and carries through the struggle against barriers and privilege.”⁵⁰

Because of its indispensability as the vehicle and prefiguration of genuine human freedom, this concept of criticism is also the criterion against which Judaism and Christianity must be measured. Initially, the imposition of this standard appears to have a levelling effect. In the opening lines of his essay, Bauer declares, “The question of emancipation is a universal one [*eine Allgemeine*]: Jews like Christians want to be emancipated.”⁵¹ Extending the similarity of Jews and Christians further, he continues, “History, whose ultimate object is freedom, must and will at least work towards this: that the two, both Jews and Christians, coincide in the longing and striving for

⁴⁸ Bruno Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 146 [191].

⁴⁹ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 146 [191].

⁵⁰ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 147 [192].

⁵¹ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 135 [175].

emancipation, since between the two no difference exists [*kein Unterschied vorhanden ist*].”⁵² Jews and Christians are therefore *identical* in their common desire for freedom, as well as in possessing a restricted self-consciousness that prevents them from attaining it. So long as Jews and Christians identify themselves according to their religious particularity rather than in their common human essence, their desires for emancipation will remain frustrated. Genuine emancipation, emancipation *as such*, is possible only on condition of the abandonment of religious particularism and the mutual recognition of Jew and Christian as human.

The juxtaposition with criticism establishes the shared character of Judaism and Christianity. It is in this same relation to criticism, however, that the apparent similarity of Judaism and Christianity ultimately fractures. Although Bauer treats the contradiction between religion and Enlightenment as enduring across historical eras, he also treats it as dynamic, morphing over time within a teleological historicist framework. Though every religion may be “necessarily bound up with hypocrisy and Jesuitism,” the specific dimensions of this hypocrisy are contextually variable, dependent on concrete religious forms and their prescribed place within humanity’s global historical advance toward self-conscious freedom.⁵³ As a result, religious hypocrisy—the contradiction between what a religion promises and the hallucinatory form in which it delivers on that promise—evolves over the course of human history, adopting and shedding successive religious forms en route to its final resolution.

Just as religion develops in a sequence of successive forms, so too does its critique. That is, insofar as criticism is immanent to religious contradiction, each iteration of religious hypocrisy generates its own unique criticism, and with it its own unique Enlightenment. The passing of successive religious forms thus has a dual character. In the first place, the triumph of what Bauer

⁵² Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 135 [175].

⁵³ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 138 [180].

posits as the innate human will toward freedom—realized via criticism—abolishes the restricted, phantasmatic religious form in which that will is expressed. Because this will toward freedom is itself not yet complete, however, it begets new religious compositions, which, like the old ones, both develop and inhibit this same emancipatory desire. At each successive stage of religious development, this contradiction intensifies, such that the perfection of humanity proceeds apace with the perfection of religious inhumanity. Only when this polarity reaches its completion—only when the hypocrisy of the religious consciousness has achieved its maximum tension—will the final victory of free self-consciousness over religion become possible.

It is Protestant Christianity that finally provides this opportunity. Only Protestants, per Bauer, have “developed the religious Jesuitism, this self-strangling Unfreedom [*abwürgende Unfreiheit*] to the point where everything is at stake [*wo alle auf dem Spiele steht*], where the Unfreedom embraces everything.”⁵⁴ In doing so, they simultaneously prepare the ground for this Unfreedom’s overcoming. “Christianity is completed, pure religion, nothing other than religion. The Enlightenment which it produces and by which it will fall, decides therefore the cause of religion and of Mankind in general.”⁵⁵ The capacity for emancipation is thus a capacity *internal to Christianity alone*, for it is only from within the terms of Christianity that religion can finally be overcome.⁵⁶ If at the opening of the essay Bauer drew a single line of distinction between religion and criticism, he now splits that original distinction with a second, one which arranges the field in four: Jewish unfreedom, Christian unfreedom, Christian freedom, and critical freedom. As a result, the ultimate polarity governing Bauer’s argument is not that of religious unfreedom in general against critical freedom, but of *Jewish* unfreedom in particular against critical freedom. If Christianity fades out of focus here, it does so only by consummating its own historical process and logical development in

⁵⁴ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 140 [182].

⁵⁵ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 141 [183].

⁵⁶ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 138 [179].

critical freedom, which Bauer redefines as genealogically Christian in an exclusive sense. Christianity disappears from Bauer's schema only to become all the more normative in its invisibility.

It's no surprise, then, that Bauer's answer to his own question is that Christians are more capable of freedom than Jews, and that in fact the desire of Jews for emancipation *as Jews* is meaningless. This is not only the case for Jews as a national group—Bauer is not suggesting that Jews must be denied corporate rights as a nation in order to receive full rights as individuals. At the individual level too, so long as Jews remain Jews they cannot become citizens. What options are left? Conversion to Christianity? Bauer forecloses this route as well, arguing that history has passed the point at which even the *abandonment* of Judaism can be meaningful: “If Enlightenment has discovered that Judaism like Christianity is the bondage of the spirit, then it is too late. The fantasy and the self-deception, that the Jew could become through baptism a free man and a state citizen, is then no longer possible, at the very least it can no longer be sincere.”⁵⁷ If the Jews desire emancipation, they must perform the seemingly impossible task of breaking not only with their own essence but with a religious essence foreign to them: “they should profess to the dissolved Christianity [*aufgelösten Christentum*], to dissolved religion in general; that is, to the Enlightenment, critique, and its result, the free Mankind.”⁵⁸ For the Christian, emancipation takes the form of self-fulfillment; for the Jew, radical self-abnegation.⁵⁹ As Lapidot has correctly observed, “the kind of

⁵⁷ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 147-8 [193].

⁵⁸ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 148 [193].

⁵⁹ As I read Bauer, even this kind of self-abnegation would ultimately be insufficient, for Bauer thinks Jews not only as a political or religious group, but already in 1843 as a race, the essential character of which cannot be changed. Early in his essay, for instance, he writes that Jewish claims to equality on the basis of moral excellence have “no other meaning for the critic of their longing for Freedom than the longing of the Moor to become white, or still less meaning: it is the longing to remain unfree. Whoever wants to know the Jew as emancipated Jew not only takes the same useless trouble as if he wanted to wash the Moor white, but rather he deludes himself in this useless toil. While he intends to lather the Moor, he washes him with a dry sponge. He does not even get him wet” (136 [176]). This passage strongly supports Ratskoff's analysis of the presumptive whiteness underwriting the (Christian) political subject, indicating that even in Germany that quiet

negation that emancipation requires with respect to Judaism is of a graver kind” than with respect to Christianity. If Christianity can be *aufgehoben*, this is only because such an *Aufhebung* develops out of a dynamic already at work in Christianity. Judaism, on the other hand, demands “a negation that is no longer dialectical...a non-dialectical negation, an utter *Verneinung*.”⁶⁰ There is no other choice. As Bauer cryptically asserts, “history does not allow itself to be mocked.”⁶¹

On close examination, then, we find that Bauer’s ostensibly a-theological criticism reiterates Christian anti-Judaism as the structure of Enlightened emancipation. For Marx, such an approach is unacceptable, as is the set of conclusions which it produces. In treating the question of Jewish freedom in terms of Jews’ relation to criticism, Marx argues, Bauer again “transforms the question of Jewish emancipation into a purely religious question,” though in an outwardly secular idiom: “The theological problem as to whether the Jew or the Christian has the better prospect of salvation is repeated here in the enlightened [*aufgeklärten*] form: which of them is *more capable of emancipation* [*emancipationsfähiger*]? No longer is the question asked: Is it Judaism or Christianity that makes a man free? On the contrary, the question is now: Which makes man freer, the negation [*Negation*] of Judaism or the negation of Christianity?”⁶² Rather than abolish religious chauvinism, Marx argues, Bauer’s ostensibly a-theological concept of criticism reproduces an operative theological distinction between Judaism and Christianity and aligns itself wholly with the latter. The emancipation that Bauer promises then can only take the form of religious conversion—a “philosophical-theological act” that repeats the Christian supersession of Judaism as the method through which criticism overcomes religion as such. Consequently, only an unmarked, though presumptively Christian subject is capable of emancipation and with it the responsibilities of freedom. As Marx mockingly

racialization is already well under way by the early 1840s, principally through the discourse of Orientalism. For more on this point, see: Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*, esp. Ch. 2.

⁶⁰ Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*, 236.

⁶¹ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 149 [194].

⁶² Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 149 [194].

ventriloquizes Bauer, “the Jew[...] in order to emancipate himself, has to carry out not only his own work, but also that of the Christian, i.e., the *Kritik der Synoptiker* [by Bruno Bauer] and *Das Leben Jesu* [by David Friedrich Strauss], etc.”⁶³ To the extent that emancipation is possible for Jews, that is, it is contingent on their transformation and normalization according to models of Christian subjectivity.

In alluding to Bauer and Strauss as the representatives of an enduringly religious and thus insufficient method of criticism, Marx suggests that genuine emancipation requires that one dispense with religion both in its explicit forms and as it masquerades in the work of Young Hegelian criticism. In order to do so, it is first necessary to learn how to ask the Jewish question properly, to “break with the theological formulation of the question [*die theologische Fassung der Frage zu brechen*]” as it is posed by Bauer.⁶⁴ What is this revised Jewish question? “For us,” Marx elaborates, “the question of the Jew’s capacity for emancipation [*Emancipationsfähigkeit des Juden*] becomes the question: What particular *social* element [*gesellschaftliche Element*] has to be overcome [*überwinden*] in order to abolish Judaism [*um das Judenthum aufzuheben*]?”⁶⁵ In this first reframing of the question, Marx shifts from consideration of the religious element in Judaism to its supporting social element, thereby extricating the question of Jewish emancipation from the religious antagonism between Judaism and Christianity. This transposition develops Marx’s argument from the first part of the essay: there Marx found that the question of Jewish emancipation poses a question concerning the limits of political emancipation; here the Jewish question asks what would have to be achieved in order for Jews to be emancipated not only in the restricted political sense, but *from* that restricted sense as well.

The answer implicit in the question is a frustrating one, however. For all the distance between Bauer and Marx, the task of criticism appears to be more or less identical: *um das Judenthum*

⁶³ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 169 [164].

⁶⁴ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 169 [164].

⁶⁵ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 169 [164].

aufzuheben, a Christian imperative if there ever was one. Yet Marx's formulation of this imperative entails a substantial displacement of Bauer's problematic. Explaining his choice to pose the Jewish question this way, he writes, "For the present-day Jew's capacity for emancipation is the relation of Judaism to the emancipation of the modern world. This relation necessarily results from the special position [*besondern Stellung*] of Judaism in the contemporary enslaved world."⁶⁶

Without yet telling us what this special position is, Marx has already departed from Bauer by asserting the mere fact of any relation whatsoever between Judaism and the emancipation of the modern world. For Bauer, as we've seen, Judaism is distinguished by its total alienation from this project: its tenacity in continuing to exist beyond its period of historical legitimacy is explicable only by virtue of its "lack of ability to develop with history [*der Mangel an geschichtlicher Entwicklungsfähigkeit*]."⁶⁷ This opposition does not meet the level of dialectical contradiction, as already discussed above; it is pure, external antagonism between history and a people utterly adverse [*geschichtswidrig*] to it.⁶⁸ For Marx, on the other hand, the relationship between Judaism and emancipation is not only possible, but exemplary.

This is something of a discordant argument for Marx, as the thrust of the first part of "On the Jewish Question" is to decenter Judaism and discredit the idea that Judaism is somehow uniquely antithetical to political citizenship. To the extent that there is any contradiction between being Jewish and being a citizen, it is a contradiction between "the *living individual* and the *citizen*," a resistance of empirical existence to a form of being that is only ever allegorical.⁶⁹ It should strike us as strange, then, that Jews and Judaism reacquire their exemplarity here, and moreover that they do so in the familiar idiom of philosophical anti-Judaism. For when Marx begins to "consider the

⁶⁶ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 169 [164].

⁶⁷ Bauer, *The Jewish Question*, 195 [11].

⁶⁸ Bauer, *Die Judenfrage*, 32.

⁶⁹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 154 [149].

actual, worldly Jew [*den wirklichen weltlichen Juden*], not the *Sabbath Jew* [*Sabbaths Juden*], as Bauer does, but the *everyday Jew* [*Alltagsjuden*],” he does so in the well-worn clichés of German anti-Judaism, repeating Bauer’s characterization of Judaism virtually verbatim.

Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion, but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew [*das Geheimniß der Religion im wirklichen Juden*].

What is the worldly basis [*weltliche Grund*] of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest* [*Das praktische Bedürfnis, der Eigennutz*].

What is the worldly cult [*weltliche Kultus*] of the Jew? *Haggling* [*Schacher*]. What is his worldly God? Money.⁷⁰

Such is the secret, secular basis of Judaism, the substance of the *wirkliche Jude* that undergirds and saturates Jewish religious consciousness. If that’s true, however—if these are indeed the criteria of “real” Judaism—then we are forced to draw the surprising conclusion that just about everyone is a Jew. The *wirkliche Jude* as figured here is indistinguishable from the bourgeois, from the “egoistic *homme*” that is produced in the Christian theological-political process by which the state and civil society are split off from one another.⁷¹ Consequently, the shift from *Sabbaths Jude* to *Alltagsjude* is less a shift from the religious essence of Judaism to its particular social basis than from Jews to members of civil society in general.

The distinction between *Sabbaths Jude* and *Alltagsjude* thus performs the same de-emphasizing maneuver as Marx’s reframing of the Jewish question in the first part of the essay, though with the obvious difference that here the disidentification of *Sabbaths Jude* with the ills of civil society comes with a paradoxical intensification of anti-Jewish rhetoric. Insofar as Marx’s critique depends on the continued figural identification of Jews with commercialism and financial exploitation, it risks affirming and even deepening anti-Jewish sentiment. Within the terms of Marx’s argument, however, what this means is that to overcome or abolish Judaism would be to abolish the material conditions

⁷⁰ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 167-170 [164].

⁷¹ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 167 [162].

of estrangement that guarantee abstract equality alongside concrete domination. Marx immediately comes to the same conclusion himself, feigning surprise: “Very well then! Emancipation from *baggling* and *money*, consequently from practical, real Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time.”⁷² Judaism thus acquires an unexpected universality: “if the Jew recognizes that this *practical* nature of his is futile and works to abolish it, he extricates himself from his previous development and works for *human emancipation* as such and turns against the *supreme practical* expression of human self-estrangement.”⁷³

To assert that Judaism—the religion of particularity *par excellence* in the German philosophical imagination—has such significance is in itself noteworthy, but it is all the more noteworthy here because Marx does not challenge the Christian chauvinist depiction of Judaism. Rather than argue that Judaism is in fact consonant with the universalist project of Enlightenment reason, Marx accepts every denigrating predicate ascribed to Judaism—egoism, self-interest, hypocrisy, particularism, materiality, practicality—and argues *on that basis* for its significance.⁷⁴ At this point Marx’s appropriation of Judaism passes from a structure of exemplarity to one of universality: Judaism becomes generalized. This is, of course, a profound reversal of Bauer, who argued that the Enlightenment produced in and against Christianity is “decisive for all times, for all of Mankind,” but what are we to make of that reversal?⁷⁵ What does it mean for Marx to say that “In its final

⁷² Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 170 [164].

⁷³ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 170 [164]. Compare this to *The Holy Family*, where Marx writes of the proletariat, “it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing *all* the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation” (Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 37 [38]).

⁷⁴ Amos Funkenstein has noted the perverse similarity of Marx’s argument to that of Mendelssohn, who also argues for the unique significance of Judaism with respect to the Enlightened state, though of course he describes that significance in entirely different terms. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perception of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 231. Cited in Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, 181.

⁷⁵ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 141 [183].

significance [*in ihrer letzten Bedeutung*] *the emancipation of the Jews* is the emancipation of mankind from *Judaism* [*die Emancipation der Menschheit vom Judenthum*]”⁷⁶

The semantic ambiguity of *Judenthum* in nineteenth-century German usage is crucial here. In addition to its literal referents—Judaism, Jewry, and Jewishness—*Judenthum* was widely used as a metaphor for trade and other kinds of commercial activity.⁷⁷ Marx conjures both sets of meanings at once, playing on pervasive associations of Judaism with egoism and self-interest in order to give shape to his criticism of civil society. In the same gesture, Marx signals a sweeping reinterpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as analogous with the relationship between civil society and the political state. Implicitly consolidating his analysis of the joint production of political state and civil society with the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Marx calls into question Christianity’s mythic narration of its own genesis as Judaism’s fulfilment and negation. In its place, he suggests an ongoing, mutually constitutive relationship between Judaism and Christianity, though not one that Christian critics are capable of perceiving. Addressing two of Bauer’s explanations for Jewish “tenacity” in *Die Judenfrage*, Marx writes that “Judaism has held its own *alongside* Christianity, not only as religious criticism of Christianity, not only as the embodiment of doubt [*inkorporirter Zweifel*] in the religious derivation of Christianity, but equally because the practical-Jewish spirit [*praktisch-jüdisches Geist*], because Judaism has maintained itself and even

⁷⁶ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 170; [165]. Translation altered.

⁷⁷ A number of commentators argue that the multiple meanings of *Jude* and *Judenthum* would have been obvious to Marx’s immediate audience. Hal Draper puts the point most strongly, contending that “virtually the entire population of Germany...habitually used and accepted the words *Jew* and *Jewry* in the manner of Marx’s essay whether they were favorable to the Jews’ cause or not, whether they were anti-Semitic or not, whether they were Jews or not” (Draper, *Marx’s Theory of Revolution*, 591). Draper overstates the ubiquity of this idiom, while underplaying the particular severity of Marx’s usage. One need not share Draper’s exculpatory commitments in order to acknowledge the polyvalence of *Judenthum* in the essay, however. Paul Rose—one of Marx’s harshest readers—writes with frustration that “The distinction between the Jew as a real person and the Jew as a metaphor is hazed over intentionally throughout” (Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism*, 301).

attained its highest development in civil society.”⁷⁸ This argument repeats Feuerbach’s comment in *The Essence of Christianity* that “Judaism is worldly Christianity; Christianity, spiritual Judaism,” but where Feuerbach interprets the spiritualization of Judaism as a historical advance in the development of religion, Marx identifies that relation as a permanent one.⁷⁹ The theological abstraction of the endemically Christian political state *produces* the Jewish egoism of contemporary civil society, in the process transforming every Christian *citoyen* into a Jewish *Bürger*. This dynamic prevents us from taking Christianity or Judaism as isolated objects of investigation or criticism. Instead, we are led to apprehend each as constituent parts of a single, compound whole: Judeo-Christianity. The interpenetration of these two traditions or principles is so complete as to prevent even their analytical extrication, an impossibility captured by the delirium induced by Marx when he writes: “from the outset, the Christian was the theorizing Jew, the Jew is therefore the practical Christian, and the practical Christian has become a Jew again.”⁸⁰

If this combined religious formation constitutes something like Judeo-Christianity, however, the accent is nevertheless on Judaism. If we think along Marx’s analogical chain we find that just as civil society is the logical and material precondition of the political state, so too is practical Judaism the precondition and sustaining force of its theoretical counterpart, Christianity. Far from constituting the consummation and supersession of Judaism, then, Christianity is more adequately understood as a moment belonging to the development of Judaism, the true world-historical religion. In this vocation, Christianity facilitates the perfection of Judaism by ruthlessly cleaving human beings’ universal species-nature from their particular existence, thereby giving free reign to the imperatives that govern that existence. “Only under the dominance of Christianity, which makes *all* national, natural, moral, and theoretical conditions *extrinsic* to man, could civil society separate

⁷⁸ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 171 [166].

⁷⁹ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 120; *Sämmtliche Werke* 6, 143.

⁸⁰ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 173 [168].

itself completely from the life of the state, sever all the species-ties of man, put egoism and selfish need in the place of these species-ties, and dissolve the human world into a world of atomistic individuals who are inimically opposed to one another.” Having accomplished this task, Christianity consummates itself—not in reason or freedom, but again in Judaism: “Christianity sprang from Judaism. It has merged again in Judaism.”⁸¹

By narrating the history of Christianity as internal to the superordinate history of Judaism, Marx rewrites the historical teleology undergirding conventional accounts of the history of religion and the genesis of reason. In doing so, he disorients Christian self-understanding along with the set of hierarchical oppositions that sustain it: just as Christianity resolves into Judaism, so too does the theoretical resolve into the practical, the spiritual into the sensuous, and the ideal into the material. The task of criticism transforms accordingly. Though he retains Judaism and its cognates as the principle objects of critique, that status is no longer preliminary to, but resultant of the critique of Christianity and the forms of theological abstraction with which it is associated. Marx describes this shift in critical registers elsewhere in the *Jahrbücher* as a joint process of radicalization and secularization: “the criticism of heaven turns into [*verwandelt sich*] the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.”⁸² The effect of this transposition is to preempt Christianity from reconstituting itself as criticism through its own self-overcoming, and therefore to reject Christian supersessionism as the template for emancipatory criticism—at least in principle.

It is in light of this imperative that we should ask again what it means for Marx to write, “In its final significance *the emancipation of the Jews* is the emancipation of mankind from *Judaism*.” This line has often been interpreted as the consummate expression of Marx’s anti-Semitism, the conclusion of

⁸¹ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 173 [168].

⁸² Karl Marx, “Contribution to Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law. Introduction,” in *MECW* 4, 177; *MEGA*² I.2,

a systematic and “secularized form of Jew-hatred” that feeds the paranoid anti-Semitism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸³ Others have found reason to be skeptical of this reading, however. Commentators including Lapidot and Carlebach, for instance, argue that the synonymy of *Judenthum* with civil society indicates suggests that Marx’s real concern is with the “general *anti-social* element of the present-time,” rather than with Jews themselves. Moreover, the Hegelian language which Marx uses to describe the emancipation from Judaism—*aufheben* and *auflösen*, rather than Bauer’s *verneinen*—complicates the ascription of proto-genocidal sentiments to Marx.⁸⁴ If we focus on the association of *Judenthum* with civil society while blunting the apparent severity of Marx’s language of “abolition” or “dissolution,” we are left with the idea that the “emancipation of mankind from *Judaism*” consists not in the elimination or even conversion of the Jews, but instead in the cooperatively organized satisfaction of individual need, and thus the reintegration of “individual-sensuous existence” with “species-existence.” This reading has much to recommend it: it allows us to assimilate the second part of “On the Jewish Question” within Marx’s intellectual development, while defusing the more dangerous elements of the text. Forcibly translating Marx’s text out of his chosen idiom, however, comes at the cost of addressing the generalization of Judaism in Marx’s argument—precisely what is at issue in this chapter.

Here again it’s necessary to read Marx in relation to Bauer. Recall that for Bauer emancipation and Enlightenment are the products of a critique internal to Christianity—a critique that dissolves religious illusion from within the terms of religious hypocrisy. Emancipation on Bauer’s model is a purification and metamorphosis of religion, specifically Protestantism: “If

⁸³ Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism*, 302.

⁸⁴ It’s worth pointing out that Marx himself pokes fun at this kind of mistaken literalization in *The Holy Family*, attributing it to Bauer in particular. “Since Herr Bauer confuses *political* emancipation wit *human* emancipation, since the state can react to antagonistic element...only by forcible exclusion of the *persons* representing them (as the Terror, for instance, wished to do away with hoarding by guillotining the hoarders), Herr Bauer must have both Jews and Christians hanged in his ‘Critical State’” (Karl Marx and Freidrich Engels, *The Holy Family* 95 [100]).

Protestantism, and in it Christianity dissolves itself [*sich auflöst*], there stands in its place the complete, free man, the creative Mankind hindered no longer from its highest creations.”⁸⁵ The critique of Christianity is a critique with Christianity as its object, of course, but it is also a critique *belonging to* Christianity, proper to Christianity and thus operating within a Christian horizon of emancipation. Marx constantly calls our attention to this point, to the way in which Bauer’s critical emancipation from Christianity remains what we might call an *Emancipation vom Christenthum*, an emancipation from, by, and out of Christianity. If we read Marx’s statement as consistent with his rhetorical strategy of repetition and inversion, we should interpret the *von* mediating the two terms *Emancipation* and *Judenthum* as expressing the same ambiguity.⁸⁶ That is, just as Bauer’s vision of emancipation is the result of a critical struggle internal to *Christenthum*, the emancipation that Marx pursues here is the result of a critical struggle internal to *Judenthum*, the condition of alienation in which “the life of the species” becomes a mere means for sustaining the animal life of the individual.⁸⁷ In redefining emancipation as the product of a critical engagement in and with Judaism—where Judaism stands in for a suite of cognate terms whose denigration constitutes the possibility of Enlightened subjective autonomy—Marx rejects that paradigm of autonomy along with the method through which it

⁸⁵ Bauer, “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews,” 143 [186].

⁸⁶ Robert Fine recommends this approach to the second essay comprising “On the Jewish Question” as well. In relation to the evident tension between the first and second essays, he recommends that “the grammar of Marx’s response to Bauer in the secondary essay is meant to be the same as the grammar of his response in the first essay.” See Robert Fine, “Rereading Marx on the ‘Jewish Question’: Marx as a Critic of Antisemitism?,” in Marcel Stoezler, ed. *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014): 137-159, 150. For Fine, the significance of the second essay consists in its recognition that no empirical evidence concerning the Jews is sufficient to challenge the perspective of the anti-Semite, an insight that challenges the strategy of refutation characteristic of contemporary Jewish critics of Bauer and distills the way that anti-Semitic abstractions like “the Jews” function as tools of distraction and domination. I’m very interested in Fine’s implicit suggestion that we read “On the Jewish Question” as responding to and transforming the rhetorical strategies of prior Jewish arguments for emancipation—in particular apologetic arguments—but I find Fine’s specific reading difficult to sustain over the course of the essay.

⁸⁷ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 276 [240].

articulates itself. Against the critical tradition summarized by Bruno Bauer, *Emancipation vom Judenthum* denotes the possibility of authentic human emancipation beyond Christian (or pseudo-Christian) horizons.

What this means, however, remains maddeningly indeterminate. There is no doubt that in relegating Christianity to a secondary role, Marx deprives it of its entrenched position as the consummate religion. In the same way, he interrupts the process through which Christianity suffuses criticism and its correlate concept of freedom. Yet what are we left with following that interruption? What method of criticism follows on the critique of Bauer? What emancipatory possibilities does it entail? And how seriously should we take the proximity of emancipation to *Judenthum*? Is Marx suggesting that real Jews (ironically not *wirkliche Juden* but Marx's *Sabbaths Juden*) have a privileged role to play in the process of human emancipation? Is it possible, as Michael Mack perhaps too generously suggests, that Marx here "anticipate[s] a nonapologetic account of Jewishness"?⁸⁸ That in a liberated world "everyone would be 'the Jew'"?⁸⁹ Does Marx gesture toward "an alternative, possibly positive, perhaps even Jewish-y political epistemology?"⁹⁰

I've suggested something similar up to this point. Yet if I read Marx as entertaining the possibility that *Judenthum* may denote a positive political epistemology alternative to the Christian-Germanic dogma of theological-political abstraction, I do so with a key difference, namely, that if there is something Jewish—or Jewish-y—about the positive political epistemology that Marx is trying to bring into focus, that something cannot be disentangled from the ostensive ambiguity of *Judenthum* in his text, an ambiguity that operates on the basis of Marx's paradoxical refusal of the exclusive identification between *wirkliche Juden* and actually existing Jews. What makes *Judenthum* viable as a critical figure to be exploited is not its own substance per se, but rather its peculiar status

⁸⁸ Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, 14.

⁸⁹ Mack, *German Idealism and the Jew*, 16.

⁹⁰ Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question*, 18.

as in the German philosophical canon and in the criticism of Bauer especially. With Bauer's inadvertent help, he identifies in Judaism not only the proof of Christianity's historical contingency, but moreover the embarrassing endurance of particularity, of materiality in every spiritualizing and universalizing process, whether discursive or political.⁹¹ Judaism represents unsublatable negativity, the impossibility of philosophical consciousness's contemporaneity with itself.

It is this negativity that Marx seizes on in his own deployment of the language of *Jude* and *Judenthum*. Judaism gives the lie to the Christian discourse of transcendence that saturates and legitimizes existing relations of domination. By pulling on that thread, by thinking through Judaism the enduring contradictions of transcendence, Marx initiates a critical procedure that leads us from religious consciousness to the material conditions that engender it. In order to distill and assess the positive epistemology which this procedure produces, therefore, we have to follow Marx beyond the dialectic of Christian and Jew to the social dynamics which that opposition only partially discloses. he transitions from the domain of religion to that of political economy, Marx proceeds, as David Nirenberg argues, by continuing to think in relation to figures of Judaism of Christianity. He does so, however, only by transposing the dynamic relation between those figures into a more "fundamental" opposition between proletarian and property. The following section examines that transposition in detail. In the process, we will come closer to isolating the political epistemology which Marxian critique generates, and thus the specific technics of that critique itself.

Section II: Proletarian and Jew

Already in Marx's other submission to the *Jahrbücher*, the "Introduction" to the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," we find Marx repurposing his analysis

⁹¹ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 171 [166]; Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 88 [93].

of the mutually constituting antagonism between Jewish civil society and the Christian-Germanic state to characterize the conflict between proletariat and private property. Here, as with *Judenthum* in “On the Jewish Question,” the emergence of the proletariat, not only as a class, but as a figure that concentrates within itself the inhumanity of civil society, signals at once the perfection of estrangement under the regime of private property as well as the possibility for its eradication. Transposing the dialectic of Christian and Jew into the idiom of political economy, Marx writes that in Germany, “where practical life is as spiritless as spiritual life is unpractical,” the positive possibility of emancipation consists in the radicalization of society’s contradictions and the consequent “formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates.”⁹² This class—the proletariat—would be that which “does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all all-round antithesis to the premises of the German state[...]a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society.” We should recognize here the recurrence of Marx’s language concerning the special place of Jews vis-à-vis human emancipation. Much as the Jew constitutes a site of unsublatable resistance in Bauer’s critical philosophy, the proletariat constitutes the point of disarticulation of contemporary civil society, as well as of its theoretical self-representation in the discourse of political economy.

In the 1844 “Introduction,” the figural identification between Jew and proletarian, though striking, remains at the level of mere similarity. It reaches a far higher level of intensity in *The Holy Family*, where Marx reiterates and radicalizes the argument of “On the Jewish Question,” deepening his criticism of Bauer’s unavowed Paulinism and testing its consequences through a more explicit transposition of the Jewish-Christian relation into domains of political economy and class struggle. In this text, Marx begins to think as expansively with *Judenthum* as Bauer does in opposition to it,

⁹² Marx, “Introduction,” in *MECW* 3, 186; *MEGA*² I.2, 181-2.

negatively exploiting the logic of Pauline supersessionism as his primary means of articulating the stakes of both socialism and Feuerbachian humanism.

The growing complexity of Marx's thinking with figures of Jews and Judaism is ironically facilitated by Bauer himself, who, in a series of responses to (primarily) Jewish criticisms of *The Jewish Question*, magnified the significance of the debate over Jewish emancipation and increasingly came to rely on it as the theoretical prism through which to conceptualize a world-historical conflict between criticism and its adversaries—the totality of which Bauer refers to simply as *die Masse*.⁹³ *Die Masse*, as Bauer uses it, is intentionally polysemous, denoting first “the masses” and their liberal spokesmen, but also materiality and particularity, philosophical categories that display the same kind of limitation and impurity as the masses themselves.⁹⁴ The priority of this figure is the result of what Bauer regards as the superficial universality of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, which abolished the external constraints of feudalism while leaving its internal constraints fully intact. The result is an indolent, unregenerate mass—a mass, however, that has been led to regard itself as the moral core and political engine of modernity.⁹⁵ It is in this self-satisfied obstinacy that the masses, whom Bauer describes in symptomatically repulsive language as a “deposit” or “phlegm” left over

⁹³ Between Bauer's initial publication of *Die Judenfrage* and “Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden” and Marx's writing of the bulk of *The Holy Family*, in the fall of 1844, the debate over Bauer's positions on Jewish emancipation had expanded into a full-blown controversy. In addition to Marx's minor contribution in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Bauer's essays drew the attention of major Jewish commentators including Gustav Philippson, Samuel Hirsch, Gabriel Riesser, Abraham Geiger, and Mendel Hess, all of whom published against Bauer in the year 1843. Bauer responded in turn, publishing two refutations of these critics in December 1843 and March 1844, as well as an additional response to Marx alone in July. Limiting ourselves only to the work that appears in *The Holy Family*, the controversy over Bauer's *Judenfrage* included more than twenty separate works and responses, a number that would grow as the feud between Bauer and Marx continued through 1845 and 1846. The most comprehensive account of Jewish responses to Bauer remains that of Nathan Rotenstreich. Nathan Rotenstreich, “For and Against Emancipation: The Bruno Bauer Controversy,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 4.1 (January 1959): 3-36.

⁹⁴ Bruno Bauer, “Neueste Schriften über die Judenfrage,” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 1 (December 1843), 2.

⁹⁵ Bruno Bauer, “Die neuesten Schriften über die Judenfrage,” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 4 (March 1844), 11.

from the revolutionary wars, become a source of “boundless irritation” and the “natural adversary of theory.”⁹⁶ Subtending this schema is a consistent allusion to the Jews and their public advocates, whose specific obstinacy in the face of criticism remains emblematic for Bauer of obstinance as such. Indeed, when Bauer addresses the proletariat explicitly in a September 1844 article written against Feuerbach, he writes that the identification of the proletariat as a revolutionary class is simply substituting a “new extenuation [*Beschönigung*] of the old egoism.”⁹⁷ In its new “determination as the proletariat,” the Mass is nothing more than a derivative image of “the opposition standing above it.” Only words have changed: “it is the same case as with the Jews two years ago.” Far from displacing the centrality of Judaism as criticism’s negative antitype, then, the figure of the *Masse* restates critical anti-Judaism as the structure of a more fundamental antagonism between criticism and world.⁹⁸

As in “On the Jewish Question,” it is this tendency of Bauer’s criticism to reiterate Christian supersessionist modes of thought that draws Marx’s and Engels’ attention and provides their point of entry for thinking more legitimate modes of emancipation.⁹⁹ Indeed, they seem to write of little else: from the first line of the “Foreword,” quoted at the beginning of the chapter, they revel in

⁹⁶ Bruno Bauer, “Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik?,” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 8 (June 1844), 25.

⁹⁷ Bruno Bauer, “Die Gattung und die Masse,” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 10 (September 1844), 42.

⁹⁸ Bauer, “Die Gattung und die Masse,” 25-6. As with the Jews before, the appropriate critical comportment is combat: “a spiritual being cannot be raised if it isn’t changed, and it will not be changed until it has achieved the utmost resistance. What one wants to raise, one must fight.”

⁹⁹ It’s clear that Marx kept up with his criticism of Bauer from “On the Jewish Question” over the course of 1844. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, he refers quite clearly to Bauer’s “Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik” and the counterposition of criticism and the masses, projecting the position of *The Holy Family* to the effect that “on close inspection *theological criticism*—genuinely progressive though it was the inception of the movement—is seen in the final analysis to be nothing but the culmination and consequence the old *philosophical*, and especially the *Hegelian*, *transcendentalism*, twisted into a *theological caricature*” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 233 [326]).

caricaturizing Bauer and his colleagues as pseudo-Christians, new ascetics, or even a comical second coming of Christ himself.¹⁰⁰

The operative distinction between Spirit and Mass draws particular ire, distilling for Marx the Christian normativity underwriting Bauer's work. He writes: "The relation between 'Spirit and Mass' has, however, also a *hidden* meaning. That relation *discovered* by Herr Bruno is, in fact, nothing but a *Critically caricatured consummation of Hegel's conception of history*, which, in turn, is nothing but the *speculative* expression of the *Christian-Germanic* principle of the antithesis between *Spirit* and *Matter*, between *God* and the *world*."¹⁰¹ This unavowed genealogy has more than merely philosophical significance. In Bauer's criticism, the quasi-metaphysical distinction between criticism and Mass relies on "the Critical debasement, rejection and transformation of *definite* mass-type objects and persons."¹⁰² This amounts to a process of self-purification, through which criticism becomes a quasi-metaphysical subject detached from any historical or material specificity. It performs this operation in relation to "the limit of the Mass, the Mass as limit [*die Schranke der Masse, die Masse als Schranke*]," which acquires its own consistency only as the aggregate of impurity—"as spiritlessness...as 'indolence', 'superficiality', 'self-complacency'."¹⁰³ Such figural polarization corresponds to a real, i.e., material differentiation, with the self-aggrandizement of Spirit and its small coterie of representatives producing a corresponding dehumanization of the really existing masses. "This antithesis finds expression in history, in the human world itself in such a way that a few chosen *individuals* as the *active* Spirit are counterposed to the rest of mankind, as the *spiritless* Mass, as *Matter*."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ In Chapter 1, for instance, Engels parodically narrates critical criticism in the language of John 3:16: "And Criticism so loved the mass that it sent its only begotten son, that those who believe in him may not be lost, but may have Critical life. Criticism was made mass and dwells amongst us and we behold its glory, the glory of the only begotten son of the father" (Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 4 [14])

¹⁰¹ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 85 [89].

¹⁰² Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 78 [82].

¹⁰³ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 84 [89].

¹⁰⁴ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 85 [89].

We can observe here the interpenetration of political, economic, and metaphysical categories—the way in which certain philosophical hierarchies come to sanction and disguise corresponding social hierarchies. Each of these hierarchies is overlaid, however, with the religious hierarchy of Christian and Jew—the original antagonism of Spirit and Matter that overdetermines all subsequent iterations. For Bauer, that originality is straightforward—ongoing resistance to criticism in the form of *die Masse* is an iteration of Jewish obstinacy in new historical garb. For Marx, on the other hand, the priority of the religious is more complex. In the first place, it is genealogical—Christian antipathy to matter and to the body in particular provides an indispensable conceptual framework for philosophy’s own congenital idealism. Yet that genealogical privilege remains operative only insofar as Christian abstraction continues to facilitate and obscure a more fundamental dynamic, what Alberto Toscano calls the “social logic of separation and autonomisation” inherent in capitalist production.¹⁰⁵ The dialectic of Christian and Jew retains its priority in Marx’s analysis *not* because it is fundamental in order of fact, but rather because it is the privileged form of appearance of an underlying dialectic of estranged labor and private property. In this sense Christian anti-Judaism becomes the theoretical site at which to initiate a materialist critique.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the Jewish question remains a topic of ongoing dispute, not only for Bauer but also for Marx, who organizes his attack on Bruno Bauer in Chapter Six of *The Holy Family* around Absolute Criticism’s “campaigns against the Mass,”¹⁰⁶ including three of Bauer’s articles that Marx refers to simply as “The Jewish Question No. 1”, “The Jewish Question No. 2”, and “The Jewish Question No. 3.” In these readings of Bauer we see most explicitly how Marx relies on Christian figures of Judaism in his characterization of the proletariat and the project

¹⁰⁵ Toscano, “Beyond Abstraction,” 8.

¹⁰⁶ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 87 [91].

of communism. At the opening of “The Jewish Question No. 2”, which deals with Bauer’s second article “Die neuesten Schriften über die Judenfrage,” we find Marx’s logic of figural substitution and dialectical inversion operating at a fever pitch:

To the material, mass-type Jews is preached the *Christian* doctrine of *freedom of the Spirit, freedom in theory*, that *spiritualistic* freedom which *imagines* itself to be free even in chains, and whose soul is satisfied with ‘*the idea*’ and only embarrassed by any mass-type existence.

[Den massenhaften, materiellen Juden wird die *christliche* Lehre von der *geistigen Freiheit, von der Freiheit in der Theorie* gepredigt, jene *spiritualistische* Freiheit, die sich auch in den Ketten *einbildet*, frei zu sein, die seelenvergnügt ist in „*der Idee*“ und von aller massenhaften Existenz nur geniert wird.]¹⁰⁷

Marx begins here by repeating a refrain that we’ve seen throughout his writing between 1843 and 1845—Bauer’s critical discourse and his concept of freedom are organized through a classically Christian counterposition of free spirit against enslaved flesh. Around the two antagonists Jew and Christian, a number of other predicates multiply, populating either side of the opposition with cognates drawn from across Bauer’s texts: on the side of the Jew *materiell, massenhaft, Ketten, Existenz*; on the side of the Christian *geistig, Freiheit, Theorie, spiritualistisch, einbilden, Idee*. Quoting Bauer, Marx continues:

“The Jews are *emancipated* to the extent they have now reached in *theory*, they are *free* to the extent that they *wish to be free*.”

From this proposition one can immediately measure the Critical gap which separates *mass-type*, profane communism and socialism from *absolute* socialism. The first proposition of profane socialism rejects emancipation *in mere theory* as an illusion and for *real* freedom it demands besides the idealistic ‘*will*’ very tangible, very material conditions. How low ‘*the Mass*’ is in comparison with holy Criticism, the Mass which considers material, practical upheavals necessary even to win the time and means required merely to occupy itself with ‘*theory*!’”

[„So weit die Juden jetzt in der *Theorie* sind, so weit *sind* sie emanzipiert, so weit sie *frei sein wollen*, so weit *sind* sie *frei*.“

Aus diesem Satze kann man sogleich die kritische Kluft ermessen, welche den *massenhaften*, profanen Kommunismus und Sozialismus von dem *absoluten* Sozialismus scheidet. Der erste

¹⁰⁷ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 94; [99].

Satz des profanen Sozialismus verwirft die Emanzipation *in der bloßen Theorie* als eine Illusion und verlangt für die *wirkliche* Freiheit, außer dem idealistischen „Willen“, noch sehr handgreifliche, sehr materielle Bedingungen. Wie tief steht „die Masse“ unter der heiligen Kritik, die Masse, welche materielle, praktische Umwälzungen für nötig hält, selbst um die Zeit und die Mittel zu erobern, welche auch nur zur Beschäftigung mit „der Theorie“ erheischt werden!]¹⁰⁸

Note how quickly Marx shifts from Bauer’s own language, which deals exclusively with the question of Jewish emancipation, to the idiom of communism. There is no elaboration here, no justification of the transition: one can *immediately* (*sogleich*) substitute the language of communism and the Mass. This transposition is facilitated by Marx’s repetition of the adjective *massenhaft*, used initially with the Jews but invoked again in the case of “profane communism and socialism,” and finally substantialized in the figure of *die Masse* as such.

Massenhaft is a curious adjective in this context. Although Bauer uses it a handful of times in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in the sense given by “mass-like,” its conventional meaning is something closer to “abundant” or “multitudinous” (as in “*massenhaft, wie der Sand am Meere*,” as one of Bauer’s colleagues uses the word in the *ALZ*’s fourth volume). Marx’s usage is therefore anything but natural. It is a specific reaction to and citation of Bauer’s idiosyncratic language. Importantly, however, Marx’s appropriation of the word differs from Bauer in one respect, namely, in its application to Jews. Bauer himself never uses *massenhaft* in relation to Jews, in spite of the resonance between *Juden* and *Masse* in his text. Marx’s repurposing of *massenhaft* thus renders explicit a figural identification that remains only implicit in Bauer, capitalizing on the polysemy of *Masse* and *massenhaft* to link the Jewish question directly to the project of communism and its revolutionary subject. That Marx goes beyond Bauer in order to establish the link between proletarian and Jew demonstrates the extent to which his own emerging materialism depends upon a repeated critique and reversal of Christian abstraction as he moves down the dialectical chain.

¹⁰⁸ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 94-5 [99-100].

The proletariat is more than just another figure within a horizontal matrix of metaphoric substitution, however. It represents the end of metaphorical substitution, anchoring the promise of Feuerbachian humanism in an empirical bearer. *The Holy Family* expresses this thought far more confidently than the earlier essays in the *Jahrbücher*, where the negative function of Jew and Proletariat remains only nominally tied to an identifiable historical group. Here, however, as the result of the alienating antithesis between property and worker, emancipation becomes more than a theoretical possibility; it becomes an “absolutely imperative *need*—the practical expression of *necessity*.”¹⁰⁹ If the propertied classes can, by virtue of their social position, experience estrangement as empowerment or even as pleasure, the expropriated classes can harbor no such illusions. In proletarian existence estrangement unfolds to its furthest extent, with the most naked, dehumanizing consequences. It does so, however, with the additional effect that, precisely because of this thoroughness, it cannot be mistaken for freedom. As a result, “these *mass-type*, communist workers, employed, for instance in the Manchester or Lyons workshops...are most painfully aware of the *difference* between *being* and *thinking*, between *consciousness* and *life*.”¹¹⁰ Possessed with this immediate, practical knowledge of the hollowness betraying formal definitions of freedom, the proletariat recognizes that “property capital, money, wage-labour and the like are no ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement and that therefore they must be abolished in a practical, objective way.” Only via the proletariat is it possible for “man to become man not only in *thinking*, in *consciousness*, but in mass *being*, in life [*im massenhaften Sein, im Leben*].”¹¹¹

The proletariat embodies alienation in an exemplary, and ultimately universal class. To the very same extent it embodies the possibility for universal emancipation. With this concretization, we should finally gain a direct account of the kind of emancipatory criticism that Marx only negatively

¹⁰⁹ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 36-7 [38].

¹¹⁰ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 53 [55]. Translation altered.

¹¹¹ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 53 [56].

indicated in “On the Jewish Question.” In asking how the proletariat acquires revolutionary consciousness, and how it leverages this consciousness in service of emancipation, that is, we should be able to identify the *differentia specifica* distinguishing materialist critique from its speculative counterparts.

Section III: The Ends of Criticism

To a certain extent this is exactly what Marx gives us across the writings of 1844-1845. In particular, the 1844 “Introduction” and *The Holy Family* provide an explicit, extended discussion of criticism and its functions, from the demystification of religion to the revolutionary abolition of the property system. In each of these texts, Marx articulates his vision of materialist criticism through a reversal of idealist conceptual hierarchies and the identification of critique with direct, revolutionary activity on the part of the proletarian classes. In the course of his efforts to stabilize this novel conception of criticism, Marx discloses—inadvertently, at times—the difficulties that beset such a strategy of reversal and subsumption.

In the texts in question, we find Marxian criticism operating in three distinct ways. In the first place, emancipatory criticism consists in a secularization of Feuerbach’s criticism of religion, extending its application to religion’s profane foundations: “the immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms*.”¹¹² Criticism’s second function—exhortation—follows automatically from its first, with the exposure of material conditions of estrangement and exploitation imposing the demand for their abolition: “The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in

¹¹² Marx, “Introduction,” 176 [171].

which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being.”¹¹³ In these first two vocations Marx remains more or less in line with his contemporaries, Feuerbach especially.¹¹⁴ Although the centrality of civil society represents a shift in emphasis, that altered focus does not yet disclose any methodological shift, if indeed there is one.

What most clearly distinguishes Marxian critique is its close identification with practice (*Praxis*). This identification is the culmination of its first two functions: in dispensing with religious mystification and calling attention to the necessity of the overthrow of existing social relations, criticism embroils itself in a kind of activity historically alien to the work of philosophy. In relation to class society, Marx writes, criticism becomes something other than mere theoreticism; instead, “criticism dealing with this content is criticism in *hand-to-hand* combat, and in such a fight the point is not whether the opponent is a noble, equal, *interesting* opponent, the point is to *strike* him.”¹¹⁵ In this vocation Marxian criticism approximates most closely to the kind of non-philosophical criticism posited in “On the Jewish Question.” It is a criticism that consists in the “negation of hitherto existing philosophy, of philosophy as such,” and thus passes over into a kind of immediacy expressible only in the rhetoric of force.

The contemporaneity of criticism and action is thinkable only on the basis of Marx’s enduring anthropologism, an inheritance from Feuerbach and his concept of ‘man.’ Inverting the hierarchy of essence and existence inherited from Hegel, Feuerbach’s philosophical anthropology purports to accomplish the real unity of consciousness and being by relocating that unity from the domain of thought to the domain of sensuous existence. This is possible only as the result of a

¹¹³ Marx, “Introduction,” 182 [177].

¹¹⁴ In the writings of 1844 and 1845 Marx proudly avows his fidelity to Feuerbach, canonizing Feuerbach as the one who “revealed the mystery of the ‘system’...annihilated the dialectics of concepts, the war of the gods that was known to the philosophers alone...substituted for the old lumber and for ‘infinite self-consciousness’...’*the significance of man* (Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 93 [98]).

¹¹⁵ Marx, “Introduction,” 178 [173].

genetic criticism that reduces alienating abstractions to their human ground and thereby restores to human beings their full autonomy as a species. Something similar is meant to play out in the case of Marx's proletariat. Criticism, having "torn up the imaginary flower of the chain" in revealing the anthropological truth of religion, provides the proletariat with an authentic consciousness of its true humanity, an awareness of its degraded social position, and—in the obvious friction between those two—a normative claim compelling revolutionary action: "*I am nothing and I should be everything.*"¹¹⁶ In the self-conscious activity of the proletariat, criticism should evaporate in its existing form.

This is not what happens, however. Though at moments Marx ascribes an automaticity, a "material necessity" to the process by which the proletariat will gain consciousness and emancipate itself, theory subsists as an independent intellectual-political force. We shouldn't paper over this. There is a real contradiction here concerning the role of a critical vanguard within proletarian revolution. On the one hand, the practical activity through which the proletariat reasserts its humanity should in principle abolish the estrangement of essence and existence. On the other hand, Marx consistently personifies critique as an independent principle acting on the working classes in an external way. Even when Marx most directly asserts the immediacy of practical-critical activity—"the weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force"—he separates them out again: "but theory also becomes material force as soon as it has gripped the masses."¹¹⁷ The proletariat remains a *passive* element vis-à-vis theory, the latter of which retains its unique creative power as the "lightning of thought" in relation to the "ingenuous soil of the people."¹¹⁸ Class consciousness is neither automatic nor organic—it is rather the product of a differentiated and hierarchical unity of philosophy with its material element,

¹¹⁶ Marx, "Introduction," 185 [180].

¹¹⁷ Marx, "Introduction," 182 [177].

¹¹⁸ Marx, "Introduction," 187 [182].

the masses: “The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its heart is the *proletariat*.”¹¹⁹ Although Marx presupposes the interdependence of the head and heart—as in the case of the body itself—his adoption of a Feuerbachian organicist metaphor to describe that interdependence maintains the unquestioned authority of the head. As Kouvelakis writes of Marx’s use of a similar metaphor in 1842, “the emancipation of the head re-establishes the pre-eminence of the labour of spiritualization and, with it, of the philosopher-journalist.”¹²⁰ Kouvelakis suggests a difference between these two uses, arguing that if Marx echoes Feuerbach’s phrase in 1844 he “utilizes it more as a metaphor than as a concept.” Even if that’s true—and I’m not convinced of the clean separability implied in saying so—Marx doesn’t provide a concept capable of displacing the explanatory primacy of the metaphor.¹²¹ If we want to explain the relationship between theory and the proletariat, the relation of head and heart remains our best means of doing so. The revolutionary position of the proletariat thus disguises a preserved contradiction between theory and the masses. That is, although the proletariat promises at its most maximal the restoration of alienated consciousness to its embodied, human home, it is incapable of effecting this restoration without the interposition of a theoretical vanguard and consequent reproduction of a division of labor between the “passive element” of the revolution’s “*material* basis” and the pure theoretical activity of a critical elite.

This is the result of a fundamental indecision on Marx’s part concerning the sources and meaning of materialism, which in *The Holy Family* indexes both Feuerbach’s philosophical humanism

¹¹⁹ Marx, “Introduction,” 187 [182].

¹²⁰ Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (London: Verso, 2003), 273. Kouvelakis notes there the overdetermination of the corporeal metaphor by a set of other oppositions, including masculine/feminine, spiritual/material, rational/emotional, and German/French. He leaves out the one that is most important for me here, and the one that I would suggest poses the deepest problems to Marx: Christian/Jewish.

¹²¹ Kouvelakis concedes as much immediately after asserting the non-conceptual status of the head/heart metaphor in this text, writing that “we scan the 1844 Introduction in vain for the concept of ‘revolutionary practice’ found in the Third Thesis on Feuerbach” (Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 333).

and an empiricist determinism running from Bacon and Hobbes through Condillac to Helvetius, Holbach, and Bentham. These are distinct, even contradictory positions, which Marx nevertheless collapses by virtue of their political affinities and common claim to the heading of ‘materialism.’ “Just as [*Wie aber*] Feuerbach is the representative of *materialism* coinciding with *humanism* in the *theoretical* domain,” Marx writes, “French and English *socialism* and *communism* represent *materialism* coinciding with *humanism* in the *practical* domain [*stellte...auf praktischen Gebiete den mit dem Humanismus zusammenfallenden Materialismus dar*].”¹²² Just as? Marx asserts the unity of Feuerbach with Anglo-French materialism through the repetition of the common phrase, “materialism coinciding with humanism,” but this lexical identification belies a friction between two inassimilable positions: Feuerbach, committed to a Kantian realization of sensible freedom in the mode of consciousness, French and English socialism intellectually bound (in Marx’s presentation) to an empiricist determination of behavior by interest. If these two positions unify materialism with humanism, they do so in a one-sided way—Feuerbach in theory, socialism in practice—reproducing a distinction that each is already supposed to have overcome.

Moreover, insofar as each constitutes a one-sided materialism, they recapitulate the division of theory and practice within their own domains as well. This is clearer in the case of Feuerbach. Achieving of the unity of species and existent in the form of consciousness, Feuerbach restricts free human activity to theoretical activity alone, thus reinscribing a characteristically idealist subordination of inert matter to the active spirit. By resolving humanism and materialism *in theory*, that is, Feuerbach can only provide the same illusory reconciliation as Hegel and Bruno Bauer. This critique is slightly less intuitive in the case of French materialism, which, as Marx writes in the above passage, unifies humanism with materialism *not* in theory but in the domain of practice—precisely what Marx himself is after. Moreover, Marx praises French materialism precisely for its staunch anti-

¹²² Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 125 [132].

metaphysical orientation, which would in principle preclude the relapse into idealism that we see in Feuerbach. Yet it is all the more informative for this lack of plausibility.

In *The Holy Family*, Marx writes approvingly of French Materialism's demystification of morality. Beginning with Helvétius, "the sensory qualities and self-love, enjoyment and correctly understood personal interest are the basis of all morality."¹²³ In contrast to someone like Kant, who theorizes morality as the imposition of a supersensuous norm on reality—a conflict between *ought* and *is*—French materialism dispenses with the implicit dualism of this framework by locating morality within the system of nature alone. Properly organized and understood, the determination of human behavior by self-interest and natural causes forms in the aggregate the universal interest of humanity. "If man draws all his knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it"—a resolutely empiricist position—then a truly moral order becomes possible by "arrang[ing] the empirical world in such a way that man experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that he becomes aware of himself as man."¹²⁴ Marx continues, "If man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society."¹²⁵ This position follows logically on the anti-metaphysical empiricism of the materialist tradition, but there is an obvious contradiction here. Granting Marx the idea that human beings are shaped by their environment, that the empirical world is absolute in its system of determinations, how is it exactly that our social environment can be made human? More to the point, who can make it human? Materialism's immanentization of practical reason should in principle dissolve the contradiction between theory and practice. In fact, it ignores it. We've already seen the results in the 1844 "Introduction"—the undeclared reinstatement of a theoreticist hierarchy.

¹²³ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 130 [137].

¹²⁴ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 130 [138].

¹²⁵ Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, 131 [138].

We should be familiar with this dynamic by now, for it is the same dynamic that Marx identifies in Bauer's work, the same dynamic that we have seen recur again and again in the canon of German criticism stretching from Kant to Bauer. Within a few months of finishing the *Holy Family*, Marx seems to have come to a similar conclusion. The *Theses on Feuerbach*, written most likely in April 1845, shortly after the Marx family's exile from Paris to Brussels, announce a break with "all previous materialism" [*alles bisherigen Materialismus*]¹²⁶—including that of Feuerbach and French socialism—on precisely these grounds. The "chief defect" with such materialisms, he writes, "is that the thing [*Gegenstand*], reality [*Wirklichkeit*], sensuousness [*Sinnlichkeit*] are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of intuition [*des Objekts oder der Anschauung gefaßt wird*], but not as *sensuous human activity* [*sinnlich menschliche Tätigkeit*], *practice*, not subjectively."¹²⁷ Marx's specific language is key: *Anschauung* refers us via Feuerbach to Kant, and with him to the principles, first, that objects are given to us only in conformity with *a priori* forms of intuition and categories of understanding, and secondly, that we are precluded from knowledge or experience of things apart from how they appear to us. In taking *Gegenstände* in the form of the *Objekt* or of intuition, materialism concedes this paradigm, accepting the axiomatic division between subject and nature, and with it the determination of nature as a total system of objects governed by the necessary laws of cognition. Strangely, then, empiricism and idealism appear not as opposites but as two aspects of a unified philosophical positivism, which must first see things in their empirical flatness in order to then posit their underlying essence. When things are seen in this way, Marx reminds us, "every profound philosophical problem is resolved...quite simply into an empirical fact."¹²⁷ Materialism, so long as it accepts a mechanical representation of nature, cannot conceive freedom without a surreptitious recourse to idealism and its restrictive idea of freedom as the theoretical activity [*Tätigkeit*] of the subject. Without articulating

¹²⁶ Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" in *MECW* 5, 3; *MEGA*² I.5, 533.

¹²⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* in *MECW* 5, 39; *MEGA*¹ I.5, 32.

a convincing account of the sensible reality of human freedom, materialism can only resolve into its opposite, into the kind of Fichtean voluntarism we find in Bauer.

The first thesis is a striking admission of failure, for in criticizing Feuerbach Marx also criticizes positions that he himself had enthusiastically endorsed as recently as two months before. In this sense it constitutes, as Balibar might say, one of Marx's "eternal new beginnings."¹²⁸ But what kind of beginning is this? Set aside the revolutionary aura that posterity has granted the *Theses*. What exactly are we looking at? It's April 1845. Marx is living in Brussels with his wife Jenny and infant daughter Jenny Caroline, two months into his second exile at the age of twenty-seven. The *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*'s heady dream of unifying German theory with French socialism has foundered, along with Marx's partnership with Arnold Ruge. The materialism articulated on the basis of Marx's critiques of Bruno Bauer and co.—the culmination of years of intellectual labor—has been disavowed. In every sense, Marx is back to square one.

It is for this reason that the *Theses* show us Marx working back through the same concepts, the same language that we've seen recur over the course of this chapter. The pathos of the famous last thesis notwithstanding, the *Theses* read less like a manifesto than as the frustrated notes of someone who, after staring at the same problem for too long, trapped in language that no longer clarifies, is trying to start again from basics, to find the point where things went wrong. To be sure, there's theoretical progress here, but it has the strange semblance of movement in place, a pantomime of forward motion.

Consider the remainder of Thesis One: "Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects [*Gedankenobjekten*], but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity [*gegenständliche Tätigkeit*]. In *The Essence of Christianity*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude [*Verhalten*] as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and

¹²⁸ Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 6.

define only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance [*schmutzig-jüdischen Erscheinungsform*]. Hence he does not grasp the significance of ‘revolutionary,’ of ‘practical-critical’ activity.”¹²⁹ Again mobilizing the Christian figure of Judaism, Marx suggests that the relative valorization of theoretical activity is inseparable from a correlate determination of practice as egoistic and unfree—a framework that reiterates Christian mystification in materialist rhetoric. Perhaps Marx’s most concise statement of *Judenthum*’s status as an *Erscheinungsform* peculiar to the composite system of Christian-bourgeois abstraction, Thesis One again identifies that figure as the point of critical entry, albeit one that simultaneously discloses and conceals *real* practice. The first Thesis distills the path that we’ve followed up to this point: Marx’s identification of an operative supersessionism within existing paradigms of emancipation, his critique of such paradigms, and his repeated deployment of that critique against successive interlocutors, now including Feuerbach. It tells us again the point at which revolutionary *praxis* becomes identifiable, and under what sign.

To the extent that there is a theoretical advance in the *Theses*, it is in the historicization of philosophical anthropology, which permits Marx in turn to abolish the Kantian antinomy between subjective freedom and natural order by reinterpreting both under the overarching concept of “practical, human-sensuous activity” [*praktische menschlich-sinnliche Tätigkeit*].¹³⁰ No longer are we to understand practice as the imposition of a spontaneous human purpose on purely passive matter. Instead, “Revolutionary Praxis” would be a process internal to the domain of sensuousness itself, the process through which we sovereignly mediate our relationship with nature as forces of nature ourselves. Marx summarizes this reorientation in the *Theses*’ ending flourish: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” 3 [533].

¹³⁰ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” 4 [534].

¹³¹ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” 5 [535].

Yet already Marx's exhortation is haunted by its undoing in Thesis Eight, which anticipates Thesis Eleven with an importance nuance: "All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice [*in dem Begreifen dieser Praxis*]." Why is Marx compelled to add the addendum "and in the comprehension of this practice," a clarification that undoes the assertion in the first half of the sentence, and indeed derails the momentum of the entire document? Here, the strict reorientation toward practice characteristic of the *Theses* as a whole belies the reappearance of the problematic relationship between theory and practice within practice itself. That it does so suggests a problem with the kind of immanence that Marxian *Praxis* seems to promise at this point. Even if Marx's inversions subordinate thinking and theoretical reflection to being, to practice, the theoretical moment continues to impose itself with the force of necessity.

At this point we can discern a certain rhythm in Marx's intellectual development. Governed by the ideal of collective, conscious mastery over oneself and one's relation with nature, Marxian criticism has consisted in the unmasking of spurious forms of abstract freedom, the analysis of their material bases, and a re-articulation of emancipation as the abolition of those underlying conditions. This pattern has recurred in each of the texts considered in this chapter, structuring Marx's critiques of Christian religious consciousness, political emancipation, Feuerbachian humanism, and Anglo-French materialism. It would be tempting to narrate this critical evolution as dialectical, a materialist reversal of Hegelian method through which Marx develops and overcomes successive contradictions at progressively deeper levels. After the critique of political emancipation in "On the Jewish Question," however, the spatial metaphor of dialectical thinking—whether of height or depth—ceases to be relevant. What propels Marx's thinking and links his texts in this period is less a dialectical progression premised on the *success* of his critical operation than the syncopation of its failure. This perpetual failure draws Marx back, again and again, to what I have

called philosophy's Christian question: the uncanny tendency of every paradigm of emancipation to reproduce an operative hierarchical distinction between thought and matter, theory and practice, or—invariably, it seems—Christian and Jew, thus renewing dynamics of abstraction and mystification even in the form of their critique.¹³²

What we learn from this pattern is this: Marx's real problem, I contend, is not so much the opposition between concept and matter (in whatever iteration), but rather the idea, implied in its traditional formulations, that it is surmountable. In its reaction to epistemological dualism and the idealism it tends to produce, materialism easily falls prey to the temptation to resolve this contradiction, to find some means of reconciling the insistent disunity of thought and matter in a materialist framework. What I have tried to show in this chapter, however, is that such reconciliation is *only* possible for idealism, *only* possible as an allegorical subreption whereby disunity or heterogeneity is forced to appear as unity. Marx's insight, achieved behind his back and in spite of his own best efforts to the contrary, is that the problem with the Christian-Germanic dogma is a problem with the concept of reconciliation itself. So long as we remain transfixed by the idea of Parmenidean unity as it has been inherited and transformed in modern philosophy, we cannot but think that unity in indelibly Christian-idealist terms. In the final instance, Marx's Christian Question becomes: how can we think a materialism beyond the dream of reconciliation?

¹³² Marx's failures are not total, it should be emphasized, for each repetition of his critical operation has produced a transformation of his original object and generated new concepts for comprehending capitalist society. It is in running up against the antinomies of emancipation, for instance, that Marx's critique of religion transformed into a critique of formal democracy and political economy, generating new concepts of alienation, property, and proletariat. In this sense, the rigor of Marx's thought consists less in his satisfactory conclusions than in his refusal to pretend that unsatisfactory conclusions will do.

Chapter Five

By Way of Thought: Materialism without Reconciliation

“To think like a materialist or Marxist means giving up the primordial vocation of man. Consequently, to disappear as a man.”

—Mircea Eliade, *No Souvenirs*

In his general introduction to the *Grundrisse*, written between August and September of 1857, Marx contrasts two possible methods in the study of political economy—one, that of the bourgeois economists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the other a “scientifically correct method” which he goes on to develop against them. Marx differentiates these two approaches according to two connected criteria, defining each on the basis of its starting-point and how it inhabits a shared theoretical field defined by the opposition of the abstract and the concrete.

In Marx’s estimation, bourgeois political economy begins from the side of the concrete, taking as its starting-point an immediate intuition of the economy’s most fully developed forms. Doing so has an obvious and appealing logic. “It seems to be correct to begin with the real and concrete,” Marx acknowledges, “with the real premise, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production.”¹ “However,” he continues, “on closer examination this proves false.”² It does so precisely because the intuitive real condition with which political economy begins is itself an abstract generality. “The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed,” and in turn those same classes are “an empty phrase” if not concretized with reference to their myriad constituent elements: “wage labour, capital, etc.,” which themselves “presuppose exchange, divisions of labour, prices, etc.” In short, to

¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 100; *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1857-58* in *MEGA* II.1.I, 35-36. Translation altered.

² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100 [36].

begin with an intuition of the whole as the starting-point for an exposition of bourgeois society would mean taking as one's foundation a "chaotic conception [*chaotische Vorsetzung*]" of that which is to be explained. In order for that conception to have purchase, one would need to dismember it through a process of analytical specification, producing "ever more simple concepts [*einfachere Begriffe*]" until arriving, finally at the simplest possible determinations [*einfachsten Bestimmungen*] of which the initial whole can now be seen to be composed. Only then could one begin to reconstruct one's initial "chaotic conception" as a concrete, internally differentiated totality.³ The problem with bourgeois political economy, then, is that it presumes the concrete as a given in the first place. The "scientifically correct method [*wissenschaftliche richtige Methode*]" moves in an opposite direction, beginning with simple abstractions—money, labor, value—and developing on that basis the ever more complex conceptual categories which those simple abstractions presuppose.

It is vital to observe that each of these methods—that of political economy as much as the "scientifically correct" second—operate entirely within the domain of thinking. In the course of Marx's exposition, we pass from an initial *Vorstellung* to *Begriffe* to a *Vorgestellten Concreten* to *immer dünnere Abstracta* and finally to *einfachsten Bestimmungen*, but never do we pass from abstraction to the real. As Marx writes, the "concrete is concrete" not by virtue of any ontological priority, but simply "because it is the concentration of many determinations [*Zusammenfassung vieler Bestimmungen*], hence unity of the diverse [*Einheit des Mannigfaltigen*]." Granted, Marx tells us, the concrete is necessarily "the point of departure in reality [*wirkliche Ausgangspunkt*]" and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception [*Anschauung und der Vorstellung*]." And yet that concrete, what we might call the concrete-real, is available only insofar as it appears via its deliberate recreation in thinking. The concrete-real does not simply confront us as such, that is: it "appears in the process of thinking

³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100 [36].

[*im Denken*]...as a process of concentration, as a result, not a point of departure.”⁴ In light of this it is possible for Marx to quickly restate the methodological alternative described above: “Along the first path the full conception was evaporated [*verflüchtigt*] to yield an abstract determination [*abstrakter Bestimmung*]; along the second, the abstract determinations lead toward a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought [*Reproduction des Concreten im Weg des Denkens*].”⁵

This passage offers one of Marx’s only explicit reflections on method, along with the abbreviated “Preface” in the 1859 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, and scattered letters to Engels and other interlocutors. Of all those, it is perhaps the most elaborate, moving beyond half-formulated allusions to Hegel’s dialectic or the deterministic metaphor of base and superstructure. Here, by contrast, Marx attends to the epistemic challenges that confront his critique of capitalist society in a way more cognizant of their full complexity. And yet by no means does it constitute a programmatic statement on method. As Stuart Hall reminds us, Marx never gave us such a statement: “we do not have, from the mature Marx, either the systematic delineation of the ‘rational kernel’ [of the Hegelian dialectic], nor the method of its transformation, nor an exposition of the results of that transformation: the Marxian dialectic.”⁶ What we have, instead, are fragments such as this. What then does it mean, exactly, to “reproduce the concrete by way of thought?” Why is it necessary to proceed in such a manner, rather than beginning from the concrete itself? And what might be at stake in identifying this expression as “materialist”?

Almost immediately Marx throws another metaphor into the mix: “the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete,” he repeats, “is only the way in which thought *appropriates*

⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101 [36].

⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101 [36].

⁶ Stuart Hall, “Marx’s Notes on Method: A ‘Reading’ of the ‘1857 Introduction’” in Gregor McLennan, ed. *Selected Writings on Marxism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021): 19-61, 20.

[*anzueignen*] the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.” These two verbs—reproduce [*reproducieren*] and appropriate [*aneignen*—transpose the epistemological relation of thinking and reality out of its traditional coordinates into an idiom associated with capital itself. *Aneignen*, for its part, calls to mind at once the capitalist property relation. As Marx reminds us throughout his work on political economy, the species of ownership [*Eigentum*] proper to capital is at bottom an antagonistic social relation, through which capital appropriates the product of labor. Describing the process of capitalist accumulation in *Volume 1*, for example, Marx writes characteristically that in the formally equal exchange of labor-power for wages there is concealed “the constant appropriation by the capitalist, without equivalent, of a portion of the labour of others which has already been objectified [*der Kapitalist einen Theil der bereits vergegenständlichten fremden Arbeit...ohne Aequivalent aneignet...*]”⁷ This appropriation involves a literal seizure of the surplus generated in the labor process, but moreover it entails a formal appropriation, whereby the production process in its entirety is transformed into capital, thereby serving as the premise for capital’s ever-expanding reproduction.

At the outset, then, “the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought” suggests a distinction, or even antagonism between the domains of thought and reality, as well as a set of metaphors drawn from the idiom of capital through which to comprehend their possible relation. In his own reading of this passage, Louis Althusser argues that Marx’s specific language discloses a theoretical problematic in which this exact distinction is decisive. “The real is one thing along with

⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 730; *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Erster Band* in MEGA II.5, 472; II.10, 522. Throughout this chapter I cite from both the first and fourth German editions of *Capital*, with occasional references to the second German edition and the first French edition as well. I opt to include citations from the fourth edition for the benefit of an audience that I anticipate will largely be reading *Capital* in English: the Penguin edition of *Capital* is translated from this model, and so if one is looking to read extended passages side by side it provides the easiest reference. Reading the fourth edition or the Penguin translation requires caution, however. As editor of the former, Engels largely followed the first edition of *Capital* rather than Marx’s second edition—itsself a problematic choice—but also inserted large passages from the second edition alongside his own clarifying remarks.

its different aspects: the real-concrete, the process of the real, the real totality, etc. *Thought* about the real is another, along with its different aspects: the thought process, the thought-totality, the thought-concrete, etc.”⁸ From there Althusser derives two subsidiary theses. First is a metaphysical materialist thesis consisting in the bare assertion, common to the tradition of materialist thought running from Lucretius and Democritus to d’Holbach, of the “primacy of the real over thought about the real.” Second, an immensely complicating, though for Althusser no less materialist thesis: “the specificity of thought and of the thought process, with respect to the real and the real process.”⁹ Together, these two positions define the relation between thought and reality as a complex structure of unity-in-difference. Thought enjoys relative autonomy with respect to the real, but only within limits—ontological and epistemic—established unequivocally by the latter. To these, we can add a third thesis based on Marx’s insistence, above, on the impossibility of an immediate intuition of the concrete. To the extent that we are capable of approaching and comprehending the point of contact between thought and the real, we can do so only by beginning from thought—from forms of thought, specifically, that originate in, but are not reducible to the object we hope to understand.

In this chapter, I take this set of theses as the basic parameters guiding what we will come to identify as Marx’s materialism. Focusing in particular on *Capital* and its preparatory manuscripts, I argue that Marx’s highly idiosyncratic conception of materialism has nothing to do with matter as such. Nor is it concerned with exposing the “real premises,” hidden essences, or true contents underlying conceptual abstractions. In the text of *Capital*, instead, materialism names a strategy concerned above all else with the emergence and reification of social *form*. How do the systematic relations of a structured social whole come to appear under certain formal determinations—value,

⁸ Louis Althusser, “The Object of *Capital*,” in Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: the Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 1997): 215-355, 232.

⁹ Louis Althusser, “The Object of *Capital*,” 232.

money, labor, etc.? How do these forms mediate the metabolic reproduction of a given social formation? What do they disclose or conceal about such a formation? And, finally, how do they come to confront us as empirical, indeed natural phenomena?

In asking these questions, *Capital* departs dramatically from the perspective and ambitions of the texts considered in the prior chapter. Although the task of critique remains largely identical, namely, to penetrate the forms of appearance of bourgeois society and disclose their exploitative conditions of possibility, that critique operates via a transformed set of theoretical presuppositions and altered horizon of epistemic possibility. Most important is Marx's abandonment of the absolute contradiction between abstract and real in favor of the relative opposition between abstract and concrete which we see in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. No longer does Marx attempt to occupy a positive perspective outside or underneath the social forms under investigation. Rather, *Capital* operates only through the systematic reproduction of its object's own immanent logic. Its basic categories are thus borrowed from capital itself; they are, as Moishe Postone writes, the "categories of a critical ethnography of capitalist society undertaken from within."¹⁰ The goal of materialist critique transforms accordingly. By reconstructing the logic of capital as a self-positing conceptual totality, Marx aims to disclose the point where that totality breaks down, the moment of conceptual disarticulation where capital's logical seamlessness—its self-evident quality of necessity—gives way to the contingency of force. The result is not the materialism of reconciliation, as in Chapter 4, but its opposite: the perpetual reproduction, by way of thought, of the irreducible non-coincidence of conceptuality and the real.

Marx's method of critique in *Capital* evinces greater suspicion of empirical phenomena and a more circumspect appraisal of critical knowledge than we find in the writings of the 1840s. In order

¹⁰ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18.

to capture that difference and its rationale, this chapter begins by returning to the unpublished manuscripts now known as *The German Ideology*. Against popular conceptions of *The German Ideology* as the authoritative statement of “historical materialism,” I argue that the project constitutes a final, flailing effort to answer Chapter 4’s “Christian Question.” Here, Marx and Engels attempt to resolve the antinomies of post-Kantian reconciliation through a step “outside” philosophy, rhetorically framed in terms of an empiricist, even positivist appeal to reality as such. Section 1 examines that appeal in detail. Drawing from the work of Michael Heinrich and Sarah Kofman, I argue that Marx and Engels’ retreat to empiricism contradicts the idea of a complex social whole which they develop in their critique of Max Stirner. Section 2 interrogates the mechanism of repression which makes that contradiction tolerable. In *The German Ideology*, we see, Marx and Engels are able to get around Feuerbach only by returning to Hegel, rooting their empiricism in a metaphysical concept of life that reiterates the structure of knowledge proper to the Hegelian Absolute. Together, sections 1 and 2 reframe the problem of reconciliation as a problem with empiricism: with its credulity toward phenomenal givens, and the subjective-objective identity which its structure of knowledge entails. Sections 3 and 4 take up *Capital* in light of this insight. Through a careful interpretation of *Capital*’s transition between the circulation and production processes, I show that for Marx the empirical knowledge-relation which we find in *The German Ideology* turns out to be a fetishistic effect of capital, itself now understood as structurally analogous to Hegelian Spirit. Section 5, finally, concludes by summarizing the chapter’s insights and inquiring as to what it means to think of *Capital* as a document of materialism.

I. Critique and the Problem of Empiricism

The year 1845 constituted a major inflection point in the trajectory of Marx’s thought, and therefore in the development of the critical materialism which we began tracking in Chapter 4. In the most famous interpretation of this transition, Louis Althusser argues that the *Theses on Feuerbach*

and *The German Ideology* effected an “unequivocal ‘epistemological break’” between two stages in Marx’s work—each of which may be said to possess a consistent, integral, and irreconcilable theoretical problematic.¹¹ In Althusser’s rendering, that break consisted in the simultaneous founding of two related scientific disciplines: the science of history (historical materialism), which included a whole arsenal of concepts now familiar as the essential jargon of Marxism (productive forces, relations of production, ideology, etc.), and a new scientific philosophy (dialectical materialism), which developed the categories and epistemology that hold historical materialism together.¹² In either case, these scientific discourses were articulated in opposition to, and abandonment of the ideological problematic to which Marx had subscribed from 1842-1845,

¹¹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster ([1965] London: Verso, 2005), 33. The thesis of the break has been challenged in various ways from the moment it was formulated. Some have argued against Althusser that there is no such break at all, and that the “early” and “mature” works of Marx (meaning, roughly, the works before 1845 and the works after, culminating in *Capital*) evince a common commitment to philosophical and political humanism, differing only in their topical foci and the means through which humanist emancipation is to be achieved. This is the position of the generation of Marxist humanists contemporary with Althusser, Sartre most famous among them, but it continues to have salience among contemporary Marxist thinkers as well. Deconstructive readers of Marx, most notably Sarah Kofman and Jacques Derrida, have in their own way argued against the thesis of the break, though on very different terms. Kofman argues that Althusser’s mistake is not that he mistakenly perceives an effort at such a break on Marx’s part, but rather that he thinks it is successful. For Kofman, that is, the desire expressed in the idea of the break—that of the clear distinction between ideology and truth—persists as an unresolved, and indeed unresolvable tension throughout the entirety of Marx’s corpus. Michael Heinrich, a more recent reader, has accepted Althusser’s general thesis with a substantial modification, discussed in the main text below.

¹² Althusser, *For Marx*, 33. Althusser provides a number of successive interpretations of each of these “sciences” across *For Marx*, *Reading Capital*, and subsequent works including *Lenin and Philosophy* and his “Reply to John Lewis,” ultimately abandoning the thesis of the scientificity of Marxism by the mid-1970s. In each instance Althusser formulates the thesis of the “break” and the scientificity of Marxist thought in different terms. In “On the Young Marx,” for instance, Marx’s break with both Hegel and Feuerbach consisted in a “retreat” from the “dissipated illusion [of philosophy] towards reality;” in “Contradiction and Overdetermination” it morphed into the shift from a Hegelian concept of totality to an “overdetermined” social whole; in “On the Materialistic Dialectic” the adoption of a specific kind of “theoretical practice” which brings certain conceptual tools (Generalities II) to bear on the raw material of given concepts (Generalities I) to create new, *scientific* concepts (Generalities III). Across these varied interpretations, however, Althusser is consistent on one point: that whatever Marxist thinking came to mean, it *first* meant an abandonment of the theoretical humanism which characterized his early years.

namely, that of Feuerbachian humanism. “In 1845,” according to Althusser, “Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man.”¹³ That prior problematic was “constituted by a coherent system of precise concepts tightly articulated together,” premised on two fundamental theses: “(1) that there is a universal essence of man; (2) that this essence is the attribute of ‘*each single individual*’ who is its real subject.”¹⁴ The postulation of human essence and its incarnation in the individual grounded in turn a “whole empiricist-idealist world outlook.” Though typically counterposed as epistemological opposites, for Althusser empiricism and idealism make up two sides of the same noetic coin, two faces of a common humanist head. The postulation of human essence requires its identifiability in a given concrete subject (empiricism); at the same time, it demands the transparency of that subject, the possibility of identifying within the particular individual the universal essence which their particularity expresses (idealism).

Thus, the supposed break of 1845 involved a simultaneous critique of two connected theoretical pairs: humanism/individualism and empiricism/idealism. Developing and complicating this thesis, Michael Heinrich has argued, like Althusser, that Marx’s thought in this period shared a “theoretical field” [*theoretische Feld*] with both Feuerbachian humanism and classical political economy, defined by the convergence of four major elements: anthropologism (the presupposition of a normative human essence), individualism (a methodological focus on the abstract individual, conceived as the bearer or incarnation of the aforementioned essence), ahistoricism, and empiricism.¹⁵ Further, and again in the vein of Althusser, Heinrich suggests that in April 1845—the

¹³ Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” in *For Marx*: 219-247, 227.

¹⁴ Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” 227-8.

¹⁵ Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, 2. Auflage (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006): 118-120. The language of a “theoretical field” has some advantage over that of the Althusserian “problematic [*problématique*],” specifically insofar as the latter ascribes a coherence and systematicity to a way of thinking that may not in fact exist. By contrast, “theoretical field” foregrounds the open, overdetermined and potentially contradictory nature of any given thinker or text—a flexibility that has particular utility in discussing texts such as *The German Ideology* and *Capital*.

date of the *Theses*—we see the initiation of a significant critique of that preexisting field, a “*Kritik bisher vertretener Auffassungen und den Beginn der Ausarbeitung eines neuen theoretischen Ansatzes*.”¹⁶ Unlike Althusser, however, Heinrich rejects the triumphant assessment of the *Theses* and *The German Ideology* which the former delivers. Rather than a single, successful break, occurring at a specific moment in 1845 and cleanly cleaving the “ideological,” i.e. Feuerbachian-humanist Marx from the “scientific” Marx of the critique of political economy, it is more accurate per Heinrich to speak of a *series* of breaks, each achieved inconsistently, at different moments, and with varying degrees of self-consciousness on the part of Marx himself.

Heinrich’s revision of the Althusserian thesis of the break provides a substantially more complex framework in which to discuss the series of problems which preoccupied us in the prior chapter. There, I argued that between 1843 and 1845 Marx was centrally concerned with what I called “the Christian Question”—the disconcerting tendency of critical thought to articulate itself with the conceptual tools and hierarchical oppositions of Christian supersessionism, and to substitute a speculative or allegorical image of human emancipation in place of its concrete actualization. This basic problem guided the development of Marxian critique, which in texts like “On the Jewish Question,” the 1844 “Introduction,” and *The Holy Family* acquired a regular structure consisting in two maneuvers: the hyperbolic inversion of a given conceptual hierarchy, and the strategic affirmation of that hierarchy’s formerly denigrated term. This process of inversion and affirmation achieved different results within the nested tiers of religion, politics, and political economy. In the case of the prior two levels, critique performed a progressive movement of demystification; in the third, it brought demystification to an end, passing over (if only problematically) into the revolutionary activity of proletarian self-emancipation. As we repeatedly

Nevertheless, I have opted to continue using “problematic” with the constant caveat that no system of thought is as consistent as the Althusserian definition of the word might suggest.

¹⁶ Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 121.

saw, however, Marx's efforts to achieve a practical identity of thought and being in the domain of materiality proved to be untenable. In every instance, such identity could be sustained only via a Christian-idealist sleight-of-hand.

At the close of Chapter 4, I attributed this recurring frustration to a "problematic of reconciliation" which governed Marx's intellectual and political ambitions in the 1840s. That phrase named, in brief, the insatiable desire in post-Kantian thought to achieve a self-conscious unity of free subjective intention and natural purposiveness, to prove that we can freely act in nature and know that we have done so. Heinrich's delineation of Marx's theoretical field permits us to describe that problematic in greater detail. Take the following two passages, one from the *1844 Manuscripts*, the second from the first part of "On the Jewish Question":

"Thus communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution [*wahrhafte Auflösung*] of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution [*wahre Auflösung*] of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution [*Er ist das aufgelöste Räthsel der Geschichte und weiß sich als diese Lösung*]." ¹⁷

"Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself [*sich zurücknimmt*] the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his '*forces propres*' as *social forces*, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political power*, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished [*ist die menschliche Emancipation Vollbracht*]." ¹⁸

Here we have two exemplary statements of Marx's commitment to the project of reconciliation, embodied in the equation of naturalism and humanism. In them we can readily identify the set of coordinates which Althusser and Heinrich bring to the fore: the ideological appeal to philosophical humanism, the identification of the individual as the icon of the species, the

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 297 [389].

¹⁸ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 168 [162-63].

ahistorical rendering of human nature as a natural structure of unity between the subject and nature, and the crucial function of empirical self-recognition.

Of particular significance, however, is the couplet of anthropologism and empiricism. In his contribution to *Reading Capital*, Jacques Rancière argues that the concept of critique which we find in the writings of the early 1840s hinges on the confluence of epistemic empiricism and metaphysical humanism. Empiricism, in this instance, entails two axioms: the explanatory primacy of experience over *a priori* ideas, and the essential transparency of experience to knowledge. To be sure, the clarity of the empirical world can be muddled by obfuscation or abstraction, but those abstractions are vulnerable to critical consciousness, and, once examined, they yield to noetic lucidity. “This means,” per Rancière, “that the statement of the facts for what they are (*für das was sie sind*), the statement of the human experience just as it presents itself, is already their explanation.”¹⁹ As in the case of the 1844 “Introduction,” for instance, where Marx depicts the criticism of religion as religion’s abolition [*Aufhebung*], the role of critique is “to say or to read...the contradiction, to declare it for what it is,” with that declaration sufficing to disarm it.²⁰

Critical success on this model functions only by virtue of Marx’s Feuerbachian philosophical anthropology. The transparency of the real which marks his empiricism, that is, requires a coincidence of the knowing subject with its object. This is itself possible only given the metaphysical homogeneity of those two poles. In the case of a thinker like Hegel, such homogeneity is anchored in the concept of Spirit as self-knowing substance, which ensures the identity of subject and object in interpreting all knowledge as a case of Spirit coming to know itself. In Feuerbach and Marx, spirit is displaced from this position of primacy, but the metaphysical dynamic underlying the empirical

¹⁹ Jacques Rancière, “The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy: From the 1844 *Manuscripts* to *Capital*,” in Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: the Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 1997): 73-174, 78.

²⁰ Jacques Rancière, “The Concept of Critique,” 78. See also Daniel Brudney, *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

knowledge-relation remains technically identical.²¹ In the process of critique, that is, the subject discovers behind the alienated [*entäusert*] object nothing other than a projected objectification of human essence. Every contradiction is reducible to this basic dynamic. Religion, the division of state and civil society, and the practical separation of labor from its product are ultimately various expressions of a *single* underlying contradiction between the human individual and their alienated species-being.²² Critique, therefore, culminates in an explicit subjective-objective identity of humanity with its predicates which was its unspoken presupposition from the start.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach* we witness Marx's first inchoate break with this anthropologism and the empiricism it supports. There, Marx initiates his separation from Feuerbach on the grounds of the latter's ahistoricism, arguing that Feuerbach incorrectly reifies human essence as an "abstraction inherent in each single individual" rather than conceiving it, as it is, as the historically mutable "ensemble of social relations."²³ That historicization implies a major epistemological correlate. If human essence is created and modified by the totality of "*sinnlich-menschliche Tätigkeit*," as Marx writes, then the subjective-objective identity achieved in Feuerbachian criticism becomes significantly more complicated to maintain. Indeed, the relation of contemplation or intuition [*Anschauung*] which links the Feuerbachian subject and their ultimate object of knowledge—their own species-essence, understood itself as the unity of theoretical and sensuous existence—comes to be displaced by another kind of relation entirely: that between a subject and the concrete historical processes of which both it and its objects are effects.

²¹ One might also compare Feuerbach fruitfully with Kant, for whom the metaphysical *discontinuity* of the supersensuous and sensuous is precisely the problem which makes the full critical project necessary.

²² Rancière gives this technique the name "amphibology," the transposition of every contradiction which Marx (or Feuerbach) comes across into the register of philosophical anthropology.

²³ Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* in *MECW* 5, 3; *MEGA* I.5, 535.

In the *Theses* the full ramifications of this insight remain conceptually underdeveloped, even granting the document's unsystematic character. Over the following two years, however, Marx and Engels extrapolated considerably from this initial position in the unpublished project now called *The German Ideology*, substituting for the humanist language of activity [*Tätigkeit*] a dramatically expanded idiom of production.²⁴ In nearly twenty separate manuscripts composed and revised between the fall of 1845 and end of 1846, the two reworked their understanding of human society and history, the relationship between consciousness and practice, and the meaning of materialism in light of this new emphasis.

The increasing significance of the language of production emerged from two major polemics which preoccupied Marx and Engels over the course of 1845. Given the significance of these two polemics for the argumentative developments of *The German Ideology*, it is worth briefly describing them and the challenges they presented.

²⁴ Beyond the specific question of the epistemological break, recent scholarship has called into question the authoritative status and textual integrity of *The German Ideology*, and in particular its most famous chapter, "I. Feuerbach." Scholars including Terrell Carver, Gareth Stedman-Jones, and Sarah Johnson have successfully argued that *The German Ideology* is something of an editorial Frankenstein, one that has been forced to perform ideological functions that it cannot possibly sustain. I agree with this group of readers that *The German Ideology* does not constitute a single, completed text, that it certainly does not constitute a comprehensive articulation of "historical materialism," and that the historical focus on "I. Feuerbach" has obscured the centrality of Marx's engagement with Max Stirner in 1845-6. That said, I find it perfectly acceptable to refer to *The German Ideology* as a coherent *project*, if not a polished *book*. Marx and Engels intended the relevant manuscripts for publication as part of a common critique of Young Hegelian philosophy and German socialism, first in a two-volume quarterly and ultimately in a single monograph. By the time they abandoned the project in 1847 after a year's fruitless search for a new publisher, the majority of the eighteen existing manuscripts were ready for publication, and had been for some time. Provided that it's read with adequate caution, *The German Ideology* remains tremendously important for readers of Marx and Engels, and deserves, if not its authoritative status, a privileged one. See: Terrell Carver, "The German Ideology Never Took Place," *History of Political Thought* 31.1 (Spring 2010), 107-127; Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness & Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 192; Sarah Johnson, "Farewell to *The German Ideology*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83.1 (January 2022): 143-170.

The first of these was the ongoing conflict with Bruno Bauer. In October 1845 Bauer published a response to his many critics (not only Marx and Engels) in the third volume of *Wigand's Vierteljahrschrift*, a small quarterly printed by the radical publisher Otto Wigand in Leipzig. The bulk of Bauer's long essay focused on Ludwig Feuerbach and Max Stirner, each of whom had levied public critiques of Bauer in the prior year—Feuerbach in an earlier issue of the *Vierteljahrschrift*, Stirner in his major work *The Ego and its Own* in the fall of 1844 (also published by Wigand). In a small section following his response to Stirner, however, Bauer turned his attention to *The Holy Family* and its two authors. Dispensing with the text in only six pages (a far cry from the extravagant three hundred and thirty pages of *The Holy Family* itself), he relegated Marx and Engels to the status of minor Feuerbachians. Their only contribution to contemporary thought, he suggested, consisted in showcasing the kinds of fanaticism which Feuerbach's thought could produce if left untreated.

That fanaticism, importantly, was theological in character. Earlier in his essay, Bauer had argued that Feuerbach's philosophy of sensuousness was in fact little more than a pale imitation of Christian mysticism. In Bauer's estimation, what Feuerbach *wanted* was to enlighten the benighted regions of religion with the light of self-consciousness—to demonstrate that Hegelian spirit was in fact “self-activating, self-creating, and self-animating Life [*selbstthätiges, selbstschöpferisches und selbstschöpfendes Leben*],” and that it was possible, therefore, for human beings to achieve an active unity of freedom and natural existence through a salvific “return to nature [*Rückkehr zur Natur ist allein die Quelle des Heils*].”²⁵ Indeed, this was the explicit animating impulse of *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843), each of which had attempted to counteract the gravity of speculative philosophy by considering being [*das Sein*] through affect, perception, and sensibility. Feuerbach's “new philosophy,” as he called it, aimed to shift philosophy out of its

²⁵ Bruno Bauer, “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs” in *Wigand's Vierteljahrschrift* 3 (1845): 86-146, 91; Ludwig Feuerbach, “Toward a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy” in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings*, trans. Zavar Hanfi (London: Verso, 2012), 72; *Sämmtliche Werke* 2, 180.

traditional milieu into a uncharted domain of “not-thinking” [*Nichtdenken*], where it would be possible to “regard being as an object of being [*Object des Seins*]” and no longer solely an object of thought.²⁶ All well and good, but for Bauer such a goal was precisely the problem. In abandoning philosophical reason for sense-perception, intuition, and (ultimately) love, Feuerbach simply reproduced the Hegelian absolute in the rhetoric of nature, and with it the mystification and unfreedom which he ostensibly had sought to dispel.²⁷ Without critical reason and its capacity to explicate the world, that is, Feuerbach left us a discourse of professional nonsense. *The Holy Family* was to be understood in the same terms. “Real humanism,” the concept invoked by Marx and Engels against Bauer on the first page of the book, was simply a synonym for Feuerbach’s theological anthropology, an appropriate object of veneration for the “*Anhänger der Feuerbachschen Liebes-Religion*.”²⁸

Bauer’s sneering dismissal of *The Holy Family* would have been likely to provoke a significant response on its own. It proved all the more pressing, though, for the ways in which it intersected with Marx’s and Engels’ concurrent dispute with Max Stirner. The prior October, Stirner’s *The Ego and its Own* had undertaken a comprehensive attack on the field of Young Hegelian criticism—the same field with which Marx and Engels had intended to settle accounts in *The Holy Family*. In his text, Stirner grouped Marx and Engels together with their critical adversaries, turning the familiar charge of crypto-theology against two of its most vociferous users. For Stirner, German liberalism and its philosophical representatives—a group that included the Bauer circle, Feuerbach, and the more radical party of Moses Hess, Marx, and Engels—was itself an un-self-conscious extenuation of

²⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred H. Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 52; *Sämmtliche Werke* 2, 297.

²⁷ On the place of love as a counter-principle to the egoism of civil society in Feuerbach’s thought, see Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. Chapter 3.

²⁸ Bauer, “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs,” 140.

Christian theology. In their various critical projects, he argued, each of these figures had only substituted for God or the Absolute Spirit new modes of religious alienation and new kinds of domineering abstractions. Specific differences among this group's representatives were minor, if not immaterial. Whether speaking in the language of Bruno Bauer's "self-consciousness," Feuerbach's "species-essence," or simply "man," Stirner claimed, contemporary criticism rehearsed the basic premises of Christianity: a fundamental division between the world of sensuousness and a transcendent world of spirit, and the subjugation of individual existence to the norms or demands of the latter.²⁹ Against this theological tendency Stirner formulated his own critical vocation: to restore to the unique individual *as individual*, not as "*mensch*" or "proletarian," but Ego [*Ich*] the total field of predicates which all abstract thought denied it.³⁰

At moments *The Ego and its Own* came remarkably close to Marx's own critical positions circa 1844, especially those concerning the crypto-Christian nature of German philosophy and eighteenth-century political liberalism. Indeed, at multiple moments Stirner repeats Marx's argument in "On the Jewish Question" point for point, writing, for instance, that the "meaning of the doctrine that we all enjoy 'equality of political rights' is simply "that the state has no regard for my person," and that in this sense liberalism, having effected a distinction within the individual between their status as human being and citizen "revolves in the same circle as the Christian."³¹ Moreover, Stirner's derivation of emancipatory egoism from the quasi-Christian split between state and civil society approximated the affirmative positions with which Marx flirted in both the *Jahrbücher* and *The Holy Family*, especially those passages in the latter where he suggested that individual human self-interest

²⁹ Max Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1901).

³⁰ As Stirner framed his own project in a rare moment of brevity: "To 'Give God the Glory' corresponds the modern 'Give man the glory.' But I mean to keep it to myself." Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, 120; 177.

³¹ Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, 93, 157 [105-106, 178].

was in principle consonant with humanist universalism.³² This accounts for Engels' initial enthusiasm for the text, which he read as "the essence of the present society and present man brought to consciousness," and thus a virtually automatic prelude to communism.³³ Writing to Marx after reading a proof copy, Engels praised the book for its effective critique of Feuerbach and recommended it as a theoretical touchpoint:

Stirner is right in rejecting Feuerbach's 'man,' or at least the 'man' of *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Feuerbach deduces his 'man' from God, it is from God that he arrives at 'man,' and hence 'man' is crowned with a theological halo of abstraction [*mit einem theologischen Heiligenschein der Abstraktion bekränzt*]. The true way to arrive at 'man' is the other way about. We must take our departure from the Ego, the empirical, flesh-and-blood individual [*vom empirischen leibhaftigen Individuum ausgehen*], if we are not, like Stirner, to remain stuck at this point but rather proceed to raise ourselves to 'man' [*zu 'dem Menschen' zu erheben*]. 'Man' will always remain a wraith [Spukgestalt] so long as his basis is not empirical man. In short we must take our departure from empiricism and materialism [*Empiricismus und Materialismus*] if our concepts, and notably our 'man,' are to be something real; we must deduce [*ableiten*] the general from the particular, not from itself, or *à la* Hegel, from thin air.³⁴

Here, Engels suggests that Stirner provides a crucial corrective to Feuerbach's philosophical anthropology. Rather than begin from the inverted essence of "man" as represented in religion in order to then derive human essence, Stirner demonstrates the necessity of taking the opposite approach, constructing the generality "man" from the starting point of "the empirical, flesh-and-blood individual [*empirischen leibhaftigen Individuum*]." We don't have Marx's reply to Engels. We do, however, know that he disagreed with him, and we can reliably guess as to what that disagreement involved. In a subsequent letter, Engels retracted his earlier comments, first writing, "Since I laid it aside and had time to think it over, I feel the same as you," and then adding, "[Moses] Hess, who is still here [in Barmen] and whom I spoke to in Bonn a fortnight ago, has, after several changes of

³² Here I refer especially to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family*, 124-134 [131-141].

³³ Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Karl Marx," 19 November 1844, in *MECW* 38, 11; *MEGA* III.1, 252.

³⁴ Engels, "Letter to Karl Marx," 19 November 1844, 12 [252-255].

mind come to the same conclusion as yourself. He read me an article, which he is shortly to publish, about the book; in it he says the same as you, although he hadn't read your letter."³⁵

The article mentioned here was published by Hess that June under the title *Die Letzten Philosophen*. In it, Hess rejected Stirner's bid to differentiate himself from figures such as Feuerbach and Bauer, arguing instead, in yet another volley of the charge of Christianity, that Stirner embodied only another, equally one-sided aspect of the "rupture between theory and praxis, godliness and worldliness," produced by "Christian dualism" in all of its myriad forms. This interpretation situated Stirner within the analysis of state and civil society which Hess and Marx had each developed over the prior two years. If it was the case, as Marx had argued in "On the Jewish Question," that modern liberalism generalized Christian alienation in its bifurcation of each person as at once *citoyen* and *Bürger*, then Bauer and Stirner could be read as unreflective, twin exemplars of either side of that split.³⁶ Bauer, for his part, represented the absolutization of philosophical self-consciousness detached from its material tethers; Stirner the uncritical affirmation of individual egoism. Even a cursory juxtaposition of their respective projects made it clear, per Hess, "that the both aforementioned philosophers are but the two sides of the sundered man [*auseinander gerissenen Menschen*]."³⁷ To mistake the self-possessing *Ich* as the principle and *telos* of emancipation, as Stirner did, was then nothing more than to accept the highly specific determinations of the concrete individual as particular, as egoistic, as property owner which the "modern, Christian-commercial world [*Krämerwelt*]" produced.³⁸

³⁵ Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Karl Marx," 20 January 1845, in *MECW* 38, 16; *MEGA* III.1, 259.

³⁶ On this diagnosis of political alienation, see chapter 4, section I above. For Hess's particular rendering of this insight, see Moses Hess, "Über das Geldwesen" in *Philosophische und Sozialistische Schriften, 1837-1850*, ed. Auguste Cornu et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961): 329-347.

³⁷ Moses Hess, "The Recent Philosophers," trans. Lawrence S. Stepelevich in Lawrence S. Stepelevich, ed. *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 359-375, 364; *Die Letzten Philosophen* (Darmstadt: C.W. Leske, 1845), 8.

³⁸ Moses Hess, "The Recent Philosophers," 368; 15.

Hess's critique of Stirner effectively precluded the method of ascent from empirical existence to generality which Engels described in his letter, for if the individual "ego" was in fact an ideological byproduct of contemporary civil society, then a communist program which took the Stirnerian ego as its premise could only end up restating a kind of libertarian capitalist individualism, no matter its intentions.³⁹ Beyond his affirmation of Stirner's individualism, however, there was a second problem with Engels' approach: the continued commitment to the generic concept "man" which Stirner and Bauer had so forcefully called into question. In Feuerbach's thought, the de-theologized sublimate "man," which expresses the unity of one's own particular existence with the universality inhering in the human species, ostensibly provides an ontological foundation and regulative ideal for the real exercise of human freedom in the domain of natural existence. Through the critique of religion, for Feuerbach, human beings recognized the divine attributes—perfect thought, will, and love—as faculties of the species, and *in that act of recognition* superseded the contradictions which finitude had seemed to entail, including those between one's theoretical and sensuous modes of being.⁴⁰ What Bauer and Stirner together demonstrated was twofold: first, that species [*Gattung*] in the Feuerbachian sense behaves suspiciously like Hegelian *Geist*. Though it lacks the latter's full metaphysical significance, *Gattung* reproduces *Geist's* dynamics of essence and existence such that individual human beings remain only incidental bearers of a superordinate universality. Moreover, although Feuerbach's critique of Hegel intends to reinvest the human species with its full array of faculties, our participation in species-existence is in the last instance mediated by reason alone. In this way Feuerbach ends up reinstating a crypto-Hegelian model of reconciliation

³⁹ On this point, it is an interesting historical coincidence that Stirner, in addition to writing *The Ego and its Own*, translated Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Jean-Baptiste Say's *Traité d'Economie Politique* into German.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1989, 7; *Sämmtliche Werke* 6, 8. On the enduring contradictions of Feuerbach's thought, see John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 355.

between human being and nature, interposing *Gattung* as a composite, superordinate subject that fulfills the old functions of Hegelian *Geist* in a putatively materialist idiom.

Between the two of them, then, Bauer and Stirner confronted Marx with an imperative to fundamentally rethink his theoretical problematic, and with it the method of criticism appropriate to an emancipatory materialist stance. It would be necessary, in the first place, to abandon the Feuerbachian humanism to which he and Engels had subscribed in *The Holy Family*. *The Ego and its Own* and “Charakteristick Ludwig Feuerbachs” were incontrovertible on this point. That abandonment was anything but straightforward, however. In principle, it might have been possible to deal with the insufficiencies of Feuerbachian *Gattungswesen* by shifting the anti-supersessionist critical machine of 1843 and 1844 into gear once again, demonstrating, in this case, the crypto-Christian freedom achieved in the abstraction “man” and mobilizing its definitional others against it. There were ample textual opportunities for Marx to make this move. Indeed, Feuerbach’s thought displayed the anti-Judaic tendencies of German philosophical criticism just as clearly, if not more than Marx’s earlier polemical targets. Yet that operation had proven fruitful in prior instances *because* of its underlying anthropologism. As we saw above, Marx’s critical inversions only yielded results inasmuch as they presupposed the *real* identity of conceptuality and human being which speculative or theological forms of thinking concealed. To perform that critical process again, this time without that philosophical substructure, would have been meaningless. Even worse: it would have been Stirner, for Feuerbach’s own operative antitype was precisely the “practical egoism [*praktischen Egoismus*]” that Stirner espoused.⁴¹

This is not to say that Marx entirely abandoned this technique in *The German Ideology*. In the two major polemical sections of the project—the chronologically first, and smaller chapter on Bauer,

⁴¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 113 [135]. This egoism was itself associated, unsurprisingly, with Judaism.

and the later, nearly four-hundred page chapter on Stirner—we find a renewal of exactly this kind of critical approach. In their critique of Stirner, for example, Marx and Engels characterize Stirner’s *Ich* in the following terms:

“The perfect [*vollendeten*] Christian, the perfect man, the Caucasian Caucasian and true egoist, who—just as the Christian became spirit through the supersession [*Aufhebung*] of the ancient world—becomes a corporeal being through the dissolution [*Auflösung*] of the realm of spirits, by entering, *sine beneficio deliberandi et inventarii*, into the inheritance of idealism, the youth, the Mongol, the modern, the Christian, the possessed, the whimsical, the Protestant the ‘educated,’ the Hegelian and the human liberal.”⁴²

One could list parodic statements of this sort for an entire chapter. What is important, however, is not the continuity with the rhetoric of “On the Jewish Question” and *The Holy Family*, but the altered role which that rhetoric here plays. The critical inversion of Stirner and Bauer still performs a crucial demystifying function, but it no longer generates positive knowledge *in and of itself*. This is a consequence of the abandonment of the Feuerbachian anthropological framework, which in earlier texts permitted Marx to segue immediately between the critique of false abstractions and the affirmation of the true. Here, by contrast, such an approach could only yield a fatal misrecognition emblemized by Stirner, who in Marx and Engels’ reading attempts to arrive at corporeal existence through the “negation of spectres [*Negation der Gespenster*]” only to “tak[e] them back into his own body,” thereby transforming his flesh-and-blood existence into a mere “body of spectres [*Leib der Gespenster*]”.⁴³

Marx and Engels employ a new visual metaphor in *The German Ideology* to mark their distance from this practice. If for Stirner critical knowledge is generated through the reduction of abstract forms to the flesh-and-blood individual, for Marx and Engels such a reduction is now at best a

⁴² Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 133-4 [114].

⁴³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 125-6 [105]. On the language of spectrality in Stirner, *The German Ideology*, and *Capital*, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

propaedeutic, a preliminary act of clearing that then gives way to new lines of sight. “Now that [the individual] no longer looks at the world through the spectacles of his fantasy,” they write, “[it] has to think of the practical interrelations of the world, to get to know them and to act in accordance with them.”⁴⁴ The physical act of removing one’s glasses evoked in this image symbolically renders the conceptual gesture in question. For Marx and Engels, philosophical consciousness is, in addition to everything else, a certain structure of empirical perception, a mode of seeing in which objects become visible in certain kinds of ways. Elsewhere in the text, they describe this philosophical optics as a bifocal or double perception [*doppelte Anschauung*] produced (again) through the supplement of philosophical spectacles [*Brille des Philosophen*]: “a profane one which perceives ‘only the flatly obvious’ [*auf platter Hand Liegende*] and a higher, philosophical, one which perceives the ‘true essence’ of things.”⁴⁵ This issue with this kind of perception is twofold. In the first place, it “does not see that the sensuous world” is not a purely natural, given phenomenon, but a historical one: “the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, [a product] in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulder of the preceding one[...].”⁴⁶ Second, by failing to perceive the historical, produced character of “naturally” given phenomena, philosophical empiricism simultaneously fails to register its *own* historical specificity. As the image of the spectacles suggests, the field of vision inaugurated by philosophy is itself a historically specific technology, produced under specific conditions of social organization and technical capacity, and employed in accordance with historically defined intentions.

In *The German Ideology*, in contrast to *The Holy Family*, one finds a consistent sense on the part of Marx and Engels that as a result of this peculiar philosophical myopia it is no longer sufficient to perform critical inversions within the domain of ideology alone (a term first introduced in this text).

⁴⁴ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 126 [105].

⁴⁵ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 39 [32].

⁴⁶ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 39 [32].

Here Althusser is again instructive, at least in distilling the aspirations of this shift. “Marx’s position and his whole critique of ideology implies...that science (which apprehends reality) constitutes *in its very meaning* a *rupture* [rupture] with ideology and that it sets itself up in *another terrain*, that it constitutes itself *on the basis of new questions*.”⁴⁷ To disentangle themselves from the ideological overdevelopment of German philosophical consciousness, “it was necessary to retreat *from* this ideological flight forwards [*revenir en deçà de cette fuite en avant idéologique*] in order to reach the things themselves, to touch real history and at last come face to face with the beings that haunted the mists of German consciousness.”⁴⁸ This retreat takes us out of the conceptual field of supersession and anti-supersession: no longer is the true content of history to be developed *out* of its false forms. The passage from illusion toward truth is now marked by a scission between the two, a hiatus that interrupts the Hegelian schema of conceptual development entirely.

In order to be successful, this retreat must satisfy the two conditions which Feuerbach’s philosophical empiricism fails to meet: it must account for the historicity of the conceptual and material objects which appear in the phenomenal field of vision, and it must further account for the historicity of the forms of perception through which those objects are apprehended. It must answer each of these problems, moreover, without recapitulating Feuerbach’s metaphysical humanism.

In pursuit of these conditions, *The German Ideology*’s main manuscript on Feuerbach develops a complex model of human history and society on the basis of stripped-down materialist principles. “Since we are dealing with the Germans, who are devoid of premises,” Marx and Engels write, “we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, the

⁴⁷ Althusser, “On the Young Marx” in *For Marx* 78; 75. In quoting *For Marx*, I quote interpretations which Althusser himself would disavow—for good reason—within only a few years. The reason he disavowed them, however, is because of their manifest inadequacy for the purposes of a normative Marxist project. As reflections of Marx’s own theoretical ambitions c. 1845-46, Althusser’s readings in *For Marx* are virtually without equal.

⁴⁸ Althusser, “On the Young Marx,” 76; 73.

premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history.’”⁴⁹ Prior to any acts of political or religious significance, the quotidian behaviors of eating, drinking, securing housing, and making clothing constitute the essential activities without which no higher forms of consciousness would be possible. The satisfaction of these basic needs constitute the “first historical act” [*erste geschichtliche Tat*]; they are in turn the perpetual precondition for a series of more complex social behaviors. The first of these involves the progressive creation of *new* human needs beyond those of simple reproduction. At this level the rudimentary cycle of material survival opens onto an expanded circuit, in which new sectors of production and consumption come into existence and redefine the historic baselines of human need and satisfaction. The third moment is a logical extension of this: as human beings reproduce and modify their material conditions of existence, they similarly recreate the social relations in which they are ensconced, producing ever more complex forms of social behavior, communication, and co-operation in the process.⁵⁰ *Only* when these three moments of social activity are accounted for does it finally become possible to speak about “consciousness,” and then only in a very delimited way. The “mind,” they write, is always already “afflicted with the curse of being ‘burdened’ with matter [*hat...den Fluch an sich, mit der Materie ‘behaftet’ zu sein*],” and thus can only be understood as forever dependent on the material forms of existence in relation to which it thinks.⁵¹ Even when forms of consciousness seem to acquire independence from their material bases, this independence remains explicable in materialist terms. In such cases, they write, ideas are something like “fog formations [*Nebelbildungen*]” or “sublimates [*Sublimate*],” gaseous phenomena which, though difficult to capture, are through the methods of

⁴⁹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 41 [17].

⁵⁰ Though Marx describes these activities in the language of “stages,” it would be incorrect to view them as separate or sequential. As the language of recreation and reproduction suggests, this is a recursive rather than linear process. At every temporal moment in human history, these three “stages” operate simultaneously in a mutually ramifying way.

⁵¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 43-44 [19-20].

science ultimately traceable and reducible to their solid forms. In any case, “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness [*Nicht das Bewußtsein bestimmt das Leben, sondern das Leben bestimmt das Bewußtsein*].”⁵²

Together, these stages or “moments” of social existence explode the concept of “human nature” which Marx had earlier adopted from Feuerbach, along with its idea of the relationship between consciousness and being. The reinterpretation of human history which Marx and Engels undertake here, whereby history becomes the history of the many ways in which human beings have continually produced their conditions of material existence, obviates the static model of subjective-objective unity which Feuerbach’s anthropology entails. More precisely, the unity of historical initiative and nature is no longer achieved by virtue of a theoretical recognition of one’s own universality. It is asserted, instead, on the premise that history and nature are always already interwoven—so interwoven, in fact, as to be coterminous. As Marx and Engels put it, “the celebrated ‘unity of man with nature’ [*die vielberühmte Einheit des Menschen mit der Natur*] has always existed in industry and has existed in varying forms in every epoch.” Even to speak of “nature” and “history” in analytic isolation would therefore be a mistake. For where would one locate either nature or history uninfected by the other? The world insofar as it appears as “natural” is in fact always already transformed by its convergence with human history; all nature is second nature, “historical nature [*geschichtliche Natur*],” just as much as all human history is “natural history [*natürliche Geschichte*].”⁵³ This extends even to the faculties through which humans cognize the world around them. In the case of sense-perception, for instance, whatever originary perceptual relation between organ and world existed has been supplanted, Marx and Engels suggest, both by a new world of

⁵² Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 37 [16]. The MECW mistranslates *Nebelbildungen* as “phantoms,” thus obscuring the natural-scientific idiom at work here and conflating the contexts in which it is used with those where Marx does use the idiom of specters, phantoms, and ghosts.

⁵³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 39-40 [33].

produced objects and the technological augmentation of the senses themselves.⁵⁴ In the case of the higher faculties such historicity is even more dramatic. Only with the historical division of laboring and intellectual classes, they argue, did it become possible to separate the faculties of consciousness from the material activity of the body. The very division between consciousness and being is thus a novel historical formation: “theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc.,” as well as the pure faculties of reason that enable them, are not constant features of human cognition, but contingent products of social stratification in class-based societies.

Paired with the “retreat” named by Althusser is thus a systematic reconstruction of the historical-material processes through which a complex social whole is brought into existence. Beginning with the “real process of production [*wirklichen Produktionsprozess*]...the material production of life itself [*unmittelbaren Lebens*],” this new mode of critical thought proceeds to “the form of intercourse,” or set of social relations “connected with and created by this mode of production, i.e., civil society in its various stages,” and then to “its action as the state” and its sublimation in “forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality”—its goal ultimately being the depiction of the whole “in its totality [*in ihrer Totalität*].”⁵⁵ In brief, rather than descend “from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of descending from earth to heaven.”⁵⁶ This image of a social totality and the method of comprehension proper to it would remain operative, though (crucially for our purposes) not univocal for the remainder of Marx’s life, most notably in his preface to the 1859 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and its formulae of base and superstructure. For the moment, however, it functioned most importantly to establish a materialist theory and politics that satisfied the conditions of the break with Feuerbach, de-naturing Feuerbach’s concept of the human and providing a genetic account that rooted consciousness in the forces and relations of production.

⁵⁴ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 40 [33].

⁵⁵ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 53 [27].

⁵⁶ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 37 [16].

There is a significant problem with this solution, however. Specifically, the couplet of retreat and reconstruction which Marx and Engels adopt to escape the trap of Feuerbachian species-being is possible only on the presumption of an epistemological empiricism in flagrant contradiction with the idea of the social whole which *The German Ideology* presents. This striking feature of the text is distilled in the same optic metaphor which Marx and Engels use to establish their step away from Feuerbach. When Marx and Engels depict demystification through the removal of one's philosophical bifocals, the implication is automatic: that the supplementary mode of perception proper to philosophy obscures an *original* clarity of vision belonging to the unencumbered eye, and that, once denuded of its filters, that eye is naturally adequate to the phenomena which it perceives. Writing of another metaphor of vision that appears in this chapter—the *camera obscura*, which Marx and Engels use to depict the inverted consciousness of ideology—Sarah Kofman suggests that in spite of the problematic seemingly necessitated by the language of ideology, the proliferation of specular metaphors in *The German Ideology* all “imply the same postulate: the existence of an original meaning of original sounds and light which would only secondarily reflect or reverberate.”⁵⁷ Not only does this mean that “the ‘real’ and the ‘true’ still preexist consciousness,” as Kofman observes. The image of the bifocals, when added to that of the *camera obscura*, indicate that for Marx and Engels the “real” and “true” are not simply preexistent but in fact immediately present to perception.

Throughout the manuscript on Feuerbach, Marx and Engels render this non-philosophical vision in the unexpected idiom of empiricism. Describing how to distill the relation between political and productive orders, for example, they write: “The fact is, therefore, that definite [*bestimmte*] individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political

⁵⁷ Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, trans. Will Straw (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 3.

relations. Empirical observation [*empirische Beobachtung*] must in each separate instance bring out empirically [*empirisch aufweisen*], and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production.”⁵⁸ Lest there be any doubt what “empirical” and “empirically” signal, they emphasize: “The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals [*gehen beständig aus dem Lebensprozeß bestimmter Individuen hervor*], however, of these individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they *actually* are [*sondern wie sie wirklich sind*].” Elsewhere, they similarly stress that the premise of their method is “men...in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development [*wirklichen empirisch anschaulichen Entwicklungsprozeß*],” or “active life-process [*tätige Lebensprozeß*]” and claim, audaciously, that “when things are seen in this way, as they really are and happened [*wirkliche sind und geschehen sind*], every profound philosophical problem is resolved, as will be seen even more clearly later, quite simply into an empirical fact” [*zeigen wird, jedes tiefste sinnige philosophische Problem ganz einfach in ein empirisches Faktum auf*].”⁵⁹

How is it possible for Marx and Engels to assert this epistemic position? In the cumulative work of *The German Ideology*, beginning with the critiques of Bauer and Stirner and concluding (chronologically) with the revised manuscript on Feuerbach, Marx and Engels had adumbrated a new concept of social reality, to use Michael Heinrich’s phrasing, in which more fundamental moments or levels—the forces and social relations of production, in particular—determined the forms of consciousness of a given social formation.⁶⁰ The language of determination left unspecified the precise causal mechanism linking the domains of material production and consciousness, but in general it seemed clear that the former acted causally so as to produce the latter, whether in a coarse functionalist sense (“the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”) or a vague

⁵⁸ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 41 [15].

⁵⁹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 35, 39; [16, 33].

⁶⁰ Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 144.

expressivist paradigm (“the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations”). In either case, there is no obvious means by which critical subjectivity can achieve the kind of empirical perspective that Marx and Engels here depict. How exactly does consciousness come to step outside of networks of determination so as to observe “empirical facts” in isolation? At moments they suggest that such a perspective is possible by virtue of an emergent contradiction between the forces and relation of production. The tectonic friction between the socialized character of capitalist production and the legal form of private property, to take one possible example, would then, by interrupting the functionalist reproduction of bourgeois ideology, permit counterhegemonic forms of proletarian consciousness to emerge. Even then, however—and even if we set aside the problems created by the automaticity of this model—proletarian consciousness would not simply perceive *Wirklichkeit* in its transparency; it would be another species of ideological knowledge deployed for (egalitarian) fighting purposes.

This is not the only disturbing inconsistency that confronts us at this point. Beyond the question of whether Marx and Engels’ empiricism is coherent with the complex social structure they describe, we might further ask: on what metaphysical grounds can such an epistemic lucidity be maintained? In our earlier discussion of the Feuerbachian theoretical problematic to which Marx ascribed c. 1844, we saw how Feuerbach’s and Marx’s empiricism generated apodictic knowledge by virtue of the metaphysical homogeneity of its subject and object. It was possible to comprehend, critique, and reinterpret ideological and social phenomena, that is, because those phenomena were ultimately objective expressions of the same human essence which came to know them.

Anthropology, in that instance, anchored a “planar space governed by a transitive mechanical causality,” as Althusser puts it, in which determinate effects could be grasped and attributed to their determinate cause without remainder.⁶¹ Having abandoned that anchor, emphatically so, by the time

⁶¹ Althusser, “The Object of *Capital*,” in *Reading Capital*: 215-355, 337.

they wrote *The German Ideology*, what concept filled its place? If the model of the social whole described above would seem to lead, as Kofman again guides us, “to the generalization of the ideological and to the rendering as non-pertinent of the distinction between ideology and science,” how do they avoid that logical inevitability?⁶² Why exactly does that distinction become entrenched in this text, rather than dissipate?

II. Marx’s Concept of Life

In the series of passages quoted above, empirical knowledge, empirical observation, and empiricism are paired with a second semantic cluster: life. *Leben* in its various iterations—*Leben*, *lebendig*, *Lebensproduktion*, *Lebensbedingungen*, and especially *Lebensprozess*—consistently appear alongside references to experience, materialism, or production, providing both the object and foundation of empirical knowledge. Life is what empirical knowledge discloses, as when Marx and Engels write that “empirical observation” must bring out “the life-process of definite individuals.” It also provides the condition of possibility for such observation: “It is life that determines consciousness,” as they quip, and it is only because of this determination that consciousness is reflexively capable of taking account of itself.

It would be easy to interpret these allusions as neutral placeholders for an as-yet-formulated account of the real process of natural-human mediation. Such is the position of Kohei Saito, who reads *The German Ideology* as a monumental, but inarticulate moment of transition away from the humanist naturalism of the 1844 *Manuscripts*, a moment in which Marx specifically begins to understand the unity of human beings and nature in “non-philosophic” terms.⁶³ In the course of subsequent decades, he argues, Marx formalized this understanding in the physiological language of

⁶² Kofman, *Camera Obscura*, 19.

⁶³ Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 51.

metabolism [*Stoffwechsel*], a conceptual precursor to “ecology” that permitted Marx both to capture the “metabolic rift” created by capitalism and to criticize “the irrationality of purely formal economic categories from the perspective of the physical and natural world.”⁶⁴ According to such a reading, the shift to from the human to *Leben* from 1844 to 1846 anticipates the more fully ramified ecological positions of the 1850s and 1860s. Life is simply the name for a metabolic process which Marx lacks sufficiently scientific language to describe.

There is however another way to interpret the remarkable density of life-language in *The German Ideology*. That alternative begins with the observation that Marx and Engels were by no means unique among nineteenth-century German thinkers in their concern with life. Indeed, the sudden centrality of *Leben* and its derivatives in *The German Ideology* constitutes less a departure from philosophical conceptions of the relation between human and nature than the diluvial resurgence of a *pre*-Feuerbachian idealism, for which, as Karen Ng has recently argued, the correspondence of the respective ideas of self-consciousness and life was the essential criterion of success.⁶⁵ Even more noteworthy, the intellectual situation in which Marx and Engels seized on this concept—the problems it is intended to solve, the rival concepts it is mustered against—recapitulates with surprising precision the itinerary of the concept of life in Hegel, Marx’s most notorious theoretical adversary.

Beginning around 1800, the concept of life emerged in Hegel’s thought as a crucial figure permitting him to think beyond Kant’s purely regulative concept of natural purposiveness and the antinomy of the ideal and real which it enforces. As I alluded to in Chapter 4, German philosophy in the early nineteenth century evolved in response to a set of unresolved problems in Kant’s critical

⁶⁴ Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism*, 97.

⁶⁵ Karen Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3. I rely on Ng’s luminous interpretation throughout the following discussion of Hegel.

project, perhaps the most important and vexing of which was the felt desire to overcome Kant's strict division between our certain knowledge of objects of possible experience and the illegitimate extension of that knowledge to things in themselves—a division that repeated itself in the dialectical antinomy of freedom and necessity and the general gap between self-consciousness and the real. This issue preoccupied Hegel throughout the 1790s, when, in texts including the fragment *Love* (1797-8) and *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* (1798-9) Hegel drew on the Christian theological concept of love to capture an experience of subjective-objective unity beyond the absolute oppositions of Kantian intellect [*Verstand*]. Already in those texts life appeared as a partner concept to love, but even in the 1800 *Systemfragment*, where Hegel names life outright as the dialectical “union of union and nonunion [*Verbindung der Verbindung und Nichtverbindung*]” mediating subject and object, that union remains restricted to the domains of religious experience and affect.⁶⁶ In Hegel's 1801 *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, on the other hand, life acquires a more rigorous set of conceptual specifications that qualify it as a principle of speculative logic. There, the concept of life allows Hegel to unify subjectivity and nature by locating in the latter an (onto-) logical structure corresponding to the self-positing character of consciousness.⁶⁷ By reinterpreting nature as organic life, that is, Hegel is able to attribute to nature a subjective-objective purposiveness

⁶⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Love*, trans. T.M. Knox in *Early Theological Writings* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996): 302-308, 305; *Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe* in *Werke* I: 239-254, 246. G.W.F. Hegel, *Fragment of a System* in *Early Theological Writings*: 309-319, 313; *Systemfragment von 1800* in *Werke* I: 419-427, 422.

⁶⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977); *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie* in *Werke* II: 9-138. In the case of consciousness, this involves the argument that in any instance which consciousness takes cognizance of something, it necessarily takes consciousness of itself as well, and in fact always already does so, even if inarticulately, as a condition of consciousness as such. What this means is that it is not ultimately possible to distinguish between the existence of what an object is *in-itself* and what it is *for consciousness* in any absolute way. Hegel's insight in this way builds importantly on Fichte's determination of absolute subjectivity in the logical equation $I=I$, while nonetheless departing from Fichte in seeking a counterpoint to Fichte's ego in nature itself. In narrating this relation between Hegel, Fichte, Kant, and their contemporaries, I continue to rely on Ng alongside Eckart Förster's *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*.

that is *constitutive* and not only *regulative* in relation to reason, as in the case of Kant.⁶⁸ To say that this structure is constitutive is to do more than identify an instructive analogy between life and consciousness. It is to argue, as Ng points out, that life is the transcendental *a priori* condition for self-consciousness, and therefore that the absolute identity only hinted at in the case of analogy is thereby established in fact.⁶⁹ As she summarizes, “Hegel transforms Kant’s Copernican Revolution not by presenting life as a category among others in a metaphysical deduction but, rather, by arguing for its constitutive character, inserting it into our concept of self-consciousness and reconceiving the structure of experience according to the internal relation between self-consciousness and life.”⁷⁰

Marx’s and Engels’ concept of life shares a crucial structural isomorphism with that of Hegel. This is not immediately evident in reading *The German Ideology*, both because Marx and Engels purposefully abandon the kind of dense philosophical argumentation that makes such structure visible in Hegel, and because of how forcefully they underscore their axiomatic opposition to the latter’s thought. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct the unstated philosophical precognition that makes Marx’s and Engel’s appeals to life comprehensible. Immediately after describing the four “aspects” of social production that determine forms of consciousness, Marx and Engels pause the natural exposition of their argument for a single paragraph. Rather than move on from these aspects

⁶⁸ In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that we are entitled to posit a purposiveness—that is, a capacity of acting in accordance with self-positing and self-preserving ends—in nature that corresponds to and is amenable to the purposes of intentional consciousness. For Kant, however, that natural purposiveness has only a regulative function. We *have* to posit such a purposiveness as a practical matter of thinking and acting in relation to the natural world, but we cannot legitimately extend that postulation to nature as it is in itself. For Hegel, on the other hand, natural purposiveness is thinkable as an *objective* subject-object of which human subjectivity is only a single, though significant part. This structure of unity has important continuities with Hegel’s theological writings in the 1790s. In the *Systemfragment*, for instance, where the concept of life first appears capable of traversing these divisions in the way worked out in the 1801 *Differenzschrift*, that capacity is thinkable only through the case of Christian religion, in which (per Hegel) the unity of the simultaneous unity and separation of the component parts of organic nature (i.e. subject and nature) is experienced as the participation of finite in infinite life.

⁶⁹ Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life*, 104-5.

⁷⁰ Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life*, 111.

to articulate the necessary contradiction between the productive forces and social relations, they instead elect to re-narrate the four aspects just considered, doing so in the form of a condensed genealogy of self-consciousness from animality to the absolute subject. That genealogy begins as follows:

“Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not ‘relate’ itself to anything, it does not ‘relate’ itself at all [*verhält sich zu Nichts*]. For the animal its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.”⁷¹

Here, Marx and Engels begin with a basic definition of consciousness common to the field of post-Kantian thought, according to which consciousness by definition constituted a relation between consciousness and the thing it is conscious of. We might take Hegel’s version from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as characteristic: “consciousness simultaneously *distinguishes* itself from something [*unterscheidet nämlich etwas von sich*], and at the same time *relates* itself [*sich zugleich bezieht*] to it, or, as it is said, this something exists *for* consciousness.”⁷² Marx and Engels continue, “consciousness is at first of course, merely consciousness concerning the *immediate* sensuous environment [*bloß Bewußtsein über die nächste sinnliche Umgebung*] and consciousness of the limited connection with other persons and things outside the individual who is growing self-conscious.” At this preliminary stage above the animal, consciousness takes the form of a relation, but solely a relation of externality—the immediate sensation of the object as something other than consciousness. Again we might elucidate this in terms of the *Phenomenology*, where Hegel opens chapter one (on sense-certainty) by stating that “the knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself [*selbst unmittelbares Wissen*], a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is* [*Wissen des Unmittelbaren oder Seienden ist*].”⁷³ This immediate knowledge of what *is* as not-I is,

⁷¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 44 [20].

⁷² G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 52; *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in *Werke* 3, 76.

⁷³ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58 [82].

at the same time, “consciousness of nature,” though only at this first stage—which Marx and Engels again follow Hegel in identifying as that of “natural religion”—as that of a “completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force.” At the same time, consciousness is *also* one’s consciousness of “the necessity of associating with the individuals around him [*sic*], the beginning of the consciousness that he [*sic*] is living in society.” Marx and Engels compress a remarkable amount of the *Encyclopedia* together in this phrase, but in short what they claim here is that consciousness takes stock of the fact of its own relationality and thus the *for-itself* of the things which it cognizes, that it does so in relation to other loci of self-consciousness, and that this sociality develops over the course of history in progressively more complex forms of organization.

This last point marks an important departure from the argument of the *Phenomenology*, no doubt. In a short passage omitted from the MECW translation of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels specify that the momentary status of consciousness as immediacy, understanding, or self-consciousness is never simply a question of the internal history of reason, but of the social forms to which discrete forms of consciousness are necessarily attached. This is consistent with their writing elsewhere on Hegel, the basic thrust of which is that Hegel reverses the proper order of subject and predicate in the relation of being and knowing, attributing to consciousness a priority and self-animating power that in fact belongs to historical forms of human sociality alone.

And yet, that metaphysical discontinuity with Hegel’s thought conceals the equally significant *logical* continuity which the concept of life discloses. For in the passage above, Marx and Engels do not so much abandon Hegel’s thesis of speculative identity as shift its locus of emphasis from the subjective to the objective. This gives us a new vantage from which to read claims such as “the celebrated unity of man with nature has always existed” or “it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.” Whether one claims that consciousness determines life, life determines consciousness, or both, that relationship of determination is ultimately possible only

by virtue of the logic of internal purposiveness which both life and consciousness share—a logic that relies in all of its essential parts on the Hegelian schema with which the concept of life is supposed to break. This, ultimately, is the intellectual ground for the appeals to empiricism that pepper *The German Ideology*. Marx’s and Engels’ consistent appeals to “actual” or “real” existence are not a step outside philosophy; they are a shortcut that takes the conceptual labor and conclusions of systematic philosophy for granted. The nostalgia for the lucidity of the real that is identifiable in Marx’s empiricism is thus *also* a nostalgia for the metaphysical forms of unity which render that lucidity plausible—whether speculative or anthropological, these are the presupposition of any critical mode that would take the immediacy of the real as its starting point. If *The German Ideology* doesn’t give us its own *Phenomenology*, that’s because it doesn’t need to: the old one works just fine.

In *The German Ideology*, then, the question that opened this chapter—how can we think materialism beyond reconciliation?—undergoes a substantial metamorphosis. In Chapter 4, we posed that question in response to the limitations of Marxian critique as it operated in “On the Jewish Question” and *The Holy Family*. There, we found that Marx’s critical strategy of inversion and affirmation, in spite of its aspirations to *reduce* the alienating separation of concept and being, provided an instructive example substantiating Stuart Hall’s warning: “once you begin with that double-sided framework [of Idea and Being] and try to get them together, you find that idealism is the most powerful available language for talking about complexity.”⁷⁴ *The German Ideology* provides an opposite, though related lesson: if beginning from the distinction between Idea and Being generates a tendency toward idealism, as Hall tells us, this *does not mean that we can start from somewhere else*. Marx’s empiricism tried to do just this, and yet we saw that his appeal to the immediacy of the concrete was not a materialist answer to idealism so much as it was idealism without complexity. In

⁷⁴ Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: a Theoretical History*, eds. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 85.

the passages from the *Grundrisse* quoted at the opening of this chapter, accordingly, the empirical is no longer to be trusted. In keeping with Marx's and Engels' genuine insight concerning the relative priority of the relations of production over a social formation's characteristic forms of thought, empirical phenomena—the phenomena of experience, phenomena as they appear to us—can no longer be taken as simple givens. The task for materialist critique, as we will see in the following section, is to learn to interpret those phenomena, not as falsehoods, but rather as the necessary abstract forms of appearance of a complex social totality.

III. Thinking Capital

Thus Marx does not open *Capital* with a consideration of the general characteristics of material production. He starts instead with the commodity-form. “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails [*herrscht*] appears as [*erscheint als*] an ‘immense collection of commodities: the individual commodity appears as its elementary form [*Elementarform*].”⁷⁵ The three volumes of *Capital* can be understood as a single, progressive-synthetic interpretation of this first sentence of text. Over several thousand pages, Marx systematically reconstructs the conceptual and social relations presupposed in the commodity-form—first in the limited sphere of capitalist production (*Volume 1*), then the expanded process of circulation and social reproduction (*Volume 2*)—before interrogating the concrete forms in which the capitalist mode of production appears and demonstrating *why* those relations necessarily show up in the empirical forms in which they do (*Volume 3*). Together, the three volumes constitute a massive circular endeavor, moving from simple abstractions to the concrete relations which they both disclose and conceal before moving back to the initial forms of appearance with which the endeavor begins.

⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1, 125; *MEGA* II.5, 17; *MEGA* II.10, 37.

This movement is presaged in its basic conceptual contours, if not all of its detail, in the opening chapters of *Volume 1*. Parts One and Two of the text, comprising the chapters on the commodity, the process of exchange, money, the general formula of capital, and the sale and purchase of labor power, express the essential categorial determinations of capital *in its own terms*, as it appears according to its own self-image. Without leaving the realm of circulation and its iron law of the free exchange of equal values, Marx reconstructs the formal determinations and animating logic of capital in its ultimate definition *qua* self-valorizing value.

Marx's argument in these chapters takes the shape of an analytic-synthetic procedure that unfolds successive determinations of capital on the basis of the text's opening observation. From this starting-point, Marx briskly proceeds through an analysis of the commodity and its definitional two-part structure. The commodity, we quickly learn, consists of two major determinations. On the one hand, it is what Marx calls a "use-value" [*Gebrauchswert*]: an "external object, a thing [*äußerer Gegenstand, ein Ding*] which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind."⁷⁶ In addition to this determination, which encompasses every physical, chemical, or other qualitative property that distinguishes a given thing as particular, "in the form of society to be considered here, they are also the material bearers of...exchange value [*stofflichen Träger des—Tauschwerths*]."⁷⁷ Exchange-value is not to be thought of as a discrete quality of its material bearer; there is no necessary vertical reference linking exchange-value to a specific object. As Marx tells us in fact, "an intrinsic value, i.e. an exchange-value that is inseparably connected with the commodity, inherent in it, seems a contradiction in terms," a point already settled by the existing discourse of political economy.⁷⁸ Instead, the exchange-value which a thing possesses is itself a form of appearance that expresses in the mode of an equivalent relation between two qualitatively different use-values a *third*

⁷⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 125; *MEGA* II.5, 17; *MEGA* II.10, 37.

⁷⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 126; *MEGA* II.5, 18; *MEGA* II.10, 38.

⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 126; *MEGA* II.5, 18; *MEGA* II.10, 38.

element that is common to them: *value* [*Wert*]. Considered as value, “all sensuous characteristics” of particular use-values are “extinguished,” Marx writes. In their place we are left with only the quasi-substantial “residue” of “human labour in the abstract,” ultimately measured quantitatively by the unit of “socially necessary labour-time [*gesellschaftlich notwendige Arbeitszeit*].”⁷⁹

By the end of *Capital*’s first section, then, we know that the commodity is the elementary form of appearance of capital, that it possesses a two-part structure as use-value and value (expressed in the exchange-relation between two commodities), and that the substance of value is abstract human labor, measured in units of socially necessary labor time. Crucially, at this point Marx has not expressed a new idea; nor does a single one of these statements constitute a specifically Marxian contribution to the comprehension of capital. Adam Smith had already argued in *Wealth of Nations* that value was determined by the quantity of human labor expended in its production, for instance, and in fact Marx cites him to this effect.⁸⁰ David Ricardo had been even more precise, arguing that the value of a commodity depends solely on the “relative quantity of labor which is necessary for its production.”⁸¹ The conceptual coordinates established in the first two sections of *Capital*, then—and in particular the link between value and labor—are inherited from the discursive field of bourgeois political economy.⁸² As Marx writes, “political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms [*versteckten Inhalt entdeckt*].”⁸³ Far from naming Marx’s intervention in that field, these concepts

⁷⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 128-129; MEGA II.5, 20; MEGA II.10, 41.

⁸⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 137; MEGA II.6, 80; MEGA II.10, 48.

⁸¹ David Ricardo, quoted in Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861-63* in MECW 32, 32; *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript 1861-1863)* in MEGA II.3.3, 1021-22.

⁸² Cf. William Clare Roberts, “The Origin of Political Economy: The Descent of Marx” in Warren S. Goldstein, ed. *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice* (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 31-58, 43-44.

⁸³ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 174; MEGA II.6, 110; MEGA II.10, 79.

and linkages represent an already-existent, coherent system of interpretation in which the major questions of political economy have already been authoritatively answered.

If political economy and its representatives have already disclosed capital's essential categories and hidden content, however, they do so in a curious way. Early in Marx's exposition of the value-form, we hear a second discourse overlap with that of political economy, a discourse spoken by commodities themselves. Examining the process by which the body of a given commodity (here a coat) comes to serve as the form of value for another (here linen), Marx writes:

“We see, then, that everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated by the linen itself [*sagt die Leinwand selbst*], as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat. Only it reveals [*verrät*] its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar [*in der ihr allein geläufigen Sprache*], the language of commodities. In order to tell us [*Um zu sagen*] that labour creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e. is value, consists of the same labour as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as a value [*Sublime Wertgegenständlichkeit*] differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and therefore that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value [*Wertding*], it and the coat are as like as two peas.”⁸⁴

Marx's figural attribution of the power of speech to the commodity in this passage is not accidental. It is only one moment in a consistent pattern of personification by which Marx's text endows non-human objects with independent motive power. Commenting on this tendency, Anna Kornbluh argues that “personification endows the mysterious relationship between commodities with intellectual, physical, and sexual complexity...figuratively record[ing] and perform[ing] the phenomenological and corporeal transformations precipitated by exchange.”⁸⁵ Speech is one crucial signal of these transformations, and in the course of *Capital*'s opening chapters we find that commodities are of a tremendously verbose species of being, capable of expressing themselves in both written and oral form. In addition to its *own* language [*Waaarensprache*], which commodities alone

⁸⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 143-44; *MEGA* II.6, 85; *MEGA* II.10, 53.

⁸⁵ Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 123.

speak to one another in what Marx elsewhere calls a “social hieroglyphic,” commodities also permit their speech to be translated into a host of other derivative tongues.⁸⁶ “Let us note,” Marx writes, “that the language of commodities also has, apart from Hebrew, plenty of other more or less correct dialects.” Among these: “The German word ‘*Wertsein*,’ “the Romance verb ‘*valere*,’ ‘*valer*,’ ‘*valoir*,’” and of course English, phrases from which recur throughout *Capital* as something like the commodity’s adopted national idiom.⁸⁷ Political economy itself is one such language. In its correspondence to the language spoken in secret by Marx’s linen and coat, political economy appears as the rational, second-order discourse that systematizes and renders scientific the hidden operations of the capitalist economy. It is for this reason that the categories of political economy carry the semblance of naturalness. They are, by virtue of their fidelity to the forms of capitalist exchange, belated “forms of thought which are socially valid [*gesellschaftlich gültige*] and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production.”⁸⁸

The precise relation between these two discourses—the commodity-language implied in the exchange-relation and the higher-level discourse of bourgeois political economy—can be clarified by reference to a second thread of personifying motifs in the first part of *Capital*, whereby commodities acquire not only the power of speech but a corresponding body as well. Early in the analysis of the commodity, when Marx shifts his attention from use-value to exchange-value, the abstraction from the physical body of the commodity brings another form of objectivity into view. In treating the commodity as value, he writes,

⁸⁶ The first French edition of *Capital*, the translation and publication of which Marx oversaw, makes this explicit from the opening line, translating “*Der Reichtum der Gesellschaften, in welchen kapitalistische Produktionsweise herrscht, erscheint als eine...*” as “*La richesse des sociétés dans lesquelles règne le mode de production capitalist s’annonce comme une...*”. See MEGA II.7, 19. On the importance of the French edition of *Capital* for philological debates in the study of Marx, see Kevin Anderson, “The ‘Unknown’ Marx’s *Capital*, Volume I: the French Edition of 1872-75, 100 Years Later” in *Review of Radical Political Economics* 15.4 (1983): 71-80.

⁸⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 144; MEGA II.6, 85; MEGA II.10, 53.

⁸⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 169; MEGA II.5, 47; MEGA II.10, 75.

“There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity [*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*]; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour [*bloße Gallerte unterschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit*], i.e. of human labour-power [*Arbeitskraft*] expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. All these things now tell us is that human labour-power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance [*Krystalle dieser ihnen gemeinschaftlichen gesellschaftlichen Substanz*], which is common to them all, they are values – commodity values.”⁸⁹

Marx’s distillation of this objectivity appears as a de-literalizing or de-physicalizing gesture. Indeed, in direct contradiction to the sensuous objectivity of the commodity’s body, he writes, “Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values [*geht kein Atom Naturstoff in ihre Werthgegenständlichkeit ein*].”⁹⁰ And yet this is not simply an eradication of the materiality of the commodity. What Marx narrates in this passage is the coalescence of another kind of material body, composed of a distinctly non-physical but no less actual “social substance.” Marx’s specific language is significant here. The value inhering in a given commodity is formed via a process of coagulation or crystallization, a solidification of something fluid into solid form. Crystallization is a noteworthy idiom in particular, as it neatly reverses the scientific metaphors which Marx and Engels employed in *The German Ideology* to differentiate materialism from the abstractions of Bruno Bauer. There, the physical process of crystallization marked the transformation of the “fluid” phrases of philosophy into their solid material content.⁹¹ In this instance, crystallization no longer describes a passage from the abstract to the real, which in this case could only mean the reduction of the manifest fluidity of value to either its physical bearer or the substance that purportedly grounds it. Instead,

⁸⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 128; *MEGA* II.10, 40. This passage does not appear in the first edition of *Capital*, although Marx does refer to the “*gemeinsame gesellschaftlich Substanz*” constitutive of the “*Werthsein*” of the commodity in *MEGA* II.5, 19. Marx first includes this passage in full in *MEGA* II.6, 72. Engels subsequently reinserted into the fourth German edition, which otherwise follows the text of the first.

⁹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 138; *MEGA* II.6, 80; *MEGA* II.10, 49.

⁹¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 110 [88].

crystallization names the paradoxical reality of the abstract itself. The commodity, as Marx tells us, is best understood—to the extent that this is comprehensible—as “a sensuous-supersensuous thing” [*sinnlich übersinnliches Ding*]. The commodity does not lack sufficient reality or materiality; it possesses both in superfluity.

In keeping with this insight, the first six chapters of *Capital* (first four in the German edition) repeatedly allude to the value-objectivity [*Wertgeständigkeit*] of the commodity such that a discernible, composite value-body [*Wertkörper*] slowly comes into view. This happens through the same synthetic process by which Marx unfolds the concepts of value, money, and capital. At the end of this movement—more specifically at the conclusion of the third chapter on money—the full appearance of the value-body of the commodity makes the value-form itself legible for the first time. In the construction of the concept of money leading up to this, Marx observes that as money takes on the role of universal equivalent in generalized commodity exchange, it produces a contradictory set of psychological imperatives corresponding to its own contradictory structure. In its function as general equivalent, first, money acquires a qualitatively infinite character: in principle money is not only the embodiment of value but the embodiment, in principle, of *any* specific use-value and thus the satisfaction of any specific desire. This qualitative infinity generates a fetishistic attachment to money itself that supplants the “natural” course of circulation, in which use-values are exchanged to satisfy specific, concrete needs. “Commodities are thus sold not in order to buy commodities,” but in order to replace their commodity-form by their money form,” Marx writes. “Instead of being merely a way of mediating the metabolic process, this change of form becomes an end in itself.”⁹² And yet the formal universality of money comes into conflict with its quantitative limitation: though money as such is qualitatively coextensive with the entire world of possible use-values, any particular pile of currency is incapable of embodying that universality. It is this contradiction that counteracts

⁹² Marx, *Capital*, 1, 227-228; *MEGA*II.5, 88; *MEGA*II.10, 121. Cf. *Grundrisse*, 88-89 [85].

the impulse for hoarding. Although money becomes an end-in-itself animating commodity exchange, that first imperative is cut by a second imperative to perennially put money back into circulation again. The individual capitalist “cannot withdraw any more from circulation, in the shape of money, than he has thrown into it,” and so in order to satisfy the desire to accumulate money one must also stake it in exchange.⁹³

These two conjoined drives—expenditure and accumulation, the impulse to throw money into circulation such that money quantitatively matches its qualitative infinity—provide us with our first definition of capital as the self-augmenting cycle of monetary circulation (M-C-M’). They also disclose the extent to which capital operates independently of its bearers, i.e., capitalists, who are per Marx merely “the point from which the money starts, and to which it returns” [*der Ausgangspunkt und der Rückkehrpunkt des Geldes*].⁹⁴ In the circulation process of M-C-M, “both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself [*verschiedne existenzweisen des Werths selbst*], the money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, disguised [*verkleidete*] mode.”⁹⁵ Throughout this process, value as self-valorizing value, i.e., capital, perpetually changes from one form into another, but remains for all that value. As the common substrate and motive force of circulation, value *qua* capital “thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject [*automatisches Subjekt*]” or “self-moving substance” [*sich selbst bewegende Substanz*] as Marx also describes it, “which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are mere forms.”⁹⁶

In defining capital in these terms as “automatic subject” and “self-moving substance,” Marx attributes to capital a set of predicates historically reserved in philosophical discourse for the

⁹³ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 231; MEGA II.5, 91; MEGA II.10, 123-4.

⁹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 254; MEGA II.5, 108; MEGA II.10, 140.

⁹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 255; MEGA II.5, 108-109; MEGA II.10, 141.

⁹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 255-256; MEGA II.5, 109; MEGA II.10, 141-142.

theological.⁹⁷ More specifically, as Tony Smith has argued, he identifies capital as “precisely isomorphic” in all its major determinations “with the structure of Hegel’s Absolute.”⁹⁸ Just like the latter, capital operates as an unyielding logical power that appropriates, inhabits and subsequently posits its various empirical bearers (use-values, but also persons) as materially indifferent moments of its own process of externalization and reconciliation. Such a position constitutes a major reversal in Marx’s approach to Hegel. In the early 1840s, Marx had pilloried Hegel for inverting the subject-object relation between consciousness and being and then projecting a theological subject to stabilize that mystification.⁹⁹ In the *Grundrisse*, similarly, he argued that Hegel confused the order of the concept with the order of being itself. Here Marx discards those dismissals. Though he still maintains a crucial difference from Hegel on the grounds of metaphysics, Marx also suggests, as Moishe Postone and others have argued, that an overarching subject in the Hegelian sense *does actually exist as a matter of historical fact*.¹⁰⁰ The recognition of this monstrous conceptual entity—an entity which until the writing of *Capital* Marx had consigned safely to the realm of idealist delusion—reflexively transforms Marx’s entire exposition up until this point. With capital now in view, it becomes clear that all of the foregoing, from the analysis of the commodity through the derivation of the money-form and the exposition of money as capital, unfolded within conceptual parameters established *not* by Marx, and still less by the empirical reality of bourgeois society, but rather by the self-positing capacity of capital itself.

⁹⁷ Marx makes this point explicitly himself. Immediately after naming value as the dominant subject [*übergreifendes Subjekt*] of the circulation process, Marx clarifies that just as in the form of capital value “differentiates itself [*unterscheidet sich*] as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person” (Marx 1990, 256; II.5,109; II.10, 142).

⁹⁸ Tony Smith, “Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism” in Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, eds. *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 17-40, 23.

⁹⁹ Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74-75.

¹⁰⁰ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 75.

How does this clarify the relation between the discourse of political economy and the language of the commodity which it translates? How in turn does that relationship allow us to account for Marx's starting point? In the first place, the structural analogy between capital and the Hegelian concept permits us to comprehend political economy as operating vis-à-vis capital in roughly the same way that philosophy does for Hegel. For the latter, philosophy is the crowning moment of the global history of spirit. It is the rational language through which the Hegelian concept comes to know itself, the point at which the concept becomes for itself explicitly what it always already was. In much the same way, political economy and its categories now can be read as the quasi-scientific discourse through which capital as an automatic and self-constituting subject achieves systematic self-consciousness. As a result, political economy must be read as a mode of expression that gestures beyond itself. It is not simply a figure of speech to say that the classical political economists speak in the voice of capital; they are, much as the characters who populate Marx's text, personifications that capital inhabits and animates on its own behalf. Furthermore, the recognition of the Hegelian absolute in the structure of capital allows us to account for the dialectical method of exposition which Marx employs.¹⁰¹ According to Chris Arthur, "the

¹⁰¹ Marx's status as a dialectical thinker, his relation to Hegel, and what it means to identify in *Capital* a "dialectical" form of presentation have been central topics for a significant body of Marx scholarship over the last several decades. This scholarship has arisen from different geographic and disciplinary locations, and has come to encompass a diverse, often contentious array of contending positions. Perhaps the most important and influential of these strands has been the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* [NML], which emerged against the backdrop of the West German *Studentenbewegungen* in the 1960s among a group of Adorno's students including Hans Georg Backhaus and Alfred Schmidt. In that context, figures like Schmidt, Backhaus, and Helmut Reichelt called for renewed attention on the contradictory and unfinished character of Marx's critique of political economy, focusing, in dramatic contrast to dogmatic versions of "dialectical materialism" then promulgated in the Soviet sphere, on the uneven development of Marx's critical project from the *Grundrisse* to the various editions of *Capital*, the transformation of its operative concepts, and the epistemic and methodological problems which it left unresolved. Perhaps most significantly, the NML dedicated sustained attention to Marx's value-theory and its dialectical presentation in *Capital*. That focus, together with the contemporary reinterpretation of Marx initiated by Althusser and his students, has since become foundational for a number of other trajectories of Marx interpretation, including the so-called "New Dialectics" associated with Tony Smith, Chris Arthur, and Geert Reeuten, among

progressive/regressive sequencing” which we find in *Capital*’s opening chapters is mandated by the nature of Marx’s object: it “depends upon the presupposition that there is a whole from which a violent abstraction has been made so as to constitute a simple beginning,” that this whole constitutes a complete, internally differentiated, and self-sustaining conceptual totality.¹⁰² Whatever one may think of Hegel’s metaphysics, it is clear, at least for Marx, that he provides the logical instruments with which to reconstruct something of this nature.

Most importantly for our purposes, the interpretation of capital as an entity akin to the Hegelian absolute establishes a continuity between the otherwise divergent contexts of Marxian critique in the 1840s and the 1860s. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx posed the question, “how do we now stand as regards the Hegelian *dialectic*?” as the crucial question for Young Hegelian critics.¹⁰³ In 1844, Marx confidently answered that Hegelianism had been dethroned: by reversing the order of subject and object in Hegelian idealism, Feuerbach had shown, decisively, that the Hegelian dialectic resolved itself into the naturalism of “man.” By 1867, Marx had jettisoned this critique, along with his preoccupation with the debates of the Hegelian school. And yet, inasmuch as capital recapitulated the characteristics of speculative philosophy, Marx’s earlier question remained as vital as ever. In this way, the figure of Hegel folds the two moments of *Capital* and the *Manuscripts* (or

others, and “Open Marxism,” which, beginning in the 1990s, pursued a collective interpretation of Marx’s value-form theory as a “critical theory of society,” drawing heavily from the tradition of critical theory associated with Adorno.

On the history of the NML, see Ingo Elbe, *Marx im Westen. Die neue Marx-Lektüre in der Bundesrepublik seit 1965* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008); Werner Bonefeld and Michael Heinrich, eds. *Kapital & Kritik: Nach der neuen Marx-Lektüre* (Hamburg: VSA, 2011); Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, “the Neue Marx-Lektüre: Putting the Critique of Political Economy back into the Critique of Society” in *Radical Philosophy* 189 (2015): 24-36; Frederick Harry Pitts, *Critiquing Capitalism Today: New Ways to Read Marx* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018). On the New Dialectic and its relation to the NML: Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Fred Moseley and Tony Smith, eds. *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

¹⁰² Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, 67.

¹⁰³ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in MECW 3, 327; MEGA I.2, 275.

“On the Jewish Question,” *The Holy Family*, etc.), together, thereby allowing us to treat each iteration of Marxian critique as separate answers to a single question—and, further, to treat the critique of political economy as a self-critique of Marx’s earlier work.

So: how do we now stand as regards the Hegelian dialectic? At what point does the reconstruction of the logic of capital metamorphose into its critique?

In Chapter 5, having discovered in the sphere of circulation the general formula of capital as “value in process [*prozessirender Werth*],” Marx asks whether this formula is capable of fully accounting for itself.¹⁰⁴ The cycle M-C-M’, he writes, does not yet take us out of simple circulation, and so we must ask “whether this simple circulation, by its nature, might permit the valorization of the values entering into it and consequently the formation of surplus-value.”¹⁰⁵ For circulation to be capable of such a feat, we would have to identify a means by which a money-owner could purchase and sell commodities so as to augment the amount of value, measured in money, first advanced in the process. Empirically speaking, there are any number of such cases. Every time someone sells something for more than they purchased it, they appear to generate surplus-value for themselves. In aggregate, however, these kinds of individual exceptions cannot explain the production of surplus-value as a general phenomenon. In fact, if we adhere to the law of equivalent exchange that regulates circulation within a capitalist economy, we find that the task set for circulation is impossible. “However much we twist and turn, the final conclusion remains the same. If equivalents are exchanged, no surplus-value results, and if non-equivalents are exchanged, we still have no surplus-value.”¹⁰⁶ We are thus left with a contradiction: “Capital cannot therefore arise from circulation and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation

¹⁰⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 256; *MEGA* II.5, 110; *MEGA* II.10, 142.

¹⁰⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 259; *MEGA* II.5, 111; *MEGA* II.10, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 266; *MEGA* II.5, 117; *MEGA* II.10, 149.

and not in circulation.” Or, as Marx concludes, for surplus-value to be formed, “something must take place in the background which is not visible in circulation itself.”¹⁰⁷

In other words, the conceptual totality which Marx has unfolded in front of us over the prior few chapters turns out, on close examination, to be incapable of substantiating its essential definition. Capital, definitionally speaking, must be value that valorizes itself; as it initially appears, however, or as it confronts us in circulation, capital cannot perform this definitional task. It leads us, instead, beyond itself, namely, to the “hidden abode of production” where the creation of surplus-value ultimately happens. If we are looking for the textual site at which to locate the hinge of the Marxian critique, then, this would seem to be the place.

IV. Capital in Secret

Marx’s description of the passage from the domain of circulation to the “hidden abode of production” creates a foreboding effect for his reader. In spite of its noisiness, crowd of characters, and myriad dead-ends, the sphere of simple circulation is a pleasant place to loiter. Within its boundaries, as Marx puts it, we find “a very Eden of the innate rights of man,” a realm where “Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham” rule without exception. As free and equal individuals confront one another on the marketplace, enter into contract with one another, and satisfy their individual needs without external compulsion, the best of all possible worlds inches towards its ultimate perfection: “either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal, and in the common interest.”¹⁰⁸ In addition to all of this, it is a landscape without shadows, a perfectly illuminated region “where everything takes place on the surface and in full view

¹⁰⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 268; *MEGA*II.5, 118-119; *MEGA*II.10, 151.

¹⁰⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 280; *MEGA*II.5, 128; *MEGA*II.10, 160-161.

of everyone [*auf der Oberfläche hausende und Aller Augen zugängliche*],” in accordance with natural laws whose rationality is so evident as to be intuitive.¹⁰⁹

The door that marks the passage from circulation to production (reading, in English, “No Admittance Except on Business”) strikes a discordant note with this otherwise frictionless harmony, evoking a site not only of opacity and restriction (both principles utterly foreign to the limitless fluidity of exchange) but moreover of inequality. As the capitalist and worker move from the scene of contract, where the laborer freely sold their labor-power to the owner of capital, to the scene of production, Marx observes that “a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*”: “the one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but—a tanning.”¹¹⁰ This transformation in the atmosphere of the text is unmistakable. In the passage to the scene of production, we descend from Paradise into what William Clare Roberts describes as the “social Hell” of a capitalist inferno.¹¹¹

It is a shock then, when having passed through the lintel separating simple circulation from production, we find ourselves in what appears to be another Eden, as brilliantly lit and justly governed as the first. A better one, in fact, for where the harmony of simple circulation had a disconcerting, Alice-in-Wonderland-like quality to it, where tables dance and linen and coats commune in secret languages, the scene that greets us at the outset of Part Three is one of unimpeachable conceptual sobriety. Such is the simple labor process as Marx presents it:

“Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature [*seinen Stoffwechsel mit der Natur durch seine eigne That vermittelt, regelt und kontrolliert*]. He confronts the materials as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his

¹⁰⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 279; MEGAII.5; 128; MEGAII.10, 160.

¹¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 280; MEGAII.5, 128; MEGAII.10, 161.

¹¹¹ William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.”¹¹²

This capacity for labour is, Marx continues, the defining feature of human being, the *differentia specifica* demarcating the human as a species. In a widely cited passage, he writes that the capacity for sovereignty with respect to nature mentioned above establishes an irreducible ontological gap between the human and the rest of the animal kingdom.

“A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally.”¹¹³

Thus, when we describe human labor we are describing the realization of human purpose in the domain of natural ends. In the act of production, “Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature.” The human is not simply one natural force operating in a series of reactions among others; “he also realizes [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it.”

Marx’s extended description of the simple labor process, carried on for several ensuing pages, effects a break in the argumentative course of *Capital*, jolting the reader out of the narrative search for the origin of surplus-value and interrupting the dialectical exposition of *Capital*’s first two parts. Here Marx proceeds instead by way of a linear exposition. From the original picture of the individual laborer in intercourse with nature, we derive a three-part transhistorical model, in which

¹¹² Marx, *Capital*, 1, 283; MEGAII.5, 129; MEGAII.10, 162.

¹¹³ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 284; MEGAII.5, 129-130; MEGAII.10, 162.

the labor process is seen to consist of “(1) purposeful activity, that is, work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work.”¹¹⁴ The combination of these three elements, i.e., the use of instruments on raw material in purposive labor, is simply put production, the process by which the “unrest” of labor passes over into the “fixed, immobile characteristic” of “use-values.”¹¹⁵ Each mode of production can subsequently be understood as an instantiation of this simple model, putting the three elements of the labor process into play in idiosyncratic and complex ways without ever eliminating these basic components themselves. Feudalism, for example, constitutes one form of social organization of the labor process, in which individual workers own their instruments and a portion of their own product, but produce under the compulsion to provide another portion to a lord or other hierarchy; capitalism constitutes another, in which the terms of property shift without altering the fundamentals of labor (at least at this point). In either case labor as such remains unchanged. It is “the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.”¹¹⁶

For generations of Marx’s readers, this short exposition of labor as “purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values [*zweckmäßige Tätigkeit zur Herstellung von Gebrauchswerten*]” has provided the human standard against which the exploitation of the capitalist labor process can be measured. And indeed the following three parts of *Capital* seem to bear that out, documenting with exhaustive empirical rigor the deformations which productive labor undergoes, first in the formal subsumption of labor to the capitalist property relation, and then in its material transformation through the techniques of co-operation, the division of labor, and the introduction of large-scale

¹¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 284; MEGAII.5, 130; MEGAII.10, 162.

¹¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 287; MEGAII.5, 132; MEGAII.10, 164-165.

¹¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 290; MEGAII.5, 135; MEGAII.10, 167.

machinery. This process of appropriation is so drastic and so violent as to be expressible only in the binary of life and death. In the capitalist production process, living labor [*lebendige Arbeit*], the promethean fire that “infuse[s]” dead things with “vital energy,” is subordinated to the perverted life-process of its undead opposite. Capital itself is dead labor reanimated, “which, vampire-like [*vampyrmäßig*], lives only by sucking living labour [*durch Einsaugung lebendiger Arbeit*], and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”¹¹⁷ This is more than an evocative metaphor. Whether in the case of Southern slavery or English textile mills, the absorption of surplus-value from living labor “not only produces a deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal moral and physical conditions...but also produces the premature exhaustion and death of this labour-power itself.”¹¹⁸ From the perspective of the labor process, therefore, it becomes possible to reframe the evident naturalness of the laws of circulation as usurpations of nature as such.¹¹⁹

The simple labor process does not only provide an analytic control or moral corrective, however. The ideal of simple, purposive labor also establishes a positive foundation for the construction of a system of production and social organization no longer premised on exploitation or the domination of living individuals by the parasitic power of abstract value. Such an order would involve the comprehensive inversion of the alienation implicit in the value-form, beginning with the act of appropriation by which living labor is first posited as a commodity, which is to say the act by which it is divided on the one hand into its abstract potentiality as generic human “labor-power,” measurable in terms of the socially necessary labor time required to reproduce it, and its use-value, i.e., its character as a particular act of living labor, on the other.

Let us consider what this inversion would look like. In the system of generalized commodity production and exchange, as we have seen, all possible use-values are transformed through a process

¹¹⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 342; *MEGA*II.5, 179; *MEGA*II.10, 209.

¹¹⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 376; *MEGA*II.5, 208; *MEGA*II.10, 239.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 138; Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, esp. ch. 3.

of “real abstraction” into “congealed quantities” of the social substance of abstract labour-time, the relation between which is expressed in their universal fungibility as money. This system is premised on the formal metamorphosis of all concrete acts of labor into quanta of the qualitatively indistinct generic category of value-producing labor [*Wertproduzierende Arbeit*]. For Alfred Sohn-Rethel, this dual determination of labor as useful and value-producing produces two discrete worlds: “two spheres of spatio-temporal reality side by side, yet mutually exclusive and of sharply contrasting description.”¹²⁰ These two worlds can be designated, at least for Sohn-Rethel, simply as “first nature” and “second nature,” the first corresponding to “use” and the latter corresponding to “value.” Though practically interwoven, they are nevertheless analytically extricable. Beginning with the contradictory determination of commodified labor, it becomes possible to sort the categories of Marx’s analysis to either side of this divide. On the side of living, concrete labor, then, is arrayed everything associated with *use*: particularity, concreteness, the physical and chemical properties of really existing objects, the satisfaction of need, etc. On the side of abstract labor, for its part, we find every term belonging to the universe of value: not only labor-power, labor-time, fetishism, exchange-value, and money, but furthermore every simple form of appearance in which the material dynamics of capitalist exploitation conceal themselves, including interest, ground-rent, and wages, the three forms of appearance belonging to the “trinity formula” of *Volume 3*.¹²¹ Crucially, for Sohn-Rethel, the latter categories of capitalist valorization can only emerge on the basis of a negation of those associated with use. And yet that negation is not total. Value remains parasitic on the categories of use: no matter how extensively it metastasizes, value presupposes both the concrete labor which capital subsumes and the useful articles which concrete labor produces.

¹²⁰ Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 23.

¹²¹ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 3*, 954 ff.; *MEGA* II.15, 789 ff.

It is because of this that the categories associated with use-value and useful labor, beginning with those embedded in the simple labor-process, can be rehabilitated as the governing principles of what commentators like Michael Taussig name a “use-value economy:” a system of production collectively organized by free producers and “aimed at the satisfaction of an array of qualitatively defined needs.”¹²² Liberated from the compulsions of generalized commodity exchange, such an economy would entail (or has entailed) the foreclosure of domination of labor by capital. This is as true intellectually as it is practically. As Taussig argues, absent the “commodity definition of the value and function of a good,” the peculiar mystifications that render the social relations of capitalism invisible lose their dissimulating power. In the place of fetishism, “the connections between producers and between production and consumption are directly intelligible.”¹²³ This would be a society in which the intelligibility of the object *qua* use-value or thing, rather than value, would simultaneously entail the intelligibility of the social relations underlying its production. Such is the promise of the simple labor process—to denaturalize capitalist valorization and its peculiar forms of appearance, to condemn the domination which such valorization requires, and to posit a mode of production unencumbered by value’s perverse system of signification—an association “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”¹²⁴

If we follow this interpretation, the sudden appearance of the simple labor process in *Capital* would provide, finally, the foundation and criterion for the critical materialism for which we have been hunting over the last two chapters. As in the case of Marx’s early work, materialism here would be defined by the broad ideological inversion which animated Marxian critique in *On the Jewish Question*, *The Holy Family*, and *The German Ideology*: to evaporate the quasi-theological forms of

¹²² Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010): 25.

¹²³ Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, 36.

¹²⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 84.

abstraction that conceal concrete relations of domination, and to attack the latter in service of a militant universalist humanism. The representation of capital as a Hegelian conceptual totality reinforces such an interpretation, as does the consistency of Marx's description of the demystified labor process and his recuperation of concrete labor as the conceptual antithesis to capital's fetishistic claim to be the ground and engine of its own valorization. The major difference between the early work and *Capital* would concern the method of achieving these ends. In *On the Jewish Question* and *The Holy Family*, we saw the futility of a simple inversion of the categorical hierarchies of a conceptual totality; in *The German Ideology* the impossibility of simply stepping outside of abstraction altogether. In *Capital*, by contrast, materialism would employ the method of reproduction named in the *Grundrisse* to reconstruct and demonstrate the internal inadequacy of the conceptual totality of capital. On the basis of that reconstruction, through which Marx would have demonstrated that the categories of capitalist political economy are incapable of accounting for capital's own definition as self-valorizing value, we pass from capital's misleading forms of appearance to their underlying essence in the sphere of production—from theory to practice, from concept to being, from idealism to materialism, at last.

And yet there are reasons to be suspicious of just this interpretation, all of which hinge on the evident transparency and priority of the simple labor process. First is the manner in which simple labor shows up in Marx's text. I have already tried to emphasize this strangeness. The description of the simple labor process appears as it were in brackets in the text of *Capital*, inserted between two otherwise continuous narrative sequences in which we follow the figure of the capitalist in his search for the origins of surplus-value. In the first of these, immediately prior to this insertion, we accompany the would-be capitalist to market as he attempts to find—and does find—a commodity “whose use-value possesses the peculiar property [*eigenthümliche Beschaffenheit*] of being a

source of value,” namely, labor.¹²⁵ The second picks up immediately from the point at which the would-be capitalist and laborer leave the market together, the latter now having purchased “all the necessary factors of the labour process; its objective factors, the means of production, as well as its personal factor, labour-power.”¹²⁶ With these factors in hand, the capitalist now conspires to achieve two objectives, according to Marx: “in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value which has exchange-value, i.e. an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly he wants to produce a commodity greater in value than the sum of the values of the commodities used to produce it.”¹²⁷ To do so, the character of the capitalist puts his factors of production into an alchemical interaction with each other, incorporating labor, “as a living agent of fermentation, into the lifeless constituents of the product.”

At this stage, the labor process itself undergoes no alteration other than its formal subsumption to the imperative of valorization: “the general character of the labour process is evidently not changed by the fact the worker works for the capitalist”; neither are the specific methods employed.¹²⁸ The capitalist appropriates and puts to use labor as he finds it, as a commodity on the market bearing the useful characteristics which the simple labor process discloses, and above all else the immensely useful quality of the capacity to produce value. In spite of this, at the end of the first cycle of production, surplus-value has not been obtained, and it has not been obtained *in spite* of the capitalist’s productive consumption of labor. The cadence of the narrative that enfolds the simple labor process is thus one of a series of misunderstandings and recurring failures on the part of the capitalist, narrated in a free indirect prose style that renders uncertain any clear distinctions between authorial and character voice. It is at least *possible*, therefore, that what *Capital*

¹²⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 270; MEGAII.5, 120; MEGAII.10, 152.

¹²⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 290; MEGAII.5, 135; MEGAII.10, 168.

¹²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 293; MEGAII.5, 137; MEGAII.10, 169.

¹²⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 291; MEGAII.5, 135-36; 168.

presents as a transhistorical structure of human labor underlying and irreducible to the valorization process is part of this narration—less an ontological fact than the commodified form of appearance in which labor confronts both the reader and the capitalist they’re shadowing.

This possibility is heightened by a second cause for suspicion, namely, the uncanny resemblance between the simple labor process and the Robinsonades which Marx elsewhere identifies as a staple feature of the genre of bourgeois political economy. In the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx explicitly disavows the rhetorical use of the individual producer in isolation as an argumentative starting point. There, he argues that the “unimaginative conceits of eighteenth-century Robinsonades” are not to be understood as “merely a reaction against oversophistication and a return to a misunderstood natural life.”¹²⁹ They are better understood as a naturalization of the individuating tendencies of modern civil society. On Crusoe’s desert island, that is, the individual of the eighteenth century, produced in the dissolution of feudalism and emergence of capitalism, “appears as an ideal...Not as a historic result but as history’s point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature.”¹³⁰ So too in *Capital*, where the simple labor process appears *not* as a historic result but as an ideal and starting point, a vision of human nature posited by the perennial interchange between nature and the human and subsequently interrupted in its appropriation by capital.

There are differences in description and ideological purpose between the Robinsonades of classical political economy and Marx’s simple laborer, but if we take the latter as an empirical depiction of a natural, and thus ideal state of human activity on which to ground an emancipated society, as generations of Marxist humanists have done, those differences become minor in comparison to the commonalities that link Marx and his adversaries, both formally and

¹²⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 83 [21].

¹³⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 83 [21-22].

substantively. From a formal perspective, those commonalities are clear: the self-evident naturalness of the individual laborer legitimizes whatever mode of social organization one imagines on that basis. That may be an isolated producer who pursues their self-interest in a market-based economy; it may just as well be a free producer who cultivates their human capacities in a mutually enriching association with other humans and with nature. In either instance, the conceit works through the rhetorical projection of an ideological construct into the position of historical origin (or telos, which amounts to the same thing).

In terms of substance the similarities between Marx and bourgeois political economy are somewhat more difficult to perceive. Recall, however, that for Marx one of the great insights achieved by classical political economy was the discovery that the substance of value is labor—that beneath the surface categories of the capitalist economy it is the relative quantity of socially necessary labor time objectified in commodities that determines their exchange. Until recently, that position has been attributed to Marx as well. Indeed, the idea that Marx advocates a “labor theory of value” (LTV) has been so common as to constitute a tautology: to even say the name “Marx” is to say in the same breath “labor creates all value.” According to Moishe Postone, this is the basic proposition that grounds “all forms of traditional Marxism,” for which “Marx’s category of labor is understood in terms of a goal-directed social activity that mediates between humans and nature, creating specific products in order to satisfy determinate human needs. Labor, so understood, is considered to lie at the heart of all social life: it constitutes the social world and is the source of all social wealth.”¹³¹ One can readily recognize here the language of *Capital* itself—a recognition that seems to support the evident validity of this kind of reading. For Postone, however, such an interpretation is undermined by two significant problems. In the first place, it is careless in its reading of the opening chapters of *Capital*, where Marx tells us in no uncertain terms that the

¹³¹ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 7-8.

purpose of the text is *not* to identify the substance of value as labor, but to interrogate the link between those two terms, to ask after the genesis and structure of a social form of wealth in which the direct expenditure of labor constitutes the measurable substance of value. For Michael Heinrich, the most important contemporary critic of LTV-based readings of Marx, “the problem that Marx poses is not to ‘prove’ that labor is the substance of value, but to reconstruct, from this specific social form of the product of labor, the specific social character of labor that represents itself [*sich darstellt*] therein.”¹³² This misreading opens onto a much more severe problem. By identifying in labor—and specifically the labor described by Marx at the opening of the chapter on the Labor Process and the Valorization Process—the crux of the Marxian critique of political economy, traditional Marxism “attributes to labor transhistorically what Marx analyzed as historically specific features of labor in capitalism.”¹³³ In other words, to critique capitalism “from the standpoint of labor” is to reify as *the premise of emancipation* the very link between labor and social wealth which it is capital’s major historic intervention to have posited in the first place.

How then should we interpret the simple labor process? What does it tell us about the conceptual structure of capital? How does it inform our understanding of Marx’s materialism, if it cannot be taken to ground it? Let us return to our would-be capitalist. As I noted above, in the narrative sequence immediately following Marx’s discussion of simple labor, the capitalist sets into motion the labor acquired on the commodity market, only to find at the end of the production process that surplus-value has not been created: the value of the productive elements employed at the outset of the production process equals exactly the value of its output. This discovery flies in the face of the capitalist’s initial expectations. Recall that he had purchased the specific commodity labor-power with the anticipation that its use-value possessed the capacity of being a source of

¹³² Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 203. Translation my own. Cf. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 26.

¹³³ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 8.

surplus-value. “This is the specific service the capitalist expects, from labour-power,” Marx writes, an expectation that is supported in every particular by the political economy of Smith, Ricardo, and Mill, and that is ultimately proven wrong.¹³⁴ What we learn through the eyes and mouth of the capitalist, therefore, is that labor does not create value. The “substance” of labor guarantees nothing. In order to solicit surplus-value from the employment of labor-power, the immanent laws of capitalist production require that the individual capitalist exploit something else—not a substance, but the *difference* introduced by commodification between the value of labor-power and the product of its use. Value, that is, is produced only in the formal bifurcation of “labor” into use and value (into labor and labor-power), which permits the extension of the working day beyond the socially necessary labor-time required for labor-power’s reproduction.¹³⁵

This act of formal differentiation is not a secondary act performed on a labor that pre-exists it. Marx’s own language in *Capital* is ambiguous on this point, often creating the impression that the labor process subsists through its formal interpellation by capital, and thus that the exploitation of capitalist production is a question primarily of distribution—of who owns the surplus-value that a transhistorically identical labor creates. In the *Grundrisse*, however, Marx argues forcefully for a different conception of the labor-capital antagonism. There, he says outright, “Labour, such as it exists *for itself* in the worker [*für sich im Arbeiter*] in opposition to capital, that is, labour in its *immediate being unmittelbaren Dasein*], separated from capital, is not productive.”¹³⁶ This statement has an immediate common-sense character to it. Productivity, we might say, is a social rather than a natural

¹³⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 301; MEGAII.5, 143; MEGAII.10, 176.

¹³⁵ Cf. Karl Marx, *Capital*, 2, 196; *Das Kapital: Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Zweiter Band* in MEGAII.13, 108. There Marx writes: “in point of fact, capitalist production is commodity production as the general form of production, but it is only so, and becomes ever more so in its development, because labour itself here appears as a commodity, because the worker sells labour, i.e. the function of his labour-power, and moreover, as we have assumed, at a value determined by the costs of its reproduction.”

¹³⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 308 [227]

attribute: it can be applied only to an activity that becomes productive in a given set of productive relations. In this sense, it is only the “displacement [*Verrückung*]” implied in the economic relation of labor and capital that renders labor productive, that gives it the necessary directionality to make it productive *of* something.¹³⁷ Yet Marx takes this insight one step further. It is not simply the case that capital appropriates and posits labor, i.e., purposive human activity, as value-producing. More fundamentally, it is capital that posits labor as such, that makes human activity visible in this specific phenomenal form. “Already the fact that it is *labour* which confronts capital as subject [*Schon daß die Arbeit dem Capital gegenüber als Subjekt erscheint*], i.e. the worker only in his character as *labour*, and not *he himself*, should open the eyes. This alone, disregarding capital, already contains a relation, a relation of the worker to his own activity, which is by no means the ‘*natural*’ one [*das keineswegs das ‘natürliche’ ist*], but which itself already contains a specific *economic* character.”¹³⁸ The act in which capital appropriates labor as a mode of its own existence, therefore, is not simply the subjection of labor *qua* purposive human activity to the dictates of valorization. That subsumption presupposes another, more fundamental act of violence, which forces human activity to appear as labor in the first place.

When we arrive at the hidden abode of production, then, what confronts us in the image of simple labor is neither the “real” substance of value, nor the purposive human activity which capital overtakes, but a phenomenal effect of this violence masquerading as its negation. Simple labor is yet another form of appearance of capital, much like the simple form of exchange or simple circulation process, albeit with the particular significance that here capital appears as its antithesis—and thus as the potential of its own abolition. In this function, labor is the key nodal point at which capital constitutes itself as a *total* and not simply totalizing conceptual system: by positing its negation, i.e., labor, as its own hidden condition of possibility, capital successfully reincorporates that negation in a

¹³⁷ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 308; [227-28].

¹³⁸ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 310 [228-29].

sweeping movement of self-reflexivity. We might think of this as the last ruse of the fetishism of the commodity. In the opening chapter of *Capital*, Marx identifies in fetishism the mysterious capacity of the commodity to reflect “the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things,” or “the social relation of the producers as a social relation between objects.”¹³⁹ The “theological” or “metaphysical” character of the commodity in this passage appears to be a subjective illusion turning on a basic confusion of the order of subject and object, or phenomenon and essence, by which the social characteristics and motive force of “men’s own labour” is wrongly attributed to the products they make. The critique of fetishism would then seem to be obvious: to restore to the subject, in a procedure of manifestation, the predicates wrongly attributed to its object. What the simple labor process demonstrates is that we are never more in the throes of fetishism than when we do exactly this. By reducing the social form “value” to its concealed essence “labor,” we effect a critical demystification that operates at every moment within a field of oppositions established by capital in advance.

V. The Mortal Science: Impossible Materialism

Marx’s critique of political economy moves beyond this binary analytic, directing our attention away from the question of essence to the act of force through which labor and value become linked. At issue here is not the true content concealed in the illusory form, but the content-form relation as such. What Marx ultimately demonstrates is that the conceptual totality “capital”—understood in its most expansive form as the total circulatory process through which value valorizes itself—depends as its *sine qua non* on a continuous dynamic of appropriation [*Aneignung*] through which capital constitutes human beings as value-producing labor. This violence irradiates the entire

¹³⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 164-5; *MEGA*II.6, 103; *MEGA*II.10, 71.

system of capitalist reproduction, from the “Herod-like slaughter of the innocents” that announces its historical advent to the forms of silent compulsion that pull people out of bed and send them to work every morning.¹⁴⁰

To the exact extent that such force provides the condition of possibility for the existence of capital, however, it is simultaneously and to an equal extent its condition of *im*possibility. In what way? Although it is incorrect to attribute to labor the mystical capacity to create value *ex nihilo*, labor is nevertheless a singular kind of commodity distinct from all others. When the prospective capitalist purchases the commodity labor-power on the labor market, they acquire the capacity to dispose of it or consume it as its owner, as in the case of any other commodity. In this sense, to purchase labor is formally equivalent to purchasing a loaf of bread; in either case one gains the right to consume the purchased use-value in the manner appropriate to it. This is the exact intention of the capitalist. Having purchased labor-power of socially average effectiveness at its normal value, they plan to make the most of it: “He has bought the use of the labour-power for a definite period, and he insists on his rights.”¹⁴¹ That labor be consumed efficiently imposes certain conditions—it must be expended efficiently, with predictable intensity, and without wasting either time or other factors of production. In these qualities labor is unusual, but not unique. What distinguishes labor, finally, is that unlike any other commodity, labor resists its use. As Harry Braverman argues, this quality of labor creates historically novel problems of *management*: “Under the special and new relation of capitalism, which presupposed a ‘free labor contract,’ [capitalists] had to extract from their employees that daily conduct which would best serve their interests to impose their will upon their

¹⁴⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 922; MEGAII.5, 605; MEGAII.10, 679. On this latter capacity, see Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* ([2021] New York: Verso, 2023).

¹⁴¹ Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, 303; MEGAII.5, 145; MEGAII.10, 178.

workers while operating a labor process on a voluntary contractual basis.”¹⁴² The (ostensibly) voluntary character of this relation necessitates that in disposing of labor the capitalist confronts a counter-intentionality that must be cajoled, managed, or forced, within limits, to labor in accordance with an alien purpose. For Braverman, “This enterprise shared from the first the characterization which Clausewitz assigned to war; it is *movement in a resistant medium* because it involves the control of refractory masses.”¹⁴³

The scene of production in which capital appropriates labor is thus always riven between two contradictory motive forces. On the one hand there is the innate drive to valorization immanent to the logic of capital, for which every limit to the length of the working day or efficiency of labor is an obstacle to be eliminated. Opposite to it: an ineradicable resistance to appropriation that makes the violence of capitalist management “an incessant and unending process.”¹⁴⁴ We see this contradiction clearly in the case of the working day. According to Marx, “The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible”; by the same token, “the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length.” In this confrontation, there is “therefore an antinomy, of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides [*Zwischen Gleichen Rechten entscheidet die Gewalt*].”¹⁴⁵

That valorization is ultimately achieved only in an ongoing scene of struggle renders the possibility of crisis an inherent feature of capitalist production.¹⁴⁶ In the recalcitrance of labor to

¹⁴² Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 46.

¹⁴³ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 46.

¹⁴⁴ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 344; *MEGA*II.5, 181; *MEGA*II.10, 210-11.

¹⁴⁶ By crisis here I do not refer to the kind of crisis theory that we find in the third volume of *Capital*, where Marx suggests that capital contains an inherent tendency toward its own collapse in

appropriation, capital confronts an externality or negativity that cannot be recuperated in the capitalist valorization process. The fact of this externality, manifest only in the act of force by which capital attempts to efface it, unsettles the paths of conversion that compose capital as a total entity. When capital circulates smoothly, the antithetical structure of the commodity resolves by its motion: a commodity can be both value and use-value, that is, by perpetually exchanging its commodity-body for a money-body and vice versa.¹⁴⁷ “To say that these mutually independent and antithetical process form and internal unity,” Marx writes, “is to say also that their internal unity moves forward through external antitheses.”¹⁴⁸ The mere fact that simple exchange must always consist in two separate acts—C-M and M-C—however, entails the potential that these antitheses become absolute, or non-convertible.¹⁴⁹ When the metamorphosis between commodity and money slows or breaks down, “the two processes become separated, they assert their independence and mutual antagonism.”¹⁵⁰ The commodity devolves into a simple thing, money an impotent signifier. The resistance of human activity to its appropriation as labor represents the active exploitation of this potential. Labor inhabits the hidden center of the M-C-M’ cycle.¹⁵¹ If it cannot be successfully coerced, therefore, the entire circuit of capital valorization grinds to a halt. The commodities which the capitalist purchases—means of production and labor-power—stall in place or actively deteriorate. The sensuous-supersensuous objectivity of the value-form itself threatens to decompose.

the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. In using the term I mean only to indicate the fragility of the circuits of exchange that make valorization possible.

¹⁴⁷ *Capital*, 1, 198; *MEGA* II.5, 65; *MEGA* II.10, 98.

¹⁴⁸ *Capital*, 1, 209; *MEGA* II.5, 74; *MEGA* II.10, 106.

¹⁴⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 85 [81].

¹⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 1, 217; *MEGA* II.5, 80; *MEGA* II.10, 113.

¹⁵¹ In *Volume 2*, Marx rewrites the M-C-M’ circuit of *Volume 1* in its expanded form as M-C-P-C’-M’, where P stands for the production process.

It is here, finally, that we can begin to speak of Marx's materialism. Above, I noted that substantialist interpretations of the simple labor process produce a version of Marxian critique in which labor *qua* purposive activity becomes the end-point and positive premise for an emancipatory, anti-idealist abolition of capital, understood comprehensively as a conceptual and epistemological system as much as a political-economic one. Understood in these terms, materialism would name the reversal of the idealist hierarchy of thought and being, the rooting of conceptuality in its *real* premises, and, in principle, the elimination of the kinds of ideological deformation which become possible when thought is delinked from its material grounds and rendered autonomous. In the course of my argument I attacked this as a misreading, but in fact that's not quite right. One could credibly attribute such a model to the person Karl Marx, with more than ample biographical and textual evidence—from *Capital* no less—to back up one's position. Yet this is only one modality of critique inscribed in the text of *Capital*, and it is not the more convincing one. Here, as Sarah Kofman again instructs us, it is a question "of the complexity of Marx' gesture, of the heterogeneity of his text."¹⁵² And beyond that heterogeneity, a question of drawing from Marx's text what Marx himself did not always fully understand.¹⁵³ What I have argued in this section is that we can locate a second mode of critique operating in *Capital*. Unlike the first, this second critique, or second materialism, departs emphatically from the ambitions which the simple labor process appears to

¹⁵² Kofman, *Camera Obscura*, 19. Althusser and Derrida make similar arguments regarding the inner heterogeneity of Marx's thought: Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, Althusser only later in his career, most notably in "Marx in his Limits" and "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter." These two essays are collected in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, eds. François Matheron and Oliver Corpet (New York: Verso, 2006).

¹⁵³ For Alfred Schmidt, this is especially clear in Marx's frequent allusions to Hegel in letters and various prefaces. "It is there not a sign of orthodoxy if one goes by his famous prefaces and postscripts which—if isolated from the various opposition and process of thought whose results they are—favour incorrect interpretations. It only needs a reminder of Marx's completely misleading phrase that in the chapter on the theory of value he occasionally 'flirted' with Hegel's peculiar way of expressing itself." To understand Marx, that is, we have to read him, and in many cases we have to read him against himself. See Alfred Schmidt, "On the Concept of Knowledge in the Criticism of Political Economy" in Golo Mann et al., *Karl Marx, 1818-1968* (Bad Godesberg: Inter Nationes, 1968): 92-102, 94.

realize. From the perspective of this materialism, the reconciliation of thought and being in the free activity of purposive labor is a species of fetishism, achievable only in an act of ideological suppression. The gap between concept and being is irreducible. Although they constitute a dialectical structure of unity-in-difference, as Marx tells us in the *Grundrisse*, here, in contrast to Hegel, the accent is always on difference. To maintain the opposite—to reduce this structure of difference in the name of an ultimate identity—is the essential thesis of idealism, regardless of its vocabulary. Materialism, accordingly, must be the resistance to this reduction. We can reread the introduction to the *Grundrisse* in light of this conclusion. If Marxian critique consists in “the reproduction of the concrete by way of thought,” it must also consist in this: the relentless, perpetual reproduction of the non-identity of those two poles.

Conclusion

The last two chapters have argued at a considerable remove from the contemporary study of religion—both in their topical focus and their level of abstraction. This short conclusion will try to bridge that gap, and to make it somewhat more clear what the vision of Marxian materialism which I have just laid out has to do with religious studies.

At the end of Chapter 3, I introduced my engagement with Marx as a means of responding to the seemingly insoluble double-bind posed by the concept of the fetish. If you recall, I there argued that Charles Long's use of the fetish as disclosive of an "alternative imagination of matter" and new "*arche*" for the study of religion recapitulated Eliadean hermeneutics and its claim to intuitive mastery over the interpretation of religious phenomena. That relapse, I further argued, was symptomatic of a broader dynamic that exceeded the narrow scope of Long's writing on fetishism. Read through the work of Tomoko Masuzawa, the antinomies of the fetish as evident in Long opened onto a more fundamental antinomy between two mutually exclusive, but equally compulsory demands, which we glossed as those of theory and method. Theory, for its part, involved the critical interrogation of a field's governing concepts; method the recuperation of those concepts for the purposes of continued knowledge production. The latter demand proved particularly problematic. As I argued alongside Masuzawa, method constitutes a mechanism for disciplinary continuity. It ensures the reconstitution and ongoing work of a discipline otherwise unsettled by theory's critical work. In this way, method functions as the guarantor for knowledge as such—and thus for the restitution of the subject who knows. That analysis left us with a guiding question as we transitioned into my readings of Marx. How might it be possible, we asked, to conduct a "deconstitutive" analysis of an enclosed and self-authorizing discursive formation—in that case "religion"—without recapitulating a position of hermeneutic mastery, whether via appeal to the irreducibility of matter or

an overinvestment in the exculpatory capacity of our own historical self-consciousness? And what would it mean to conduct such an analysis as a kind of materialism?

The prior two chapters proceeded on the hunch that Marx provides a means of navigating this exact methodological quandary. The plausibility of that hunch rested on the surprising formal similarity between Masuzawa's question, posed to "religion," and the Marxian critique of political economy as undertaken in *Capital*.¹ In the case of the latter, we witnessed in Chapter 5 how Marxian materialism developed as a strategy of disarticulation internal to the immanent logic of a ramified conceptual system. In sharp contrast to earlier paradigms of inversion or retreat, *Capital's* critique of political economy did not seek to simply reverse the operative oppositions of capital's logic; nor did it attempt to step outside that logic altogether. Instead, *Capital* systematically reconstructed its object's logical and formal relations in order to identify the point at which capital's apodicticity betrayed itself as the exercise of force. This would be the "deconstitutive" analysis which Chapter 3 called for. In turn, Marx's (admittedly uneven) refusal to reify "labor" as the positive principle for an overcoming of capital corresponds to our guiding question's second provision. As I argued in Chapter 5, to retrieve the negativity which labor potentiates as the substantial basis for human emancipation would effectively restate the link between "labor" and "wealth" which capital posits,

¹ The logical affinity between the methodological recuperation of, say, the material turn and the logic of capital valorization presents the possibility that there is more than a mere analogy at work here. Put bluntly: it raises the possibility that the anti-critical methods associated with this kind of recuperative gesture are in some way complicit with the ongoing work of accumulation in the neoliberal capitalist present. Lucia Hulsether pursues a version of this argument in *Capitalist Humanitarianism*. Drawing from Patricia's Stuelke's *The Ruse of Repair: US Neoliberal Empire and the Turn From Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), Hulsether argues that neo-Durkheimian functionalist approaches in the study of religion such as that of Kathryn Lofton reiterate the affective structure of capitalist humanitarianism, which seeks reparative models of survival or social solidarity in place of more thoroughgoing critical negation. I am highly sympathetic to this view, and would add that one finds additional evidence for it in: (a) the intense promulgation of "new" methods and conceptual neologisms among post-critical tendencies (enacting a capitalist drive for ever-expanding frontiers of accumulation that fruitfully coincides with the business incentives of academic publishing); (b) the odd refrain among anti-critical thinkers that critique is to be discarded because it's boring or passé, last year's model of thinking.

and thus renew the dynamics of valorization. This move is structurally isomorphic with the function of method. Both method and capital seek to recuperate negativity. One does so in the name of valorization, the other in the name of knowledge. Either way, the message is the same: back to business. By resisting that injunction, Marx adopts a critical posture that successfully avoids two obverse methodological pitfalls—idealism and empiricism—each of which achieves the reconciliation of concept and being on the basis of a clandestine supersessionist metaphysics.

What does this mean for us? In the present context of religious studies and its turn toward materiality, Marx, as I have presented him in this dissertation, allows us to tack between our own two methodological dangers, each of which represents a particular configuration of the couplet idealism/empiricism which Marxian materialism struggles against. The first of these is the anti-Kantian materialism discussed at length in the introduction and Chapter 3, which asserts the irreducibility of the material thing to discursive appropriation only to then recuperate that irreducibility as the principle of a discourse of certain knowledge. Here I hope the convergence of empiricism and idealism is evident. By avowing the ontological autonomy of the thing-in-itself *and* its availability to empirical consciousness, such styles of materialism end up proffering a unity of thought and being indistinguishable from the idealism which they critique.

The second of these dangers is diametrically opposed to the first, aligning with what David Morgan in the introduction called “politics,” and what we might readily recognize as a position proper to Marxism. For this latter approach, which I identify in particular with the work of Bruce Lincoln and Russell McCutcheon, the materiality of religion in no way refers to its physical or extra-discursive properties. It indexes instead religion’s basically social character; materiality refigures religion as a species of ideology. To be clear, interpretations of religion *qua* ideology share much in common with the version of Marxian materialism that I have tried to delineate. It’s hard for me to do anything but agree, for instance, when McCutcheon insists that we apprehend religion as a

subspecies of wider “social formations,” or when Bruce Lincoln defines ideology as a “screen that strategically veils, mystifies, or distorts important aspects of real social processes.”² Moreover, the very best work in this trajectory admirably resists the epistemic chauvinism that careless deployments of “ideology” can easily take on. Again Bruce Lincoln stands out. In particular, I take his work on how multiple and overlapping ideological systems operate within a single hegemonic field to showcase the very best that Althusserian ideology-critique can offer religious studies. At the same time, there remains in this body of scholarship a persistent conflation between what Tyler Roberts, following Raymond Guess, calls the “descriptive” and “pejorative” uses of the concept of ideology.³ When Lincoln writes that myth, “like any other ideology...serves to create false consciousness in many members of society,” or when Gary Lease remarks that religion, by virtue of its ideological character, “is always the enemy of revolution,” they reinstate a polemical distinction between ideology and knowledge premised on the dogmatic difference between the false and the true—a distinction which, as we saw in Chapter 5, contradicts the idea of a social formation which the concept of ideology presumes.⁴

Faced with these alternatives, the problem that confronts the material turn is this: to provide an adequate account of the relationship between materiality and conceptuality, to describe how that relationship operates at multiple levels of social and philosophical abstraction, and to perform each of these tasks without lapsing into the comforts of empiricism or idealism, essentialism or functionalism. Throughout the latter half of this dissertation, I have returned to Marx to develop a

² Russell McCutcheon, “Redescribing ‘Religion’ as Social Formation: Toward a Social Theory of Religion,” in *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001): 21-39; Bruce Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Description* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 164.

³ Tyler Roberts, “Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion,” *Religion* 85.3 (July 2005): 367-389, 371.

⁴ Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society*, 32; Gary Lease, “Ideology,” in Russell McCutcheon and Willi Braun, eds. *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2000): 438-447, 445.

set of provisional responses to these exigencies, and to recommend the Marxist theoretical tradition more broadly as a privileged discourse in which questions of materiality and conceptuality have been perhaps most rigorously addressed. In addition to Marx himself, it would be worthwhile to dedicate sustained attention to the convergence of these terms and their relation to religion in other discursive pockets of Marxism, a non-exhaustive list of which would have to include: the work of postwar students of the Frankfurt School, the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the United States, Louis Althusser and his students—including Nicos Poulantzas, Pierre Macherey, and Étienne Balibar—critiques of orthodox Marxism levied from within feminism and the Black Radical Tradition, and the discipline of Marxist cultural studies represented by Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. The last of these offers an especially fruitful terrain for religion scholars. A serious consideration of Hall’s revision of the classical metaphor of base and superstructure, his targeted studies of race and religion, and his conceptualization of the relation between material and ideological relations via the modified Althusserian notion of “articulation” would constitute a good first step toward a materialist study of religion.⁵ It would also provide a welcome corrective to the relative neglect of religion in cultural studies.⁶

One crucial contention of this dissertation, however, is that the Marxist tradition cannot guide our thinking about materiality in isolation. At a personal level, that tradition only ever makes

⁵ On Hall’s consideration of base and superstructure, see Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: a Theoretical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees” in Gregor McLennan, ed. *Selected Writings on Marxism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021): 134-157; Stuart Hall, “The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the Sociology of Knowledge” in David Morley, ed. *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 111-142; “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, eds. *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021): 195-245. For particularly luminous examples of what Hall offers the study of religion: Stuart Hall, “‘Africa’ is Alive and Well in the Diaspora: Cultures of Resistance: Slavery, Religious Revival and Political Cultism in Jamaica,” in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*: 161-194.

⁶ Terry Eagleton, “Where does culture come from?” in *London Review of Books* 46.8 (published online; accessed 22 April 2024).

sense to me as one major pole within a non-synthetic and contradictory field of theoretical coordinates established by the convergence of psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory, deconstruction, and the global traditions of Black radicalism. Rather than end with an invocation of cultural studies, then, I want to conclude by considering a final contribution to materialist thinking from the direction of deconstruction, the specific partner discourse on which I've relied most heavily throughout the foregoing.

In 1997, Judith Butler took up the basic conceptual problem animating this dissertation in a short article published for the journal *Qui Parle*. Originally delivered at a conference for Paul de Man, Butler's essay performs a reading of Descartes' *Meditations* in order to examine the specific kind of effectivity implied by the language of "discursive construction."⁷ Every time we use this type of language, Butler argues, we presuppose that language is capable of acting, that it acts on the body (or material bodies), and that this activity is in some way determining of that body's existence. We often do so, however, while "sidestep[ping] the important questions of 'in what way' and 'to what extent.'"⁸ They go on: "To say that the line between the sexes, for instance, must be drawn, and must be drawable, is to concede that at some level the stability of the distinction depends upon a line being drawn." This could mean multiple things. It may signal, for instance, that in drawing such a line we simply stabilize in discourse a distinction that already exists in fact; conversely, it may reveal that sexual difference is in fact a product of the line, and that the latter "permits and controls the appearance and knowability of sex."⁹ The language of construction, here discussed in the configuration of discourse and sex, thus isolates the question, what is materiality? Is the body made by language? Is it made *of* language? Is materiality determined by discourse? Is it anything else?

⁷ Judith Butler, "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?" *Qui Parle* 11.1 (Fall/Winter 1997): 1-20, 2.

⁸ Butler, "How Can I Deny," 2.

⁹ Butler, "How Can I Deny," 2-3.

In answering these questions, one risks two forms of reduction, Butler warns us: a linguistic monism according to which the body *is* ultimately nothing other than language; and an anti-constructivism that recognizes the heterogeneity of the body to its linguistic capture, but then seeks to describe that heterogeneity as a separable, non-linguistic ontology.¹⁰ We should immediately recognize these positions as the alternatives which Marxian materialism tacks between; so too should we recognize Butler's negotiation of them. They write, "I think it must be possible to claim that the body is not known or identifiable apart from the linguistic coordinates that establish [its] boundaries—*without* thereby claiming that the body is nothing other than the language by which it is known."¹¹ This is the lesson that Butler draws from the *Meditations*. In the procedure of radical doubt that opens that text, specifically, Descartes demonstrates the simultaneous validity of two contradictory statements. First, he shows us that the iterable linguistic subject-position of the "I" is capable of positing, suspending, and calling into doubt the existence of the body (thus performing its independence). At the same time, the narration through which the method of doubt is enacted unfolds only through a series of bodily figures, summoned in an act of writing for which Descartes' physical body is an unavoidable precondition: "the very language through which he calls the body into question ends by reasserting the body as a condition of his own writing."¹² On this basis, Butler concludes that the body "is and is not determined by the discourse it produces." Materiality is thus neither "a surface nor a substance." It is instead "the linguistic occasion of the body's separation from itself, one that eludes its capture by the figure it compels."¹³

Butler's essay reaffirms the idea that any consistent materialism must inhabit the unstable zone created by the twin theses that the concept and being are inseparable, and that their difference

¹⁰ Butler, "How Can I Deny," 5.

¹¹ Butler, "How Can I Deny," 5.

¹² Butler "How Can I Deny," 14; 6.

¹³ Butler, "How Can I Deny," 18.

is irreducible. The point of materialism is not to settle that difference in favor of one side or the other. It is instead to examine the many ways in which this difference has been organized—or, to use Marx's verb, appropriated—in varied social and historical contexts. We might say that “the social” is in fact one name for the appropriation of this gap. Capital is another. Religion a third. Materialism tasks itself with the reconstruction of these social formations, beginning with simple abstractions and proceeding, via a subjective itinerary of critical failure, to the antithetical relations that sustain them. It does so not as method, however, at least as described above, but rather as the allegory of method's ultimate impossibility—the “ruthless criticism of all that exists,” as Marx wrote in 1843, to which criticism is itself is always first and finally subject.

Bibliography

Works by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

- Capital* [1867] 1976. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin.
- [1883] 1992. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 2. Translated by David Fernbach. London: Penguin.
- [1894]. 1991. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol 3. Translated by David Fernbach. London: Penguin.
- CM* [1848] 2017. Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Translated by Samuel Moore. London: Pluto Press.
- LF* [1886] 2005. Engels, Friedrich. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Honolulu: University of the Pacific.
- MECW* Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*. 50 vols. New York; Moscow; London: International Publishers; Progress Publishers; Lawrence and Wishart, 1975-2005.
- MEW* Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Karl-Marx-Friedrich Engels-Werke*. 39 vols., plus *Ergänzung-banden*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957-68.
- MEGA* Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*. 114 projected vols., ongoing. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975-98, and Akademie Verlag, 1998-.

Other Works

- Alexander, Kathryn. 1988. "Religious Studies in American higher Education since *Schempp*: a Bibliographical Essay." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 71.2/3: 389-412.
- Allardyce, Gilbert. 1982. "The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course. *The American Historical Review* 87.3: 695-725.
- Althusser, Louis, et al. [1965] 1997. *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. London: Verso.
- Althusser, Louis. [1965] 2005. *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: Verso.
- . [1965] 2005. "The Object of *Capital*," in *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. London: Verso.
- . 2001. *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.

- . 2006. *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, edited by François Matheron and Oliver Corpet. Translated by G.M. Goshgarian. London: Verso, 2006.
- American Council on Education. 1947. *The Relation of Religion to Public Education: The Basic Principles*. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education.
- Anderson, Kevin. 1983. "The 'Unknown' Marx's *Capital*, Volume I: The French Edition of 1872-75, 100 Years Later." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 15.4: 71-80.
- Anidjar, Gil. 2014. *Blood: A Critique of Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun, ed. 1986. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Apter, Emily S., and William Pietz, eds. 1993. *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Arthur, Christopher J. 2004. *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*. Leiden: Brill.
- Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Austin, C. Grey. 1957. *A Century of Religion at the University of Michigan: A Case Study in Religion and the State University*.
- Avineri, Shlomo. 2019. *Karl Marx: Philosophy and Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Babbitt, Irving. 1908. *Literature and the American College*. Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Bach, Marcus. 1952. *Of Faith and Learning: The Story of the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa*. Iowa City: The School of Religion State University of Iowa.
- Balibar, Étienne. [2001] 2017. *The Philosophy of Marx*. Translated by Gregory Elliott and Chris Turner. London: Verso.
- Bass, Dorothy C. 1989. "Ministry on the Margin: Protestants and Education," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America*, edited by William R. Hutchison. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauer, Bruno. [1842] 1843. *Die Judenfrage*. Braunschweig: Friedrich Otto.
- . [1842] 1983. "The Jewish Problem." In *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepevelich. Translated by Helen Lederer. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 187-197.

- . [1843] 1968. “Die Fähigkeit der heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden.” In *Bruno Bauer: Feldzüge der Reinen Kritik*, edited by Hans-Martin Sass. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp: 175-195.
- . [1843] 1967-77. “The Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free.” Translated by Michael P. Malloy. *The Philosophical Forum* 8: 135-149.
- . 1844a. “Die neuesten Schriften über die Judenfrage.” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 4: 10-22.
- . 1844b. “Was ist jetzt der Gegenstand der Kritik?” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 8: 18-26.
- . 1844c. “Die Gattung und die Masse.” *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* 10: 42-48
- . 1845. “Charakteristik Ludwig Feuerbachs.” *Wigand's Vierteljahrschrift* 3: 86-146.
- Bellofiore, Riccardo, and Tommaso Redolfi Riva. 2015. “The Neue Marx-Lektüre: Putting the Critique of Political Economy back into the Critique of Society.” *Radical Philosophy* 189: 24-26.
- Bennett, John C. 1936. *Christianity—and Our World*. New York: Association Press.
- Bergunder, Michael. 2014. “What is Religion? the Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26: 246-286.
- Betts, George H. 1920. “The Curriculum and the College Department of Religion.” *Religious Education* 15.5: 257-263.
- Blakeman, Edward W. 1930. “Religion at State Universities.” *Religious Education* 25.4: 326-331.
- Blum, Edward J. 2005. *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Boer, Roland. 2009. “The Full Story: On Marxism and Religion.” *International Socialism* 123.
- . 2012. *Criticism of Earth: On Marxism and Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Böhme, Hartmut. [2006] 2016. *Fetishism and Culture: A Different Theory of Modernity*. Translated by Anna Galt. Boston: de Gruyter.
- Bond, Charles M. 1935. *The Liberal Arts College Functioning in the Field of Religion: a Case Study*. New York: National Council on Religion in Higher Education.
- Bonefeld, Werner, and Michael Heinrich, eds. 2011. *Kapital & Kritik: Nach der neuen Marx-Lektüre*. Hamburg: VSA, 2011.
- Bradley, Mark Philip. 2010. “Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1: Origins*, edited by Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Braisted, Paul Judson. 1942. *Religion in Higher Education*. New Haven: Hazen Foundation.
- Brauer, Jerald. Papers. Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.
- Braverman, Harry. 1998. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Breckman, Warren. 1999. *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Brooks, Beatrice Allard. 1938. "The Place of the Study of Religion in the Liberal Arts Curriculum in the Light of Recent Theories of Higher Learning." *Journal of Bible and Religion* 6.4: 187-194.
- Brudney, Daniel. 1998. *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, Wendy. 1997. "Rights and Identity in Late Modernity: Revisiting the 'Jewish Question,'" in *Identities, Politics, and Rights*, edited by Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Keams. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Brown, William Adams. 1918. "The Contribution of the Church to the Democracy of the Future." *Religious Education* 13.5: 343-347.
- Burden-Stelly, Charisse. 2023. *Black Scare / Red Scare: Theorizing capitalist Racism in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burridge, Kenelm. 1969. *New Heaven, New Earth*. New York: Blackwell.
- Butler, Judith, 1997. "How Can I Deny That These Hands and This Body Are Mine?" *Qui Parle* 11.1: 1-20.
- Calhoun, Robert L. 1941. "The Place of Religion in Higher Education," in *Religion and the Modern World*, edited by Jacques Maritain, Joseph L. Hromadka, and William J. McGarry. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Carlebach, Julius. 1978. *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Carter, J. Kameron. 2022. "Anarchē; or, The Matter of Charles Long and Black Feminism." *American Religion* 2. 2: 103-35.
- . 2023. *The Anarchy of Black Religion: A Mystic Song*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Carver, Terrell. 2010. "The German Ideology Never Took Place." *History of Political Thought* 31.1: 107-127.

- Catlin, Samuel. 2022. "The Rest is Literature: Midrash and the Institution of 'Theory' in America." Ph.D. Diss. University of Chicago.
- Cavert, Samuel McCrea, ed. 1921. *The Churches Allied for Common Tasks: Report of the Third Quadrennium of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 1916-1920*. New York: Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.
- Cherry, Conrad. 1995. *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chidester, David. 1996. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- . 2000. "Material Terms for the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68. 2: 367–79.
- . 2018. *Religion: Material Dynamics*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- . 2021. "Mapping Oceans: Charles H. Long, Colonialism, and the Study of Religion," in *With this Root About My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion*, edited by Jennifer Reid and David Carrasco. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Chu, Julie. 2010. *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Church Peace Union. 1914. *The Collapse of Civilization*. New York: Church Peace Union.
- Coakley, Sarah, ed. 1997. *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Coe, George A. 1923. "What is Religious Education." *Religious Education* 18.2: 92-95.
- . 1933. "The Present Crisis in Religious Education." *Religious Education* 28.: 181-185.
- Committee on the Objectives of a General Education in a Free Society. 1945. *General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook, the. 1921. *The Church and Industrial Reconstruction*. New York: Association Press.
- Corrigan, John, ed. 2017. *Feeling Religion*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Corwin, Virginia. 1951. "The Teaching of Religion," in *Liberal Learning and Religion*, edited by Amos Wilder. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Council on Graduate Studies in Religion. 1954. "Doctoral Dissertations in the Field of Religion, 1940-1952: their titles, locations, fields, and short précis of contents." *The Review of Religion* 18.

- Cremin, Lawrence. 1961. *The Transformation of the American School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Danforth Foundation Annual Reports. MSS 005. ,” Foundation Center Historical Foundation Collection. IUPUI Philanthropic Studies Archive, Indianapolis, I
- Davis, Orville L. 1949. “A History of the Religious Education Association.” *Religious Education* 44.1: 41-54.
- Day, Matthew. 2017. “Marxism,” *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, edited by. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2023. *No Bosses, No Gods: Marx, Engels, and the Twenty-First Century Study of Religion* Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter.
- de Man, Paul. [1971] 1983. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. [1967] 1972. “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, edited by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . [1974] 2021. *Glas*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and David Wills. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . [1993] 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- Dolan, Jay P. 1992. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*. South Bend: Notre Dame University Press.
- Draper, Hal. 1977. *Marx’s Theory of Revolution, Volume 1*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977.
- Dubuisson, Daniel. [1998] 2007. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*. Translated by William Sayers. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dulles, John Foster. “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It.” *Life*. June 3, 1946: 113-126.
- . “Thoughts on Soviet Foreign Policy and What to Do About It.” *Life*. June 10, 1946: 119-130.
- Duvall, Sylvanus M. 1931. “Religion in Higher Education.” *Religious Education* 26.1: 13-17.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2024. “Where does culture come from?” *London Review of Books* 46.8.
- Edward W. Hazen Foundation. 1950. *The Edward W. Hazen Foundation, 1925-1950*. New Haven: Hazen Foundation.

- . 1942. *Conversations on Higher Education and Religion*. Haddam, CT: Hazen Foundation.
- Edward W. Hazen Foundation Annual Reports. MSS 005. Foundation Center Historical Foundation Collection. IUPUI Philanthropic Studies Archive, Indianapolis, IN.
- Edwards Family Papers, #1484. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections. Cornell University Library. Ithaca, New York.
- Edwards, Mark. 2009. “‘God Has Chosen Us’: Re-Membering Christian Realism, Rescuing Christendom, and the Contest of Responsibilities during the Cold War.” *Diplomatic History* 33.1: 67-94.
- Elbe, Ingo. 2008. *Marx im Westen: Die neue-Marx-Lektüre in der Bundesrepublik seit 1965*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1951. *Le Shamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot.
- . 1959. *Traité d'Histoire des Religions*. Paris: Payot.
- . 1961. “History of Religions and a New Humanism.” *History of Religions* 1: 1–8.
- . 1964. “The Quest for the ‘Origins’ of Religion.” *History of Religions* 4.1: 154-169.
- . 1977. *No Souvenirs: Journal, 1957-1969*. Translated by Fred H. Johnson, Jr. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1979. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. London: Sheed and Ward.
- . [1971] 2021. *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . [1972] 2004. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eliade, Mircea, and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds. 1959. *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Engelke, Matthew. 2011. “Material Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert Orsi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2013. *God's Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Evans, Curtis J. 2008. *The Burden of Black Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. 1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Federal Council of Churches Papers, RG 18. Presbyterian Historical Society. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. [1843] 1986. *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Manfred H. Vogel. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- . [1841]. 1989. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by George Eliot. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- . 2012. *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings*. Translated by Zawar Hanfi. London: Verso.
- . 1959-1963. *Ludwig Feuerbach: Sämtliche Werke*. 12 vols. Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, G. Holzboog.
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. 1998. *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings*, edited by Daniel Breazeale. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Filene, Peter G. 1967. *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fine, Robert. 2014. “Rereading Marx on the ‘Jewish Question’: Marx as a Critic of Antisemitism?” In *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology*, edited by Marcel Stoetzler. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Fischer, David. 2016. *Spider Web: The Birth of American Anticommunism*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. 2003. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fontenay, Élisabeth de. 1973. *Les Figures Juives de Marx: Marx dans l'idéologie allemande*. Paris: Galilée.
- Förster, Eckart. 2012. *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. 1919. *The Church's Message to the Nation*. New York: Association Press.
- Foster, O.D. 1921. “Religion in American Universities.” *Christian Education* 4.9: 3-69.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1953-1974. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth and Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Funkenstein, Amos. 1993. *Perceptions of Jewish History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Furey, Constance M., Sarah Hammerschlag, and Amy Hollywood. 2021. *Devotion: Three Inquiries in Religion, Literature, and Political Imagination*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gamble, Richard M. 2003. *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, The Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*. Wilmington, Del: ISI Books.

- Gaston, K. Healan. 2019. *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Geller, Jay. 1997. "Idols, Fetishes and Foreskins : The Other of Religion." *Religion* 27. 2: 117–22.
- . 2011. *The Other Jewish Question: Identifying the Jew and Making Sense of Modernity*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- . 2020. "Long Contact with *Significations*," in *With this Root About My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion*, edited by Jennifer Reid and David Carrasco. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- . 2016. "Fetish / Fetishism / Fetishization," in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*. Brill Online. https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/vocabulary-for-the-study-of-religion/fetish-fetishism-fetishization-COM_00000140.
- Geertz, Armin W. and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, eds. 1991. *Religion, Tradition, and Renewal*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Geiger, Roger. L. 2014. *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gerber, Lynn. 2011. *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Gerstle, Gary. 1989, *Working-class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2001. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Greenberg, Udi. 2017. "Protestants, Decolonization, and European Integration, 1885-1961." *The Journal of Modern History* 89.2: 314-354.
- Gunn, Jeremy T. 2009. *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hall, Stuart. 2016. *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, edited by Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2019. *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- . 2021. *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, edited by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. Durham: Duke University Press.

- . 2021. *Selected Writings on Marxism*, edited by Gregor McLennan. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hammerschlag, Sarah. 2021. "A Poor Substitute for Prayer: Sarah Kofman and the Fetish of Writing," In *Devotion: Three Inquiries in Religion, Literature, and Political Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Handy, Robert T. 1987. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1991. *Undermined Establishment: Church-State Relations in America, 1880-1920*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Harkness, Georgia. 1952. *The Modern Rival of the Christian Faith: An Analysis of Secularism*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.
- Hart, D.G. 1999. *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hartman, Andrew. 2008. *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American Soul*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Harvey, Graham and Jessica Hughes, eds. 2018. *Sensual Religion: Religion and the Five Senses*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox.
- Harvey, Susan. 2006. *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hawkes, Herbert E. 1926. "Religion in a Liberal Education." *Christian Education* 9.6: 211-221.
- Hazard, Sonia. 2013. "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 4: 58-78.
- Heale, M.J. 1990. *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1971-1979. *Werke*. 21 vols, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- . 1977. *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. Translated by H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf. Albany: SUNY Press.
- . 1977. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1996. *Early Theological Writings*. Translated by T.M. Knox and Richard Kroner. Philadelphia: university of Pennsylvania Press.

- . 2006. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heinrich, Michael. 2006. *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, 2. Auflage. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot.
- . [2018] 2019. *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*. Translated by Alexander Locascio. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Heo, Angie. 2018. *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Herzog, Jonathan P. 2011. *The Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hess, Jonathan M. 2002. *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hess, Moses. 1845. *Die Letzten Philosophen*. Darmstadt: C.W. Leske.
- . [1845] 1983. "The Recent Philosophers," in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*. Translated and edited by Lawrence S. Stepelevich. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hintz, Howard. W. 1955. *Religion and Public Higher Education*. Brooklyn NY: Brooklyn College.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hocking, William Ernest. 1932. *Re-Thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- . 1935. *Evangelism: An Address on Permanent Change in Church and Mission*. Chicago: A Movement for World Christianity.
- Holbrook, Clyde. 1963. *Religion, A Humanistic Field*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hollinger, David. 1996. *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century American Intellectual History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2013. *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2017. *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World But Changed America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. [1944] 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Horsman, Reginald. 1981. *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hughes, Aaron W, ed. 2013. *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: Twenty Five Years On*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hulsether, Lucia. 2018, "The Grammar of Racism: Religious Pluralism and the Birth of the Interdisciplines." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86.1: 1-41.
- . 2023. *Capitalist Humanitarianism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hulsether, Mark. 1999. *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Hume, Robert E. 1923. "A Course of Study in the History of Religions." *Christian Education* 6.7: 361-374.
- Hunter, Ian. 2006. "The History of Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 33: 78-112.
- Hutchings, Tim and Joanne McKenzie. 2017. "Introduction: The body of St. Cuthbert," in *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie. New York: Routledge.
- Hutchings, Tim and Joanne McKenzie, eds. 2017. *Materiality and the Study of Religion: The Stuff of the Sacred*. New York: Routledge.
- Hutchins, Robert Maynard. [1936] 1995. *The Higher Learning in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Hutchison, John A. 1941. *We Are Not Divided: A Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America*. New York: Round Table Press.
- Hutchison, William R. 1987. *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1992. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2003. *Religious Pluralism in America: the Contentious History of a Founding Ideal*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hutchison, William R., ed. 1989. *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Iacono, Alfonso Maurizio. [1985] 2016. *The History and Theory of Fetishism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Imhoff, Sarah. 2016. "The Creation Story, or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Schempp." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84.2: 466-497.

- . 2017. “Hoover’s Judeo-Christians: Jews, Religion, and Communism in the Cold War,” in *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11*, edited by Sylvester Johnson and Steven Weitzman. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Inboden, William. 2008. *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobs, Seth. 2001. “‘Our System Demands the Supreme Being’: The US Religious Revival and the ‘Dien Experiment.’” *Diplomatic History* 25.4: 589-624.
- . 2005. *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. 1998. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2000. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- James, William. [1902] 2002. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.
- Jameson, Frederic. 2008. “How Not to Historicize Theory.” *Critical Inquiry* 34.3: 563-582.
- Johnson, F. Ernet, ed. 1952. *American Education and Religion: The Problem of Religion in the Schools*. New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies.
- Johnson, George. 1932. “Consequences of Education Without Religion.” *Religious Education* 27.6: 515-517.
- Johnson, Sarah. 2022. “Farewell to *The German Ideology*. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 83.1: 143-170.
- Johnson, Paul Christopher, ed. 2014. *Spirited Things: The Work of Possession in Afro-Atlantic Religions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Johnson, Sylvester A. 2015. *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, Sylvester A. and Steven Weizman, eds. 2017. *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security Before and After 9/11*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kamuf, Peggy. 2018. *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. [1790] 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- . [1793] 2018. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings, Revised Edition*, edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Katz, Jacob. 1964. "The Term 'Jewish Emancipation': Its Origin and Historical Impact," in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, edited by Alexander Altmann. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Keane, Webb. Keane Webb. 2003. , "Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things." *Language & Communication* 23: 409-425.
- . 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Keene, Jennifer D. 2022. *The United States and the First World War, Second Edition*. New York: Routledge.
- Kelly, Robert L. 1925. "The State University and the Christian College. *Christian Education* 9.1: 11-13.
- Kendall, Laurel. 2021. *Mediums and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings, and Masks in Asian Places*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kennedy, David M. 1980. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kent, Charles Foster. 1922. *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 2: Filling the Gap in Modern Education*. New Haven.
- . 1923. "The New School of Religion." Address delivered in Detroit Michigan.
- . 1923. "The Curriculum of a State University School of Religion." *Christian Education* 6.7: 349-355.
- . 1924. *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 3: Religion at a Great State University; Based on the University of Illinois Survey*. New Haven: National Council of Schools of Religion.
- . 1925. *Bulletin of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Volume 4: The Undergraduate Courses in Religion at the Tax-supported Colleges and Universities of America*.
- Kim, Jinah. 2021. *Garland of Vision: color, Tantra, and a Material History of Indian Painting*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East*. London: Routledge.
- King, Richard, ed. 2017. *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic And Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Kirby, Dianne, ed. 2022. *Religion and the Cold War*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kirkpatrick, Frank G. 1999. "Critical Terms for Religious Studies by Mark C. Taylor." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38.2: 320-321.
- Kitagawa, Joseph M. 1980. "Humanistic and Theological History of Religions with Special Reference to the North American Scene." *Numen* 27.2: 198-221.
- . 1987. *The History of Religions: Understanding Human Experience*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.
- Kofman, Sarah. [1975] 1999. *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*. Translated by Will Straw. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kornbluh, Anna. 2014. *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Kouvelakis, Stathis. [2003] 2018. *Philosophy and Revolution from Kant to Marx*. London: Verso.
- Kraemer, Paul. 2006. "Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the U.S. Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War." *Diplomatic History* 30.2: 169-210.
- Laipson, Peter. 1995. "And the Walls Came Crumbling Down: the Michigan School of Religion, 1920-1930." *Michigan Historical Review* 21.1: 93-123.
- Lapidot, Elad. 2020. *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti-Anti-Anti-Semitism*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Lasch, Christopher. 1962. *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Laski, Harold. 1927. *Communism*. London: Thornton Butterworth.
- Latour, Bruno. [1993] 2010. *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2004. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30.2: 225-248.
- Lease, Gary. 2000. "Ideology," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Russell McCutcheon and Willi Braun. London: Continuum.
- Leonard, Miriam. 2012. *Socrates and the Jews: Hellenism and Hebraism from Moses Mendelssohn to Sigmund Freud*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leslie, Stuart W. 1994. *The Cold War and American Science: The Military-Industrial Complex at MIT and Stanford*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. 2005. *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, edited by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Levene, Nancy. 2018. , “Marx’s Eleventh Thesis and the Politics of the Study of Religion: Lessons from *The Sacred is Profane*.” *Journal of Religion* 98.2: 224-246.
- Lincoln, Bruce. 1986. *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Description*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1989. *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1994. *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1999. *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2012. *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2018. *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindstrom, Lamont. 1993. *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from Melanesia and Beyond*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Lofton, Kathryn, 2011. *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2012. “The Body (Under Review): On Manuel Vásquez’s *More than Belief*.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24: 482-496.
- . 2017. *Consuming Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Long, Charles H. 1962. “Myth, Culture, and History: An Inquiry into the Cultural History of West Africa.” Ph.D. dissertation. University of Chicago.
- . 2005. 1974. “Cargo Cults as Cultural Historical Phenomena.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42.3: 403–14.
- . 1986. *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. Aurora: Fortress Press.
- . 2018. *The Collected Writings of Charles H. Long: Ellipsis*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Lowen, Rebecca. 1997. *Creating the Cold War University: The Transformation of Stanford*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Löwy, Michael. Löwy, Michael. 1996. *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America*. London: Verso.
- . “Le Concept d’affinité elective chez Max Weber.” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 127: 93-103.
- Macfarland, Charles S., ed. 1917. *The Churches of Christ in Time of War: A Handbook for the Churches*. New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. 1977. “Fetishism Revisited: Kongo ‘Nkisi’ in Sociological Perspective.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 47. 2: 172–84.
- Mack, Michael. 2003. *German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and German Jewish Responses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Maidan, Michael. 1987. “Marx on the Jewish Question: A Meta-Critical Analysis.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 33.1: 27-41.
- Macksey, Richard and Eugenio Donato, eds. 1972. *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
- Marsden, George. [1980] 2006. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 1990. *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, Luther and Donald Wiebe, eds. 2016. *Conversations and Controversies in the Scientific Study of Religion*. Leiden: Brill.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. 1993. *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2000. “Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2: 242-267.
- . 2005. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2007. “Theory Without Method: Situating A Discourse Analysis On Religion,” in *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, edited by Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka. Leiden: Brill.
- Mathews, Shailer. 1918. *Patriotism and Religion*. New York: Macmillan.
- Matory, J. Lorand. 2018. *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- McCullough, Matthew. 2014. *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish-American War*. Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press.
- McCutcheon, Russell. 1997. *Manufacturing Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. “‘Just Follow the Money’: The Cold War, the Humanistic Study of Religion, and the Fallacy of Insufficient Criticism.” *Culture and Religion* 5.1: 41-69.
- . 2023. *Critics Not Caretakers: Redefining the Public Study of Religion. Second Edition* New York: Routledge, 2023.
- McDowell, Nancy. 1988. “A Note on Cargo Cults and the Cultural Constructions of Change.” *Pacific Studies* 11.2: 121-134.
- McKinnon, Andrew W. 2010. “Elective Affinities of the Protestant Ethic: Weber and the Chemistry of Capitalism.” *Sociological Theory* 28.1: 108-126.
- McLellan, David. 1971. *Marx Before Marxism*. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1997. *Marxism and Religion: A Description and Assessment of the Marxist Critique of Christianity*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Medine, Carolyn M. Jones. 2022. “Ellipsis: Deconstructive Practice in the Work of Charles H. Long.” *American Religion* 2. 2: 5–24.
- Meland, Bernard Eugene. 1937. “The Study of Religion in a Liberal Arts College. *Journal of Bible and Religion* 5.2: 62-69.
- Merrimon Cuninggim Papers, 1939-1997, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, university Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
- Meyer, Birgit, and Dick Houtmann, eds. 2012. *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Michaelsen, Robert. 1957. “The Iowa School of Religion (As seen from the inside).” *Religious Education* 52.2: 130-132.
- . 1965. *The Study of Religion in American Universities: Ten Case Studies with Special Reference to State Universities*. New Haven: The Society for Religion in Higher Education.
- . 1966. “The Study of Religion: A Quiet Revolution in American Universities. *The Journal of Higher Education* 37.4: 181-186.
- Miller, J. Hillis. 1952. “Religion in a State University,” in *American Education and Religion: The Problem of Religion in the Schools*, edited by F. Ernest Johnson. New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies.

- Mocko, Anne. T. 2010. "Tracing the Red Thread: Anti-Communist Themes in the Work of Mircea Eliade," in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Molyneux, John. 2008. "More than Opium: Marxism and Religion." *International Socialism* 199.
- Moreton, Bethany. 2009. *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Morgan, David. 1996. *Icons of American Protestantism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 2010. "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions," in *Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, edited by David Morgan. New York: Routledge.
- . *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Morgan, David, ed. 2010. *Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan. New York: Routledge.
- Morgan, Kenneth W., ed. 1953. *The Religion of the Hindus*. New York: The Ronald Press Company.
- . 1956. *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists*. New York: The Ronald Press Company.
- . 1958. *Islam—the Straight Path: Islam Interpreted by Muslims*. New York: The Ronald Press Company.
- Moriss, Rosalind C. and Daniel H. Leonard, eds. 2017. *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*. University of Chicago Press.
- Moseley, Fred, and Tony Smith, eds. 2014. *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination*. Leiden: Brill.
- Murakami, Tatsuo. 2021. "After Fetishism: The Study of Religion in the Age of the Commodity," in *With this Root About My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion*, edited by Jennifer Reid and David Carrasco. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Murray, J. Lovell. 1918. *The Call of a World Task in War Time, Part I: The Demands which are being Made in these War Years for a New Expression of International Christianity*. New York: Student Volunteer Movement.
- Nason, John W. 1946. "Religion in Higher Education: The Program of Faculty Consultation." *The Educational Record* 27.4: 422-432.
- National Council of Schools of Religion. 1922. *Bulletin of the National Council of Schools of Religion, Volume 1: The Origin, Organization, and Aims of the Council*. New Haven.

- National Council on Religion in Higher Education. 1924. *1923-1924 Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*. Ithaca: Barnes Hall.
- . 1926. *1925-1926 Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*. Ithaca: Barnes Hall.
- . 1927. *Bulletin of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Volume 6: Undergraduate Courses in Religion at Denominational and Independent Colleges and Universities of America*. Ithaca: The Cayuga Press.
- . 1928. *1928 Year Book of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*. Ithaca: Barnes Hall.
- . 1941. *Bulletin of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Volume 11: Two Decades: The Story of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education (Founded by Charles Foster Kent): 1922-1941* (New York: National Council on Religion in Higher Education).
- . 1942. *1942 Yearbook of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education*. New Haven: National Council.
- . 1955. *Fellows of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education: Directory, Fall 1955*. New Haven: National Council.
- National Security Council. 1950. "National Security Council Report, NSC 68, 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security.'" History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives.
- New York Times*. 1946. "Report to Federal Council on 'The Churches and World Order.'" ———. 1944. "Communist Dogmas Basically Revised." ———. 1944. "U.S. Aid for Soviet in Peace Studied." ———. 1946. "Federal Council of Churches Plan for Peace with Russia."
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, ed. 1964. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Religion*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Ng, Karen. 2020. *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Nirenberg, David. 2013. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. New York: Norton.
- Otto, Ton. 2009. "What Happened to Cargo Cults?: Material Religions in Melanesia and the West." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 53.1: 82-102.
- Outler, Albert C. 1949. "Colleges, Faculties, and Religion; An Appraisal of the Program of Faculty Consultations on Religion in Higher Education, 1945-48." *The Educational Record* 30.1: 45-60.

- Paden, William E. 1999. "Critical Terms for Religious Studies." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11.2: 193-197.
- Pals, Daniel L. 2015. *Nine Theories of Religion*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parker, Michael. 1998. *The Kingdom of Character: the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1886-1926*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America and American Society of Missiology.
- Peled, Yoav. 1992. "From Theology to Sociology: Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx on the Question of Jewish Emancipation." *History of Political Thought* 13.3: 463-485.
- Pels, Peter. 2008. "The Modern Fear of Matter: Reflections on the Protestantism of Victorian Science." *Material Religion* 4.3: 264-283.
- Pérez, Elizabeth. 2018. "Toward an Inventory of Influence: Biography and Belonging in Sustained Dialogue with Black Atlantic Religion." *Journal of Africana Religions* 6, no. 1 (January 2018): 104-13.
- Pietz, William. 1985. "The Problem of the Fetish, I." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9: 5-17.
- . 1987. "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 13: 23-45.
- . 1988. "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa: Bosman's Guinea and the Enlightenment Theory of Fetishism." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 16: 105-24.
- . 2022. *The Problem of the Fetish*, edited by Francesco Pellizzi, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Ben Kafka. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Piper, John F. 1985. *The American Churches in World War I*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Pitts, Frederick Harry. 2018. *Critiquing Capitalism Today: New Ways to Read Marx*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Plantz, Samuel. 1920. "The Department of Religion as a Scholarship Asset to a University." *Religious Education* 15.2: 99-102.
- Plate, S. Brent. 2015. "Material Religion: An Introduction," in *Key Terms in Material Religion*, edited by S. Brent Plate. London: Bloomsbury.
- Plate, S. Brent, ed. 2015. *Key Terms in Material Religion*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Polk, Andrew. 2013. "'Unnecessary and Artificial Divisions': Franklin Roosevelt's Quest for Religious and National Unity Leading up to the Second World War." *Church History* 82.3: 667-677.
- Pool, Robert. 1990. "Fetishism Deconstructed." *Etnofoor* 3. 1: 114-27.

- Postone, Moishe. 1993. *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- President's Commission on Higher Education. 1947. *Higher Education for American Democracy, a Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Preston, Andrew. 2012. *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy*. New York: Knopf.
- . "The Limits of Brotherhood: Race, Religion, and World Order in American Ecumenical Protestantism." *American Historical Review* 127.3: 1222-1251.
- Promey, Sally M., ed. 2014. *Sensational Religion: Sensory Culture in Material Practice*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Preus, Samuel J. 1996. *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ramsey, Paul, ed. 1965. *Religion*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Rancière, Jacque. [1965] 2005. "The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy: From the 1844 Manuscripts to Capital," in *Reading Capital: the Complete Edition*. Translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach. London: Verso.
- Rapp, Holly. 2015. "The Material and the Real: American Conceptions of Materialism in the Nineteenth Century." Ph.D. Diss. University of Michigan.
- Ratskoff, Ben. 2020. "Improbable Spectacles': White Supremacy, Christian Hegemony, and the Dark Side of the *Judenfrage*." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 39.1: 17-43.
- Readings, Bill. 1996. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Reid, Jennifer I. M., ed. 2004. *Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the Work of Charles H. Long*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Reid, Jennifer, and David Carrasco, eds. 2020. *With This Root about My Person: Charles H. Long and New Directions in the Study of Religion*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Reitter, Paul and Chad Wellmon. 2021. *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Reuben, Julie. 1996. *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rey, Terry. 2017. "Karl Marx on Religion, in "Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic And Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies, edited by Richard King. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Roberts, John H. and Turner, James. 2000. *The Sacred and the Secular University*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roberts, Tyler. 2005. "Rhetorics of Ideology and Criticism in the Study of Religion." *Religion* 85.3: 367-389.
- Roberts, William Clare. 2006. "The Origin of Political Economy: The Descent of Marx," in *Marx, Critical Theory, and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice*, edited by Warren S. Goldstein. Leiden: Brill.
- . 2017. *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roediger, David R. 2005. *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rose, Paul Lawrence. 1990. *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rossinow, Doug. 2005. "The Radicalization of the Social Gospel: Harry F. Ward and the Search for a New Social Order, 1898-1936." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 15.1: 63-106.
- Rotenstreich, Nathan. 1959. "For and Against Emancipation: The Bruno Bauer Controversy." *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 4.1: 3-36.
- Rotter, Andrew J. 2000. "Christians, Muslims, and Hindus: Religion and U.S.-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954." *Diplomatic History* 24.4: 593-613.
- Saito, Kohei. 2017. *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the unfinished Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017.
- Sarna, Jonathan. 2004. *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schillbrack, Kevin. 2019. "The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religions." *The Journal of Religion* 99.2: 219-227.
- Searles, Herbert Leon. 1926. *The National Council on Religion in Higher Education, Bulletin, Volume 5: State Constitutional and Legislative Provisions and Supreme Court Decisions Relating to Sectarian Religious Influence in Tax-Supported Universities, Colleges and Public Schools*.
- . 1927. *The Study of Religion in State Universities*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Studies in Character.
- Schillbrack, Kevin. 2019. "The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religion." *Journal of Religion* 99.2: 219-227.

- Schmidt, Alfred. 1968. "On the Concept of Knowledge in the Criticism of Political Economy," in *Karl Marx, 1818-1968*. Bad Godesberg: Inter Nationes.
- Schmidt, Stephen A. 1983. *A History of the Religious Education Association*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press.
- Schrecker, Ellen. 2021. *The Lost Promise: American Universities in the 1960s*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shedd, Clarence Prouty. 1938. *The Church Follows its Students*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1948. *Religion in the State University*. New Haven: Hazen Foundation.
- Showalter, Nathan D. 1998. *The End of a Crusade: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and the Great War*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Silberner, Edmund. [1949] 1997. "Was Marx an Anti-Semite?" in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, edited by Ezra Mendelssohn. New York: New York University Press: 361-401.
- . 1962. *Sozialisten zur Judenfrage; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sozialismus vom Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1914*. Berlin: Colloquium Verlag.
- Sloan, Douglas. 1994. *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestants and American Higher Education*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. 1982. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1998. "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2004. *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Seymour A. 1957. *Religious Cooperation in State Universities: An Historical Sketch*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan.
- Smith, Tony. 2014. "Hegel, Marx and the Comprehension of Capitalism," in *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination*, edited by Fred Moseley and Tony Smith. Leiden: Brill.
- Snyder, Thomas D., ed. 1993. *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Soares, Theodore Gerald. 1928. "History of the Religious Education Association. *Religious Education* 23.7: 61-63.
- Sohn-Rethel, Alfred. [1970] 2021. *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*. Translated by Martin Sohn-Rethel. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

- Sorkin, David. 1987. *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2019. *Jewish Emancipation: A History Across Five Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Spadola, Emilio. 2013. *The Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education, the. 1935. *Report of the Special Committee of the Faculty on Religious Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Speer, Robert E. 1919. *The War and the Religious Outlook*. New York: Association Press.
- Spyer, Patricia, ed. 1998. *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2000. *The Memory of Trade: Modernity's Entanglements on an Eastern Indonesian Island*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Stedman-Jones, Gareth. 2016. *Karl Marx: Greatness & Illusion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stirner, Max. [1844] 1901. *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. Leipzig: Otto Wigand.
- . [1844] 1995. *The Ego and its Own*. Edited by David Leopold. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stuelke, Patricia. 2021. *The Ruse of Repair: Us Neoliberal Empire and the Turn from Critique*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Thompson, Michael G. 2015. *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States Between the Great War and the Cold War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Stokes, Anson Phelps. "God's Place in the School." *New York Times*. January 18, 1953.
- Taussig, Michael T. [1980] 2010. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Tead, Ordway. 1948. *Toward First Principles in Higher Education: A Dynamic Quest for Unity*. New Haven: Hazen Foundation.
- Thelin, Joel. 2004. *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Thomas, George F. 1949. "The History of Religion in the Universities." *Journal of Bible and Religion* 17.2: 102-107.
- Toews, John Edward. 1980. *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805-1841*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Toscano, Alberto. 2010. "Beyond Abstraction: Marx and the Critique of the Critique of Religion." *Historical Materialism* 18: 3-29.

- Traverso, Enzo. 2019. *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate*. Chicago: Haymarket.
- Truman, Harry S. "Address in Columbus at a Conference of the Federal Council of Churches." March 6, 1946.
- University of Chicago. Office of the President. Hutchins Administration. Records. Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.
- van Leeuwen, Arend Theodoor. 2002. *Critique of Heaven*. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke.
- Vizcaíno, Rafael. 2021. "Liberation Philosophy, Anti-Fetishism, and Decolonization." *Journal of World Philosophies* 6. 2: 61–75.
- Vlastos, Gregory. 1939. *Christian Faith and Democracy*. New York: Association Press.
- Vos, Johannes G. 1935. "Religion or Christianity." *Christianity Today* 6.5: 100-102.
- Warren, Heather A. 1997. "Character, Public Schooling, and Religious Education, 1920-1934." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 7.1: 61-80.
- Wasserstrom, Stephen M. 1999. *Religion After Religion: Gershom Sholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wedemeyer, Christian, and Wendy Doniger, eds. 2010. *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weigle, Luther. 1926. "The Secularization of Public Education." *Religious Education* 21.1: 90-95.
- Weisenfeld, Judith. 2017. *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration*. New York: New York University Press.
- Wenger, Tisa. 2009. *We Have a Religion: the 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom*. Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press.
- Wenger, Tisa and Sylvester A. Johnson, eds. 2022. *Religion and US Empire: Critical New Histories*. New York: New York University Press.
- Wickey, Gould and Ruth A. Eckhart. 1936. "A National Survey of Courses in Bible and Religion." *Christian Education* 20.1: 9-45.
- Wiebe, Donald. 1988. "Postulations for Safeguarding Preconceptions: The Case of the Scientific Religionist." *Religion* 18.1: 11–19.
- . 2001. "Religious Studies in North America During the Cold War," in *The Academic Study of Religion During the Cold War: East and West*, edited by Iva Doležalová, Luther H. Martin, & Dalibor Papoušek. New York: Peter Lang.

- Wilder, Amos, ed. 1951. *Liberal Learning and Religion*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Williams, F.E. [1923] 1978. *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf District*. New York: AMS Press.
- Worsley, Peter. 1968. *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo Cults" in Melanesia*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Zietsma, David. 2007. "'Sin Has No History': Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1927-1941." *Diplomatic History* 31.3: 531-565.
- Zimmer, Kenyon and Cristina Salinas, eds. 2018. *Deportation in the Americas: Histories of Exclusion and Resistance*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.
- Zito, Angela. 1997. *Of Body and Brush :Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Zorach v. Clauson*. 1952. 343 U.S. 306.
- Zubovich, Gene. 2022. *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.