Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. Religion is the opium of the people.\(^1\)

Perhaps the most formidable obstacle in the task of retrieving a sense of the sacred in Marx consists in his repeated, and often polemical, statements against religion. Indeed, such an obstacle may in the end be one of our own making, as we are trapped within the labyrinth of our own historical understanding. Yet, assuming, for the moment, that religion and the sacred are the same phenomena, if we take his pronouncement (in the opening quotation) that religion is the opium of the people in isolation, we may be led to believe that Marx felt that at best religion—and thus the “sacred”—is a narcotic, which, while it may be utilized to alleviate pain, remains an illusory amelioration for a situation of despair. Religion as an opiate not only implies sedation from the pain of a life of exploitation, but also suggests a systematic and strategic attempt to deaden or absorb any critical impulse to liberation. In this sense, Marx’s characterization of religion as an opiate is a forerunner to many of the most radical criticisms of religion in twentieth-century theology and philosophy—Gutierrez, Miranda, James Luchte (BSc, University of Dayton; PhD, University of Essex) is a lecturer of philosophy and master’s program coordinator of European Philosophy, University of Wales, Lampeter. He is the author of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason: A Reader’s Guide, Heidegger’s Early Philosophy: The Phenomenology of Ecstatic Temporality, Pythagoras and the Doctrine on Transmigration: Wandering Souls, is the editor of Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise, and is the translator of The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche (forthcoming). His articles have appeared in Philosophy Today, Heythrop Journal, Pli, Hyperion, and The Agonist. Special interests include: nineteenth- through twenty-first-century European and continental philosophy, and ancient and political philosophy.

Bultmann, Heidegger, and Bataille. Each of these thinkers, in his own way, articulated a sense of the sacred in the wake of Marx and his deconstruction of religion as an ideology.

The kinship which is shared by each of these thinkers is a disdain for mere religion in favour of the “sacred.” Religion simultaneously constructs a “picture” (Bild) for contemplation (Anschauung) and an organization that cultivates our captivity to that “picture.” The sacred, on the contrary, indicates obligation and commitment and an engaged, affirmative eruption of liberation amidst finite existence. Religion constructs its eternal church as an everlasting perpetuation of the “picture” of an idol, while the sacred exults in this moment of lived existence, in the haeccitas of Duns Scotus. If religion is a “rational” and “systematic” orchestration of feeling and phenomena, the sacred is an attempt to seek access to a phenomenon beyond the array of objectification toward traces of the numen. Indeed, for Otto, one need merely begin amidst this singular event.

In light of this preliminary distinction between religion and the sacred, it will be the task of this present study of “Marx and the Sacred” to excavate and disclose in the writings and historical activism of Marx an affirmative sense of the sacred which is distinct from his inherently negative conception of religion. Amid Marx’s empathy with the “sigh of the oppressed creature,” we can glimpse a sense of the sacred dissociated from a religious leviathan that merely serves to perpetuate suffering—a sacred that exists as a radical commitment to liberation. In this way, I will contend that Marx’s criticism of religion as an ideology of oppression and sedation in no way forecloses on a possible relationship with twentieth (and twenty-first)-century attempts to articulate a sense of the sacred. There emerges in these latter attempts the possibility of an openness which lays out a space for a personal encounter with a sense of a sacred not mediated by ideology.

In this way, that which will be disclosed as the “unity” and coherence in these encounters of Marx with different strands of twentieth-century theology and philosophy is the inner kernel of “obligation” and “commitment” of affirmation, against nihilism and oppression—this “inner kernel” is an openness to the Sacred. That which is sought is an indication in Marx’s writings and advocacy of a personal expression and articulation of the Sacred which transcends both scientific prognostication and political advocacy. What we seek is the deeper ground of the Sacred in Marx.

Otto suggests in the first part of his seminal work The Idea of the Holy that there is a non-rational, non-moralistic, and obscure feeling, a fascination and dread, in the wake of the numinous, the Mysterium Tremendum, the Augustus, which intimates to the
mortal self a radically overwhelming power of the holy, of the Sacred. Such an apprehension stands outside of the rationalist, moralistic program of mere religion as ideology, of the merely Apollonian. It is that which stimulates, arouses the mortal being to affirm the sacred—in the well of feeling, amidst this Dionysian eruption of the event. Such an incitement enacts and intimates a sense of the sacred amid the world—expressed in poetry, the work of art, and praxis. It is a call to a radical phenomenology of the sacred—not of rationalist morality or dogma—of mere religion—but of a sacred affirmation, one which is situated, for Marx, amidst the historical topos of Capital.

Ideology is a picture which, problematically, indicates the truth of the world. A picture is untimely—de-temporalized—and thus, the notions, pictures of the “natural”—of species, population, nation, race, and humanity are merely idealizations (and erasures) of the concrete situations of lived existence... this place of strife, conflict, and love. An “ideal unity” and ultimate meaning, picture, of “life” is an ideology which operates as an erasure of a temporality of liberation amid this fractured existence of an alleged “humanity”—another ideology. For Marx, there exists a temporal and existential dialectic of action amidst a discordant and coercive matrix of terrestrial power. This dialectic indicates the actuality of freedom, of a free existence. Yet, Marx’s commitment to such an emerging actuality of freedom comes into conflict with religion as a disciplinary matrix of the individual soul. However, if we can agree that mere religion plays a negative or sedative role in the thought of Marx, this does not preclude the possibility of an existential or ethical openness to an affirmation of the sacred. Indeed, as I will seek to show, the very criticism of religion by Marx, in the context of his writings and actions, indicates an affirmation of the sacred. That which is essential is an openness which, following Otto, Bonhoeffer, Eliade, Altizer, and others, enacts a personal commitment that transcends, overwhelms, the self—existentially prior to the posited “stems” of “theory” and “practice”—this moment of an ecstatic “event” beyond, but as, existence.²

². Many may contend that Marx is an irreducibly secular thinker. And, while the all-too-usual—whether Marxist, neo-Marxist, marxian, or anti-Marxist—approach to his work may bear that out, there are clear exceptions to the apparent secular tone of much of his writing. For instance, we have the quote at the head of this essay, “Religious suffering is at the same time a protest against real suffering,” itself a piece of poiesis from Marx’s unfinished analysis of Hegel’s doctrine of the state. There are many indications in the writings of Marx, many non-scientific, poetic excursions, calls for revolution, which, like Herodotos’ Histories, do not sit well with the analysts. At the same time, is there any necessity to impose upon our exploration these categorical separations which deflect that which is most worthy of thought and action?
The texts that bring me directly to the sacred in Marx are his early poetry (and the traces of his poiesis which emerge throughout his life and later works). I will attempt to enact a retrieval of the sacred in his early poetry and writings which explicitly affirm a personal, existential obligation, and commitment to revolution. We can find a beginning of his lifelong commitment in his early poetic writings—before philosophy.

I refuse to simply dismiss these works as merely immature eruptions of “enthusiasm” (that would be to rubber-stamp the notion of linear temporal development of a thinker—into periods—which I think is suspect). Marx may have supplemented his early writing of poetry with the concrete texts of the epigramist and social theorist, but the traces of the poetic opening which signal his affirmation, his obligation, intersect his entire so-called mature work, from the literary and rhetorically dramatic works such as The Communist Manifesto, the Eighteenth Brumaire, and The Holy Family to the traces of his early poetic awareness in his many key references to Shakespeare in Capital and his earlier Contribution and Grundrisse. His opening, and beginning, in poiesis stands in contrast, but is ultimately complementary, to his notion of praxis. His poetry marks the breach in the usual depiction of his work as merely scientific, or as, Miranda writes, “Western.” Marx’s poetry guides and envelops his “scientific” prose. As Heraclitus writes, “An unapparent connexion is stronger than an apparent one.” Marx’s “analysis” is not that of a disinterested observer, abiding safe on the island of knowledge. He writes amidst the act, in the trajectory of obligation, commitment, and praxis. His writings, in this way, could be described as a poetics of existence.

In this light, I am trying to excavate the sacred impulse expressed in Marx’s poetry, which continues to underscore and find expression in his works and life. Indeed, beyond the texts and the allusion to the [un]said, there is the unmistakable affirmation in the life of Marx—especially in his political advocacy and in his difficult fatherhood. I do not believe we should see Marx as a mere political

3. “A hidden harmony is stronger (or ‘better’) than the visible,” from Kathleen Freeman, Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers (Cambridge: Harvard, 1966), Fr. 54.
4. This approach to the poetry of Marx bears a family resemblance to the methodology of Heidegger, who has thought through various unsaid possibilities in other thinkers and in the poets. Yet, for Marx, such a saying of the Sacred was said—and continued to be said, even if his poiesis of the sacred was eventually wrapped up in the most analytical prose. Although his poetry was merely the articulation of the logos, it indicated or pointed to an opening to the sacred. Such a use of language preceded or exceeded a logical or conceptual-philosophical discourse which seeks only to objectify an “event” into an entity.
reductionist, junky—or as a one-dimensional man\footnote{This is a reference to Herbert Marcuse’s work of the same title.}—he may have been an “atheist”\footnote{Of course, this would be to systematically ignore the literature which seeks to situate Marx in the realm of the Old Testament prophets as is indicated by Miranda and the many others who have sought to appropriate the analyses of Marx within the sacred tradition. In this way, one can understand Liberation Theology beyond the tentative appropriations of Gutierrez toward the work of Miranda and others, including the popes who have interpreted Marx in light of the genealogy of the prophets and Jesus.} with regard to the Judeo-Christian or Islamic traditions, but that does not mean he must stand outside the sacred.\footnote{Indeed, beyond the various traces in the extant text of Marx, and even with the arguably relevant early poetry, it is in the lifeworld and \textit{praxis} of Marx where we can locate the sacred. Bandera, for instance, has used Gerard in order to contend that the entire gesture of Marx’s thought stands on Sacred ground in the limited and negative sense of sacrifice. Such a negative sense of the sacred emerges in the gesture of a sacrificial event of revolution. Without nullifying the significance of such a gesture of negativity, of active nihilism, I am trying however to go beyond a merely sacrificial sense of the sacred toward that of \textit{the gift} as indicated in Marcel Mauss’ work of the same title. I seek an affirmative sense of the sacred in the work of Marx, not merely in his early poetry, but in a life of affirmation and engagement. I consider my work to be an overture for a dialogue which I feel needs to occur with respect to a non-reductive “materialist” re-thinking of the sacred. It is clear from early on that Marx contends that a criticism of religion is a pre-requisite for all social analysis. However, it must be asked: what is his \textit{motivation} for such criticism and social engagement in the first place? Marx explicitly enacts a \textit{commitment} to revolutionary social transformation. Could such a commitment abide upon a merely scientific or political level? Can we not investigate the \textit{existential} ramifications of the writings of Marx with respect to the question of the sacred?} 

In the following, I will begin with the question of the meaning of Marx in the controversy surrounding the “continuity” or “discontinuity” of the works of Marx. I will first lay out an interpretation of the extant statements made by Marx concerning religion as such in \textit{Marx’s Criticism of Religion}, providing a critique of ideology as \textit{Weltanschauung} which seeks to forbid a strategy of interpretation which is oriented to \textit{praxis}. I will follow this with the development of a distinction between religion and the Sacred in \textit{From Religion to the Sacred}. Without downplaying the necessity of Marx’s commitment to a revolutionary social transformation of the world, I will explore the possibility of an \textit{affirmative sense of the sacred in Marx}, beyond the sacrificial logic of \textit{mere} political and social violence. The \textit{event} of dialectical \textit{praxis}, of revolution, as an intimacy of thought and action, forecloses on a merely \textit{voluntarist} (or, on the contrary, “scientific”) interpretation of Marx. In the spirit of Reiner Schürmann,\footnote{Reiner Schürmann. \textit{Heidegger: Being and Acting, From Principles to Anarchy} (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986).} we can read Marx backward in a desire to come to grips with the root
of his affirmation. Yet, differing from the reading of the works of Heidegger, we must read Marx forwards, and then backwards, in a circle, as it were, so as to attempt to cast into relief not only Marx’s own consistent existential and social ethos, but also his affirmation of revolution as an event amidst this finite moment.

Marx’s Criticism of Religion

Marx sets forth his first philosophical criticism of religion in his appropriation of the Feuerbachian humanist criticism and inversion of not only Hegel, but also Christianity. Returning to the poetry of Theognis, such a sensuous inversion of religion forces us to become, as Bataille has written, disintoxicated—no longer to stand upon our heads—but, to see religion as that which it is, as an abstraction of “real man” into “ideal man.” Such an idealization constitutes alienation in the loss of agency vis-à-vis this all-too-human artifice which occurs, for Feuerbach, in the forgetfulness of the concrete origin of the work of art—in human sensuousness. For Feuerbach, it was simply enough to realize such a loss and alienation to regain the essence of humanity once and for all—for Marx, Feuerbach remains an idealist, a contemplative.

The simplicity and genius of Feuerbach’s insight that God is the ideal representation of the aspiration of the human species was not enough for Marx. While he would not ultimately deny the possibility of flights of desire, of thought, and being on the “outside,” as in a moment of revolutionary aporia, Marx also demanded a materialist deconstruction of the real interests of religion, in word, thought, and deed. Mere insight, mere thought, could never undo this material substratum, that configuration of terrestrial power, which originally sets the hegemonic parameters, horizons for thought—which deny this ethos of existence. There must be, as the root of any theoretical activity, on the contrary, a radical dialectical transfiguration of the real conditions of existence for there to be a transmutation and alternative disclosure in the ideal reflection or thought of being.

Marx contends that a criticism of religion is the pre-requisite for any concrete analysis of the actual social relationships of human existence. Indeed, a criticism of religion is not merely an exercise of thought. It requires resistance to and refusal of its rituals of outward effect. It requires existential praxis. Religion, as distinct from the sacred, becomes ideology, as it is, for Marx, an alienated product of an alienated existence. As an alienated activity, amidst a matrix of systematic alienation, its own self-interpretation is

divorced from any immediate awareness of the conditions of its emergence and maintenance—one that, with Nietzsche and Bataille, hides its own dark roots. It therefore cannot be anything but a mask that shrouds the concrete truth of human existence. In this section, I will set forth Marx’s criticisms of religion as mere ideology. While I will argue below that Marx’s criticism of religion is already expressed in his poetry, his initial philosophical criticism of religion is greatly influenced by Feuerbach, and the humanist criticism of absolutist idealism. Marx’s step beyond, toward a materialist criticism of religion, is a specification and concretization of the insight of Feuerbach. Yet, despite the significant traces of Feuerbach in the later Marx, as in the notion of fetishism of commodities articulated in Capital, Marx’s deconstruction of religion abides the implicit possibility of a retrieval of a non-alienated sense of the sacred as a concrete human activity and reflexivity via praxis.

While Marx departs from Feuerbach, it is crucial to the following inquiry that there be a deep continuity in the writings of Marx. It is this continuity which must put to rest a greatly misunderstood "epistemological break." I will attempt to disclose the contours of this continuity and argue that it is only from this perspective that we can glimpse, most clearly, the distinction in Marx between religion and the sacred.

Let us begin with one of Marx’s most direct statements on mere religion,

Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic point d’honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal source of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence because the human essence has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma.10

As long as the “fantastic realization” is embedded in the grand narratives of idealistic religious instruction, however, there exists no avenue to explore the intimate trajectories of the way or manner of temporal irruption of the sacred. In mere thought, we cannot smell the spiritual aroma of the religious cult. In this way, religion, as a concrete indication of existence, is a symptom of an actuality in which humanity is alienated from its own self-understanding. A desire for a truth of the sacred must overcome mere thought and the practical, utilitarian stratagems of religion. It must be awakened to its own free existence. As I will argue

below, such a situation of alienation indicates a severance of humanity from an authentic sense of the sacred. Religion as ideology prevents an awakening to an intimate and authentic sense of the sacred, just as is the case with those other ideological forms such as mere politics, mere art, and mere philosophy. Indeed, if it is possible, as Marx suggests in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, to achieve via a revolution a non-alienated sense of social being and social praxis, it would seem possible to be able to achieve a non-alienated sense of the sacred. This would seem to indicate a sense of the sacred which is not merely a phantasmagorical product of mere thought and ideology, but an authentic singular and social praxis which is liberated from the snares of a condition of alienation.

Beginning with the Feuerbachian inversion and transformation of the Hegelian dialectic, Marx insists in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, and in the *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* that the authentic interests of a “universal humanism” remained enshrouded within an a-historical regime of consciousness in the matrix of religious ideology. In this interpretation, the traditional grand referent “God” and the theological infrastructure articulated on the basis of such a conjecture persists as a lost work of art—ultimately of human origin, but forgotten in its genealogy. Marx writes that religion is the “self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again.” That which was created by human beings has attained an abstract agency over humans, in that the origin of the work of art has been erased. Amidst the narrative of “consciousness,” our own creations have been given agency over and against us. An alienated social existence gives rise to an alienated consciousness. We can no longer see or hear these contours of our existence as we only apprehend that which is indicated in a free-floating matrix of an imposed interpretation. As Miranda suggests, we do not question the legitimacy of the ownership of capital or of the apparent justice of the wage system, for as Wittgenstein writes in his *Philosophical Investigations*, “A picture held us captive, and we could not free ourselves from it as it is inexorably repeated in our language.” For Miranda, the picture must be destroyed amidst the birth of the kingdom of god amidst the invasion of Yahweh. In different language, the “death of God” meant, for Altizer, the fulfillment of love in the moment of existence. We are here together now, and we can do whatever we must amid this temporal opening. Amidst existence, possibility expresses the meaning of this phenomenon, of my own self.
Yet, the language of ideology is a “phenomenalism” all its own. It points out, indicates, that which will specify the “facts” which will serve to reproduce its own existence, its theory or morality. We are talked to death. We are given a world through these words. But, these words serve merely to cover over that which exists—at least from the concrete perspective of a contestation of “which” facts. We are told everything, but shown nothing. And, as with Miranda and others who challenge the entire edifice of religion and cult, Marx hit upon a struggle for truth in the wake of a systematic falsification of existence by “religion,” by a “cult of sacrifice.” This raises the question of the relation of the sacred and revolution.

In Marx’s works written under the influence of Feuerbach, one senses a transition away from the merely religious—albeit negative (“the against”)—sensibility one finds, for instance, in Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*. The famous Eleventh Thesis, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point is to change it,” which seems to exhort action over interpretation, serves as a transition from *mere thought* to a *praxis* amidst this everyday and existence. Yet, it does not operate amidst any new epistemic event—the Eleventh Thesis is akin to all of Marx’s early works. Already in his poem, *The Epigramist*, Marx expresses a preference for concrete action against the religiosity and ideologiosity of moral demagogues, even such as the contemplative poetry of Schiller. Indeed, concrete action or the *praxis* of human existence takes center stage in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, or *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844, texts written, as with the *Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1845), under the shadow of the “fiery brook.”

The posture of the Eleventh Thesis does not mean that Marx has merely abandoned, or will ever abandon, however, interpretation as radical criticism or even the methodology of inversion which he orchestrated in his earlier writings. Despite the many academic

11. Regardless of the question of whether or not Marx himself coined this famous phrase, it is quite clear from a reading of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Theses on Feuerbach* and especially *The Holy Family*, that Feuerbach acts as an essential catalyst in the transformation of Marx’s philosophical perspective away from the Absolute idealism of Hegel and toward the notion of a non-alienated humanity. For a clear and groundbreaking investigation of the role Feuerbach played in the philosophical development of Marx, please see Schlomo Aviniri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1970). It is such a non-alienated humanity which is the focus of the current study, one which seeks to distinguish the “sacred” from “religion” and it is in this context—as against the position of Zvi Rosen and others that there are nor Feuerbachian aspects to Marx’s conception of religion—that the role of Feuerbach is that of a “fiery brook,” one that is clearly evident.
and political discontinuity theorists who seek to leave Marx dissected upon the cutting table—in an epistemological break—Marx continued his life of writing and political advocacy continually setting forth engaged interpretations, analyses, and pictures and poems of the “situations” and “laws of motion” of the “world.” For Marx, interpretation undergoes a transformation of meaning—amidst praxis.

A critical hermeneutic and strategy of inversion continues to surface in Marx’s writings, even in those in which he collaborates with Engels, such as *The Holy Family*, a radical and often comic criticism of the idealist philosophies of the so-called young Hegelians and in the *German Ideology*, a text not published in his own lifetime. In both of these texts, there is a displacement of a Feuerbachian humanist fundamentalism via a materialist analysis of history. That which is consistent in these critical works is a confrontation with an idealist and a-historical “interpretation” of human existence, a *camera obscura* which remains parasitic on an abstraction of human essence which projects an eternal exemplar deemed to possess exclusive access to a disclosure of “Nature.” From one side of the coin, such an image or world-picture (*Weltanschauung*) fails to acknowledge the radical historical character of human existence; from the other, such a picture merely serves to reinforce a conception and ethos of human existence which is portrayed as a natural, and therefore, unchangeable static situation. Such a picture simply obscures existence in its eruption amidst struggle.

This is the essence of Marx’s criticism of religion—and “objective” science and “systematic,” “rational” theology—it merely serves to pre-empt, ideologically, the ethical intentionality, of an ethical significance of our lifeworld, of the possibility of a radical disclosure and transformation of the situation and contours of human existence. Marx’s disclosure is therefore more complex than a mere refusal of an interpretation of human existence, which projects itself as an eternal exemplar. He never throws down the ladder. His motivations are also existential in the sense that he deconstructs a metaphysics of interpretation which projects a typology of interpretation which not only paints a static image of that which is, what existence is, but also, in accord with this depiction, serves to consolidate a dominant ideology which considers change impossible.

*Mere* interpretation—the “scientific method”—as it exists, in the context of Marx’s criticism, beyond the maelstroms of existential temporality and historicity, gives the interpreter—the safe, eternal observer—a sense that he can create the world in his own image. The interpreter, *in this sense*, sets back away from historical
events and merely describes that which is, in a posture of objectivity, as a *transcendental* subject of modernity, as a contemplator of ideology, a Christian ego in a Secular world. Marx writes that religion is the “illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself.” Such a gesture conjures the spirit of Giordano Bruno, against the merely Copernican metaphysics of Kant, who opens up the possibility of an intimate self-interpretation of human existence which resists the “secure” strata-gems of ideological falsification. Bruno wrote that the center was everywhere, that each tenuous existence opens toward the Sacred. Such a notion of radical immanence subverts the solid and safe architectonic of a subjectivity which could only rest upon a structure of transcendence which was immune to a radical sense of the sublime. The structure of transcendental subjectivity, as it is immune from the overwhelming sublimity of the sacred event, of the roots of the sublime, temporality, or as Otto suggests, of the *numinous*, posits a safe place where the “subject” is protected from the radical *makeshift* sense of existence. The sublime, in the context of Kant’s *Third Critique*, becomes nothing but a *spectacle* viewed from the safe distance of a protected exteriority, a transcendental subject which is a safe, little island . . . very little, almost nothing.

For Marx, such a comfortable station was not an option. With his indication of *praxis*, and with the serious visceral repercussions of his political advocacy (not to mention the tenuous situation of his life of poverty in London), there was no longer the possibility of an eighteenth-or even nineteenth-century scientific (Enlightenment or Darwinist) objectivity to his inquiries, but an engaged *praxis* through which he learned as he acted amidst his world. Once again, this is not, however, to suggest that Marx merely refused interpretation as such. It would be to set forth the possibility of a radically different typology of interpretation—one influenced at its core by the cry of the oppressed, even the cry of oneself as he walked for thirty-five years to the Round Reading Room at the British Library, as he *aged* in Levinas’ sense. For instance, one could contend that Marx’s *Capital* is a work of interpretation, a hermeneutic *poiesis* of existence. And, as one reads this work, one fathoms that it is neither a merely mythological interpretation of the “beginning,” as with the earlier political economists with the “natural state” (the myth of the hunter and the fisherman), nor is it a work exhorting the pretense of a scientific methodology of an objective, pan-optic, or god’s eye observer. It is an *engaged* work, one of revolutionary advocacy, but also one infused with myriad factual data and documentation of the actual situation of workers (cf. Chapter 10, *On the Working Day*) and of owners of capitals.
amidst a novel matrix of historical existence—that which Marx
dubbed as the capitalist mode of production. However, Marx’s
work is not therefore a work of positivism of empirical descriptive
generalization as with the inductive works of the working class
writer Dietzgen, who Marx called “our philosopher.” There resides
a strong interpretative and hermeneutic sophistication in
Capital—and there is the legacy of Feuerbach in Capital in its his-
torical and political economic articulation.12

That which truly discloses Marx’s criticisms of religion is a consis-
tent criticism of idealistic abstraction from the perspective of lived
existence. This perspective is underscored by Marx’s choice of
words to describe this novel historical constellation—fetishism. It
is in this light that we can fathom Marx’s Eleventh Thesis in a new
light. It is not interpretation as historical hermeneutics oriented
to praxis (or poiesis in the sacred sense) that Marx is criticizing,
but the idealized projections which attempt to stand beyond the
historicity of human existence—the always bad poetry which
merely serves power. While Marx sets forth his (and Engels) grand
narrative of historical materialism in The German Ideology (con-
demned to the criticism of rats and mice), he, the old mole,
is involved, from the imminent perspective of praxis, in an intimate
hermeneutic of human existence, articulated amidst the horizons
of a specific opening of historicity. The commodity is the latest
manifestation and modus operandi of Adam and Eve, of the inexor-
able narrative and theatre of human impotence. The commodity is

12. One need only consider, as an archetypal example, Section 4 of Chapter 1 of
Capital on commodity fetishism. Immediately, in this “scientific” work, as
Althusser and Gutierrez describe it—one that has left the youthful, immature
Hegelianism behind, one finds a sophisticated and darkly humorous analysis
of an all-too-human situation in which commodities become the real actors in
human existence. This self-propelling wheel of commodities not only afflicts
the working classes—who, for Marx, in a significant way, serve merely a strategic
position for the liberation of all human beings—but also the owners of capital.
Commodity fetishism orchestrates a camera obscura of oppression. Such a char-
acterization of the commodity as fetish echoes his earlier Feuerbachian alli-
ances. We have created the commodities, but now they have agency over us—
they are our fetishes. Of course, it is the direct producers who have created
these commodities, but the capitalists and agents of dissemination and distri-
bution (commodity realization) read and create the desires in the direct con-
sumer—We are all alienated, but that does not evaporate personal
responsibility—differing ways and with differing concrete involvements. Yet,
for “we,” it is the commodities, who go up and down on the magic wheel of
fortune of the stock exchange. It is they, as well as the abstractions of nation
states, who are deemed to have the agency and authentic power of human exis-
tence. We are all left—workers and capitalists alike—sitting here witnessing the
flashing lights, sounds, smells, tastes of an alien orchestration, on our skin—if
that is, we continue adhere to Feuerbach’s humanistic optimism.
our god—our fetish. Marx no longer seems to need to speak of religion *per se* as all this idle chatter—pseudo-religion—is being catastrophically eclipsed amidst the pseudo-renaissance of the nineteenth century. But, it is a renaissance which is also indicative of an eclipse of an authentic notion of the Sacred. Religion and the sacred become identified into a matrix of the Same. Not only that, but the new god, the commodity, as a fetish, exudes the resonance of that which is utterly profane—in­timating the other connotation of the term fetish—in the sublime spirit of the Marquis de Sade who was so admired by Georges Bataille. Religion cowers in its concentration camp. It is the concentration camp. Sacred affirmation erupts however amidst this “life.”

Marx is playing here to Protestant ideology as the novel spirit of capitalism and to Christianity as the “special religion of capital.” Not only does he suggest the possibility that capitalism constitutes a retrogression to the so-called “savage” religions, which would so offend the supremacist delusions of the newly chosen Christian elite, but that our very situation of affliction is a perverse desire—a fetish. We are addicted to our affliction, to our god, and to our masochistic prostration to a mere “cultus,” as Miranda suggests. Such prostration to the “Grand Inquisitor,” of *cultus*, is a renunciation, a displacement, of an affirmation and cultivation of the sacred. The madman Nietzsche shouts out, as the new Cassandra, that *God is Dead* in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and his *Gay Science*. No one listens to him, but everyone feels the wake of that which he speaks. But the death of god does not mean, or was not intended to mean, that there is nothing holy, that there is nothing divine. A Sacred opening does not close with Marx’s deconstruction of religion, or of Nietzsche’s objections to a mere Platonic or Aristotelian “Christianity.” Indeed, the impetus for such cries in the wilderness, as with any prophetic intervention, was and is that there exists a sacred that has not been destroyed by the facile refusals of a scientific or religious hegemony. The deconstruction is the simultaneous prerequisite for an affirmation of the Sacred. Marx’s criticism of religion consists in a confrontation with an a-historical idealism and moralistic rationalism which, through its inability to disclose the truth of human existence, serves merely to mask a historical condition of self-deception and perverse self-laceration. Religion, or the a-temporal, but successionist ideology of power is not concerned or existentially aware of an intimate affirmation of the sacred.

Marx does not need to directly articulate a doctrine of the sacred—or of the possibility of a non-alienated sense of the Sacred *after*

communism. His affirmation is enough—indeed, communism was only the means for that which would emerge—he is always already on Sacred ground in his *taking sides* with the weak and oppressed. Indeed, Miranda contends that the *praxis* of earthly justice, of love, [is] the sacred itself, which for him is envisioned as a god of liberation, justice, and love. Such a possibility and comportment is evident in the *showing* of a life of confrontation and advocacy for a different world. As Kant writes in his *Religion*, the actions and life of a man indicate his disposition. Marx’s poetry and his poetic references in his later works and his actions serve as symptoms or indications of a desire, an affirmation which is the concrete actualization of an intentionality toward and amidst a sacred opening. Indeed, although it is unlikely that Marx is working within the horizons of the Bible, he, in his affirmation, fulfils the prophets’ injunction against speaking or setting forth an image of the god. Such an image is a symptom of an existence which had created masks to obscure and prohibit the possibility of communication. That which lies beyond the image is an affirmation of a sacred *praxis*.

Mere religion as an instruction, as an ideological discipline, collaborates with the de-sacralization of the world—with the eclipse of the sacred. There is nothing left but words which point to *nothings*, which disclose *nothings*. The refusal of these *nothings*—of the myriad chaos of beings entering and exiting “THIS” world which are distinct from the No-thing of *transcending* in Heidegger—is a rejection of an *ethos* and methodology which serves to reduce the event of existence to either an a-historical narrative, without phenomenological or existential relevance, or a scientific narrative of descriptive everydayness. Marx is not interested in constituting a Marxian science or a Marxian politics—he confronts the abyss of commodity, this mere being which determines our alienated, capitalist “consciousness”—one which yawns between you and me. We cannot pretend that this *abyss* is not there—that we can ignore it. By ignoring this situation, we more firmly affirm our situation of pathetic incarceration. [Mankind] is afflicted by its own alien projections and fabrications. Marx incites us to apprehend our own concrete situations and predicaments . . . it is not merely the workers with which he is concerned—“we” are all alienated—each from each other. There must be something deeper at work here.

**From Religion to the Sacred**

Religion, in a *dialectical* materialist analysis, is not dismissed merely as an idealism or a phantom—as if a mere refutation of ideas could lead to the evaporation of religion. Indeed, Marx uses
the term ideology (weltanschauung), and this term does not indicate a mere “reflection” of material conditions, as a logos which issues forth as not only as an interpretation of existence (dasein), but also as an expressive topos of a differentiated and conflictual matrix of power. Ideology is a camera obscura which masques power relationships by means of an organization which orches-
trates a regurgitation of spurious interpretations, or pictures. As Foucault writes in Discipline and Punish, ideology is not merely a repression of conscious representation, but as discourse, indicates, in its intimacy amid the disseminations of power, a proactive cultivation of a reproduction of configurations of power. The medium is the message, as McLuhan taught us, and vice versa. Miranda14 contends that religion, as the cultus, is a falsification of the meaning of lived existence. From the radical perspective of Miranda’s interpretation of the Old and New Testaments, the cultus of religion, as it has suppressed the authentic meaning of the sacred as a pursuit of justice, serves to eradicate the breach which is a call for resistance against oppression. In this way, religion is not simply an idea, but a medium of transmission and control, with its own organizations, networks, and mnemnotechnic devices of indoctrination, of “remembrance.”

Yet, from amidst this exposure of religion, one sees, hears, and smells that a sense of the sacred does not depend on the latest concept or image—all of these will be engulfed in the various mod-
ifications of the spectacle, of the serial articulation of a profane gallery. That which clears the topos for an opening to a sacred dimension is a temporal existence which overwhelms the finite self in the moments of horror, terror, and to a lesser extent, in anxiety. In a radical phenomenological gesture, we can cast the sacred into relief not only as this personal apprehension of finitude, but also, as this possible awakening to the Other—or to, as Otto sug-
gests, the numinous, the mysterium tremendum, or, with the face, as indicated by Levinas. In this way, an apprehension of the negativity of finitude may pass over into a situation in which one may tune into one’s own ethos amid an affirmation of the possibilities of ecstatic existence. For an isolated, alienated self—there erupts the event of transcending—Ariadne’s thread descends amidst a la-
byrinth of a merely “negative dialectics.” This exit-less destination is transfigured into an affirmation of the sacred meaning of existence.

It was perhaps with the Emperor Constantine that religion, specifically the Christian religion, as it was made the legal and ideological orthodoxy of the Roman state, began a process in which the ancient Pagan, and if we can agree with Miranda, the authentic biblical

notion of the Sacred was erased from the public lifeworld of existence (it is perhaps possible that the biblical notion of the sacred was eradicated at an even earlier date in the redactionist interpretation of, for instance, Exodus). In the wake of the untimely death of Julian, the so-called Apostate, who attempted to reverse the subversive and radical edicts of the new religious hegemony of nascent Christendom, the myriad public and private cults of the gods, goddesses, and spirits began to suffer inquisitorial interdiction amidst a totalitarian project which sought the establishment of a unitary and political sense of the sacred. With the eventual establishment of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne, and with the triumphant power of the Roman Church, the actuality of a political cultus overwhelmed an immediate and fragile assertion of a sacred resistance to oppression and injustice. For Miranda, the hegemony of Greek (Platonic and Aristotelian) philosophy over Christian theology served to continue the suppression of the authentic conception of the sacred in the Old and New Testaments—not to mention of the Pagan mysteries. The sacred as the breach of the “order of things” was suppressed in the wake of the desire for worldly security. Such an inquisitorial project existed even after the paltry initiatives of the Reformation. For even in light of the assertion of Luther that one would be judged by God via the criteria of faith alone, the various reformational cults aimed, in the end, to establish their own regional jurisdictions, serving merely to heighten the paranoia of the inquisitional spirit. For instance, despite the idle chatter against popery and the priest, there was never any affirmation of a singular disclosure of the sacred on the part of the individual soul—this soul was never set free. If one did manage freedom, she could find herself burning on a stake at a public festival, the Christian version of human sacrifice. Once again, the propaganda and rhetoric of Luther far exceeded the actual transformation which he was facilitating as this re-formation did not provoke or invoke the questioner to a singular awakening and liberation to an intimacy amidst a sacred event. The iconoclasm of images and the erasure of the indulgences (bribery of God) and the destruction of a politico-religious bureaucracy never foreclosed on the mediating role of the spiritually elect, of the reverend, and of a protestant political authority. The continued propagation of a specific interpretation of the Bible, a book, biblio, which is in any event political through and through—having been changed here and there with the whim of power—not to mention the exclusion of hundreds of books of the original—served to foreclose on the possibility of a radical encounter of a singular mortal being with the sacred. If one is to perceive and imbibe the divine by faith alone, and not via works, then there is no need of a Bible—or a Church. There is the radical
possibility of an immediate opening amidst the sacred. For Miranda, such an opening is—in its authentic sense—a pursuit of justice which is the sacred, is the divine. In this sense, there is not even a need to proclaim and name such an intimacy—it is inexorably lived. In this way, an outward appearing a-religionism may indeed betray a life lived in the immediate light of the sacred. Do not let your right hand know what your left is doing.

The Reformation, in this way, is aptly named, as it indicates a re-configuration of that which was already there. There was never any attempt to re-write the Bible—the Canon—or to re-insert the many documents which had been excluded by the Roman Catholic Church, that whore of Babylon, such as the Gospel of Thomas, or to dismiss the bible as such—or to separate the Old from the New Testaments, etc. Religion remained the same as it had been since the monotheist insurgencies—that which Breasted designated as “religious imperialism”—albeit in devolved, fragmented “forms”—“organizations,” “networks”—but still articulated by that strange hybrid, the “Bible”—the book, the index. The doctrine of faith alone, as it was a doctrine of a church, never set free the soul to cultivate a direct and intimate relation with the divine or the sacred. The reformation, under the directives of Luther, Calvin, and others, never allowed for the possibility of an I and Thou. In the language of Marx, born into a Jewish family that had converted to Protestantism for reasons of physical and emotional survival, religion, even after the so-called reformation, remained an ideological and political concern. Max Weber does well enough to describe the intimate relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. The Reformation not only provides cover for an expropriation of the spoils of theocratic order of roman Christendom, but also set forth its modus essendi.

It is not merely the Christian religion, however, which is subject to the characterization of ideology. It is well known that India and ancient city-states such as Sparta and Athens projected their own hierarchical discipline as a sacral topography upon everyday life in the articulation of its own narrative of cosmic and political legitimacy. Each city-state created a mythos in its own image, but as a city-state, forced the play of the Sacred opening into a reduced logic of communication, command, and control—of politics. What is significant here is that there is in religion a political and organizational component which necessitates the laying out and the perpetuation of an idea—a logic of ideas. The Pythagoreans often spoke of mnemnotechnic artifices which would facilitate the continuance, remembrance, and dissemination of a specific array of ideas or beliefs. For instance, there is poetry, stories, music instruments such as the rudimentary monochord, which any child can learn,
or various other symbolic and narrative artifices or icons, which can be passed on and remembered. Religion implies a historical dimension of reproduction which stands outside any direct and intimate awakening to the sacred as such with respect to a singular mortal being. Indeed, as we see in the “dawn” of modern philosophy, religion, if not summarily dismissed, is given a merely instrumental or rational signification. It is, to again invoke Foucault, a technical regime of disciplinary power. The word “religion” itself implies a “binding,” a “tie,” which holds, contains the constituency of believers in a way which transcends any situation of an intimate and free encounter with the divine. Indeed, such a “tie” and “binding” may intimate the possibility of a connection to the divine, but as it is articulated in the form of ritual, it is a tie and binding which implies an ulterior meaning of the “religious.”

One could consider, as an example, the situation of Akhenaten in his attempt to eliminate the priesthood of Amun for an immediate encounter with the Aten or Sun-Disc. The bureaucracy of the priesthood, for its continuance, necessitated obedience toward its authority and an active propagation and dissemination of its doctrines if it is to survive. The heretic Akhenaten built his city in the desert, but within little more than a decade, was killed and his son was re-named Tut-ankh-amun from Tut-ankh-aten. There is not merely a change of power in the terrestrial sense, but also a transformation in the articulation of the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of the topoi of the phenomena of sacred meaning. In this way, the Amun priests sought to erase any artifact of Akhenaten.

This allusion may serve to explain the timidity of the Reformation. Merely religion does not necessarily have anything to do with the sacred. It has its own interests and reasons, and as an organized bureaucracy, must orchestrate its own procedures, its discipline, its truth, in order to secure its own survival, its terrestrial recurrence. A priest or a reverend has different interests and “ideas” than his flock—or should have. Paul is not Jesus (nor is Homer Odysseus). He thinks beyond this or that mass or service to the future of the church. He asks different questions: how am I to make sure that this teaching will survive into the future? How will I ensure that the children of my flock accept and perpetuate the doctrine of this teaching? The answer to his questions, for the Judeo-Christian or for the Civil-Pagan, inexorably comes in the form of the Bible or of a retroactive “hierarchy” (as opposed to hierophany, first suggested by Eliade in The Sacred and the Profane) projected upon doctrines of polytheism—these are extant texts that can surf along amid the tides and waves of history. Yet, such a-historical life-rafts, as they are merely mnemnotechnic artifices of trans-generational continuance, may preclude, conceal an intimacy with the sacred—with the
This intimacy is an irruption amidst the homologous articulation and operation of profane ideology of a radical power of horror, terror—of the overwhelming. This vertiginous encounter reveals to us that we are, each of us, radically vulnerable, not only existentially, but each step along the path of aging—as one make-shift resolution displaces the last. At the gateway of such a disclosure, the singular being exalts in surprise amidst its fatal and tenuous predicament. If this being does not seek to flee, to hide amidst the cult of security, of the Last Man, she or he may seek to embrace this situation of uncertainty as an intimation of the sacred significance of this opening of our being. Of course, much of this mysterium is sublimated and even eradicated from this terrain of utilitarian reproduction, if, that is, we are to continue amidst this prevailing “order of things.” Yet, despite the sanitization and the tranquilization of horror, death—abjection—via the profane world of work and profane religion, sacred events, moments of vision, truth events break in reminding us of the chaos which churns in ourselves. Of course, we do not wish to merely disintegrate into animality from our suspension between consciousness and the sacred. Yet, we neither wish to be absorbed in a pantheistic reason which turns us into puppets and parrots. We wish, each of us, to have an autonomy amidst our own personal and spiritual lives, a demand which breaks the chain of homogeneity and allows to irrupt this heterogeneity of the singular, mortal, being, as an event. Yet, if such an intimacy has always been or is always a possibility for each soul, what would be left for the priest, the reverend, the mediator, the politician, the self-chosen elect?

In this present study of Marx, we are already forced to remove ourselves from the mediational, ideological reality of religious and political assertion. Marx has already rejected—in line with his understanding of the being of this historicality of human existence, religion as an ideology, as a mere “logic” of “ideas”—eidos, mere pictures, idols. Such a rejection implies a criticism of not only the narrative idealism and mechanisms of perpetuation of the cloth, but also the recognition of the politico-ideological discipline of an organizational matrix of cultural perpetuation. This discipline asserts itself as a religio-cultural matrix. It is “consciousness” in the free-floating vision of the idealists, but in the eyes of Marx, this “consciousness” is determined by being, existence, and thus becomes, as with any phenomenology of life, symptomatic and indicative, but not therefore powerless. That which is implied in such a deconstruction of “consciousness” becomes the sacred meaning of praxis. We are not to live in the camera obscura of the “world picture,” but are to act and be, and in this nunc, to think, to grasp after, and seek deep within that which is glimpsed in this event of
the sacred opening. Marx is not a Protestant in that he exults action, but he is neither a Catholic nor a Jew as he throws into question the “Law.” He advocates revolution, a transgression of the “Law” in all its concrete manifestations. His indication of *praxis* (especially in light of Aristotle’s distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*) shatters, as we will see in Marx’s encounter with Bultmann, the world picture of representation via events of transgression—the existential breaks which give insight amid an the “de-ontological” event, a “glance of the eye” (*augenblick*), saturnalia, potlatch—this *pagan* event of sacrifice and the gift, as Mauss tells us.

Yet, incessant action, excessive transgressions dissipate the mortal self into a profane chaos of existence. Mere action alone, having dispensed itself of the necessity of interpretation, of thought, loses itself in the everydayness of a busy flight from existence. We run after our commodities, our fetishes, and thinking this is the ultimate being of the “real,” we suppress any hermeneutic engagement with existence. Mere action, assertion (but not, as we have intimated, *praxis*, in Marx’s sense), as it is oriented only to the everyday, remains outside an authentic *poiesis* of existence. In Heidegger’s conjuration, Marx’s *Eleventh Thesis* is pictured in its seeming haste. Even though Marx may have expressed himself under the influence of a deeper affirmation, he in the end holds the fragments in his hands. However, seeing, feeling these chards of reality, he does not reject action, but instead castigates the fragments. For Heidegger, Marx seeks action in a displacement of his own finite existence, in a neo-Hegelian escapism. Yet, Heidegger’s literal reading of the *Eleventh Thesis* cannot stand as Marx is not simply embracing a superficial version of “headlessness” or voluntarism, but may be, in Heideggerian terms enacting a resolution of binding commitments in the thrown projection of his own world.

We should keep in mind that Marx himself engaged in a *poiesis* of the sacred in his early poetry and in the *genealogy* of his work. Poetic expression is not annihilated in his later works, but only emerges into the light amidst a phenomenology of Capital, a disclosure of the cycles of profane reproduction. Throughout *Capital*, Marx makes references to literature, poetry, or throws in a statement about the *coming revolution* which will resolve the contradictions, oppression, and suffering of class “society.” His vision is always that of a radically transfigured situation via *praxis* in which the direct producers—the workers—own the means of production and self-manage a matrix of *poiesis*—indeed of life—at the point of production. This is the poetic and philosophical affirmation of liberation, of the sacred—born amidst this deconstruction of the capitalist *ethos* and disciplinary matrix. Perhaps, such a revolution, as envisioned by Marx, will allow for a transfiguration
of the mere production of capitalist, utilitarian reproduction to the sacred poiesis of the gift.

As he never repudiated his poetry, we may not, in the usual manner, simply assert that such expression was of an immature student; nor can we interpret Marx as one who designates all linguistic, expression, indication as ideology. While some language games subsist in themselves as idealistic totalities, Marx’s poetry indicates an awakening to alterity—and in this awakening he apprehends, amidst his topos, a sense of obligation and commitment, of affirmation. Each of his writings can be seen as a phenomenology of indication which seeks to disclose the truth of the world, truth as a-lethea, which must be disclosed via a struggle for authentic self-expression.

While the specific contours of Marx’s early poetic affirmation of the sacred may transfigure themselves amidst a life of writing, the poiesis of affirmation abides in his consistent advocacy of revolutionary transformation. Marx is neither priest, scientist, nor politician—he is engaged in the poetry of existence. He is, as Arthur Miller wrote, a “white nigger,” a reluctant prophet. If we are, in our interpretation of Marx, to give to the “picture” a sense of the whole man, we must witness his acts as symptoms or indicators, as Kant writes in his Religion, of a disposition, even if such a notion of character is, with Heidegger and Bataille, and Marx, ultimately temporal—and secret.

The Sacred after Marx

It is clear—which seems to be increasingly unavoidable—that we can disclose some type of relationship between Marx and the sacred, and one that transcends a merely negative relationship. Marx is not the great atheist, nor is he the great authoritarian. Such interpretations result from either deliberate misrepresentation, or reductionistic, partitionistic readings which fail to disclose the most plausible (and profound) readings of Marx. Lenin never read the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, nor the German Ideology—it is truly doubtful if he ever read Marx’s poetry. Be that as it may, such an example can serve as a warning for those who have become complacent in their theoretical stereotypes. There is more to Marx than the merely political or even historical significance to which he has been assigned. Even in the twenty-one hundred pages of Capital (excluding the text Theories of Surplus Value, rejected by Lenin as its editor, Karl Kautsky, did not support the policies of revolutionary defeatism and insurrectionary communism), Marx makes numerous advocacy (ethical) and poetic statements. Often, he speaks eloquently of a communist society...
as a contrast to capitalist exploitation. His most explicit reference to the "moral" as that which must be affirmed is his reference in *Capital*, vol. 1 of the moral character of the standard of living (similar to Sraffa’s "standard commodity"). There is a moral, practical criterion for the level of subsistence, based on the prevailing historical “negotiations” of class struggle (and warfare). This concrete phenomenology of the temporal morality of material existence is in tune with his own sense of the overwhelming character of the sacred and the inner glow\(^\text{15}\) that remained after the implosions of his own illusions. One could speculate, as legitimate as any of the interpretations of Marx, that he maintained his inner glow and sense of the sacred and poetic even amid his “serious” investigations of scientific political economy—and the more serious deaths of his comrades in the Paris Commune. The implicit affirmation exhibited by his own statements and by his political advocacy and involvement (even to the extent that he was sought for arrest and was exiled numerous times) indicates that a merely secular or atheist interpretation of Marx is unsound.

I have attempted, in the preceding, to show that the typical Marxian quip that *religion is the opium of the people* has been read out of context and fails to properly understand a more subtle distinction in Marx between mere religion and the sacred—and thus, of his affinity with tendencies of sacred rebellion as illustrated in *Liberation Theology* and the *Ghandian* rebellions in South Africa and India. Moreover, it is clear that Marx’s ostensible criticisms of religion are much in tune with twentieth-century radical theology (and twenty-first-century apophatic theology) most clearly articulated in figures such as Bultmann and Johannes Hoff. It is also clear that his criticisms falter in light of Marx’s own failure to articulate—as in the case of the latter theologians—a radical phenomenology of the sacred,\(^\text{16}\) something that only remains implicit in Marx. Nevertheless, despite the absence of an overt explicit statement of intimacy with the sacred, I have tried to show that the usual interpretation of the question (or of its denial) fails to come to terms with strong counter-interpretations which demonstrate clearly that Marx not only remains embedded in an interpretive and practical *topos* of a lifeworld, but that a sense of the sacred is necessitated

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16. This claim is meant to indicate the nearly absolute reference to “death” in Marx’s philosophical writings. His only reference, outside of his frequent references to the “death-knell” of capitalism, occurs in his *Paris Manuscripts* in which he refers to death as the individual who is the necessary sacrifice for the continuation of the group.
by his life-long ethical and moral advocacies. In light of Marx's poetry, writing, and activism, the sense of the sacred is cast fully into relief as committed and dedicated thought, writing and social, cultural, and political praxis (a "showing"). In this way, if we were to seek an explicit topos of affirmation in Marx (although this need not be necessary)—to seek an intimate affirmation setting beneath the image of Marx’s “humanism” or to his alleged “scientism,” we are thrown back again to his poetry (and plays), such as that of “Transformation,” especially in its sophisticated criticism of a merely idealistic sense of the sacred and in its imaginative reconstruction, and affirmation of a sacred which overwhelms the finite self, but also allows this self to guide the spirits which infuse themselves into the self—as a Sorcerer who writes this poetry of existence. In the end, he is a poet, but one who will remain silent in the face of the Nameless—the Overwhelming.

Wittgenstein ends his “mystical” Tractatus with the words: “That about which we cannot speak, we must pass over in silence.” Yet, even though the mystical lies at the limit of “world”—Die Welt ist als der Fall—the “mystical” still is. The mystical, or in the context of this present study, the sacred, is not “the case,” it is not a thing, an object, or state of affairs in this world to which a convenient label can be tagged. It is “outside”—at the limit of the world, but it can and does erupt—as with Bataille—“inside” amidst existence, of which, the “world” is only one aspect. Marx has already said all of this in his early poetry. Marx can neither escape the sacred, nor can a merely negative sense of the sacred be defined for him. His poetic explorations are indeed the existential root of his latter work and thought. There is no discontinuity.

Transformation
My eyes are so confused
My cheek is so pale
My head is so bemused
A realm of fairy-tale.

I wanted, boldly daring
Sea-going ways to follow
Where a thousand crags rise soaring
And floods flow bleak and hollow.

I clung to Thought high-soaring
On its two wings did ride,
And though storm winds were roaring,
All danger I defied.

I did not falter there,
But ever did on press,
With the wild eagle’s stare
On journeys limitless.

And though the Siren spins
Her music so endearing
Whereby the heart she wins—
I gave that sound no hearing.

I turned away mine ear
From the sweet sounds I heard,
My bosom did aspire
To a loftier reward.

Alas, the waves sped on,
At rest they would not be;
They swept by many a one,
Too swift for me to see.

With magic power and word,
I cast what spells I knew,
But forth the waves still roared,
Till they were gone from view.

And by the Flood sore pressed,
And dizzy at the sight,
I tumbled from the host
Into the misty night.

And when I rose again
From fruitless toil at last,
My powers all were gone,
And all the heart’s glow lost.

And trembling pale, I long
Gazed into my own breast;
But no uplifting song
Was my affliction blessed.

My songs were flown, alack;
The sweetest art was gone—
No God would give it back
Nor Grace of Deathless One.

The Fortress had sunk down
That once so bold did stand;
The fiery glow was drowned,
Void was the bosom’s land.

Then shone your radiance,
The purest light of soul,
Where in a changing dance,
Round Earth the Heavens roll.

Then was I captive bound,
Then was my vision clear,
For I had truly found,
What my dark strivings were.
Soul rang more strong, more free,
Out of the deep-stirred breast
In triumph heavenly
And in sheer happiness.

My spirits then and there
Soared, jubilant and gay,
And, like a sorcerer,
Their courses did I sway.

I left the waves that rush,
The floods that change and flow.
On the high cliff to crash,
But saved the inner glow.

And what my Soul, Fate-driven
Never in Flight o’ertook,
That to my heart was given
Was granted by your look.