My heartfelt thanks go out to Jonathan Hughes for his thoughtful reply, along with my apologies for giving the impression that his book’s argument is ‘critically weakened’ by its methodological commitments. I would not have undertaken such an extended and critical review of Ecology and Historical Materialism (EHM) if I did not consider the book a major intervention in the debate on Marxism and ecology. Moreover, although my review did discuss the major insights EHM provides into the consistency of historical materialism and ecological concerns, it may not have adequately indicated the strengths of the book’s approach to its subject-matter.

These strengths, it seems to me, are two-fold. First, Hughes avoids the dual traps of taking the standard ecological criticisms of Marxism as self-evident ‘givens’ to which Marxism must adapt (e.g. by grafting non-Marxist paradigms onto historical materialism), or, alternatively, simply dismissing these criticisms as figments of reactionary anti-socialist thinking (e.g. Malthusianism or deep ecology). EHM uses rigorous and textually informed argumentation.

---

1 For a fuller discussion of these two dimensions of EHM, see Foster 2000–1.
to engage both systematically and critically with different strands of ecological thought and their stances toward Marxism, thereby developing the ecological resources contained in historical materialism. Secondly, Hughes clearly shows – though not always as consciously as he could have – that it is above all its materialist dimension that enables Marxism to shed light on specific ecological problems. My disagreements with Hughes do not concern the need for a materialist approach, but, rather, the kind of materialist approach which is most useful for the interpretation and further development of a Marxist social ecology. The somewhat contentious tone of my review was in part a deliberate attempt to stimulate discussion and debate over these important disagreements in a crucial area of historical materialism, and, in this respect at least, I was successful. Hughes’ reply does clarify his own position as well as our methodological differences.

More specifically, Hughes’ reply clarifies his position vis-à-vis analytical Marxism. In EHM, the main statement on this position merely indicated ‘some reservations about’ Elster’s ‘strong form’ of methodological individualism, while giving brief credit to Cohen’s functionalism for providing ‘the starting point for [Hughes’s] own account’. In light of the generality of this statement, along with the book’s various strong criticisms of the narrowness of Cohen’s functionalist materialism from an ecological perspective, I suggested that ‘Hughes embraces neither of the main theoretical paths of the analytical Marxist school’. I admit that this overstated EHM’s divergence from analytical Marxism – I make this admission all the more willingly insofar as I do not want to debate the exact meaning of ‘embrace’ – though one wishes that the book had been more assertive on this relationship.

Less clear to me is how Hughes makes the transition from this point of interpretation to his two main responses: (i) that I read more into EHM than it actually contains, especially in terms of the extent to which it adopts the anti-dialectical stance typically associated with analytical Marxism; (ii) that certain positions that I correctly attribute to the book are more defensible than my review indicated. Indeed, the only additional motivation Hughes provides for his two main counter-claims is the argument that, ‘while the expository content of EHM is closer to some strands of analytical Marxism

---

2 Hughes 2000, pp. 4–5.
3 Burkett 2001a, p. 443, emphasis added.