

Karl Marx - Capital Vol. 1 (Notes by Nazi-Anon)

Chapter 1: The Commodity

(Capitalism) "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities," its unit being a single commodity".

Commodity (C) = Use-Value (UV) + Exchange-Value (EV)

Use-Value: Substance of Value (Quality)

Exchange-Value: Magnitude of Value (Quantity)

(Quality and Quantity) "As use values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities, but as exchange values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use value."

(UV) "The utility of a thing makes it a use value [...] This property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities. Use values become a reality only by use or consumption: they also constitute the substance of all wealth, whatever may be the social form of that wealth. In the form of society we are about to consider, they are, in addition, the material depositories of exchange value."

(EV) "Exchange value, at first sight, presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. [...] first: the valid exchange values of a given commodity express something equal; secondly, exchange value, generally, is only the mode of expression, the phenomenal form, of something contained in it, yet distinguishable from it. [...] exchange values of commodities must be capable of being expressed in terms of something common to them all, of which thing they represent a greater or less quantity. This common "something" cannot be either a geometrical, a chemical, or any other natural property of commodities. [...] the exchange of commodities is evidently an act characterised by a total abstraction from use value. Then one use value is just as good as another, provided only it be present in sufficient quantity. If then we leave out of consideration the use value of commodities, they have only one common property left, that of being products of labour. [...] Along with the useful qualities of the products themselves, we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labour; there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract."

Here, Labour takes 2 forms; concrete and abstract.
Concrete Labour = Useful Labour (Private, Qualitative).
Abstract Labour = Labour-Power (Social, Quantitative).
See here how concrete labour as the substance of value is transformed into the material body of commodities which possess use-values, while abstract labour denotes the relations between commodities. one is material, the other ideal (abstract). ["exchange values [...] do not contain an atom of use value"].

(EV, cont.) "Let us now consider the residue of each of these products; it consists of the same unsubstantial reality in each, a mere congelation of homogeneous human labour, of labour power expended without regard to the mode of its expenditure. All that these things now tell us is, that human labour power has been expended in their production, that human labour is embodied in them. When looked at as crystals of this social substance, common to them all, they are – Values. Therefore, the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange value of commodities, whenever they are exchanged, is their value. exchange value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. [...] we have to consider the nature of value independently of this, its form."

This bears relation to what was written earlier: "exchange value, generally, is only the mode of expression, the phenomenal form, of something contained in it, yet distinguishable from it." This in hegelian terms is the difference between appearance and essence, such that "exchange value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed". Thus, to Marx, the "value form" expresses the essence of value, in appearance. Value thus can only be expressed through exchange. Exchange-Value then is the "value form" (the form of value, or appearance of value), but we must then penetrate the essence of value to continue.

Value (V): "A use value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because human labour in the abstract has been embodied or materialised in it. How, then, is the magnitude of this value to be measured? Plainly, by the quantity of the value-creating substance, the labour, contained in the article. The quantity of labour, however, is measured by its duration, and labour time in its turn finds its standard in weeks, days, and hours. [...] Some people might think that if the value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of labour spent on it, the more idle and unskilful the labourer, the more valuable would his commodity be, because more time would be required in its production. The labour, however, that

forms the substance of value, is homogeneous human labour, expenditure of one uniform labour power. [...] The labour time socially necessary is that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time. The introduction of power-looms into England probably reduced by one-half the labour required to weave a given quantity of yarn into cloth [...] and consequently fell to one-half its former value. We see then that that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour time socially necessary for its production. Commodities, therefore, in which equal quantities of labour are embodied, or which can be produced in the same time, have the same value. As values, all commodities are only definite masses of congealed labour time. The value of a commodity would therefore remain constant, if the labour time required for its production also remained constant. But the latter changes with every variation in the productiveness of labour. [...] If we could succeed at a small expenditure of labour, in converting carbon into diamonds, their value might fall below that of bricks."

Use-Value (UV) = Substance of Value

Exchange-Value (EV) = Magnitude of Value

Value (V) = Socially-Necessary Labour-Time (SNLT)

Marx in section 2 returns to the twofold character of labour, between concrete/useful labour, and abstract labour power: "Productive activity, if we leave out of sight its special form, viz., the useful character of the labour, is nothing but the expenditure of human labour power. Tailoring and weaving, though qualitatively different productive activities, are each a productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscles, and in this sense are human labour."

He continues by seeing how human labour in the abstract is standardised by units of simple labour, by which all labours (in different uses) are commensurated as labours in general: "Skilled labour counts only as simple labour intensified, or rather, as multiplied simple labour, a given quantity of skilled being considered equal to a greater quantity of simple labour. [...] Just as, therefore, in viewing the coat and linen as values, we abstract from their different use values, so it is with the labour represented by those values." Marx perceives antagonism in this relation, however: "An increase in the quantity of use values is an increase of material wealth. Nevertheless, an increased quantity of material wealth may correspond to a simultaneous fall in the magnitude of its value. This antagonistic movement has its origin in the two-fold character of labour."

Section 3: The Form of Value or Exchange-Value:
Marx first makes distinction between a commodity's "physical or natural form, and a value form", which we should recognise as its UV and EV. He makes the further point here: "The value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition." He then says "the value of commodities has a purely social reality" and "value can only manifest itself in the social relation of commodity to commodity." This is not arbitrary however. Exchange is not determined to Marx by the whims of the market, but by a common value expressed between the commodities; "the value of commodities has a purely social reality, and [that] they acquire this reality only in so far as they are expressions or embodiments of one identical social substance, viz., human labour". Exchange to Marx is an equivalence.

Now he develops his logical anthropology; "the task of tracing the genesis of this money form [...] from its simplest, almost imperceptible outline, to the dazzling money-form. By doing this we shall, at the same time, solve the riddle presented by money." He begins with the "Elementary or Accidental Form Of Value" by perceiving "The two poles of the expression of value." The "Relative form and Equivalent form".

He begins, "The relative form and the equivalent form are two intimately connected, mutually dependent and inseparable elements of the expression of value; but, at the same time, are mutually exclusive, antagonistic extremes – i.e., poles of the same expression [...] it is not possible to express the value of linen in linen. [...] The value of the linen can therefore be expressed only relatively – i.e., in some other commodity." [By which, the other commodity serves as an equivalent]. Cont. "No doubt, the expression 20 yards of linen = 1 coat, or 20 yards of linen are worth 1 coat, implies the opposite relation. 1 coat = 20 yards of linen [...] But, in that case, I must reverse the equation [...] A single commodity cannot, therefore, simultaneously assume, in the same expression of value, both forms. The very polarity of these forms makes them mutually exclusive." And he concludes, "Whether, then, a commodity assumes the relative form, or the opposite equivalent form, depends entirely upon its accidental position in the expression of value - that is, upon whether it is the commodity whose value is being expressed or the commodity in which value is being expressed."

Relative Form (Quality). Equivalent Form (Quantity). The substance of value is not considered, but only the order of magnitude; thus, this is an "accidental" value form.

Marx quotes Aristotle: "Exchange cannot take place without equality, and equality not without commensurability." [cont.] "It is, however, in reality, impossible that such unlike things can be commensurable". [cont.] Aristotle therefore, himself, tells us what barred the way to his further analysis; it was the absence of any concept of value." He gives explanation to this however, "Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had, therefore, for its natural basis, the inequality of men and of their labour powers." Moreover, "The secret of the expression of value [...] cannot be deciphered, until the notion of human equality has already acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice. This, however, is possible only in a society in which the great mass of the produce of labour takes the form of commodities, in which, consequently, the dominant relation between man and man, is that of owners of commodities." Some take this to mean that Marx imagines Value as an exclusively capitalist phenomenon, but as he concludes with Aristotle, "The brilliancy of Aristotle's genius is shown by this alone, that he discovered, in the expression of the value of commodities, a relation of equality." Here, neither commodities nor Value are exclusively capitalist constructs, but it is simply that they become most well-known under capitalist conditions.

Marx revises himself here: "When, at the beginning of this chapter, we said, in common parlance, that a commodity is both a use value and an exchange value, we were, accurately speaking, wrong. A commodity is a use value or object of utility, and a value. It manifests itself as this two-fold thing, that it is, as soon as its value assumes an independent form – viz., the form of exchange value. It never assumes this form when isolated, but only when placed in a value or exchange relation with another commodity of a different kind." Here we can remember the distinction between one's private labour and social labour, "Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour, creates, indeed, use values, but not commodities. In order to produce the latter, he must not only produce use values, but use values for others, social use values." Thus, value as a "purely social reality" exists only in a value relation between commodities, and so is not a "natural" category, akin to logistics or statistics.

Marx's anthropology concludes: "It therefore follows that the elementary value form is also the primitive form under which a product of labour appears historically as a commodity, and that the gradual transformation of such products into commodities, proceeds *pari passu* with the development of the value form."

He then moves on to the "Total or Expanded Form of value" which includes "The Expanded Relative form of value" and "The particular Equivalent form". He begins, "The linen, by virtue of the form of its value, now stands in a social relation, no longer with only one other kind of commodity, but with the whole world of commodities" whereby "for the first time, this value shows itself in its true light as a congelation of undifferentiated human labour." Here he sees that "it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the magnitude of their value; but, on the contrary, that it is the magnitude of their value which controls their exchange proportions." This is the expanded relative form, while the particular equivalent form is simply an expansion of its elementary aspect; here, commodities express value spontaneously. Marx sees this disparate and fragmentary relation as finding its reason in the "general form of value", whereby one commodity represents each particular commodity. This comes in the elementary value form, but one wherein the equivalent represents many relative forms, thus it is as an equivalent form, and so general.

Elementary/Accidental Form: x (relative) = a (equivalent)

Total/Expanded Form: x (relative) = $a,b,c\dots$ (equivalent)

General Form: x,y,z (relative) = a (universal equivalent)

Thus the movement of the value form is as an internal motion governed by mutual antagonism (dialectic), which converts the relative and equivalent form, to the expanded relative and particular equivalent form, to the expanded relative and universal equivalent form. this has its final movement however, where the universal equivalent becomes the money-form.

Relative (A) - Expanded (B) - General (C)

Equivalent (A) - Particular (B) - Universal (C) - Money (D)

Marx describes this final movement, "The universal equivalent form is a form of value in general. It can, therefore, be assumed by any commodity. [...] The particular commodity, with whose bodily form the equivalent form is thus socially identified, now becomes the money commodity, or serves as money. [...] If, then, in form C we replace the linen by gold, we get, D, The Money-Form. [...] there is no difference between forms C and D, except that, in the latter, gold has assumed the equivalent form in the place of linen. Gold is in form D, what linen was in form C – the universal equivalent." Money then expresses its universal equivalence in the price-form: $[x,y,z = £2]$. He concludes by saying "The simple commodity form is therefore the germ of the money form." And thus he conceives of the value form by its internal progress, with money being its end.

The final section of Chapter 1 is "Section 4: The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof". He starts by saying the commodity is "abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties". He speaks of tables; "But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was". He does not attribute this to its mere material use value however, but its social existence as a value; "the existence of the things quâ commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom." He rather affirms "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. [...] There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."

This is Marx's theory of alienation (estrangement) whereby our social essence is mediated by alien objects through which we attempt to recognise ourselves. In Hegelian terms, it is the difference between self and other in the objective conditions of labour. As Marx continues, "to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin, as the foregoing analysis has already shown, in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them." He otherwise calls this Fetishism "the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour", and thus the commodity is furnished with its supernatural strength, by at once being individual and social in character.

this is once more explored by marx: "the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations which the act of

exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things. It is only by being exchanged that the products of labour acquire, as values, one uniform social status, distinct from their varied forms of existence as objects of utility."

In other words, "when we bring the products of our labour into relation with each other as values, it is not because we see in these articles the material receptacles of homogeneous human labour. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it. Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic." Here, Marx sees value as a kind of unconscious which moves us, and so is the true social agent, which he previously asserts in the development of the elementary value form into the expanded form, "it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the

magnitude of their value; but, on the contrary, that it is the magnitude of their value which controls their exchange proportions." As social labour expands its enterprise, it enters into a greater mode of self-recognition, the same way that in Aristotle's time, value was not conceived because of the inequality of labour.

Marx speaks on the religious conditions of capitalism: "The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. And for a society based upon the production of commodities, in which the producers in general enter into social relations with one another by treating their products as commodities and values, whereby they reduce their individual private labour to the standard of homogeneous human labour – for such a society, Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c., is the most fitting form of religion. In the ancient Asiatic and other ancient modes of production, we find that the conversion of products into commodities, and therefore the conversion of men into producers of commodities, holds a subordinate place, which, however, increases in importance as the primitive communities approach nearer and nearer to their dissolution." Here, Marx imagines a terminal modernity inscribed into civilisation, for he conceives in the most elementary value form the germ of capitalist relations.

Continued, "[immature trade] can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life, between man and man, and between man and Nature, are correspondingly narrow. This narrowness is reflected in the ancient worship of Nature, and in the other elements of the popular religions. The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature." Here, Marx is appealing to the relations of base and superstructure by also gleaning a Hegelian image of historical progress. He then sees its telos in industrial society; "The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."

Marx concludes by criticising bourgeois economy's attribution of value to nature, when to Marx, it is a purely social affair, "So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond".