

# **Critical Realist Arguments in Marx's Capital**

Hans G. Ehrbar

Published 2002

# Contents

## Note

<b>3</b>	<b>Critical Realist Arguments in Marx's Capital</b>	<b>1</b>
3.1	From Hegel to Bhaskar . . . . .	1
3.2	Marx's opening moves . . . . .	2
3.3	Surface and core of the economy . . . . .	3
3.4	From surface to core . . . . .	6
3.5	The double character of labour . . . . .	6
3.6	From core to surface . . . . .	7
3.7	The fetish-like character of commodities . . . . .	8
3.8	The exchange process . . . . .	10
3.9	The curse of money . . . . .	11
3.10	Does critical realism make a difference? . . . . .	12

# Note

This essay was published as chapter 3 in [BFR02].

This collection was published by Routledge; © 2002 selection and editorial matter, Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood and John Michael Roberts; individual chapters, the contributors.

The print edition of the book says: All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

ISBN 0-415-25012-9 (hbk)  
ISBN 0-415-25013-7 (pbk)

## 3 Critical Realist Arguments in Marx's Capital

### 3.1 From Hegel to Bhaskar

<43> In *Capital*, Marx uses Hegelian concepts and terminology extensively. For instance, shortly after the beginning of the first chapter, Marx concludes that the exchange value of commodities must be the 'form of appearance' of some 'substance', called 'value', which is different from exchange value itself. The subsequent discussion seems more akin to literary criticism than to political economy. Marx interprets the *meaning* of certain familiar kinds of market transactions, in order to come to the conclusion that value consists of congealed abstract labour. Later on, a long section of the first chapter derives various 'forms of value' as surface *expressions* of this congealed abstract labour. These expressions have 'defects' which lead, in a dialectical development, to more satisfactory forms.

Some Marx scholars try to ignore these Hegelianisms, others consider them an important part of Marx's argument. Lenin belonged to the latter camp; he wrote in his Philosophical Notebooks:

Aphorism: It is impossible to completely understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx! [Len61, p. 180]

Eighty years after Lenin it is doubtful whether even an extensive knowledge of Hegel can make it possible to 'completely' understand Marx's *Capital*. Those Marx and Hegel scholars who went this route have not achieved the hoped-for breakthroughs.

Hegel's system was presumably the best framework available at Marx's time to represent the structure of modern society. But it is not a perfect fit for the purposes for which Marx put it to work. Many arguments which Marx makes in the Hegelian paradigm are metaphorical [Mar98, p. 304], others are implicit, only indicated by Marx's choice of words (often lost in the translations), and certain other arguments are simply never made <44> at all [AB70, p. 86]. As a consequence, to understand Marx has become a secret science, open only to the 'initiated', those who know long passages of Marx's writings by heart, so that they can hum a melody along in a tonal system which they are not quite sure about.

Fortunately, in the last quarter century, a cleaner and more persuasive framework for social sciences has been developed than Hegel's philosophy. I am speaking here of Bhaskar's

'critical realism', as it is laid out in [Bha97], [Bha89a], [Bha93], and other works. Bhaskar gives, in the framework of the modern critique of positivism, a systematic and coherent formulation of the philosophical outlook to which Marx himself became more and more committed [Bha89b, p. 126]. This essay tries to reproduce Marx's arguments in the early parts of *Capital I* in a critical realist rather than a Hegelian framework. It can be considered a test of a conjecture formulated by Bhaskar:

What accounts for Marx's (and Engels's subsequent) recourse to dialectics? My conjecture is that it took the place of critical realism as the missing methodological fulcrum of Marx's work. [Bha89a, p. 178]

If Marx was indeed a critical realist 'avant la lettre', it should be possible and beneficial to translate Marx's Hegelian arguments in *Capital* into critical realist terms.

This essay attempts such a translation. It gives a summary of Marx's argument which tries to stay as close as possible to Marx's own, but in which critical realist categories take the place of Marx's Hegelianisms. My summary will differ from Marx's own development only because those steps which are hidden in the Hegelian terminology have been made explicit, using categories informed by dialectical critical realism (DCR). Of course, a different paradigm makes things visible from a slightly different angle, therefore the arguments will also get a different flavour. Perhaps the reader of this summary will not even recognize them. Those interested are invited to download from the web the preliminary version of my extensive sentence-by-sentence interpretation of Marx's micro-logic, called *Annotations to Karl Marx's 'Capital'* [Ehr00]. There they will find detailed textual evidence for the summary that follows.

### 3.2 Marx's opening moves

Since society cannot be reduced to the individual, Marx does not begin the book *Capital* with the individual. His entry point into the social structure of capitalism is the *commodity*. This is a plausible starting point, since almost everything produced in capitalism is produced for sale, i.e., takes commodity form.

The first thing that needs to be said about the commodity is that it has two factors, use value and exchange value. Marx discusses use value only briefly <45> and then goes over to exchange value. Here he observes that our day-to-day experiences with exchange value are contradictory. Part of these experiences seem to indicate that exchange value is intrinsic in the commodities (if you drop a commodity and break it then its exchange value disappears too), and others seem to indicate that exchange value is relative and only depends on the circumstances of the exchange (the same good is sold at different prices in different stores or at different times).

Marx takes this as evidence that a deeper level of reality is involved. This is one of several places in *Capital* where Marx identifies a contradiction, and then, often with the words 'let

us look at the matter more closely', expands the 'discursive domain' [Bha93, p. 57] in order to arrive at a more comprehensive explanation. Bhaskar recommends this procedure:

A logical (or other) contradiction is not something to fear and/or to seek to disguise, cover up or isolate. Rather it should be taken as a sign that the existing conceptual field is incomplete in some relevant respect. [Bha93, pp. 378/9]

In the present situation, Marx comes to the conclusion that exchange value is the 'form of appearance' in which some deeper attribute of commodities, which he calls 'value', 'expresses' itself.

### 3.3 Surface and core of the economy

In order to follow Marx's argument we need to know what the words 'form of appearance' and 'expression' mean. I will therefore interrupt my summary here in order to explain these terms.

When we observe the commodity producers trading their goods in the market, we are witnessing the second act of a two-act drama, which can only be understood if we also know the first act. The first act is the production of these goods.

Although commodities are produced on private initiative, their production is a thoroughly social process. The capitalists take it for granted that they will be able to find the inputs for production and labour power waiting for them to be purchased, that their money will be accepted, that their employees in turn can buy their subsistence means with their wages, that their own and their workers' skills enable them to produce a competitive product, etc. The seemingly autonomous activity of the capitalist competitors would not be possible without a high degree of co-ordination in the economy as a whole.

How is this co-ordination achieved? Interestingly it is a mere side effect of the market activity of producers and consumers. In response to market signals, consumers adjust what they consume, and producers adjust their production schedules and technologies, in ways which facilitate the functioning and reproduction of the economy as a whole. But they do not do it out of <46> concern about the overall economy but out of self-interest. Their intent is to reach the best possible outcome for themselves in the framework of the market, and they employ many different techniques to achieve this. Despite these myopic motives, their interactions generally have the unintended side effect of keeping production on track.

If there is not enough of something, productive resources are directed into producing it, not because of a concern for the consumers or responsibility towards the economy, but because production of the scarce article is rewarded with high prices. The producers' self-interest also induces them to introduce innovations quickly, to maintain the continuity of the production process, and to pay attention to costs and the consumers. This does not exactly lead to the most efficient use of resources, and does not make the consumer 'king' either. On the contrary, it ravages the earth's natural resources most irresponsibly while at the same

time keeping the majority of the earth's population in abject poverty. But obviously the system itself has remained intact for a long time under this regime.

Commodity exchange and private property—relations which are located on what Marx calls the 'surface' of society—are the institutions which induce the producers to take actions that enable the continued functioning of the economy. If the market provides the social interactions which keep production on track, one might think that the structure of the market determines the character of production. This is a fallacy. Production, in any society, is a much more fundamental activity than the market. If social production were not structured in such a way that a market is needed, there would be no market. People go to market to exchange their products only because of the specific character of the relations which bind them together (and at the same time keep them apart) in the social production process.

Causality goes therefore from production to the market, not vice versa. Market interactions induce the economic agents to take actions that uphold the systemic structure of social production, but this structure itself is logically prior to the market. Marx does not have a consistent terminology for the structure which lies beneath the surface of market activity; I will introduce such a terminology here and call it the 'core' of the economy.

Marx uses Hegel's form-content paradigm for the indirect and asymmetric link between surface and core: the surface relations among the economic agents are the *forms of appearance* of the principles which govern social production in the core of the economy. In Hegel's system, there is a close link between content and form:

On the question of the relation between content and form, Marx took the standpoint of Hegel and not of Kant. Kant treated form as something external in relation to the content, and as something which adds itself to the content from the outside. From the standpoint of Hegel's philosophy, the content itself, through its development, generates that form which <47> was already latently contained in the content. Form necessarily grows from the content itself. [Rub72, p. 117]

The form-content paradigm is therefore in many respects appropriate for the situation at hand. It connotes that the market affects production in an indirect manner. It also connotes that the principles co-ordinating production in a commodity society are not *generated* by the market. Although they *manifest* themselves in and are *mediated* through the market, they invisibly already exist in the production process itself and can be defined without reference to the market.

Nevertheless, I will not use these Hegelian terms in my summary of Marx's arguments, but look at the links between core and surface explicitly. The core-surface distinction can be located in the intersection of critical realism and historical materialism. A critical realist knows that society is stratified. Bhaskar speaks of the 'hiatus' between the level of social structure and the level of the individual: neither level is reducible to the other. Historical materialism explores the inner structure and historical development of the social stratum, distinguishing between base and superstructure, and between various modes of production.

The core–surface distinction captures the specifics of the social–individual interaction in capitalism. In capitalism, the economic base of society consists of two layers, core and surface. The interactions of the individuals which sustain the economic and wider social structure take place against the backdrop of the surface relations, whereas the all-important relations of production are submerged in the core. The core is a hidden skeleton which holds everything in place but which the practical agents do not address directly. Interpersonal interactions are two steps removed from the co-ordination of production: they generate market outcomes (surface) which in turn have repercussions for production itself (core).

The dislocation of the co-ordination of production from the sphere of production itself (the core) to the market (the surface) relies on the existence of two opposite channels of communication between core and surface:

- 1 The core sends information about itself to the surface.
- 2 The economic agents, who interact within the framework of the surface relations, respond to this information by actions which, as an unintended side effect, maintain and reproduce the core structure.

From the fact that capitalism does indeed function it can be inferred that these two channels of communication between core and surface must be operative. Whenever Marx uses the word ‘expression’ he talks about channel 1, and whenever he uses the word ‘form’ he talks about channel 2.

A metaphor may be useful to illustrate these two channels. Say the core of the economy is your computer, and the surface is you. In order to run the <48> computer you need a monitor, which tells you what state the computer is in (channel 1), and a keyboard, through which you give the computer instructions (channel 2).

At the beginning of *Capital*, Marx takes a round trip through these two channels. In section one of the first chapter, Marx begins on the surface and follows channel 2, asking how the core must be structured if the market interactions of the economic agents are what mediate this structure. In Hegelian terms this is the inference from the form to the content, a deciphering of the ‘meaning’ of the form. In our computer illustration, this is the attempt to infer the structure of a computer program by the keyboard input. Section two verifies that the core structures postulated by this retroductive argument do indeed exist. Here the computer illustration does not fit very well; perhaps one can say that this step verifies that what we assume the computer program does can really be done on the basis of the inputs. In section 3, Marx follows the opposite channel (channel 1) and asks how the information in the core is transmitted to the surface, i.e., in Hegelian terms, how the content ‘expresses’ itself in the form. This is the question how the state of the computer is displayed on the monitor. The second chapter verifies that this expression of the core principles developed in section three of the first chapter indeed creates tools on the surface which allow the economic agents to pursue their immediate interests. In the computer illustration this verifies whether this display is something the user can understand and respond to in human language. One notices that in none of these steps the computer is opened or its program is analysed directly—since

in the case of social structures there is no box to open; social structures only exist in their effects.

### 3.4 From surface to core

I will now describe each of these four steps in more detail. After coming to the conclusion that there must be something deeper underlying the exchange value, Marx explores what this deeper thing is. For this, he looks at the instructions (keyboard inputs) which the market interactions on the surface send down to the core of the economy. Here our computer analogy again has its limits. The economic agents do not deliberately generate instructions for the economy. Instead, they interact with each other in specific ways referring to concrete situations. The instructions which the core receives from these surface interactions are not based on these specifics, they are, in critical realist terms, transfactual. One might view them as the resultant force from the sum total of innumerable interactions, or their general footprint.

Since each exchange equates one commodity with another in certain quantitative proportions, the transfactual impact of the multitude of exchanges criss-crossing the economy is that all goods have the same quality and differ only quantitatively. This common same quality in the commodities cannot have anything to do with the bodily properties of the goods, since it is exactly <49> the purpose of the exchanges to replace different use values with each other, i.e., the use values are too transitory to have an impact on the core.

The instructions which the surface sends to the core must be compatible with the core structure itself, otherwise the economy would not function. If the instructions which the core receives treat all goods as equal, as long as they are available in the fitting proportions, then the core structure of the economy must be such that all goods indeed count as smaller or bigger quantities of one and the same thing. What is this one and the same thing, this common substance of all products? Marx starts with the plausible, and at his time still uncontroversial, assumption that it must be the labour in the commodities. But since the difference of the use values is not visible to the core, the different kinds of useful labour cannot be visible either. The labour which serves as a measuring stick for all goods in the core must therefore be ‘labour in the abstract’, i.e., labour which is indifferent towards the form in which it is expended. And the commodities, as seen from the core, must be congelations of abstract human labour.

### 3.5 The double character of labour

Section two of the first chapter verifies that abstract human labour is not just a fiction but that it really exists, i.e., that there is really something that is common to all labour processes. Every labour process has two aspects. On the one hand it is the skilful handling of the object, and on the other it is the expenditure of human brain, muscle, etc. Under this second aspect, all labour is very much alike, otherwise it would not be possible that the same humans can

use their brains, muscles, etc. to perform a multitude of different kinds of labour. Labour is not completely alike, i.e., not all kinds of labour can be performed by everybody, but most labours can be performed by most members of society, and this is what matters. Usually, the workers need training before they can perform specific labour processes, but if one prorates the training time over the labour time performed, one ends up with quantitative, not qualitative differences of abstract labour.

One often hears the argument that abstract human labour is the product of capitalism, i.e., that there is no abstract labour outside capitalism. This is not my reading of Marx. Every labour process is the expenditure of human brain, muscle, sense organs, etc. In other words, abstract human labour is an aspect of every labour process. The fact that the same word 'labour' is used for many different activities shows that this abstraction can be made. Capitalism is distinguished by the fact that this aspect of the labour process is the criterion by which social production is directed. The core only sees the abstract labour. I.e., only through the abstract labour is the labour process socially connected. This special role of abstract labour leads to the *split* of the labour process into two parts, concrete labour creating use values and abstract labour creating values.

### 3.6 From core to surface

<50> Section three of the first chapter explains how information from the core of the economy is transmitted to the surface, i.e., how the computer represents its inner state on the monitor. Marx shows that already the simplest exchange relation, for instance '20 yards of linen = one coat', contains expressions of the values of the commodities involved. I.e., the two parties agreeing to such an exchange import information about the values of their products from the core into the surface.

Look for instance at the linen weaver. She knows how much labour and expenses are contained in the 20 yards of linen she just produced. She does not have the same information about the coat, but she knows that it is a product of labour, i.e., that she has to give up part of her own labour to get it, and she knows the use value of the coat. By agreeing to exchange her linen for the coat she tells the market that to her the coat is a worth while reward for having produced the linen. I.e., she expresses the value of her linen in the use value of the coat.

Marx observes that here the linen is active and the coat is passive. The linen weaver has spent labour producing the linen, labour which is wasted if she cannot exchange the linen against something she needs. She will not rest until she has made this exchange.

This expression of value is only an individual act, although value itself is a social relation binding every social production process together. In the remainder of section three, Marx explains how this expression develops through its own inner dialectic into the institution of money.

The linen weaver needs not only a coat but many other things. The activity of the linen creates therefore not only one but many expressions of the value of linen: besides in coats,

it is also expressed in tea, coffee, wheat, gold, iron, etc. This so-called Expanded form of value is no longer purely individual but reaches out into society. The very arbitrariness of the individual expression has given rise to a social totality of expressions. But these expressions do not yet induce a surface behavior that can leave a transfactual impact on the core, because the expressions are not homogeneous and simple enough. What Marx calls 'defects' are those features of the expressions of value which prevent them from functioning as conduits through which the surface agents pass instructions down to the core.

Therefore, a second transformation becomes necessary, and again this transformation is already implicitly given. Since linen expresses its value in coats, tea, coffee, wheat, gold, iron, etc., all those other commodities also express their values in linen. Now a deliberate social act is necessary, namely, the consensus to set linen aside as the commodity in which all other commodities express their values. This leads to the General form of value, the first form of value in which the expressions of value resonate with each other to yield a social consensus which can 'be heard' in the core.

<51> This is not yet the end of it. The Money form of value differs from the General form of value in only one seemingly innocuous detail: now it is known *a priori* that gold is everywhere and always the General equivalent. Since there can only be one General equivalent, this is an obvious further step, but we will see that this welding together of a social form of value with one particular use value has far-reaching implications. But before taking this up, Marx discusses a different issue.

### 3.7 The fetish-like character of commodities

Section four of the first chapter is not part of our round trip, although channels 1 and 2 play a role in it too. Immediately after the detailed analysis of the commodity, Marx surprises the reader with the assertion that the commodity is 'mysterious'. By this he means that a society in which individuals deal with each other through commodities does not allow them to control their own social relations. Marx asks two questions, which correspond to the two channels:

- Where is the mysterious character of the commodity located, i.e., what are the mechanisms through which social control is lost (this corresponds to channel 2 from surface to core).
- What is the origin of this mysterious character, i.e., since the surface is a reflection of the production process (channel 1, from core to surface), what aspect of the production process is responsible for that 'mysterious' character of the surface relations?

The answer to the first question lies in the discrepancy between those aspects of the social production process which are regulated by the surface interactions of the agents, and the forms in which these interactions are experienced by the agents. The equality of all human

labour is enforced by the exchangeability of all commodities, and social labour time is allocated and accounted by the quantitative market relations between goods. In other words, the social connections between the producers' labours are not perceived and acted upon by the producers as such, but take the form of properties of things.

People try to take advantage of these social properties of their things, but they are often frustrated in their efforts, because the social properties change in the exact moment when people react to them:

The magnitudes of value vary continually, independently of the will, foreknowledge and actions of the exchangers. Their own social movement has for them the form of a movement of things—things which, far from being under their control, in fact control them. [Mar76, pp. 167/8]

<52> Critical realism can clarify this argument. For this let us turn to Bhaskar's primordial retroductive argument, which infers general properties of the world (stratification, homogeneity, openness, etc.) from the fact that science is possible. Our world might be such science is impossible, but in fact it is possible to learn about the world through science, and this tells us something about the world.

Bhaskar registers the abstract possibility of the impossibility of science, but does not give any examples of areas in which science is indeed impossible. Marx, in the commodity fetishism section, gives such an example: the market is an area in which science and rational activity is not possible for the market participants. This is why Marx calls the commodity 'magical'. With respect to the social properties of the commodities, there is no separation between the transitive and intransitive dimensions, because that which the agents investigate and act upon is already the secret by-product of their own activity. This is a framework in which rationality and ingenuity does not allow the economic agents to impose their will on the world, but on the contrary, they become the pawns in a bigger game which they do not control. Marx uses the metaphor of a 'phantasmagoria', translated with 'fantastic' in [Mar76, p. 165], an optical illusion created with the help of a magic lantern. In more modern terms, the market participants live in a virtual reality, which gives them the illusion to be able to act in their interest, but which channels them towards a predetermined outcome.

The second question is as follows: is there anything in the production process itself which paves the ground for this lack of social control? Marx points out that already during production the producers consider not only the natural properties of the labour process, but they take a peek at the elusive social properties of their products as well.

Unfortunately Marx does not elaborate on the significance of this. Therefore I will try to supply my own explanation. To Marx, the relations in the production process proper, where human individuals interact with nature, are central for the fabric for the whole society. This is the point where no illusions are allowed, where actions must be most rational, where mankind has to be most awake. Nature does not yield to pious wishes but only to scientifically guided purposeful activity. Now if the man-made market properties of goods are given consideration in this domain of direct production, this introduces irrationalism precisely at that

point where relations should be the most strongly be directed towards reality. The lack of control is the spread of this irrationalism.

## 3.8 The exchange process

In the second chapter, Marx investigates how the expressions of value discussed in section three of the first chapter serve the practical needs of the commodity traders on the surface of the economy. While section two of the <53> first chapter confirmed that the core is real, the second chapter confirms that the surface is functional.

A simple commodity producer who goes to market in order to barter his products pursues two opposite goals in the same transaction. On the one hand, he wants to get the use value in this exchange that best suits his needs, and on the other, he wants to realise the value of his commodity which he is giving in exchange.

These two goals are so much at odds with each other, that Marx presents them metaphorically as the goals of two different agents, of the commodity producer himself on the one hand, and his commodity on the other. The commodity is single-mindedly interested in realising its *value*, while the commodity producer is the procrastinator restraining the commodity until he has found a *use value* that suits him. The commodity, which represents the social context in which the commodity producer stands, is depicted as having its own will, because the market relations between the commodities are beyond the control of the traders. Marx's metaphorical conflict between the commodity and its owner is an apt characterization of the juggling act, by which people fit their individual goals and desires into the invisible but inescapable social framework in which they find themselves.

The contradiction between the two goals can be seen as follows: as soon as the commodity producer has set his mind on a specific use value, he is limited in offering his commodity only to the producers of this article, and therefore cannot get the same fair equivalent which he would be able to get if he offered his commodity to everyone.

This contradiction can be 'solved' by splitting the barter into two transactions: a sale which has the purpose to realise the value of the commodity, and a purchase which has the purpose of selecting the use value desired by the individual. For this, money is necessary. But Marx emphasizes that this money does not have to be introduced now as an instrument to facilitate the exchange, since it already exists as the most appropriate social expression of value.

In other words, the origin of money lies in the core, not the surface. This is an important insight. Whether something is a good money or not is not decided by how well it facilitates the exchange, but by how well it induces the economic agents to treat their products as values, i.e., to equalise their labours, and encourages them to make profits by production instead of speculation. In today's global economy, money does not need to be commodity money, but these criteria for a good money still apply.

### 3.9 The curse of money

The second chapter shows therefore that the expression of value developed in section three of the first chapter are functional for the exchange process, which in turn co-ordinates production in such a way that abstract labour is the main organising principle. The system is consistent, channels 1 and 2 fit <54> together. But the third chapter shows that the best expression of value on the surface also generates surface behaviours which send messages down to the core that go beyond the needs of a social production process based on abstract labour.

This novelty appears at first in the function of money as a hoard. After the social form of General equivalent has once and for all been attached to a specific use value, say gold, new behaviors arise. Now it becomes practically desirable to accumulate gold, to hold on to wealth in its abstract form. The desire to accumulate money is *insatiable* because:

according to its concept, money is the quintessence of all use values; but, since it is always only a given amount of money (here, capital), its quantitative limitation stands in contradiction to its quality. The constant drive beyond its own limitation is therefore inherent in its nature. [Mar73, p. 270] and [Mar86, p. 200], translation adjusted.

This quote is from *Grundrisse*, but it is obvious that Marx was employing the same argument in *Capital*.

Let me restate: Qualitatively, money gives access to all use values, i.e., qualitatively it is universal. This qualitative universality comes in conflict with its quantitative boundedness, since money always only exists as a limited sum of money. This conflict is felt by everyone dealing with money, and an obvious resolution is to try to get more money. The drive for quantitative expansion belongs therefore to the nature of money. It is what I call the ‘curse’ of money. Now money is no longer servant but king.

The tendency of money to multiply itself is therefore as old as money itself. It does not come from human greed but from the money form. If there is one key which unlocks all doors, it seems very rational to get hold of that key. Not only the greedy capitalist, but also the worker who willingly agrees to overtime, the consumers who purchase shiny toys so that they do not have to feel their social isolation (i.e., the modern version of Marx’s ‘spendthrift’,) are victims of the curse of money.

The curse of money has its origin in circulation. But it finds its rational kernel, its alethia, not in the withdrawal of money from circulation, but in the production of surplus value, which necessarily encompasses both production and circulation, as Marx shows in the fifth chapter. Not the miser but the capitalist is its ‘rational’ agent.

Capitalist business can only be an exception as long as the mechanisms to multiply values are not in place in the core of the economy. For a long time, capital existed therefore only at the periphery of the economy, as merchant capital or usury capital siphoning surplus value out of circulation. Early examples, mentioned by Marx in the tenth chapter [Mar76, p. 345],

in which the motive to make more and more money was directly tied into production, are the gold and silver mines in antiquity—these were at the same time among the few places where slaves were systematically worked to death.

<55> Only with the creation of a modern proletariat, i.e., with the wholesale exclusion of the direct producers from their means of production, could the principle of self-valorization be elevated to the main principle governing production. In the formal subsumption of labour under capital, the capital relation still in part hovers on the surface, in the changed property relations, while the character of the production process is unchanged. Only with the real subsumption of labour under capital, i.e., with the development of machinery which controls the labourer, speeds him up, and at the same time sucks the skills out of the labour process, has the capital relation become fully centred in the core of the economy, and has the expropriation of the worker been completed.

### 3.10 Does critical realism make a difference?

I will break off my summary here. Although this summary is deeply informed by critical realism, it does not have Bhaskarianisms sticking out of it everywhere comparable to the Hegelianisms in Marx’s own text. This is a sign that dialectical critical realism fits better than Hegel’s philosophy and blends in with the flow of the argument. Dialectical critical realism comes in through the stratification of the economy into core and surface, the reality of generative mechanisms, the use of retroductive arguments and of dialectics, the conscious use of irreducibility and emergence, the recognition of contradictions and their use as signposts pointing toward hidden layers, the recognition of situations where science is not possible, etc. Nevertheless, even someone unfamiliar with these general concepts should find this narrative understandable. The framework proposed here is more systematic and easier accessible than Marx’s original argument—but it is also narrower, since something is always lost in such translations.

The interpretations of Marx given in this essay are a summary of my *Annotations* [Ehr00], a work which is still incomplete at the time of this writing. Some of the interpretations given here may have to be revised, but I hope that

- any errors in the above translation of Marx’s arguments can be corrected within the DCR framework or will lead to a remedy of those shortcomings that may exist in DCR or Marxism itself;
- Marx’s easier accessibility will take him out of the hands of the ‘cranks’ and open him to a wider scientific community;
- the gap between Marxism and modern emancipatory social sciences will be narrowed, and that this will make it easier to refute irrealist apologies of capitalism.

The main stumbling block however is not the theoretical power of academic emancipatory social sciences, which is steadily increasing, but its theory-practice inconsistency. Again,



besides Marxism there is only one <56> branch of modern social sciences which addresses this: dialectical critical realism.

## Bibliography

- [AB70] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. NLB, London, 1970. Translated by Ben Brewster. 1
- [BFR02] Andrew Brown, Steve Fleetwood, and John Michael Roberts, editors. *Critical Realism and Marxism*. Routledge, 2002. ii
- [Bha89a] Roy Bhaskar. *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of Contemporary Human Sciences*. Harvester-Wheatsheaf, London and New York, second edition, 1989. 2
- [Bha89b] Roy Bhaskar. *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*. Verso, London and New York, 1989. 2
- [Bha93] Roy Bhaskar. *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. Verso, London, New York, 1993. 2, 3
- [Bha97] Roy Bhaskar. *A Realist Theory of Science*. Verso, London and New York, reprint of the 1977 second edition, 1997. 2
- [Ehr00] Hans G. Ehrbar. Annotations to Karl Marx’s ‘Capital’. Draft version under development. Online—available at <http://www.econ.utah.edu/ehrbar/akmc.htm>, 2000. 2, 12
- [Len61] V. I. Lenin. *Philosophical Notebooks*, volume 38 of *Collected Works*. Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961. 1
- [Mar73] Karl Marx. *Grundrisse*. Vintage, 1973. Translation and foreword by Martin Nicolaus. 11
- [Mar76] Karl Marx. *Capital*, volume I. Vintage (Random House), New York, 1976. Introduction by Ernest Mandel, translation by Ben Fowkes. 9, 11
- [Mar86] Karl Marx. *Economic Works 1857–61*, volume 28 of *Marx Engels Collected Works*. International Publishers, New York, 1986. Contains the beginning of the economic manuscripts of 1857–58 (first version of “Capital”), known as “Grundrisse”. 11
- [Mar98] R. Marsden. The unknown masterpiece: Marx’s model of capital. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 22(3):297–324, May 1998. 1
- [Rub72] I. Rubin. *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*. Black and Red, Detroit, 1972. Originally appeared in Moscow in 1928. 4