

**ABSTRACTS for *CAPITAL AS A SOCIAL KIND:  
DEFINITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN  
THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY***

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Abstract – Chapter One

**INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL KINDS IN SOCIAL THEORY**

Chapter One extends scientific realism's attention to natural kinds to the study of society by arguing that the object of Marx's *Capital* was the study of capital as a social kind. This means giving what we would today characterize as a real definition of it: by insisting that meaning follows reference rather than the reverse, we pick out those causal properties that distinctively characterize capital as a feature of social life the way the formula H<sub>2</sub>O picks out the molecular structure of water. Arguments by Althusser and Backhaus that Marx did not succeed in developing the concept of capital as an object adequate to his science are rejected. Rejected also are suggestions that Marx abandoned efforts to define the concept of capital.

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Abstract – Chapter Two

WHY IS THIS LABOR VALUE?  
COMMODITY PRODUCING LABOR AS A SOCIAL KIND

Chapter Two offers a real definition of the form of labor that accounts for the commodity and value: persons labor independently and they do so as part of the social division of labor – they produce goods useless to them for private exchange. The explanation of this shows how it corresponds to the three key features of contemporary scientific realism’s “central core conception of natural kinds” (Boyd). Further, the chapter tracks the continuity of scientific reference between Ricardo’s conclusion that labor was the source of value and Marx’s presentation. In an Appendix devoted to a close reading of §2 of *Capital’s* first chapter, the suggestion by value-form theorists that Marx there reduced the substance of value to a bare physiological expenditure of effort while ignoring labor’s social form is rejected.

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Abstract – Chapter Three

SEPARATION AND SUBORDINATION: THE REAL  
DEFINITION OF CAPITAL AS A SOCIAL KIND

Chapter Three offers a real definition of capital as a social kind. Capital is characterized by two separations: the separation of workers from the conditions of production and the separation of enterprises from each other. Abstraction makes access to the intersection of these causal structures possible, but those uses of abstraction that search for the highest level of generality are rejected; instead the target is specific particularity, capital's *differentia specifica*. The double separation is tracked through the cycle of capital's reproduction: as premise (labor's possibility), as starting point (labor's capacity), as process (labor's activity), and as result (labor's objectivity). Expressed structurally, capital is the free worker's alienated separation from and subordination to the means of production as values; expressed as a form of the structure's activity, capital is living labor in the process of production appropriated by objective labor for the sake of the latter's increase.

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Abstract – Chapter Four

THE CONCEPT OF CAPITAL IN THE *GRUNDRISSE*

Chapter Four traces Marx's development of the concept of "capital in general" in the *Grundrisse*. Marx's effort to specify the concept of capital depends on an understanding of reference we would today call ostensive and he works to pick out causal structures that are constitutive of the thing studied. The intersection of those structures, capital's double separation, is here tracked through three moments of capital's development: the simple concept of capital, the moment of the unity of production and valorization, and the moment of the unity of production and circulation. In the last of these capital's distinctive structure of separations stands revealed as the precondition, ground and goal, and limit of the capitalist mode of production. An appendix explains why we may speak of value as a social kind.

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Abstract – Chapter Five

VALUE AND CONTRACT FORMATION

Chapter Five shows how a textbook rule of law may be explained by Marx's analysis of value. The Anglo-American doctrine of consideration has played a role in the enforcement of promises for over 400 years but has never been well explained – traditional explanations are acknowledged to be circular: you assume the enforceability of one promise in order to establish the enforceability of the other. The key to the puzzle can be found in the role the enforcement of bargains plays in the social reproduction of value. Law is required because commodity owners, who produce independently, are ultimately indifferent to one another. Force is necessary to bind their relationship, and the analysis of this shows the sense in which it is meaningful to talk of the economic base determining the legal superstructure.

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Abstract – Chapter Six

WHAT OUGHT TO BE DONE: MARXISM AND  
NORMATIVITY

Chapter Six generalizes the approach of Chapter Five by arguing that the social kinds that characterize historically specific modes of production provide the material ground for understanding structures of law and morality. That Marxism makes no place for normativity, that Marx did not think capitalism unjust, and that Marxists cannot believe in human rights are all ideas this argument rejects. Ultimately capital is unjust because it fails as an ecological kind. While rights mark an achievement to defend against the attacks of a decaying social form, they remain limited insofar as they are rooted in and reproduce capital's separations. Socialists look beyond these to an association based on the full and free development of every individual as the ruling principle of social life. The move from separation to association is illustrated by tracking the trajectory of expressive freedom from soapbox right to social need.

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Abstract – Chapter Seven

WINNING THE BATTLE OF DEMOCRACY

Chapter Seven argues that the transition to socialism means moving beyond capital as a social kind. This means overcoming capital's double separation, and, because capitalism has made the means of production social, democratic forms must be found to accomplish this; free and associated workers must learn to control production in common. That is, the transition to socialism is a matter of winning the battle of democracy. Challenges by Alec Nove and others that any such project is utopian are rejected: these criticisms rely on a social vision that leaves capital's separations intact; moreover they ignore a pivotal distinction between the separation of a unity and difference within a unity. Transforming capital's separations means, first of all, transforming capital's organization of work. But democracy at work can be achieved only if joined to a national and global movement for political power, one united with today's movements for democracy. Reciprocally, overcoming capital's separations is a precondition to completing any popular democratic struggle.