

Lecture Notes 12 : Appendix (*Results*)

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Assume, for a moment, that prices correspond to values, that the total number of hours worked remains constant, and that the price per commodity accruing to commodity-producing firms is given by p , and the quantity sold by q . Then:

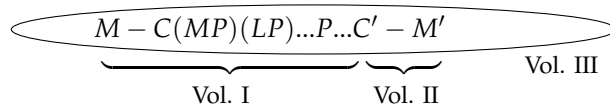
Total sales = pq

If productivity $\uparrow \rightarrow p \downarrow$. Thus if sales are to grow, q must \uparrow faster than $p \downarrow$. Therefore:

with the development of capitalist production and the resultant reduction in prices, there must be an increase in the quantity of goods, in the number of articles that must be sold. (967)

Productivity growth generates an imperative to constantly grow the market for commodities.

The structure of *Capital*



Vol. I: The Process of Production of Capital

Vol. II: The Process of Circulation of Capital

Vol. III: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole

Reification

In general, a social relation R is reified if and only if R is a social relation between people, but R only appears (or 'manifests itself') as a relation between things. Insofar as capitalism involves just such a relation, as Marx maintains, it involves the personification of things, and the reification of persons:

The capitalist functions only as personified capital, capital as a person, just as the worker is no more than labour personified. That labour is for him just effort and torment, whereas it belongs to the capitalist as a substance that creates and increases wealth, and in fact it is an element of capital, incorporated into it in the production process as its living, variable component. Hence the rule of the capitalist over the worker is the rule of things over man, of dead labour over the living, of the product over the producer. (990)

There is a sense, therefore, in which the antagonistic form of relationship that capitalism entails is not one between two classes of people, capitalists and workers. It is, rather, most fundamentally an antagonism between people and things.

In elaboration of this claim, Marx reverts to Feuerbachian language:

Thus at the level of material production... we find the same situation that we find in religion at the ideological level, namely the inversion of subject into object and vice versa. Viewed historically this inversion is the indispensable transition without which wealth as such, i.e. the relentless productive forces of social labour, which alone can form the material base of a free human society, could not possibly be created by force at the expense of the majority. This antagonistic stage cannot be avoided, any more than it is possible for man to avoid the stage in which his spiritual energies are given a religious definition as powers independent of him. (990)

Forms of inversion

Inversion à la Feuerbach:

God creates Man → Man creates God

Inversion à la early Marx:

Man controls Property → Property controls Man ('the will becomes the property of property')

Inversion à la mature Marx:

Man controls Machines → Machines control Man

Just as man is governed, in religion, by the products of his own brain, so, in capitalist production, he is governed by the products of his own hand. (772)

Bourgeois and Proletarians

It follows from Marx's reification account that there is a sense in which both workers and capitalists are dominated under capitalism:

The capitalist is just as enslaved by the relationship of capitalist as is his opposite pole, the worker, albeit in a quite different manner. (990)

In what ways is this manner different?

Reification and Fetishism

In the *Results* fetishism (whether of commodities, or of capital) is clearly set out as a necessary *consequence* of reification:

It is obvious from the very outset that the worker who is denuded of the means of production is thereby deprived of the means of subsistence... Thus even in the first process, what stamps money or commodities as capital, is neither their money nature, nor their commodity nature, nor the material use-value of these commodities as means of production or subsistence, but the circumstance that this money and this commodity... confront labour-power, stripped of all material wealth, as autonomous powers, personified in their owners. The objective conditions essential to the realization of labour are alienated from the worker and become manifest as fetishes endowed with a will and a soul of their own. Commodities, in short, appear as the purchasers of persons. (1003)

Suggested Reading

Rubin, I.I. (1928), *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, ch. 1.

Further Reading

Honneth, A. (2008), *Reification*, Oxford.