CHAPTER 2

Value Form and Abstract Labor in Marx: A Critical Review of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's Notion of 'Real Abstraction'

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Marx's Concepts of Value, Value Form and Abstract Labor

The Marxist concept of value is radically different from the Ricardian concept of value as 'labor expended'. Unlike the Ricardian theory of value, the Marxist theory of value is a *monetary theory*. In the Marxist system, the value of a commodity cannot be defined in isolation, but *exclusively in relation to all other commodities*, in the process of exchange. In this relation of exchange, value is materialized in money. The essential feature of the 'market economy' (of capitalism) is thus not simply commodity exchange but monetary circulation and money. Barter is for Marx non-existing, as all exchange transactions are made up of separate acts of exchange of commodities with money.

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In capitalism, each commodity is produced not as a mere useful thing, that is a use value, but as a bearer of value, a thing carrying a price. Even before entering the market, each 'product' potentially carries a price, which though will be realized (validated) in the exchange process. Prices are thus determined in the process of capitalist production, that is in a historically unique process of (capitalist) production-for-the-exchange-and-for-profit, a process which unites immediate production with circulation.

Money is thus conceived as *the adequate form of appearance of both value and capital*. According to Marx's analysis, it is the material embodiment of *abstract and therefore equal human labor*, which the capitalist appropriates, and which in the framework of capitalist relations of exploitation is accumulated and functions as a 'self-valorising value'. This point requires, though, further elaboration.

That 'wealth', that is to say everything that is useful, is mostly a product of labor applies not only to capitalism, but also to every mode of production. Every mode of production presupposes the *worker–producer* and his (her) particular relationship with the *means of production,* from which can be deciphered the particular structural characteristics of the community in which that mode of production is predominant. However, as stressed by Marx on the very first page of *Capital*, it is only in 'those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails', that wealth 'presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities"' (Marx 1990: 125).[1] It is thus obvious that it is not because it is a product of labor that wealth is a commodity, but because this labor is carried out within the framework of certain social relations of production and so is subjected to the standardization and uniformity that is inherent in these relations of production. *Value* is a manifestation of the structural characteristics of the capitalist mode of production and not a manifestation of labor in general.

It is therefore clear that Marx conceived of value as a historically specific *social relation*: Value is the 'property' that products of labor acquire in capitalism, a property which is actualized in the market, through the exchangeability of any product of labor with any other, that is through their character as commodities bearing a specific (monetary) price on the market. From the *Grundrisse* (1857–1858),[2] to *Capital* (1867),[3] Marx insisted that value is an expression of relations exclusively characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, wherever in his work he introduces the concept of 'generalised commodity production' (such as in the first section of the first volume of *Capital*) so as to comprehend value, in reality he is shaping a preliminary intellectual construct (which to some extent corresponds to the superficial 'visible reality' of the capitalist economy), which will help him to come to grips with capitalist production, and subsequently construct his concept of it. In 1858–1859 he wrote: 'The simple circulation is mainly an abstract sphere of the bourgeois overall production process, which manifests itself through its own determinations as a trend, a mere form of appearance of a deeper process which lies behind it, and equally results from it but also produces it—the industrial capital' (MEGA II.2 1980: 68–69).

Marx approaches the problem of value creating labor by way of the question of commensurability. Put in another way, where Classical Political Economy believed that it was giving a conclusive answer (qualitatively different objects—use values—are rendered economically commensurate—exchangeable—because they are all products of labor), Marx simply sees a question which has to be answered: How and why can qualitatively different kinds of labor be made equivalents? Marx clearly questions the classical notion of 'equal' labor: 'Let us suppose that one ounce of gold, one ton of iron, one quarter of wheat and twenty yards of silk are exchange-values of equal magnitude […] But digging gold, mining iron, cultivating wheat and weaving silk are qualitatively different kinds of labour. In fact, what appears objectively as diversity of the use-values, appears, when looked at dynamically, as diversity of the activities which produce those use-values' (Marx 1981: 29).

For the riddle of the equivalence of different kinds of labor to be solved, what must be comprehended is the *social character of labour under capitalism*: The capitalist organization of production and the resultant social division of labor is underpinned by the direct (institutional) independence of each individual producer (capitalist) from all the others. Nevertheless, all these individual productive procedures are linked indirectly between themselves through the mechanism of the market, since each of them produces not for himself or for the 'community' but for exchange on the market, with the purpose of acquiring a profit not lower than the average profit of the economy. This procedure imposes an increasing social (capitalistic) uniformity on all individual productive activities precisely through generalized commodity exchange and competition between individual capitalist production processes (commodity producers).

Marx defines this procedure of social homogenization of individual labor procedures and productive processes through introduction of the term *abstract labor*. Labor *has* a dual nature in the capitalist mode of production—on the one hand, it is concrete labor (labor which produces a concrete use value, as in any mode of production) and on the other, it is at the same time abstract labor (labor in general), *labor which is from the social viewpoint qualitatively identical*. From this stem the overall commensurability and exchangeability of the products of labor, that is that they are constituted (produced) as commodities: 'The labour contained in exchange-value is abstract universal social labour, which is brought about by the universal alienation of individual labour' (Marx 1981: 56–57).

This means that 'every commodity is *the* commodity which, as a result of the alienation of its particular use-value, must appear as the direct materialisation of universal labour-time' (Marx 1981: 45).

Put in another way, every commodity attains the social form of general exchangeability, in abstraction from its specific utility or any other characteristic, expressing its value in monetary units. Marx formulates at this point what Alfred Sohn-Rethel defined as the 'real abstraction' of the value form. Commenting on the fact that as values commodities carry a monetary name (express themselves in a—potential—quantity of money), Sohn-Rethel correctly stresses: 'In this capacity money must be vested with an abstractness of the highest level to enable it to serve as the equivalent to every kind of commodity that may appear on the market' (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 6).[4]

In Vol. 1 of *Capital* (Penguin Classics edition) the analysis of abstract labor takes up no more than seven pages (131–137). Nevertheless, he hastens to declare that he is proud of the formulation of this concept, a declaration the like of which we would probably find no more than once or twice in all the rest of his writings.[5]

Abstract labor does not 'emerge' from the concrete, it is not an identity of it: it is the historically specific property of *all* labor under capitalism. Concrete-natural labor as a distinct concept can in no way be reduced to abstract labor or constitute the content of exchange value: Abstract labor is a distinct 'property' of *every (concrete) act of labor under the capitalist mode of production*, that is an expression of the particular form of social arrangement that characterizes that (and only that) specific mode of production, irrespective of whether the work in question is simple or more complex and requiring a high degree of specialization.[6]

The problem of social homogenization of labor to which one is referred by the concept of abstract labor is thus different from the problem of 'quantitative correspondence' of work of differing degrees of intensity, specialization, and productivity. For one hour of the work of an engineer to be able to correspond (quantitatively) to *n* hours of the work of an unskilled laborer, the two types of work must already constitute 'qualitatively similar' (i.e. *abstract*) labor.

In conclusion: The products of labor are commodities, values and exchange values, not simply because they are products of labor but because they are products of abstract labor, that is 'capitalist labor' (labor which is performed under capitalist conditions, within the framework of the capitalist mode of production), labor creating products-for-exchange-and-for-profit: commodities. Abstract labor produces value-carrying commodities. Value constitutes the relation of general exchangeability of commodities, and is expressed through money—their common measure, which lacks every predicate beyond that of size.

Here it is worth noting two points:

(a) Abstract labor (and consequently 'abstract labor time') is not a straightforward (empirically verifiable) property of labor but an 'abstraction', that is a social form which expresses the social homogenization of labor in the capitalist mode of production. Marx's notion of abstract labor renders thus comprehensible this very process of social homogenization of labor *under the capitalist mode of production*: 'Universal labor-time itself is an abstraction which, as such, does not exist for commodities' (Marx 1981: 45).

That which empirically exists is merely the specific commodities which are bought and sold on the market (and so exchanged with money).

(b) Abstract labor, as the concept which conveys the specifically social (capitalist) character of the labor process, does not have to do with each separate productive procedure but with the *social interrelation of all* the separate, institutionally unrelated, *capitalist productive processes*, as this interrelation reveals itself in the market-place: 'Social labour-time exists in these commodities in a latent state, so to speak, and becomes evident only in the course of their exchange […]. Universal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result' (Idem: 45).

These two issues suggest why the whole weight of the analysis must be placed on the *manifestation* of value as *exchange value* (the 'form of appearance' of value) and this is where Marx places it: he does not close his analysis of value with the concept of abstract labor but on the contrary devotes by far the greatest part of his analysis (107 of the 120 pages of Part I of Vol. 1 of *Capital*) to the value form, or value as an exchange relation between commodities, and to money.

The price expressing the general exchangeability for any commodity with all others is the sole *objective materialization* (form of appearance) of value. In *Capital* Marx introduces his readers to these questions through the following phrase:

> The reality of the value of commodities differs in this respect from Dame Quickly, that we don't know "where to have it". The value of commodities is the very opposite of the coarse materiality of their substance, not an atom of matter enters into its composition. Turn and examine a single commodity, by itself, as we will, yet in so far as it remains an object of value, it seems impossible to grasp it. [...]. *Value can only manifest itself in the social relation of commodity to commodity.* In fact, we started from exchange-value, or the exchange relation of commodities, in order to get at the value that lies hidden behind it. We must now return to this form under which value first appeared to us. (Marx 1990: 138–139, emphasis added)

Marx's whole analysis makes clear that the notion of *abstract* labor does not mainly refer to a process of subjective or intellectual appropriation of reality (by Marx or any other intellectual), but to an objective process: the formation of an aspect *of the structure of capitalist reality*, the typical configuration of certain elements of this reality. Deciphering this reality is then characteristic of Marx's analysis, which conveys the causal relationships that regulate reality without ever themselves appearing as such in the realm of empirical reality and of appearance, since they do not belong to the tangible entities and phenomena (Marx 1990: 433, 680).

The conclusion that may be inferred from the above theses is that the value of commodities never appears as such, as an immediately perceivable (empirically observable) and thus measurable entity. It finds expression only through the form of its appearance, that is commodity prices. This form of appearance of value does not, as we have argued, relate to each commodity separately, that is to say, it is not a matter of isolated, of *initially mutually independent* expressions of the value of each commodity. The *form* registers the *relationship of exchange* between each commodity and *all other* commodities.

Marx's Methodology and Alfred Sohn-Rethel's Notion of 'Real Abstraction'. A Critical Discussion

As can be inferred from Section 1 of this chapter, a methodological issue in Vol. 1 of *Capital*, which must always be taken into account, is that Marx examines the question *what is value* and subsequently *what is money* in the first three chapters of the first volume of *Capital* before offering a definition of capitalism (the capitalist mode of production—CMP). This method of exposition, aiming at the gradual maturation of concepts, has led certain Marxists to the view that value is not a constituent category of the concept of the CMP but that it gives a preliminary description of a (supposed) historical epoch of commodity production, which preceded capitalism.

As argued above, Marx introduces this concept of generalized commodity production only as an intellectual construct that will help him to approach and then to establish the concept of capitalist production.

In one of his latest texts, Marx himself describes his method as follows:

> *De prime abord*, I do not proceed from 'concepts,' hence neither from the 'concept of value,' and am therefore in no way concerned to 'divide' it. What I proceed from is the simplest social form in which the product of labour presents itself in contemporary society, and this is the '*commodity*.' This I analyse, initially in the *form in which it appears*. […] The mere *form* of appearance is not its own *content*. […] For this reason when analysing the commodity, I do not immediately drag in definitions of 'capital,' not even when dealing with the 'use-value' of the commodity. Such definitions are bound to be sheer nonsense as long as we have advanced no further than the analysis of the elements of the commodity. (Marx 1881)

To be consistent with Marx's methodology, one must take into consideration his whole analysis from the commodity to money as the general equivalent, and from there to the notion of capital as a social relation, the circuit of capital, money as the general form of appearance of capital, credit money etc. Otherwise, apart from the detachment of the concept of value from the CMP and its projection to a plethora of 'commodity'—forms and—modes of production, the introductory reference to value and money 'in itself' creates again the illusion that in the first three chapters of the first volume of *Capital* there is (or may be) a conclusive theoretical investigation of the Marxian concepts under question.

It is true that the commodity is the simplest economic form 'in contemporary society' (Marx, op.cit.). However, if we restrict our analysis to the first section of Volume 1 of *Capital*, we will miss reference to the most characteristic commodity of the CMP, the existence of which is also the most significant *presupposition for the generalization of commodity production*: labor-power. Labor power subsumed under capital, that is the capital–wage–labour relation, constitutes the basis of the CMP as such.

The distinguishing feature of the capitalist economy is that all active agents of production are commodity *owners,* because even if they are not commodity *producers* (capitalists), they possess the commodity of labor power. Only under this precondition all products of labor, including, first of all, those that constitute the laborer's remuneration, become commodities, that is goods produced for-exchange-and-for-profit bearing a value which is expressed in monetary units; only under this precondition useful-concrete labor exists also as abstract labor; we may therefore speak about a real abstraction.

It is exactly this point that Alfred Sohn-Rethel misses when he puts forward a notion of *real abstraction* supposedly extending through all the 'ages of commodity production from their beginnings in ancient Greece to the present day' (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 5). He further explains:

> This kind of exchange—commodity exchange properly speaking—is the one which is characteristic of Greek antiquity. It leads to a monetary economy and to a system of social synthesis centred on private appropriation.
>
> 'Commodities' then answered the Marxian definition as 'products of the labour of private individuals who work independently of each other'. (Sohn-Rethel 1978: 98)

Such analyses, portraying the character of ancient Greek economy and society as a 'market economy', are most often put forward by non-Marxist historians, sociologists or economists. Characteristic is the case of certain economic historians (portrayed as 'modernists', like Edward E. Cohen, Alain Bresson), who challenge the theorizations of Moses I. Finley, Karl Polanyi and others (the so-called 'archaists') on the archaic and 'embedded'-in-polity, pre-capitalist, character of the ancient Greek economy (Milios 2018, Ch. 7). But even John Maynard Keynes argues that capitalism was born in the antiquity! Commenting on 'Ancient Currencies', he writes:

> Individualistic capitalism and the practices pertaining to that system were undoubtedly invented in Babylonia [...]. Perhaps the clue to the economic history of Greece from the Homeric period to the fifth century B.C. may be partly found in the gradual adaptation of the primitive economy of the tribes to the individualistic capitalism which they found in Asia Minor in a decadent and confused form but reaching back in its origins and in the experience behind it to a highly developed and complex system of great antiquity. (Keynes 2013: 253–254)

However, each and every version of this problematique stressing a supposed affinity between the economy of ancient Greece and capitalism (as 'commodity producing economies') either implicitly or explicitly fully disentangles the notion of capitalism from any connotation or hint of connection with wage-labor. Marx has repeatedly referred to pre-capitalist 'mobile wealth piled up through usury—especially that practised against landed property—and through mercantile profits' (Marx 1993: 504), but always in an effort to distinguish it from the capitalist form of 'mobile wealth'.

But the *mere presence of monetary wealth*, and even the achievement of a kind of supremacy on its part, is in no way sufficient for this *dissolution into capital* to happen. Or else ancient Rome, Byzantium etc. would have ended their history with free labor and capital, or rather begun a new history. There, too, *the dissolution of the old property relations was bound up with development of monetary wealth—of trade* etc. But […] this dissolution led in fact to the supremacy of the countryside over the city. […] Capital does not create the objective conditions of labour (Idem: 506–507, emphasis added).

Value and abstract labor are notions pertaining to the capital relation, not to 'exchange', the market, or ancient currencies. I will further elaborate on this issue, bringing into the discussion the conclusions of Marxist historical research.

The dominant mode of production in the societies of antiquity was the classic (or patriarchal, as Marx names it) mode of production. In this form of ('classic') slavery, the slave-owners were landowners who, however, were *absent from the production process* and conceded the management-supervision of this process to a special category of slaves, ensuring for themselves the surplus appropriation through the extra-economic coercion inherent in the master–slave relationship. Marx cites Aristotle, who writes: 'Whenever the masters are not compelled to plague themselves with supervision, the overseer assumes *this honour*, while the masters pursue public affairs or philosophy' (Aristotle, cited by Idem: 509).

This form of exploitation fully separates (manual) work from the ruling class of citizens, who by definition abstain from any form of production, practicing only politics and philosophy in the cities. The prominent Marxist historian of antiquity, G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, emphasizes the fact that 'the function of slave (and freedman) overseers was essential […] playing a very important role in the economy, perhaps far more so than has been generally realized' (de Ste. Croix 1981: 258). Perry Anderson also writes along these lines:

> Graeco-Roman Antiquity had always constituted a universe centred on cities. […] The Graeco-Roman towns were […], in origin and principle, urban congeries of land-owners. […] The condition of possibility of this metropolitan grandeur in the absence of municipal industry was the existence of slave-labour in the countryside […]; the surplus product that provided the fortunes of the possessing class could be extracted without its presence on the land. (Anderson 1974: 19–20, 23, 24)

In ancient societies, apart from the dominant classic slave mode of production, there also existed the following forms and modes of production:

(a) Simple commodity production of freedmen artisans or farmers (Ste. Ctoix. 1981: 33).
(b) Wage-labor, though to a rather limited extent, especially among the poor and in public construction plants.[7] However, this form of labor was regarded as a form of (temporary) voluntary enslavement, and was generally disdained (Kyrtatas 2002).
(c) A self-contained exploitative mode of production based on slave labor also existed, which was characterized by the concentration of both the ownership *and* the management-supervision of the means of production in the hands of the slave-owner. Characteristic of this mode of production is that the slave-owner, in nearly all cases a metic, that is a non-citizen, was *present in the production process*, which was production for the market aiming at the appropriation of surplus in monetary form. I have named this non-dominant pre-capitalist mode of production the *money-begetting slave mode of production* (Milios 2018).

In the words of Aristotle, the process has 'no limit to the end it seeks; and the end it seeks is wealth of the sort we have mentioned […] the mere acquisition of currency […] all who are engaged in acquisition increase their fund of money without any limit or pause' (cited by Meikle 1995: 59).

Marx clearly differentiates the money-begetting slave mode of production from the classic (or 'patriarchal') slave mode of production (of the absentee slave-owner, who is dissociated from the management of the means of production): on different occasions he repeatedly stresses the 'transformation of the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery into a *system of commercial exploitation*' (Marx 1990: 925, emphasis added). As he explains: 'In the ancient world, the influence of trade and the development of commercial *capital* always produced the result of a slave economy; or, given a different point of departure, it also meant the transformation of a patriarchal slave system oriented towards the production of the direct means of subsistence into one oriented towards the *production of surplus-value*' (Marx 1991: 449–450, emphasis added).

In the above citation, Marx uses the terms 'capital' and 'surplus-value' in a rather loose manner in order to denote the specific difference of surplus appropriation in the framework of the money-begetting slave mode of production.[8]

Dominant mode of production, determining the society's principal structures, remained the classic slave mode of production: 'The nature of a given mode of production is decided not according to *who does most of the work of production* but according to the specific *method of surplus appropriation*, the way in which the dominant classes extract their surplus from the producers' (de Ste. Croix 1984: 107).

The dominant classic slave mode of production assigned both the money-begetting slave mode of production and the simple commodity production to the 'intermundia' of society, that is, interstitially, in spaces between the basic social structures: The trading peoples of old existed like the gods of Epicurus in the *intermundia*, or like the Jews in the pores of Polish society (Marx 1991: 447).[9]

Both in ancient Greece and Rome, the non-monetary character of the dominant classic slave mode of production had, as a consequence, as de Ste. Croix explains, that 'money income cannot be directly equated with income in kind from land for assessment purposes' (de Ste. Croix 2004: 41).

> A manufacturer or trader, even when the use of money became general, would simply not know what his 'income' or his 'profits' expressed in terms of drachmae were. This is one of the basic facts about the economy of the Greek world (and the Roman world) which many modern historians have entirely overlooked, because they persist, quite unconsciously, in conceiving the ancient economic systems in terms taken over directly from the modern or the medieval world. (Idem: 42–43)

It is clear from the above-presented analysis that the money-begetting slave mode of production is different from the capitalist one, as in the former the laborer is still bound to the taskmaster by a relation of direct personal dependence, and his individual consumption does not depend directly on monetary market relations. As a consequence, exchange value and money cannot become universal, that is, it cannot become the motivating force in the economy, the capital relation cannot take shape. Pre-capitalist societies 'follow a different economic logic', as Ernest Mandel aptly stresses.

> It is true that the capitalist mode of production is the only social organization of the economy which implies *generalized* commodity production. It would thus be completely mistaken to consider for example Hellenistic slave society or the classical Islamic Empire—two forms of society with strongly developed petty commodity production, money economy and international trade—as being *ruled* by the 'law of value'. Commodity production in these pre-capitalist modes of production is intertwined with, and in the last analysis subordinated to, organizations of production (in the first place agricultural production) of a clearly non-capitalist nature, which follow a different economic logic from that which governs exchanges between commodities or the accumulation of capital. (Mandel 1991: 14–15)

I would like to elaborate a bit further on the difference between the two modes of production, since the 'ancient capitalism' or 'ancient market economy' thesis remains powerful among certain parts of academia.

Scott Meikle reviewed a vast array of literature on the ancient Greek economy and concluded that the low development of *productive* credit in the ancient world constrained the role of money to a medium of circulation and a treasure to be hoarded (Meikle 1995: 147–179). The absence of inclusive capital and labor markets ruled out the possibility of exchange value becoming the regulating principle of the economy.

There were no credit instruments of any kind, and each individual transaction was settled almost always by physical transfers in person, either by the principal himself or by an accredited agent. […] There was no double-entry bookkeeping; notions of debit and credit were unknown; there was no accounting of debits and credits through strings of transactions to be settled at the end of a period, and there were no settlement days, quarterly or otherwise (Meikle 1995: 160).

The subordination of monetary relations to pre-capitalist structures, and the prevalent position of politics maintained in ancient societies, resulted in economic relations and processes being perceived as issues of politics or ethics. As Dimitris Kyrtatas aptly stresses: 'The idea of exploitation as a general economic category in human relations was absent in ancient Greek thought. What Aristotle and other authors stressed was domination. […] [T]opics that we would examine as aspects of the economy, the Greeks examined as aspects of politics and ethics. And instead of seeking profit-maximization, the Greeks were mostly after honour-maximization' (Kyrtatas 2002: 153–154).[10]

Concluding my analysis, I may formulate my final result as follows: Sohn-Rethel's notion of real abstraction constitutes an important contribution to Marxist theory of value and the value form. However, its generalization to cover 'ages of commodity production from their beginnings in ancient Greece …' deprives it of its hermeneutic accuracy.

Notes

1. 'The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows directly out of production itself and reacts back on it in turn as a determinant' (Marx 1991: 927).
2. 'The concept of value is entirely peculiar to the most modern economy, since it is the most abstract expression of capital itself and of the production resting on it. In the concept of value, its secret is betrayed […]. The economic concept of value does not occur in antiquity' (Marx 1993: 776 ff.).
3. '*The value form of the product of labour* is the most abstract, but also the *most general form* of the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character' (Marx 1990: 174).
4. As Christopher Arthur writes: 'What is extraordinary about Sohn-Rethel is that he shows that social abstraction occurs as a result of the practical action of exchangers and obtains with objective validity regardless of whether they are aware of it' (Arthur 2010: 1).
5. 'I was the first to point out and examine critically this twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities' (Marx 1990: 132).
6. A characteristic instance is that of Rosdolsky. In his book *The Making of Marx's Capital*, which had a significant influence on post-World War II Marxist theoretical analysis, he maintains that decline from the 'craftsmanship' of the pre-capitalist artisan led to concrete labor becoming 'abstract labor'. He writes: 'Marx accepted the thesis of Ricardo, which is confirmed by the workings of the market, that what is involved is a reduction of specialised labour to unspecialised' (Rosdolsky 1969: 609. Also see Rosdolsky 1977: 510 ff.).
7. 'By the end of the fifth century, as we know from the Erechtheum accounts, wage rates of one drachma per day were common. The daily pay of sailors

in the fleet was also between one drachma per day […] and half a drachma […] and the daily pay of dicasts was half a drachma from 425 onwards' (de Ste. Croix 2004: 43). 'The poorer women of Athens and, presumably, of other cities also worked for wages' (Kyrtatas 2011: 105).

8. In the *Grundrisse* Marx makes clear that he refers to economic forms which function 'not as themselves forms of capital, but as earlier forms of wealth, as presuppositions for capital' (Marx 1993: 504).
9. In the antiquity, 'no single statesman is known to have been a practising merchant, and no merchant is known to have played a prominent part in politics, even at Athens. The merchants were not all […] both non-citizens and men of little or no property; but […] their influence on politics, as merchants, was certainly infinitesimal' (de Ste. Croix 2004: 356).
10. Karl Marx has also stressed this view: 'Do we never find in antiquity an inquiry into which form of landed property etc. is the most productive, creates the greatest wealth? Wealth does not appear as the aim of production, although Cato may well investigate which manner of cultivating a field brings the greatest rewards, and Brutus may even lend out his money at the best rates of interest. The question is always which mode of property creates the best citizens' (Marx 1993: 487).

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