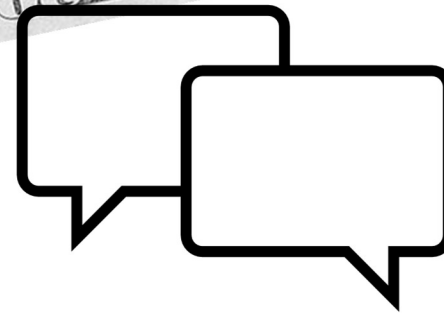




Beyond Money, Commodities and the State:

**A Discussion Guide for
Heinrich's Introduction
to *Capital***



Welcome to the discussion guide for Michael Heinrich's *Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*. This guide is meant for people with no prior knowledge that want to better understand capitalism in order to move beyond it. Heinrich's Introduction has gone through multiple publications in German and was translated into English in 2012. It gives a brief overview of all 3 volumes of Capital (over 2200 pages) into a short guide of about 200 double spaced pages. It packs a lot of information, but with discussion and some additional resources it can be very helpful.

Of note, Capital Volume 1 was the only volume published in Marx's lifetime and tends to be the only one many people read. Volume 1 is focused on capitalist production. Volume 2 deals with circulation or exchange and were some of the last manuscripts Marx worked on. Volume 3 deals with capitalism as it appears to exist and was the earliest manuscript from 1864-65, two years before Volume 1 was published.

Though Volume 1 is much more fun to read than the unpublished, fragmented manuscripts of Volumes 2 and 3, all 3 volumes need to be engaged with or you may end up misunderstanding the entire project since they are each investigating different areas. Heinrich rightfully claims that Marx's project is an unfinished, open project. Having a readable outline is highly useful for people without unlimited time or not wanting to read over a thousand pages of unpublished manuscripts.

In the book, Heinrich also expands on other areas beyond Capital such as the role of the state and ultimately moving towards a society beyond the

[Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: How Are We "Ruled by Abstractions?"](#) is a podcast episode from David Harvey discussing Marx's many abstractions and how it is that we are "ruled" by abstractions under capitalism.

This guide was influenced by the tendency known as Open Marxism that has provided critiques of money, the state, and class identity that are often lacking in many people that engage with Marx. Open Marxism works include *In-and-Against the State* in the late 1970s, the DIY journal *Common Sense* in the 1980-90s and a series of collections including the four *Open Marxism* books last published in 2020. People associated with it include John Holloway, Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, Kosmas Psychopedis, Simon Clarke and Ana C. Dinerstein among others. See libcom.org/tags/open-marxism to browse additional readings.

[Cyber-physical decentralized planning for communizing](#) by Pedro HJ Nardelli et al.

[The Market, the State, and the End of History](#) by Johannes Agnoli

[Further along in the same talk to US readers above](#)
Heinrich talks about the practical role of the critique of capitalism in organizing (about 1 hour, 23 mins). Heinrich is in favor of reforms that don't just address harms within capitalism, but addressing harms in ways that are beyond capitalism. He uses an example of removing housing from the market in Berlin and having them self-administered by residents themselves that is not profit oriented. Self-administration outside commodities, money, capital and the state is the start of a new process that could expand to other sectors. This is not central planning, free markets or Keynesianism.

More info on [2021 Berlin housing referendum](#) and the next referendum. What are some concrete reasons it may never happen despite majority support?

Other notes and suggestions from the group

[\[BEST OF\] The Fundamentals of Marxism: Intro to Political Economy](#) from *Revolutionary Left Radio* that addresses many of the abstract concepts that we've been discussing, and I think it might be useful to us. If you want to start with the abstract terms that we discussed, you can start the podcast at 46.56.

commodity, money, and the state (some would call this communism)! We hope this guide will give you a basis of what the critique of political economy Marx was writing about while being able to critique, take what's useful to you, and go beyond Marx to make the case for the abolition of capitalism yourself.

This guide was developed after reading the 3 volumes with Edward's reading group and uses many resources suggested from that group. Counseling Communism Discussion Circle met and discussed the book ([counselingcommunism.com](#) - they also have other discussion guides on CLR James and Council Communism!) and a 2nd in-person group was held at The Rhizome House, a radical social center in so-called Cleveland Heights, Ohio ([rhizomehouse.org](#) - check them out if you are in the area). Thanks to all who shared and participated!

We recommend starting the discussion with chapters 1 and 2 and loose discussion of why you are reading this book and take a look at the additional readings as needed. Then allow a separate session for chapter 3 and set your own pace from there. Additional resources are also included for each chapter.

If you are reading this on paper, you can find a digital version of this guide at [libcom.org](#) that includes links to everything here:

<https://libcom.org/article/beyond-money-commodities-and-state-discussion-guide-heinrichs-introduction-capital>

You can exchange money for the book here:

<https://monthlyreview.org/product/an-introduction-to-the-three-volumes-of-karl-marxs-capital/>

A PDF of the book can be found at libcom:

<https://libcom.org/article/introduction-three-volumes-karl-marxs-capital-michael-heinrich>

An audiobook is available on youtube from user Free Association here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnnjkYGSvAA&list=PLj7X423isrGfAY6HFZ5O3uRmgu09yldbp>

Chapter 1. Capitalism and Marxism

Chapter 2. The Object of Critique in the Critique of Political Economy

[Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms – Ways of Reading Marx’s Theory](#) by Ingo Elbe. See especially footnotes 49 & 68

[“Je ne suis pas marxiste”](#) by Michael Heinrich

Chapter 3. Value, Labor, Money

- What are the two characteristics of a commodity?
- Was Marx trying to prove labor produces value or was this already a common understanding of political economy during Marx’s time?

- Are we living under late capitalism? What are some potential issues with periodization of capitalism?

[Editor’s Introduction to Pashukanis’ General Theory of Law and Marxism](#) by Christopher J. Arthur

[Contra State and Revolution](#) by Chris Wright

[State and Capital: a Marxist Debate](#) by John Holloway and Sol Picciotto

12. Communism—Society Beyond the Commodity, Money, and the State

- What are potential problems defining communism as an ideal or as nationalization of the means of production?
- Marx offers no unified conception of communism. What are two considerations that can be drawn from Marx?
- Does communism involve better commodities, money, capital, markets or states? Are there any inherent reasons preventing it? What are some good enough reasons to abolish capitalism?

[Capitalism vs. Freedom: The Toll Road to Serfdom](#) by Rob Larson

[From Revolution to Democracy: The Loss of the Emancipatory Perspective](#) by Edith González

- Capital. What is the concrete example Heinrich gives and do you agree with it?
- What are two distinct ways of thinking about class? Does Marx have a fully developed theory of class? What are two false conclusions concerning class and class struggle that Marxism has relied on?
 - How does Marx remain deterministic about the end of capitalism? Why are some barriers Heinrich identifies?

[Fetishism](#) by John Holloway. From *Change the World Without Taking Power*

[Notes on Class](#) by Richard Gunn

[Classes](#) by Karl Marx. Last chapter of *Capital Volume 3* (AKA Marx's Economic Manuscript of 1864-1865)

Chapter 11. State and Capital

- What is economism? What are instrumentalist conceptions of the state?
- How is the relation of domination between classes growing out of the production capitalist society different from all previous societies? What role does fetishism play in the state and efforts to reform it?
- How is the material foundation of the state directly connected to the accumulation of capital? What about the nation? How does Lenin's theory of imperialism and monopoly capitalism fall short?

- Is value objectified into a single object or is it a social relation? When is value constituted—production, exchange or both?
- Heinrich covers the first 3 chapters of *Capital* Vol. 1 on value and money – this is regarded as the most challenging section of *Capital* and a lot of new concepts are introduced. It's worth it to take some time to discuss concepts such as:
 - When does concrete labor become abstract labor and what is the difference? Is Socially Necessary Labor Time related to concrete or abstract labor?
 - What is commodity fetishism? Money fetishism?
 - What is spectral or value objectivity and how are these examples of a real abstraction?
It is OK to think more on what these terms and check out the additional readings and come back to them in your next discussion. Heinrich's [Glossary from How to Read Marx's Capital on libcom.org](#) can be helpful here.
- What are the functions of money? Does money need to be a commodity like gold?

[The Genealogy of Value in Classical Political Economy](#) by Sam Chambers. From *There's No Such Thing as "The Economy": Essays on Capitalist Value*

[The Fetish Speaks](#) by Fredy Perlman – short comic zine to print (flip SHORT edge and double sided)

[Value](#) by Frederick Harry Pitts

Chapter 4. Capital, Surplus Value, and Exploitation

- At the beginning of capital, is Marx talking about a different historical economic system or the surface of capitalism? What makes "money as money" in capitalism?
- What is the general formula of capital? What is the aim of capital?
- What is Marx's definition of capitalist? Are they compelled by greed? Is Marx's critique a moral critique of capitalists?
- What is labor power? What are two conditions required for it to be a commodity? What is its value? How does its value change? / What are its historical and moral elements? How does its price change? Does labor have value?
- What is exploitation? Is it a moral category (see debates with Lassalle)? How can humanity move beyond exploitation?

[The Myth of 'Simple Commodity Production'](#) by Christopher J. Arthur. From *Marx Myths and Legends*

Chapter 5. The Capitalist Process of Production

- What is the dual character of the capitalist process of production?

- Marx is analyzing capitalism at its ideal average, but what are more concrete factors that may contribute to crisis?
- Is there a theory of collapse in Marx? How did Marx's ideas of collapse of capitalism change over time?

[Robert Brenner's Unprofitable Theory of Global Stagnation](#) by Seth Ackerman

[The 'Fragment on Machines': A Marxian Misconception in the Grundrisse and its Overcoming in Capital](#) by Michael Heinrich

[Marx's Theory of Crisis](#) by Simon Clarke

Chapter 10. The Fetishism of Social Relations in Bourgeois Society

- What are the origins of the term "fetishism"? Heinrich calls Marx's use of this term a "pointed barb against the enlightened-rationalist self-confidence of bourgeois society." What does this mean?
- What is the trinity formula? How does fetishism of social form-determinations such as wage-labor, capital, landed property lead to reified (objectified) class categories of the trinity formula that happen to coincide with material conditions such as labor, means of production and land?
- Personalization of capitalist relations depend on historical context and social structure beyond the "ideal average" assessed in

claims to analyze capitalism at its ideal average, does this require commodity money?

- What are stocks and dividends? Do they have value? What is fictitious capital?
- What does Marx say is the “the principle lever of overproduction and excessive speculation in commerce” that also accelerates development of productive forces and the world market? Is this a good place to introduce this in the line of argument of the 3 volumes of Capital?
- Is it possible (or even desirable) to oppose “speculative” financial markets to a “solid” capitalist production?

[Money](#) by Samuel Chambers. From *Capitalist Economics*. See especially footnote 1.

About an hour into a [recent discussion Heinrich with US readers](#) of his *Introduction* book, Heinrich critiques Marx’s notions of commodity money and the need to deal with modern central banking and credit money beyond Marx. After that, Heinrich explains the so-called transformation problem is a difference between qualities (categories of value, price) not quantities (numbers).

[Bank fail: How rising interest rates paved the way for Silicon Valley Bank's collapse](#) - NPR

Chapter 9. Crisis

- How does Marx view crisis in capitalism? Does Marx have a theory of crisis? Why are surplus goods a problem in capitalism only?

- Value is defined as $c + v + s$. What do these stand for and mean?
- What is absolute vs. relative surplus value? How does this relate to the concepts of formal and real subsumption?
- What does Marx mean by “dead labor, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labor”? How does capital shape technology? How does it affect working hours and conditions? How has capitalist technology been used in so-called actually existing socialism and is this worth defending?
- How does capital view nature? What are the original sources of all wealth? Can the capitalist process of production deal with externalities like climate change?
- How can increase in productivity help explain stagnant wages (variable capital) since the late 1970s? Is Marx’s critique no longer valid since workers have iPhones and refrigerators? Is Marx’s critique a question of income and wealth distribution?
- What does Marx mean productive vs unproductive labor? Are these productive or unproductive workers: Factory worker, Starbucks barista, personal chef, UPS driver, public transit bus driver? Does this mean unproductive workers are bad or not worth organizing?
- What does Marx mean of value composition vs. organic value composition?
- Can wages grow high enough to impair surplus value?
- Is full employment possible under capitalism?

- What is the industrial reserve army? Does Marx's claim hold that the industrial reserve army will always grow?
- Does immiseration inevitably lead to the abolition of capitalism?
- What are some critiques of "market socialism" and co-ops in chapters 4 and 5?

["Social Reproduction Theory," Social Reproduction, and Household Production](#) by Kirstin Munro

Chapter 6. The Circulation of Capital

- What are its 3 forms that make up industrial capital?
- Are service industries considered industrial capital? How are they different?
- What is the turnover of capital?
- What concepts make up the constitution of value vs. the circulation of value?
- What are Marx's two departments of production? In capitalism, are there conscious ways of maintaining the correct proportion between departments? What could happen if there are disproportions? Does this offer an exact depiction of capitalist reproduction as it exists?

[Fixed Capital and Circulating Capital](#) by John Fox.
From *Understanding Capital Volume II*

Chapter 7. Profit, Average Profit, and the "Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall"

- What is Marx describing in each of the 3 volumes of Capital?
- What is the difference between surplus value and profit?
- What is the difference between cost price and price of production? Is there a transformation problem or are these at different levels of abstraction?
- Was the falling rate of profit original to Marx or already assumed in the political economy Marx was critiquing? What two factors affect profit rates? Can we tell at this level of abstraction which will fall faster?
- Is the "Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall" needed for a notion of crisis? What other limitations of capitalism produce crisis?
- How do rates of profit between industries look today?

[Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx's Studies in the 1870s](#) by Michael Heinrich

[Marx and Mathematics](#) interview with Annette Vogt

Chapter 8. Interest, Credit, and "Fictitious Capital"

- How does capitalism change the function of money and credit?
- What is the capital fetish? How does it relate to interest-bearing capital?
- What is commodity money and how is it different from credit money? In Capital, Marx