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Use-value and Exchange-value ... and Value

I want to talk about a few concepts that are basic building blocks of Marx’s *Capital*—*use-value*, *exchange-value*, and *value*. As we’ll see, the meanings of these terms—and, especially, their relationships to one another—are frequently misunderstood, even to this day. When even the building blocks of a theory suffer from such misunderstanding, the edifice doesn’t stand a chance.

So I’ll talk about how these terms were defined before Marx, and the conceptual innovation he introduced—namely, a clear distinction between *exchange-value* and *value*. And I’ll discuss some common misconstruals of what the terms mean and how they’re related. We’ll also see that one result of Marx’s innovation is that the key polarity, or opposition, is no longer between *use-value* and *exchange-value*; the opposition between *use-value* and *value* is now the key one. And I’ll talk a bit about the implications of that transformation, especially the role that the polarity between *use-value* and *value* plays in Marx’s theory of the fetishism of the commodity.

But I want to begin with a couple of preliminary remarks on *Capital*’s genre that I find important in this context. Both of them have to do with the fact that readers often have the sense that the author isn’t speaking to them. They’re not wrong.

The book doesn’t speak directly to the reader partly because it is principally a work of theory, not a work of description. Theory and description are similar in that both of them have to connect to the world outside. But whereas descriptions connect to the outside world immediately, in one-to-one fashion—each description directly pertains to something particular in the world outside—the immediate connections in a theoretical work are connections between the parts of the theory itself. Often, it is only the theoretical system as a whole, or some substantial “cluster” within it, that connects to the outside world. If you take a single term in isolation, and search for real-world examples, or you take a single proposition and ask how it sheds light on the outside world, you can end up quite frustrated.

Actually, real-world examples of *use-value*, *exchange-value*, and *value* are all around us. But they’re obvious and trivial. So as our discussion proceeds, it may seem dry and formal and without much real-world importance. But my hope is that, once *all* of the pieces are in place, we’ll be better able to address whether and how the discussion illuminates the world outside.

Another reason *Capital* doesn’t speak directly to the reader is that it is a critique of political economy. “Political economy” refers here to a body of thought, not the current economic order—though the book is a critique of that as well. So who Marx is speaking to most directly is not his reader, but the whole tradition of economic thought that preceded him.

Because *Capital* is a critique of political economy, the topics that Marx takes up, the concepts and terminology he uses, and the book's argumentative structure—none of these are the results of free, creative choices on Marx's part; and *Capital* isn't a self-contained theoretical system. The book's topics, terminology, and structure were constrained and largely determined by the preceding history of the political economy Marx was criticizing.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin famously remarked that one can't fully understand *Capital*, especially the first chapter, "without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic." Although that statement seems to me to be a bit of an exaggeration, I think it's basically right. By the same token, one can't fully understand *Capital*, especially the first chapter, without some grounding in the tradition of political economy with which Marx is engaging. So, in general, a business student who has taken a course in Money and Banking is initially going to understand chapter 3 somewhat better than a radical student who hasn't. The business student will at least have a sense of what Marx is talking about, and why.

OK, so let's start our discussion of *use-value* and *exchange-value*—and *value* by engaging with pre-Marx economic theory. In his *Politics*, Aristotle noted that shoes can be used in two ways. They can be worn, and they can be exchanged for something else. This was Aristotle's entry point into an argument which concluded that household management is "necessary and honorable," while retail trade and especially usury (money-lending) are "unnatural" and "justly censured." In any case, the shoe example doesn't actually distinguish between *value* in use and *value* in exchange. But it does mark a distinction between an object being *useful* (in the normal sense) and an object being *exchangeable*.

Adam Smith seems to have been the first person to point out the distinction between what we're calling "use-value" and "exchange-value" and he called "value in use" and "value in exchange." He seems not to have had Aristotle in mind when doing so. Instead, he made a passing remark about how the word *value* is commonly employed, in the midst of a passage in his 1776 book, *Wealth of Nations*, that discusses how he'll be focusing on value in exchange. He wrote, "The word value, it is to be observed, has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called 'value in use'; the other, 'value in exchange.'" And then he noted that things can have a lot of value in use but not much value in exchange, like water; or the opposite, like diamonds.

Smith didn't do much with this distinction. But it was kept alive, largely because, about 40 years later, David Ricardo began his book *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* by quoting and endorsing Smith's distinction, after which he drew a couple of inferences from an example similar to Smith's water-diamond example. The first inference was that "[u]tility ... is not the measure of exchangeable value, although it is absolutely essential to it." The second was that, provided that we're referring to commodities that do "possess[] utility, [they] derive their exchangeable value from" other sources.

Now that Ricardo had given the distinction between "value in use" and "value in exchange" a prominent place, and a role in a systematic theoretical discussion, the distinction became part of standard economics. It remains one to this day.

The only other thing I want to say about the pre-Marx history of these concepts is that Louis Althusser, a supposed expert, was shockingly ignorant of it. In his Preface to volume 1 of *Capital*, Althusser advised first-time readers of the book to “put *the whole of Part One aside for the time being*.” He said that this is “imperative.” Among his main complaints was the fact that Part One retains “traces of Hegelian influence.”

And what was Althusser’s supposed evidence? “This Hegelian influence can be located very precisely in the *vocabulary* Marx uses in Part I: in the fact that he speaks of two *completely* different things, the social usefulness of products ... and the exchange value of the same products ..., in terms which ... have *a word in common*, the word ‘value’: ... use-*value*, and ... exchange *value*.” Marx “should have” “eliminat[ed] the word *value* from the expression ‘use-value’”; he should have used the term “*social usefulness of the products*.” And Althusser then suggested that, when Marx admitted to having flirted with “modes of expression peculiar to Hegel,” he was referring to the distinction between use-value and exchange-value!

So the abysmal state of Marx scholarship is nothing new. Althusser wrote this nonsense in 1969. And because he was considered quite the authority, it was published, not in some obscure journal, but in a Preface to volume 1 of *Capital*.

To understand the remainder of my talk this evening, you’re going to have to hold in mind the definitions of the terms *value in use* and *value in exchange*. These are definitions that Marx inherited from classical political economy (not Hegel!), and he employed the terms in *Capital* without modifying their meaning substantially.

The definition of *value in use*, also known as *use-value*, is simple. It means *utility* or *usefulness*. Marx didn’t think that utility-in-general, abstract utility, was a viable concept. As he put it at the start of *Capital*, “usefulness does not dangle in mid-air.” There are only *different* things that are useful in *different* ways. So he typically referred to use-values—plural. And because “usefulness does not dangle in mid-air” but is instead “conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity,” he typically called the physical things themselves *use-values*. Instead of saying that they *have* use-values, he said that they *are* use-values.

The definition of *value in exchange*, also known as *exchange-value*, is also simple—or it would be, except for the fact that, to grasp it, you may have to clear away a good deal of misinformation. As Smith said, the term *value in exchange* “expresses ... the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys.” That’s a good definition, but a more complete one has to specify how much power of purchasing the object has. So here goes:

The exchange-value of any item is the *particular physical amount* of a different item for which it can be exchanged.

That’s the definition—no more than that, no less than that, nothing different from that. So, if a sandwich can be exchanged for two cups of coffee, the exchange-value of the sandwich, in terms

of cups of coffee, is 2 cups. If a car can be exchanged for 600 barrels of crude oil, the car's exchange-value, in terms of crude oil, is 600 barrels.

We have to say stuff like “exchange-value in terms of cups of coffee” and “in terms of crude oil” because sandwiches and cars are potentially exchangeable for lots of other things, too, and so they have lots of other exchange-values. For example, the sandwich might also be exchangeable for 4 dollars, so its exchange-value, in terms of dollars, is 4 dollars; and the car might also be exchangeable for 25,000 dollars, so its exchange-value, in terms of dollars, is 25,000 dollars. Thankfully, there's a shorthand term for exchange-values in terms of money, namely price. The price of the sandwich is \$4; the price of the car is \$25,000.

As I mentioned, Marx uses the term *use-values* to refer to physical things themselves. This is not even an issue when it comes to exchange-values. A commodity's exchange-values are, by definition, physical things—2 cups of coffee, 600 barrels of crude oil, and so on. So, although we often say that commodities *have* exchange-value, there is no doubt that it's correct to say that they *are* exchange-values—of other commodities.

And now we come to Marx's innovation. Chapter 1 of *Capital* is on “The Commodity.” At the start, Marx writes, “Our investigation ... begins with an analysis of the commodity.” That in itself is new. Previously, no one had thought that commodities were things that needed to be investigated, much less analyzed.

Strictly speaking, *analysis* refers to breaking something down into its elements, separating the elements. It's the opposite of *synthesis*. And Marx begins with the commodity already separated into elements. In the title of section 1, he says that there are “two factors of the commodity: use-value and value.” Note that he writes “use-value and value,” not “use-value and exchange value.” That in itself should signal that *value* here is not an abstract general term under which he subsumes *use-value* and *exchange-value*. Instead, Marx says that there are two factors, or elements, of commodities; and value is *one* of them. It's the one that is not use-value. So already at this point, the standard opposition between use-value and exchange-value has begun to be crowded out, if not exactly replaced, by a somewhat similar but different opposition between use-value and *value*.

Marx then says a few things about use-values, after which he says that, in this society, the use-values—that is, the physical things that are useful—“are also the material bearers of exchange-value.” For example, a car is the “material bearer” of the exchange-value of 600 barrels of crude oil. And then he launches into his innovation.

The innovation is Marx's claim—I would say, his recognition of the fact—that there's something *underlying* the relation between cars and crude oil, and indeed something that underlies the relation between any two exchange-values. It's a “third thing”—*value*. Now, value isn't actually a *thing*, certainly not a physical thing, and in the German text, Marx didn't say that there's “a third thing.” He said that there's “a third.” But that's weird in English, so the word “thing” gets tacked on. In any case, his point is that “exchange-value cannot be anything other than the mode of expression, the ‘form of appearance,’ of a content distinguishable from it.” On the next page, he gives the name *value* to what he here called the “content.”

In other words, value is something distinguishable from exchange-value, and value is what underlies exchange-value; exchange-value is just the form in which value appears on the surface of society.

Why was Marx concerned to make this distinction between exchange-value and value? I think there were multiple reasons—technical, political, and so on. I’m going to skip all of that. And I’m also going to skip the proof, or sketch of a proof, that Marx provided in support of his conclusion that exchange-value is just the form of appearance of value. It’s rather involved and difficult. But I do want to give you a sense of the basic *intuition* behind Marx’s proof.

The intuition is this. A car and 600 barrels of crude oil are worth as much as one another. They’re of equal worth. But for two things to be equal, or even capable of being compared quantitatively at all—worth twice as much, worth three times as much, and so forth—they must be commensurable, have a common measure. In other words, they must be things of the same kind. What they have in common is that they are things of this “kind.” And this “kind” is their ground, or “substance,” or “content,” or, if you will, a “third thing.”

Marx communicated this intuition pretty clearly in a passage he wrote in the early 1860s that became part of *Theories of Surplus-Value*, published after his death. He was arguing against the notion that exchange-value is merely a relation between two things, with nothing underlying that relation:

If a thing is distant from another, the distance is ... a relation between the one thing and the other; but at the same time, the distance is something different from this relation between the two things. ... If we speak of the distance as a relation between two things, we presuppose something “intrinsic”, some “property” of the things themselves, which enables them to be distant from each other. What is the distance between the syllable A and a table? ... In speaking of the distance of two things, ... we distinguish them as different points of space. To belong to space is their unity.

OK. I want to share just a couple of more things with you about the relationship, in *Capital*, between the concepts *use-value*, *exchange-value*, and *value*. One is a comment that Marx made around 1880, in his “Notes on Wagner.” He was responding to the interpretation of *Capital* contained in an 1879 book by Adolph Wagner, a German economist.

All this is “drivel.” *De prime abord* [in the first place], 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*. ... Thus I do not divide *value* into use-value and exchange-value as opposites into which the abstraction “value” splits up, but the *concrete social form* of the product of labour, the “*commodity*,” is on the one hand, use-value and on the other, “value,” not exchange value, since the mere *form* of appearance is not its own *content*.

This passage indicates that Marx didn’t agree that his text began with an abstract concept, value,

that he divided into use-value and exchange-value. Instead it began with something concrete, the commodity, which it analyzed. And the analysis revealed that the commodity itself is “divided”; it is a use-value and a value (not a use-value and an exchange-value, since exchange-value is “the mere *form* of appearance” of value).

And in the middle of the same response to Wagner, Marx called attention to a paragraph, in chapter 1 of *Capital*, in which he stressed the distinction between value and exchange-value and clarified the relation between them. The paragraph is on p.152 of the Penguin edition:

When at the beginning of this chapter, we said in the customary manner that a commodity is both a use-value and an exchange-value, this was, strictly speaking, wrong. A commodity is a use-value or object of utility, and a “value”. It appears as the twofold thing it really is as soon as its value possesses its own particular form of manifestation This form of manifestation is exchange-value, and the commodity ... has this form ... only when it is in ... an exchange relation with a second commodity Once we know this, our manner of speaking does no harm; it serves, rather, as an abbreviation.

I guess Marx was right that it “does no harm” to say that “a commodity is both a use-value and an exchange-value”—“*once* we know” that this is not his actual theory and “*once* we know” that the actual theory is that “a commodity is both a use-value and a *value*,” while exchange-value is merely a form of manifestation of value. The problem, however, is that the relations between these concepts are still, to this day, *not* things we all know. And because of that, using *value* to mean *exchange-value*, or vice-versa, can do a fair bit of harm.

To give you a chance to process all this, and help make sure that we’re all on the same page going forward, I want to take a few moments and play “What is Wrong with this Picture?” We’ll read a few things written in encyclopedias, a glossary, and a couple of books. See if you can spot what’s wrong with them.

1. Wickedpedia entry for “Exchange Value”: “Marx regards exchange-value as the proportion in which one commodity is exchanged for other commodities. ... Actual money prices ... only ... roughly correspond to exchange-values; ... The exchange-value of a good is determined by the socially necessary labour time required to produce the commodity.”

You may feel inadequate because you don’t see how these 3 definitions are the same. But the problem isn’t yours. The problem is an alleged encyclopedia that anyone can edit ... and it shows.

The first definition is correct. But the second one contradicts it. A money price is the proportion in which one commodity is exchanged for money. It doesn’t “roughly correspond” to the commodity’s exchange-value; it is the commodity’s exchange-value—in terms of money. The third definition, “determined by the socially necessary labour time,” refers to Marx’s theory of how the magnitudes of commodity’s values are determined (values, not exchange-value). Neither

Marx nor anyone else has ever thought that the proportion in which one commodity is exchanged for other commodities is determined exclusively by the amount of labor needed to produce it.

2. Here's something from a more reputable encyclopedia, the *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*. The entry for "Value: Exchange and Use Value," by Matthias Zick Varul, begins by saying that, "For Marx ... the value of a commodity has two necessary, but contradictory aspects: use value and exchange value."

The problem here is that the author has done a Herr Wagner. He's alleging that Marx "divide[d] *value* into use-value and exchange-value[,] as opposites into which the abstraction 'value' splits up." But for Marx, what has contradictory aspects isn't value but the commodity. Value is one of the commodity's two contradictory aspects.

3. The glossary of the popular Marxists Internet Archive has this to say about "Exchange-value": "Exchange-value is the *quantitative* aspect of value, as opposed to 'use-value' which is the *qualitative* aspect of value, 'Value' is often used as a synonym for exchange-value, though strictly speaking, 'value' indicates the concept which incorporates both quantity and quality."

This definition is another Herr Wagnerism. Its problem is the same as the previous one.

4. Duncan Foley is a prominent economist at the New School. In his book, *Understanding Capital*, he wrote that "the commodity ... can ... be exchanged for other commodities. This characteristic of exchangeability Marx calls value. It is important to understand that Marx views value as a substance contained in definite quantities in every commodity."

Actually, what Marx calls value is not the "characteristic of exchangeability." He pointed out that some things that are exchangeable, like land and securities, aren't commodities and thus don't have value. What Marx called value wasn't the characteristic of exchangeability; it was the content common to all commodities. In any case, what can it possibly mean to say, as Foley does, that "the characteristic of exchangeability" is a "substance" that's "contained" in commodities—much less in "definite quantities"?

5. My final case is somewhat more difficult, so it's extra credit. It's from the book *Marxist Economic Theory* by Ernest Mandel, who was also the author of the "Introduction" to the Penguin edition of *Capital*. He wrote, "Money ... is ... a commodity in the value of which all other commodities express their own exchange value."

First of all, exchange-value, as understood by Marx, is the form of appearance of value. In other words, it's the form in which commodities' values are *expressed*, on the surface of society. So Mandel should have said, "... all other commodities express their own value," not "exchange-value." But there's a bigger problem here. It's not the value of money that expresses other commodities' values. What expresses their values is the money itself, the "physical body" of the

money. If gold were money, a car might be exchangeable for 13 ounces of gold. How would we talk about the value of the car? We'd say that it is worth 13 ounces of gold, or that its value is 13 ounces of gold—a particular amount of a physical thing. We wouldn't say that the car is worth *the value of* 13 ounces of gold, or that its value is *the value of* 13 ounces of gold.

I want to turn now to one important implication of Marx's innovation, which will lead into a discussion of the fetishism of commodities. I said earlier that he transformed the key polarity, or opposition. Before him, the key opposites had been understood to be *use-value* and *exchange-value*. Marx, however, turns *use-value* and *value* into the key opposites. What I want to discuss now is how he effects this transformation.

I think the answer is that, in contrast to Smith and Ricardo, Marx is no longer analyzing the *concept* of value or the uses of the word "value." This is what he emphasized in response to Adolph Wagner. Marx is analyzing commodities, which aren't abstract universal terms. They aren't terms at all, but particular, concrete physical objects that we find all around us.

By analyzing commodities, Marx concludes that they are, on the one hand, physical objects, each of which has distinct properties that make it useful in a distinct way. On the other hand, they all have a shared, non-physical--purely social--property: every commodity has value. Indeed, every commodity is a value. Or perhaps it's clearer to say that it is a "material bearer" or "carrier" of value. For example, if you walk around with a diamond on your finger, you're carrying around value, not just a useful object. (And by the way, you're not carrying around the diamond's exchange-value, since its exchange-value is some amount of a *different* item.)

So Marx is telling us that these physical objects, commodities, that we find all around us, have a dual character. They're not simple; they're complex, composite. And they're internally divided. As use-values, commodities are diverse, physical, useful things. As values, they're just the opposite: homogeneous, non-physical—and thus exclusively social—figures, and without useful properties.

Inasmuch as the commodity is the "elementary form" of all wealth in capitalistic societies, and wealth is so central to these societies, this duality and internal division are all-pervasive. As the Marxist-Humanist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya put it, "There is nothing simple about a commodity. ... It is, from the start, a unity of opposites—use-value and value—which, in embryo, contains *all* the contradictions of capitalism."

We've said that use-values are the physical or material side of commodities, while value is the immaterial, purely social side. And the same internal division holds true regarding many important relations within capitalist society. For example, capitalist relations of production are, considered from one side, material or physical relations. Particular kinds of use-values—labor-power and means of production (machines, raw materials, etc.)—combine to produce use-values. That's the material side of capitalist production. But in this society, the means of production are also values, and Marx argues that workers' labor not only produces use-values but creates value as well. So capitalist production is, also, the production of value (and surplus-value). That's its social side.

As far as I know, Marx didn't explicitly draw attention to this dialectic of material and social as a theme of *Capital*. But I think it is prominent throughout the book nonetheless. Again and again, Marx contrasts the material character of things to their social character, the use-value side to the value side.

Why did he do so? One key reason, I think, is that he was a revolutionary. He wanted to help change the world. And the issue any thoughtful revolutionary faces is to distinguish between what can be changed and what cannot. Marx's view was, roughly speaking, that material entities and relations are natural, present in all societies, and cannot be changed, while social entities and relations are specific to particular societies and capable of being changed. As he wrote in a letter to a friend, Dr. Kugelmann,

[T]his *necessity* of the *distribution* of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the *specific form* of social production; it can only change *its form of manifestation*. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the *form* in which those laws assert themselves.

This task of separating out the material side from the social side may seem to be pretty easy. But Marx treated it as a difficult and tricky problem. One thing that makes it tricky is that, in capitalist society, the things that have social properties *are also* material things, and relations that are social *are also* material. Commodities, for example, are material things that have a purely social property, the property of being values.

But there's something that makes it even trickier to separate out the material from the social. It is that things and relations that have social properties seem to have them *because of* their particular material properties. Back when Marx was writing, for instance, the gold standard prevailed, and gold was not infrequently treated as if it were value itself, value incarnate. In other words, gold was treated as if it had value immediately—after all, it's *gold*, for crying out loud. In contrast, all other commodities seemed to possess value only indirectly, reflectedly, by being exchangeable with gold, the thing that was value itself.

If things and relations that have social properties really did have them *because of* their material properties, what would that mean? For example, imagine that products of labor were values just because they are produced by labor—just because labor naturally creates value—and that relations of production were value relations because it's an inherent characteristic of material production to create value. This would suggest that value and value production are natural and cannot be done away with. That's a conclusion that Marx, as a revolutionary, was at pains to combat.

His theory of the fetishism of the commodity, and of more developed forms of that fetishism, is partly about this issue of things seeming to have social properties because of their material properties. In section 4 of chapter 1 of *Capital*, volume 1, Marx posed the question,

Whence ... arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly, it arises from this form itself. ... [T]he commodity

reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects ... which exists apart from and outside the producers.

This isn't the easiest passage to explicate. But part of what Marx was getting at, I think, is that the commodity form itself makes the historically-specific, social side of commodities and commodity relations seem to be natural and immutable. Social properties seem to be "socio-natural properties"—because commodities are natural things that have social properties, such as value. And because commodities are indeed natural things, they seem *naturally* to have these social properties.

There is a somewhat similar passage near the end of volume 3 of *Capital*. Marx was there excoriating the idea that capital generates interest income or profit, and that land generates rent, because it is in the nature of physical means of production and land to generate these kinds of income. He wrote that

this ... completes ... the reification [thing-ification] of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and mere things.

The expression "at the same time social characters and mere things" kind of puts in a nutshell the conflation of what's natural and what's social, and the bizarreness of that conflation.

But there's another dimension of Marx's theory of the fetishism of the commodity as well. Marx alluded to this other dimension in a passage I quoted earlier, when he referred to "a social relation between objects ... which exists apart from and outside the producers." Commodities and capital aren't just physical things that have social *properties*. They are things that human beings have produced, but which have social *power*—their own social power, detached from, alienated from, the people who produced them. Indeed, they have *power over* their producers.

And this is why Marx uses the term *fetish*. The situation is, in one sense, much like a totem that people have carved that has supernatural power, because people endow it with supernatural power, or shoes that someone has produced that have sexual power because a shoe fetishist endows them with sexual power. Marx's own favorite analogy was to religion: "the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."

However, there's a crucial difference between these cases, a difference that has important political implications. When "products of the human *brain*" are "endowed with a life of their own," that is an illusion or delusion. It can be overcome through correct thinking. But when "products of men's *hands*" are endowed with a life of their own, the cause isn't ideological error. At least Marx didn't think it was a matter of ideological error.

Later in volume 1 of *Capital*, he argued that workers' wages will never rise to levels that threaten the continuation of capitalism, because counteracting mechanisms kick in. And he concluded this discussion by writing, "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."

Marx was saying that workers *really are* governed by commodities, capital, the products of their hands. This situation cannot be overcome by thinking about it differently. For example, you can know perfectly well that, insofar as its physical side is concerned, capital is just machines and raw materials and similar stuff. But that knowledge doesn't do anything to eliminate capital's social power. And it's a power that's great enough to kill you if you can't get a job that allows you to work with the machines and materials and produce products for capitalists. The reason that knowledge doesn't eliminate the social power of capital is that capital's power is *objective*, not an illusion or delusion produced in your brain. So we're not trapped by *false consciousness* here; we're trapped *in this society*.

Thus, current social relations can't possibly be overcome just by dispelling illusions. There needs to be objective revolutionary transformation of these social relations.