

1. Jason W. Moore: The Myth of the ‘Human Enterprise’: The Anthropos and Capitalogenic Change [<https://jasonwmoore.wordpress.com/2016/10/>]

[...]

The philosophical point is fundamental to the Anthropocene dialogue because, after all, its central concept is the *Anthropos*. In the dominant Anthropocene presentation, the human species becomes a mighty, largely homogenous, acting unit: the “human enterprise” (Steffen, et al., 2011a). (Could a more neoliberal turn of phrase be found?) Inequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, and much more – all have been cleansed from “Humanity,” the Anthropocene’s point of departure.

Cleansed of such differences, Humanity appears as a kind of Cartesian virgin birth. Nature appears, in this same imaginary, as “out there,” somehow pristine and untouched. (Thus Humanity and Nature implicate not one, but two, virgin births.) The resulting story of ecological crisis is a kind of Tale of the Fall. Humans do bad things to Nature. Nature becomes a fantasy of the wild, of pristine nature, awaiting our protection, fearing destruction at our hands. In this Tale, the human enterprise now rivals, and presumably is destroying, the “great forces of nature” (Steffen et al. 2011, 2007). [...]

recognizing humans as part of nature whilst separating Humanity from Nature, troubles Anthropocene thinking at every turn. On the one hand, humans become Humanity, a singular *human enterprise*. They act upon – or are subject to – the “great forces of nature.” On the other hand, Humanity – the uppercase is deliberate – remains a *geophysical force*. This is the “One System/Two Systems” problem faced by environmentally-oriented scholars across the Two Cultures (Moore 2015a). In this view, humans are recognized as one species within the web of life (One System). But the recognition proceeds by abstracting – rather than synthesizing – the biological from human sociality. Established methodological frames, analytical strategies, and narrative structures are scarcely touched. Practically speaking, Society is independent from Nature (Two Systems). For the earth-system scientists behind the Anthropocene, Social Factors – again, decidedly in the uppercase – are added; for scholars in the humanities and social sciences, Nature is added. There are “human constructions” and “natural” constructions (Zalasiewicz et al. 2011: 837). This is Green Arithmetic: Nature plus Society equals the Whole.

But is this Human/Nature binary the most effective way to distinguish humans in the web of life? The elevation of the *Anthropos* as a collective actor encourages several important misrecognitions. One is a neo-Malthusian view of population lurking below the surface of these analyses (e.g. Crutzen 2002; Fischer-Kowalski, et al., 2015; Steffen et al. 2007: 618; Ellis et al., 2013). These are neo-Malthusian not because they emphasize population, but because they make population dynamics independent of capitalism’s historical patterns of family formation and population movement (see Secombe 1992, 1995). Secondly, Humanity’s agency is realized principally through technology-resource complexes rather than interpenetrated relations of power, technology, and capital (e.g. Steffen, et al. 2007; contrast with Mumford 1934). Thirdly, scarcity tends to be removed from those relations – of power and re/production – and deposited into Nature, abstracted from those relations. And finally, as we have seen, such approaches tend to view humanity (or “human societies” in the abstract) as a responsible for the transgression of planetary thresholds (Steffen et al. 2015b).

Such views evidently rest upon Human/Nature dualism and its cognates. This dualism obscures our vistas of power, production, and profit in the web of life. It prevents us from seeing the accumulation of capital as a powerful web of interspecies dependencies; it prevents us from

seeing how those interdependencies are not only shaped by capital, but also shape it; and it prevents us from seeing how the terms of that producer/product relation change over time. For instance, it is clear that capitalogenic climate change is undermining crucial relations of capitalism's Cheap Food regime in the 21st century – Cheap Nature increasingly confronts forms of nature that cannot be controlled by capitalist technology or rationality (Moore, 2015b; Altvater 2016). [...]

Humans, and human organizations, are obviously distinct from the environments in which they evolve; they are also products of those environments. This is why I've underscored the concept of environment-making as central to rethinking history (Moore 2015a): we make environments and the environments make us (Lewontin and Levins 1997). The web of life is obviously larger than any one species. It operates – if that is the right word – relatively independently of humans. (Just as capitalism operates relatively independently of any firm or empire or even class.) By the same measure, planetary life is a web of interdependencies, all the way up and down. Species form and differentiate through a web of life. That web of life is historical, and not only over geological time. Capitalism's revolutionary character can scarcely be understood absent the extraordinary scientific revolutions behind successive great leaps forward in labor productivity and capital accumulation. Consider how every era of capitalist development turns on agricultural revolutions that comprise not only class, production, and power, but also new agronomic and botanical knowledges (see esp. Cañizares-Esguerra 2004; Kloppenburg 1988; Brockway 1979; Perkins 1997). Capitalism revolutionizes the co-production of historical natures as no previously existing civilization could. The implication? Any historical conception of human activity and relations that abstracts geography and biospheric relations is irreducibly partial. Geography in its widest and best sense is an ontological condition.

2. Jason W. Moore: Value in the web of life, or, Why world history matters to geography [Dialogues in Human Geography 2017, Vol. 7(3) 326–330]

[...]

The law of value as a law of Cheap Nature: A world-ecological alternative

Laws of value are those large-scale and long-run patterns that shape and cohere a civilization. They lead a double life. One operates in a domain that is usually called 'economic' but is in fact much more expansive. This is the domain of surplus production and distribution: Who gets what and how do they get it? It's not really economic for two good reasons, and these implicate modern value's other life. First, the question of surplus always implies power. And second, it always pivots on the reproduction of life, from one day, and from one generation, to the next. This second moment is sometimes called social reproduction, but the messy realities that it names go far beyond the 'social'. Every 'mode of production' is at the same time a 'mode of reproduction' and therefore a mode of coproducing definite historical natures.

In capitalism, the substance of value is socially necessary labor time. The drive to advance labor productivity is fundamental to competitive fitness. This means that the exploitation of commodified labor power is central to capital accumulation and to the survival of individual capitalists. But this cannot be the end of the story. For the relations necessary to accumulate abstract social labor are necessarily more expansive, in scale, scope, speed, and intensity. Capital must not only ceaselessly accumulate and revolutionize commodity production; it must ceaselessly search for, and find ways to produce, Cheap Natures that can deliver a rising

stream of low-cost food, labor power, energy, and raw materials to the factory gates. (Or office doors, or) These are the Four Cheaps. The law of value is a law of Cheap Nature.

That phrase—Cheap Nature—has two principal meanings. There's a Marx moment and a Gramsci moment. One turns on cheapening by reducing the costs of production to the bare minimum. Great booms of capitalist development have turned on the extra-economic appropriation of unpaid human and extra-human work. In this sense, frontiers of uncaptialized nature—including human nature—are indispensable to capitalist survival. A second dimension of Cheap Nature pivots on processes of domination and cheapening: reducing the work and lives of women, people of color, and indigenous peoples to the lowest possible cultural priority. This is Cheap Nature as real abstraction and as fundamental to installing a binary code at the heart of modernity. Far from economic, this view of value relations shows money, power, and modern rationality forming through a cascading process of violent binaries: capital/labor, man/woman, master/slave, White/non-White, colonizer, and colonized. The epochal refashioning gendered divisions of labor and the elaboration of modern slavery in the early modern centuries stand as signal moments of such cheapening (Patel and Moore, 2017; Moore, 2017a, 2017b).

Both dimensions of Cheap Nature remade life, land, and sea centuries before the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the centuries after Columbus made landfall on Hispaniola marked an epochal rupture unprecedented since the dawn of agriculture and rise of the first cities. The massive infrastructures of empire and capital that soon emerged—marking the first great wave of planetary urbanization—reunited Pangea for the first time in 180 million years (Brenner, 2017; Crosby, 1985). Suddenly, the work/energy potential of two continents could be appropriated for Europe's capitalist empires. Across the early modern centuries, fields were planted, forests cleared, indigenous peoples exterminated, mines dug and metals smelted, and peasants dispossessed—all at scale, scope, and speed that exceeded, often by an order of magnitude, the standards of premodern civilizations. They were also formative moments of the law of value as a law of Cheap Nature.

On this view, the law of value represents a determination of socially necessary labor time which occurs simultaneously through organizational and technical innovation and through strategies of appropriating the unpaid work/energy of 'women, nature, and colonies' (Mies, 1986: 77). Without massive streams of unpaid work/energy from the rest of nature—including that delivered by women—the costs of production would rise, and accumulation would slow. Every act of exploitation (of commodified labor power) therefore depends on an even greater act of appropriation (of unpaid work/energy). Wages are exploited, everyone else, human and extra-human, is appropriated. To paraphrase an old Marxist joke: The only thing worse than being exploited is ... being appropriated. The history of capitalism flows through islands of commodity production, developing within oceans of appropriated work/energy. These movements of appropriation produce the necessary conditions for the endless accumulation of capital (value-in-motion).

In other words, value doesn't work unless most work isn't valued.

The law of value under capitalism is, then, comprised of two moments. One is the endless accumulation of capital as abstract social labor. The other, the ceaseless expansion of the relations of exploitation and appropriation—congealing surplus value and its necessarily extra-economic conditions—joined as an organic whole. This perspective stresses the historical and logical nonidentity between the value form and its necessarily more expansive value relations—the very relations governing the appropriation of human and extra-human unpaid work. While Marxist political economy has taken value to be an economic phenomenon with systemic

implications, the inverse formulation may be more plausible: Value relations are a systemic phenomenon with a pivotal economic moment. Far from denying the centrality of socially necessary labor time to capitalist civilization, such an approach affirms Marx's greatest contribution. Thinking of value as a systemic phenomenon with a pivotal economic moment allows us to connect the production and accumulation of surplus value with its necessary conditions of reproduction. It recognizes, moreover, that these conditions extend beyond the circuit of capital: The accumulation of abstract social labor is possible through the appropriation of unpaid work (human and extra-human). The value form (the commodity) and its substance (abstract social labor) depend upon value relations that configure wage labor with its more expansive conditions of reproduction: unpaid work. Importantly, capital's appropriation of unpaid work transcends the Cartesian divide, encompassing both human and extrahuman work as outside, but necessary to, the circuit of capital and the production of value.

Against historical-geographical flattening: Towards a revolutionary ecology

To abstract history from our thinking about value flattens the very historical geographies that we, as geographers, have worked so hard to illuminate. It also flattens our understanding of the web of life, now endorsed by critical geographers as 'Nature-Society' geography—perhaps because it's expedient, or perhaps out ignorance of the historical movements of genocide and expulsion that Nature and Society, as real abstractions, have enabled since 1492 (Patel and Moore, 2017).

But what if we embrace a historical-geographical vision of capitalism's value relations as unfolding at the knife edge (or gun barrel) of valorized and devalorized work/energy, channeled into specific human and extra-human forms across the *longue durée*? This encourages us to go beyond the now commonplace and rarely specified invocation of Nature as one of several crises facing Humanity today. A radical challenge to such Malthusian binaries will take value relations as one angle of vision on how capitalism is not only a producer of the web of life—but a product of it.

Such a radical challenge asks us to reflect upon our well-worn conceptualizations of capitalism: as economic system, as social system, and as commodity system. For if the production of surplus value has been the strategic pivot of capitalism, to an even greater extent accumulation has unfolded through the appropriation of planetary work/energy. Such appropriation—yes of cheap resources ('taps') but also of cheap garbage ('sinks')—does not produce capital as 'value', but it does produce the relations, spaces, and work/energy that make value possible. Capitalism does generalize commodity relations, but the actual reach of such generalization depends on an even greater generalization: the appropriation of unpaid work/energy.

Here Marx's emphasis on work is important—and necessary for a revolutionary ethic of care and life. Marx may offer a way to cut through the mystifications of the Labor/Nature dichotomy—a binary embraced even by many Marxists. That binary will serve 21st-century radicals no more than the gendered, racialized, and colonial binaries helped socialists of a century ago. Among the virtues of dialectics is its insistence on connecting first, connecting second, connecting always. Marx opens his discussion of the labor process in *Capital* with precisely this emphasis, highlighting a triple transformation: of human and other humans, of humans and 'external nature', and of the totality of humans in the web of life (Marx, 1977: 283). To speak of 'labor and nature', in these terms, is to engage a dialectical, diverse unity: labor-in-

nature; nature-in-labor. The two are not separate—not in the 16th-century’s sugar plantations, silver mines, iron forges, and shipyards; and not today, in the 21st-century’s sweatshops, call centers, and fast food chains. Work is always work in nature, and human work is always work with nature

If the process is more complex for civilizations, these too must ‘work’. What is civilization but a specific apparatus of mobilizing work—of humans, but also of plants, animals and geology—for specific purposes? At the center of such work is the work of care, especially but not only the domain of ‘women’s work’ and unpaid work of social reproduction. It is precisely the symbolic erasure, the invisibilization, of care work that has been the necessary condition of capitalist development (Federici, 2004).

Reimagining work—and therefore value—in capitalism provides a way forward in today’s unpleasant reality. A radical politics around an expanded conception of value offers resources for connecting struggles that are often disconnected. A revolutionary vision must be able to articulate a politics that links the crisis of the biosphere and the crisis of productive and reproductive work. A revolutionary politics of nature that cannot speak to the questions of precarious and dangerous work, of surplus humanity, and of racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence will be doomed to failure. A revolutionary labor politics unable to speak to the ongoing crisis of planetary life will be equally doomed. The time has come for a conversation about how to forge a radical vision that takes as its premise the organic whole of life and biosphere, production, and reproduction—and the kinds of care that will be necessary to heal five centuries of capitalist violence.