

does not fully explain it. Both our capacities to hurt and the reach of state punishment exceed the logics we use to understand them. Having breadth of analysis is, then, imperative. Though containing many excellent and highly developed chapters, I wonder if *Abolitionist Voices*, as a general text, might have benefited from some further contributions to give the reader a wider sense of the ‘rhizome’ it addresses. For those interested in exploring further, the *Routledge International Handbook of Penal Abolition*, edited by Michael J. Coyle and David Scott (2021), has a broad geographic reach and some highly instructive, if

shorter, contributions from approaches less represented in *Abolitionist Voices*, including from critical disability, incarcerated and queer theorists.

At a moment in which the powers of state punishment are expanding through both familiar and newfound techniques, *Envisioning Abolition* and *Abolitionist Voices* make timely and thought-provoking interventions. Effectively countering the politics of punishment while offering their readers numerous avenues to explore further, these volumes promise to enliven many an abolitionist imagination.

Isabella Gregory

Minor premises

Andrés Saenz de Sicilia, *Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx: From the Critique of Reason to the Critique of Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2025) 260pp., £120.00 hb., 978 9 00471 382 6

The term ‘subsumption’, literally meaning ‘taking under’, first emerged in thirteenth-century scholastic philosophy to describe the logical subordination of a particular to a universal. In the syllogism, *All human beings are mortal; I am a human being; therefore, I am mortal*, the minor premise, ‘I am a human being’, thus represents the ‘subsumption’ of a particular term (me) under a general one (humanity). How, then, did ‘subsumption’ also come to describe the processes whereby a peasant family agrees to spin consignments of wool for a local merchant, or a team of graphic designers gets laid off when their firm invests in image-generating software? Moreover, what are the stakes of grasping the connection between this logical operation and such economic processes as more than some baroque metaphor or etymological coincidence?

As Andrés Saenz de Sicilia argues in his new book *Subsumption in Kant, Hegel and Marx*, Karl Marx’s appropriation of the term ‘subsumption’ to describe capital’s control and transformation of commodity production was premised on the profound reconfiguration of this concept within post-Kantian philosophy. What is ultimately at stake for Saenz de Sicilia in this conceptual history is a deeper understanding of the ‘logic’ of capital and a clearer sense of how it might be overcome. The book accordingly has a double aim: first, to retrace

subsumption’s theorisation and problematisation within Immanuel Kant’s and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s systems in order to contextualise Marx’s deployment of the concept; and second, to elaborate a more comprehensive theory of subsumption as a dynamic of social reproduction, going beyond Marx’s narrower account of capital’s subsumption of the labour process. For Saenz de Sicilia, Marx’s account has continually led to reductive interpretations of capital’s logic as being or having become non-contradictory and self-identical, which in turn have occasioned various ‘moralisms of the abstract/concrete’ that repudiate the very terms of dialectical thought as oppressively all-subsuming. He therefore seeks both to address misunderstandings of the concept and to redress the limitations of Marx’s account that inspire such forms of dogmatic speculative closure and naïvely terminological resistance.

The first chapter traces the development of the notion of subsumption in Kant and Hegel’s thought. Kant takes the structure of judgment in a syllogism’s minor premise as ‘the model for [his] entire theory of rational cognition’, yet crucially, subsumption here also becomes a process of ‘form-determination’ that actively shapes the representations and concepts that it connects. Even the universal categories of experience do not pre-exist this process but are only actualised through it. Accord-

ingly, the totality of an individual's experience must be understood as something they themselves produce, or as what Saenz de Sicilia terms a 'compositional totality'. Hegel's subsequent critique of Kant then shows how the subject of judgment is itself processual and social. Hegel thus demotes subsumption from the model of cognition in general to merely one moment of the derivation and development of the compositional totality of the universal collective structures that subsume and actualise individuals. Although neither Kant's nor Hegel's philosophical treatment of subsumption was immediately the model for Marx's account of the subsumption of labour under capital, Hegel's notion of subsumption under objective social forms was a foundational insight, while subsequent debates over the speculative closure of Hegel's system were the matrix for Marx's development of historical materialism.



This development is then traced in the second chapter, which documents how, from the early 1840s, Marx 'adopts a series of increasingly coherent and comprehensive conceptual frameworks ... moving from *praxis* to *production/consumption* and finally to *social reproduction*'. For Saenz de Sicilia, these frameworks nonetheless

remain essentially consistent in their materialism. He quickly skates over the significance of the theorisation of 'modes of production', much debated as *the* key critical break in Marx's thought, turning instead to Bolívar Echeverría's reinterpretation of Marx's thought as a unified philosophical anthropology of 'social reproduction'. Admittedly, amidst this rich genealogy, the thread of subsumption is sometimes entirely lost, yet one payoff of rehearsing Marx's theoretical career is the bold argument that historical materialism requires something like a general theory of human nature, and that Marx's critique of capital furnishes us with 'transhistorical' yet 'open' concepts of social being – such as 'social reproduction', but also, more controversially, 'use-value' and 'concrete labour' – which are necessary for historicising capitalist social forms and, by the same token, making non-capitalist and post-capitalist societies conceivable.

Following this exhaustive conceptual-historical groundwork, the latter two chapters then constitute the book's theoretical core, clarifying and extending Marx's account of capitalist subsumption. The detailed exposition of this account in the third chapter is unequivocally the book's strongest section. For readers without the patience to parse through the dense philosophical excursus of the book's first hundred-odd pages, it is also, gratefully, quite portable. After briefly discussing commodification as a more elementary subsumption of the 'socio-natural' category of use value under the value-form, Saenz de Sicilia surveys the three forms of the subsumption of labour under capital described by Marx: *formal*, *real* and *hybrid*. Throughout, he emphasises that 'the distinction between these forms of subsumption is neither an empirical typology nor a historical periodization of different forms of capitalist production'. This criticism of periodising interpretations of subsumption will be familiar to any reader of the journal *Endnotes*. More illuminating is Saenz de Sicilia's framing of its different forms as 'strategies' of capital accumulation that coexist, often in competition or combination. Formal subsumption entails a capitalist's direct ownership of a previously non-capitalist production process and the supervision of waged workers. Here, capital extracts absolute surplus-value by extending working hours, increasing the pace of production, or expanding its scale, though 'the specific material-practical content of the activity undertaken by the worker remains unchanged

from its pre-capitalist form'. Real subsumption is then 'the transformation of the material content and technical structure of the labour process in order to increase productivity ... through the implementation of co-operation, divisions of labour, [and] machinery'. Such tactics for extracting both relative surplus-value and greater absolute surplus-value are widespread even before extensive mechanisation. Lastly, with hybrid forms of subsumption, 'surplus-value is 'extorted' by capitalists without the production process being even formally subsumed to their command' and 'without the mediation of a direct wage', generally operating instead through relations of debt or bondage. As Saenz de Sicilia emphasises, drawing on Jairus Banaji's work, 'hybrid forms must be grasped not simply as residual forms of exploitation but as a permanently present strategy of exclusion and outsourcing that is functional for capital as a response to both cost-cutting imperatives and class resistance'. Hence, if it is ultimately more profitable, a branch of production will remain only formally subsumed or may even revert to a hybrid form.

As incisive as this survey of Marx's account of subsumption is, Saenz de Sicilia's tendency to avoid robustly engaging with other commentators and broader debates in favour of pursuing his own theoretical reconstruction becomes somewhat frustrating here. Major interpretive claims about Marx's account and its place within the broader structure of his critique of political economy, as well as key divergences of interpretation among scholars, are too often only mentioned in passing or relegated to footnotes. For instance, Saenz de Sicilia does not delve into why Marx 'almost completely eradicated' his discussion of subsumption from the published version of *Capital* and instead concluded with the section on primitive accumulation. Yet whether Marx did this for conceptual, structural or logistical reasons strongly determines whether we should understand the relationship between these two accounts as contradictory, duplicative or complementary. Saenz de Sicilia has only a cursory and eclectic discussion of primitive accumulation, and the thorny questions of capitalism's origins and primitive accumulation's 'ongoingness' remain bracketed by abstract pronouncements against periodising schemas. This is particularly disappointing because his own discussion of hybrid forms of labour's subsumption under capital might have equipped him to wade into these de-

bates and help clarify some important theoretical and historiographical questions. Indeed, one crucial affordance of theorising hybrid subsumption is the ability to then specify the *capitalist* character of patterns of production beyond heavily industrialised regions and outside formally waged sectors, such as colonial uses of indentured or enslaved labour, both during and after any singular 'transition'.

In the book's fourth chapter, Saenz de Sicilia turns to developing his own theory of subsumption as a dynamic of social reproduction. For him, Marx's account is limited insofar as it is only expounded at the level of individual capital rather than total social capital, and it reflects a 'discursive tension' between Marx's revolutionary orientation and his 'capital-centric' systematicity, which 'lends itself to functionalist reductions of class struggle and social reproduction'. A less economic, more politicised theory of subsumption thus requires 'undoing the "tendential" or "provisional" closure' of Marx's account and developing a more dynamic one beyond the immediate process of production. Saenz de Sicilia also finally offers some robust engagement with other theorists of subsumption here, critiquing several for likewise succumbing to either 'diachronic' or 'synchronic' forms of speculative closure. Reproducing an argument popularised by *Endnotes*, he debunks the crudely stageist notion of 'total subsumption' – that is, of 'the historical completion or totalization of capitalist subsumption ... across the full compass of human life' – exemplified by Theodor Adorno and Antonio Negri; although, as he sharply observes, this notion remains the 'regulative idea' of most discussions of late capitalism. He then considers the synchronic closure of Chris Arthur's 'systematic dialectics', where the 'hyper-idealized' presentation of capitalist society as a 'closed logical totality' precludes 'theoretical comprehension of concrete development ... and systemic change'. Although this critique of synchronic closure is rather telegraphic – and notably, the discussion of Moishe Postone promised in the introduction never appears – it is worth recalling his earlier recuperation of Marx's philosophical anthropology, according to which capitalist forms subsume transhistorical features of social reproduction and therefore retain an immanently antagonistic and transformable character. The logical functionalism characteristic of 'value-form theory' more generally is thus rooted in a one-sided conception of

capitalist society and its categories as absolutely subsumed, severing any ability to effectively historicise and resulting either in fatalistic depoliticisation or in a compensatory fetishisation of capitalism's 'outside'.

But what, in the end, is Saenz de Sicilia's theory of subsumption? He distinguishes three levels of subsumption operative in capitalist society: first, the elementary subsumption of 'socio-natural' objects through commodification; second, the three forms of the capitalist subsumption of labour in production; and third, the subsumption of social reproduction *tout court* under capital's relentless drive towards accumulation. Insofar as the dynamic of subsumption thus traverses every level of capitalist society, it must be recognised as 'the concept of capitalist domination as such'. Beyond positing this new schema, however, it would be more accurate to say that he merely stipulates the criteria of an 'open' and 'dynamic' theory of subsumption that would resist diachronic or synchronic closure. This speculative project also bears a strong family resemblance to Søren Mau's *Mute Compulsion* (2023), which likewise offers a more expansive account of subsumption, critiques the abstract formalism of many value-form theorists from the perspective of a Marxian philosophical anthropology, and attempts to develop a new concept for capital's total – yet, crucially, not absolute – domination of our life-world through its stranglehold on social reproduction.

Yet the affinity between Saenz de Sicilia's and Mau's projects also prompts the question of whether it is really necessary to rethink Marx's critique of capital through

this one particular Marxian concept rather than another, such as Mau's 'economic power'. Indeed, while it may make logical sense to speak of capital's subsumption of objects other than the labour process, doing so may also sacrifice much of the term's analytical precision – especially as Saenz de Sicilia himself admits that 'the classification of the forms of subsumption loses its explanatory power beyond the immediate process of production'. Moreover, his condemnation of 'speculative closure' at times verges into its own 'moralism of the abstract/concrete', and in emphasising the non-teleological character of the dynamic of subsumption, he arguably undercuts its path-dependency, notably omitting any discussion of the rising organic composition of capital and the profit-rate's tendency to fall, as well as any engagement with crisis theory. Another significant omission here is any serious engagement with Marxist feminism, all the more surprising given that 'social reproduction' is the cornerstone of his rethinking of subsumption. Ultimately, however, such frustrations and disappointments index the fruitfulness of Saenz de Sicilia's intervention as both a definitive clarification and a provocative challenge for contemporary Marxist theorists. To embrace a more utopian form of speculative closure, then, perhaps this work may one day prove to have been a minor premise in a more practical syllogism: the revolutionary deduction that capital – as a logic, as a mode of social reproduction, as the tyrannical accumulation of humanity's own dead labour – is also mortal.

Christopher Geary

It's all in the landing

Melyana Kay Lamb, *Philosophical History of Police Power* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2024). 220pp., £85.00 hb., 28.99 pb., 978 1 35020 404 1 hb., 978 1 35020 408 9 pb.

In the aftermath of a series of large pro-Palestine protests in the UK in 2024, the Metropolitan Police spokesperson responsible for protests, Matt Twist, gave an interview to the right-wing think tank the Policy Exchange, where he admitted that the police had not got everything right, but rejected that there were double standards when it came to policing certain groups over others. Much criticism

of the police from the right has argued that there is a two-tier system. Leftist causes like BLM, environmental issues or Palestine protests are allowed to disrupt the general public, they claim, while patriotic causes are harshly policed. Twist rejected this, arguing that, in fact, there were infinite tiers of policing.

This phrase has stuck with me. It might be dismissed