

Western Philosophy of Social Science

Lecture 5. Analytic Marxism

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Western Marxism

- 1960s-1980s in western Europe, Great Britain, and the United States
- An intellectual-political development
- Not driven by a political party. No intellectual orthodoxy; many diverse approaches.
- Generally aimed at developing more adequate ways of understanding modern society and offering critique of modern society.
- Loosely linked to progressive parties of the left; social democratic parties.

Reading Marx freshly

- My perspective since beginning to read Marx in the 1960s: this is a complex thinker with many lines of thought; not all coherent or consistent with each other; worthy of careful study and criticism.
- Don't assume that Marx's theories and philosophical views were fully consistent and developed; observe his intellectual development through the many threads and stages of his development.

Reading Marx freshly ...

- Read *Capital* for the sociological, philosophical, and institutional insights that it develops; don't assume that these ideas all flow from a single unified vision of "Marxism".
- Read historical materialism as a suggestive set of ideas about the factors that drive historical development; observations (often imperfect) of the development of other historical epochs (classical slavery, feudalism, China), but not a systematic theory of history

Reading Marx freshly ...

- Read Marx's humanism as a suggestive set of philosophical ideas about human development and the good of human life.
- In short: read Marx as a serious, disciplined and fertile intellectual, observing a complex and rapidly changing social world, with a critical perspective that leads him to be a penetrating critic of the existing and evolving social order of 19th century Europe.

Marx's thought

- Humanism and alienation
- Historical materialism
- Marx's intellectual development
 - Post-Hegelian philosophy (Feuerbach)
 - French socialist writings
 - English political economy
- A social science study of capitalism
- A conception of socialism

The historical context

- The 19th century revolutions in thought and society
- French Revolution and its aftermath
- Industrial revolution
- Rapid, difficult change, both socially, politically and economically

What is alienation?

- The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts
- The paradox of capitalist political economy: wealth => poverty
- Critique of political economy
- Four forms of alienation:
 - alienation from the product
 - process
 - species being
 - alienation from other human beings

Alienation and property

- Private property and the division of labor
- Commodification of social products
- Consumption and production
- Control and domination
- The labor process as coerced forced labor:
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What is a full human being?

- Freedom and human self-expression
- The social individual
- What is labor? Objectification of the self through intelligent manipulation of nature
- The aesthetic model of self-realization: sculpture
- Self-realization through free productive social labor
- The Hegel inheritance: freedom as objective human circumstance

Analytic Marxism

- 1970s in United States and Britain
- Philosophers and social scientists give new attention to Marx's writings
- There is a political element (Vietnam, American inequalities of wealth and poverty)
- But there is intellectual open-mindedness: treat the ideas as serious pieces of analysis, to be criticized, analyzed, and developed

Rational choice Marxism

- The view that Marx's economics assume a rational-choice model of agents: workers, capitalists, state officials
- Marx's explanations involve identifying central institutions (e.g. the system of capitalist profit and wage labor) and the rational strategies that are available to the players;
- And Marx provides an aggregative explanation of the macro-consequences of these incentives and institutions.
- E.g.: Marx's derivation of falling rate of profit.

Rational choice Marxism

- Philosophers, sociologists, and economists pursued this line of thought as a basis for analyzing and extending Marx's theories.
- Leading contributors: G.A. Cohen, John Roemer, Jon Elster, Adam Przeworski, Erik Olin Wright, Allan Buchanan, Allen Wood, others

Justice and exploitation

- The beginnings of analytic Marxism (1971) focused on the question, “Does Marx have a theory of justice?”
- Does Marx believe that capitalism is unjust? If so, on what basis? What is the moral theory that underlies this judgment?
- There were rigorous efforts to express an interpretation of Marx’s concept of exploitation.
- There were efforts to interpret Marx’s writings about alienation and human nature in a philosophically adequate way.

A theory of history

- Class conflict
- Tension between the forces and relations of production
- The metaphor of “dialectic” within a given mode of production

An approach to social science theory

- Be empirical: study the best available sources on such things as British industry, French feudal economy, classical slavery
- Be scientifically critical: question assumptions; test the consistency of interpretations; evaluate ideas in terms of their ability to explain the social world.
- Bring ideas into engagement with the needs of the underclass; allow theory to be a tool for social improvement; allow theory to reveal underlying conflicts.

Moral ideas in Marxism?

- Justice and exploitation
- Human nature and alienation

The relevance of Marx's thought in the 21st century

- Be critical; test, weigh, and criticize Marx's ideas. This gives his work the intellectual respect it deserves.
- Recognize that it is a limited perspective—just as is the perspective of any brilliant, insightful observer of a complex social reality. It highlights some aspects and overlooks others altogether. And, of course, the social world is fundamentally different from the world of 19th century British capitalism.

Relevance

- Emphasis on power, exploitation, domination, and alienation still appears relevant
- Emphasis on the idea that social arrangements are flexible enough to serve as tools of domination
- Emphasis on the idea that great economic systems create groups with substantial economic interests, who are in turn positioned to employ the instruments of power to their advantage
- Emphasis on the basic democracy of the majority: mass society permits the emergence of powerful voices for the dominated.

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