Sociological Theory in the Classical Era: Text and Readings: Chapter 2

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Chapter 2

KARL MARX (1818–1883)

Key Concepts

Class
Bourgeoisie
Proletariat
Forces and relations of production
Capital
Surplus value
Alienation
Labor theory of value
Exploitation
Class consciousness

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.
(Marx and Engels 1848/1978:473)
Videos about Marx

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ztVeUX8Hpo&feature=related
- Marxism made simple

- Do you know how to make a shirt?
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QbWbwj7-OE&feature=related
Biographical Sketch: Karl Marx

- University career (1835-1841): history, philosophy, and law
- Joined Young Hegelians
- Critiqued George W.F. Hegel’s philosophy
- Academic career ambitions ended when the Berlin Ministry of Education blacklisted him due to radical views
Biographical Sketch: Karl Marx

- Early 1840s, Marx began longtime friendship and collaboration with Friedrich Engels

- Marx and family died due to poverty and ill health (early 1880s)
Environment and Focus

- Reaction to the dire economic and social conditions
- Due to industrial revolution

- Theoretical model intended not only to *interpret* the world, but also to *change* it.

- Focus:
  - Economy
  - Classes
  - Forces of production
Economy

- Ways in which people satisfy their material needs
- Food, clothing, shelter, etc.

**PRODUCTION**: Transformation of raw materials into things people can use
- Products
Production

- Distinction between the means of production & relations of production

- The Means of Production:
  - Land
  - Natural resources
  - Technology
  - Factories
The Relations of Production

Social and technical relationships people enter into as they acquire and use the means of production

- Relations among individuals
- Between or among groups of people or classes
Mode of production

- **Means of Production + Relations of Production = Mode of Production**

- **The Mode of production changes**
  - Primitive Communism
  - Feudalism
  - Capitalism
  - Socialism

- **The result of a process known as “dialectical materialism”**
Process of Dialectical Materialism

- Each historical period’s mode of production—economy (thesis)

- Challenged by a set of social forces (anti-thesis)

- New mode of production (synthesis)
Dialectical Materialism

- **Materialism** = Material world, perceptible to the senses
- Objective reality independent of mind or spirit
- Ideas arise only as products and reflections of material conditions

- “I labor (work), therefore I am.”
Materialism vs. Idealism

- **Materialism** is the opposite of **idealism**

- **Idealism** = Treats matter as dependent on mind or spirit
  - Mind or spirit capable of existing independently of matter

- “I think, therefore I am”
Capital

- Land
- Buildings
- Machinery
- Raw materials
- Labor power
- Money (investment)
Capitalism

- Capitalism **benefits** owners of capital
- Prevents workers from realizing their **essential human capacity** for creative labor
- **Capitalism** is inherently exploitative
Capitalism

- Capitalism leads to monopoly
- Business owners unable to compete successfully for share of market
- Join property-less wage earners ("proletariat")
Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas

- Marx’s theory is reaction to laissez-faire capitalism (Adam Smith)

- Private ownership of the means of production leads to alienation of workers.
Species Being

**Essence of creative nature** = **species being**

- Humans live off nature (as do other animals)
- Nature = Inorganic body
- Expresses "species being" through free, conscious activity
- Estranged labor makes life-activity only a means to existence
**Alienation** – Workers experience the process of production & the results of their labor (product) as a dominating power.
Alienation

• Just working for money—and not for the creativity of labor = “selling your soul”

• Production process controls the worker;
  • Confronts worker as an alienating power
Alienation and Capitalism

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCOdHcRkd0E&feature=related
Alienated Labor: “Alienation”

- Because the worker is alienated as a producer

- The worker is alienated from the product. The product becomes an object over which the worker has no control
  - Where and how it is sold and its price

- Because the worker is alienated from the process of production as well as the product of his labors, he becomes alienated from himself.
Alienated Labor: “Alienation”

- Wage earner spends \(\frac{2}{3}\) of waking hours engaged in meaningless activity
- Little or no interaction with others
- Alienated from other people
Alienated Labor: “Alienation”

- Removed from the **process & product** of his labor
- Denied the **essence** of his creative nature or **“species being”**
- The **worker is alienated from the rest of humanity**
Alienation

1. Worker from process of production
2. Worker from products of labor
3. Worker from self (self-estrangement)
4. Worker from other people
5. Worker from humanity
Key Concepts

- **Class:** Relationship to the means of production

- **Class consciousness:** Recognition of common relationship to means of production

- **False consciousness:**
  - Inability to recognize oppression & exploitation
  - Incorrectly identifying source of problems
Marx’s Model of Social Change

- Development of *class consciousness* key in evolution of society toward ultimate, utopian end: *Communism*
- *Capitalism* a necessary stage in evolution of society
- The last historical period rooted in class conflict
Marx’s Model of Social Change

- Capitalism -> Economic productivity
- Create capital and technology to sustain a communist society
  - The final stage of history
- In utopian society, production of goods would be controlled collectively
  - Not by private business elites
Marx’s Model of Social Change

- **Marx’s political activities**: Generate **class consciousness**—an awareness by the working class of their common relationship to the means of production.
The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society

- Marx describes how the possessor of money is transformed into anything money can buy.

- One’s individuality is determined not by his or her own characteristics or capacities

- But by the power afforded by money to transform what one wants into what one is.
The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society cont.

- Money is **universal medium of exchange**
  - For a specific good or object
  - For human qualities such as beauty, talent, or honesty

- It connects us to life and to our relationships with others

- Not through **what we are**, but through **what we have the power to buy**
Use-Value & Exchange Value

- **Use-Value**: the usefulness of a commodity or its ability to satisfy wants/needs

- **Exchange Value**: expresses equivalencies—how much of a given commodity (e.g., corn) it takes to equal the value of another commodity (e.g., iron)

- **Money** is *universal exchange value*
Commodities = things made to be sold

- **Labor Theory of Value**: the value of an object is determined by amount of labor time (hours, weeks, months, etc.) it took to produce it.
  - Value = Workers’ labor time

- Those who do not own the means of production must **sell their labor power in order to survive**

- The **main source of exploitation** inherent in capitalist production
Commodities: Surplus Value

- **Surplus Value**: Difference between what workers earn for their labor and the price or value of the goods that they produce (profit)

- The capitalist has two principal means for increasing profit and market share: **increasing**
  - “absolute” value or
  - “relative” surplus value
Surplus Value

- **Absolute Surplus Value**: Extending work day
  - Make more products
  - Sell more products
  - Increase profit

- **Relative Surplus Value**: Increasing the productivity of labor by instituting timesaving procedures
  - Decrease amount of time needed to produce
  - Reduce cost per item
Alienation of Use Value

- **Use-Value:**
  - The usefulness of a commodity
  - Its ability to satisfy wants/needs
Capitalism

An economic system based on:
1. Private ownership of the means of production
2. Pursuit of profit
3. Competition
4. No government intervention

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Alienation of Use Value

1. Private ownership
   - Economy controlled by a few people
   - Benefits individuals, not society

2. Pursuit of profit
   - Useless products
   - Harmful products
   - Environmental/societal consequences
   - Low wages
   - No profit = no product
Alienation of Use Value

3. Competition
   - Monopolies
   - Oligopolies

4. No government intervention
   - Price supports
   - Subsidies
   - Tariffs
   - Trade agreements
Fetishism refers to the distorted relationship existing between individuals and the production and consumption of goods.

We treat the goods we buy as if they have "magical" powers.

We forget that we create commodities and, in doing so, grant them a power over us that in reality they do not hold.
Introduction to The Communist Manifesto

- *Manifesto* is a “scientific prophecy” detailing the downfall of the capitalist class and the rise of the proletariat

- The Communist Manifesto Cartoon
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KUL4yfABE4&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KUL4yfABE4&feature=related)

- Communist Smurfs
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qra0hlO6hZk&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qra0hlO6hZk&NR=1)