Exemplary ID answers

1. Commodity fetishism: The dictionary definition of a "fetish" is an object that is believed to have magical powers, and/or one that receives excessive attention, and/or carries a charge which is out of proportion with its usual uses or values. This ties in directly with what Marx calls "commodity fetishism." On page 52 of Capitalism and Commodities, he says, "There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities. There, the existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom." Marx believed that commodities often receive excessive attention, and are valued much more than they should be in terms of their use and actual value, and thus commodities begin to possess human properties, by being the product of human labor and satisfying the needs of humans. Political economies fetishize commodities to obscure the relationship of a product and the labor put into that product. By only viewing the exchange value, they miss the social relations of production. Dr. Brush made a great example in class on the 24th: Say I was to bring a "lucky" rabbit's foot to the exam for good luck, and I ended up doing well. If I thought the sole reason I did well on the exam was because I brought the rabbit's foot, and completely disregard the studying and the work I put into preparing for it, I would be fetishizing the rabbit's foot. I would be giving great value and causal power to something that in reality didn't really do anything for me at all. This concept is extremely significant both during Marx's time and still today. On page 35 of Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, Marx says, "The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things." This concept of commodity fetishism ties in with most of Marx's concepts of alienation, exploitation, exchange value, etc., in that these commodities become so important to the capitalist that he will go to any means to make sure they're being produced. When talking about capitalism, companies/industries with fetishize a product in an attempt to gain more power and more profit. Industries will create a product and present it to the people as if they NEED this thing to do something in particular or to live life in general, and make it seem like without this "thing" it's impossible, which generally is extremely wrong. Marx's main point is that you need to be a critical social theorist to make sure you don't fetishize commodities and concepts, and perhaps to make aware of the fact that political economies do in fact fetishize commodities simply to gain power and create more profit, and to be conscientious of that.

Your ID is thorough and nicely rooted in a wide range of the course materials.

3. Column 3, item 4: The proletariat were the workers, "the people who work for wages" (philosophypages.com). By restoring the dignity of labor, the proletariat may experience a revolution (classnotes 1/07/06). It is the proletariat class that develops into a movement, a revolution, as a result of its conflict with the bourgeoisie, "The
proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air” (p.84, CST).

**Nice job connecting the specific concept to an important characteristic of Marxist sociological theory (class analysis, conflict, and struggle).**

1 Historical Materialism is one of the key concepts in Marx's work. The 'historical' aspect examines "the transition or change over time and history that is driven by contradictions in everyday life" (class notes 1/12/06). That is, Marx uses this concept to examine whatever changes have taken place in human history and explain how these changes have influenced our current situation. The materialism aspect examines "the reality of everyday life" (class notes 1/17/06). That is looking at what actually occurs in current life and not focusing on idealism or other concerns (such as the afterlife).

Historical materialism is the opposite of idealism. Idealism states that "it is a clash of values or ideas that cause contradictions to occur that drive change over time in history." (class notes 1/17/06)

You could have noted that historical materialism is a characteristically Marxist methodology (in Harding's sense defined in class) or provided an example (especially one drawn from the readings to complement your drawing on class notes), or elaborated your statement of theoretical significance.

1 Column 3: Proletariat- Simply put, the proletariat is the class of workers, the proletariat is the collective noun of proletarian (notes from January 12, 2006). This key term is significant because it is the phrase that is used to describe the working class. This is considered the only class that is able to break down the class structure and cause a change or a revolution (which is all outlined on pp. 32-33 of the book "Classical Sociological Theory"). They were brought into society through the industrial revolution and it is not natural that they have no power, as explained by Marx, which is why they are the class that can break down the barriers and cause a change in society (pp. 33). They are the group of people in the society that are important in life to make a change. They are kept down by the bourgeoisie of the society because they are considered the "have-nots" of society, but only through a revolution of the masses, can they change things. They are a part of the Marxist dialectic idea.

A bit scattershot, but demonstrates your grasp of several important points.

3 Proletariat:

Under capitalism the proletariat is the class of worker or laborers, that is those who do not own property or means of production (under capitalism the owners are the bourgeoisie) (1-12-2006). The members of the proletariat are those who are forced to use their labor to make money which is necessary to function in a capitalist society. Under
capitalism they are often the majority, as it only work if only a small number of individuals are able to own and monopolize the means of production and thereby the economy (1-12-2006). The theoretical significance is that the growth of the bourgeoisie and the growth of the proletariat contradict one another. That is to say "their social relations contradict one another" (1-24-2006). So the irony is that the growth of the bourgeoisie also entails the growth of the proletariat, which will be the beginning of the downfall of the bourgeoisie. They cannot grow side by side when one is meant to hold the other down (1-24-2006). In this sense the proletariat is revolutionary because they have "radical chains" which are the means for "radical change". They will be able to change the social relations and thereby their position because the growth of the bourgeoisie requires the growth of the proletariat which will in turn lead to the downfall of the bourgeoisie (1-24-2006). (It is important to note that the "revolutionaries" depend on whether we are discussing capitalism, feudalism, or socialism).

A bit scattershot, but you eventually tag all the bases!

2. Exchange value- On page 45 of Capitalism and Commodities, Marx explains exchange value as the actual price of a commodity; the value of commodities when being exchanged for each other. It is the quantitative side of value. Marx argues that if two [different] commodities can be exchanged, there must be some third thing that they have in common that allows for this measurement of a commodity's value, which Marx then concluded is labor. Exchange value, as opposed to use value, isn't independent of labor because the exchange value of a commodity is essentially based on the labor required to produce it. Marx claims the exchange value results in the advancement of capitalism by "buying" the workers' labor power and using it to generate profit, which it turn makes the capitalist more powerful. This concept of "exchange value" is important because explaining exactly how capitalists are able to have all of this power and are able to make a profit is important when capitalism as a whole is really just beginning to flourish. These power relations determine the social relations, which between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are unequal. The concept of exchange value becomes significant in Marx's theories because he is seeing that the exchange value of a commodity is being based on labor, and that in turn, capitalists will push this labor power to gain power and create profit for themselves, which is when Marx also comes in with the idea of the exploitation of workers, and also ties in with the alienation of labor. Everything ties together!

Shows a sophisticated grasp of an abstract concept that is, as you note, centrally located in Marx's sociological theory.

1 Simply stated, commodity fetishism entails giving value to a commodity or product without crediting the worker. Marx uses religion as an example for explaining this phenomenon. He explains that using forces outside of this world as justifications for occurrences in the

Comment [UU4]: When are workers NOT “the majority” in a capitalist system?!
material world is comparable to giving a product an exchange value that does not award the proper credit to the labor put into its creation (CST 52/53). Commodity fetishism is used by political economists to obscure the social relations of production (notes 1/24). Marx is critical of this concept because it "misattributes causality" (Dr. Brush quote).

3 Marx refers to the bourgeoisie many times in his pieces because he sees class structure as a main problem of society. The bourgeoisie is the class of capitalist owners who own the means of production for labor. They are the ones that provide the proletarians (the class of workers) access to the means to which produce commodities from their labor. Most of the time the bourgeoisie have ascribed status where they were born into this role. They are the ones in control of all aspects of production for if they did not have the means of production the proletarians would have no jobs which in turn they would have no money. Marx states, "The bourgeoisie has torn away from its family the sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (Marx, pg. 78 of the Manifesto of the Communist Party). By the bourgeois capitalist having this power over the working class, he is stripping a world of social relations into that of economy and commodities. He ruins what the world cherishes, family and social ties. This is only one of the many ways that Marx argues the bourgeoisie are heading the world into rebellion. Another aspect of bourgeoisie is that they were the ones that led the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The significance of the bourgeoisie is to provide the means of production for the working class but along the way they ruin many aspects of human life.

Especially strong on the theoretical implications of Marx’s materialist class analysis.