

Class Notes for Soc 0150: Social Theory

Dr. Lisa Brush

Recorded for January 12, 2006 / notes by Emily Z. and Mindy Ghaemaghamy **with some insertions from Dr. Brush**

The website to access information for this course is www.pitt.edu/~lbrush/teach.htm

-Click on course 0150/Social Theory to find a copy of the syllabus, notes, words and definitions that will come up a lot in this course.

Dr. Brush briefly reviewed participation norms; see notes from the first class.

Part A: Alienation and Historical Materialism

Chapter One: Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law / Karl Marx

Students pair together and discuss Q-card questions with each other.

Students introduce Marx's opinion of 'the capitalist as a sort of vampire that literally drains away the productive life of the worker'. (Introduction / pg 22, 2nd paragraph)

Students are asked to incorporate introductory material into the text; linking it with the assigned primary source material.

Two classes of individuals are discussed.

The bourgeois – the class of capitalist owners

The proletarian – the class of workers

Dr. Brush distinguishes between bourgeois (a singular noun and an adjective) and bourgeoisie (a collective noun), between proletarian (a singular noun and an adjective) and proletariat (a collective noun). Use them carefully!

One of the learning goals of this class is to be able to identify and give the significance of a 'big idea'. Concepts are big ideas.

Two of our big concepts

- Alienation

- Historical materialism

The concepts of alienation and historical materialism will be important over the next few readings. In this text, what argument might a person be making if they are presenting a historically materialistic argument?

(Student answer)

- Although human nature is creative, a transition occurred over time where this creativeness switches to a pursuit of material wealth.

Historical part?

- There is a transition or change over time and history that is driven by contradictions in everyday life.

What is Marx doing here that is historical?

- He is defining a task of history.

Marx wants to establish truth of this world which is part of his materialist argument.

- He wants to characterize the present moment and characterize how it is we got here (historical part) and do it to our specific lives.

When any theorist talks about materialism they are talking about

- the actual material reality of what it is that we think.

Philosophers are not talking about money grabbers when they mention materialism instead they are talking about the reality of everyday life.

When speaking of this world, a materialist argument of a philosopher or social scientist would be based on what actually occurs in this world. It would not be based on ideas or ideology, but on actual material that exists.

- Material pieces of evidence, material events that have shaped the world.

We were being materialist the first day of class by:

- asking and telling each other what will make this a good class-that's material, it's not about jeans, or hair cuts etc.

Materialism (the basis of our common life) is in distinction to idealism.

Hegel was a champion of Idealism. Idealism stands in contrast with historical materialism. Idealism is movement through time in dialectic mode of change; change facilitated through a clash of ideas.

1. Thesis
2. Antithesis (an opposing idea): causes a process of contradiction to occur, creating a synthesis.
3. Synthesis

Marx critiques the concept of dialectic change by saying that it is not a clash values or ideas that cause contradictions to occur that drive change over time in history. It is material processes and

occurrences that facilitate change. Marx appropriates the notion of dialectic and contradiction from Hegel, but is critical of Hegel's idealism.

Always ask yourself two questions while reading (*you will see these questions on exams*)

- What is it? (identify)
- What of it? (give significance of)

What is the significance of this text?

(Student responses)

- The ideas are the same but the agents are different.
- There is significance in opposition of classes.
- The proletariat trying to claim the people as his; just as a king claims ownership over his land and workers.

How do things become the way they are?

- Historical materialism aims to characterize the present moment and locate the material basis of our, our work.

Marx's comments on the presence of religion in society are discussed.

Marx states that 'religion is created by man'; 'Religion is the self consciousness and self esteem of man who has either not found himself yet or has already lost himself again.' (Page 26) In this aspect religion is seen as an unsubstantiated constraint on society. It inhibits man from focusing on the current material world by having him focus on the world to come. The importance of the protestant reformation was a key factor in the birth of sociological theory and practice. This opened up opportunities to for new ideas that were formerly being oppressed by the church and its views.

(Student comment)

- This could be viewed as a secularization hypothesis presented by Marx.

Marx's comments on religion are further discussed - 'Religion as the illusory happiness of the people' and 'it (religion) is the opium of the people'. (Page 26)

In this sense, religion is a way in which people can be distracted from dealing with problems. It creates dependency and acts to sedate the individuals from the problems of the material world.

Who is capable of making the change in society?

- Marx is getting your attention and making you question your beliefs, thus waking you up to the situation through a charges image. Marx is NOT disrespecting religion- he is making a theoretical argument but knows by questioning your beliefs he will have your attention. He wants us to wake up from our dreams and see the real world.

This removal of religion will allow the radical change to take place.

When will the emancipation take place?

- When the workers of the proletariat class realize that they are bound by radical chains that will in turn create radical change. (Refer to page 33, 1st paragraph)
- No kind of bondage broke without breaking every kind of bondage. (Page 33 last paragraph)
- Proletariat has radical chains and these chains are necessary for radical change as a Marxist.

Next class (Tuesday January 17, 2006) we are moving to Marx on alienation.