

Sociology 0150 Classical Sociological Theory

Class notes for 1.24.2006

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Commodity fetishism

-fetish (according to Marx; **this is an anthropological definition rather than a deviance-oriented sociological or psychological definition, which is the more commonsense meaning we discussed**) – a material object believed to have a magical power *or* an object of unreasonable or excessive attention *or* an object that carries a charge out of proportion with other things

-commodity fetishism is used by political economists to obscure the social relationship of a product and labor put into a product.

-by viewing value as only exchange value one misses the **social relations of production**

-example: You bring a rabbit's foot to the exam for good luck and do very well. If you think the rabbit's foot is reason you did so great you would be obscuring your work (social relationship) and you would be fetishizing the rabbit's foot – you would be putting causal power on something that didn't actually do anything.

-have to be a critical social theorist to avoid fetishizing concepts

Dialectical materialism

materialism

-both social relationships and categories of analysis (any set of ideas) have a material basis

-reality precedes ideas and theology

-Marx is a materialist

dialectical

-dialectical means identifying contradictions and attributing trajectories of change to the development of contradictions and their resolution into something **new**

-example: development of bourgeoisie + development of proletariat => revolution of proletariat (The **social relations** between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat **are** contradictory [**the development of the bourgeoisie both entails the development of the proletariat and contains the seeds of destruction of the bourgeoisie**] and the “synthesis” or outcome of the contradiction is a revolution)

-example: development of means of production + development of social relationships of production => social change in the mode of production (**from feudalism to capitalism, or from capitalism to socialism, for example**)

Marx's....

Epistemology

In general: theory of knowledge, statement of how we know what we know, what constitutes “fact”

For Marx:

-materialist (not an idealist)

Theory of historical and social change

-theory of epochal revolutions in class relationships

-feudal mode of production lead to the capitalist mode of production

-happened when feudal means of productions reached limits of inherent contradiction and there was a revolution

-Marx argues same will happen with capitalism

-history is made up of class struggles that lead to change

Central problem

-class relations (are how the world is organized)

-exploitation

-alienated labor

-emancipation

Privileged agent/subject

in general: where the theorist says the action is **or who the actor/agent is**

according to Marx:

-revolutionary class (the class with radical chains)

-under feudalism this would be the bourgeoisie

-under capitalism this would be the proletariat

Principal explanatory mechanism

in general: why change happens

according to Marx: contradiction

Idiom

in general: way author/theorist talks about things consistently through his/her works

Marx:

1. dialectical historical materialism
 - dialectical= identifying contradictions
 - historical=seated in what's happened in history
 - materialism=reality
2. criticism

An idiom is what makes a work something characteristic of the author/theorist. For example, dialectical historical materialism would signal that a work is a Marxist work.

Goal

Marx: understand social world well enough to change it.

This goal is why he is included in classical social theory.

Think about what is characteristically Marxist.

Think about the questions what, where, why, when, who, and how.

Think about Marx's theories (of social change, collective action, ideology, globalization, economic development, etc.).

A theory is Marxist in the broadest sense to the extent it critically analyzes society's dynamic laws of motion in their totality, materiality, and historicity, combining determinacy with agency, thought with situation, complexly based on interests. (MacKinnon)