

EARLY MODERN SOCIAL THEORY

LECTURE NOTES

**INTRODUCTION  
TO EARLY  
MODERN  
SOCIAL THEORY**

**SOCIOLOGY 3P00**

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## EARLY MODERN SOCIAL THEORY

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## EARLY MODERN SOCIAL THEORY

### LECTURE ONE: SOCIAL THEORY, LIBERALISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT

#### Introduction to Social Theory

-- According to one possible definition, a social theory is a system of ideas or propositions that are considered to be the general principles, laws, or causes of *social* phenomena that are known or observed. Tidy as this definition seems, it raises as many questions as it answers. For example, what do we mean when we refer to a phenomenon as ‘social’? The fact is, no consensus exists amongst social theorists concerning what ‘the social’ or ‘society’ refers to! No wonder social theory abounds with controversy!

-- The great German writer Goethe wrote: “Theory is grey my friend, but green is the eternal tree of life.” No theory can capture the richness -- the full ‘colour’ -- of reality, least of all social reality. But sociology, like any discipline that aspires to be scientific, cannot do without a body of theory. Sociology is a social science, and like all science, it aims to develop a body of *objective* knowledge about the world. But this goal often seems beyond its reach, owing to the influence of ‘ideological influences’ and ‘vested interests’ on not just the answers that social theorists give to the ‘central questions of social theory’ but even on the way those questions are formulated. Still, however formidable the obstacles may be to achieving ‘objective knowledge’ about social reality, most social scientists insist that the attempt to achieve it is well worth the effort. After all, if we were to give up on the struggle for objective knowledge, where would that leave us in trying to find solutions to pressing social problems? Is either a free-for-all (“one opinion is as good as the next”) or an authoritarian/dogmatic approach really better than a debate that pays heed to the need for reason, logic, evidence, and scientific rigor in the adjudication of different opinions, policy options, or remedial programs? Clearly not.

-- Whether or not we aspire to be rigorous social scientists, the study of social theory provides all of us with the opportunity to think systematically about the key concepts and problems that -- consciously or unconsciously -- structure the way we look at the social world. This can be an uncomfortable thing to do, because it demands that we set aside our preconceived notions about many things that are important to us, and accept the fact that our views are often partial, one-sided, prejudiced and even unfounded. The difference between a scientific approach to the study of the social world and a non-scientific one is that the first rejects the notion that we should accept propositions about the social world ‘on faith’. Science is committed to the development of knowledge based on reason and evidence, rejecting any tendency to accept an idea uncritically simply because it’s backed by authority (whether secular or religious) or because it’s widely accepted or popular.

-- This course will survey some leading but also mutually competing approaches to

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answering many of the key questions of social theory, including: What is human nature? What is society? What is social progress? Is social progress real or an illusion? What is the relationship between human values and social facts? What is the relationship between social structure and human agency? What are 'social laws' and how variable are the social relations and institutions that give effect to them? And finally, what are the prospects for reconciling our loftiest moral and ethical aspirations with the hard facts and imperatives of human social life?

-- These questions were entertained for thousands of years by philosophers, but it was the advent of 'modern society' that joined them for the first time to the spirit of scientific inquiry. The search for the origins of early modern social theory must begin with the 'great transformation' that attended the scientific revolution inaugurated by Copernicus and that was dominated by the rise of a new economic order: capitalism.

### **Liberalism**

-- Classical **liberal social thought** of the 1600s and 1700s, especially in Britain, was an early expression, at the level of ideas, of **the transition from feudalism to capitalism**.

-- The **feudal social order** was built around rural estates called 'manors' that were dominated by aristocratic lords and/or clergy, nominally on behalf of a monarch or the Church. Under "pure feudalism," each manor was divided into three components: the demesne (the lord's domain), tenant land (the land cultivated by peasants/serfs), and 'the commons' (meadows or wooded areas that were open to all). Society was divided into a very rigid hierarchy: aristocrats, clergy and commoners. Peasant commoners were obliged to provide labour services or a portion of their agricultural product to their lords and/or the Church in exchange for military "protection" (provided by the lords) and spiritual guidance (provided by the clergy).

-- The transition from classical feudalism to a market-driven, capitalist socio-economic order was a lengthy process that was facilitated by the emergence of a centralized monarchical state. In Britain, from 1500 onward, absolutist monarchies supported the 'enclosure' of the commons and later of tenant land -- that is, the transformation of lands utilized by peasants to meet their needs (and fulfil their obligations to their lords) into the private property of lords and agricultural capitalists. Enclosed lands were often used to raise sheep, whose wool was sold for a profit to the burgeoning textile industry.

### **British 'Social Contract' Theory: Hobbes and Locke**

-- The absolute monarchies presided over a **commercial-feudal civilization** that combined feudal social forms and institutions with merchant-capitalist and imperial-

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colonialist ones. It was in justification of "absolutism" that **Thomas Hobbes** (1588-1679) wrote his famous work *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes argued that in a **state of nature** "the life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" and that "the condition of Man ...is a condition of Warre of everyone against every one." Human nature being what it is -- brutish, fearful, aggressive, glory-seeking, and resistant to change -- only a powerful government could compel people to comply with their contractual obligations and restrain their invidious appetites.

-- Hobbes distinguished between **political society** (the state) and **civil society**, and regarded the state as playing the dominant role. The State Leviathan is based upon and guarantees a **social contract** which permits a "civil" society and prevents a descent into chaos.

-- **John Locke** (1632-1704) is the first **distinctly liberal** thinker of the modern age. His accounts of the "state of nature" and the "social contract" were quite different from those of Hobbes. Like Hobbes, Locke doesn't regard the state of nature as something that only existed in the past; rather it's part of the human condition in the here and now. But, for Locke, most human beings are naturally sociable, polite, mannerly, and morally upright. Exceptions exist, however, and this fact, together with the need to address certain "inconveniences" of the state of nature, necessitates the existence of government.

-- Locke argues that the best government is the one that governs least. He is a believer in parliamentary majority rule; but the majority he has in mind is the majority of male property-holders, who alone should be represented in parliament. He is also an early exponent of the concept of "economic liberty."

-- Both Hobbes and Locke contributed to what C.B. Macpherson called **possessive individualism**, an ideology which asserts that the individual is the sole proprietor of his or her skills/capacities and owes nothing to society for them. (Such capacities are commodities to be bought and sold on the open market.) This ideology is the bedrock of classical liberalism.

-- Liberal social thought has always found a variety of expressions, but its characteristic point of departure is the acceptance, and celebration, of "free enterprise" and the market allocation of resources. (Twentieth-century "welfare liberalism" recognized that the preservation of these principles sometimes requires compromises involving a regulative role for the state and some public enterprise, while contemporary "neo-liberalism" represents a partial reversion to the classical liberal doctrine.)

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### **The Enlightenment**

-- "Enlightenment" thought both reflected and encouraged **the great transformation** that was occurring in European social life in the epoch of transition from the agrarian social order of feudalism to the increasingly industrial and market-based social system of modern capitalism. The Enlightenment (the culmination of the Age of Reason) was an intellectual movement that arose during the 100 year period between the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England and the French Revolution of 1789. The Glorious Revolution signalled the arrival of "constitutional monarchy" and political liberalism in Britain, while the more radical French Revolution has been viewed as both the fulfillment of the Enlightenment and its death knell.

-- John Locke was not only the dominant figure of the "English Enlightenment"; he was one of the seminal thinkers of the Enlightenment in general. His political philosophy (which made the case for **constitutional monarchy and a limited form of liberal democracy**) and his contributions to **the empiricist theory of knowledge** were to deeply influence the French *philosophes* of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as such leading lights of the American Enlightenment as Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Closer to home, there was a direct line of continuity from Locke to the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, who nevertheless rejected his (or any) social contract theory as a basis for liberal thought.

### **Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1770)**

-- Major Works: *Emile*, *The Social Contract* and *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*

-- Rousseau was the last of the classical social contract theorists, and perhaps the most enduringly influential of the French *philosophes*. For Rousseau, human equality and harmony prevail in a "state of nature"; society emerges as a result of population increase and the struggle against hostile natural forces. Society is born of **artificial inequalities** imposed by social development and that have their origin in *social conventions*, in particular, the institutions of **private property** and inheritance. According to Rousseau: "The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is Mine', and then found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society."

-- Under conditions of substantial inequality that breed "every vice," it's necessary that the social order legitimate itself through a social contract grounded in "**the general will**" to achieve the common good. Society can then base itself upon a "moral and legitimate" compact in which "virtue is the conformity of the individual will to the general will."

-- Just as human nature is malleable and variable, so too are individual human beings; a

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great deal depends upon education. In *Emile*, Rousseau's theme is the **perfectibility of man** through education, and the defence of the idea that human beings are naturally good. According to Alastair MacIntyre: "The simple, central, powerful concept in Rousseau is that of a **human nature** which is overlaid and distorted by existing social and political solutions, but whose authentic wants and needs provide us with the basis for morals and a measure of the corruption of social institutions... Rousseau does not deny that human nature has a history, that it can be and is often transformed."

### **The Scottish Enlightenment Thinkers**

-- Main figures: David Hume (empiricist philosopher and extreme sceptic); John Millar, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith (proto-sociologists, moral philosophers, and political economists)

**Three central themes** of specifically sociological interest:

a) **Social action frequently produces unanticipated and unintended consequences.**

"The road to hell is paved with good intentions," as the saying goes. But equally perhaps, the road to paradise is paved with self-serving ones.

Adam Smith writes: "...it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love." Also: "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good."

b) In opposition to social-contract theory (Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau), the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers regarded the state as subordinate to civil society (or believed that it ought to be). The most important forces shaping society and determining social change are economic forces emerging from the division of labour. **Economic determinism** is therefore a central theme of this intellectual current.

According to Millar: "In searching for the causes of [systems of law and government] we must undoubtedly resort...to the differences of situation, the fertility or barrenness of the soil, the nature of its productions, the species of labour requisite for procuring subsistence, in the number of individuals collected together in one community, their proficiency in the arts...The variety that frequently occurs in these and such other particulars...must be productive of corresponding habits, dispositions and ways of

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thinking."

c) Related to the last point -- an interest in the determinants of social change and establishing the **stages of human progress**.

Ferguson: savagery → barbarism → polished society

Smith and Millar: hunting → pastoral → agricultural → commercial

**Adam Smith** (1723-1790)

-- Main works: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) & *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)

-- Smith's thought evolved between the writing of these two works; thus, the first presents a concept of **human nature** that is somewhat more positive than that contained in the later work. *The Wealth of Nations* is concerned to show, among other things, that the individual pursuit of economic well-being, however selfish and mean-spirited this may seem, can produce socially beneficial outcomes. But Smith did not entirely abandon his earlier moral philosophy and positive view of human nature. Smith starts from the premise of the **natural sociability of human beings**, rejecting the idea that society is founded upon the relentless, self-seeking individualism emphasized by Thomas Hobbes or Bernard Mandeville. Human moral conduct is grounded on the **sympathy** that people feel toward those who have been wronged or unjustly treated.

-- Yet Smith was wary of human pride and excessive self-confidence. Accordingly, he rejected the idea of a "strong state" in favour of the idea of a society in which free-market forces (acting as an "**invisible hand**") could substitute for the calculations, plans and conscious intentions of (fallible and sometimes-corrupt) human agents. For Smith, the market should be allowed to rule as a kind of benevolent tyrant. But for this to happen, the State must strictly observe the principle of **laissez faire** (non-interference) and there needed to be a break from the prevailing economic system of "mercantilism."

-- Smith expressed some of these ideas in the following passages:

"Every individual ... intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an **invisible hand** to promote an end which was no part of his intention."

"It is the industry which is carried on for the benefit of the rich and powerful that is principally encouraged by our mercantile system. That which is carried on for the poor and indigent is too often either neglected or oppressed."

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-- The **central argument** of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was that the expansion of wealth depends upon the growth of labour productivity and the development of the division of labour, which in turn depends upon the extension of markets. Smith distinguished between **two types of obstacles** to the extension of markets (and hence to the development of the division of labour and the wealth of nations): natural and conventional obstacles. The former include natural factors such as geographical distance, which can be addressed through the development of transportation and communication infrastructures. Conventional obstacles, on the other hand, include human institutions and laws (for example, mercantilist trade monopolies and protectionist trade laws).

-- Paradoxically, Smith's defence of the **free market** was tied to his belief that state interference with the market will tend to benefit the rich and hurt the poor! The (not unrealistic) assumption behind this was that the state is an instrument of the privileged. (Certainly true for Smith's time; and ours?)

-- Smith's ideal society was one in which people own their own small businesses or farms and are not compelled by economic necessity to work for someone else. Nevertheless, Smith recognized that "commercial society" produced a social structure that was divided into **three classes** (which he referred to as "social orders"): landowners (who derive their income from rent), capitalists (who derive their income from ownership of stock), and labourers (who derive their income from wages).

### **The Damaging Human Effects of the Division of Labour**

-- Smith, Ferguson and Millar all recognized the damaging and dehumanizing effects of an increasingly detailed division of labour within industry, while also celebrating its potential for promoting economic growth and efficiency.

-- For Smith: "The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding... He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion and becomes as stupid as it is possible for a human creature to become."

-- For Ferguson: "Manufactures...prosper most when the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may, without any great effort or imagination be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men."

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### **Main Contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment Thinkers to Sociology**

- 1) a concept of society as both structure and process;
- 2) a sense of the complex relation existing between human agency and social structure;
- 3) a concept of society as an organized system that develops through definite stages.

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### LECTURE TWO: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO SOCIAL THEORY

-- When we evaluate a particular theory, and especially when we compare competing theoretical orientations, it's very helpful to examine the basic assumptions that each theory makes about such fundamental philosophical questions as 'What is the nature of social reality?' and 'How do we come to know social reality?'

-- One of the distinctive features of modern social thought is the (partial) separation of social theory from philosophy. Prior to modernity, the central questions of modern social theory were either not addressed at all or they were addressed by one or another branch of philosophy. Social theory continues to have a philosophical dimension, but it aspires as well to be a guide to *scientific inquiry*. Just as we distinguish philosophy from the theories that inform natural science, so must we distinguish it from the theories that inform social science. Nevertheless, neither natural science nor social science can detach themselves entirely from the questions or inquiries entertained by classical philosophy.

-- "Philosophy" derives from Greek words meaning the "love of wisdom." Until modern times, most educated persons interested in expanding the store of human knowledge were considered philosophers of some sort. Philosophy addressed virtually every question entertained by the human intellect, save the most mundane: the nature of reality, the sources of our knowledge, logic, religion, morality, aesthetics, politics, mathematics, physics, biology, human nature, psychology, and "the good society."

-- Before the advent of "modern science," some philosophers were important contributors to the expansion of human scientific and technical knowledge. But it's likely that artisans contributed a greater amount, since their activity was directed toward solving practical problems in the real, material world. Most philosophers, by contrast, were more interested in discovering the "eternal truths" that purportedly transcend that world. (On this, see Cliff Connor: *A People's History of Science*, New York: Nation Books, 2005.)

-- Does this history suggest that philosophy is "impractical" by its very nature? Not at all. However, the **idealist** school of thought that dominated philosophy for some two thousand years was undoubtedly an important impediment to the development of what we understand to be "science" today. Despite its achievements (notably Aristotle's system of formal logic), **philosophical idealism** diverted human inquiry from exploring "the real" toward speculation about "the ideal."

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### Materialism and Idealism

-- “**idealism**: any theory of the ultimate nature of reality which holds that all that exists is based on mind, spirit, or consciousness, and that material conditions are caused by these ‘ideal’ forces.” (Glossary to Course Reader, p. 397)

-- “**materialism**: any theory of the ultimate nature of reality which holds that all that exists is based on matter in motion, and that ideas and consciousness develop out of concrete material conditions.” (Glossary to Course Reader, p. 397)

-- **Philosophical idealism** has historically enjoyed a close and intimate association with religion, which itself has been a persistent obstacle to the development of science and the spread of a scientific worldview. Its greatest exponent, the ancient Greek philosopher **Plato**, openly discussed the value of religion (defined as belief in gods) as an instrument of ruling class domination and as a force for social cohesion in a class-divided society. His own “ideal society,” as presented in *The Republic*, is a rigidly class-divided one, in which its members are encouraged to believe that while they are all “brothers” some are more “valuable” than others: “when God was fashioning those of you who are fit to rule, he mixes in some gold, so these are the most valuable; and he put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen.”

-- **Philosophical idealism** arose in reaction against the ideas of earlier Greek thinkers with a more “materialist” frame of mind, especially the Ionian and Atomist schools of ancient Greek philosophy. **Philosophical materialism** was a reflection of the practical concerns of merchants and craftsmen operating within an increasingly trade-based division of labour. Philosophical idealism on the other hand sought to provide “rational” grounds for religious beliefs that were useful in justifying and perpetuating the domination of an aristocratic class of land and slave owners. Plato and his followers were opponents of the ancient Athenian democracy and proponents of **rule by an oligarchy** (a privileged minority). As George Novack points out: “To justify the caste system of Plato’s *Republic*, the citizens are to be duped into believing the noble lies that God created social distinctions, that differences in social status arose from inborn differences in the makeup of men and indeed from the very nature of things, and that if those of baser metal should capture power, the divine order of excellence would be overturned and the Republic ruined.” (*The Origins of Materialism*, p. 217)

-- **Philosophical materialism** could not mount an effective challenge to philosophical idealism so long as society remained in the grip of a strong ruling class that both backed and depended upon the authority of a powerful Church. Thus, the history of Western

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philosophy was dominated for well over a thousand years by the ideas of such idealist philosophers as Plato and Aristotle and, later, by the Catholic philosophers St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas.

-- It's not an exaggeration to say that this alliance between the Church and idealist philosophy was a major obstacle to any kind of human progress. **Augustine** candidly declared: "There is another form of temptation, even more fraught with danger. This is the disease of curiosity. It is this which drives us to try and discover the secrets of nature, those secrets which are beyond our understanding, which can avail us nothing and which man should not wish to learn." Augustine's death in 430 A.D. corresponds roughly to the beginning of the "Dark Ages" in Europe, a time when even the more "naturalist" elements of Aristotle's thought were actively suppressed by Church and State.

-- The materialist philosophy of Democritus, Epicurus and others was all but extinguished during this "Age of Faith." But new stirrings of curiosity and intellectual achievement associated with such names as Copernicus, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, and Isaac Newton laid the basis for a major challenge to religious dogma and philosophical idealism during the opening years of the so-called Age of Reason. Modern materialism was only to come fully into its own, however, with the revolution in natural science inaugurated by Charles Darwin's "theory of evolution through natural selection" as well as the revolution in social science associated with Marx's "materialist conception of history."

### **Rationalism and Empiricism**

-- The divide between idealism and materialism is just one of the important divides in philosophy. Another is the divide between rationalism and empiricism as distinct *theories of knowledge* ('epistemologies'). But here a word of caution is in order. "Rationalism" can be understood in a number of different ways. Rationalism, in the broadest sense, is simply a commitment to "reason" as opposed to "faith" as a basis for knowledge. In this sense, most of the Enlightenment thinkers were "rationalists" (including the empiricists). But in a narrower sense, rationalism is an epistemological position that *privileges reason over experience* in the generation of knowledge, and is therefore at odds with the "empiricist" school's celebration of experience (sensation, observation, experimentation, etc.) as the sole source of human knowledge. The leading Continental rationalists of the Age of Reason were Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, all of whom saw mathematics as the purest and most reliable form of knowledge. The leading empiricists were John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume.

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-- Within the rationalist and empiricist camps major differences developed over basic **“ontological” questions** (the nature of reality or being), and those differences were sometimes greater than those existing between the rationalists and the empiricists. There are two main sorts of ontological questions. One concerns whether “the material” or “the ideal” is the ultimate “substance” underlying all of reality (**materialism versus idealism**), and the other concerns whether reality is “unified” by one substance or divided into two very different substances, one material and the other ideal-spiritual (**monism versus dualism**). Among the rationalists, **Descartes** is most closely associated with dualism (his famous mind-body dualism suggesting that the human mind is a kind of “ghost” in the “machine” of the human body). **Spinoza** on the other hand was a monist (and probably a surreptitious materialist, despite his identification of nature with “God”).

-- Among the empiricists, **John Locke** was closest to a materialist position, even though his “theory of ideas” posited a dualistic separation between real objects and our perceptions of those objects. Exploiting the contradictions in Locke’s dualistic theory of knowledge, **Bishop Berkeley** argued that Locke’s empiricism is most compatible with **subjective idealism** (the position that all we can know is the contents of our own subjective experience, which may not have any connection at all to a “material reality” but which could be furnished instead by an incorporeal god). **David Hume** pressed the empiricist approach to its most radically sceptical conclusion, arguing that the empiricist questions “How do you know?” and “What is your proof?” must lead us to doubt everything, including god, material reality and even the self. T.Z. Lavine summarizes Hume’s philosophy as follows: “In the world of fact we are limited to our impressions and our ideas. We do not know what causes them to appear and reappear. We have no knowledge that an external world exists. We have no knowledge that we have personal identity, a continuous self through our lifetime. We have no knowledge of ultimate reality or of God.” Hume’s **radical skepticism** issues finally in the admission that by itself reason cannot secure our belief in any of these things. In the final analysis, only instinct -- or “animal faith” -- prevents us from descending into the madness of pure **solipsism** (the doctrine that one can only be sure about the existence of one’s own subjective consciousness at this particular moment). Hume’s philosophy was enduringly influential in the English-speaking world, but it provoked a rationalist backlash in Continental Europe -- on the one hand, the rationalist dualism of Kant and, on the other, the rationalist monism of Hegel, to which we shall turn a bit later.

## ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTION

-- The emergence of early modern social theory in the 1800s needs to be situated in the historical context of the social, political and economic transformations brought about by

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the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the 1600s and 1700s (in England, Holland and France in particular) and the industrial revolution of the 1700s and 1800s. These "twin revolutions" laid the basis for the modern capitalist social order. Both were nurtured by the intellectual movement and climate known as "the Enlightenment," which was the culmination of the "Age of Reason" that began in the 1600s.

-- In his essay, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784), the influential German philosopher **Immanuel Kant** wrote: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another... 'Have courage to use your own understanding!' -- that is the motto of enlightenment." The *liberal individualism* implied in this motto was a major theme of Enlightenment thought, as was the defense of *human reason* against the sentiment expressed in Protestant Reformation leader Martin Luther's declaration that: "Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has; it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but more frequently than not struggles against the divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God."

-- The "courage to use your own understanding" is undermined by many things, among them: deference to traditional authority (whether religious or secular), a preference for sentiment or emotion over science and reason as a basis for conduct, scepticism regarding the possibility of attaining a "true understanding" of reality, etc. (Such considerations discourage "enlightenment" even in our own time.)

-- Enlightenment philosophy was a major inspiration for those who led the great French Revolution of 1789-94, a revolution which was a pivotal event in the death agony of European feudalism. It also inspired the American Revolution (War of Independence) of 1776. Both the U.S. Constitution and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man are expressions of Enlightenment philosophy and social/political thought.

### ***The European and American Enlightenment***

-- Some major figures of the Continental European Enlightenment included: Diderot, Voltaire, Condorcet, Rousseau (France); Vico (Italy); Herder, Kant (Germany). In America, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Adams are noteworthy. In the British Isles, as previously noted, John Locke, David Hume, and Adam Smith were towering figures.

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### Some Major Themes of Enlightenment Thought

-- Although it's difficult to identify any specific "theories" that are common to all these thinkers, the Enlightenment is generally associated with the following general themes:

- a) a **near-materialist** view of reality and human beings (and a hostility toward religious dogma); related to this, a general preference for philosophical materialism or dualism over philosophical idealism, and a **humanistic** (deist or atheist) perspective;
- b) an **optimism** about both individual human development and **social progress** through education, emphasizing the role of individual (subjective) **reason** and **enlightened self-interest**;
- c) a **critical** attitude toward existing social institutions and arrangements, and an appetite to promote progressive change;
- d) a preference for **science and reason** over religious faith, superstition and tradition;
- e) a commitment to **intellectual freedom**, famously expressed by Voltaire's statement that "I disagree with what you say, but I defend to the death your right to say it";
- f) a desire to reconcile and synthesize the most fruitful insights of the **empiricist** and **rationalist** theories of knowledge; related to this, an ambition to define definite and reliable *foundations* for human knowledge;
- g) a reaction against the negative view of **human nature** expressed in Christian social philosophy (the doctrine of "original sin") in favour of the view that social conditions determine and often corrupt human conduct. (For **Diderot**, human beings are born innocent, but with a capacity for evil that is activated by *social* influences.)

-- **Rousseau** marks a turning-point in Enlightenment thought and anticipates some of the themes of the Romantic reaction against its more "scientific" currents. He recognizes the role of **non-rational factors** in determining human conduct and social outcomes; is **sceptical of science** and technology as panaceas for human problems (indeed he recognizes that they are very often simply weapons in the hands of the wealthy and powerful); and breaks from the rigid (mechanical) determinism of much Enlightenment thought by assigning a larger role to **free will** (voluntaristic action) in human affairs.

### Legacy of the Enlightenment

- liberal individualism
- the slogan of the French Revolution: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"
- the idea of the perfectibility of humanity through institutional change, education, and scientific progress
- defence and promotion of science and reason as against tradition and religious faith.

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### **Immanuel Kant** (1724-1804)

-- Having been awakened from his “dogmatic slumbers” by the challenge of David Hume’s radical skepticism, Immanuel Kant sought to counter Hume’s skepticism by defining reliable foundations for human knowledge and acknowledging the contributions of both experience and “pure reason” to its creation. But in formulating his epistemology, Kant also committed himself to a **dualistic metaphysics**, one which divided reality between “things in themselves” and “things as they appear to us.” He believed this approach would create a space for both scientific reason and religious faith in human affairs.

-- Kant acknowledged that human experiential knowledge is limited to “phenomena” -- the product of our sensory inputs as processed and interpreted by the faculties of human reason. While affirming that a reality existed beyond the human mind and independently of it, he denied that this reality was knowable by humans. His “transcendental idealism” defined the objects of knowledge as sensory inputs that are absolutely distinct from “things-in-themselves” or “noumena” (knowable only by God). These sensory inputs (perceptions), however, are always organized, interpreted and processed by the “categories of human reason”.

-- Kant insisted that the “categories of human reason” through which perceptions are interpreted are “innate” and “fixed” in the human mind. He identified **twelve pure categories or concepts**: unity, plurality and totality (under “quantity”); affirmation, negation, and limitation (under “quality”); substances-accidents, cause-effect, causal reciprocity (under “relation”); and possibility, actuality and necessity (under “modality”).

-- While Kant’s successors often disagreed with many aspects of his philosophy, few could deny the importance of his discovery of the “creative role” of the human intellect in shaping the raw materials of experience into human knowledge, beliefs and opinions.

### **Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory**

-- **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** (1770-1831) rejected Kant’s claim that the reality lying beyond our sensory perceptions is unknowable in principle. Although a thoroughgoing philosophical idealist, Hegel was also a **realist**, in the sense that he affirmed both that a reality existed independently of the human mind and that, in principle, this reality is knowable to it. Hegel accepted Kant’s revolutionary insight that the concepts of the human mind play a primary role in determining what we know. But he refused any limitation on their number; rejected Kant’s limitation on their use to sensory experience; and opposed the idea that these concepts stand as “barriers” to our understanding of reality. While acknowledging that appearances can be misleading, Hegel insisted that it is

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also through appearances that reality “shines forth.” As Lavine writes: “He wants...to be unlimited in using rational concepts to understand [the] vast variety of experience and knowledge. He wishes also to bring into his philosophy Romantic opposition, conflict, irony, contradiction, paradox, and to express the new sense, after the French Revolution, of the turnabouts of historical change.” (*From Socrates to Sartre*, p. 207)

-- Hegel proceeded to construct a new theory of reality, a new metaphysics, that he called “absolute idealism.” He argued that **the totality of concepts** employed over the vast stretches of human knowledge -- in philosophy, the sciences, the arts, religion, history -- are unified in the ultimate reality that he called “absolute mind” or “absolute spirit.” According to Lavine: “Reality is thus a vast and complex totality of rational concepts and this totality constitutes absolute mind or absolute spirit or God. The real, says Hegel, is the rational, and the rational is the real. This totality of thought is absolute, and characterizes absolute spirit, in contrast to finite minds such as ours; it is objective mind in contrast to the subjectivity of human minds.” (*From Socrates to Sartre*, p. 207)

-- The goal of human history, says Hegel, is the reconciliation of humanity with absolute spirit -- the overcoming of the contradiction between human subjectivity and “objective mind.” No one today would agree with Hegel’s claim that the rationality embodied in the Prussian absolutist state of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century represented the culmination of this historical process of the “unfolding of absolute spirit.” (Indeed, some would argue that Hegel only made this claim for the sake of political expediency and to satisfy the demands of government censors.) Nevertheless, in developing his philosophy of history, Hegel also refined a “system of logic” -- the dialectical method -- which many see as having enduring value, not least as a means of defending a realist theory of knowledge and a monistic ontology. Karl Marx shared Hegel’s commitment to realism, monism and the dialectical method -- but transformed them from Hegel’s idealist mould into his own resolutely materialist one.

According to Herbert Marcuse: “Hegel’s system brings to a close the entire epoch in modern philosophy that had begun with Descartes and had embodied the basic ideas of modern society. Hegel was the last to interpret the world as reason, subjecting nature and history alike as the standards of thought and freedom. At the same time, he recognized the social and political order men had achieved as the basis on which reason had to be realized. His system brought philosophy to the threshold of its negation and thus constituted the sole link between the old and the new form of critical theory, between philosophy and social theory.” (*Reason and Revolution*, pp. 252-253)

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### **Marx's Materialist and Dialectical "Social Ontology"**

-- Karl Marx was a materialist, who believed that all reality is essentially material and that consciousness (and "spirit") emerges through an evolutionary process. "Ideas" do not possess an "independent" existence (for example, in an incorporeal "God-head"), but are always the product of real-world processes and practices. Nevertheless, forms of consciousness and ideas do exhibit a "relative autonomy" in the sense that, once they have emerged, they can survive the disappearance of the conditions which gave rise to them. In other words, ideas can themselves become a "material force" once they have been embraced by "real, living individuals".

-- In Marx's words: "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." And further: "Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these ... no longer retain the semblance of independence [in the materialist conception of history]. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness." And still further: "All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice."

-- Thus, for Marx, all ideas (including wrong ones) "reflect" reality in some fashion; and in particular they reflect the practical attempts of human beings to meet and solve their manifold life problems using the concrete means at their disposal. Marx therefore avoids both voluntarism ("anything is possible if the will is strong enough") and mechanical determinism ("all human behaviour is determined by fixed laws"). Instead, he posited a *dialectic of subject and object*, and refused to see them as absolutely distinct. The "subject" is always part of the object, just as the object is part of the subject. A consequence is that: "Mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve, since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."

-- Marx rejected a powerful tendency within modern philosophy and social thought (descending from Kant, but opposed by Hegel) to regard "the material" and "the ideal" (i.e., material conditions and ideas) as absolutely distinct (i.e., independent). Instead, he saw them as distinguishable yet "internally-related" elements or "moments" of a singular reality; they comprise a "unity of opposites" -- distinct yet interpenetrated. Marx's **dialectical realism** stresses that the relationship between things and ideas is not static,

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but a *process* -- and subject to change. Dialectic is the "logic of change" -- of a reality that is constantly in motion. This dialectical approach is unalterably opposed to any Kantian or neo-Kantian *dualism* -- which regards the material and the ideal as absolutely distinct, as "different worlds" separated by an unbridgeable gulf.

-- Unlike most other social theorists, Marx does not posit an absolute opposition of the "material" and the "ideal". Instead he focuses on the dialectical relation between three relatively autonomous but interpenetrated aspects of social reality: 1) material/natural conditions, 2) human consciousness, and 3) the social relations of production and reproduction. It is the interplay of these elements that stimulates social development and imparts whatever "pattern" can be attributed to human history. Furthermore, Marx's "historical materialism" pays *closest* attention to the dynamic and contradictory relation between the material (or the "natural") and the social. It is this relation that always sets the stage for the emergence of forms of human consciousness that promote social change in the arena of **class struggle**. Class struggle is the means whereby the contradictions of social life are finally resolved.

-- A major obstacle to viewing the world in this way is a religious world-view. This is why the young Marx declared that "**the criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism.**" Religious faith nurtures both philosophical idealism (the doctrine that consciousness or spirit has priority over "the material") and dualism (the doctrine that the material and the ideal are entirely independent of each other). Nevertheless, in keeping with his commitment to dialectical realism, Marx did not dismiss religion as "mere illusion" (as Feuerbach did), but sought to unearth the roots of religious ideas in the lived experiences of "real, living individuals." Thus, while Marx certainly believed that religion was the "opium of the people," as he put it, he also maintained that "religious distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress."

-- These methodological and "ontological" principles are the basis of Marx's "materialist conception of history," also known as **historical materialism**, which will be discussed in Lecture Four.

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### **LECTURE THREE: 'UTOPIAN SOCIALISM', EARLY SOCIOLOGY AND DURKHEIM**

-- The aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars produced conditions favourable to a reassertion of a conservative "**Counter-enlightenment**" way of thinking. The main figures of this counter-enlightenment movement were the English political philosopher Edmund Burke and the French Catholic philosophers Bonald and Maistre.

-- Counter-enlightenment thinking emphasized the role of **irrational factors** in human conduct and often assigned them a positive value. It also involved an "**organicist**" **view of human society**; and a suspicion or hostility toward the idea that scientific progress is key to human happiness. Some of these themes were present in "romantic" versions of Enlightenment thought as well (notably in Rousseau's philosophy); but Counter-enlightenment thought pressed them into the service of deeply conservative, and even reactionary, ways of understanding the world.

-- Some key ideas of the Counter-enlightenment included Tradition, Feeling, Religion, Community, and Nation. **Edmund Burke**: a fierce critic of the French Revolution (although a defender of the American revolutionary War of Independence) saw society as more similar to an organism than to a machine. He rejected the idea that humans enjoyed absolute "natural" rights (or innate "human rights") and advocated a path of gradual social reform rather than of revolution.

-- In France, the monarchy was restored in 1814, though not the pre-revolutionary social order. The left-wing of the French Revolution (the "Jacobin-communist" current) was reduced to a small following on the continent, although Jacobin and socialist ideas spread rapidly in England in the 1820s.

-- Out of this ferment emerged **two bodies of ideas** that were to be influential in the development of 19<sup>th</sup> century social thought: the **early sociological theories** of Saint-Simon and Comte (which were to influence Durkheim, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and others) and the **early "socialist" thought** of Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, among others. This early socialism, together with Jacobin communism, prepared the political ground for the emergence of Marxian socialism, which considered itself a "scientific socialist" alternative to what Marx and Engels called "utopian socialism."

-- In general early sociology and utopian socialism drew quite different conclusions from the disappointing results of the French Revolution. The bourgeois sociologists saw the

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aims of the Revolution as overly-ambitious ("too radical"), while the utopian socialists saw the program of the French Revolutionaries as inconsistent and insufficiently radical. Saint-Simon may be seen as a figure who straddled the two camps, and whose thought is therefore marked by profound inconsistencies.

### **Henri De Saint-Simon** (1760-1825)

-- A participant in both the American and French Revolutions, he is often described as a "utopian socialist" (even though he was not an opponent of "private property" in the means of production). Saint-Simon was the mentor and teacher of Auguste Comte (the "father of sociology") and the original author of the most important and enduring ideas of Comte's "sociology." He retained elements of Enlightenment and revolutionary thought, but fused them with Romantic and conservative themes.

-- He called his field of study "social physiology," which he defined as a "positive science" that will be instrumental in forestalling further revolutions and permitting gradual social progress. According to Saint-Simon, "The philosophy of the 18th century has been critical and revolutionary; that of the 19th century will be inventive and constructive." Scientific knowledge should and will take the place of religious dogma, and the leadership of society should pass to a "natural" elite of scientists and industrialists. His is an **authoritarian-technocratic** vision of society -- an anticipation of the idea of "social engineering."

-- Saint-Simon saw the main social division within his own society as that between a class of idlers and a **productive class** consisting of industrial capitalists and the wage-labourers they employ. He was the original author of the concept of **industrial society**, and saw industrialism as the most salient feature of the modern social order. For Saint-Simon, meritocracy is a fundamental principle of the new industrial society.

-- Disagreeing with the British political economists that the pursuit of individual interest in the context of a free market economy leads automatically to the general good, he saw the need for a large-scale **system of centralized planning**. This is the main "socialist" element in his thinking.

-- Quote: "In the old system society is governed essentially by men; in the new it is governed only by principles."

### **Utopian Socialism**

-- Early 19th century socialist thought may be seen as a reaction to the depredations and social problems bred by the industrial revolution and the spread of capitalist social

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relations. It has a "nostalgic" aspect in that it often idealizes "simple commodity production" even as it recoils against the logical consequence of the *generalization* of commodity production: capitalism, which invariably involves the monopolization of the means of production by a small segment of society. To some degree, utopian socialism (especially in England) may be seen as a continuation and radicalization of certain themes in Adam Smith's political economy, precisely at the time when Smith's theories were being taken over, misrepresented and vulgarized by thinkers like **Thomas Malthus** (who sought above all to justify the inequities of the emerging capitalist order).

-- This early socialism was "utopian" in the later judgment of Marx and Engels because it continued a long tradition (reaching back to Plato) of "describing" an "ideal society" and then struggling for its realization primarily through "education" or the power of "example." Utopian socialists failed to see the conflict of objective class interests that prevented people of "good will" from all social classes uniting in a project of progressive and emancipatory social transformation. Furthermore, they sought to ground the socialist project on moral exhortations (appeals to "justice" and so forth) rather than on a scientific analysis of the contradictions and "laws of motion" of capitalism.

-- Main figures: **Robert Owen** (1771-1858), a Welsh industrialist whose revulsion toward working-class poverty led him to advocate successively: social legislation, experiments in organizing communist colonies in America, trade-union centralization, and the creation of workers' production cooperatives; **Charles Fourier** (1772-1837), a French commercial agent who attacked private property, the division of labour between city and countryside, money as the source of venality and corruption, and women's oppression in the patriarchal family, and who advocated the creation of self-managed communities of producer-consumers; **Etienne Cabet** (1788-1856), a French lawyer, who was the first to describe his doctrine as "communist" and who drew up a blue-print for a centrally planned economy in opposition to the market economy.

-- **A Marxist assessment of utopian socialism by Ernest Mandel:** "The flaws and contradictions of utopian socialism...reflect in the last analysis the immaturity of the material (economic and social) conditions in which the pre-proletarian oppressed classes fought their battle for a classless society. Ultimately, the label 'utopian' ought to be applied not to the goal these socialists sought to achieve, but to the conditions under which they tried to achieve it."

**Auguste Comte** (1798-1857)

-- Secretary to and disciple of Saint-Simon, prior to a falling out shortly before the latter's death, Comte infused Saint-Simon's doctrine with many more conservative ideas.

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-- Comte was extremely "anti-revolutionary" and tried to sell his doctrine on the basis that it defended the status quo and served existing social authority. He coined the term "**sociology**" and popularized a **positivist** philosophy within the social sciences.

-- Some Comte quotes:

"The principal social difficulties are today essentially not political but moral ones..." and their solution requires change in "opinions and morals" rather than in institutions.

Positivism promises to "insure the ruling classes against every anarchistic invasion"; "it is destined not to destroy but to organize." It involves "the subordination of imagination to observation."

-- **Order and Progress** are the fundamental concepts of Comte's sociology; the two ideas are united under the notion of "social evolution." Comte also popularized the concepts of **structure** and **function** in social theorizing. **Order** is the "fundamental condition of progress" and "all progress ultimately tends to consolidate order." Sociology has two main branches: **social stasis** (concerned with "laws of co-existence") and **social dynamics** (concerned with "laws of succession").

-- **An assessment of Comte by Irving Zeitlin:** "The whole apparatus of [Comte's] positive doctrine is ideological in the strictest sense of that term, and science never achieves very much autonomy in his doctrinaire and totalitarian system.... Despite the lip service he paid to 'science', virtually every assertion he makes is based not on experience, observation and reasoning, but on values and sentiments."

### **EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)**

-- Durkheim was born in Alsace, a disputed region between France and Germany, and subsequently moved with his parents to France after the region was ceded to Prussia in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871. A non-religious Jew who always felt somewhat out of place in Catholic France, especially during the period of the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s, he was influenced strongly by Montesquieu, Rousseau, Comte and Saint-Simon.

-- Durkheim was fundamentally "Saint-Simonian" in intellectual and political orientation. He was the founder of the French school of sociology and was the first French sociologist to hold an academic chair as such. His thought was an enormous formative influence on

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**structural-functionalism** in both anthropology and sociology, and more generally on the structuralist school of social theory.

**Major Works:** *The Division of Labour in Society; Suicide; The Rules of Sociological Method; Socialism; Sociology and Philosophy; The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life; Primitive Classification* (with Marcel Mauss).

**Major Theme:** society is based fundamentally on a **moral order** that renders possible the existence of **social solidarity**. Morality -- and not self-interested activity -- is the true "cement" of all societies, regardless of the complexity of the social structure. The basic theoretical problem is the relationship between the individual and society.

**Concept of Society:** Society constitutes a "reality *sui generis*" -- a reality of its "own type." It is not simply the sum of the individuals who make it up. It encompasses an "ideal" component that gives definition to its structure of social organization. This ideal component consists of principles of social organization and definite moral elements that cannot be studied "directly" but must be inferred through theoretical investigation. Durkheim is therefore not a positivist after the fashion of Comte, but rather a **theoretical realist**, with a strong tendency toward philosophical idealism. It is the "ideal" components of social existence (morality, ethics, "collective representations" like language and religious sentiment, etc.) that most interest him.

**Concept of Social-Scientific Method:** Durkheim is committed to the idea that there is a fundamental continuity between the natural and the social sciences; and this idea he shares with Comte's (and contemporary) "positivism." But he is at odds with positivists in two decisive respects. First, although he is committed to empirical methods of research, he does not hold that all that exists is directly accessible to the senses. In other words, reality contains within it certain elements that are "hidden" or "invisible" -- but which nevertheless decisively influence social affairs. Second, Durkheim is committed to **methodological holism** -- the idea that to grasp certain aspects of social reality one must begin with "the whole" and not with its individual elements.

-- Durkheim also maintains that sociologists must treat **social facts** as if they were *things* external to and exercising a constraining influence on the individual. There are three varieties of social facts: 1) **structural-morphological** (including the human milieu, material infrastructures of society, and the forms of association); 2) **institutions** (which are "crystallized" forms of the collective consciousness); and 3) **collective representations** (social currents, currents of opinion, and uncrystallized forms of the collective consciousness).

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-- Finally, Durkheim is methodologically **functionalist**; he tends to explain why social phenomena exist by pointing to the functions they perform on behalf of the larger "social organism."

### **Social Solidarity**

-- The impulse toward "solidarity" marks all human societies. This impulse arises less from the dispositions of individual human psychology than from the requirements (or needs) of society itself. Society imposes real constraints upon the individual, and exerts an enormous influence on individual human behaviour. Indeed, individual social action is largely dominated by a structure of ideas, concepts, values and moral imperatives that exists prior to and independently of individual volition. This is not to say that individuals are not free to make *some* choices; but these choices are defined decisively by the ideal structures of language, knowledge and, most importantly, morality.

-- **Morality** is not individual in nature; it involves the creation and imposition of rules, whose existence transcends the experience of individual social actors. The ethical or moral properties of society are not determined by a fixed **human nature** (as the utilitarians and natural-law liberals would have it). Instead, human nature is **dualistic** (two-sided), reflecting the "two poles of our being" -- the first "body-based," the second "supra-individual." The supra-individual determinants of human nature are precisely *social*. Society is both the source and the repository of all those "ideals" which help to shape human behaviour. As society changes, so too must human consciousness and the expressions of human nature.

-- There are two principal forms of **social solidarity: mechanical and organic**. In *The Division of Labour in Society*, Durkheim's first major work, he examines these in some detail. The distinction he draws is his way of understanding the differences between traditional and modern, or pre-capitalist and capitalist, societies.

-- **Mechanically solidary society** is one characterized by a high degree of "likeness" among its members. There is little in the way of **division of labour**, by which Durkheim means "occupational specialization"; indeed, most people are engaged in very similar tasks. Under such conditions, a highly cohesive "**conscience collective**" can exist. This can be understood in English as connoting both a "collective consciousness" and a "collective conscience." The basic idea is that most people have essentially the same world-view and moral beliefs; there is a high degree of homogeneity in terms of ideas, values, attitudes, etc. The conscience collective is made up of a number of *collective representations*: ideal structures that exist prior to and independently of individual social

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actors, dominating and constraining their conduct. For Durkheim, the *conscience collective* is "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society."

-- **Organically solidary society** is based on a developed, complex division of labour. People are involved in highly differentiated tasks within the overall division of labour, and there exists a plethora of "ways of life." Under these conditions, the *conscience collective* undergoes fragmentation. Collective representations continue to exist, of course; but they multiply. A plurality of religious, ethical, philosophical and even linguistic systems appear and disappear. Yet amidst all this diversity, a core of unifying beliefs asserts itself -- a core of beliefs that is central to organic solidarity, but which is far more "abstract" than those found in mechanically solidary societies. This might be described as a "humanistic ethos": tolerance for human cultural diversity and respect for the right of individuals to "go their own way" (within certain limits). Durkheim refers to this outlook as the **cult of the individual**. Ironically, it is the celebration of individualism that makes social solidarity possible in modern, industrial societies. In sum, organic solidarity relies on a new humanist collective consciousness that is based not on individual egoism, but on a shared belief in reciprocal obligations and mutual respect.

-- Organic solidarity is a product of historical development, since none of its elements are to be found in traditional societies/communities. Durkheim is vague about what causes the development of the division of labour (and eventually a system of organic solidarity). He points to an increase in **moral or dynamic density**, involving greater frequency of social contact, but makes it clear that this is not simply an automatic result of increasing "physical density" (population increase).

-- Unlike Marx (or even Weber), Durkheim does not regard modern society as necessarily prone to social conflict between classes. In fact, Durkheim rarely uses the term "class," preferring such expressions as "milieu". His conviction is that the impulse toward solidarity is as strong in modern, industrial (i.e. capitalist) society as in any other. However, solidarity under these new conditions does require the emergence of a **new moral order**, based upon new ethical and normative principles. These include: respect for individual rights, **meritocracy**, modern forms of **moral regulation** founded upon **egalitarian** and **democratic** principles. Here we find an echo of **Saint-Simon's** commitment to the idea of an industrial society based on **harmony** between different social classes. Harmony is not inevitable, however; and social conflict can certainly erupt if the moral order of society is insufficiently strong owing to **pathologies** within the division of labour.

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### Problems of Organic Solidarity

-- Durkheim believed that he was living through a period of transition to a society based fully on organic solidarity. The "malaise" of modern society reflected the incompleteness of this transition -- an "alarming poverty of morality." Modern society has not yet really "normalized" itself on the basis of adequate moral foundations. Consequently there is a **deficit of moral and normative regulation** linked to inadequacies in social organization. This is **anomie**. The main reason for this is that pathological or "abnormal" forms of the division of labour persist -- **anomic** and **forced** divisions of labour.

-- An **anomic division of labour** is one characterized by anomie (an absence or weakness of moral regulation) and is manifested in economic crises of overproduction, antagonistic relations between employers and employees, and the alienating tendencies of modern industrial organization and scientific specialization.

-- A **forced division of labour** is one characterized by rigid hierarchies based on social privilege, significant barriers to social mobility based on merit, and persistent inequalities of opportunity. It is a division of labour marked by immoral and unjust forms of regulation, and which is indifferent to the "distribution of natural talent."

-- Overcoming these pathologies is key to the emergence of a healthy organic solidarity. Durkheim is optimistic this will happen in time; but he is also pro-active -- i.e., he offers a concrete program of remedial action. This program includes: promoting meritocratic principles, limiting the right of testament and property inheritance, and the establishment of **occupational associations** that will play a role somewhat similar to the medieval guilds in morally regulating economic activity. He also believes that **public education** must play a key role in promoting the new values appropriate to organic solidarity.

### DURKHEIM ON RELIGION & THE GOOD SOCIETY

-- Given the central place occupied by morality in Durkheim's sociology, it is not surprising that he accords religion a great deal of attention; his "sociology of religion" is indeed revealing of both the strengths and weaknesses of his overall sociological system.

-- In *The Division of Labour in Society* and other early writings, the *conscience collective* is largely identified with **religious** practices and collective representations. Yet in the work most explicitly concerned with religion as a social phenomenon, his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim suggests that a collective consciousness need not have an overtly religious character. Indeed, he discusses how, through social evolution, religion is displaced by science, even while allowing that science continues to express many "religious" features.

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-- Durkheim's sociology of religion is fundamentally concerned with disclosing the continuities and discontinuities that exist between traditional and modern societies.

### **The Nature of Religion**

-- The distinctive feature of religious practices and beliefs is that they "presuppose a classification of all things known to men, real and ideal, into two classes, two distinct kinds" of phenomena, objects and symbols: **the sacred** and **the profane**. (This dichotomization of the world is related to the **duality** of the human being.) Sacred things are surrounded by ritual prescriptions and prohibitions that absolutely distinguish them from the everyday, mundane phenomena that are classified as profane. In addition, religion always involves **prescribed ritual practices** and **definite institutional forms**.

-- These considerations lead to Durkheim's most general definition of religion:  
"A unified (*solidaire*) system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things ... beliefs and practices which unite into a single **moral community** called a church, all those who adhere to them." The sacred may involve conceptions of a supreme being (a God) or several gods; or it may refer to particular objects or entities found in the natural environment (as in Totemic religions).

### ***The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*** (1915)

-- In this his last, and possibly greatest, major work, Durkheim's principal concern is to discover the *essence* of religion. What does the sacred refer to and from what does it spring? His analytical strategy is to identify what are the essential features or elements of the "simplest" form of human religion, which he understands to be the **totemism** characteristic of tribal societies with a primitive division of labour. His main focus is on the totemic religion of pre-literate Australian aboriginal tribes.

-- Totemic religions are distinguished from other religions by their preoccupation with the categories of **clan** and **totem**. The clan is a group of kindred which is not based centrally on ties of consanguinity ("blood ties"). Rather its identity is asserted through its association with a totem -- a specific plant or animal singled out for this purpose. The totem may be represented in a variety of ways, but each totem has its own emblem or blazon -- an object which serves as a figurative representation of the totem. Ordinary objects are regarded differently once they have become the emblem of a totem; they acquire a sacred quality.

-- Durkheim notes that totemic worship, which is not the worship of a "god" as such, is directed toward an impersonal and anonymous force that is both "immanent" and

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"transcendent." The essential aspect of such worship is the glorification or exalting of something that is superior to the worshiper's individuality -- something "sacred." In Durkheim's view, that essential something is nothing other than *society*-- which possesses all the characteristics required to inspire the awe, reverence, love and fear commonly associated with the religious experience. If we transpose this insight from totemic religions to those which posit the existence of a supreme being, we arrive at the conclusion that the worship of God is really the worship of society. God is the symbolic expression of the intensity of our feeling of community with others. The concept of the *soul* symbolizes the force of group life as this is internalized within the self. It therefore encompasses that side of human nature that is imposed by society.

-- In making this argument, Durkheim lays great stress on the significance of **collective ritual practices** to the development of a religious collective consciousness. He is unconcerned with the introspective dimensions of the religious experience (and this has been a basis for criticism of his theory). For him, the *interaction* of people in ritualistic practice generates that **effervescence** (bubbling with excitement) which leads people to believe that they are in the presence of something "special" -- something "sacred" and awe-inspiring. Effervescence is not peculiar to religious ceremonies, however. This feeling of exhilaration is also experienced at political rallies and even sporting events -- which explains the seemingly "religious" fervour that people can develop toward politics or sports.

-- Durkheim argues that the essential components of religion continue to assert themselves in apparently non-religious contexts. Thus, for example, the duality of body and soul, which is posited in the most primitive religions, is also to be found in the philosophy of Kant, and more generally in the strong tendency of modern "secular" thought to insist upon the duality of sensation and conceptual thought as sources of knowledge.

-- The fact that science is displacing religious faith in the consciousness of the multitude, however, does create moral and ethical problems of an acute sort. There is a pressing need for new forms of (moral) authority to fill the void left by the decline of traditional religious authority. This is a clearly Saint-Simonian theme, and it returns us to the issue of **remedial strategies** for overcoming the maladies of modern society. The work in which Durkheim addresses this issue most closely is his *Socialism*.

### **Communism, Socialism and the Good Society**

-- Durkheim makes a sharp distinction between what he calls "communism" (or communist doctrines) and "socialism" (or socialist doctrines). This distinction is

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unrelated to the one drawn by Marx, according to which communism is the “higher stage” of socialism. For Durkheim, the essential difference between communist doctrine and socialist doctrine turns on the issues of production, consumption and the role of the state. But there is a common element shared by communism (which he regards as an ancient utopian creed) and socialism (a program for reshaping modern industrial society): “Both are impelled by the double feeling that the free play of egoism is not enough to automatically produce social order and that, on the other hand, collective needs must outweigh individual convenience.” Durkheim is clearly in sympathy with this “double feeling” -- which is the common core of communism and socialism. But he nevertheless rejects both doctrines. To understand why, we must first outline his understanding of the two doctrines.

-- **Communist** ideas have existed for many centuries, usually finding expression in fictional utopias (e.g. Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*). Private property is typically identified as the source of all social evils, and material wealth is considered dangerous, since its accumulation leads inevitably to moral corruption.

-- **Socialism**, on the other hand, is of recent vintage -- one of the ideological products of the revolutionary changes that occurred in Europe from the late 1700s on. Socialism takes the view that the separation of state and economy must be overcome -- and that state policy should be directed toward the purely economic functions of management and administration. According to Durkheim, socialism advocates “the connection of all economic functions, or of certain of them, which are at the present time diffuse, to the directing and conscious centres of society.” The aim of socialism is the centralized regulation and control of production with a view to redistributing wealth and ensuring the welfare of all members of society. Unlike traditional communism, it is not concerned with the regulation of consumption, and it is not committed to an ethic of self-sacrifice.

-- It is noteworthy that Durkheim does not emphasize the idea of “class struggle” in socialist doctrines, nor does he concern himself with the differences between Marxian socialism and other varieties.

-- The socialist program of remedial action is inadequate in Durkheim's view; indeed it's part of the problem. It can't address the modern malaise because it fails to see that the fundamental problem with modern society is a *moral* one. (Interestingly, this is the obverse of Marx's criticism of utopian socialism.) Durkheim wants to limit the right of inheritance, extend welfare programs, attenuate class divisions, promote equality of opportunity, and he recognizes that all this requires **regulation of the economy** -- though not exclusively by the state. Non-state institutions -- the “occupational associations” --

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must play a leading role in regulating the division of labour. At the same time, the state must address the **moral measures** that are needed to overcome anomic social conditions.

-- With the development of the division of labour and social differentiation comes a trend toward the emancipation of the individual from subordination to a homogeneous collective consciousness, and this development brings forth an ethos (the cult of the individual) which stresses the rights and innate dignity of the individual. The state is the supreme guarantor of these individual rights in the modern world. But the state is subject also to nationalistic and bureaucratic tendencies which pose a threat to notions of individual equality and freedom. For this reason, the power of the state must be checked by secondary institutions which intervene between the state and the individual, mediating their relationship and protecting the rights of the individual citizen.

-- **Occupational associations** would be the most important of these institutions, bringing together all members of a particular industry or occupation to determine its rules of conduct and its relationship to the state and other associations. They would function to integrate, morally regulate and safeguard social responsibility. Unlike trade unions they would foster collaboration and solidarity, rather than confrontation and adversarial relations between capital and labour. Durkheim's idea prefigured *fascist corporatism*, the *co-participation* and *industrial democracy* systems that are widespread in contemporary Western Europe, and other modes of *institutionalized class collaboration*.

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### LECTURE FOUR: KARL MARX I

-- Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German-born philosopher, social theorist and political economist, and arguably the most influential thinker of modern times. He sought to put socialism/communism on a "scientific" foundation by showing how capitalism paves the way for its own supersession. He was active successively in the German Communist League and the Revolution of 1848, in the First International (International Working Men's Association), and in the Social Democratic movements of the 1870s and 1880s, advocating a class-struggle, revolutionary socialism. He produced most of his mature theoretical works while living in exile in England, maintaining a long-time intellectual and political collaboration with his friend **Friedrich Engels** (1820-1895).

-- Marx's theoretical work can be seen as the product of a critical encounter with and synthesis of several major influences: German philosophy (especially Hegel's dialectical logic and Feuerbach's materialism); French socialism (especially the Jacobin-communist tradition of Babeuf, Blanqui and Cabet ); and British political economy (Adam Smith, David Ricardo and the "Ricardian socialism" of Hodgskin, Hardy, Owen and Thompson).

-- **Major Works:** *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*; *The German Ideology* (with Engels); *The Poverty of Philosophy*; *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (three volumes, the last two edited by Engels); *Grundrisse*; *Theories of Surplus Value*; *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*; *The Civil War in France*; *The Communist Manifesto* (with Engels); *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The Marx-Engels Collected Works amount to over 100 large volumes!

-- **A warning by Engels** about the relationship of Marx's thought to the theories and practices of many of his supposed followers:

"...Marx used to say about the French 'Marxists' of the late [1870s]:

'All I know is that I am not a Marxist.'" (Engels, 1890)

#### **Marx and Socialist Politics**

-- Marx began his political career as a radical democrat, but evolved quickly to a socialist or communist position. It is common for people these days to regard democracy and socialism, and especially communism, as opposed to one another. Indeed, it's very common for people to equate capitalism and democracy. But for many people of Marx's time, and for that matter many people today, democracy and capitalism are at odds with one another, while socialism promises a truer form of democracy.

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-- Marx's intellectual authority has been claimed -- to one extent or another -- by a large number of very diverse tendencies on the socialist left. Interpretations of Marx vary widely; but it's plain that not everyone who claims to "follow Marx" (in theory, program or in "spirit") can do so with equal justification. Many of Marx's ideas have also been adapted and incorporated into non-Marxist theories and systems of thought.

-- It's safe to assume that Marx would have been highly critical of both of the major trends in the 20th Century labour movement that his ideas are supposed to have influenced: Social Democracy (parties like Canada's NDP, the Swedish Social Democrats, etc.) and Stalinism (the ruling parties of most "Communist" states and their supporters internationally). Marx was clearly committed to a *revolutionary* and a *democratic* socialism. Moreover, he was a thoroughgoing *internationalist* -- believing that **socialism could only be consolidated on a world scale**, as the successor to the international division of labour created by the capitalist world market. Thus, he would have rejected both the Stalinist project of "building socialism in one country" and the contemporary social-democratic project of "giving capitalism a human face." These "programmatic" points are important to grasp, because it was in the service of his **program of social transformation** that Marx developed his main theories.

-- For Marx, **socialism** represents a qualitative rupture with the capitalist form of social and economic organization. While capitalism creates many of the material preconditions for socialism, socialism cannot be constructed so long as society remains dominated by the "social logic" of the capitalist mode of production: above all, by the imperative to produce *for a profit*. Socialism means *production to meet human need*, which can only be guaranteed, according to Marx, under conditions where the major means of production and distribution are socially owned and where the social division of labour is based on democratically administered planning.

-- For Marx, socialism and communism are actually interchangeable terms at the programmatic level; however, **communism** also refers to the "higher stage" of socialism associated with the complete disappearance of class divisions, of the mental/manual division of labour, of the state (as an instrument of class rule), and of economic scarcity in the necessities of human life. Socialism/communism replaces capitalism's social logic of competition, exploitation, and profiteering, with **a social logic of co-operation, solidarity, and human development**. The elimination of private ownership and control of socially developed and collectively necessary productive resources, and the suppression of market-based social relations are the means to entrench this new social logic -- one which offers the hope of ending humanity's long nightmare of war, extreme social inequalities, and recurrent economic crises, as well as the injustices, prejudices and

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ignorance which have always marked -- and sustained -- class-divided societies.

### **Marxism and the “Soviet Experiment” in “Building Socialism”**

-- It's often said that Marx's ideas are attractive "in theory" but can't be realized "in practice." Arguably this is really little more than a simplistic rhetorical device to discourage the study of a powerful theoretical system that has inspired many of the most significant social movements of modern times. Marx himself anticipated the formidable practical difficulties involved in trying to construct "socialism" in isolated and backward countries (like Russia) when he asserted that: "A development of the productive forces [of the type brought about by capitalism] is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means the old crap must revive." The Soviet experience of "socialist construction" (i.e. "Stalinism") therefore does not refute Marx's views; on the contrary, it confirms Marx's own theoretical and programmatic warning!

### **Major Theoretical Innovations:**

- a) the **materialist conception of history**, and the highlighting of the **class struggle** as the major motor force of human social progress
- b) the refinement of the theory of **human alienation**
- c) the refinement of the theories of **labour-value** and **surplus value**
- d) the critique of bourgeois political economy as an **ideology** which tries to depict the capitalist economy and its laws as "natural" and "eternal"
- e) the discovery of the **laws of motion of capitalism** -- the laws governing its origins, dynamics, decline and eventual supersession
- f) identification of the **working class** as the only force with the social weight, strategic location, and consistent material interest to bring down capitalism and inaugurate a socialist transformation of society.

### **Marx's Social Ontology**

-- As already noted in Lecture Two, Marx does not posit an absolute opposition of the "material" and the "ideal". Instead he focuses on the dialectical relation between three relatively autonomous but interpenetrated aspects of social reality: 1) material/natural conditions, 2) human consciousness, and 3) what are almost always neglected in non-Marxist theories: the social relations of production and reproduction. It's the dynamic interplay of these elements that stimulates social development and imparts whatever "pattern" can be detected in human history. Furthermore, Marx's historical materialism pays *closest* attention to the dynamic and contradictory relation between the material (or the "natural") and the social. It is this relation that always sets the stage for the emergence

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of forms of human consciousness that promote social change in the arena of **class struggle**. Class struggle is the means whereby the contradictions of social life are finally resolved.

### HISTORICAL MATERIALISM/ THEORY OF HISTORY

-- Humans, according to Marx, "begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization ... What [human individuals] are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce."

-- Although he does not explicitly say so, Marx implies that human history has a pattern and "meaning" to the extent that the attempt to extend the **productivity of labour** (and indeed human capacities in general) can be said to hold sway in human history. This rational imperative is both frustrated and (indirectly) served by forms of rationality which promote inequality and relations of domination/ subordination. Human beings are driven to seek "material security" in the face of hostile natural *and social* forces.

-- "Modes of life" and **modes of production** are variable; but they always involve the interpenetration and interplay of **forces of production** (human productive capacities, including tools, labour-power, skills, technology and even "forms of thought") and **relations of production** (forms of social and economic organization, including class relations).

-- The propensity of human beings toward **labour-saving technical rationality** was a fundamental premise of Marx's view of **human nature**; it promised, in his view, to permit the eventual emergence of a mode of human existence in which human individuals would have the chance to develop their many-sided talents and capabilities unconstrained by either material hardship or social antagonism. This vision of "human emancipation" is as much a "guiding thread" of Marx's thought as any other that might be cited.

-- For tens of thousands of years, human beings lived under conditions of **primitive communism**, marked by egalitarian social relations, very simple technologies, and low levels of productivity. Life was insecure under these conditions because there was little capacity to produce or preserve an accumulated social surplus. Private property was unknown and the guiding principle of social life was "share the wealth." What division of labour did exist was based largely on considerations of gender and age.

-- As human technique and knowledge improved, the transition from hunting and

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gathering modes of life to settled **agricultural civilization** became possible. The agrarian revolution resulted in the emergence of a social surplus off of which a non-producing "ruling class" could live. Hence the first class divisions were associated with the emergence of an (initially modest) **social surplus product**. Forms of **private property** began to appear.

-- The most fundamental **class division** within any class-antagonistic mode of production is that between the **direct producers** (whether chattel slaves in ancient Rome, serfs in feudal Europe, or wage-labourers in modern capitalism) and a ruling class of **appropriators** (slave-owners, feudal lords, or capitalists). According to Marx:

"The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave-labour, and one based on wage-labour, lies only in the mode in which [...] surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer." (*Capital*, Vol. 1)

And further:

"The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers -- a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity -- which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis -- the same from the standpoint of its main conditions -- due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances." (*Capital*, Vol. 3)

-- Class division is also associated with the emergence of **ideology** -- a way of thinking that promotes particular class interests. According to Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The

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class which has the means of material production at its disposal consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it." The dominance of ruling class ideology is not absolute, however. Through struggle and self-organization, the modern working class, for example, can come to an understanding of what is wrong with capitalist ideology and acquire a class consciousness and worldview appropriate to its own interests and historical tasks.

-- Early class-antagonistic modes of production (like those of Mesopotamia, Egypt and China) were dominated by **state elites** (religious and military leaders), that were concerned less with promoting the productivity of labour than with securing their own power and privileges in relation to the mass of direct producers. As a result, the development of the forces of production was painfully slow under the social conditions prevailing in the '**Asiatic' mode of production**.

-- The mode of production associated with ancient Greek and Roman civilization represents a step forward from the "Asiatic mode." While many (though not all) direct producers were **chattel slaves** in this **ancient mode of production**, the civilizations of the Mediterranean basin were increasingly trade-oriented, as well as militaristic. The spread of markets through trade and conquest encouraged the development of small-scale **independent commodity production** and new crafts. And all this led to innovation -- to new techniques and new modes of problem solving.

-- **Feudalism**, which succeeded the ancient mode in Europe, further encouraged the development of markets and independent commodity production, although Europe was plunged into a Dark Age for several centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. The politically decentralized character of the feudal system and the inability of the feudal ruling class to suppress the growing economic power of merchants and industrial entrepreneurs favoured the spread of markets, the development of a money economy, and the eventual emergence of capitalism. Hence, the feudal mode of production powerfully assisted the development of the productive forces -- but only up to a point. Eventually, it became an impediment to further progress, and was finally swept away by the **bourgeois revolutions** that consolidated the conditions for capitalist development.

-- The **capitalist mode of production** is the first class-antagonistic mode of production to possess a set of social relations of production that promotes *systematically* the development of labour productivity and the extension of human capacities. Where capitalism has become the dominant mode of production within a particular society, that society is characterized by three dynamically interrelated relations of production: the

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**competitive relation** between individual capitalist firms in the market; the **exploitative relation** between capitalists and workers; and the **equalitarian relation** between economic actors that prevails in the "free market". Like all other class-antagonistic modes of production, capitalism depends upon the **appropriation of surplus-labour** (i.e. class exploitation). Indeed, under capitalism, labour-time becomes the exclusive *measure of wealth*, since money (the market's "universal equivalent") is essentially an expression of "abstract labour." Yet capitalism also tends toward a **displacement of living labour** from production (the "automization" of production that Marx was among the first to predict). This results in a **structural contradiction** that renders capitalism less and less capable of playing a progressive historical role.

-- Marx nowhere asserts that this historical sequence of "modes of production" is either "necessary" or "inevitable", even though such a view has been attributed to him. Nevertheless, the historical transitions associated with the succession of modes of production have produced a discernible **pattern of human progress**. In Marx's words:

"In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois [capitalist] mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production ... -- but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation." (*Preface* of 1859)

-- Elsewhere in the *Preface* of 1859 to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx suggested a **base-superstructure model** that became extremely influential in later interpretations of his thought. Here is what Marx says:

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life... At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or -- this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms -- with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their

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fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure."

-- This passage is a useful summary of Marx's views on the dynamics of social change, but a few words of caution are in order:

a) the **base-superstructure metaphor** used by Marx in this passage lends itself to a "dualistic" conception of the relationship between an "economic foundation" and an "ideal" superstructure; furthermore the metaphor seems altogether more applicable to a capitalist social formation than to pre-capitalist ones.

b) locating **the state and the law** in the "superstructure" obscures Marx's own insistence elsewhere in his writings that these institutions may play a vital role in defining the relations of production (and therewith the "economic structure" or "mode of production").

c) the **dialectical interaction** of forms of consciousness, relations of production and forces of production is *not* sketched in this passage, thereby encouraging an interpretation of Marx as a straight-forward "economic determinist." But Marx's thought is *dialectical* -- i.e. sensitive to the complex interplay existing between the various aspects of social reality -- and is resistant to any form of mechanical determinism.

-- One should keep in mind what Marx says in the *Grundrisse*: "**Society** does not consist of individuals, but expresses **the sum of interrelations**, the relations within which these individuals stand."

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### LECTURE FIVE: MARX II

-- The greater part of Marx's strictly theoretical or scientific work was devoted to developing a historical-materialist analysis of **the capitalist mode of production** and its characteristic **laws of motion**. In doing this, Marx was obliged to confront critically the prevailing economic doctrines of his own day: the classical political economy of Adam Smith and David Ricardo; the "vulgar economics" of Thomas Malthus and other apologists of the misery imposed by capitalism; the "popular political economy" of Hodgskins, Bray, Proudhon and Thompson; and, to a lesser extent, the "marginal-utility" theory of value that was just appearing toward the end of Marx's life.

#### **Specific Features and Laws of Motion of Capitalism**

-- Like every mode of production, capitalism possesses characteristics that are *historically specific* to it. Grasping the *specific features* of the capitalist mode of production permits the analysis of its *unique laws of motion*: the laws governing its emergence, its structural dynamics, and its eventual historical decline. While capitalism's laws of motion are historically specific to it, and therefore do not operate in other socio-economic formations, these laws reflect the encounter between certain "natural" imperatives, constraints or laws and the particularities of capitalist social organization.

-- For example, the **law of labour-value** is the specifically *capitalist form* of the human imperative to distribute the aggregate labour of society in definite proportions to a multitude of different economic tasks. It is a "law" which can only operate fully in the context of capitalist social institutions and social relations. More precisely, the law of labour-value "regulates" the distribution of social labour in accordance with the specifically capitalist imperatives to measure "wealth" in terms of labour performed in the production of marketed goods; to articulate a division of labour through the interplay of market forces; and to subordinate social production to the drive for private profit.

-- Capitalism is not simply a system of "private ownership" of the means of production; nor is it simply a market-driven economy in which everyone seeks to maximize their "utilities" or their "profits" (conceived as a "return on entrepreneurial effort"). For Marx, capitalism is a *mode of production* in which **labour-power** (the capacity to perform physical or mental labour, or some combination of the two) has become a **commodity** on a wide-scale -- something that is bought and sold in a market. Labour-power in pre-capitalist societies does not *typically* assume the "commodity form", because the direct producers in such societies are in possession of their means of production (though they may still be exploited through political processes). Capitalism, however, emerges through

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**the separation of the direct producers from their means of production**, and through the "monopolization" of the means of production in the hands of a smaller and smaller segment of society: the capitalist class (or bourgeoisie). As the direct producers are no longer able to secure a livelihood except through the sale of their labour-power for a wage or salary, they are transformed into the modern "working class" (or "proletariat"). Thus, the system of commodity production becomes *generalized*.

-- The **primitive accumulation of capital**, which is the historic precondition for this generalization, depended upon the widespread application of **force**: the coercive commodification of labour-power, the plunder of colonial possessions, and the super-exploitation of slave labour that helped to finance the "industrial revolution."

-- **Capitalist commodity production** needs to be distinguished from the "simple" or "independent" commodity production that existed in both pre-capitalist and capitalist social formations for thousands of years. Marx begins by considering the "economic circuit" of **simple (independent) commodity production**:

C -- M -- C.

Here a commodity (say potatoes) produced by an independent commodity producer, largely through the application of her own labour, is sold in the market for money, which is then used to purchase a different kind of commodity (say farm implements). This economic circuit doesn't permit the producer to realize "profits," since it's based on the principle of exchanging equivalent for equivalent. No exploitation of other people's labour is involved. The money received by the independent commodity producer may increase or decrease in accordance with how vigorously and efficiently she works; but so long as she performs most of the work herself, she is unlikely to accumulate a great deal of wealth (at best, only a gradual accumulation of wealth is possible).

-- In **capitalist commodity production**, the situation is fundamentally different. Here, we find the economic circuit, which Marx calls the **circuit of capital**:

M -- C -- M'.

Here the economic process begins with an investment of **value** (the money capital, M), which is then used to purchase specific commodities (C) that allow for the realization of an *enlarged* magnitude of value (M'). The difference between M' and M is what Marx calls **surplus value** -- an accretion of new value. Surplus value is the "social substance" of profit (as well as ground rent and interest).

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-- Marx showed that surplus-value (and hence private profits) originated in the **exploitation** of living labour by capital.

-- Marx notes that the circuit  $M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$  appears to violate the principle of the "exchange of equivalents" which is supposed to govern exchange in a free market. Certainly, it's possible for some economic agents to realize a profit by "buying cheap and selling dear." But such profits result from equivalent losses elsewhere in the market; so the profits and losses would tend to cancel each other out. The question thus remains: how are profits generated on an *economy-wide* basis under conditions where total value and total prices must ultimately be equalized? Marx says that this question cannot be answered so long as we focus only on the "sphere of exchange" -- the "marketplace" of bourgeois economics. To answer it we must look at what occurs in the sphere of *production*. To do this, he reformulates the circuit of capital as follows:

$$M \rightarrow C \text{ (MP and LP)} \dots P \dots C' \rightarrow M'$$

-- In this "expanded formula" for the circuit of (industrial) capital, a capitalist invests a definite amount of money capital (M) in two distinct *kinds* of commodities, both of which are *inputs* to a production process (P). The first *kind* of commodity is "means of production" (MP) -- consisting of tools, physical plant, land, machinery, raw materials and so forth; these constitute the *objective* elements of the production process. The second *kind* of commodity is "labour-power" (LP), the *capacity* for labour (mental and manual), which is always embodied in *living workers*. When means of production and living labour-power are brought together in production, the result is an *output* commodity (C') that represents a greater amount of *value* than the original input commodities. If and when this output commodity is sold at its value, a magnitude of value (M') is *realized in money form* that is greater than the original money capital investment. Surplus value is therefore the result of capitalist *production* (always involving the exploitation of wage labour).

-- Surplus value is therefore created solely by that "unique" commodity known as labour-power. Means of production cannot create "new value"; they merely pass on to the new commodity product "previously-existing values" as these are consumed in production. Labour-power, however, can produce more value than it "represents." The value of labour-power is determined by its cost of reproduction (simply put, the wage); but the physical activity of labouring is variable (or elastic) in its contribution to the creation of new value. The difference between what living labour *creates* in the way of new value and the wage-bill of productive workers is surplus-value.

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-- Surplus value results then from the appropriation of surplus (effectively unpaid) labour in production, which is made possible by the capitalist monopoly of ownership of the means of production and capital's control over the labour process. Capitalist exploitation doesn't rely on "unequal exchange" in the market, but on the **subordination of labour to capital** within the sphere of production.

-- But what does Marx mean by **value**? Recall that a commodity is a *product of labour* that is produced with a view to its *sale* in a market. Every commodity has a utility (or "use-value") as well as an exchange-value (the power to command some sort of remuneration in exchange: a price). Marx asserts that a commodity's exchange-value is a "form of appearance" of its *value*. The **value** of a commodity is an expression of its relationship to all other commodities as a product of the social division of labour existing between producers (i.e. living labourers). Accordingly, the substance of value is **abstract social labour**; the magnitude of value is **socially necessary labour time**, and the form of value is **money** (which quantifies and measures abstract labour).

-- The point of Marx's theory of value is not to explain *individual price formation* (as the marginal utility theory of "value" seeks to do in bourgeois economics). Rather its point is to disclose the "laws of motion" of the capitalist economy as a whole. According to Marx, **total value equal total prices** -- for without the social relations of capitalist production expressed by "value" (which ultimately is a **relation between people**), the economic category of price could have neither concrete existence nor theoretical pertinence.

-- Operationally, Marx's **law of labour-value** involves **two fundamental postulates**:

- 1) **living labour is the sole source of all new value**, including the surplus-value represented by profits of enterprise and interest; and
- 2) **value exists as a definite quantitative magnitude** at the level of the capitalist economy as a whole, a magnitude that "limits" profits, wages and prices.

-- This theory of labour-value is the basis upon which Marx constructs his theory of **capitalist crisis**. The law of labour-value explains a peculiar characteristic of capitalism: the fact that it is the only mode of production in human history to generate **crises of overproduction**. In pre-capitalist societies, economic crisis is associated with *underproduction*. But underproduction of use-values is rarely a problem in capitalist societies. Yet periodically **too many commodities are produced** in relation to the **effective demand** that exists for them. Effective demand is demand backed by *purchasing power* -- money in the hands of the would-be purchaser. The characteristic

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*form* of capitalist economic crisis, namely overproduction, is therefore a result of insufficient demand (backed by money, the expression of *abstract social labour*) for commodities representing a definite amount of value (abstract socially necessary labour time). Commodities cannot be sold (or markets “cleared”) at prices which permit an adequate profit margin; and since profit drives capitalist production, the economy slows and ultimately contracts, throwing large numbers out of work and rendering much productive plant idle. (We will consider Marx's theory of crisis in somewhat greater detail in Lecture Nine.)

-- Much controversy has surrounded Marx's theories of value, surplus-value and crisis as a scientific basis for establishing the historical limits of capitalism. Many theorists have found the young Marx's overtly humanist critique of capitalist **alienation** to be of more enduring significance. It is, however, possible to argue that Marx's later economic works are a logical extension of his earlier, more "philosophical" criticisms of capitalist alienation. **Marx's theory of alienation**, as found in his Paris manuscripts of 1844, rests upon the following propositions:

- a) By *objectifying* their labour, humans embark on a project of transforming nature through *praxis* (i.e. purposive, self-directed activity), in this way affirming their 'species being'.
- b) This objectification of human labour entails the 'alienation' of the direct producer only under well-defined and historically-specific social conditions.
- c) The alienation of labour occurs where:
  - 1) labour is 'external' to the worker, in the sense that it 'belongs to another', is 'coerced' or 'forced' labour, and is performed only as a *means* 'to satisfy needs external to it';
  - 2) the worker experiences the product of labour 'as an alien object exercising power over him' and the objects of nature 'as an alien world inimically opposed to him';
  - 3) the worker experiences the labour process as an 'activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him'; and
  - 4) human beings are estranged from their 'species life' and from one another due to a compulsion to transform their capabilities into *means* to 'individual existence'.
- d) In short, the alienation of labour is not endemic to the human condition, but is bound up with the presence of *class-antagonistic* social relations of production, particularly those associated with capitalism.

-- Marx's *Capital* can be seen as the '*completion*' of his critique of capitalist alienation. In

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this, his mature 'scientific' critique of capitalist economy, Marx provides an analysis of **humanity's 'objective alienation' from control over the social division of labour as a whole.** The alienation of the producer from the (appropriated) product, from other human beings, from nature and from 'species life' (praxis) constitute the dimensions of an alienated condition as it is experienced subjectively by *individual* direct producers. In *Capital* and especially in the *Grundrisse*, Marx shows that these are but aspects of a larger alienation -- the collective alienation of the human species from an authentic praxis. Such a praxis, for Marx, necessarily requires human emancipation from the blind forces of the market and the substitution of rational and democratically administered planning in the articulation of a societal division of labour.

### SOCIAL REVOLUTION, THE STATE AND WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

-- Only the working class has a consistent material, albeit historically conditioned, interest in achieving socialism, and only it has the potential to break the economic, social and political power of the capitalist class and inaugurate a new social order. This **revolutionary potential** can only remain a *latent capacity*, however, so long as most working class people lack a fully developed **class consciousness**. Owing to capitalist ideological domination and the "dull compulsion" of capitalist social relations, the development of working-class, socialist consciousness is an uneven and discontinuous process. In "normal times," it develops slowly, if at all. After major defeats of the working class, it can be thrown back considerably. Yet, the "social being" that determines consciousness consists of more than the concerted efforts of capitalists to impose their values and world-view on workers, or to divide workers along national, ethnic, racial and gender lines, or the experience of working-class defeat at the hands of capital. The conditions of working-class life also include the experience of class conflict, of witnessing the injustices and depredations of capitalist society, and ultimately of recognizing the irrationality of capitalist production for profit. History shows that, particularly during times of political and economic **crisis**, workers can escape the domination of bourgeois ideology and acquire socialist consciousness.

--The fundamental principle of Marx's political program for transcending capitalism and achieving a socialist society is the principle of **the self-emancipation of the working class**. The working class, he insists, must organize itself independently of the capitalist class (through unions, political parties and other institutions) and seek to win over other oppressed social strata on the basis of its own program for social reconstruction.

-- It is through the struggle for reforms under capitalism and for transitional demands that anticipate the social, political and economic content of a socialist society that the working

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class can build its self-confidence, win allies, and create the organizational instruments for a socialist transformation.

--The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 convinced Marx that the working class could not simply take over the administrative apparatus of the capitalist state and use it as an instrument for socialist transformation. All states are *class* states that seek to perpetuate a particular mode of production. The state in capitalist society is constituted to safeguard and promote the interests of the capitalist class. While the capitalist state may sometimes make concessions to the working class and other subaltern strata in order to secure "social peace" (educational and health services, social welfare, unemployment insurance, etc.), it will always stand opposed to any movement toward socialist transformation. Its fundamental components (the police, the armed forces, the judiciary, and the upper echelons of the civil service) are devoted to upholding the laws and institutions of capitalist society.

-- For socialist transformation to occur, therefore, the socialist working-class movement must "smash" the old state apparatus through social revolution and inaugurate a workers' state. This workers state (dictatorship of the proletariat) will undertake the expropriation of capital, the socialization of the economy, the establishment of economic planning, and the defence of the new order against foreign capitalist enemies. Its ultimate goal is to achieve **world socialism -- a classless and stateless society** in which, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "**the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.**"

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### LECTURE SIX: MAX WEBER

-- Weber (1864-1920) was an economic historian and the leading figure in the rise of academic sociology in Germany. He was a pioneer of both "historical sociology" (which has many affinities to Marx's historical materialism) and "interpretive sociology" (a subjectivist, social-psychological approach which is based on a neo-Kantian dualist perspective in philosophy). If Marx and his followers may be seen as an "Enlightenment of the Second Mobilization," Weber (along with Nietzsche and perhaps Freud) may be seen as among its leading intellectual adversaries.

-- Weber's sociological project is one which stresses the difficulty, indeed impossibility, of genuine human progress beyond modern capitalism. He (like the political economists against whom Marx inveighed) tends to treat capitalist social relations as entirely "rational" and non-transcendable. Yet this tendency co-exists uneasily with Weber's detailed historical-sociological investigations which lend support to Marx's historical-materialist proposition that human social relations and forms are enormously *variable*. This inconsistency can be attributed in part to Weber's commitment to erecting an intellectual bulwark against the political implications of Marx's theories.

-- A **liberal democrat**, Weber defended capitalism against the challenge of the German socialist movement; yet he lived to see the right wing of that movement (in the German Social Democratic Party) come close to his own political positions in the immediate aftermath of World War I. He was nevertheless a *reluctant* defender of capitalism, inasmuch as he saw modern capitalism furthering a process of **rationalization** that was enclosing society in an "iron cage" of bureaucracy. He may thus be fairly considered an "historical pessimist"; the future, he believed, was not a bright one, and human beings could do little to turn back the forces eroding human freedom. Again, however, it might be observed that this pessimism and historical determinism fits uneasily with his commitment to the idea that human social action is irreducibly diverse and frequently produces unintended social outcomes. It would seem that **Weber was of "two minds,"** arguing, on the one hand, that pre-capitalist (or non-capitalist) societies are subject to great cultural variation and susceptible to changes brought about by the independent influence of *ideas* on human conduct; and, on the other hand, that capitalism creates conditions favouring an ineluctable process of rationalization, eliminating cultural distinctions and reducing the scope for "voluntary" human action.

-- Weber's **dualism** is therefore reflected in his view of the very "structure" of human history. While not all of Weber's work conflicts with Marx's theory (indeed, much of it serves to refine it and "round it out"), this dualistic vision of human social development is

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ultimately entirely at odds with Marx's dialectical one. It may therefore be said that Weber was truly a "bourgeois Marx" who carried out a life-long debate with the "ghost" of his socialist adversary.

-- **Quotes** from Weber:

"I am a member of the bourgeois classes. I feel myself as such and I am educated in its views and ideas."

"The honesty of a scholar of today, and particularly of a philosopher, can be measured by where he stands in relation to Nietzsche and Marx. Anyone who does not admit that he could not have achieved very important parts of his own work without the work that these two men accomplished, deludes both himself and others. The mental world in which we ourselves exist bears to a great extent the stamp of Marx and Nietzsche." (Stated in a debate with Oswald Spengler in 1920.)

**Major Works:** *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism; Economy and Society; General Economic History; The Methodology of the Social Sciences*

-- A useful way to grasp Weber's thought is to consider the significance of his disagreements with Marx concerning two issues in particular:

- 1) the *origins* of modern capitalism, and
- 2) the *nature* of modern capitalism.

-- It cannot be stressed too strongly that Weber's divergences from Marx on these questions reflect his commitment to a markedly different "social ontology" and "scientific method." To begin, we will focus on Weber's famous argument concerning the role of the Protestant Reformation in the rise of modern European capitalism, and relate this argument to his methodological and philosophical commitments.

### **Protestantism and Capitalism**

-- It would be incorrect to say that Weber thought that modern capitalism was "caused" by the emergence of Protestant religious ideas, or that these ideas were "necessary" to the development of capitalism. Nevertheless, he clearly believed that the "breakthrough" to modern capitalism was enormously facilitated by the Protestant Reformation, and that the overcoming of hostile "traditional" forces required a new "orientation" to social action that Protestant ideas strongly encouraged. Hence, for Weber, Protestant ideas were an important, though hardly a sufficient, basis for the development of capitalism in Europe. Modern European capitalism must be grasped, historically, as a *unique cultural configuration*, quite distinct from the "adventurers' capitalism" and "pariah capitalism" that existed in **traditional societies**. Modern capitalism destroys traditionalism; it is that

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historical form of capitalism which constitutes **modernity**.

-- Weber agrees with Marx that modern capitalism is characterized by: a) concentrated ownership of the means of production, and b) the separation of the direct producers from their means of production. But he sees its emergence as neither "historically necessary" nor "inevitable" (as Marx seems to). Furthermore, he rejects the Marxian account of its emergence through the dialectical interplay of (expanding) forces of production and (obsolescent and emergent) relations of production. Key to the transition from feudal traditionalism to capitalist modernity, Weber implies, is the **independent role of ideas** in shaping social action. In *The Protestant Ethic...*, he writes: "The following study may ... perhaps in a modest way form a contribution to the understanding of the manner in which ideas become effective forces in history."

-- Weber begins his analysis with the following observation:

"A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light... the fact that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and even more the highly technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant?"

-- The question is therefore posed: how can we explain this association or affinity between capitalistic economic activity and a Protestant religious orientation? The answer is to be found in the origins of modern capitalist enterprise -- in the fact that, from the outset, the latter involved a religious component, a "spirit" and an "orientation to social action" flowing from a new "ethic" -- that of Protestantism.

-- The principal features of the "**spirit of capitalism**" are described as follows:

"[T]he acquisition of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment... is thought of so purely as an end in itself that, vis-à-vis the happiness of, or utility to, the particular individual, it appears as quite transcendental and wholly irrational. Man is dominated by acquisition as the purpose of his life; acquisition is no longer a means to the end of satisfying his material needs. This reversal of what we might call the 'natural' situation, completely senseless from an unprejudiced standpoint, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalist influence."

-- The originality of **Weber's thesis**, however, is expressed in this passage:

"[T]he beliefs and norms of Protestantism, especially Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism and the Anabaptist sects, were conducive to rational asceticism, the spirit of capitalism." Hence, Weber identifies **the spirit of capitalism** with "**rational asceticism**" and explains

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the origin of the latter in a **Protestant 'worldview'** involving the following key elements:

1) **The Doctrine of the 'Calling'**, formulated by Martin Luther, according to which the believer is called by God to work actively in the world to further the glory of God. Work is viewed as a 'positive virtue', and this implies high standards of excellence and honesty, promoting trust in business dealings, etc. These ideas are well expressed by Benjamin Franklin, and are associated with the "Protestant work ethic."

2) **The Doctrine of Predestination**, formulated by John Calvin, according to which the damnation or salvation of individuals has been determined in the mind of God since the beginning of time. "Free will" is therefore an illusion, and no action of confession, penitence or good works can alter the outcome that is already known to God. The believer can therefore never be *certain* that s/he is among "the elect" -- those who will enter the kingdom of God. This produces, according to Weber, a strong psychological desire on the part of the devout to seek out signs of God's grace. By following Church teachings and conducting themselves in the prescribed ways, believers can reassure themselves that their behaviour is consistent with that of those most likely to be saved. Hence, the desire to be saved encourages conformity with certain rules of behaviour.

3) **An Ethical Asceticism**, according to which those who will attain eternal grace will be those who live a modest life of service to God and to their community, and who will reject frivolous activities and over-indulgence of every type. This ethic has the effect of promoting saving and encouraging entrepreneurial initiative, behaviours which further the accumulation of capital. This requires that "rigorous calculation, directed with foresight and caution towards the economic success which is sought" without which economic activity cannot be "rationalized" on a modern, capitalist basis.

4) **The Doctrine of Sanctification**, elaborated by Calvin, according to which no "magical" or quasi-magical human practices in the temporal world can have an influence on the forces of the supernatural. He therefore repudiates the magical sacramental system of the Catholic church (transubstantiation and so on), and "rationalizes" Christian doctrine, insisting upon an absolute and clear separation of the mundane and the divine. The flip side of the Calvinist contribution to historical rationalization is therefore the "**disenchantment of the world.**"

-- Weber's Protestant ethic thesis has sometimes been seen as a damaging blow to Marx's historical materialism; and it may be that this was Weber's intent. However we need to be cautious in drawing these conclusions. Consider this passage from Weber: "[I]t would ... be further necessary to investigate how Protestant Asceticism was in turn influenced in its

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development and its character by the totality of social conditions, especially economic ... [I]t is, of course, not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and of history. Each is equally possible, but each, if it does not serve as the preparation, but as the conclusion of an investigation, accomplishes equally little in the interest of historical truth." Here is a striking statement of Weber's *dualism*. On the one side, there are "material" factors that have to be considered; on the other side, there are "spiritualistic" ones. Both must be taken into account "equally." Weber is therefore declaring that an adequate "causal interpretation" must treat "spirit" and "the ideal" as factors *independent* of "material factors" in "culture" and "history." But it is not at all obvious that Weber was able to "prove" this dualistic proposition.

-- An equally plausible account of the relationship between Protestant beliefs and capitalist economic activity was suggested by Marx and Engels. Five years before Weber's birth, Marx wrote: "The cult of money has its corresponding asceticism, its renunciation, its self-sacrifice -- thrift and frugality, contempt for the worldly, temporary and transient pleasures, the pursuit of the *eternal* treasure. Hence the connexion of English Puritanism and also Dutch Protestantism with money making." The "connexion" to which Marx refers is an "internal" one in dialectical thought. Marx isn't saying that capitalism "caused" the Protestant Reformation, any more than Weber is saying that Protestantism caused modern capitalism. Yet the Marxist and Weberian approaches do differ on the question of how "independent" a role "ideas" (Protestant beliefs) played in the capitalist transformation of the economy.

-- Consider the following passage from **Engels**:

"Calvin's creed was one fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time. His predestination doctrine was the *religious expression* of the fact that, in the commercial world of competition, success or failure does not depend upon a man's activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of the mercy of unknown superior economic powers; and this was especially true at a period of *economic revolution*, when all old commercial routes and centres were replaced by new ones, when India and America were opened to the world, and when even the most sacred economic articles of faith -- the value of gold and silver -- began to totter and break down." (Engels, Preface to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*)

-- Engels is clearly arguing here that ideas like "predestination" did not simply drop from heaven, but "expressed" or reflected new economic (social and material) conditions. Capitalism did not appear all at once; its preconditions included the emergence of a

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"commercial world of competition" which had the effect of changing people's habits of thought and their most cherished beliefs.

-- In drawing out the methodological and ontological implications of Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis, the following observations can be made:

1) Weber's thesis illustrates his commitment to a **dualistic social ontology**.

2) Weber's focus on the changes brought about in individual psychology and behaviour as a result of the Protestant Reformation illustrates his commitment to **methodological individualism**. Quote: "...even sociology can only start out from the action of one or a few, or many individuals, i.e. pursue a strictly 'individualistic' method." "There is no such thing as a collective personality which 'acts'." This implies, among other things, that Marxist accounts of "class action" are guilty of "reification."

3) Weber's attempt to "walk a mile" in the shoes of a Calvinist in order to appreciate how religious beliefs might influence economic conduct illustrates his commitment to an **interpretive** method, and to *Verstehen* (sympathetic understanding) as a basis for interpretation. Quotes: "[Sociology] shall be taken to refer to a science concerning itself with *the interpretive understanding of social action* and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences."

4) The Protestant Reformation is taken by Weber to be a singular and unique historical event that proved enormously consequential. Its analysis illustrates Weber's idea that the social sciences (and particularly sociology) are concerned chiefly with *ideographic knowledge* (of the specific or the peculiar) rather than with *nomothetic knowledge* (concerning persistent or general laws of regularity). Quote: "Our aim is the understanding of the characteristic uniqueness of the reality in which we move. We wish to understand on the one hand the relationships and the cultural significance of events in their contemporary manifestation, and on the other the causes of their being historically *so* and not *otherwise*."

5) Weber is concerned with achieving "objective knowledge" (including about cause and effect relationships) concerning phenomena which are frequently rooted in human subjectivity. His method is therefore marked by a strong tendency toward **subjectivism**.

### **Weber's Concept of Modern Capitalism**

-- Weber was concerned to disclose the distinctive features of Western capitalism and the modern world it was shaping. This analytical agenda brings him close to Marx, but the

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conclusions he draws are markedly different from Marx's. In particular, Weber concludes that modern capitalism represents the end-point of the process of rationalization and the summit of human rationality, albeit a "formal" and "technical" rationality frequently at odds with that "substantive rationality" that is concerned more with the "ends" of human social action than with its "means."

-- Weber's fundamental understanding of modern capitalism is expressed in the following passages from *The Protestant Ethic...*:

"capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise. For it must be so: in a wholly capitalistic order of society, an individual capitalistic enterprise which did not take advantage of its opportunities for profit-making would be doomed to extinction."

"We will define a capitalistic economic action as one which rests upon the expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange, that is on (formally) peaceful chances of profit... Where capitalistic acquisition is rationally pursued, the corresponding action is adjusted to calculations in terms of capital... The important fact is always that a calculation of capital in terms of money is made, whether by modern book-keeping methods or in any other way, however primitive and crude. Everything is done in terms of balances: at the beginning of the enterprise an initial balance, before every individual decision a calculation to ascertain its probable profitability, and at the end a final balance to ascertain how much profit has been made."

-- Weber is in accord with Marx in emphasizing the fundamental significance of a "free labour market" to capitalism. The "exact calculation," which he takes to be the "basis of everything else" in the modern Western social structure, is itself only possible on "the basis of free labour." But whereas Marx sees the commodification of labour-power and the transformation of the direct producers into wage-labourers as creating a new class-antagonistic mode of production fraught with profound contradictions, Weber sees the market regulation of labour as compelling a thorough-going rationalization of economic activity, and making possible a high degree of "predictability of results."

### **Types of Social Action**

-- In coming to terms with the fundamental differences between traditional social forms and capitalist modernity, Weber thought it necessary to examine the main forms of **social action**. His most general definition of social action is that it involves *meaningful interaction* between social actors in the context of definite social relationships. He distinguishes four **ideal types** of orientation in social action/conduct. (An ideal type is a

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descriptive concept that abstracts and recombines elements of reality in order to *accentuate* certain "points of view." Weber: "In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.")

- 1) Traditional action -- carried out under the influence of custom and habit, and entrenched through conditioning.
- 2) Affective action -- carried out "for its own sake" under the influence of emotions.
- 3) Purposively-rational action -- based on the rational selection of particular means to achieve specified goals or ends, regardless of the character of those ends. (Example: the technically or instrumentally- rational performance of a job/task, whether it be the building of a bridge, speculating on the stock exchange, or executing a military victory.)
- 4) Value-rational action -- directed toward the service of an overriding "ideal," "principle" or "cause".

-- Elements of each of these ideal-types of social action exist in all societies. But modern Western capitalist society sees the decisive ascendancy of purposively-rational action, which is *at first* abetted by the value-rational action associated with the Protestant Ethic. As traditional action declines in importance, the technical rationality of capitalist accounting gradually cuts itself free from its "spiritual" roots. The "spirit of capitalism" is overtaken by a remorseless rationalization that furnishes capitalist economic activity with increasingly "mechanical foundations."

-- Recognizing the potential significance of magical and religious forces, Weber undertook to prove not only that the Protestant Ethic facilitated the rise of modern European capitalism, but also that other religious Ethics (e.g. Hinduism and Buddhism) served to block the emergence of capitalist "economic rationalism" in civilizations that were older and in many respects more advanced than Europe's.

-- Weber also linked his analysis of the discontinuous and uneven process of rationalization to an ideal-typical analysis of the **forms of domination and legitimacy** that prevail in traditional and modern societies. Largely absent from Weber's concept of domination is the Marxian concept of exploitation; instead we find a characteristically subjectivist preoccupation with how systems of domination come to be regarded as "legitimate" in different societies. Weber assumes that all societies are marked by an *unequal* distribution of **power** -- which he defines most generally as the capacity to achieve goals against the will of others. This inequality of power Weber treats as

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essentially "inevitable" -- and with it the social phenomenon of domination. For Weber, **domination** is an instance of power where an actor obeys a specific command issued by another. Domination depends not only on the existence of effective sanctions (that is, repressive measures), but more fundamentally on the perceived **legitimacy** of the power relationship. Legitimacy always involves a combination of law, custom and convention; it is the basis for the stability of social relationships, and without it there can be no "predictability" about the social actions determined by those relationships.

### **Weber's Ideal-Types of Legitimacy/Domination**

1) Traditional domination, which involves no specialized administrative apparatus and which rests upon the authority of elders (as in a gerontocracy) or upon the authority of the head of the household unit (traditional patriarchy).

2) Charismatic domination, which tends to be associated with *social movements*, rather than institutionalized arrangements, and which involves the recognition of the authenticity and supreme authority of a leader who is seen as possessing extraordinary qualities and a message subversive to the existing structure of domination.

3) Rational-legal domination, which is characteristic of modern capitalist societies and which involves the elaboration of detailed laws and rules of behaviour, the rationalization and bureaucratization of social and economic life, the systematization and routinization of authority relationships, the rise of impersonal norms, and the restriction of personal authority to well-defined spheres. The legitimacy of this form of domination rests on the claim that it promotes and maximizes efficiency and productivity: that is, that it is best able to "get the job done."

-- Those in authority hold their positions by virtue of laws and legal procedures, and the domination of the many by the few is based on the "rightness of the law," where laws are accepted on the grounds that they are enacted according to a proper and rational procedure.

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### LECTURE SEVEN: DUALISM VERSUS DIALECTICAL-MONISM IN SOCIAL THEORY

-- The philosopher Daniel Dennett (in his 1991 book, *Consciousness Explained*) has pointed out that the dominant perspective in contemporary science and philosophy is materialism (of one sort or another), and that dualism has been in disfavour since at least the publication of Gilbert Ryle's famous critique of it in 1949. Yet, within non-Marxist social theory, dualism (often tending strongly toward idealism) remains highly influential. Social theorists routinely operate within a dualistic conceptual framework, whether consciously or unconsciously, while rarely attempting to justify the ontology that this presupposes: that 'social reality' is composed of two different kinds of 'stuff' -- matter and 'non-matter' (whether Mind, Consciousness, or Spirit).

-- Why has social theory remained a refuge for dualistic metaphysics? For two reasons. First, people are naturally disposed to looking at the world dualistically; and this inclination is reinforced by social conditions which divide reality into two irreducible parts: intellectual labour and manual labour in the division of labour; use-value and exchange-value in commodity production/exchange; the sacred and the profane in religious thought; etc. Second, dualism offers a possible line of defense against Marx's historical materialism, the most influential form of materialist thought in the social sciences during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In order to combat Marxism, non-Marxist social theorists have felt obliged to resort to theoretical strategies which, in different ways, posit an indefinite relationship between 'material/natural factors' and 'ideal-cultural' ones.

-- **Weber's sociology** may be seen as providing a **dualistic template** for much non-Marxist (and even some 'neo-Marxist') social theory, particularly in relation to Marx's legacy. As we've seen, his theoretical project offered an alternative to Marx's handling of the characteristic preoccupations of modern social theory (capitalism, social conflict, inequality, rationality, moral solidarity) by effacing the determinative role of historically specific social relations of production/reproduction and by reinstating a metaphysical indeterminacy as between the material/natural and the ideal/cultural.

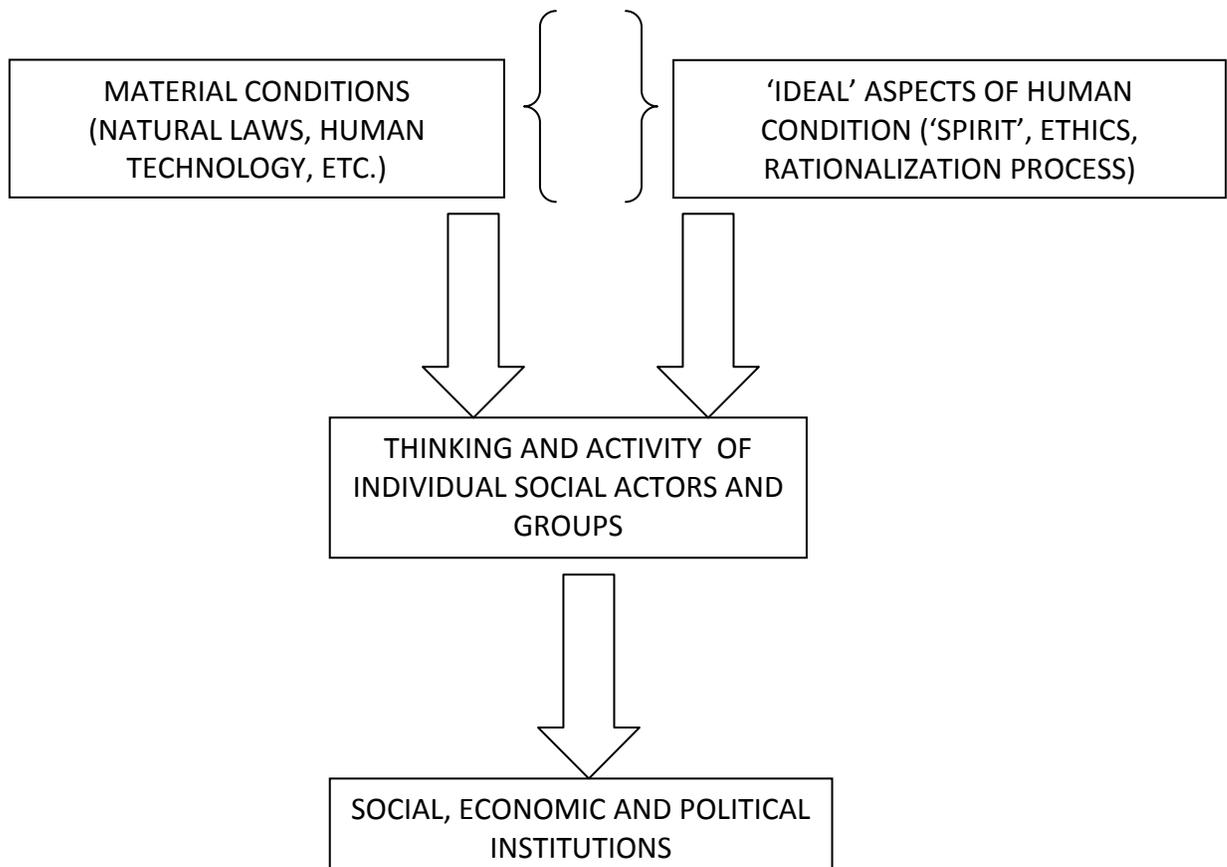
-- This is most readily illustrated by Weber's thesis concerning the *independent* contribution of Protestant theological and ethical ideas to the emergence of 'rational asceticism,' the 'spirit of capitalism', and thus to the rise of the modern capitalist economic order; but his dualistic perspective is no less evident in his theories of domination and the 'distribution of power' within society.

-- At bottom, Weber conceives human social action, and the human institutions to which

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it gives rise, as the product of **two *entirely independent* sets of factors**: on the one side, natural laws and technical necessity (the concerns of formal rationality) and, on the other, spiritual and ethical orientations (the province of value rationality). On this view, value rationality is disconnected from the material facts of life associated with production and economics, stemming instead from a mystical connection between human subjectivity and an immaterial, spiritual domain. Accordingly, Weber's dualistic social theory allows a significant role for mysterious, spiritual and supernatural factors in human affairs, even though it is not explicitly motivated by a religious purpose and even though it is not justified in philosophical terms. While Weber did not articulate explicitly a theory of social being, it's possible to attribute to him a **dualistic social ontology** as schematically represented in Figure One below.

**FIGURE ONE: WEBER'S DUALISTIC SOCIAL ONTOLOGY**



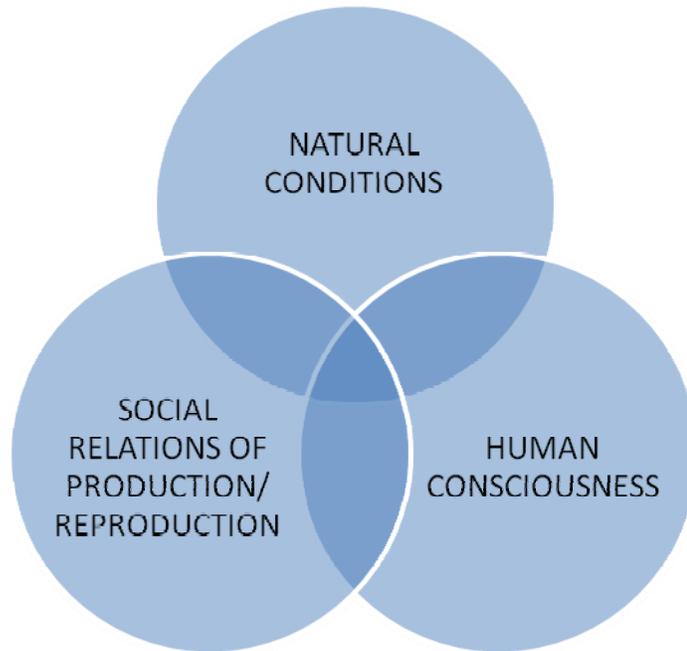
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-- At bottom, dualistic social theorists are united by their insistence upon treating what Marx called “the social relations of production” as *derivations* of ‘the material/natural’ on the one hand and/or ‘the ideal’ on the other. The crucial *ideological* function of this theoretical move is to deny Marx’s thesis that the social relations of production play a definite role in **affecting and mediating** between “the natural” and “consciousness,” that “the social” has a *relatively autonomous* status within **a unified, material reality**, and that social relations and institutions are subject to **fundamental change**.

-- Marx’s historical materialism is predicated on what we might call a **dialectical-monistic social ontology**. It is **dialectical** inasmuch as it understands social reality to be a **unified totality** characterized by **movement, contradictions, and mediations**. In other words, Marx regards social reality as corresponding to the categories of dialectical logic: the logic of change. Marx’s social ontology is **monistic** inasmuch as it regards all aspects of reality as partaking of **one** substance: **matter**. To understand this dialectically structured, monistic social reality properly, one must refuse its bifurcation into two metaphysically separate realms (as in dualistic social ontology) and view it as a unified totality embracing three *partially autonomous* but equally *material* ‘dimensions’: **the natural, the social and (individual) consciousness**.

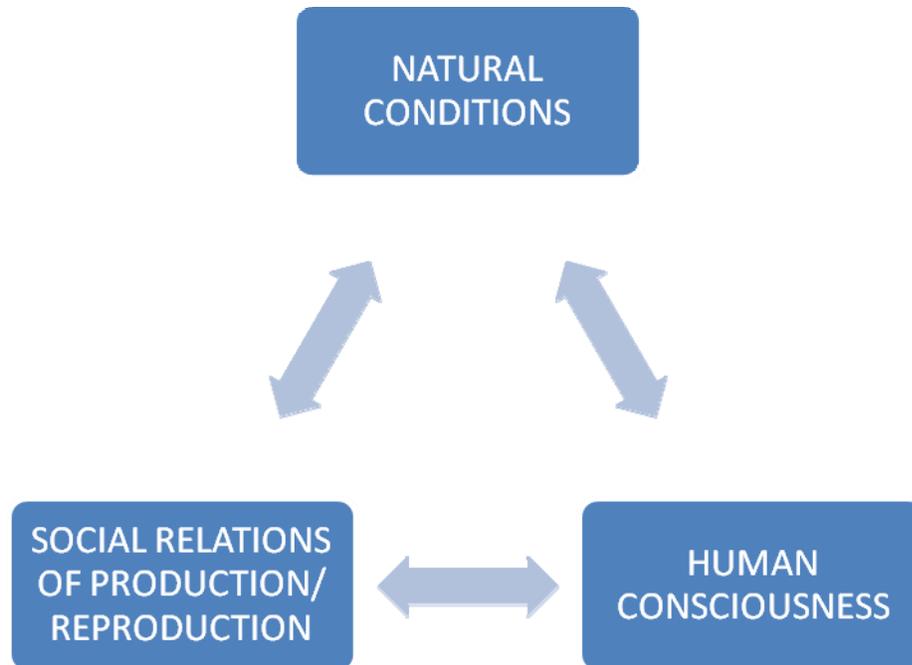
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***FIGURE TWO: MARX'S DIALECTICAL-MONISTIC SOCIAL ONTOLOGY  
(EMPHASIZING THE UNITY OF REALITY)***



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***FIGURE THREE: MARX'S DIALECTICAL-MONISTIC SOCIAL ONTOLOGY  
(EMPHASIZING RELATIONS BETWEEN THREE RELATIVELY DISTINCT  
ASPECTS OF REALITY)***



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-- In general, theorists subscribing to one or another version of dualistic social ontology base their criticisms of Marxism on the proposition that the latter allegedly 'misses things' of great importance to human social life, whether defined as a human propensity to playfulness, deference, mysticism or domination. Yet this indictment can be very easily reversed. For what distinguishes Marxism from all versions of dualistic social theory is not its alleged blindness to non-class-based conflict, religious sentiment, language, sexuality, communication, 'difference', or symbolic exchange, but rather its insistence upon approaching such phenomena with due attention to the historically specific and alterable conditions in which they are manifested. Indeed, Marxists can legitimately insist that there is nothing in the theoretical constitution of historical materialism that prevents or compromises the analysis of any and all of the phenomena that often preoccupy dualistic theorising (although political priorities will inevitably influence the selection of those problems that will attract greater attention and those less).

-- Moving from a defensive posture to a more offensive one, Marxists can argue forcefully that it is precisely dualistic social theories that necessarily 'miss something' that is of utmost significance to social life: namely, *the social relations of production in the dialectical mediation of the material/natural and ideal/cultural aspects of human existence*. Accordingly, the issue is not whether the defining shibboleths of non-Marxist or post-Marxist social theory should be addressed, but whether they should be addressed *in connection with* an analysis of the social relations of production and historically specific forms of human labour, or whether they should be invoked as a rationale for *ignoring* the problem of the social relations of production or, alternatively, treating these relations as mere 'epiphenomena' (direct emanations) of natural laws, an independent human consciousness, or both.

-- In the remainder of the course, we shall have occasion to consider how dualistic and dialectical-monistic social ontologies persistently conflict with one another in trying to come to grips with specific problems and issues of social-scientific interest.

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### LECTURE EIGHT: THE WOMAN QUESTION IN CLASSICAL SOCIAL THEORY

-- **Feminism** is both an egalitarian political doctrine committed to achieving legal and social equality between the sexes, and a body of thought (including theoretical propositions) based upon the idea that women are and have long been subject to **systematic oppression**. Beyond this, however, it is highly heterogeneous, at both the analytical/theoretical and programmatic levels. Indeed, those committed to "feminism" range across a spectrum of views that is probably no less wide than that which exists among supporters of "democracy."

-- While the term feminism is vague and imprecise, the problems that opponents of women's oppression address are very real: gender discrimination, unequal earnings, a gender based division of labour that leaves women occupying positions with less prestige and power, the assignment to women of the primary responsibility for infant and child care (a responsibility that carries with it little in the way of societal support), violence against women, etc.

-- Contemporary debates surrounding "the woman question" have been shaped at the theoretical level by the following schools of thought:

a) Conservative structural-functional and "socio-biology" accounts, which effectively deny the reality of women's oppression and regard women's unequal social status as "normal" or "natural" in some sense.

b) Liberal feminism (espoused by liberal functionalists and Weberians), which seeks to achieve a greater degree of "equality of opportunity" between the sexes, and which does not look beyond the horizon of capitalism to achieve this.

c) Radical feminists, who seek a radical institutional restructuring of society to overhaul the processes of socialization and effectively abolish "gender" as an organizing principle of social life. Their goal is to destroy "patriarchy", conceived as a structure of domination/subordination that is "independent" of other types of social inequality and oppression.

d) Socialist feminism, which regards class exploitation as a major structural support of "patriarchy," even while insisting that patriarchy has roots independent of class division as well. Its goal is to abolish the "dual systems" -- capitalism and patriarchy -- that perpetuate women's oppression.

e) Marxism, which traditionally sought to subsume the problem of women's oppression under the problem of class division, and which remains sceptical about the feminist notion of "patriarchy" as an "independent" structure, not least because this idea encourages women to "organize as women" (irrespective of social class), rather than on a

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class basis. Marxism insists that the destruction of capitalism is a necessary, though not a sufficient, condition for the liberation of women, and that the achievement of an authentic socialism presupposes that liberation.

-- Feminism, as a body of theory, tends to be distinguished by the proposition that gender inequality is the most fundamental social division (although some socialist feminists equivocate on this). Marxists are not feminists in this "theoretical" sense, even though most Marxists are committed to some notion of "women's liberation" and therefore share many programmatic aims with feminists (an extension of child care services, free abortion on demand, equal legal and political rights for women, etc.).

### **Intellectual and Social Context of the Emergence of the "Woman Question"**

-- The earliest challenge to the idea that the subordination of women to men reflected the "natural order of things" came during the Enlightenment, when many age-old prejudices and inequalities were coming under attack.

-- Mary **Wollstonecraft**, the mother of modern liberal feminism and a defender of the radical aims of the French Revolution against Edmund Burke, drafted a work entitled *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) to supplement her anti-Burke polemic, *Vindication of the Rights of Man*. Responding to Rousseau's views, she argued that "the doll will never excite attention unless confinement allows [the little girl] no alternative." She was a member of a circle of early modern "radicals" whose ideas helped prepare the way for "utopian socialism" in both Britain and France.

-- The **Utopian Socialists**, with their commitment to an egalitarian ideology, were generally receptive to "feminist" ideas, and indeed played a role in popularizing them. Robert Owen's followers pioneered cooperative nursery schools, and encouraged the political education of women. They were also opposed to the traditional nuclear family, because it promoted competitive and anti-social attitudes, and called for easy divorce and an end to the 'double standard' in sexual morality. The Saint-Simonians had similar views and even predicted the appearance of a "female messiah" who would usher in a new golden age. Charles **Fourier** sought to build his "great communes" on the basis of a non-gendered division of labour. His plans included communal responsibility for infant and child care, and the effective elimination of the nuclear family. He first enunciated a principle later echoed by Marx and Engels: "The extension of women's rights is the basic principle of all social progress."

-- What accounts for the affinities between working-class radicalism and utopian socialism on the one hand and early feminism on the other? One obvious answer was

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their mutual commitment to the idea of "equality." But it goes beyond this. The rise of industrial capitalism had a profound impact on family life, disrupting traditional sex roles and household divisions of labour. By the early 1830s, women made up more than half of the adult labour force in England, and many worked in appalling factory conditions.

-- Gradually, however, the issue of women's equality was absorbed into middle-class political discourse as well, where "liberalism" was the prevailing political-economic doctrine. Responses varied amongst "social welfare liberals" like John Stuart Mill and "natural-law liberals" like Herbert Spencer.

### **John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)**

-- Mill was the last of the great "classical political economists" and utilitarian philosophers. In addition to his writings on political philosophy and economics, he is best remembered today for his advocacy of women's rights, a liberal feminism most fully elaborated in his book *The Subjection of Women*. Like today's liberal feminists, Mill emphasized the importance of formal legal equality for women and called for changes in the education system that would provide women with greater opportunities in life.

-- Quotes from Mill:

"... no slave is a slave to the same lengths, and in so full a sense of the word, as a wife is."

"What, in unenlightened societies, colour, race, religion, or in the case of a conquered country, nationality, are to some men, sex is to all women; a peremptory exclusion from almost all honourable occupations."

"...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes -- the legal subordination of one sex to the other -- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; ... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."

"What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing -- the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others."

### **Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)**

-- Spencer was sympathetic to feminist goals in his earlier writings but moved decisively away from this stance in his later writings. The reason he did so had a lot to do with the "inner logic" of his larger sociological and political perspectives, which were a) functionalist, b) evolutionary and "Social-Darwinist," and c) "ultra-liberal" in a natural-law, neo-Malthusian sense.

-- Spencer argues that change to the social organism is primarily the result of principles of *evolutionary selection*. He endorses the Lamarckian/Darwinian idea of **survival of the**

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**fittest** -- applying it to human society, however, in a way that Charles Darwin never intended. Apologizing for the inequalities of his own society, Spencer maintained that the rich are on top because of certain inherent attributes (higher intelligence, greater ambition, better moral fibre), which he attributed to a superior biological endowment. Similarly, the poor are at the bottom of society because of their innate deficiencies.

-- There is a tension, even a contradiction, in Spencer's thought between a strong biological and evolutionary **determinism** and an equally strong commitment to the efficacy and power of **individual human action** as the source of social unity and harmony. The latter tendency in his thought may have provided the initial impetus to his support for a form of liberal feminism. But his liberal individualism also led him away from feminism as he came to believe that the inclusion of women as equals in political and juridical processes would lead to stronger government regulation (in the name of "compassion"). Spencer believed that women were constituted differently than men with respect to their capacity to reason and to resist "illogical" sentiments and emotions as a basis for action. They had in fact "evolved" differently, or at least at a different pace, than men. By giving women the vote, then, a dangerous situation could easily arise where state action could be dictated by "family values." According to Spencer, the "salvation" of society "depends on the maintenance of an absolute opposition between the regime of the family and the regime of the State." The family is governed by the principle of compassion for the weak, a principle dear to the heart of most women. But society functions best when it rewards the strongest and encourages the disappearance of the less fit. For evolutionary and biological reasons, women tend to elevate emotion over reason (or at least Spencer's "reason"!), and are therefore unfit for political life.

### **Durkheim on the Woman Question**

-- There are two main sources for Durkheim's views on women: *The Division of Labour in Society* and *Suicide*. His discussion of sex roles and sex differences occurs as part of his analysis of the functionality and the moral dimension of the division of labour in society. The division of labour is "more and more becoming one of the fundamental bases of social order," and the "categorical imperative" of the new moral conscience is: "Make yourself usefully fulfill a determinate function." The specific moral effect produced by the division of labour -- "its true function" -- is "to create in two or more persons a feeling of solidarity." This is amply confirmed, in Durkheim's view, by the entire history of conjugal (marital) relations between the sexes: "the sexual division of labour is the source of conjugal solidarity" and has developed alongside it. "The further we look into the past, the smaller becomes the differences between man and woman" -- with respect to appearance, strength, brain size, and social roles and functions.

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-- Durkheim followed the prevailing belief of the anthropologists of his day that there was once an epoch in human history when there was no such thing as marriage -- when sexual promiscuity was the norm and the family structure was *matriarchal* (dominated by women/mothers). As marriage developed as an established institution, however, men and women became increasingly differentiated in their social functions and roles. The final outcome of this differentiation was that "the two great functions of the psychic life are... dissociated" -- "one of the sexes takes care of the affective functions and the other of intellectual functions." (An almost identical vocabulary was used by conservative functionalists like Talcott Parsons in the mid-20th century to describe sex-role differentiation.) The upshot of Durkheim's argument is that it is precisely the division of labour in sex roles that made "domestic solidarity" possible. And, indeed, this is the starting point of his larger argument about the integrative effects of the division of labour in society as a whole.

-- By way of criticizing this argument, Terry Kandal writes: "The serious flaw in Durkheim's analysis of conjugal solidarity is that it leaves out the roles of coercion, repression, and unequal exchange in its concern with the technical complementarity of specialized functions institutionalized in sex roles in the family... Durkheim admitted the hidden hand of 'economic utility' in the sexual division of labor, but he denied the importance of economic interests because the division of labor also constituted 'the establishment of a social and moral order *sui generis*. Through it, individuals are linked to one another." (Kandal, *The Woman Question in Classical Sociological Theory*, p.81)

-- Durkheim also argued that without the sexual division of labour, women "would be independent of men" and that equality between the sexes would undermine the solidarity of the patriarchal family -- something to be deplored in his view.

-- All of this discussion strongly suggests a commitment by Durkheim to the idea of "fixed" male and female "natures." Yet this sits uneasily with Durkheim's view that, historically, a matriarchal system preceded the patriarchal. We see a lapse into a biological determinism that is otherwise absent from a sociological system that, if anything, is too strongly marked by a particular form of social determinism -- by a 'reification' of society and an over-emphasis on the influence of 'social facts' on individual human behaviour. Durkheim does not attempt to account for this inconsistency. Women's "nature" is presumed simply to be a "given." But his overall position on the woman question relies not only on sexist biological (or socio-biological) assumptions; they also depend upon an uncritical acceptance of a puritanical moral code common among French feminists of his era as well! All of which serves to underscore Stephen Lukes' judgement that Durkheim's thought is "an alliance of sociological

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acumen with strict Victorian morality." Durkheim had little to fear from a feminist movement obsessed with prostitution and the moral rehabilitation of men!

### **THEORY AND PRACTICE IN GERMANY**

-- By the late 19th century, Germany had become the arena of the most sophisticated theoretical debates concerning the woman question (and "sexual politics"). This was clearly related to the fact that Germany was also the terrain of a serious confrontation between an organized liberal feminist movement and a socialist women's movement organizationally linked to the German Social Democratic Party (SPD).

-- As elsewhere, the labour movement in Germany had encountered many problems in developing an adequate position on the woman question. The first major working-class socialist party, that of Ferdinand Lassalle, had opposed female participation in the labour-force on the grounds that it weakened the labour movement, depressed wages, and harmed the working-class family. Female emancipation had to await the overthrow of capitalism in their view. But in 1875, the Lassalleans fused with Marx's German followers to form a united social democratic party, and within this party the Marxists' views ultimately prevailed. The Marxists called for universal suffrage, supported female participation in the labour-force, while also calling for special "protective legislation" for women workers, and demanded equal pay for women and men performing similar work.

-- In 1878, August Bebel, a leader of the SPD, published the first edition of "Woman in the Past, Present and Future" (a.k.a. "Women and Socialism") which went on to become the most widely read socialist work of the pre-World War One period. According to Thonnessen: "It prepared the ground for the achievements of the Social Democratic women's movement after 1890 in the realms of education, agitation and organization."

-- Bebel's basic position was that "the so-called women's question is ... only one side of the whole social question." What was needed was a socialist reorganization of society that would abolish capitalist exploitation and the special, age-old oppression of women alike. He argued that woman was "a slave before the slave existed" and that female servitude extended far back into the pre-capitalist past. To eradicate women's oppression required new institutional arrangements that would progressively remove sex-based social and economic roles, merge the family with public life, and socialize many activities that are now carried out "in private" and at the expense of women (the domestic drudgery of cooking, cleaning, laundering, etc.). Bebel recognized as well that women themselves must play the leading role in their self-emancipation; that women should be drawn into political activity through a special women's organization; but that this organization of working-class women would have to be based on a socialist program and

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organizationally linked to the SPD.

-- By 1914, the SPD women's movement embraced 175,000 members, and was active in a variety of campaigns pertinent to women: for women's suffrage, the protection of working women, for equal pay for equal work, and for daycare centers for working mothers. The SPD also criticized Germany's restrictive abortion laws, advocated a greater availability of contraceptives, and mounted educational courses to train and promote women as leaders not only of the socialist women's movement but of the workers' movement as a whole.

-- The liberal middle-class feminist movement was organized into the Federation of German Women's Associations (BDF). Its roots were in the General German Women's Association founded in 1865, which was initially friendly to the labour movement in the German province of Saxony, but ultimately bended to Chancellor Bismarck's "anti-socialist" laws. The middle-class feminists concentrated their efforts on educational reform and the creation of schools to prepare the most "promising" young girls for admission to universities. Their watchwords were: motherhood, morality, charity and social welfare for wayward girls. Since citizenship rights depended upon military service in Bismarck's Germany, German militarism was a major obstacle to women's claims for equality. The Bismarckian state opposed abortion while supporting prostitution -- and as elsewhere a preoccupation with the moral depredations and consequences of prostitution was a major preoccupation of middle-class feminists. In 1894, the BDF was formed and by 1901 it comprised 137 member associations, with 70, 000 members. The major concerns of this new "left-liberal" association were: women's suffrage, and opposition to state-sponsored prostitution as well as the new male-chauvinist "civil code." After 1908, the BDF became increasingly conservative. Faced with the possibility that the membership would endorse the legalization of abortion, the right wing leadership persuaded the large and very conservative German-Evangelical Women's League to join and use its voting strength to defeat the proposal. This was followed by the expulsion of pacifists and "sexual radicals," including the "League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform." Ultimately, by 1930, driven to the right by its super-patriotic position during World War I and by its antipathy toward socialism, the BDF (the self-styled "fortress of feminism") had come to oppose contraception, sexual libertarianism and abortion on demand, reaffirming woman's traditional role as housekeeper and mother. In 1932 they called for the creation of a "corporate state" on the Italian fascist model, with the proviso that one of the "corporations" should represent women. They went on in 1933 to support the Nazis, ultimately embracing the Nazi "program for women": "Children, Kitchen, Church."

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-- To speak of Clara Zetkin's socialist women's movement and the BDF as sharing any political identity, including "feminism," would be manifestly absurd. The crisis of German society produced the most profound differentiations among those women who had been drawn into political life in order to address "the woman question" -- and those differentiations usually had *class* as their central (if not exclusive) axis.

### **Engels' Theory of Women's Oppression**

-- Bebel's contribution had focused many of the political issues in dispute between the socialist women's movement and "bourgeois feminism"; but it was Engels who formulated the first serious Marxist analysis of the origin, nature and future prospects of male domination/ women's oppression. This was undertaken in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884, a year after Marx's death. Basing himself on Morgan's *Ancient Society*, Engels postulated the existence of a universal stage of "matriarchy" that preceded the emergence of private property and class division. In tribal, communalist social formations, the principle of "mother right" prevailed. This did not mean that the situation was one of female domination/ male subordination. Rather in these communities, the line of descent was traced through the mother's side; women were not treated like the private property of men; and a rough equality of the sexes existed. Though a sex-based division of labour existed, women's contributions were more highly esteemed than in succeeding patriarchal societies. What brought an end to "mother right"? The emergence of a social surplus and increasing social differentiation led to the rise of private property (at first in cattle and land) and rudimentary systems of trade. With this came the overthrow of "mother right" and "the world historical defeat of the female sex."

-- Once private property became entrenched, men wished to ensure that their possessions would be passed on to their own offspring (i.e. sons); they could only do so by imposing monogamy upon the women of the community and establishing the patriarchal nuclear family. Thus, patriarchy is produced by the same conditions that produce class division: a significant social surplus and the emergence of the institution of private property in the means of production. Prior to the existence of these material and social conditions, men had no reason to use their brute force to "enslave" women. Engels states: "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male."

-- Since sexual oppression is a product of class division, it cannot be fully overcome under capitalism (where indeed the overwhelming bulk of private property is legally

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owned by men). Only socialism can create the material and social conditions propitious to the emancipation of women. Engels does not argue that women's liberation will be an automatic outcome of the socialization of the economy and the disappearance of antagonistic social classes; but he most certainly sees socialism as a *necessary condition* for the achievement of sexual equality. Under socialism, in principle at least, the relations of men and women can be based on attraction, love and reciprocal obligations, rather than upon considerations of property ownership, hypocritical bourgeois "morality," and class-biased legality.

-- Engels' contribution was an important early Marxist effort to develop an historical-materialist analysis of the "woman question." But it was by no means the last word on the subject from such a standpoint. The anthropological data upon which Engels relied was not very reliable, and the evidence for a universal stage of matriarchy very weak. But aside from such considerations, there are theoretical and methodological weaknesses in Engels' analysis from a Marxist point of view. For Engels, no doubt unwittingly, was an early inspiration for a "dual-systems" theory of women's oppression that ultimately rests upon a dualistic social ontology that is at odds with Marx's dialectical one. (See Lise Vogel's essay on Engels, "A Defective Formulation," in the course text.)

### **Max Weber's Liberal Feminism and Analysis of Patriarchy**

-- Weber, together with his wife Marianne, was a liberal "bourgeois feminist," and as such believed that significant progress toward women's equality could be achieved under capitalism. Weber made two important contributions to an historical-sociological treatment of the woman question: the chapter on "The Household Community" in *Economy and Society*, and several passages in his *General Economic History*. Taken together they amount to an implicit critique of Engels' analysis.

-- Weber seeks to establish the following points:

1) The nuclear family is founded upon relationships that are wholly "unstable and tenuous" when "separated from the extended kinship household as a producing unit." In other words the patriarchal nuclear family flourishes best where the household is a producing unit (e.g. a farm) and constitutes a real community.

2) Communal action requires other bases than biological and sexual relationships. Marriage and family relationships "can engender communal action only by becoming the normal, though not the only, bases of a specific economic corporate group: the household community" -- a community which did not exist in the primitive economies of hunters and nomads.

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- 3) Sex-role differentiation occurs under the pressure of men's obligation to perform military service; female household management can then result.
- 4) Household community implied common ownership of property; but household communism was disrupted by: a) increases in household size, and b) the development of exclusive sexual claims of the male partners on the women.
- 5) Evidence can be found to support the existence of communistic households that were under male leadership; and this breaks the connection between class division and patriarchal relations. With reference to variations in the forms of marriage, Weber argued: "...investigation of the socialistic theory of mother-right shows that none of the stages of sexual life which it asserts can be shown to exist as steps in a general evolutionary sequence. Where they are met with, it is always under quite special circumstances."

### **DIALECTICAL VERSUS DUALISTIC VIEWS OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION**

-- Contemporary debates and research in feminist theory have certainly produced new and interesting insights and findings. But the older debates that we have reviewed remain relevant for theoretical and methodological reasons.

-- Marxist socialist and liberal- or radical-feminist positions on the issue of women's oppression are ultimately divided over whether class-antagonistic relations of production offer a framework in which sexual equality can be achieved. The Marxists say no, along with most socialist-feminists; liberal and radical feminists, committed to the idea that patriarchy is a structure independent of class, say yes. This cleavage reflects different social ontologies and methodological strategies. Though Marxists sometimes make concessions to the dualistic outlook (as even Engels did), the Marxist analysis is best understood in terms of a dialectical-monistic perspective which sees "culture" (ideas, values, socialization processes, etc.) as *internally related* to "social relations of production" and "material conditions." A complete transformation in culture -- which is what the elimination of "sexist attitudes" would require -- calls for a transformation in social relations of production and very likely further progress in natural science and technology (the forces of production). The dualistic perspective, most clearly espoused by Weber, sees "culture" (including ideas about the relations of the sexes) as "independent". Hence a Weberian-style dualism fits in well with liberal and radical feminist views according to which "education" and "fighting sexist ideas" within capitalism are sufficient to achieve sexual equality.

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-- Theoretical debates surrounding "Family Wage" ideology serve to illustrate how the dialectical and dualistic perspectives differ. Different treatments of this topic are given by two self-styled socialist feminists: **Heidi Hartmann** and **Jane Humphries**. Both regard themselves as socialists and both are influenced by Marx; but their analyses make clear that Hartmann is close to a Weberian-style dualism while Humphries applies a method of analysis that is more dialectical and Marxist.

-- In her article "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex" Hartmann argues that patriarchy is "a set of social relations which has a material basis and in which hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, enable them to control women. Patriarchy is thus the system of male oppression of women." Hartmann sees job segregation according to sex as an expression of a cross-class "male solidarity," justified ideologically by male workers in terms of the need to defend the "family wage." The family wage is a normative wage level sufficient to support not only the individual wage earner, but that wage earner's spouse and children as well. Organized labour has long maintained that the entry of women into the workforce -- and in particular into industries traditionally dominated by men -- will have the effect of eroding the "family wage" norm.

-- In her "Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family," Humphries takes a very different view of why not only working-class men but also working class women are so committed to the idea of a family wage and wary about the possible effects of increased labour-force participation by women. This is not simply a matter of sexist ideology or "male solidarity" (though these may play some role); more fundamentally, the defense of the family wage norm reflects an empirical understanding by working people that a) there are definite advantages associated with having an adult member of the household staying at home and attending to the communal needs of the family, and b) the entry of wives into the labour-force can have the effect of depressing wages by increasing competition amongst wage-labourers and by redefining the normative determinants of the "value of labour-power." Humphries is expressly critical of Marx and Engels' view that the working-class family is subject to historical decline, owing to the fact that it has little property to dispose of inter-generationally. But her theoretical strategy is nevertheless Marxist -- and quite consistent with a dialectical view. For Humphries, the social relations of production and the structural mechanisms that determine the value of labour-power must be adduced to explain the power of "family wage ideology" as well as other traditional ideas concerning the "proper place" of women within society. The working-class family can be seen as a sphere of "communal relations" resisting incorporation into the market-driven society, and this accounts for the persistence of "family values" among working class people. Says Humphries:  
"...the family, as an institution, has been shaped by the aspiration of people for

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personalized non-market methods of distribution and social interaction." And further: "...it seems at least possible that a retreat of certain family members from the labour force, in conjunction with an organized attempt to secure a 'family wage' would raise the standard of living of the working class." Thus family wage ideology expresses the appetite of working class people to assert some control over the supply of labour, while preserving the family household as something approximating a "communist organization" (to use the expression of the neo-classical economist Paul Samuelson).

-- What all this suggests is that we need not resort to Hartmann's theory of patriarchal male solidarity to account for job segregation and the persistent appeal of family wage ideology. While Hartmann says this solidarity has a "material base" this is never really defined. We are left with the impression that patriarchy is a purely cultural construct, independent of the kinds of material and socio-economic factors analyzed by Humphries.

-- The theoretical difference has programmatic implications. Hartmann's approach suggests that the battle against job segregation can be concentrated on a cultural front -- an ideological struggle against "family wage ideology" that is conceived as purely sexist. Humphries' approach suggests that the sexist notions that accompany family wage ideology and the defense of job segregation by sex are powerfully reinforced by the lived experiences of working people in the particular social relations of capitalism. Therefore progress in the struggle against sexism and job segregation depends critically upon progress in the struggle to transform these social relations -- and indeed the whole "logic" of the economic system.

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### LECTURE NINE: RATIONALITY AND IRRATIONALITY OF CAPITALISM

-- A central contrast between Marx and Weber, and between Marxian and Weberian social theory today, concerns the question of how far capitalism can be said to be a "rational" socio-economic system, sponsoring consistently "rational" modes of social organization. Neither Marx nor Weber gives an unequivocal answer to the question: "Is capitalism rational or irrational?" But their answers are nevertheless profoundly different.

-- **Marx** sees capitalism as a mode of production combining elements of rationality and irrationality, where the ultimate criterion for the rationality of something is its capacity to promote the development of human productivity and satisfy human needs. Marx sees rationality as not only a property of individual action, but as something that finds expression in social structures as well. From this standpoint, capitalism is a system that promotes human rationality *up to a point* -- the point at which the relations of production begin systematically to constrain the development of the forces of production, to engender severe crises with highly destructive consequences, and to encourage the waste of economic resources and the squandering of scientific and technological potentialities.

-- **Weber** sees capitalism as supremely rational in a *technical, instrumental* sense. He does not subscribe to Marx's theory that capitalism is subject to historical laws of motion that render it less and less "rational." Indeed, he doesn't entertain notions of *systemic* rationality or irrationality at all. Capitalism is simply a set of institutions and practices that have an impact on individual human action -- rendering this action more and more preoccupied with technical rationality and stripping it of concern for "value rationality." For Weber then, capitalism encourages and sponsors technical, instrumental rationality, while undermining value-rational forms of conduct (or ethically substantive rationality).

-- Our focus here is strictly on Marx and Weber's differences concerning capitalism's capacity to promote **technical rationality**. (There is a sense in which Marx would agree with Weber that capitalism is "amoral" -- but to do justice to this topic we would have to explore the ethical dimensions of their opposing dialectical and dualistic ontologies.)

-- The following characteristics of capitalist economic rationalism are emphasized by Weber: Capitalist enterprise and competition in a market-based economy require that capitalist firms: a) adopt precise accounting systems; b) continually reduce their costs of production; c) enhance the productivity and efficiency of their labour force and production systems; d) encourage/promote "rational-legal" forms of social action, including by the state (modern bureaucratic modes of organization; the rule of law; etc.). Marx would agree with much of this, but he would not agree with Weber's

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(methodologically-individualist) conclusion that what is rational at the "micro" level of the individual firm will prove to be rational at the "macro" level of the capitalist economy as a whole. Indeed Marx believes that what is technically-rational for the individual capitalist firm can produce results that disrupt the growth, efficiency and technical progress of the capitalist economy as a whole.

### **Weber's Marginalism vs. Marx's Theory of Labour-Value**

-- One root of this difference of opinion between Marx and Weber lies in their adherence to different concepts of "economic value". Everyone agrees that what makes the capitalist economy "tick" is the pursuit of exchange-value (money in its different forms). But what is this value that money represents? Weber sees it as purely subjective -- a psychological relation between economic agents and things (commodities). He subscribes to the **marginal utility theory of value**, according to which the sole purpose of a theory of economic value should be to establish the determinants of *individual prices*. This is the approach of mainstream ("neo-classical") economic theory to this day. According to Leon Walras, a pioneer of marginalist economics: "rareté is the cause of value in exchange" -- "the theory of exchange based upon the proportionality of prices to intensities of the last wants satisfied ... constitute the very foundation of the whole edifice of economics."

-- For Weber and all adherents of marginalist economic theory, value is subjective and arbitrary -- and this explains why psychological phenomena like "consumer confidence" can play such a large role in the overall performance of an economy. The marginalists provide a "demand-side" account of economic value, which abstracts entirely from the issue of production costs as a determinant of value. This distinguishes them from the whole classical tradition of political economy as well as from Marx.

-- For Marx, value exists as a definite quantitative magnitude at the level of the capitalist economy as a whole. Moreover, it is a magnitude that places *objective limits* on such phenomena as incomes, prices, profits, etc. This is consistent with Marx's view that value is not a psychological relation between people and things, but is rather a *relation of people to people*. This is the starting-point of Marx's **theory of labour-value**.

-- In Marx's theory, a commodity is a *product of labour* that is produced with a view to its sale in the market. Every commodity has a utility (a use-value) as well as an exchange-value (the power to command some sort of remuneration in exchange: a price). But the exchange-value of a commodity is merely a "form of appearance" of the commodity's value, with which it rarely coincides precisely. The value of a commodity is an expression of its relationship to all other commodities as a product of the social division of living labour. Accordingly, the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of

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socially-necessary labour time required for its production; but its *exchange-value* may deviate from this value as a result of other factors bearing upon price formation (including those pointed to by the marginalists). But the key point is that the main purpose of the theory of value should not be the explanation of price ratios but rather the elucidation of the capitalist economy's macroeconomic laws of motion. However much individual prices and values diverge (owing to "transfers" and "redistributions" of value effected through market processes), *total prices* must equal *total values* -- for without the social relations of capitalist production expressed by "value" (whose substance is social *abstract labour*), the economic category of price could have neither theoretical importance nor concrete existence.

-- Marx and Weber agree that capitalism is centrally concerned with profit maximization and the accumulation of capital. But in the marginalist theory, the focus is entirely on the performance of individual capitalist enterprises, and profits are conceived as a "return" on entrepreneurial investment and "risk-taking." There is of course truth to this; but it is one-sided from Marx's perspective. No amount of "risk-taking" will permit the realization of a profit if the structural conditions for "profits" are not in place. So what is the social-structural source of profits and how are they transformed into new capital?

-- Marx says that if value is the social substance of price, the social substance of profit is *surplus-value*: the increment of value created by living labour beyond the value embodied in the wages of productive workers. Further, total profits will equal total surplus-value. The key point to understand, however, is that the sole source of value and surplus-value is living labour that is subject to class exploitation. At the level of the individual commodity as well as at the level of the gross product, value is allocated in the following way: **constant capital**, which represents the value of means of production and other costs of capitalist production/ reproduction) + **variable capital**, the value represented by the wages of those workers directly involved in the product's production + **surplus value** (the value created by the unpaid "surplus labour" of those productive workers) = P (the total value of the commodity product or Gross Product).

### **Marx's Theory of Capitalist Crisis**

-- The theory of labour-value has profound implications for the stability and "rationality" of the capitalist economy, for it leads to the conclusion that capitalism's is not only marked by contradictions but that its "laws of motion" render it prone to increasingly severe **crisis**. Since the principal goal of capitalist production is the private appropriation of profit, the rate of return on invested capital (also known as the average rate of profit) is the key regulator of capitalist accumulation and economic growth. When the average rate of profit falls, investment falls off, the economy contracts, and a crisis ensues. Marx

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asserted that there is a **long-term tendency for the rate of profit to fall under capitalism** -- a tendency rooted in the competitive and class-antagonistic social relations of capitalist economy. The competitive interaction of individual capitals forces each capitalist firm to reduce its costs of production per unit of output (in order to preserve or enlarge market share). Given the antagonistic relations between capital and labour, the favoured strategy for reducing costs is to increase the productivity of labour and to displace living labour from production through the introduction of labour-saving technologies. This is a "rational" strategy from the point of view of the individual capitalist firm seeking to meet the challenges of competition. But the unintended consequence of this strategy -- when it is pursued by all the competing capitals -- is to reduce the *total* "social surplus-value" produced in relation to the *total* capital investment. Recall that, for Marx, only living labour can produce surplus-value. As the ratio of "dead" to living labour in production rises (expressed in the ratio  $c/v+s$  -- the "organic composition of capital"), the rate of profit,  $s/c+v$ , is depressed; and this, other things being equal, will tend to slow the rate of capital accumulation and economic growth. In this way, "the barrier to capitalist production [becomes] capital itself" (Marx). The system "shoots itself in the foot," a crisis ensues, and the crisis creates conditions (through the "slaughtering of the values of capitals") for at least a partial recovery in the rate of profit and renewed growth.

-- In the long-term, however, such crises tend to become more acute, more protracted, and eventually require more drastic "solutions" (e.g., aggressive attempts to raise the rate of exploitation of living labour by driving down working-class living standards; trade wars or colonial adventures permitting a displacement of the "internal contradiction" to the "external field" of production and exchange; fascism, involving a complete destruction of the organized labour movement and the mobilization of "the nation" to solve its problems as the expense of other nation-states; and war, which leads to the *physical destruction* of capital, permitting a "new start" -- a new material and social basis for capital accumulation, such as that which emerged after World War II). For Marx, such extreme manifestations of capitalist crisis are sufficient to indicate that the capitalist system is ceasing to play a progressive role, that its irrational aspects have overtaken its rational ones, and that it must give way to a higher and more rational (as well as more "just") form of social production: socialism.

-- The neo-classical marginalist economic theory that Weber endorsed makes no predictions about the future course of the capitalist economy except the general one that it should continue to promote economic rationality. Theorists like Joseph Schumpeter, who drew upon Marx, were prepared to admit that capitalism exhibits tendencies toward "creative destruction"; but capitalism, in principle, should not be subject to sharpening

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crisis tendencies. It would seem that the recent troubles of the world capitalist economy (from the early 1970s on) can be accounted for more fully and easily in terms of Marx's theoretical framework than those of neo-classical economic theory. However, it should be noted that Weber's version of "conflict sociology" can and has been adduced as a theoretical support to neo-Marxist, neo-Ricardian and post-Keynesian theories of crisis which emphasize the role of class struggle and international competitive conflicts in the genesis of capitalist economic crises, while rejecting or ignoring Marx's "value-theoretical" account. The debate continues.

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### LECTURE TEN: MARXIAN SOCIALISM VERSUS BOURGEOIS SOCIOLOGY

-- Beginning in the late 19th Century and early 20th century, the development of social theory was profoundly shaped by the confrontation between a "bourgeois sociology" and a body of theory committed to Marxian socialism. Neither of these "camps" was ever homogeneous; in fact, both were riven with the most profound controversies. To further complicate matters, at a purely theoretical level, there were often striking convergences between specific currents of bourgeois and Marxian social theory (owing to the "pressure" that each exerted on the other). But what finally distinguishes "bourgeois sociology" and Marxian social theory is the former's commitment to preserving and legitimating capitalist society, and the latter's commitment to its socialist/communist transformation. These over-arching programmatic goals have a way of shaping theoretical and analytical agendas; but they also leave open a great many questions for debate.

-- As we have seen, both Weber and Durkheim were concerned in major parts of their work with providing a diagnosis of the malaise of modernity which denies the possibility or desirability of the Marxian socialist remedy. Despite their great differences (and it should be noted that they each, on specific points, often agreed more with Marx than with each other), Weber and Durkheim were equally opposed to socialist revolution and dedicated to the piecemeal improvement of capitalist society through a process of gradual reform. The reforms they advocated were not identical; but they were of a type that contemporary **social-democratic** parties and governments have often entertained and implemented. Both Weber and Durkheim would feel at home in today's Social Democratic Party of Germany, Canada's NDP, France's Socialist Party, or Sweden's Social Democratic Party. But this should be qualified in only one respect. Much of their theoretical and programmatic work reflects a strong commitment to German or French **nationalism**. That said, both were decidedly "left-liberal" reformers, who believed that the crises of their respective societies could best be resolved by enhancing the political power and economic well-being of the masses.

-- Weber was prescient in his observations about the likely political development of the German Social Democratic Party, which, throughout his adult life, had proclaimed its adherence to Marxist theoretical and political principles. As Giddens observes, he believed that "the German state will conquer the Social Democratic Party and not vice versa; the party will move towards accommodation to the prevailing order rather than providing a realistically revolutionary alternative to it.... Weber's consistent view of 'Marxism' as represented by the SPD in Germany is that its professed objectives, the revolutionary overthrow of the state and the achievement of a classless society, are

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entirely divergent from the real role which it is destined to play in German politics" (*Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, pp. 191-192). Indeed, Weber lived to see the right-wing leadership of the German SPD help to strangle the German Revolution of 1918-19 and go on to play a vital role in consolidating the Weimar Republic (whose constitution Weber helped to draft).

-- This returns us to the evolution of the Marxian socialist camp. The German SPD was the largest party of the Second International. It had been a mass party of the German working class since the 1870s, when two smaller parties fused at the Gotha Congress. One of these parties was led by followers of Marx and Engels; the other was led by Ferdinand Lassalle, who espoused a form of "state-socialism" of which Marx was highly critical. The united Social Democratic Party was never a truly revolutionary party; it aspired to be a "party of the whole class," to use the formula of Karl Kautsky, the party's chief theoretician and for many years the "pope" of international Marxism. The SPD was committed to the idea that revolutionary change would come to Germany (and world capitalism in general) when the productive forces of society could no longer be reconciled with the capitalist social relations of production. This **objectivist** perspective saw history as unfolding in accordance with definite "laws," and played down the role of consciousness, ideas, leadership, strategy and tactics in ending the rule of capital and inaugurating a socialist transformation. Consequently, the SPD's activity was devoted to "preparing" for the "inevitable transition" to socialism: by organizing trade unions, politically educating the working class, struggling for "progressive reforms" within capitalism, etc. Thus, the theoretical *determinism* of "orthodox" Social Democratic Marxism became a cover -- and an excuse -- for an increasingly *reformist* political practice.

-- **Leon Trotsky**, a leader of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, described "classical" social democratic parties like the German in the following terms: "Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program*, which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program*, which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and maximum program no bridge existed." (*Transitional Program*, 1938)

-- The right wing of the German SPD, initially led by Eduard **Bernstein** and influenced by the British Fabian notion of the "inevitability of gradualness," gradually broke from Marx's theoretical analysis of capitalism and came to believe that "the movement is everything, the ultimate goal nothing." The left wing, led by Karl Liebknecht and **Rosa Luxemburg**, defended the essential core of the Marxist doctrine and program against

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Bernstein's "revisionism," and ultimately broke with the party over its support of Germany's war effort during WW I and in solidarity with the Bolshevik Revolution. This left wing regrouped with other elements to help form the Spartacus League and subsequently the German Communist Party; and for a time at least, the German Communists sought to elaborate a programmatic "bridge" of the sort referred to by Trotsky above. The early **Communist International** of **Vladimir Lenin** and Trotsky castigated the fatalistic determinism of social-democratic theory and reasserted the role of **revolutionary practice** in Marxism. Within the international labour movement as a whole, lively debates developed over the relationship between "structure" and "agency" -- and these debates sometimes recapitulated older debates within bourgeois social theory.

-- Weber, of course, was no admirer of the Bolshevik/Communist project. Commenting on the attempts at socialist transformation that he witnessed immediately after World War I (which included not only Soviet Russia, but also the short-lived Bavarian and Hungarian Soviet Republics), Weber declared: "I am absolutely convinced that these experiments can and will only lead to the discrediting of socialism for 100 years." Indeed, in his view, *any* attempt to establish a socialist government and a planned economy even in so relatively advanced a country as Germany, let alone backward Russia, could only lead to bureaucratic despotism. "This would be a socialism in about the same manner in which the ancient Egyptian 'New Kingdom' was socialist."

-- This sort of argument against Marxian socialism was also taken up by a conservative school of sociology, centered in Italy, best known for its "elitism." The **elitist theorists** included Vilfredo **Pareto**, Gaetano **Mosca**, and Robert **Michels**.

-- **Pareto** (1848-1923) saw the task of sociology as one of refuting liberal-democratic, socialist and Marxian theories alike, but concentrated his attacks on socialism and Marxism. He produced both a *General Sociology* and a polemical work on *Socialist Systems*, while also contributing influentially to neo-classical economist. Pareto was explicitly **dualist** in his outlook, arguing that there were two independent and mutually-exclusive domains of human conduct: 1) science and logic, and 2) sentiment. Sentiment is both non-rational and the determining factor in most human conduct. **Sentiments** are relatively constant and unchanging, but they give rise to **residues**, or forms of action, that require **derivations** (rationalizations or theoretical justifications).

- Pareto's critique of Marx is based on the following points:

- 1) Marx's socialist doctrine is based on sentiment and is therefore a "religion."
- 2) Class conflict is inevitable, rooted in human nature and in the struggle for life and individual well-being.

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- 3) People are easily fooled.
- 4) Society is forever divided between an elite and the non-elite masses.
- 5) Revolutions have never liberated the common people and never will.

-- A quote from Pareto: "The aristocracies maintain themselves only by constant renewal and absorption of the most distinguished individuals from the lower classes. As a rule, all closed aristocracies deteriorate sharply after a certain number of generations."

-- **Mosca** (1858-1941) represents a step forward in sophistication relative to Pareto, at least as an "elite theorist." His major work is *The Ruling Class*, which is a sustained attack on what he describes as the "Rousseauian-Marxian utopia" of a classless society. The "ruling class" (elite) maintains its power because, as a minority, a relatively small group, it can achieve what the majority cannot: mutual understanding and a capacity for concerted and resolute action. Mosca is also of the view that the ruling minority of a society is typically distinguished by superior material, intellectual and moral qualities. The rule of a minority elite depends upon the elaboration and dissemination of **political formulas** that are used to justify the exercise of power; typically, they invoke some sort of "universal moral principle."

-- Politically, Mosca was more liberal than Pareto (who served as a Senator in Mussolini's fascist regime). He was committed to a philosophy of the "golden mean" and argued that progress can be secured only through the extension of "**juridical defense**." This involves the rule of law, the separation of powers, a standing army, and a reasonably equitable distribution of wealth.

-- Quote from Mosca: "[The] dominion of an organized minority, obeying a single impulse, over the unorganized majority is inevitable. The power of any minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority, who stands alone before the totality of the organized minority. At the same time, the minority is organized for the very reason that it is a minority."

-- **Michels** (1876-1936) was not only an elite theorist, but a life-long political activist, in his youth as a German social democrat, and later as a convert to Italian fascism. It was his experiences in an increasingly bureaucratized German workers' movement that led to his disillusionment with Marxian socialism and his eventual adoption of a right-wing, elitist perspective. His major sociological work is *Political Parties* (1911), a meticulous analysis of the German SPD which seeks to illustrate his thesis that all organizations tend inevitably toward **oligarchy** -- rule by the few. Michels formulates an "iron law of oligarchy," according to which even those organizations most ostensibly committed to

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the extension of democracy must evolve a division of labour that leads to a division between the leaders and the led. According to Michels, the masses are apathetic and perennially incompetent, while those who accede to positions of power and leadership almost always seek to preserve them.

-- It should be noted that **Trotsky, Luxemburg and Lenin** all shared a concern with the "oligarchic" or bureaucratic tendencies of large-scale working-class organizations. But instead of repudiating the goal of a classless society (as Michels did) they insisted upon the need to develop new organizational forms to combat such tendencies: **mass strike committees, workers' councils** (soviets), and **vanguard parties** (of "professional revolutionaries"). Lenin's concept of the vanguard party is often depicted as an "elitist" concept of political organization, but it can be interpreted otherwise. A vanguard party is one in which a condition of membership is a high level of personal activity and a strong commitment to implementing the democratically constituted policies of the party. Such a party ought to be better able to resist bureaucratization than a so-called "party of the whole class" -- though as Trotsky noted, reflecting on the bureaucratic degeneration of Lenin and Trotsky's own Communist Party of the Soviet Union after the rise to power of Joseph Stalin, there can never be any iron-clad guarantees.

-- According to Bottomore, the elitist theorists criticized democracy mainly because they saw it as "a stage in the 'revolt of the masses' leading with apparent necessity towards socialism." However, the elite theorists were also influential in producing new definitions of democracy, definitions that were friendlier to the realities of capitalist societies. "Capitalist democracy" could never literally mean "rule by the people." Instead, in Joseph Schumpeter's words, democracy in a capitalist society becomes "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."

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### LECTURE ELEVEN: ENLIGHTENMENT AND MORAL PROGRESS -- CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM?

-- Can a society founded upon massive social inequalities be either "rational" or "moral"? It is on their varying answers to this question that the differences between Marx, Weber and Durkheim turn. In Lecture Nine, we saw that Marx believed that capitalism would exhibit an increasing trend toward "irrationality" -- a view that Weber rejected. But we have also seen that Weber believed that the rationalization process encouraged by capitalist social forms would be an increasingly "mechanical" one, amoral and bereft of spiritual values.

-- Durkheim, in contrast to both Marx and Weber, was confident that the new society founded upon a technically-sophisticated division of labour would eventually find its moral "moorings" -- that modern capitalist society could be both (technically and scientifically) rational *and* moral. Thus, Durkheim may be characterized as a "bourgeois optimist" and Weber as a "bourgeois pessimist." Marx, of course, was neither.

-- As a prophet of anti-capitalist revolution, Marx was committed to a **socialist historical optimism**, according to which the contradictions and irrationalities of capitalism would set the stage for a social transformation that would not only free the forces of production from their capitalist fetters and greatly extend human scientific, technical and productive capacities, but also reshape human behaviour and, with it, human morality. Morality, for Marx, is not a fixed thing; it, like everything else in human society, is subject to progress or regress, development or decline. It is "internally related" to all the other aspects of human social reality. In Marx's view, a necessary condition for "moral progress" then is real progress in overcoming the stultifying effects of class antagonism and an alienated division of labour -- for only when human beings can enjoy material security, without the need to shackle themselves to a productive system that dominates and deforms them, can they also begin an 'all-round' development of their talents, capabilities and moral sensibilities. Only then can they realize that original goal of Enlightenment -- the freedom to act upon their "own understanding," not only with respect to their individual interests but in the cause of progress for humankind as a whole.

#### **Bureaucracy: A Thorn in the Side of Socialist Enlightenment**

-- The Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher writes: "In the problems of bureaucracy, to which the problem of the state is roughly parallel, is focused much of that relationship between man and society, between man and man, which is now fashionable to describe as 'alienation'." If the original aspirations of bourgeois enlightenment faltered owing to the

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persistence of class conflict in a society that was supposed to ensure a rationally based harmony of interests, the project of Marxian-socialist enlightenment has been impeded by the persistence of the social phenomenon of **bureaucratism**. Every society that has ostensibly attempted a transition to socialism has been encumbered by the (more or less) repressive rule of privileged bureaucratic oligarchies.

-- Weber, as we have seen, would insist that this disappointing historical experience of "socialist construction" -- the bureaucratization of post-revolutionary societies ostensibly committed to "empowering the working masses" -- was more or less inevitable. In explaining "socialist bureaucracy", Weber would stress the *technical superiority* of bureaucracy as a mode of organization, as well as the disappearance of that dispersal of economic and political power supposedly inherent in a market-based economy. Socialism can only encourage centralization, and centralization can only mean bureaucratization. "The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of organization."

-- The "elite" theorists Pareto and Michels would add that socialist state bureaucracies are merely a new form of elite domination -- a new style of class division. The class-less society is an illusion, an unrealizable utopia. The "new class" of bureaucratic oligarchs may preach the virtues of equality, democracy and co-operation (especially on the road to power), but their power-hunger and appetite for privileges must eventually trample these values underfoot.

-- All this sounds pretty conclusive, particularly in light of the "historical record." It is certainly the "politically correct" way, from the standpoint of the dominant ideology of Western societies, to appreciate the "lessons" of Soviet-style "socialism" and to account for the great distance that exists between Marx's ideal of socialism/communism and the realities of Stalinist Communism. "Looks good in theory; can't work in practice." But all this ignores the fact that there is a Marxist theory of bureaucracy which casts considerable light on why the concrete experience of "socialist construction" in the 20th century has been so disappointing, so "off the track." If this theory receives little attention (as it does), might it not have something to do with the fact that it undermines the notion that liberal-democratic capitalism is "the end of history"?

### **Marx on Bureaucracy**

-- For Marx, the essence of bureaucracy is that it promotes and represents the pursuit of "particular interests" as "the general interest." These particular interests are normally the sectional interests of a propertied ruling class, like the capitalists, who see bureaucracy very much as a "servant" of their interests. Is it not remarkable that the bureaucracy

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remains under the effective control of a relatively tiny class of capitalists in a capitalist society, and yet it is insisted that in a socialist society the administrative apparatus of the state will 'slip the leash' of 'the associated producers', i.e. the working class majority of society? Weber and the elite theorists believe that under socialism the "norm" must be bureaucratic tyranny; but why should bureaucracies be willing to follow the dictates of a minority ruling class and not the dictates of a majority ruling class? This question is never answered by the Weberians or the elitists. But Marxists do acknowledge that under certain circumstances the "particular interests" that a bureaucracy will serve will be its own. However, these must be carefully specified.

-- Marx sees the bureaucratization of industry as promoted by a capitalist imperative to separate cognitive from manual functions within the division of labour. In this sense, industrial bureaucracy represents an extension of the division of intellectual and manual labour into the heart of the production process. While Weber sees this as "technically" expedient, Marx sees it as driven by the particularistic sectional interest of capitalists in depriving workers (at least "manual workers") of an overall view of what is happening in production. Industrial bureaucracy involves a centralization of knowledge and a "cognitive expropriation" of ordinary workers.

-- Both within work enterprises and within "political society" bureaucracy is best seen as a response to sharpened social antagonisms. It fills the vacuum created by the disappearance of trust, co-operation and solidarity. But bureaucracy, for Marx, is not synonymous with efficiency or technical rationality; rather it's a poor substitute for social and organizational relations that would be more conducive to efficiency and rationality but that would also be incompatible with the preservation of capitalist domination and a competitive market economy.

-- Why then did bureaucracy become so great a problem in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution? (Since all other "Communist" countries followed the Soviet model, and none of these had experienced a truly working-class revolution as Russia had, we can focus our attention on the Soviet case.) The most incisive analysis of this problem from a Marxist perspective was provided by **Leon Trotsky** (1879-1940), co-leader of the 1917 revolution with Lenin and mortal enemy of the Stalinist bureaucracy from the mid-1920s till his death at the hands of a Stalinist assassin. Trotsky saw Stalinist bureaucratism not as an expression of "the general laws" of transition from capitalism to socialism, but as a product of a "temporary refraction" of those laws "under the conditions of a backward revolutionary country in a capitalist environment."

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### **Trotsky's Analysis of Stalinist Bureaucratism**

-- The following passages are central to Trotsky's analysis of the origins and nature of Stalinist bureaucratism:

"We ... defined the Soviet Thermidor as a triumph of the bureaucracy over the masses. We ... tried to disclose the historic conditions of this triumph. The revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat was in part devoured by the administrative apparatus and gradually demoralized, in part annihilated in the civil war, and in part thrown out and crushed. The tired and disappointed masses were indifferent to what was happening on the summits... [The] bureaucracy succeeded in raising itself above society and getting its fate firmly into its own hands... The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there is enough goods in the store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It 'knows' who is to get something and who has to wait... Thus out of necessity there... developed an organ ... which far outgrew its socially necessary function, and [became] an independent factor and therewith the source of great danger for the whole social organism." (*The Revolution Betrayed*, 1937)

"The scarcity in consumer goods and the universal struggle to obtain them [generated] a policeman who [arrogated] to himself the function of distribution. Hostile pressure from without [imposed] on the policeman the role of 'defender' of the country, [endowed] him with national authority, and [permitted] him doubly to plunder the country... The world revolution [could have done away] with the danger from without as a supplementary cause of bureaucratization. The elimination of the need to expend an enormous share of the national income on armaments would [have raised] even higher the living and cultural level of the masses. In these conditions the need for a policeman-distributor would [have fallen] away by itself." (*In Defense of Marxism*, 1940)

"The frightful difficulties of socialist construction in an isolated and backward country coupled with the false policies of the leadership... led to the result that *the bureaucracy... expropriated the proletariat politically* in order to guard its social conquests with *its own* methods... The bureaucrat... [turned] out to be not an independent class but an excrescence upon the proletariat. A tumor can grow to tremendous size and even strangle the living organism, but a tumor can never become an independent organism."

-- In many ways, Trotsky's analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian socialist revolution is both more historically accurate and theoretically incisive than

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anything that has been produced in the Weberian tradition. Even so, the spectre of a totalitarian and bureaucratized “socialism” has played a major role in closing people's minds to the socialist alternative, even as the direction of world capitalism has become increasingly irrational and unjust. At the same time, bureaucratism within the labour movement has played a major role in diverting workers from anti-capitalist struggles. These problems continue to confront Marxists in theory and in practice, and their solution requires progress in both areas. At the same time it should not be surprising to find the defenders of the capitalist status quo pointing to the sorry experience of Stalinism as if it were definitive proof that "socialist emancipation" is nothing more than a dangerous illusion.

### **Social Progress and the Socialist ‘Ideal’**

The British socialist philosopher Sean Sayers has written:

"Marx... portrays history as a progressive process in the sense that it involves the growth of human productive powers, and hence the development of human nature in all its aspects: needs and desires, powers and capacities, freedom and reason... It is impossible to believe that this is the end of history; forces of opposition to capitalism will surely emerge. This is the faith of socialism.... it is the belief -- rationally grounded in a theory of history -- that the aspiration towards a higher stage of society is not a mere ideal but the movement of historical reality itself."

-- There is an ethical idea expressed in one way or another by all the world's great religions and rhetorically upheld by every human being with a conscience: 'Treat others as you would have them treat you'. Dualistic and pro-capitalist thinking tells us that this 'Golden Rule' is an 'ideal' that belongs to a realm that is separate and apart from the real, temporal world of flesh and blood human individuals. Dialectical and socialist thinking suggests to the contrary that the aspiration expressed by the Golden Rule is not beyond the reach of human beings. The Golden Rule is persistently undermined by antagonistic and exploitative social relations, as well as by the often cruel material circumstances imposed on people by nature. In everyday life under capitalism, the golden rule is actually replaced by the 'rule of gold'. But moral progress *is* possible, once the powerful productive forces developed by advanced capitalism are united with new *egalitarian and fully cooperative* social relations of production and reproduction. Then, and only then, can a world marked by deep social inequality, material privation and pervasive injustice be transformed into one in which the Golden Rule can become the guiding principle of everyday human conduct.