

SY207 Notes

Week 1:

Karl Marx

Theoretical Influences on Marx's view of Society and History: The Shift to Materialism (pg 37)

- First, he devised a method with Hegel's idealist philosophy which helped him study society and history
 - Secondly, he introduced the materialistic outlook as a theoretical perspective, for looking the formation of historical societies
 - Was able to show that the first act of all societies were economic needs as humans had to satisfy their everyday material needs before anything else

Rejection of Hegel and Idealist Philosophy

- Hegel was originator of one of the most far reaching philosophical doctrines of the 19th century called philosophical idealism
- "to be pear isn't essential to the pear" – the essence of the idea is "fruit" (an example pg 38)
- Marx believed that when the existence of human beings is only understood as "ideas and thoughts" the more real and practical problems of individual lives are overlooked.
- Materialism places in opposition to idealism (pg 39)
- Marx disagreed with Hegel and thought that individual subjection stems from class and economic inequalities that arise when one class own the means of production and another needs to sell their labour in exchange for a wage. (40)

German Ideology (42)

- 1st: Outline the conditions of the break with German speculative philosophy
- 2nd: to develop and expound the materialist conception of history by setting out the views of materialism in opposition

Marx's Materialist theory: (42-43)

- 1st: humans must be in a position to obtain food, shelter, and clothing in order to live
- 2nd: humans are different from animals as they must produce the means to satisfy their primary material needs
- 3rd: what humans produce depends on what they find in nature and what they must produce to survive
- Fundamental concepts:
 - The means of production
 - The relations of production
 - The mode of production
 - The forces of production

Means of production (44-46)

- In every stage of history humans have had certain productive forces of land, animals, tools which are necessary to produce their means of survival
 - Anything in the external world which is used to obtain livelihoods, produce incomes and acquire materials

- The owners own the means of production and the non-owners are the direct producers of labour
- Owners declare production as their private property and obtain control which causes certain restrictions to come into play to relate how the MOP is to be used by the worker
 - They first appear in the form of hiring policies, imposing of work schedules, and limits imposed on wages and wage levels
 - Secondly, they penalize the worker in terms of infractions related to hours of labor, the conditions of work and rules regulating the conduct of the worker
- Once these rules became formalized they introduced a more rigorous regulation of the worker
 - put the worker under constant supervision
 - restrictions imposed on the wages of women and children
 - restrictions in terms of their movement at the work site

Relations of Production (46-49)

- non-owners are compelled to enter into relations of production in order to satisfy their own economic needs;
- they are compelled to perform the economic maintenance of the class of owners who are dominant over them
 - they have to go through these relations of production to survive which in turn makes them dependent on their superiors to survive
 - relationships of dominance and subordination is a direct reflection of the class relationships (owners vs non-owners)
- Two types of relations are fundamental to a feudal society:
 - The feudal lord controls means of production and peasant farmer who is the non-owner of the means of production, to live they have to enter into a relation with the landlord and this relation gives the landlord the right over the labour of the serf and the serfs agriculture production.
 - 1st: ability to be transformed into relations of domination
 - 2nd: ability to become physical and economic fetters for one class and economic advantage for the other
 - The ability to be backed up by coercive sanctions legitimated in politics and law
 - Slavery – the name given to ROP in ancient societies where production is based on a class of patrician rulers who enslave populations that must directly produce for those who own them
 - Serfdom- the name given to ROP in feudal society whose production is based on class of landholders who lease land to enserviced peasants. The peasant have to produce for their economic livelihood
 - Wage labour – the name given to ROP in capitalistic societies whose production is based on large class of wage labourers producing surplus profits for the class of owners who rule over them
- **Mode of Production (49-51)**

- Initially the MOP is used to identify the primary elements of a given historical stage of production by showing how the way a society produces actually shapes its social relations.
 - During slavery the patrician class presided over forces of production in a way that relations of production entered into by the producer transformed them into slaves (and that was how ancient societies engaged in the production process)
 - In feudal society the landholder presided over FOP and had the rights to control the labor of the serf and the serfs agricultural production
 - In an industrial society bosses have direct control over MOP as well as the terms of employment, and this gives them rights over the disposition of product of labor, and control over the laborer and the production process.
- **Laws of Historical Development (51-55)**
- Marx believed that the division of society into classes who are owners and non-owners of the means of production was a law of historical development. To prove this, he essentially divided history into four separate stages: tribal, ancient, feudal, capitalist.
 - Tribal - a society with an economy where people produce principally by hunting and gathering
 - Division of labor is rudimentary because there is no private property and the social structure is derived from family and kinship
 - No division of classes
 - Ancient – social organization that developed from a n association of tribes who formed a group of city sates giving rise to political and civil organization with a rudimentary industry and a system of trade and commerce
 - Found in ancient Greece and Rome
 - Class system of patrician and slave
 - Ownership of the means of production is in the hands of patrician class who live by conquering territories whose lands were seized and population was turned into slaves
 - Feudal – in this type of society agriculture is the main source of economic production and the ownership of MOP is in the hands of the land-owning class
 - Developed class system where peasant class did physical labor, and landholders had social and political power, giving them the rights to control both the labor of the serf and the serfs economic production (backed by legal and political institutions)
 - Existed largely in Europe and England
 - Industrial capitalism – in this society the economy is industrial with an advanced division of labor which develops trade and commercial activity.
 - Rural economy declines, and city life becomes center of economic activity

- Emergence of private property and developed class system of industrial capitalists who are owners of means of production and wage laborers who are producers of physical labor.
- MOP largely consists of machinery, technology

Marx's Theory of Ideology (61-71)

- **Sociology of Knowledge** is used to identify a brand of social theory which looks at the relationship between knowledge and society and focuses primarily on three main issues:
 - to find out to what extent our perceptions of the world and our knowledge of it is conditioned by society
 - to find out whether the methods used to obtain knowledge by the sciences are neutral or conditioned by society
 - to make determinations about whether or not objective knowledge is possible
- **Three themes Marx related to a theory of knowledge:**
 - Is the contention that beliefs, ideas and attitudes alter our perception of the society
 - That our ideas are expressions of our material relationships and are thus conditioned by economic arrangements;
 - That dominant ideas are the ideas of the dominant classes.
- Ideology – a system of attitudes, conceptions, ideas and beliefs which justify existing social inequalities originating in the class system of society.
- Marx took the view that the systems and beliefs in society always originate from economic activity.
 - This production is so central to their material well-being that the shape of society always coincides in the way they produce
 - The manner in which this production is carried out determines the system of social relations which tends to create the division of society into two distinct classes one which is dominant because it owns means of production, the other subordinate because it is the subject to the will of those who rule over them.
- A second definition of ideology has to do with the relation between the common ideas and conceptions, and our own conception of the way the world works and our relation to it.
 - Ex; can be seen in our perceptions towards material objects we own, and the belief that these objects often confer powers which enact our imaginary relation to reality because we imagine how others view us in the light of the material things we own
 - Emphasizes that we live in a social world rather than a natural one
- A third definition of ideology is that it is an activity that takes place in relation to the world and is enacted through our lived relations with it, which is ongoing every day in life .
- 5 Building Blocks to Marx Theory of Ideology
 - 1st: the relation between ideas and material activity in society

- 2nd: how the theory of ideology concerns the way ideology is related to a theory of perception, and to how individuals come to perceive the outer world from the standpoint of their positions in the relations of production
- 3rd: the relation between ideology and the interest of the dominant classes
- 4th: the role played by the ROP and the prevailing social conceptions about how we come to see those who are outside the legitimizing sphere of the community
- 5th: ?

Marx and the critique of Capitalism (76-80)

- Marx's Capital is an economic analysis of the development of industrial capitalism. The major theme of capital is an analysis of the system of social relations which came into being during the development of capitalist society.
 - Also takes a look at historical, political and social analysis of the origins of a capitalist society
 - The Capital can be divided into three main sections:
 - 1st: the economic analysis of capitalism
 - 2nd: the historical analysis of capitalism
 - 3rd: the social consequences of capitalism
- Leading political economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo took the view that capitalist economies worked according to a set of eternal laws which they thought could be described scientifically
 - They thought the scientific description of the laws of value, price, labor, profit and exchange captured the essence of capitalism
 - Marx disagreed as he thought:
 - Money and commodities alone do not make capitalism, rather money and commodities have to be transformed into a system of social relations based on a division between social classes
 - Capitalism is not a system of fixed eternal laws but rather a society that came into being at a certain stage of historical development and thus must be looked at as a historical phenomenon
 - Political economists described capitalism from a scientific viewpoint, Marx criticized it and saw it as a system of social inequality based on the dominance of one class over another

Marx and Capitalism (81-

- Capitalism – Marx believed it was a system of social relations and believed that neither money nor commodities alone were sufficient to make capitalism. Rather money, and commodities have to be transformed into a system of social relations based on a division between social classes. This takes place only when:
 - The worker is forcibly separated from the means of production
 - Ownership is in private hands

- A system of exchange emerges which governs the buying and selling of labor and commodities
- The advent of capitalism primitive accumulation – in which feudal land was coercively transformed into private property and the director producer was divorced from the means of production
- To understand Marx's discussion of capitalism these 3 concepts have to be focused on:
 - The commodity
 - Distinction between use and exchange
 - Commodity fetishism
- Marx begins his analysis by looking at the commodity. A commodity is a thing whose qualities are capable of satisfying human needs.
 - Bread, oil, gasoline, shoes...
- Commodities can be looked at two different ways: its use value and its exchange value
 - Use value of a commodity may be defined as the particular quality a commodity has to satisfy human needs.
 - The use value of a commodity refers to the specific social functions a commodity performs when it satisfies human needs.
 - A coat provides warmth; wheat diminishes hunger and therefore use values serve directly as a means of existence – something that sustains life
 - With use values – each commodity is capable of filling only a particular and unique function which is not interchangeable or replaceable
 - The use of bread can't be substituted by coal
 - Exchange value is very dominant in capitalistic society.
 - It is quantities of one commodity being expressed in terms of the value of quantities of another commodity (exchange relation between one another).
 - 1 ton of rice has the exchange value of ¼ ton of coffee
- Marx two fundamental issues:
 - Believes that the form of value which he calls value in exchange is new and never has been seen before and therefore must be specific to capitalism
 - Believed that exchange value obliterates the distinctions in regard to use values
- Marx took a look at feudal society to prove that exchange value only arises in capitalistic society
 - In feudal society what was produced was consumed to satisfy human needs, so there were no markets for commodities to be bought and sold
 - In feudal society there was no system of exchange, and therefore value was not determined by exchange itself.
 - Since there was no separation between production and consumption because what was produced could not be a considered a commodity

- Commensurable magnitude – when a comparable basis is found between two commodities so that their values can be expressed in relation to each other
- Marx says that as soon as exchange value becomes dominant use drops out of the equation and this is of fundamental social importance because it marks the beginning of the dominance of exchange over use
- Important effect of exchange is its tendency to eliminate the qualitative distinction between various kinds of human labour.
 - When commodities enter into the exchange, the unique qualitative distinction between the different kinds of labour used to produce commodities is erased.
- Useful labor- the capacity of human labor to bring about usefulness or utility in a commodity and produce simple values.
- Abstract labor- is when useful labor is measured in terms of ‘a temporal duration of labor time’ and this is only able to happen in capitalistic societies.
 - In industrial societies two coats can be made in same time it takes to produce one in other societies, that means twice the use value has been created but the same amount of labor has been conceived and is paid at the rate of one hour of labor.
 - Beneficial to capitalists and the wealth is not shared with the worker, no matter how productive
- Marx says that value that has a commodity arises from its ‘relative form’
 - Can only be arrived at in relation to other commodities which are seen to have value
 - Can’t say 20 yards of linen is worth 20 twenty yards of linen/ when linen is compared to another commodity (silk) and exchange value emerges
- Marx criticisms:
- He states that exchange relations become so powerful in capitalistic societies that they shape all other social relations in their image
- So much so exchange relations dominate that they obliterate the useful distinction between different kinds of use values and between different kinds of labour
- Marx argued that when exchange relations become so powerful that all value is determined by the ability to enter into the medium of exchange. (in capitalism all value is determined by exchange)

Commodities Fetishism

- Fetishism – this refers to the stage in development of capitalism when commodities are assigned powers which they do not have in reality. It is the display of unusual devotion toward a material thing or object in the belief that it has extraordinary abilities and powers.
 - First emerged in 19th century as a religious practice when certain objects were set aside because they were thought to have greater power
 - Never happened in feudal societies because the products of their labor never became commodities

- It can be described as the stage in commodity production where human beings are dominated by the products they possess and are compelled by the powers these products have over them.
- Marx looked at religion in tribal societies and how individuals assigned magical characteristics to objects which they believed grew out of the nature of the objects themselves
 - Marx would say that these objects had no powers and that the individual's active relation to the object was the hidden source of power.
 - He believed this was shaped by social relations in which these beliefs were imbedded
- Marx thought that commodities had simple use values which were capable of satisfying human want and therefore commodity fetishism refers to the point where commodities obtain powers beyond simple use
 - When commodities are believed to have value in and of themselves, we mistakenly assign powers to them which they do not have in reality
 - Commodities are assigned human qualities which they do not possess

Transformation of Social Relations

- Marx believed that exchange relations were so powerful because they transformed social relations between individuals in society.
 - In capitalism social relations assume the form of the fantastic relations between things, whereas in reality social relations between persons rather than things.
 - Only in capitalism do we confront each other as buyers and sellers of commodities
 - In this sense society does not appear in its human form but rather in the form of a commercial transaction
 - This is a problem because the value is no longer between individuals but between things

Alienation (116-127)

- Alienation – is a state of disruption taking place in the laboring process when workers lose control over their labor and the self-defining characteristics of their laboring activity.
 - Hegel first said when humans encounter obstacles and limitations in the world which act against them to block their progress and self-realization
 - They experience their own activity as something external to them (self-estrangement)
 - For Marx alienation takes place in 4 ways:
 - When humans lose control over the product of their labor as a result of the MOP falling into private hands, at this point whatever they produce

does not belong to them and as a result enters into the system of exchange where things are bought and sold (alienation of the product)

- Occurs when individuals lose control over the self-defining aspects of their productive activity because they are required to sell labor for a wage and because when they are at work their labor doesn't belong to them. (alienation from labouring activity)
 - Makes workers feel like animals because all they control is eating, sleeping, drinking
- Occurs when humans lose connection to their own species since in industrial capitalism labour is turned into a physical act rather than a mental act. (alienation from species)
 - Required to perform laboring functions to fill physical needs so they relinquish their mental being
- Occurs when humans are estranged from fellow humans as a result of private labor turning them into individuals who compete alone against one another for private gain. (alienation from human beings)
 - Forces individuals to be private when in non-capitalistic societies the labor was cooperative and collective
- Hegel was the first to understand that human beings can experience their own activity as something external to them, something that is 'not self' and he described this moment in human experience as experience
- Marx theory of alienation conveys two central ideas:
 - That human beings make society and at some point, society is a natural extension of their nature and their being, it reflects them, and they feel at home in it
 - Secondly as society develops humans begin to feel that it is not of their own making and that it doesn't reflect their being or their nature but rather appears to be alien.
 - Starts out as an extension and then ends up being something apart and external
- Marx Theory of human nature
 - Believed that laboring was so central to human existence that it was a part of their essence or what defined them as human beings
 - Labour defined humans in three senses:
 - Through it individuals exert control over nature and natural obstacles and therefore feel themselves to be active rather than passive agents
 - Labour is the source of human existence in that it produces material necessities of food, shelter, clothing

- Labour is part of human self-definition since through it individuals control their circumstances and actively feel confirmed in their activity
 - Marx believed that laboring activity connects humans to existence in three distinct ways:
 - It connects them to nature so far as they are reliant on the MOP to fulfill themselves by producing food, shelter, and clothing
 - Labour connects them to the means of self affirmation since it helps them gain control over nature and obtain well being and existence
 - Connects them to the product of their labor to the extent that the product has a use value which is directly used as a means of existence.
- **4 distinct types of alienation:**
 - Alienation from the product of labor
 - Occurs when humans lose control over the product of their labor as a result of the MOP falling into private hands, at this point whatever they produce does not belong to them and as a result enters into the system of exchange where things are bought and sold
 - Alienation from productive activity
 - Occurs when individuals lose control over the self-defining aspects of their productive activity because they are required to sell labor for a wage and because when they are at work their labor doesn't belong to them
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The State

- Marx theory of the state
 - The relation between the base and superstructure
 - The historical origins of the state
 - The role of ideology in the state

- The role played by civil society
- The role of ideology in the state
 - Marx defined ideology as a set of dominant ideas and beliefs which justify existing social relations and class distinctions
 - Marx saw the connection between the two because he thought that the dominant ideas and beliefs supported the interest of the dominant classes
 - He believed that these ideologies and beliefs were embodied in social institutions and reflected existing social relations of production
 - Legitimated the existing class system in which one class dominates over the material means of production
 - Made the subordinate classes politically passive and quiet
 - Concealed the coercive nature of society
 - One of the most important aspects of ideology was its ability to distort reality
 - In feudalism religious beliefs justify the serfs relation to the lord, the serf performs economic roles within society which advantage the landholder and disadvantage the serf
- The state and civil society
 - Marx says the modern state comes into existence only with the institutionalization of the commercial economy and the effect of this economy on the political structure.
 - Civil society is the point where development of an independent economic realm which emerges as a consequence of individuals pursuing economic gain through private interest.
 - Previous times individuals were part of larger groups which defined their place in society
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Terms to Know:

- Consensus theory – the understanding of society as a form of social cooperation resulting from shared norms and values.
 - They impose cooperative rules upon individuals
 - They define the individual's connection to the larger system of social and political solidarity
- Conflict theory – the theory that states that society is divided into two economic classes the bourgeoisie and the proletariat
 - These social classes are locked in a struggle to secure economic and political power
 - Believe that the dominant class created social rules and forces these rules upon the proletariat in order to maintain status
- Ideology – a system of attitudes, conceptions, ideas and beliefs which justify existing social inequalities originating in the class system of society.
- Abstract labor- a term Marx used to describe the change that takes place in the system of social relations when human labor is treated only as an expenditure of energy that is paid at the same hourly rate regardless of the differences in the skill and abilities of the worker
- Useful labor – the capacity of labor to confer the use value to a commodity
 - A coat has the use value to provide warmth only so far as the skill of the laborer confers a use value upon it and its capable of satisfying a distinct human need
- Capitalism – Marx believed it was a system of social relations and believed that neither money nor commodities alone were sufficient to make capitalism. Rather money, and commodities have to be transformed into a system of social relations based on a division between social classes. This takes place only when:
 - The worker is forcibly separated from the means of production
 - Ownership is in private hands
 - A system of exchange emerges which governs the buying and selling of labor and commodities

- Commodity- a key concept in Marx's theory of capitalism. Commodities are subject to buying and selling and in this sense enter a medium of 'exchange' where they are sold for a price. Marx thought commodities had two distinct properties:
 - Use value which is capable of satisfying human needs
 - Exchange value in which quantities of one commodity can be expressed in the value of quantities of another commodity
- Exchange value- a concept Marx used to pinpoint the change taking place in the 'form of value' that occurred as a result of the development of capitalism and the emergence of a market which functioned as a medium of exchange. Marx believed before capitalism value was in the form of 'use' or 'utility' which served directly as a means of existence.
 - Feudal society everything was for use no separation between production and commerce and what was produced was consumed directly to satisfy human material needs
- Use value - a term used by Marx to denote the capacity a commodity has to satisfy distinct human needs and sustain existence. Refers to the ability of a commodity to render a particular service to an individual by satisfying a need which sustains life. Marx used the term 'use value' for feudal economies and 'exchange value' for industrial economies.
 - A coat provides warmth and food diminishes hunger which serves directly as a means of existence
- Fetishism – this refers to the stage in development of capitalism when commodities are assigned powers which they do not have in reality. It is the display of unusual devotion toward a material thing or object in the belief that it has extraordinary abilities and powers.
 - First emerged in 19th century as a religious practice when certain objects were set aside because they were thought to have greater power
 - Never happened in feudal societies because the products of their labor never became commodities
 - It can be described as the stage in commodity production where human beings are dominated by the products they possess and are compelled by the powers these products have over them.
- Commensurable magnitude – when a comparable basis is found between two commodities so that their values can be expressed in relation to each other
- Labor- the activity by which human beings produce the means of their existence and their economic livelihoods.
 - It was through labour that human beings create use values, maintain their existence and define themselves in society and history.
 - Labor was seen as a commodity which the worker sells to the capitalist for a wage
- Human essence – used to describe a characteristic of human beings which he through was realized through their human labor and productive activity.
 - Marx thought of human labor as the ultimate category of existence and self-definition

- He believed that since laboring came first, it was essential to human material well-being and self-realization
 - Thought humans were defined by their laboring activity in three specific senses:
 - By exerting control over nature, they feel themselves to be active rather than passive in history
 - By producing material necessities of food, shelter, and clothing they maintain their physical existence
 - By controlling their circumstances, they provide self-definition and feel confirmed in their activity
 - Alienation robs human beings of the self-definition created by their laboring activity since in making the MOP the property of one class, labor is experienced outside the control of the individual.
- Alienation – is a state of disruption taking place in the laboring process when workers lose control over their labor and the self-defining characteristics of their laboring activity.
 - Hegel first said when humans encounter obstacles and limitations in the world which act against them to block their progress and self-realization
 - They experience their own activity as something external to them (self estrangement)
 - For Marx alienation takes place in 4 ways:
 - When humans lose control over the product of their labor as a result of the MOP falling into private hands, at this point whatever they produce does not belong to them and as a result enters into the system of exchange where things are bought and sold (alienation of the product)
 - Occurs when individuals lose control over the self-defining aspects of their productive activity because they are required to sell labor for a wage and because when they are at work their labor doesn't belong to them. (alienation from labouring activity)
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- Surplus value – the form of value that was created by the surplus labor of the worker. It refers to the part of the workday where laborers expend labor power but creates no value for themselves, the labor adds value to the product and the end result only benefits the capitalist alone.
 - Marx said in all societies productive relations are structured to extract excess surplus labor from the worker
 - In slavery the slave was compelled to perform surplus labor in exchange for bare necessities
 - In feudal societies serfs were obligated to perform free unpaid labor as a result of the corvee obligations
 - In all these cases surplus value gives an advantage to the ones who own MOP and benefits one class but not another.
 - Four central attributes:
 - It is the value create by surplus labor of the worker
 - It is unpaid and therefore creates value for the capitalist but not the worker
 - It presents a deception since it claims to be paid labor
 - It is recognized form of overwork in industrial capitalism since the worker is not paid for the value that is created by their labor
- Labor power- is what is sold to a capitalist at much less than the value it creates
 - Always benefits the capitalist more than it does the worker
 - It is found on the market and purchased as if it were a commodity
- State- the state arises out of productive relations of society and is linked to the economy, economic production, and the class formation of industrial capitalism. The state reflects the prevailing class structure of society and acts as an instrument in the ruling classes.
- Economic base – describes how the system of social relations in society always derived from economic production
 - Since humans must produce to satisfy their material needs the first act of all societies is always economic and leads to class relations based on economic production
- Superstructure – social institutions which rise on top of the economic base
- Civil society – describes the political changes taking place in society during the development of the modern state
 - A real where individuals compete privately and pursue their interests separately from political society
 - Consists of 3 elements:
 - The emergence of a sphere of free action separate from the political sphere of society and immune to political intervention
 - The satisfaction of all wants through pursuit of private economic gain

- The protection of private property as a political right
- The replacement of direct ties with society by abstract political and legal links to the state